Lapurtutako Haurrak: The Theft of Children as State-Backed Gendered Violence in Ireland, Euskadi, and Galicia

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Many comparisons have been drawn between the political violence of Iberia and Ireland in the 20th century, most centering around the parallel visibility of militant movements and state responses. However, the rigidity in defining only certain incidents as "political violence" has not allowed for a thorough study of some of the subtler and more normalized abuses that occurred at the same time. This study focuses on institutional gendered violence at the medical, religious, and state levels, through an analysis of large-scale forced adoptions after the Spanish and Irish civil wars. This thesis analyzes how the state-led processes of defining and 'dealing with' violence enable cultures that defend, embed, and disguise brutality, and how this raises entire generations characterized by constant subjugation and negation that are often misidentified as inexplicably aimless, defeated, and helpless, or alternatively, as incomprehensibly violent. While hegemonic religious and political dynamics have created and enforced this violence on women and children, there is an invisibility to this particular violence even in the resistance to it, given the vulnerability and marginality of its victims. While the concept of political violence in Ireland and Iberia is still frequently subject to reductionist interpretation, when it intersects with gendered violence, the absence of truth and accuracy in the resulting narratives is profoundly embedded, both at the state level and at the core of the countercultures. This paper seeks to analyze these cases while

considering broader concepts of insider and participant research and what it means to define violence and memory anthropologically.

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Preface

I want to begin by thanking Dr. Gabby Yearwood for his incredible guidance and support as my advisor and mentor during my years at the University of Pittsburgh. Without his insight, perspective, and wealth of knowledge, this project would not have been possible. I want to thank the other members of my committee, professors Dubuisson, Roman, and Novosel, for their considerable contributions to my understanding of these fields and these topics over my undergraduate years.

I would also like to thank all the lecturers of the Anthropology and History departments of the University of Pittsburgh and Queen's University, where the opportunities and the insight I encountered far surpassed all my expectations. I will always be aware of how lucky I was to be able to experience the sincere pleasure of learning from such thoughtful, careful, and empathetic individuals. I can only hope that one day, such a thorough and impactful education will be well-compensated and accessible to everyone.

I want to thank the University Honors College for the opportunity to do this research project. At the risk of repeating myself, it is tremendously meaningful to me as a Basque-Galician woman to see these stories receive some of the visibility they deserve, after witnessing them be hidden from view my whole life.

Finally, I want to remember all the victims of these abuses, some whose testimonies I have read, some whose graves I have visited, some of whom are still with us and still hoping, some of whom

are long dead, some who will never be buried as they deserve, and some of whom we will never know about. Ni olvido ni perdón.

1.0 Introduction

In the last twenty years, there have been a multitude of reports coming out of the Republic of Ireland, the north of Ireland, and the Spanish state[1], alleging that tens of thousands of infants were taken from their mothers by religious and medical staff, and put up for adoption. These reports estimate over 70,000 of these forced adoptions occurred in Ireland, north and south, through the Magdalene[2] Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes; and that up to 300,000 children were forcibly or "irregularly" adopted during the Francoist period and the democratic "regime"[3] that followed it. In 2023, after five months of archival research, I spent seven months doing fieldwork in Ireland, Galicia, and Euskadi, focusing on the enduring legacy of these abuses on Irish and Iberian societies.

There is certainly no shortage of other key historical periods in Ireland and Iberia where we see striking parallels, in particular, their pre-World War One colonial dynamics, the post-civil war construction of public moral codes, the increasingly visible political clashes of the 1970s and 1980s, and the "reconciliation" narratives stemming from the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and

[1] I use the terms "Spanish state" and "Iberia" to avoid referring to the two autonomous communities of Galicia and the Basque country as "Spain" which is a common practice among independentists, who do not recognize the legal borders. Similarly, I avoid using the term "Northern Ireland" to describe the British-occupied six counties, unless I am referring to the government itself.

[2] While there are multiple spellings of "Magdalene" (most commonly *Magdalen*) for the purposes of this thesis I will use *Magdalene* as it is the most common.

[3] The transition to democracy from Fascism in Spain is often colloquially referred to as "el regimen del '78" (the regime of '78) referencing the Constitution written as a result of it, which protected many fascist collaborators.

the 2011 ETA ceasefire, in the North of Ireland and the Basque Country, respectively. All of these periods reveal the embeddedness of hegemonic tensions between the established state and the contested region: the British Empire and the north and south of Ireland, and the Spanish state and the autonomous communities it occupies, especially in Galicia and Euskadi[4]. In this thesis, I propose that the existing definitions and characterizations of political violence in these zones have not successfully accounted for the many victims of more "invisible" violence, particularly gendered violence.

After laying out the theoretical standpoint in the remainder of this chapter, in Chapter 2 I discuss how although this violence occurred in structurally different ways in Ireland and the Spanish state, it produced notably similar results: cultures of impunity and silence, states entitled themselves to designate women as 'unfit' mothers and take their children, inextricable bonds between the state and the church, and tens (or hundreds) of thousands of children separated from their families and their histories. Chapter 2 also deals with the sources and references used in this thesis, and delves further into the differences in how these cases were recognized and discussed in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Spain, and what impact that has had on the academic interpretations of these abuses. Chapter 3 connects the analysis presented here to other anthropological analyses of researcher positionality, ethnography and research as activism, post-conflict narrative building, and the impact and consequence of testimony. Chapter 4 details the specifics of the forced adoption

[4] 'Euskadi' refers to the Basque Country in Euskera, the Basque language, and specifically refers to [the Spanish-occupied provinces, but can be used interchangeably with "Euskal Herria", which is more closely associated with all seven provinces, both Spanish and French-occupied. "Euskadi" is less associated with independentist sentiments when utilized in Spanish, while "Euskal Herria" often carries the independentist connotation. Thus, despite the fact that the terms *are* interchangeable, they are not often used in the exact same way.

process in both areas and focuses on the difference in the available information. In particular, this chapter references information from the Irish and Northern Irish official state inquiries, and from the unofficial online non-profit forums created by victims in Spain. Chapters 5 and 6 analyze the specific field sites in Ireland (Belfast, Cork, and Galway) and Iberia (Vigo, A Coruña, Coirós and Bilbao). These chapters examine the role that insider status played in the ethnographic work, the commemoration (if any) of the institutions and the gravesites, and the specific record of the abuses that occurred in those cities and towns. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the concepts of "participant observation" in ethnographic work, challenging the perceptions of "native anthropology" that exist within the field and exploring the complications of that "insider" status as they occurred in my work.

On one level, this analysis is a study of institutional violence waged against women regardless of whether the Republicans won, as in the case of the Irish Civil War, or whether they lost, as they did in the Spanish Civil War. Additionally, it is also an attempt to analyze the practice of ignoring this violence in the contemporary revolutionary movements, which either could not come to terms with it or were unwilling to prioritize recognizing and combating it. Ultimately, this study seeks to compare more than just the methods, constructions of narratives of morality used to justify these abuses, and the political climates that they occurred in. Specifically, it aims to compare the legacies left by such intense and widespread violations of autonomy, and how they have impacted the existing gender dynamics, and conceptions of militant movements in these regions. It is a study of the impacts of this on the current discourses of state and religious violence, bodily autonomy, and post-conflict justice, as well as the impact on these societies' abilities to come to terms with *all* the violence of their pasts, not just the more visible instances of it.

1.1 Theoretical standpoint

The process of examining, judging, amending, or even "remembering" violence in these supposed "post-conflict" periods often suffers from a reductive and simplistic direction (Hastrup, 2003; Ross, 2003; Wilson, 2003). Firstly, the violence that defines these periods, in this particular case the Troubles in Ireland, or the "Lead years" in the Basque Country, rarely ends or vanishes completely when the period concludes (Baby, 2012; Clark & Rice, 2011). Secondly, the "aftermath" period frequently leads to a re-writing of the past and an establishment of a specific national or cultural image by part of the states that have inflicted that violence. This process takes place under the guise of helping the body politic to heal the wounds of the past. In Ireland, the fashioning of this new national self can be clearly seen in the post-civil war establishment of the Irish Free State, and the increasing conservativism of the political and religious movements within it (Reagan, 2007; Garrett, 2017, O'Mahoney, 2018). We can also see it through the narratives established in the North, during the decades of Unionist rule and the post-Good Friday Agreement, narratives which were determined to paint violence as a rootless, inexplicable product of the past with no enduring presence (Clark & Rice, 2011; Irvin, 1999). In Iberia, the re-writing of history in the "aftermath" of the violence that will be discussed in this thesis includes the very different post-Franco narratives that emerged in the occupied communities of Galicia and the Basque Country. In Galicia, these narratives depicted remembrance, commemoration, and resistance (in the form of public funerals, large-scale protests, revolutionary poetry or music, etc.) as futile in the face of a state power that had only undergone performative change, in an attempt to keep the violence of

the past from repeating itself by ignoring its remaining impact (Ayán Vila, 2019; Costa, 2021). In Euskadi, in contrast, the narrative was one where resistance, national re-imagining, militancy, and martyrdom were less of a specific political choice and more of an attempt to survive (Clark, 1979; Woodworth, 2001).

There are clearly different levels of coverage of the institutional abuses across Ireland, Galicia, and Euskadi, and the ethnographic material referenced in this study is reflective of that. In the case of Ireland, the abuses on both sides of the border have been examined and analyzed at various levels, and with a wealth of information, both quantitative and qualitative (Garrett, 2017; Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benitez-Castro, 2020; O'Mahoney, 2018; McCormick, O'Connell, Dee, Privilege, 2021; Simpson, Clegg, Lopes, Pinha, Rego, Pitsis, 2015). However, rarely are they discussed in the same environments and with the same fervor as the more 'tangible' political violence that took place in Ireland. In Iberia, these abuses have only been minimally investigated, with copious state intervention hindering any interpretation of the findings. Despite the severity indicated by data, – specifically, the credible suspicion that 300,000 children may have been stolen and "adopted" through this system – this story is often treated in mainstream conservative circles like some sort of communist conspiracy theory, with no credibility or urgency behind it. The majority of these allegations come directly from children who discovered that their parents were not their biological parents, and had in fact purchased them (Vicedo, 2019). A number of the accusations have even resulted in unofficial testimonies from nuns involved in the process, confirming that these irregular adoptions were a practice of theirs (Ruíz Armesto, 2016). The dismissal of these allegations comes as a consequence of the post-transition Spanish mentality, which encouraged a commitment to "progress" by "forgetting" the past (Baby, 2012). As a result

of this, allegations of this sort are routinely met with scorn or exasperation, as if by searching for the truth or by condemning abuses they experienced, victims are inconveniencing the larger population by staying "stuck" in the past. At the same time, despite the 2011 cessation of armed activity from the most significant of the Basque independence movement's armed groups, a communist militia called Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom) referred to as ETA, they are still referenced as a potential threat and utilized as a political maneuver almost daily in Spanish politics. This will be further explained in sections 2.1, 6.0, and 7.3. Within the Spanish state, the victims of Fascist and "democratic" state violence do not form part of any regular conversation, and the resistance to that violence is consistently referenced as a "terrorist threat" and used as a justification for increased policing, even a decade after the primary "threat" (in this case ETA) has disappeared entirely (Baby, 2012; Guelle, 2022). In doing so, they continue to silence victims of state violence and simultaneously limit the scope of what is legible as political violence (Ross, 2003; Gruber, 2022).

My analysis proposes that a replication of this state-generated narrative in the academic world is not coincidental, but a result of decades of intellectual interpretations of "militant violence" and "terrorism" that more often than not have refashioned the states' views through a myopic academic lens. Very often in times of extreme crisis in a region that then results in a sort of "contestatory violence," academic spaces that have either obtained professional success or economic gain through the study of that region, are, in the best of cases, reluctant to apply an accurate analysis or inclined towards a mutual condemnation of both groups. However, as is evidenced by the frequent practice of denial of these abuses in the Spanish academic environment, this type of interpretation is often a product of state sponsorship or pressure, and not personal

belief. As I am writing this, I am seeing institutions do the same regarding the illegal occupation of Palestine and the response to the near century of apartheid, with the targeting of pro-Palestinian students in institutions like Brown, Harvard, and Columbia, and the harassment of faculty at Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania, who were merely suspected of "leniency" towards protesting students. It has never been clearer to me that the determination to avoid applying accurate analysis, or the willful misinterpretation of militant movements, is not a thing of the past in the anthropological field. To sincerely use terms like "terrorists" or "unprecedented violence" concerning the reaction to the intolerable conditions that the Palestinians have been forced into by Israeli and US-backed occupation makes it exceedingly clear to me that the obfuscation that has informed the incomplete analysis of the Basque and Irish conflicts remains prevalent in this environment, with institutions repackaging a state-generated narrative that presents sanctioned brutality as normal, and reactive brutality as appalling (University of Pittsburgh, Gabel, 2023). The presence of militant contestatory violence exists as a sort of aberration that motivates those analyzing it to resist or even deny context, and treat it as "unprecedented" or "senseless" violence. This period of intense state violence has answered a long-held question for me – how do institutions and intellectual authorities muddle or resist the truth in times when definition and opposition are crucial?

In short, despite the fact that the overwhelming focus on the IRA and ETA's violence in Ireland and Iberia has made analysis of other kinds of violence more difficult, those other instances cannot be examined separately from these insurgent movements, as in many ways they inform each other. I suggest that the absence of "sufficient" or accurate analysis into these forced adoptions stems from more than just a potential hypocrisy or inherent patriarchal nature within

these insurgent movements, but from the fact that the reductionist interpretation of these movements has been so constant that there is little expectation for accurate analysis of *any* political violence in these areas.

One cannot separate the state models that arose in the Irish Isle and the Iberian peninsula as a product of British and Spanish fear of insurgency from the later, more developed models – which surveilled their subjects in attempts to identify "ungovernable" traits, and which excised institutional power as a castigating force in response. In the case of Spain, this is plain to see – the legacy of Francoism is evident at every level of the "democratic" state, from its establishment (see 2.1 and 3.2) to consistent human rights violations in Euskadi, even decades after the end of the dictatorship. In Ireland, the governments of the Free State and later on the Irish Republic eventually emulated the British rule they rejected, in their persecution and incarceration of IRA volunteers from the post-civil war period onward. The Unionist-led government in Northern Ireland explicitly continued the financial and social exclusion of Irish Catholics and the widespread normalization of targeted police brutality and surveillance. Both of these states and the religious institutions that worked within them (whether in collaboration, as was the case in the South, or in direct opposition, as occurred in the North) used the same strategies to observe and judge the militancy of their occupants as they did when deciding which women were "improper" and "unfit" and required institutional correction as a result. My analysis proposes that the states in question still function similarly, surveilling the public for signs of deviance in order to gauge and stamp out the threat to the national narrative. This now occurs through state responses to structural issues like poverty, which are criminalized in each of these places through evictions, loitering charges, and "squatting" charges. Additionally, the state reaction to addiction is very relevant, as drug use continues to

affect the populations of Ireland, Galicia, and Euskadi, with the further caveat that in Euskadi, the state was directly implicated in dealing and embedding heroin (see 2.0). Upon finding evidence of this deviance, they enable the arms of the state, either through their security forces or their social services. The forced removal of children now looks like careful surveillance and incarceration, or family services' decisions to separate children from their parents for their "well-being" given several precarious situations that children may be living in, most often parental drug use or extreme poverty. As expected, the fact that the state is responsible for the structural conditions that lead to this precarity in many cases, the direct cause of it, does not factor into the perceived legitimacy of their actions[5].

I return again, to the continuously unfolding reaction to the situation in Palestine, where the daily reality of extreme violence is treated as irrelevant until there is some presence of contestatory violence by any of the occupied or oppressed people. In particular, I have noticed an uptick in the fealty towards a state's ability to define itself and the violence it produces – the employment of words like "military" to describe the Israeli "Defense" Force, and "terrorists" to describe the Palestinian militants. The degree of legitimacy implied in that, in the subscription to these terms and designations as somehow logical, starkly parallels how dominant perceptions of "illegitimate" insurgencies, like ETA and the IRA, have prevented thorough analysis of the political context that created them and which created the adoption markets in these countries. In

[5] In the 1980s, as part of the state-led push to "exterminate ETA" the Spanish government enabled several military and Civil Guard commanders to form death squads that targeted the *abertzale* (Basque Independentist/Communist) community (Woodworth, 2001). While some of their strategies were obvious, like the creation of active paramilitary groups, the commanders of those groups also began intricate heroin trafficking networks, often using their own mercenaries as drug mules (Oiarzabal, 2014). This led to a heroin epidemic in Euskadi that decimated an entire generation in the 80s, and still lingers today.

particular, these state-generated narratives rely on a fear of "terrorism" felt by the larger public, who have the potential to be the chief objectors of state brutality. This occurs in different ways – in Ireland, with the frequent miscategorization of accurate historical contextualization as "glorification of the IRA," and in Spain with the constant invoking of ETA, and the similarly constant assertion that any pro-independentist sentiment is proof of ETA sympathies or direct collaboration.

The job of the public then becomes to accept the idea that the state has intervened so brutally, through direct executions or mass incarcerations, in order to protect them from what would otherwise be inevitable: their deaths at the hands of mindless, directionless terrorism. Simply put, the lack of visible public outrage about these forced adoptions is not a testament to any fundamental apathy towards children in Ireland or Iberia, it is a result of decades of instruction that the only expressible outrage pertains to militant violence. I suggest that this is by design – if citizens feel they cannot interrogate the state's brutality toward militants, then the odds of public backlash to state violence at a more intimate scale are much smaller. Without wanting to insinuate that the siege on Gaza should be looked at as a "teachable moment" it has answered one final unasked question that has lingered subconsciously throughout the time I've done my research, specifically – how was it possible that the general population safeguarded these evils? How did people sustain a collective delusion in regard to their position as present or future victims of "terror" while nothing, in actuality, was happening to them, and how did this translate to support of the state's "answering" violence?

1.2 Insider status in ethnographic work

While several aspects contributed to the relative ease or difficulty of gaining insight from interviewees in each field site, none had quite so much impact on the process as my identity as a Basque. This was most useful in Ireland, where the notion of Irish Republican and Basque Independentist allegiance has been extensively popularized. That purposeful solidarity remains the single most instrumental part of my fieldwork thus far. In my first fifteen minutes in Ireland, rushing to catch the Aircoach out of Dublin airport, I ended up seated next to a man named Seamus in his late forties, who told me he was from South Armagh, asked whereabouts I was from, and then told me he was a "huge fan of [our] work" referring to both the political legitimization attempts made by the radical Basque left through the Herri Batasuna party, and ETA's fifty-year bombing campaign. Despite my assurances that I was in grade school for the last of the bombings, and as such, could not take any credit for them, Seamus's immediate and seemingly innate ability to gauge what he could say without offending me and his easy and enthusiastic declaration of solidarity set the standard that the majority of my interactions with Republicans would conform to. I had some knowledge of this before I arrived in Ireland, having the occasional encounter with Irish tourists who immediately professed their 'love' for the Basques, even though on many occasions, they did not know any themselves. And I, in turn, had professed a similarly inexperienced but no less sincere appreciation for the Irish. In part, I believe this stems from more than just the inherent joy of solidarity, both cultural and political. The north of Ireland and Euskal

Herria have both been the subjects of relentless criticism, stereotyping, and prejudice for the better part of the last seventy years, both domestically, by the dominant state and their media, and internationally, by conglomerate state powers such as the EU and UN, which have frequently focused on the threat of "terrorism" and not the hegemony that creates the conditions for it (Guelle, 2022: pp. 11-13) The one unintended positive consequence of this has been the creation of a point of even more intense connection between the Irish and the Basques, where not only are there experiences of occupation and state violence to compare, but our generation's experiences with being smeared as "terrorists" or "sympathizers" for wanting to remember any detail of the past, or in many instances, simply for speaking in a certain language or attending a certain church (Libertad Digital, 2023; Robinson, 2023)

My first visit to Ireland in July of 2022, while brief, cemented my understanding of my positionality as a researcher, where before I was an anthropology student, before I was a woman, even, I was Basque, and furthermore, I was Basque while in Ireland. My contested nationality superseded the rest of my identity, even my American passport. My first conversation with Seamus lasted only thirty minutes from the Dublin airport to the city center, but his willingness to lean into that perceived solidarity translated to a desire to "let me in" or introduce me to Ireland as thoroughly and efficiently as possible. He pointed out landmarks as we drove past them, sites that were already indistinguishable in the grey blur of the highway the Aircoach sped down, but would have stayed invisible and illegible without context even if we were immobile. The gate outside of a large hospital where his friend had been shot to death was particularly notable, this inevitable recollection that Seamus had every time he took this bus – a frequent occurrence as he had emigrated, along with many other Irishmen and women, to Liverpool several decades past – and

drove alongside the place where his friend had spent the last, violent moments of his life. He had been a victim of the gang violence that has gripped Dublin with increasing ferocity since roughly the end of the Troubles, and there was no marker for his memory, no flowers or placard. Just a street and a gate, visible for a second from the road, and only with prior knowledge or invitation.

I felt somehow dishonest, listening to Seamus's stories, and not offering any of my own. The assumption that I was in Ireland on some sort of political pilgrimage, while not entirely untrue, had, to him, evoked behaviors informed firmly by a generation that I had never belonged to, if only missing it by ten years. Our immediate, instinctual topic of conversation being ETA and the fact that I was bound for Belfast made it clear to him what subject my research would deal with, the same way, I supposed, that as little as a decade ago, it would have likely meant that I was on the run, during the epidemic of arrests of suspected ETA members and associates that took place during my childhood, and which I only vaguely remembered (Ministerio del Interior, 2000; Oficina de Relaciones Informativas y Sociales, 2003, RTVE, 2010). He trusted me with these details on the assumption that I was someone with similar stories, and a similar willingness to share them, that I was simply not in a setting where there were landmarks of my own proximal tragedies to share. Of course, at that point, hoping to avoid the traveler's naivete, I ascribed his openness mostly to the stereotypical Irish love of storytelling, and the frequent experience in my own life where my perceived friendliness and age often led older men of varying ages to open up to me, giving me life advice that ranged from relevant and helpful to paternalistic or plainly sexually inappropriate. I wanted to be sure to take his advice while considering the context in which he was giving it – as I would later find out, the desire that older Irish men had to "bring me in" and explain dynamics based on our shared political sentiments often did not prevent them from leaning into the dynamics

of our different ages and genders, although this seemed subconscious rather than deliberate. Seamus told me to tell everyone what I was doing in Ireland, to make a point of my research – at that point, still a nebulous, uncertain topic, with Basque-Irish parallels and state repression as the only tangible focus – as soon as possible, and that he was certain people would be eager to help. When I expressed surprise, he laughed, telling me that "things were different here," citing the stoicism of his Basque friends in Liverpool. This anecdote was not an outlier – nearly every Basque enthusiast I met in Belfast remarked at how unfriendly or standoffish many Basques could be, particularly in comparison to the Irish. "They told me absolutely nothing," said one young Irish musician I met that week, who had gone to Euskadi some years before and had evidently had a hard time making connections amongst the insular, closed-off locals he encountered. I felt caught between a desire to defend or apologize for my father's people, wanting to contextualize that perceived standoffishness with the surveillance and persecution of not just the Franco years, but the "democratic transition" era, but I also found myself wanting to admit that I, too, had a hard time getting the answers that I wanted from people I met there, even those with whom I had a prior connection. I began to realize that a constant re-examination of my status as a tentative "insider" within Basque and Irish cities would be necessary.

Seamus asked me to get a pint with him, somehow preemptively apologetic, and then approved of my declining, citing the difference in our ages, and he bid me good luck, abruptly growing serious and telling me to be sure to pay attention to the curbs of the streets in Belfast because I would immediately be able to tell if I was in a Loyalist area if they were painted with the colors of the Union Jack. This initial dynamic I encountered with Seamus would repeat in each of my individual conversations with older Irishmen, where my lack of offense at their nearly

immediate reference to the independence movement or ETA, and my reciprocate, albeit subtler, appreciation of the IRA's more strategic actions created an immediate, easy camaraderie, that temporarily allowed the question of my age and gender to become less defining than the question of my political sympathies, which I based on several theories of activist or 'reciprocal' anthropology (Martinez 2008, Bickham-Mendez 2008). In that vaguely secretive, almost performatively conspiratorial space, in parks, on buses, in taxis and bars, I received anecdotes, personal histories, jovial descriptions of thoroughly illegal activities, and incredibly personal stories of loss. These men, all complete strangers, would make adamantly radical political statements, things that many times, they joked or remarked would not be well-received by the more liberal public of the Republic and would be completely shocking to a "real American," a designation that I was thankfully thought to be exempt from.

It was that closeness, both real and imagined, that led me to the conclusion that I could not write about just Basque-Irish solidarity and that I would have to be careful with how I referenced it and any information I received as a result of it (Anderson, 1983, Zulaika, 1988). I was anticipating research positionality (Martinez, 2008; Hordge-Freeman, 2015) to be useful in a much more significant way in my fieldwork in Galicia and Euskadi, where half of my family still lives, and where I am immediately, by appearance, name, and accent, identifiable in one way or another. Particularly in the question of appearance, my relative ethnic ambiguity played a role in my 'credibility.' My family is "very dark" for the north of the Iberian peninsula, as I have been told many times. In Galicia, the fact that I was "very dark," in combination with my Basque last name, made it easy for my Galician identity to be dismissed, even in my ancestral village. In Ireland, the fact that I "didn't look American," which I was also frequently told, established my position as an

outsider. I was clearly not Irish, but my "lack" of American appearance made me more welcome than I might have been otherwise.

Ultimately it was in Belfast, that first week there, where it became clear to me that any ethnographic research I did would be immensely aided by the strange intimacy shared between the Irish and the Basques, and as such, I could not write about that intimacy alone. Similarly, because it was the lingering memory of ETA and the IRA that granted me that intimacy, I could not write solely about them, and their legacy and impact.

In Galicia, I experienced a similar, and equally unexpected occurrence – I had, perhaps naively, assumed that the majority of the 'controversial' information I'd come across would happen in Euskadi, given the enduring presence of the militant movement. However, it was in one of my primary field sites, a village in the A Coruña province, Coiros, where my grandmother's family has lived for multiple generations, where I ended up truly understanding what role insider status can play in ethnographic research. As a result of my experiences in both of these places, I was able to consider the impact of relaying and contextualizing information I received as an "insider". As such, while this study does rely in part on an analysis of the independence movements of these occupied communities, I feel it is necessary to clarify that the analysis in question is invariably impacted by my own relation to those movements, either as a participant in them or a recipient and beneficiary of their achievements. Additionally, I have been able to reflect on what it means to be an outsider within that "insider" designation, a way of considering the position I occupied due to my gender, my ethnicity, my ability to speak the "right" languages, and my inoffensive accent, all of which made able to appear as though I was not out immediately of place in the many places I did my fieldwork (Hordge-Freeman, 2015). In Ireland, I was able to have

much more open conversations with other women regarding gendered violence, and in particular the forced adoptions and the sexual violence of the church. Many of the men I spoke to, across all ages, who had been perfectly willing to discuss our respective links to known terrorist organizations upon preliminary introductions, were noticeably uncomfortable with the topic of violence against women of any sort. At first, I assumed this was also a shared reticence towards critiquing the Catholic Church, an unwillingness which is certainly present further south in the Republic with older men, but I now believe this to be a more complex reluctance – it seems to me that many of the men I spoke with were not opposed to critiques of the church and the state for the violence they had inflicted on women, in fact, they privately shared those critiques. It was that they were uncomfortable discussing those critiques with me, in part because I was an outsider, if a welcome one, but also because I was a woman, and there is still a certain presence of Catholic shyness, or practiced propriety, so to speak, that makes these subjects particularly uncomfortable in Ireland.

In Euskadi, the discomfort with discussing this subject is one I will explore further in sections 3.1 and 6.2, but one that can most succinctly be described as the fundamental consequence of my haphazard "insider" status. Despite the fact that my legible Basque identity fundamentally impacted the way I was treated in Ireland and Galicia, as a welcome or unwelcome visitor, respectively, in Euskadi, the fact that I was half-in, half-out stood out starkly (Abu-Lughod, 2008; El-Kholy & Al-Ali, 1999). A central motivation behind my decision to study the impact of "insider status" in ethnographic work was my fascination with what remained unsaid in places with an ingrained culture of vocal resistance to hegemonic violence (Bickham-Mendez, 2008; Irvin, 1999). While it's clear to me that the complexities of Euskal Herria as a whole are sufficient to fill a series

of encyclopedias, I will for the purposes of this analysis have to borrow the reductionist interpretation of Basque society as "halved" by the stances on Spanish occupation and the resistance to it (Clark, 1979; Woodworth, 2001; Zulaika, 2000). Amongst those I knew who were opposed to the idea of militant direct action of any sort, my interest in discussing the intricacies of Spanish state violence and the remaining impact of it was read as allegiance to the *abertzale*[6] mentality – which appears to imply that opposition to the *abertzale* mission of self-determination and giving the working class control over the means of production is inherently an opposition to the historical interpretation of state violence – despite the fact that I deliberately never mentioned ETA (Guelle 2022, Gruber, 2022). Conversely, when speaking to or observing more committed or "traditional" believers in the Basque left, I noticed that questions as to the lack of voice and space given to the institutional abuses among the more committed left were taken – in my own interactions and those I witnessed online – as an attack on the moral backbone of the *abertzaleak*.

In Galicia, the widespread reticence was one I attributed to the deeply engrained gender dynamics at play, ones which have been visible to me in Coiros for the whole of my life, a precise and intricate series of mores that may seem illogical to the average visitor or liberal Spanish feminist. Violence and tragedy are acceptable subjects – and common ones – but violence against women, or sexual violence of any sort, cannot be referenced without causing a noticeable deviation in the conversation, what I have come to think of as the classic Galician "passive shift". Additionally, regardless of the outspoken character of many of the individuals I spoke with, I came to realize that the fact that I had grown up, and was no longer the child they once knew me as, had

[6] *Abertzale* is the Basque word most often used by Basque and Spanish speakers to describe the ideology of an independentist, typically with strong communist beliefs. The plural form is *abertzaleak.*

not made them any more willing to discuss women's material realities in the past or present with me. In my experience, there are some things that, regardless of age, a proper Galician countryman will not speak to women about, and I do often wonder if, in male company, they speak of it at all.

2.0 Forced Adoptions in Ireland

The first Magdalene Laundry in Ireland was opened in 1767 by Lady Arabella Denny, under the name Magdalene Asylum for Penitent Females (Quinn, 2011). It was Protestant-run and served primarily to "serve" prostitutes who needed support or aid (Clark, 2020). There were similar institutions across Catholic Europe, which functioned as "halfway houses to marriage" for women who had been marked by "sexual sin" of a sort (McCarthy, 2010: p. 2). While they were common throughout Medieval Europe, the advent of industrial capitalism transformed them into "institutionalized workhouses" as a result of increased state development which encouraged and supported exploitation-based labor dynamics to secure the most profit for the least amount of worker's compensation (McCarthy, 2010). The Magdalene Laundries provided an ideal model for that economic goal, in which the "deviant" or "fallen" women held there would rid themselves of their apparent sin through hard work, which eliminated the question of pay – their reward for their labor existed only in the potential to achieve "rehabilitation" by proving that they were committed to redemption through hard work. Of course, this relied on the notion that the labor of prostitution, or any of the other informal economic work they may have been engaged in was excluded from the designation of "work" by the dominant moral narrative.

The "modern period" of the Laundries occurred between the 18th and 20th centuries, and while they were particularly present in Ireland, these institutions also existed in other English colonies, including the United States (McCarthy, 2010, pp. 2-3). The modern period can best be categorized as the turning point where these institutions became centered entirely around forced

labor, particularly laundry work, which became their namesake. While they existed in multiple English colonies, their presence and pattern of behavior in Ireland is notably the harshest and the one which endured the longest. In this chapter, I will lay out the specific factors that took what was a series of Protestant-run, charitable institutions in Ireland and adapted them into a system of state-led exploitation, Catholic institutional abuse, and forced labor and adoption which impacted the lives of approximately 70,000 women and at least 57,000 children.

In the Irish case, there were a multitude of academic sources that were useful to my own analysis. Primarily, I referenced Paul Michael Garrett's *Excavating the Past: Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland,* (2017), for its contextualization of the early clerical involvement in the new Republic government, and the two commissions to investigate the Homes and Laundries in the North and in the Republic, Leanne McCormick, Sean O'Connell, Olivia Dee, and John Privilege's *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922-1990,* and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's *Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes* (2021). Garrett's analysis was also useful in that it laid out the awareness that the Irish state had of the mortality rate of infants and children in these homes (Garrett, 2017: p. 364). Most of the information on the methods, structure, longevity, and practices of the Laundries and Homes came from these sources, which were instrumental quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

For an analysis of the more nuanced social and psychological aspects of the internment, Jennifer O'Mahoney's *Advocacy and the Magdalene Laundries: towards a psychology of social change* (2018) offered insight into the mission of the Laundries, and the symbolic pressure put on the internees, as the "bearers" of the Irish nation. Similarly, Simpson, Clegg, Lopez, Cunha, Rego

& Pitsis's *Doing compassion or doing discipline? Power Relations and the Magdalene Laundries* (2014) helped to contextualize the Laundries along with the "paradoxical" 19th-century Christian charity mindset and offered a thorough analysis of online commentary regarding the Laundries, which helped to prepare me for in-person fieldwork, gauging the opinions and stances of the Irish across generations regarding the church's abuse. Encarnacion Hidalgo-Tenorio and Miguel-Angel Benitez-Castro's *The Language of Evaluation in the Narratives by the Magdalene Laundries Survivors: The Discourse of Female Victimhood* (2020) served as a point of reference for examining the language I was reading in other sources, and also prompted me to consistently examine and interrogate the language I was using in my analysis.

Understanding these specific long-term abuses inflicted on Irish women requires an understanding of the social impacts of the Irish Civil War (1922-1923), not to be confused with the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) or the 1916 Easter Rising. Out of all of these conflicts, the pivotal Easter Rising that defined Irish Republicanism for multiple generations was the one that featured the heaviest involvement of female volunteers and utilized the most explicit "Mother Ireland" imagery and rhetoric. "Mother Ireland" was a feminized personification of the Irish nation, one that was alternately pure, brave, violated, unprotected, and devastated (Jacobsen, 2020). The involvement of Irish women within the conceptions of republicanism, and in extension, violence, and sacrifice, were made complex by the past Victorian ideals of femininity and the present reality where men were likely to be the victims of visible British violence. The concept of "Mother Ireland" is directly linked to the conception of the "revolutionary family cell" as Jacobsen and others have dubbed it. The Irishwoman was both a mother and a daughter, a sister, and a lover, and at the same time, the nation itself. This personification of the nation as a woman is not specific

to Ireland, as feminized depictions of states appear throughout much of Western European and American art (i.e. *Manifest Destiny,* the Statue of Liberty, etc.) and coincidentally there is a strikingly similar narrative in pre-Christian Basque mythology, which represents the universe itself as a woman and a mother, Mari (Kurlansky, 2000; Villanueva, 2003). Some analyze the resulting "tragic hero" narrative, a staple in Irish literature, in something of a condescending lens, ascribing it solely to Catholicism and the guilt implicit within it. I find that there is a fundamental error in the social interpretation of reticence, sacrifice, and the apparent willingness to suffer and to die within Catholic cultures, as signaling of this sort of "battered" quality in the people as a product of their senseless fealty to a religious institution that does not have their material interests in mind (Rooney, 2007, Clark, 1979). The "tragic heroism" that defined gender dynamics in the period of British occupation in Ireland was a byproduct of colonialism, not an unprompted or rootless tendency towards martyrdom.

There is a terrible irony to the fact that the republicanism of the time, patriarchal and complex as it was, created the "Mother Ireland" phenomenon, and as such, the "revolutionary family cell". They intended to bolster this idea of the complete necessity of fighting for Ireland, even to the death, because *not* fighting for her would likely mean the death of their nuclear family (for their visible weaknesses: femininity, age, youth; and their visible strength: resilience, insolence, rebellion, the potential to one day match a soldier in strength, to one day be strong enough to work their ancestral lands) and because it would also mean the deaths of thousands of complete strangers living parallel lives, and this "imagined community" was also a family of sorts (Anderson, 1983). This is the same logic that the British would use to justify their persecution of the family members of known Republicans, surveilling and often brutalizing and arresting them –

and as such, pushing them further into the rhetoric of militant violence as an inherited cause, creating a cyclical self-fulfilling prophecy (Toolis, 2011).

Roughly three hundred Irishwomen participated in the events of the Easter Rising in Dublin, as nurses or active militants within Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland) and Cumann na mBan, a sort of 'sister group' to the all-male Irish Volunteer Force. They were under less scrutiny and surveillance at the time, enabling them to gather intel and facilitate the transportation of smaller weapons. Eamon De Valera, president of the newborn Irish republic established after the Civil War, referred to these women as the "boldest and most unmanageable" of those involved in the revolutionary action (Ward, 2022). In his time in office, De Valera allowed the Catholic Church to collaborate at the highest levels within the Free State, ultimately cementing their cultural capital to the degree necessary for the Church's ability to successfully create its adoption market in the following decades (Garret, 2017). In the 1922 constitution, Irish women were declared to have the same rights of political citizenship as men. Three years later in 1925, the Civil Service Regulation Amendment demoted women to lower ranks of service on a broad scale (Beaumont, 2002). From then on, the influence of the widespread "Catholic social teaching" grew even more significant and the state started to increase its emphasis on women's "moral welfare" (Beaumont, 2002). In this post-partition era, where De Valera's government's priority was stability at all costs, contraceptives were banned and women brought to court, most of them on prostitution charges, were judged by all-male juries (Beaumont, 2002)**.** This period marked an intense increase in the stigmatization of sex work and sexuality in general, where, in addition to creating extreme social pressure to remain "pure," De Valera's government severely limited women's employment opportunities. While this was presented as an attempted solution to the issue

of mass male unemployment, it also created a paradoxical environment for women in the workforce – they could no longer find jobs in civil service, and the other traditional fields of female employment did not have vacancies for their influx, so what remained? Poverty, destitution, or prostitution – which, since the removal of the British, was no longer seen as an extension of English brutality and dominion, but rather an indicator of sin and impurity in the woman's soul. The particular increase in the state's ability to punish women for the apparent contents of their souls would eventually lead to the strengthening of the Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes and to the normalization of the separation of mothers from their children.

Protecting the "moral character" of Irishwomen was the post-war priority, particularly in the case of young women, who were being reared on the idea that their relationship with Irish citizenship was inherently tied to marriage and motherhood. This directly bolstered the new focus of the Magdalene Laundries, and the creation of the Mother and Baby Homes, which were now enabled by the Church (and by extension, the state) to make these concepts of "propriety" and "citizenship" actionable (O'Mahoney, 2018, pp. 2-4). The Free State government and many clergy officials did not shy away from the revolutionary rhetoric of the past nine years, despite the fact that some of the principal martyrs of the Easter Rising spoke plainly about the necessity of equal rights for men and women (Morris, 2008). Instead of ignoring the legacy of the Rising and the remaining Republican sentiments, they chose to impose another narrative on them in their process of "healing" and "stabilizing" the body politic. The women's contributions to the rebellion that had started it all, that had made the Free State possible in the first place, were not often mentioned – instead, their future contributions towards the stability of the Irish nation, namely, marrying Irishmen and having their children, were presented in the same language and context as the rallying

cries to action that had brought them to the rebellion. The state and the Church managed to rewrite a very recent history, freeing themselves of the obligation to pay the cultural debt owed to Irish women, and presenting the increased surveillance, punitive measures, and social pressures placed on these women through their exclusion from the workforce as something done in service of Ireland, in accordance with the Republican tradition (Jacobsen, 2020; O'Mahoney, 2018). As such, the primary role of women in the national narrative was as the "bearers" of the nation, who were responsible for its moral character and enduring existence but were also characterized as unable to be trusted, manage their own sexualities, and comprehend or navigate political and social changes (O'Mahoney, 2018).

It was directly after this period of national narrative construction that the Mother and Baby Homes reached their full potential for harm. Built from the model of the Magdalene Laundries, they were primarily institutions where unmarried women who had fallen pregnant were kept for the duration of their pregnancy and their labor, after which their child was put up for Catholic adoption and they worked in the institutions. The Republic's government had such a high degree of clerical involvement and such an intense commitment to performing stability that there emerged a culture of invisible punitive violence, where the "open secret" of the Mother and Baby Homes went uncontested, represented as a completely legitimate approach to the "crime" of sexual indecency and irresponsibility (O'Mahoney, 2018). In 1943, there were only 443 people incarcerated in the Irish prison system, but 1,983 women were confined to the Laundries and the Homes (Garrett, 2017, p. 363). While these institutions are commonly associated with the southern Republic and the Catholic Church, it is worth noting that there were active institutions in the North, and some were operated by Protestant churches. There were several in Belfast, one Laundry that

operated until the mid-eighties, and a Mother and Baby Home that closed in 1990. In the northern institutions, over two-thirds of the women were under the age of twenty-three. Thirty-three percent of the women confined were aged between fifteen and seventeen, twenty-eight percent between eighteen to twenty-three, and a further ten percent were between the ages of ten to fourteen (McCormick, O'Connell, Dee, Privilege, 2021, pp. 14-15). In the Republic, eighty percent were aged between eighteen and twenty-nine, and 11.4 percent of the women were under eighteen years of age (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 2). In Bessborough (see 6.2), Pelletstown, and Dunybone, there were much higher figures representing the underage women held there, particularly after a sharp increase of underage admissions in 1960 that continued into the eighties. In Dunybone, underage women made up 23.4 percent of all the women held there (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, p. 2). The process of interning and punishing the young woman for the "sin" of her pregnancy severely intensified her shame surrounding the experience and often ended up safeguarding the reputation of the unborn child's father, a fact which alone is already indicative of the misogyny implicit in the process. When we consider this alongside the average age of the women, many of them well below the age where they could realistically emotionally consent to sex, it becomes clear how committed the state and the church were to punishing women for any evidence of sexuality, consensual or not (Garret, 2017: p. 363).

It's central to my analysis to classify this as a kind of misogynistic violence, and not leave it in the purgatorial definition of "institutional violence" without further analysis. If we consider misogynistic violence to be a result of the socialization and normalization of resentment, aggression, judgment, and anger towards women as a consequence of patriarchal dynamics, we

should also consider that those same dynamics are what enabled many of the men in these situations to gain their professional power within those institutions. The designation of "institutional violence" often fails to consider the gender of those who make up the institution, and how their relative homogeneity impacts the others involved. If an institution is founded, directed, and operated by men who seek to punish women or who see no problem with the punishment of women at the hands of men, then it follows that their institution will follow their pattern of behavior. While women can participate in institutional violence (as military personnel, police, government employees, medical employees, or workers in the financial sector, to name a few) their participation does not often radically improve situations for their female victims, making the women collaborators in their active participation. In this case, and in the Iberian one, while it was the nuns and midwives who had the majority of the interactions with the victims, from daily control of the mothers to the "care" and adoption processes of the children, the priests, and doctors, all of them of course male, were the ones directing and sustaining these programs, even if the nuns managed the day-to-day. This "symbolic capital" shared by the priests and doctors allowed them to justify and maintain their control over women and children in the centers, but also to normalize their existence to the rest of Irish society, functioning as "gate-keepers" that simultaneously hid and justified the abuses they were committing (Bourdieu, 1991; Garrett, 2017: p. 362). Additionally, some reports include testimony from victims that the centers allowed older men, often elderly, to "visit" and look for wives, and young women in their late teens were then pressured, if not forced, into marriage with them (Wallace, 1995: p. 150; Garrett, 2017: pp. 362-363).

In addition to the gender dynamics at play, class distinctions had a huge role in determining how the Homes and Laundries were run. Because there was a cost associated with the "treatment" of the women, a daily charge billed to the local authorities, and the woman's family was expected to "pay back" the cost of her time in the institutions. One account by a midwife in Bessborough, Cork (see section 6.2) states that women whose families could pay the £100[7] fee were permitted to leave approximately a week and a half after giving birth and that their children were put up for adoption "immediately" (Goulding, 1998: p. 36) Women who were not so fortunate – £100 in the 1950s, is equivalent to £4,225.68 today (5390.02 USD) – were forced to stay in the institutions to "work off the debt" a period which took an average of two years, time enough for them to master whichever task was expected of them, most often laundry work, which the institutions provided for local hotels, hospitals, and other like businesses (O'Mahoney, 2018). In this sense, the institutions functioned much like the American carceral system, which charges prisoners for the invented "burden" of their care, creating a system and culture of indebtedness that seeks to aid their rehabilitation by motivating them to work in extremely exploitative conditions, for mere cents in the United States and nothing at all, in the case of the women in these institutions (Browne, 2010). Aside from the embedded classism of this premise, this element reveals something else about the way the church ran the homes – children whose mother's families could pay the £100 were immediately put up for adoption. And the other children? All formal inquiries and studies into these institutions posit that the incredibly high mortality rate in these homes – Bessborough,

[7] Although Cork is located in the Republic, and as such uses the Euro and not the British Pound, this change was made in 1998, and circulated in 2002. Up until that point, the citizens of the Irish Republic continued to use British Pounds Sterling (referred to as *Punts).*

in particular, saw the deaths of 921 children – primarily due to malnutrition, overcrowding, and poor medical care, could have been prevented if the children were not kept in the homes as long as they were (Garret, 2017).

2.1 Forced Adoptions in Iberia

The narrative which suggests that up to 300,000 children were taken from their mothers by "irregular" or "forced" means from 1939 to the 1990s remains controversial in Spain. The absence of a comprehensive state inquiry, such as the ones that the Irish and Northern governments put into place, makes it difficult to reinforce the idea that this narrative is based on contested facts, rather than conspiracy. What remains clear is that there was a clear presence of irregular adoptions within the Spanish state during the post-war period, which continued to a varying extent, for decades. The dominant narrative, often prompted if not directly generated by the state, is that while there may have been an abnormally high number of irregular adoptions within the Spanish state, there is some difficulty in proving that the bulk of them were *forced,* and there is a similar difficulty in proving that there was any far-reaching collaboration that enabled them, particularly any collaboration that involved the state or church in any way. In my analysis, I have found that there are clear patterns in the experiences of the women who believe their children were taken from

them and equally clear patterns in the experiences of children who learned that their parents had adopted them "irregularly." I have also determined that within these parallel experiences, there are clear shifts in methods, narratives, and practices surrounding the adoptions – I have determined there to be four main "stages" or "phases" of these irregular adoptions, which match up perfectly with the stages of political development occurring at the state level. The four stages of adoption line up with the following stages of sociopolitical change: the postwar period, the "stable" normalization period of Francoism, the *Transición*[8]-era push towards "democracy," and the post-transition focus on deviant behavior, particularly drug use and "terrorism". In this section, I will lay out the political factors specific to each of the stages, as well as the elements that appear specific to each of the corresponding stages of forced or irregular adoptions.

As there have been no commissions to investigate the *robo de niños*, much of the information about the methods of setting up the adoption black market is "unofficial." The chatrooms of non-profits dedicated to investigating and reuniting forcibly separated families, *SOS Bebes Robados* in particular, are the most useful for developing some understanding of the methods used to select women for forced adoptions, and the practices used to conceal them. For this project, a significant part of the information that I reference about the adoptions comes from the SOS Bebes Robados Galicia forum[9]. This webpage is connected to the Galician branch of the organization and mostly contains information related to cases that occurred in Galicia, but does contain many submissions that occurred in other autonomous communities and appears to be the only such website for submissions. A sizeable part of my text-based research has been based on

[8] Meaning: transition. Refers to the political shift after Franco's death in 1975, spurred on by the assassination of his would-be successor, Luis Carrero Blanco, in 1973. This period of political unrest and uncertainty continued until 1983.

[9] https://sosbebesrobadosgalicia.jimdofree.com/busquedas/

this site, where the majority of comments follow one of two structures: family members, usually mothers or siblings, seeking information about a child they believe was stolen; and adults who believe they may have been stolen or irregularly adopted.

In addition to the SOS forum, Daniela Ruíz Armesto's *Análisis criminológico del fenómeno vasco de las desapariciones de recién nacidos (Criminological analysis of the Basque phenomenon of the disappearances of newborns) (1939-2016)* (2016) was useful for establishing a line of analysis of the forced adoptions in Euskadi and attempting to gauge any possible patterns. Ruíz Armesto's paper not only focuses on the specifics of whom these institutions targeted and how they carried out the thefts but also tracks the history and development of the phenomenon back to the Civil War. She outlines how the fascist medical industry saw Marxism as a 'mental illness' and they used this diagnosis to justify the execution of thousands of female Republican prisoners who were charged not with actual militant activity, but with not 'being able to control their men' (Ruíz Armesto, 2016: p. 25). Raquel Vanyó Vicedo's, *Niños robados: deberes pendientes para España en el acceso a la verdad, la justicia y la reparación (Stolen children: pending tasks for Spain in the access to truth, justice, and reparation)* (2019), is the main point of reference for the legal process pertaining to the persecution and investigation of the forced adoptions, and which parts of the 1978 democratic constitution complicate those processes. Like many other referenced authors, she mentions how the state's impunity and unwillingness to collaborate with victims or external investigators continues to draw strength and legitimacy from the Amnesty Law from 1977, and the massive legal consequences that carries for this case. Because the state will – only recently, and only in the most minimal terms – admit that there were "thousands" of children stolen and abused by the regime after the war, and *only* during that time

period, the amnesty law relegates the case of all the stolen children to what is essentially a legal black hole (Vicedo, 2019: p. 197).

For a focus on the artistic representations of these abuses, Monica Gruber's, *Como denunciar cuando todos callan: los niños robados por el franquismo, (How to denounce when all are silent: the children stolen by Francoism)* (2020) examines the depictions of the *robo de niños* through two documentaries that dealt with the reality of Francoist repression and the process of healing from violence within an enduringly violent country. Interestingly, one of the two documentaries she analyzes, *El silencio de otros (The Silence of Others)* (2018) about the culture of silence and impunity that outlasted Franco and established itself in the "democratic years," is one I have studied separately, for its decision to exclude Basque narratives. I find this particularly interesting, seeing as the documentary is one of the few major productions that actually mentions the *robo de niños*, or the practice of police torture. Given that the rates of torture in interrogation rooms were disproportionately high in Euskadi, the decision to exclude any Basque voices communicates a lot about the structure of the "Spanish left" and their commitment to excluding the narratives of independentists who are victims of the state, again reinforcing the idea that the only discussable victimhood is one they have designated.

2.1.1 Initial stages and origins

The widespread presence of forced adoptions in the Spanish state began with the Civil War (1936-1939). When the fascists won the war after their coup d'etat, there were thousands of female Republican and Independentist prisoners, many of whom were held in monasteries that were made into makeshift prisons, and manned by the clergy. Some of the women were not active militants

but were known associates of male Republicans or Independentists. The men, their brothers, sons, fathers, lovers, or husbands, were all likely already dead, and the women were jailed for the crime of "not being able to control them" (Ruíz Armesto, 2016: p. 25). Many of the women were pregnant or had young children, and as such, there were several infants and children incarcerated alongside them, some of whom were not even born there but were jailed along with their mothers. Given the social changes that the democratically-elected Second Republic sought to put into action and the radical character of the Republican and Anarchist brigades the fascists sought to correct the "plague" of *los rojos* (the Reds) by inflicting traditionalism, conservative Catholic family values, and harsh gender norms to undo some of the damage done by the radical culture of the pre-war and war years and to give the world an image of stability (Evans, 2018; Ruíz Armesto, 2016). The war had garnered some level of attention from Republican sympathizers internationally, and from world leaders in the US and UK, Churchill in particular, who quietly backed Franco to prevent Stalin from aiding the Republicans (Boyd Rush, 1979). This drive for the image of respectability would define the Franco years and remains at the center of Spanish mainstream politics today in their staunch protection of the "national image," particularly regarding immigration, "radical" feminism, and the socialization of labor. It was that commitment to a public facade of charity, piety, and propriety that enabled the Church and other Catholic charities to carry out their abuses with impunity – where not only were they the primary agents of this abuse, but they were the least suspected of it.

Auxilio Social was a medical-religious charity, mostly operated by nuns, which took in the children of the female prisoners and other orphans of the war and sought to "reform" them (Gruber, 2022: pp. 107-110). In large part, their mission was informed by the teachings of Dr. Vallejo-

Nágera, a psychiatrist high up in the Francoist chain of command who considered Marxism to be a mental illness, describing it in such a way would justify the murder and repression of communists (Ruíz Armesto, 2016: p. 25). The children who survived described extreme cold, starvation, corporal punishment, and psychological abuse. They then had their names changed legally and were placed in the care of "suitable" families, all of whom would have had a similar ideological makeup to Franco's regime (Hansen, 2017: p. 314). Although this post-war period of transference of care and responsibility for the children was relatively short, limited to approximately five years after the war's end, the way it was carried out would inform any and all concepts of adoption and parental rights going forward (Vicedo, 2019).

While there had already been something of a precedent for the practice of parents "taking in" children to add to the family or to help with domestic labor, as was common in the early twentieth century in Europe, the ease with which Auxilio Social "distributed" these children to families of their choosing set a new precedent (Ruíz Armesto, 2016; Rahikainen, 2004). Adoption within the Spanish state became a quiet, practiced activity, one that carried an intense degree of shame at every angle, whether it came from the mother, who had to deal with the internalized stigma and from anyone who knew of the situation, or from the adoptive family – whose decision to adopt often meant they were infertile (Ruíz Armesto, 2016). After the war, an adopted child signaled a myriad of potential scandals: a teenage pregnancy, a pregnancy out of wedlock, a disability or mental illness that prevented the mother from being able to care for the child (this often also contained the less discussed element that the mentally ill or disabled women were potentially not able to consent to sex, and were victims of assault by someone known to them) a child whose father was not the mother's husband, incest and other forms of assault. The pressure

to make the ‘transfer’ of the child as quick and unnoticed as possible was to protect the adoptive parents from the shame of those around them suspecting or confirming their infertility, which, as is the case in many cultures, was seen as fundamentally tragic. However, it was very hard for a woman to hide her pregnancy, particularly in the small-town environments that many of the victims came from, and their condition was often obvious to their neighbors, given the lack of widespread institutions like the Irish Homes and Laundries. Conversely, it was quite easy to fake a pregnancy in those days – many reports mention well-off or “respectable” couples simulating a pregnancy, unbeknownst to mostly everyone, save for their household staff or close relatives (SOS Bebés Robados Galicia). This ensured that an adoptive family could, theoretically, “pull off” a simulated pregnancy and pass their child off as biologically theirs, but a woman attempting to conceal a pregnancy would have a much harder time maintaining that illusion.

In a very clinical sense, the fascists were correct that separating the children from their radical parents and raising them in a conservative environment would deter them from taking up their parents’ missions, and this plan worked relatively well for several decades (Ruíz Armesto, 2016). What they failed to account for was the impossibility of permanent secrecy and the incompatibility of mass abuse with mass silence. Serious reports of what Auxilio Social did to the Republican children began to surface in the early 2000s and were immediately confirmed to fit into the history of Francoism that went unwritten, but not unheard, in so many cities and villages across the state (Vicedo, 2019). Victim’s organizations began to spring up, often led by men and women in their middle age, who had learned that their adoptive parents had paid the state for them and that their real parents were likely in a common grave somewhere. Or, as several would discover, only twenty minutes from them (SOS Bebés Robados Galicia). Nuns who worked for

Auxilio Social began to confess in their old age, seemingly unperturbed by the reality of the abuse they inflicted on the children, hardly denying any of it, citing the morality of their mission in "curing communism" (Ruíz Armesto, 2016: pp. 26-27). The estimated number of victims that many organizations calculated was 300,000 children, beginning in 1936 and petering out sometime in the late nineties, although there are similar reports from the early 2000s. That is more than the estimated total of victims from both sides of the civil war (Druliole, 2018).

Despite the number of expected adoptees and the ever-emerging details from victims and perpetrators, the state has denied any deliberate conspiracy of "theft" or "forced adoptions" and largely ignored the pleas of victims, often having figures of authority, such as judges or geneticists make public statements about there being "no real proof" of these abuses (Ansede, 2023). Despite the state's unwillingness to investigate or even acknowledge the damage done, the staggering number of victims and the fact that these adoptions continued long past the "end" of the dictatorship (see section 3.1) made them common knowledge, which could not be forgotten, In their attempt to weed out any resistance to their hegemony, the Spanish right-wing inadvertently created the precise conditions that would make a reckoning increasingly likely. Now, nearly ninety years after this process first began, the modern Spanish state is doing its best to avoid one question in particular: how is a state that has above all publicly valued family; and emphasized the purity of children, the necessity of the Church, and the moral harm posed by communism meant to address the incalculable harm they inflicted on the "most innocent" members of their society?

2.1.2 Phase One

Due to the desire to present a seemingly unified, peaceful, and stable Spain to the rest of the world – a performance that hinged on the visibility of perfect families – and the precedent for easy, silent, and secretive adoptions that was created by Auxilio Social, there was a huge demand for adoption (Ruíz Armesto, 2016). There were only so many mothers who they could starve and execute in the jails, and only so many children forced to live in those conditions with them. The nuns, priests, doctors, and state agents likely began to realize that they had created an enormous demand for readily available adoptees. This marks the first of four transitions that I have identified in the process of forced adoptions in Iberia. The first phase was a direct exploitation of victims of Francoism, most often orphans or other family members of known "reds". The regime was able to do this in the immediate postwar period due to two laws that Franco passed in 1940 and 1941, which gave the state custody of all the children in Auxilio Social (Hansen, 314). Once all those children had been adopted by regime-oriented families, and registered as the biological offspring of the adoptive couple, there emerged an issue. The absence of female prisoners expecting or already parenting children meant that the state and all its arms had to shift their focus and their methodology. Their targets remained relatively similar – where before they had explicitly targeted Republican and Independentist families, they now began to target poor, working-class families, many of whom were socially stigmatized in one way or another (SOS Bebés Robados Galicia; Vicedo, 2019). It is worth noting that these families, particularly in places like Galicia and Euskadi, were the ones that were most likely to share Republican and Independentist sympathies, which posed a "threat" to Spanish national cohesion. While the new generation of Basque nationalism

had not yet taken its sharp communist turn, the unignorable brutality of Francoist violence in Euskadi, such as the bombing of Gernika, meant that the resentment and awareness of state suppression was very high. As per usual, communist and anti-colonial sympathies, at whichever degree of elaboration, were more likely to be found in families belonging to the working class, who were in no way benefitting from the economic gains of the dictatorship.

The social stigmatization of the Basques and Galicians did not stem entirely from any widespread radicality that was inherent to the communities. For the most part, their relationship to the Spanish state remains similarly fraught, for similar reasons – the existence of different languages (Galician and Basque) and different cultural practices presented something of a hole in the tapestry of cohesive Spanish national identity, which continues even today, to present itself as unilingual, Roman Catholic, and European. Also included in that threat to the national identity were the Spanish Roma, the *gitanos* or *calé*, who experienced harassment, persecution, and even eugenicist measures under Franco (Cañete Quesada, 2020). Essentially, groups that showed allegiance to any cultural identity other than the Catholic Spanish conservative one were targets of extreme social stigma, which resulted in severe social exclusion. This naturally resulted in further economic disenfranchisement, deepening their poverty and exclusion and limiting their social protections.

2.1.3 Phase Two

It was in the second stage that the medical industry began to take the reins from Auxilio Social, defining the next four decades of forced adoptions. While the hospitals were staffed with

religious employees, not all hospitals were run by priests and nuns. The doctors, and presumably the hospital administrators, had evidently been aware of the practice of the previous decade, and by the fifties, had formally established networks with churches, social service agencies, and wealthy families, as evidenced by the continuing rate of adoptions. The silent, invisible transfer of orphans of fascism had become a plainer sales transaction, a simpler question of supply and demand. The names of certain hospitals where these doctors worked have become synonymous with the *robo de niños* phenomenon – despite changing their names multiple times over seventy years, the data makes it very likely that there were multiple doctors in these hospitals, often across generations, that sold children and lied to their biological families. In the majority of reported cases, a doctor was made aware of a couple that could not have a child and then kept an eye out for a patient that would suit their needs. Often, however, the victims were so poor, and so geographically isolated, that they were not regularly attended by medical staff. Here, the stigma, surveillance, and mounting pressure of social perfection played a crucial role.

The ideal victims were almost always poor. In nearly all of these cases, they were told their child had died in or shortly after the labor process or had been stillborn, and were not permitted to see their bodies. They were often young women, pregnant out of wedlock, and attended by doctors or midwives who took advantage of their precarious social position to sell their children to an infertile couple, knowing that despite the loss felt by the mother and whatever family she might have had with her, in a way they were liberating her from a burden she would carry her whole life. Many reports include attempts to manipulate that potential for a "positive spin" on things, with doctors, midwives, nurses, and nuns telling the victims "not to worry, that they'd have one once they were married (SOS Bebés Robados)." Single mothers were ideal targets likely because it was

less probable to have an advocate with them, in the form of a husband or an unashamed parent, and because women at that time, particularly "disgraced" women, women from poor families, and traumatized women, had relatively no power or agency. Even if they suspected that their child was actually alive, and had been sold, their protests and demands fell on deaf ears, as many victims reported.

Among single mothers, there was a pattern to the selection by part of the doctors and the medical and religious staff. Mothers who were having their firstborn child, particularly if they were young and alone, were often consoled with the aforementioned "you'll have another one once you're married" narrative and reassured that their age meant that their fertility was still fine. Single mothers with many children were frequent targets as well, in particular, if one or more of their children were suspected of having different fathers from each other. Again, the role that gossip and what I think of as a sort of "citizenship-based surveillance" is clear. These women's neighbors reaffirmed their commitment to the state as a religious-moral project by "sharing" information about them, very often to the Civil Guards or to religious authorities (Gil Andres, 2006). Consequently, the doctors and midwives knew that the women in question were likely dealing with an incredibly high level of isolation, stigma, and prejudice from their community, and manipulated that resulting emotional fragility. Many of the reports regarding these women's experiences were made by their other children, who were old enough to remember the events of the birth, including hearing the staff and others present attempt to console the mother by telling her that "she already had enough" and that "it would be easier" to not add another child to the mix. I believe both of these patterns of selection show not only a clear methodology, but give insight into the rationale that the staff were operating with. Many reports include mentions of individual nurses, nuns, or

midwives – though never any doctors, never any men at all – expressing remorse or sympathy, or even a rare few that told the mother in secrecy that her child was still living. It is clear that similar to the Magdalene Laundries, particularly in their early stages, some participants had to reconcile their behavior through a moral lens. Many of the anecdotes from the reports that I have found paint a credible picture of flimsy justifications that these somewhat conscientious participants might have told themselves – that a young, first-time mother would one day marry and have few physical issues having more children; that a single mother with multiple children, already burdened with financial and social troubles, would likely think of another child as just another burden, where in an adoptive family the child would fill a desperate void; that the child would be better off in a financially stable, socially acceptable home; that these mothers, by virtue of being unmarried, were likely tortured by their sin and its consequences, and were relieved, deep down.

Although single mothers were the more prominent victims, married women, including those who already had children with their husbands, also made up a significant portion of the victims. Again, there is a clear issue of class here, where nearly all of the couples had a child in the aforementioned hospitals, which are now looked at as hotbeds for this kind of abuse, but at the time were seen as a clear step up from the provincial or rural medical care they would otherwise have access to. Their legible working-class status was what made them into targets in every case, although there is a high degree of speculation that in some cases when either the husband or the wife, or any of their family members, was a known Republican or Independentist, or a dissident in any way, this increased the motivation of the medical and religious staff to place the child in more "suitable" care. Given that over twenty years had passed since the war ended, and the majority of cases did not appear to have such explicit political motivation, it is understandable to see how these

stories have stayed as essentially only speculation. However, it is relevant to consider two factors before dismissing this theory in unison with the Spanish conservative mainstream – first, the fifties and sixties marked an incredibly harsh, and deliberately invisible, period of state violence. Franco's civil guard was everywhere, and kept extremely close tabs on everyone, regardless of whether they made that known or not (Ayán Vila, 2019). Their presence in the smaller towns and villages where many of these couples were from was such that the guards would have easily known who they were, and what their families had done during the war, even if they hid their sympathies after the fighting stopped. It is not at all illogical to suggest that the level of surveillance in these towns, from fascist neighbors and civil guards alike, put a target on these families' backs, and that the personnel in charge of selling the children took advantage of that. Second, the reaction given by the supposedly democratic Spanish state of today regarding any inquiry into their state-sanctioned violence, or that of the dictatorship preceding them, has been routinely shut down, dismissed, and in some cases, legally prevented. The Spanish government, in 2022, passed a motion under the 1968 "Ley de secretos" (Law of Secrets) that would make information about state terrorism against the Basques in the eighties sealed until 2048 (Sola, 2022). The fact that a "socialist-led", democratic country in the 21st century, one which frequently offers moral critiques of the way other states are run, will not allow for any legitimate investigation into abuses by part of the state of any sort, should be indicative of the impunity at play here, and of how many stories of harm and suffering have gone deliberately unheard. The exact selection process of the victims may never be fully understood or admitted to.

What is clear about the selection process, however, is that married couples were inconvenient targets. The fact that the mothers were not alone, not besieged by stigma, and had a

partner there who had not just been through the trauma of birth, and could advocate in some way, made the whole process more complex. The SOS site contains reports from married victims that are often more detailed, clearly aided by the shared recollection of the mutual experience. There are enduring similarities between their accounts and those of the single mothers, most notably that in the majority of the cases, they were not permitted to see the child's body. Often they were told that the hospital, inevitably related to a nearby church, would handle the burial, and they were not even told where the child was allegedly buried. There are reports of empty tombs, or being handed the child's body in a box that contained medical waste, or other objects, and reports that state that the parents were shown a dead child that was not their own. A child that was noticeably different in appearance (size, coloring, etc.) or a different sex than their own. Similarly to the single mothers, first-time parents were targets, receiving a version of that consolation, that "they could have another one soon." Additionally, couples that were expecting multiple children at once made up the majority of the married victims. The reports indicate that this is perhaps the clearest indication of a precise methodology here, aside from the fact that most of these births occurred in the "hotbed" hospitals. Their experiences were typically one of two: where they were told that one of the children had died, and to be content with the living one; or they convinced the parents that there had only been one child, made possible by the fact that the fathers were not allowed in the room, and the mothers were put to sleep, even for non-surgical or non-traumatic births. The use of anesthesia without previous mention, or in non-surgical births, is another common reoccurring theme in the most credible reports of these thefts. None of the medical or religious staff have ever been held accountable for this legally, even in cases where they admitted their own involvement (Vicedo, 2019).

2.1.4 Phase Three

The third phase of the *robo de niños* overlaps somewhat with the second. As the state entered the seventies and eighties, encountering a plethora of social issues the structure of the dictatorship had made it impossible to navigate, the adoption market began to function as a more traditional black market. At this point, reports indicate that religious and medical staff, primarily obstetricians, were purchasing the child *from* the mothers themselves, and then selling them to another couple. This presumably gave the adoptive parents a sense of security, and perhaps calmed any moral qualms – there was consent, and now they could securely anticipate a specific child, not having to wait around for one to become available at a moment's notice. This period marks a crucial point in the interpretation of the *robos,* one which seeks to paint it as an unfortunate reality of the post-war period, and alleges it occurred only sporadically afterward, in the worst years of the dictatorship. There was now a new way for this all to be looked at, a narrative which made the state look less calculating, and made the mothers appear more involved in the process. Even though it was completely illegal – human trafficking, as well as the falsification of countless medical and legal documents – these women *sold* their children, didn't they? Callous, maybe, but it would guarantee their child a better future, and it would help them reach a better financial situation. Where was the crime in that?

What I believe this analysis fails to account for is the question of coercion as well as that of outright lying. While it is standard practice for the atrocities of the pre-, post-, and actual transition process to be downplayed or ignored, this depiction of the "sale" of children in the seventies and eighties is one of the more prime examples of the Spanish mission to resist historical

context at any turn. The simple fact that the pool of victims remained essentially the same – poor women, single women, and young women, and that the adoption agencies and hospitals were the same as those previously stealing and selling children, should be indicative that this was not a more ethical transformation of the adoption market, but a mere adaptation of it. While the demography of the victims didn't change substantially, the approach that the "middlemen" took had to. Women working as domestic servants, or women who fell pregnant and had some relation to the domestic workers, were ideal – their patron would offer to pay for their medical care, and then generously take on the care of the child. At the surface, this seems like a logical, albeit bittersweet course of events. One only needs to remember the severe economic exploitation these women faced in these homes to begin to question the legitimacy of the sale (Constable, 2009). In several reported cases, the mother did not receive any financial compensation and was then fired from her post. In some cases, the mother did not think that her patrons would be adopting her child, and was kept in the dark the whole time. Even in cases of a "perfect" sale, when the mother was informed and compensated, the clear hegemony in the dynamic at play begs some questions – was there such a thing as saying 'no' to these families? What role did their financial and social power over the mother play in her decision to give up her child? Can a victim of circumstances such as those ever truly *consent?* And finally, what does it mean for a woman to consent to anything at the hands of people who believe they own her labor and her body?

2.1.5 Phase Four

The final stage of the adoption market in Spain is the most contested of all. In the eighties, there was a massive influx of drugs, primarily from Colombia and Morocco, that entered the state through Galicia, which is uniquely suited for contraband smuggling, as it has thousands of miles of coast and terrifying, almost unregulated waters. As expected, the drug crisis worsened the economic conditions of the country, and forced many people into destitute poverty, often resulting in "unwanted" children born to parents who were suffering too much from addiction, or too financially disadvantaged to take care of them. There was a marked shift in the methods of irregular adoptions during this period, where many of them occurred as "purchases" rather than "thefts" and drug-related economic disparity likely played a role in many of them. While this alone could raise the issue of state complicity in the normalization of unlivable conditions, and question the fact that that same state then entitles itself to remove children from those conditions in order to give them a "better life," there is more to this narrative (Simpson, Clegg, Lopes, Cunha, Rego & Pitsis, 2014). The eighties also saw the beginning of the heroin epidemic in Euskadi. In the seventies, ETA's rise was undeniable and terrifying to the state, which had created several covert death squads in response. One of these death squads, the GAL under the leadership of General Galindo, financed and funneled heroin into the Basque Country as another strategy to weaken the increasingly militant left (Azumendi, 2019). It decimated nearly an entire generation, coming seemingly out of nowhere. Those who lived through it still talk about its suddenness and its undeniable deliberateness. It wasn't just that heroin addiction was creating parents who were liable to have the state take their children, it was the fact that the drug was so new, so thoroughly dispersed

through the territories, that no one knew how it worked. HIV-related deaths were mounting rapidly, and by the early eighties, there were approximately 10,000 cases of extreme heroin addiction in Euskadi. Heroin has never quite left the area and continues to destabilize families.

The fourth and final stage of these familial interruptions depends on the "politics of dispersion" which was a tactic employed by the state in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s to further demoralize and destabilize the *abertzaleak.* The policies, which included the extrajudicial "distancing" of ETA prisoners, or ETA-related prisoners, sustained themselves on the notion that the lack of familial support and proximity to the homeland would act as a form of enduring psychological torture on the Basque political prisoners. This was considered justifiable morally, although Spain's judicial system is set up as "humanely" as possible, prioritizing the proximity of prisoners to their family networks, and granting them conditional liberty after two-thirds of their sentences have been served. Predictably, those humane distinctions were not made for Basque political prisoners, and after thirty years of campaigning, most of the demands have still not been met (Segovia, 2023). Basque prisoners who had young children were granted the "mercy" of having the child live in the jail with them, typically with the mothers, until the child reached three years of age. The same policies were employed by Francoist soldiers when they jailed women for the "crime of not controlling their men," over eighty years before. Under the "politics of dispersion" those children, and the other family members of the prisoners were forced to undertake monthly pilgrimages to see their parents in prison, traveling up to 2,000 kilometers (Forner, 2020). The children of "common prisoners" had entirely different situations, as, in accordance with Spanish law, their parents were in the closest possible jails in an attempt to conserve the familial structure. The politics of dispersion, like so many other tactics of the state, had the singular goal

of dividing, demoralizing and ultimately destroying the “revolutionary family cell” that seemed to haunt every corner of Euskadi.

3.0 Academic and Literary Discussions and Depictions

In addition to the referenced state inquiries, online communities, and various academic sources I used to gain an understanding of the methods utilized in both of these cases of forced or irregular adoption, I also used the Council of Europe's 2015 resolution: *Social Services in Europe: legislation and practice of the removal of children from their families in Council of Europe member States,* to better grasp the legal developments that have informed the present state of the removal of children from their homes in the EU. It also provides perhaps incidental insight into the consequences of assuming that the branches of the state charged with child welfare will actually work in order to improve a child's material conditions. Notably, the document contains multiple references to Spain's supposed example to follow for children's rights, and (even though Ireland was a member of the Council of Europe nearly thirty years prior to Spain) does not mention Ireland at all. The inquiries done by the Irish and Northern Irish governments, while still state-generated, show a markedly different narrative and approach to the question of state culpability. I believe this to be a result of the temporal relationship that these different documents have to the states they are writing about. When state bodies like The Council of Europe are tasked with representing or describing the current conditions, intentions, and results of their state intervention, they appear to operate with a copious "benefit of the doubt" approach of sorts, which takes the state's intentions at face value – if they say that the removal of children from the home is to their benefit, then it must be. If they do not mention what has caused these "detrimental" conditions for children (extreme poverty, addiction, food insecurity, etc.) then it must be because they are simply not

contributing to the situation. In contrast, the state inquiries that are put into motion *after* abuse becomes undeniable show a clear disconnect, where the investigating body clearly does not ascribe any inherent truth to the narratives put out by the state at the time.

3.1 Studies on Political Violence

Given the high degree of attention paid to the political violence in the north of Ireland and Euskadi, as well as my own assertion that the response to the IRA and ETA is not entirely separate from the respective state's abuses of these women and children, I referenced several studies that focused on the political violence of the 20th century, primarily in Spain, because as previously mentioned, the absence of any significant legal inquiry into the *robo de niños* has created an academic environment where the only discussions of the forced adoptions are in broader discussions of Spanish state violence from the Franco years and the transition period.

For studies on the transition itself, I reference Sophie Baby's, *El mito de la transición pacifica: Violencia y polítca en Españа (The myth of the peaceful transition: Violence and Politics in Spain) (1975-1982),* (2012). She discusses the changing levels of commitment to this myth and the factors that made it somewhat easier to criticize in recent years but emphasizes that it was considered essentially unheard of to criticize it until very recently (Baby, 2012: p. 7). Like Guelle (2022), she emphasizes how many consequences the Amnesty law had on the Spanish legal system, referencing the oft-utilized characterization of it as the "pact of forgetting" (Baby, p. 19).

She mentions that despite the obvious contradictions in its structure, in particular, the fact that the fascists entirely directed the 'reform' process, the Spanish transition is still widely considered to be a success, which I feel is an interesting parallel to both the establishment of the Free State and the Good Friday Agreement, where the narratives made public at the time did not in their entirety reflect the reality of the lived conditions for many of the people (Baby, pp. 23-25).

Given the lack of direct data regarding the potential for forced adoptions in the Basque country (there are significant mentions on SOS Bebés Robados, but given the nature of the site, most refer to Galicia; and Ruíz Armesto's study is more about the difficulties in searching for these cases in Euskadi, rather than statistical information about them) I elected to include a thorough political analysis of the Basque conflict, in particular, the complex relationship it has had with truth, justice, and narrative. My goal in focusing on these sources was not to imply that the political conflict there is more nuanced than in Ireland or Galicia, but to say that perhaps the lack of investigation done into the forced adoptions in the Basque territories has much to do with the lack of investigation into human rights violations in Euskadi in general.

Pauline Guelle's *La ausencia de verdad en el caso vasco (The absence of truth in the Basque case)* (2022) follows a similar direction as Baby's writings. She focuses on how the frequently referenced peaceful nature of the transition is a complete fallacy within Spain, and specifically in the Basque country. Notably, she opens her paper with references to Antonio Pacheco, known as "Billy the Kid" and Enrique Rodriguez Galindo, two members of the Spanish security forces throughout all stages of the state, both well-known in Euskadi for their prolific and enthusiastic tortures, and both of whom were met with the most extreme justice available for fascists in Spanish courts: they were convicted after years of trials and copious evidence and served virtually no time in prison at all (Guelle, 2022: pp. 2-4). Galindo was one of the only convicted

members of the GAL, and Guelle characterizes the GAL's existence as not an outlier, but a continuation of the constant facet of human rights violations in Euskadi, the rate of which did not lessen with the "democratization" of Spain (Guelle, pp. 3-4). Guelle's paper also served as a reference for specific instances when the state continued to exert political violence, in particular torture and murder, long after the transition, and how the Amnesty law – explicitly stated to apply only to crimes committed under the dictatorship – continued to be used in the Spanish courts, even at the highest level, to grant impunity to state agents who had tortured and killed militant and non-militant Basques alike (Guelle, pp. 5-6; 6-7; 10; 12; 13). The paper also contained information on the Spanish state's unwillingness to collaborate with internal and external investigations into violations of human rights, and how unreceptive it was to criticisms, even from the UN and EU level. This is particularly poignant, because despite both the EU and UN's clear lack of concern for Basque victims of torture, particularly women who suffered explicitly sexualized forms of torture, if not clear sexual assault, the European Tribunal for Human Rights (TEDH) has condemned Spain eight separate times for their actions – post-transition – in the Basque country (Guelle, pp. 11-12; 13).

Through the Human Rights Commission in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Manuela Carmena, Jon Miren Landa, Ramon Mugica, and Juan Maria Uriarte wrote a report on the human rights violations in Euskadi from 1960 to 2013, *Informe-base de vulneraciones de derechos humanos en el caso vasco (1960-2013),* (2013) which was very valuable for statistics that painted a stark image of the likelihood of ever seeing justice in a Spanish court. While the report is very useful, it is worth mentioning that the fact that it began in 1960 means that all the Basques killed in the civil war and in the first decades of the dictatorship continue to be relegated to anonymity and remain absent from the calculations of victims. This includes those approximately 2,000 Basques killed in the

bombing of Gernika. Ultimately the report attempts to counter the dominant narrative that all political violence is caused by Basque militancy and that the only victims of terrorism are ETA's victims because the only terrorism that exists is ETA's terrorism. The fact that so many clear-cut instances of state violence (which they propose should be considered "terrorism of the state") go unpunished despite being undeniable makes it significantly less surprising that "less visible" instances of state violence, like the forced adoptions, cannot hope for resolution in a place like Euskadi, where justice is not something most would associate with the state anymore.

Cynthia L. Irvin's, *Militant Nationalism: Between Movement and Party in Ireland and the Basque Country,* (1999) was particularly helpful in terms of establishing a relationship between the structures of political parties and militant organizations in Euskadi and Ireland, especially her second chapter, which delved into the developments of different eras or "assemblies" in the groups and parties. I found this chapter in Irvin's study of ETA, the IRA, Sinn Féin, and Herri Batasuna to be helpful as it offered detailed insight into the actual history, theories, and praxis of ETA, which are not typically seriously discussed even in academic studies of Basque and Spanish political violence; but also, in the sense that it highlighted the lack of awareness and concern for the abuses that were actively inflicted on Basque women at the time. It's easy enough to say both that ETA, as a revolutionary Marxist group, wanted the liberation of Basque women, and to say that they were a mindless terrorist organization interested in normalizing violence with no real end in mind. Irvin's analysis and careful research show neither of those to be true – ETA was clearly constantly, consciously, and deliberately grappling with its role in the political environment and with the many ideological differences of its members, and it cannot be denied that there was a great deal of theoretical work and nuance involved at each level of their activity (Irvin, 1999: p. 25). However, knowing the context and contents of those assemblies makes it obvious that the conditions of

women, particularly those suffering from forced adoptions, were not a cause they intended to take on.

Similarly, Ruíz Armesto's study was useful in more than just its intended purpose. Her thesis was in part directed by Patxi Etxeberria, a forensic anthropologist who has had arguably more impact on the narratives of "the Basque conflict" as it were, than anyone else. In the nineties, upon the discovery of two bodies of young men, José Antonio Lasa and José Ignacio Zabala, who were killed by the GAL (Anti Terrorist Liberation Groups)[10] Exteberria was able to prove that they had been tortured brutally before their point-blank executions – not that much proof of mistreatment was needed – and as such, he has long been associated amongst the *abertzale* community with truth-seeking projects, anti-torture campaigns, and for being a 'voice' for the effectively voiceless. In Ruíz Armesto's thesis, where he is also interviewed, his perspective on the *robo de niños* is jarringly clear – he shies away from even admitting it was a commonplace occurrence, instead choosing to talk about how women who had lost their babies at birth latched onto a hysterical conspiracy because they couldn't cope with the loss they'd suffered. He then tries to deny that it occurred, saying it was a question of "purchase, not theft" (Ruíz Armesto, p. 70). I find this particularly relevant for three reasons. Firstly, because it shows the dissonance at play – where someone whose reputation is largely built on countering clearly manipulated narratives, and on speaking for 'invisible' victims so dehumanized that their injury and their identities are simultaneously denied, can try and play into a sanitized narrative so easily. Also, this stands as a further testament to the 'blind spot' abused women still occupy within older *abertzale* generations. Secondly, it serves as another example of how even the most undeniably inhumane experiences

[10] The GAL were a new generation of anti-Basque militias funded by the Spanish government. Their predecessors, the Basque-Spanish Battalion (BVE) were funded under Franco to combat ETA, and killed eighteen Basques. The GAL were funded during the "democratic" years, and by the socialist party (PSOE) which was never formally charged with its involvement in the deaths of twenty-seven Basques, or the twenty-six others injured.

can be written off as “hysteria” or “imagination” when they are suffered by women. Thirdly, it raises a key question I wish to engage with in my project, regarding the “shift” within the practice, from telling women directly that their children had died; to manipulating vulnerable women, outright lying to them, and often threatening them, for the purpose of “purchasing” their child. I wonder whether this shift, and the supposed pacification, or legitimization, of the process can really be separated from the parallel narrative of sanitized abuse directly stemming from the transition (occurring at exactly the same time). Can we not still consider these thefts?

Finally, for the anthropological lenses I decided to employ in my own analysis and fieldwork, I turned to Richard Ashby Wilson, Samuel Martinez, Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman, and Jennifer Bickham-Mendez, for their perspectives on reconciliation, anthropology as activism, researcher positionality in an insider setting, and inherently hierarchical relationships within the field of anthropology.

Richard Ashby Wilson’s *Anthropological Studies of National Reconciliation Processes,* 2003 deals with the post-Apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and the complexities that lie at the heart of amnesty, designation of responsibility and culpability, contextualizing history, nation-building, truth-finding, and narratives of “healing the nation”. Wilson lists several examples of how seemingly progressive initiatives, often the same ones that leftist popular movements hold as the ideal results of a transition from authoritarianism, are put into practice with concealed conservative intentions. There is a clear connection between this premise and the conditions of the Spanish transition, in which the state refused to punish fascism as it was still comprised of fascists, which is part of the reason why the *robo de niños* was so easily adapted into ‘democracy’ and why it is still essentially impossible for any of the victims of the practice to get any sort of justice. Wilson goes on to analyze the practice of constructing national

narratives based on hastily determined "public moral values" that betray the presence of the past in obvious ways, and how this often became the "preferred discourse" used to paint political compromise as both a necessity and an individual responsibility (Wilson, 2003: pp. 369-370). He further analyzes the motivations behind this reconstruction of the national self as existing within a purified, restored political landscape, which, by refusing to admit its similarities to those of past authoritarianism, establishes it more soundly within the "new" society (Wilson, pp.370-371). I found this to be useful for analyzing both cases, but particularly for the Irish case, especially when considering the Free State's actions after the Civil War. The newness of the state, the sting of Republican military failures they desperately wanted to combat – both to appease the more Republican factions of the Irish public and to secure a 'return' to stability – and the pressure from the Catholic Church, all led to the establishment and enforcement of the public moral codes on the legal system and social organization, and as such, carved a space in post-war Irish society for harsh punitive violence against women, aiming to paint it as a 'purifying' process for the people and to avoid the fact that they were creating conditions for women similar to those inflicted by British occupation. This paper is extremely useful in terms of contextualizing the behavior of all the states involved in these forced adoptions and institutional abuses, by offering an example for contrast and providing a theoretical examination of the larger process occurring as a whole.

Samuel Martinez's *Making Violence Visible,* 2008, reflects on themes of participation, collaboration, observation, and convention within anthropology, and with how the field treats and studies activist movements. He makes the central point that power is an inevitable component of any social research method, despite the intentions of anthropologists (Martinez, 2008: pp. 183-184). He reflects on how it is a very specific power to have, to be able to designate the importance of studying one concept, people, or group, over another, to decide *how* it will be studied, and how

those findings will be represented (Martinez, pp. 184-185). Additionally, like the other anthropological studies on the nature of scholarly activism, I used it as a referenceable perspective on the oft-raised question of 'objectivity' in anthropology, whether or not it is truly possible if it is affected by 'too much' participation by the researcher, and if it ultimately matters more than trust. Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman's *Out of Bounds? Negotiating Researcher Positionality in Brazil,* 2015 dealt with her experiences as a Black, English-speaking, non-Brazilian woman within the Afro-Brazilian communities, and her positionality as an 'outsider-within'. This designation comes in part because of her reticence to participate with 'normative approaches' to social research, and because of the ambiguity, or intangibility, of her position (p. 124). She writes about the difficulties of her anticipations for the academic climate falling short, and the increasingly 'salient' role of researcher and activist she felt herself taking on, particularly when faced with the mistreatment of young Afro-Brazilian children in a variety of racist experiences (Hordge-Freeman, 2015: pp. 127-129). I also found it useful as a reference for how I was considering my positionality as a researcher.

Jennifer Bickham Mendez's *Globalizing Scholar Activism,* 2008 had the most impact on my own theoretical framework, particularly about the ethnographic approach I took. While her paper prompted reflection on the factors of the precise political and social moment in which I was conducting my research, it was also very useful for me in terms of further examining my relationship with the groups I studied. Although the bulk of my ethnographic work was not 'sensitive' per se, as it stayed away from first-hand experience, I was very aware of my own emotional ties to the communities – not just because of my awareness of what they had endured, but because I also belonged to part of them, as someone from a Basque-Galician background. In part, this paper helped me realize that I had very little to offer in terms of my ability to impact

existing power structures with my research. As someone who is recognizably or ‘visibly’ Basque and Galician, I have already experienced a degree of access due to that social capital, similar to what Bickham Mendez references. In this sense, this paper helped me realize that while my proximity to one of these cases was a huge advantage, it also required me to consider how much I was willing to ‘take advantage’ of these experiences, as my analysis would very likely not result in increased awareness or support.

4.0 Patterns in forced or clandestine adoptions

This section will deal with the ways these institutions were run in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and with the methods utilized in Spanish clinics and hospitals to arrange the adoptions. As mentioned, the information on the Irish and Northern Irish institutions comes from state inquiries, and the information on the specific methods and patterns in the Iberian case is primarily drawn from the unofficial victim's forum, SOS Bebés Robados. With the exception of one, the former Bessborough House in Cork, none of the traditional Irish institutions remain operational in any capability. There is one other slight exception with a Salvation Army house in the North, given that the Salvation Army remains operational as a larger Christian institution, but this particular home is inactive and has been since 1977. In the Spanish case, the majority of the Galician and Basque hospitals and clinics involved in the forced or irregular adoptions appear to have simply changed their names and continued offering medical services.

The first section of this chapter will detail the information about the specific institutions on both sides of the Irish border, and the difference between the two state inquiries. The second section contains information about the patterns that can be determined from the SOS forum, and how those patterns fit in with the "four phases" of irregular adoption discussed in section 2.1. The third section will discuss the differences between these sources of information and the subsequent challenges in extrapolating patterns and making conclusions.

4.1 Findings from Irish and Northern Irish Official Inquiries

In 1925, while the Free State government was restricting women's employment, the first Mother and Baby Home was opened in Tuam, co. Galway. It was active for 36 years, until 1961. In 2014, a mass grave located in a septic tank was found by a local amateur historian, Catherine Coreless. It contained the bodies of 796 children, most of them infants. They had died of malnutrition and illness during the period of activity of the Tuam Home and had been buried in a collective unmarked grave (Garrett, 2017). The discovery of the Tuam home was one of the first instances in which the truth of the Mother and Baby Homes and the Magdalene Laundries was unignorable, and it prompted the first series of official recognitions and investigations by the Republic's government (Garrett, 2017, p. 359). The "problem of the unmarried mother" had been on the minds of many conservative Irishmen since before the establishment of the Republic but the postwar years were the ideal time to implement the strategies for coercive and punitive control that they had been imagining as the ideal solution (Garrett, 2017). By 1927, "critical approaches" to the condition of unwed motherhood were appearing in major national publications (Commission for the Relief of the Poor, 1927, p. 68). They created distinctions between the women they focused on, "first offenders" who had presumably fallen pregnant accidentally (with the embedded subtext that it was their "sin" alone) and "less hopeful cases" who had multiple pregnancies out of wedlock (Commission for the Relief of the Poor, pp. 68-69). While there were many differences in how the individual institutions operated and who they admitted, these distinctions between "first offenders" and the "less hopeful" appear across the majority of cases.

In 2021, the Irish and Northern Irish governments commissioned two inquiries into the institutions on either side of the border. There is a difference in the approaches taken by the two state inquiries, given the fact that there were considerably more institutions in the Republic. The Republic's report considers each individual institution, whereas the Northern Irish state inquiry favors a broader collective comparison, since the majority of the northern institutions were run by the same specific religious orders, just in multiple cities. The inquiry by the government of the Irish Republic was carried out by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and contained information about fifteen institutions that fit the profile of this study. The key findings, in order of appearance in the report, are as follows:

The Dublin Union Home, also known as St Patrick's Navan Road, Pelletstown, or Eglinton House, was operational between 1919 and 1998 and saw 15,382 women and 18,829 children pass through its walls (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p.25). It did not function solely as a Mother and Baby Home and also housed unaccompanied children, who, along with children who remained there after their mothers left, comprised 5,888 of the total children. Many of these children were later discovered to have been turned away from hospitals due to their physical or intellectual disabilities and some of them were even the children of married couples, labeled "unaccompanied" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 25). 3,614 of the children died in this institution, 78 percent of them between 1920 and 1942 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: pp. 25-26).

The Children's Home Tuam, which was originally named Glenamaddy, was operational between 1921 and 1961, and housed 2,219 women and 3,251 children, many of whom were the

children of widowed parents or parents who were deemed “unable” to care for them (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 26). 978 children died there, with 80 percent of them being under a year old. 75 percent of these deaths occurred between 1943 and 1947, and there is no record of proper burial. The report indicates that they are likely “buried inappropriately” on the grounds.

The Kilrush home was open from 1922 to 1932, and the exact number of inhabitants remains unknown, with estimates of 300 to 400 unmarried mothers and “much larger” numbers of children. The Home was operated in a former workhouse in dire condition and had no running water. Much like the total number of inhabitants, the total number of children who died there remains unknown, but a visit by a medical officer in 1927 labels the number of deaths as “appalling” (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 28)

The Bessborough Home (see 5.2) in Cork operated from 1922 to 1998 and held 9,768 women and 8,938 children. 923 children died there, with one of the highest recorded death rates in these institutions. In 1943, three out of every four children that were born at Bessborough house died. Similar to Kilrush, Bessborough House did not keep adequate records of their patients, and there is no available register of any infant burials. The location of the majority of older children’s burials also remains unaccounted for (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 28).

The Sean Ross home was active from 1931 to 1969 and held 6,414 women and 6,079 children, and was unique in its frequency of diphtheria outbreaks in the 30s and 40s, which ultimately became the primary cause of death between 1936 and 1937. 1,090 of the children died, with 79 percent dying between 1932 and 1947, with a significant peak in 1936 and 1942. The Sean

Ross home also had inappropriate records-keeping practices, and despite the existence of a "designated burial ground" there is no proper record of burials (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 30).

The Castlepollard home operated from 1935 to 1971, and housed 4,972 women and 4,559 children, and saw the deaths of 247 children, 60 percent occurring in the 40s, primarily due to severe overcrowding in the home (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 31). There are no burial records.

The Regina Coeli home was active from 1930 to 1998 and held 5,631 mothers and 5,434 children. The Regina Coeli home was unique in that it serviced homeless and "destitute" women, and was the only such institution that "supported" single mothers raising children until the 70s. As the institution did not receive state support the mothers were told to work in private homes and hospitals as domestic staff and were required to pay for the "charity" they received. 734 children died, 91 percent of them before 1950, and there are no clear records of burial arrangements (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: pp. 32-33).

The Dunboyne home operated between 1955 to 1991 and housed 3,156 mothers and 1,148 children. While the home was initially intended for second or third-time mothers, the majority of the women were in their first pregnancy, and by the end of the 80s, 58 percent of them were teenagers (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 34). 37 children died there.

The Bethany Home operated between 1922 and 1971 and held 1,584 women and 1,376 children. Bethany was unique in that it was run by the Church of Ireland and focused their admissions on women convicted of crimes, including infanticide, as well as their central mission

of operating like a standard Mother and Baby home. Bethany was one of the only Protestant-run homes, and stopped admitting Catholic women in 1940 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: pp. 34-35). 262 children died in or after staying at Bethany, 61 percent of the deaths occurring in the decade between 1937 and 1947 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 35). The Bethany home is also set apart from other contemporary institutions in that it did keep proper burial records of the deceased children, who were laid to rest in Mount Jerome cemetery.

The Denny House used to operate under the name Magdalen Asylum and was open from 1765 to 1994. Given the length of time that it was operational, the records referring to the women and children who passed through begin as late as 1922 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 35). Between 1922 and 1994, 1,416 mothers and 1,134 children stayed there, with the highest number of inhabitants occurring in the 1980's. Before 1980, it had only admitted first-time single Protestant mothers, and the sharp increase in occupancy is likely due to the institution being open to women of other faiths. 55 children died at Denny House from 1922 to 1994, which is a considerably lower death rate than other institutions.

Miss Carr's Flatlets opened in 1972 and is still operational. Flatlets were not traditional Mother and Baby Homes, and Miss Carr's functioned more like a hostel that actively encouraged "unmarried mothers and deserted wives" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 37). From 1972 to 1998, around 180 mothers and 200 children stayed there.

The Castle Home was active from 1982 to 2006. 329 women and 64 "accompanying children" stayed there from 1982 to 1998 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability,

Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 38). Like the Flatlets model, the Castle was not a traditional Mother and Baby Home, but another hostel-type system that provided the women with individual bedrooms and relatively sufficient accommodation, and even allowed the women's families, including any boyfriends, to visit.

The Cork County Home operated from 1921 to 1960 and held 2,318 unmarried mothers and 2,408 children, many of whom were unaccompanied and had been "transferred" from Bessborough House. The County Home and Bessborough House appear to have had a relationship of transferring women and children "back and forth" between locations (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 39). The living conditions are listed as "appalling" in accordance with the conditions of all other county homes, with inadequate food and lodging. The conditions did not improve in tangible ways until the 1950s (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 39). The Cork County Home in particular has several mentions of women suffering assault by other "inmates" including sexual assault resulting in a pregnancy. In that particular case, the victim was then sent to a Magdalene Laundry, though the report does not contain information about which one (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 39). 545 children died there, 93 percent of them before reaching one year of age (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 39). The report states that the leading cause of death was gastroenteritis, worsened by the terrible living conditions which made infection control "extremely difficult" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 39).

The Stranorlar Home was active from 1922 to 1964 and held 1,626 unmarried mothers and 1,777 children. 98 percent of the women who stayed at Stranolar Home were Catholics

(Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 40). The conditions were very poor, particularly when it came to indoor plumbing, heating, and the food available to the mothers and children. There were several typhoid outbreaks due to these conditions (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: pp. 40-41). The Stranorlar Home operated on unpaid labor, requiring the unmarried mothers to do domestic labor. They were only permitted to see their children on Sundays, as the administration said that more visits would "upset the children" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 41). 343 children died in Stranorlar, with over 60 percent of the deaths attributed to pneumonia or bronchitis.

The Thomastown Home operated from 1922 to 1960, housing 970 women and 1,241 children, some of whom were "unaccompanied" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 41). The living conditions are described as "very poor" by the report, with particular emphasis that the nursery was the "worst part" of the home. The majority of the domestic work was done by the unmarried mothers, who were not paid for their labor. 177 children died, and some of those deaths were attributed to have been caused "by neglect" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: pp. 41-42).

The report mentions the delay in legal adoption (introduced in 1953) as a key factor to the continuing harsh conditions inflicted on the children (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 4). As they were unable to be legally adopted before that point, the majority of them ended up in industrial schools. After 1953, adoption became the "most likely outcome" for any child born into these institutions (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 4). Part of the reason that legal adoption took so long to be

implemented in the Republic is that there was a relatively widespread concern from devout Irish Catholics that adoption would lead to children being placed with Protestant families and therefore "lost to Catholicism" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 16). By 1967, the majority of children born to unmarried mothers in these institutions were put up for adoption – the report mentions that this fact should be considered sufficient evidence to dispel the "myth" that the sixties saw an increase in progressive attitudes towards unmarried mothers raising their own children (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 22). However, as time progressed, the adoption rates decreased: in the eighties, as the number of Mother and Baby Homes was dwindling, only 37 percent of "illegitimate children" were adopted out. At the end of the nineties, the majority of adoptions that occurred in Ireland were of foreign-born children, or "family adoptions" where a family member adopted a relative's child for a number of reasons, finally marking a clear shift in social attitudes towards "alternative family models" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021: p. 22-23).

Fourteen institutions in the North inflicted these abuses on women and arranged for private adoption (McCormick, O'Connell, Dee, Privilege, 2021). There were three Magdalene Laundries all three of which were Good Shepherd Sisters institutions, the same as their southern counterparts: St Mary's Home, in Belfast, which was operational from 1867 to 1982, St Mary's Home in Derry, operational from 1922 to 1982, and St Mary's Home in Newry, operational from 1946 to 1984. The Protestant-run Salvation Army Industrial and Rescue Home in Belfast operated similarly to the Laundries and was operational from 1886 to 1965. There were three Catholic Mother and Baby Homes, the latter two being Good Shepherd Sisters institutions as well: Mater Dei, in Belfast, run

by the Legion of Mary, which operated between 1942 and 1984, the Marianville home in Belfast, active from 1950 to 1990, and the Marianville home in Newry, active from 1955 to 1984. There were four Protestant Homes: the Belfast Midnight Mission (or Malone Place Maternity Home and Rescue Home) which was operational from 1860 to 1948, the Church of Ireland Rescue League (or Kennedy House) in Belfast, operational from 1912 to 1956, the Hopedene House, in Belfast, active from 1943 to 1985, and the Salvation Army or Thorndale House, active from 1920 to 1977.

Finally, three Health and Social Services charities served the same functions, all three located in Belfast: Mount Oriel, active from 1969 to 1980, Deanery Flats, from 1973 to 1991, and the Belfast and Coleraine Welfare Flats, from the 1940s to the 1980s.

The mortality rate in the northern institutions was considerably lower when compared to the south, undoubtedly due in part to the lower numbers of individuals held in the institutions. The report carefully explains that the process of gauging how many individuals died is more complex than it might appear and that the improper records posed a significant concern even for the process of approximating the number of deaths. The report was able to confirm that four percent of babies born in the Mother and Baby Homes, either due to stillbirths or for undetermined reasons "shortly after birth" (McCormick, O'Connell, Dee, Privilege, 2021: p. 6). The report was also able to conclude that the deaths of several women in the St Mary's Homes (located in Belfast, Derry, and Newry) were likely not due to a lack of adequate food, or unsanitary living conditions, though those were both present (McCormick, O'Connell, Dee, Privilege, 2021: p. 17).

4.2 SOS Bebés Robados Forum

SOS Bebés Robados is an organization with multiple chapters all across the Spanish state, run by victims and allies attempting to figure out the truth about what happened in these adoption procedures, and attempting to connect victims to their families and to each other. While the forum is focused on Galicia, it includes submissions from other autonomous communities and even other Spanish-speaking countries. SOS Bebés Robados Galicia appears to be the only active forum site at this time. I analyzed 392 case submissions on the site, occurring between the years 1945 to 2015. In the following section, I have laid out the patterns specific to each decade after the end of the Civil War. For conciseness, I have elected to primarily include information about where the irregular adoptions allegedly occurred, any new or continuing patterns, and the details of any submissions that indicate a new or singular trend in the adoptions.

4.2.1 1940s

Three submissions and four cases were dated to the 1940s. One submission contains the first recorded cases on this forum of multiple children allegedly dying at birth, and the parents not being allowed to see the bodies. The children, both male, born in 1946 and 1948 in the Santiago de Compostela Hospital in Santiago, Galicia, fit a typical profile. A “peasant couple” in which the mother said she had heard the baby born in ‘46 cry and was told that he died. The second child was born at seven months and was baptized, which presumably meant he was not stillborn, as the Catholic church does not baptize dead babies, Neither child was ever written into the family book

(similar to a family bible) and the couple had two female children in between those years, presumably at the same hospital.

The first submission regarding a suspicion of stolen twin babies was dated to a 1947 birth, in the Hospital de Carcaixent, in Valencia, written by the male twin. His submission includes the fact that he has his own birth certificate, where his twin sister is named along with their parents and grandparents. The documentation he has states that his twin sister died one month after birth, which he does not believe, and has contracted a private detective upon finding some apparent indication that his sister was adopted and had her name changed in the process.

4.2.2 1950s

There were twenty-one submissions dated to the fifties, resulting in the suspected forced adoption of twenty-five infants (multiple twin birth-related submissions). Eleven of them occurred outside of Galicia or Euskadi. Nine of the total submissions for the fifties occurred in Galicia, with five of them occurring in either Vigo or A Coruña. There was only one submission related to Euskadi. Aside from the obvious increase in submissions, there was a notable shift in the amount of information provided in them. The submissions include additional details about the case, some even include photographs of the siblings or parents of the child. The detailed information helps compare the suspected patterns established by the tentative inquiries into the *robo de niños.*

Over half of the submissions directly mention or imply that the mothers and families (if present) were told that the babies had died during labor or been stillborn, and neither the mothers nor any other family members were permitted to see the body. Five of the total submissions explicitly mention that there was no medical or legal documentation provided to the families, no

death certificate for the child, but also no record of the labor itself. Three cases mention that the nuns present at the hospital or clinic assured the mother that they would handle the burial (a frequent occurrence in later submissions, an indicator of a possible deception) and the families were uninvolved in the planning of the funeral, which they suspect never took place. In Spain, for a funeral home to accept a body and prepare it for burial, a death certificate is needed. That, coupled with the fact that they mention never receiving any answers regarding the supposed burial location, has left the submitters convinced that a theft took place.

Seven of the submissions are about a twin birth. All of these submissions follow a similar pattern: a twin birth where the parents were either only given one child, or told that the other had died, and were not shown the body. Some of the submissions include unique details, which, despite not fitting into any patterns in the fifties, fit into the larger narrative of the phases of forced adoptions. One in particular cements the theory that domestic workers were targets after the dictatorship "stabilized": a female baby, born in 1950 in Madrid, with no further details as to the location. The submission was made by her sister, who heard it from their mother.

"My mother was working in a Duchess's house, it was this woman who paid for the clinic, the girl was born well, beautiful, and with a lot of hair, [the nuns] took her to bathe her and she died, my mother always lamented how different she looked when they showed her the body, because she didn't look like her baby."

This is the oldest instance where a pregnant domestic worker has an unexpected benefactor through her patron, and where there is a suspicion that the body shown to the mother is not that of her baby. When I first began to sort through the online comments and submission sites, I came across a mention of a baby's corpse that the nuns supposedly kept "on ice" in order to show it to parents. Initially, I dismissed this comment, thinking it was highly improbable, given the probable gaps of time between these adoptions so as to not elicit suspicion, and the rate of decay of a corpse, even one kept "frozen," which would also be difficult given the lack of technology in fifties and sixties-

era Spain. The fact that this submission was made on an entirely different platform, independently, makes me less certain that the practice can be dismissed entirely.

Another post, dated to 1956 about a female baby adopted out of a "*casa de cuna"* in Malaga, contains another narrative involving domestic labor. The submission, made by the child's sister, says that she was not abandoned in the *casa de cuna,* as the vast majority of children would have been, rather her mother had left her in the care of the nuns while she worked After two months, the nuns told the mother that the child had died, prevented her from seeing the body, and told her that they would "take care of everything" regarding the Catholic burial. The mother never received any information about where she was supposedly buried and firmly believed that the nuns "sold" the baby. This case's significance is undeniable, both because it further confirms that domestic workers, particularly if they were unmarried while pregnant, were targets, and because it posits that the nuns benefited financially from these forced adoptions. Cases like this one show that for some nuns, the traffic of children was not solely about "curing" communism and potentially also about profit.

One submission about a baby, sex unknown, born in Lugo (Galicia) in the Hospital Provincial de San José between 1954 and 1955, is the oldest dated submission that indicates the probable usage of anesthetics, in order to take advantage of the mother's unconscious state to more easily remove the baby.

"[The mother] woke up on the floor of the room and they told her that the baby was born dead. She didn't see the baby nor the cadaver of the supposedly dead baby. She is convinced that they stole the baby from her."

Multiple submissions dated to different years mention the usage of anesthesia, even in non-emergency or non-surgical births, and with no prior consultation between the doctors and the mother. The final case with relevant details occurred in the Maternidad O'Donnell, in Madrid, the

location of the earliest potential theft (1945). This submission, regarding a male child born in 1957, was made by his sister and is highly detailed.

"My mother gave birth to her first child in the village, and because her hips were narrow and the boy was large, the birth attendant couldn't get him out, and in the end, they damaged his little head, and three days later he died of meningitis after so much suffering, he couldn't stop crying. When she fell pregnant again the next year, they decided to go to the Maternidad O'Donnell in Madrid which at that point was considered a dream come true in the village. She had such bad luck that they decided to anesthetize her for a non-cesarean birth, and when she woke up they told her that the baby had died and that they would take care of everything, without showing him to the family. The doctor (on Botella's team) told my mother not to cry, that in the next year, she'd have another and the pain would pass. And my mother said "Yes, and I'll come here so you can take him from me, too." She has carried this pain with her all this time and fifteen years ago when my father had a stroke he said "We're going to die and we haven't found your brother." I promised them to do all that I could and I am now realizing that we were just another set of victims among thousands, they abused their power and not even the families believed the mothers, it was less complicated to believe the doctor. A horror."

There are several things of note here. Firstly, the recurring mention of anesthesia for a non-surgical birth, with no explanation. Secondly, the mention that going to a maternity clinic in a city like Madrid was a "dream come true in the village" strengthens the argument that poor couples, particularly those living in rural areas, were easy targets. Thirdly, the potent apathy directed towards the mother stands out starkly, "don't cry, next year you'll have another one" is just the first of the many similarly callous statements made by doctors that appear on the SOS forum.

The final, and perhaps most significant detail in this submission is the inclusion of a doctor's name. Many of the submissions are imprecise, or vague, without sufficient detail about the location of the birth or those present for it. "Botella's team" refers to Dr. José Botella Lluisá, a successful obstetrician who founded and directed the O'Donnell clinic. On the SOS forum, there are six separate cases, spanning from 1945 to 1990, that occurred in the O'Donnell clinic. Botella

was posthumously accused of involvement in the forced adoptions by the Association for the Recuperation of Historic Memory (ARMH), a non-governmental organization with no official capacities. There has been little progress in investigating the hundreds of cases suspected to have occurred at the O'Donnell clinic – only five of the *total* cases regarding forced adoptions have been investigated as of 2018 (Esteso Pover, 2014). The rest have been archived. Coincidentally, Dr. Botella was the uncle of Ana Botella, former mayor of Madrid (PP), and the wife of former right-wing Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar. Dr. Botella delivered the first of their children before he died in 2002. His political connections, while obviously established long after he began his work, point to the level of embeddedness that violence has with the state itself. Even if Botella was not an earnest supporter of the PP, or of Aznar's government, his ties to the high ranks of the political industry ensured the safety of his practice and his reputation.

4.2.3 1960's

There were 88 submissions on the SOS site dated to the sixties. Two of them had no known location, 41 of them occurred outside of Galicia or Euskadi, 6 of the total cases occurred in Euskadi, and the remaining 40 occurred in Galicia. 17 of the total cases were twin births, where the majority of them followed the same pattern of passing a twin birth off as a singular one. Many of the submissions are made by the potentially stolen children themselves, who suspect they have a twin out in the world.

Within the Galician cases, 25 of the cases occurred in either A Coruña or Vigo. This is the most significant development to occur in the sixties and one that marks the firm entrance into the second "phase" of the forced adoptions, where the practice emerged from the shadows somewhat,

and did away with any traces of the Francoist "moral mission" to cure communism to service the adoption black market. Previously, each submission had the name of a different hospital or clinic, and repeat locations (such as the O'Donnell clinic) were a rarity, but the submissions of cases from the sixties are littered with the names of the same few hospitals. Additionally, many of these "hotbed" hospitals changed their names every few decades, making the pool even smaller.

The two most extreme cases of this were in Galicia. Eleven out of the thirteen cases specific to A Coruña occurred in the same three hospitals (see 6.1.1) Materno Infantil (also previously called Teresa Herrera or Hospital de Coruña), Hospital Juan Canalejo (now known as Complexo Hospitalario Universitario A Coruña, or CHUAC) and Labaca de Coruña (now Centro Oncológico de Galicia). The remaining two did not occur in any hospitals, one had no known location, and the other case occurred in a *casa de cuna.* Regarding the cases that happened in Vigo, the same two names came up every time: Hospital Almirante Vierna and Hospital Xeral de Vigo, which, are the exact same place. Franco himself attended the inauguration of Almirante Vierna in 1955, and it operated under that name until the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) government was elected in the eighties when it became the Hospital Xeral.

Most of the patterns established in the fifties (twin births passed off as single births, anesthesia for non-surgical births, families forbidden from seeing the child's body, no death or birth certificate, and funerals arranged by the nuns or the hospital) continued on in the sixties. One submission specific to Euskadi, in the Maternidad de Eibar, Gipuzkoa, describes where the mother was anesthetized *after* the birth. The submission was written by the mother of a male child, born in 1962.

"I was not attended by the matron that typically helped during births. He was born alive and was a very large boy, blonde, with blue eyes. I saw the boy, but as soon as he was born they put me to sleep and they took him. They told us that he had died."

One case that involved a child adopted from a Galician *casa de cuna* in 1963 mentions being adopted by a couple living in Barcelona, the first recorded mention of a clear trans-community adoption. Given that Galicia and Catalunya are on opposite ends of the Iberian peninsula, this signals a high degree of planning, coordination, and premeditation by part of the adoptive parents, the nuns, and the agency in contact with the *casa de cuna.* Another submission specific to Galicia occurred in the Hospital Provincial de Pontevedra mentioned a similar connection with Barcelona. The child was female, born between 1965 and 1966, and the post was written by her niece.

"We are searching for our aunt, possibly born in the summer in either 1965 - 1966 in the Hospital Provincial in Pontevedra, it could be a year up, year down. When she was born, they told our grandmother that she'd died, but she insisted that she'd seen her all red-faced and that she felt her cry. They did not show her a body, nor did they give her any documentation of the death. She may now be a tan woman with brown eyes. One of the nurses that worked in labor and delivery in that time has told us that many of those babies were given to highly powerful families in Barcelona. Perhaps she even has a birth certificate from Barcelona… We have no further details, our grandmother died without remembering the exact date of the birth."

4.2.4 1970s

There are 133 submissions about possible forced adoptions or thefts dated to the seventies. 82 of them occurred before Franco died in 1975, and 51 occurred after. These submissions are generally far more detailed than the ones dated to previous decades, and among them are the first two submissions not relating to Spain. The forum contains two posts dated to the seventies of suspected stolen children in Argentina and Chile, which correspond with their respective military dictatorships and "dirty wars".

13 of the total 133 submissions do not include a specific or precise location. There were 52 submissions that contained information about clinics or hospitals outside of Galicia or Euskadi. 63

of the cases were specific to Galicia, and five were specific to Euskadi. Sixteen of the submissions include information about twin births. The general trends from the sixties continue in the seventies, particularly with the twin births, which appear to follow the same pattern. The same Galician hospitals account for the majority of Galician cases. Three out of the five cases specific to Euskadi occurred in Bilbao, in the Maternidad de Santutxu or the Clinic on Solokoetxe, which are the two most frequently mentioned Basque locations throughout the whole forum. Thirty-nine submissions follow the earlier pattern of mothers or other family members present at the birth receiving the news that the baby had either been stillborn or died shortly after birth, and none were permitted to see the bodies or attend the burials.

The three primary differences clearly visible in submissions specific to the seventies are in location, identity, and intention of the poster, and the age of the mothers. Due to these three factors, I suggest that the transition-era marks the third stage for the adoption black market. Firstly, these submissions include a sharp increase in submissions specific to southern Spain, or Valencia. I believe this is because the southern regions, and Valencia which is located on the southeastern coast, have larger Roma populations, and their social exclusion made them particularly vulnerable to medical abuse, as indicated by the fact that many of the submissions mention Roma identity or living in a Roma-populated area. While these submissions do not contain many details, they are relatively frequent. Secondly, the increase in posts made by children who suspect that they were "stolen" or irregularly adopted at birth serves as a counter to the state-generated narrative that the *robos* only occurred in the immediate postwar period. There are multiple posts that either imply or directly state that the mother of the child was underage, (ages ranging from 16 to 18 years old) and these posts are all made by either a relative of the mother or the adopted child in question. These submissions are also lacking in copious detail, but three of them imply that there may have

been a financial incentive for teenage mothers to give up their children, marking the emergence of the "consensual sale" of babies. One submission includes the oldest recorded details about a "simulated pregnancy" allegedly performed by the woman who would become the adoptive mother. The woman gave birth in 1975, at the Maternidad La Paz in Madrid, which appears frequently on this forum as a potential site for these irregular adoptions. She claims that the woman lying next to her in her hospital room was "simulating" a pregnancy and that she appeared "completely perfect" immediately after giving birth, even standing and walking with no issue. The mother says that she was positive she was having twins, but after labor, she was only given one boy, and that the woman in the room with her was given a nearly identical girl who weighed the exact same as her son (2700 grams). It is worth noting that this woman also experienced a cesarean, and as such was anesthetized for the birth. She states that her claims that she had been carrying twins were directly refuted by the doctor, who told her "not to worry about it."

Otherwise, patterns from the sixties continue as established, particularly with the lack of birth or death certificates shown to parents, the frequent use of anesthesia for non-surgical births, the hospital "arranging" the funeral, and the frequent dismissal of mothers who felt their children were still alive. Finally, many of the posts made from this point onward are made by the mothers themselves, and include a number of spelling or grammatical errors that indicate an absence of regular formal schooling, as the majority of the text in their submission is spelled phonetically. This indicates that the trend of irregularly or forcibly adopting the children of working-class mothers or mothers living in extreme poverty was still ongoing after Franco's death.

4.2.5 1980s

There are 97 submissions that reference a suspected irregular adoption in the eighties. Only four of these submissions do not include a precise location, and all are made by adults who believe they were irregularly adopted as infants. 40 submissions include hospitals, clinics, or private homes outside of Galicia or Euskadi, with the overwhelming majority of them mentioning an institution in Madrid or Valencia, as was the case in the seventies. There is also an increasing number of submissions made about other southern cities, like Córdoba and Alicante, but unfortunately, they are lacking in precise details or many specifics. 46 cases are specific to Galicia, with the majority of them mentioning the same hospitals as the sixties and seventies: Juan Canalejo and Materno Infantil in A Coruña, and Xeral and Municipal in Vigo. Two cases are suspected in Euskadi, and while both submissions include very few details, one of the two occurred in the Maternidad de Santuxu. Multiple submissions reference or directly mention a "very young" or teenage mother.

While the majority of these submissions follow the same patterns as those established in the seventies-era posts, some stand out for the details they include. This is particularly apparent in submissions made by individuals who suspect they were irregularly adopted. One submission, made by a woman born in 1981 in Vigo who has known her whole life that she was adopted, states that she wants to know if there is any way to determine if her adoption was legal, or if "she, like so many other girls, was stolen and sold." Several other similar posts from individuals suspecting the worst about their own adoption indicate the impact of the emerging awareness of the *robos* in Spain. When these stories began to circulate in the last decade and a half, they evidently caused significant confusion for a number of adults who had previously not questioned their adoption

status. Due to the relative lack of detail included in these submissions, it is not possible to determine to what extent they discussed this with their adoptive parents. What is clear, however, is that the absence of any official means to determine the legality of so many Spanish adoptions from the 20th century continues to leave a litany of unanswered questions.

4.2.6 1990s and 2000s

There's a clear decrease in the number of submissions made about the nineties. Out of the 31 on the forum, four are about suspected thefts that occurred in Argentina and Chile. The majority of the posts are made by adults looking for information about their biological parents, and the posts made in search of information about a baby include very few details. The majority of the nineties-era submissions occurred outside of Galicia or Euskadi, but the Galician cases include the same hospitals, with the majority of the cases occurring in Xeral. These submissions appear to correspond with the fourth and final stage of these irregular adoptions, where adopted children know very little (if anything) about their biological parents, other than that they were very young, and in some cases addicted to drugs. What is surprising about these submissions, is the adamancy with which some commenters assert that they were "stolen."

One submission, made by a woman born in 1991, claims that she was "stolen and purchased."

I was born on December 20th, 1991. My birth certificate is fake. That caused me to request some legal justification for this., because there is no real or original one, and I want written documentation of why they won't give it to me. They deny everything. The certificate has a patient file number and when I went to request it they refused to give it to me. On the birth certificate, I'm listed as {name} BORN AT EIGHT FIFTEEN. And I have no more information… not even where I was born or anything…I've requested my medical history at all the hospitals and I get

no answers…my adoptive mother knew MERCEDES HERRAN DE GRASS. For eighteen years she worked with her in childcare services in the Maternidad de Bilbao on Solokoetxe street… AND SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WAS DOING!

There are seven submissions dated to the 2000s, one occurring in Buenos Aires. Three out of the remaining six are made by the same mother, whose three children were taken from her in Catalunya (likely Barcelona, but the details are unclear) over the course of several years. The submissions from the 2000s that include any details all mention clashes or interference from the state police, but none include specifics as to what caused those confrontations.

Overall, these two decades contain the least amount of specific information about the adoptions or the births, which is significant given that they were the most recent. Clearly, in large part, this is because many of the nineties-era submissions were made by adopted adults with no way of knowing details about their birth or biological parents. However, nearly all posts made by mothers include frequent mentions of frustration with police or judges who "interfered" with the family after coming into contact with the mothers for an external reason. This suggests that complex factors such as drug addiction or extreme poverty may have played a role in making these families more vulnerable to separation. The absence of detailed information in the more recent cases, particularly stark when compared to the past cases, also suggests a degree of shame or reticence from the posters, who include little to no specifics that would give any context.

4.3 Nuances and complications

The primary issue with determining patterns across all of these cases is that there is so much missing information. Both state inquiries mention the difficulty of estimating total patients, total deaths, general conditions, and general mortality patterns due to a lack of sufficient record-keeping by part of the institutions. In the case of the northern institutions, there are several instances where the authors state that the records they received from the institutions regarding their mortality rates for female "patients" did not correspond with cemetery records, or were proven to be insufficient at the end of their investigation (McCormick, O'Connell, Dee, Privilege, 2021). The Republic's commission directly states on multiple occasions that they do not know the total number of children who died at some of the homes, or how many (if any) were buried, or where.

Furthermore, it's important to consider that while the report indicates that there were institutions, such as the Regina Coeli or Miss Carr's Flatlets, in some sense supported single mothers and encouraged them to raise their children, the actual nature of this support may be more complex than the record shows. The women at Regina Coeli were still actively encouraged to seek out domestic work that may have been exploitative, and while the institution was certainly modern in its approach, the desire to consider it apart from the other institutions that relied on forced labor and arranged adoptions for women may fail to account for how the home engaged with the attitudes surrounding single motherhood at the time. That fact there was still a strong encouragement for recent mothers to prove their self-sufficiency through labor casts a somewhat striking parallel to the concept of "cleansing the sin" of unmarried mothers through labor that was so common in the more traditional homes.

The absence of a "complete" or official record also poses a considerable issue when analyzing any of the forum submissions. For example, while there were few submissions about cases in the 1940s, I do not believe that this is indicative of a lack of forced adoptions occurring at that time. As previously mentioned, the postwar period was unstable and uncertain enough to provide the perfect clandestine environment for these abuses, inflicted on a largely battered public that remembered the recent violence well enough to not ask questions. Also relevant to this is the fact that all of these submissions were made by a younger family member of the victims or by one of the victims themselves, a sibling or a twin born in that same hospital. The vast majority of the submissions on this forum are made by mothers who suspected their children were alive, and who were still alive in the 2010s, when the forum opened. This is one of the larger and more unexpected losses that I have encountered in the online research process – these open spaces where logic and evidence dictate that there should be hundreds or even thousands of narratives, but everyone who could tell them is already dead. This then complicates the entire concept of seeking "adequate commemoration" for victims of state violence, particularly when it is raised in response to "inadequate" commemoration, as in the case of the *El silencio de otros* film. How should we remember those who we do not know about, but suspect may have had parallel experiences? It even goes so far as to complicate any academic analysis, including my own – if victims' voices go unheard in their lifetimes, and they are unable to leave behind a record of their experiences, how can we know if we are inadvertently excluding them and their experiences from any analysis? Throughout my research, I often wondered how I might be replicating a pattern created by the state, which relied on the notion that one day any potential testimony to its brutality would disappear because in many cases, no one was around to hear it.

Another consequence of there being no widespread, official record available is the difficulty in noticing patterns without considerable effort. As a result of the fact that the *robos* are frequently dismissed as a relic of Francoism, or a conspiracy theory, and of the fact that there is no singular, official database of related information that is easily accessible, even those individuals who are prepared to confront the idea that there may be up to 300,000 cases of irregular adoptions may find it difficult to have their own suspicions reaffirmed. It is unlikely that they have the time to read nearly 400 submissions on a forum like SOS, which has a dated web design that is not user-friendly. It is even less likely that a forum of this sort is known or accessible to the elderly, who could offer first-hand accounts of what the practice looked like under Franco. In the time it took me to sort all of the data on the forum, it became apparent that even though the overwhelming majority of the commenters were convinced that their submissions pertained to forced adoptions, and they were posting there with some degree of hope that they'd receive new and relevant information, many of them were unaware that their experiences closely paralleled those of other commenters. For example, several submissions included the names of the hospitals only vaguely, or right at the end of their texts, as if they were afterthoughts – not realizing that the hospital where the baby was born appeared named in dozens of incredibly similar posts. The most apparent case of this was with the Almirante Vierna hospital in Vigo, Galicia, which was renamed Xeral de Vigo in the eighties. Typically, submissions made by mothers or by siblings of the stolen child refer to it as Almirante Vierna, and those made by younger nieces, nephews, and grandchildren call it Xeral. This shows that not only is there a clear lack of general understanding from the Galician public that this hospital consistently had very irregular procedures, but that the process of "renaming" a hospital is significantly effective towards sanitizing its reputation. A younger

generation that considers this place only under the name *Xeral* likely does not immediately associate it with the behavior of a hospital named after a fascist general.

Finally, the biggest difficulty in interpreting patterns from these submissions stems from the dwindling amount of information included as the submissions refer to more recent periods. Many posts include only vague or seemingly meaningless details or no details at all, save for the date and location. While this may indicate that the irregular or forced adoptions decreased considerably with the absence of the dictatorship and a dwindling level of Church control, it could also indicate that the reason that posts about the fifties, sixties, and seventies are more detailed is that the commenters personally experienced the lack of change brought on by the transition. It is possible that children adopted in the eighties and nineties, or young women who gave birth at that time, do not associate their experiences with state violence or fascism. This may have resulted in them believing that their experiences were individual and stopped them from seeking out further information. Lastly, I would suggest that the change in methods from the first two stages (outright "thefts" or forced adoptions) to the last two ("purchasing" or "selling" an infant or any other irregular adoption) may have carried a degree of shame or culpability. Mothers who were persuaded or manipulated into "selling" their child, particularly mothers who were underage, or suffering in poverty or addiction, may have had feelings of guilt or isolation that prevented them from connecting their experiences to the broader narrative of "irregular" adoption.

5.0 Field Site: Ireland

The justification for a comparative study between Spain and Ireland was due to the myriad similarities between the *robo de niños* and the Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries. Beginning in January of 2023, I spent 5 months in Belfast conducting ethnographic research and continuing my archival work, and I was also able to travel to cities in the counties of Dublin, Cork, and Galway. While I was very interested in the way that my identity would impact my ability to enter certain spaces, my focus was broader. I did not only want to study the cases specific to Ireland, or the potential for solidarity-based "insider" status within the Republican culture, I wanted to analyze the Irish state and public response to the Homes and Laundries to highlight the failures of the Spanish response. In practice, as one might expect, that was exceedingly complicated.

5.1 Belfast

I was still worried about getting people to talk to me when I returned to Belfast in January 2023, even after the litany of positive experiences I'd had in the previous summer. In July of 2022, I ended up meeting one of the members of a Belfast rap group whose popularity was on the rise.

This week-long encounter provided a very comprehensive introduction to the dynamics of Millennial and Generation Z Republicans.

Niall lived near the Falls Road, Belfast's most famous and recognizable Republican area, and utilized a pseudonym in his professional, and public life. Their music was nearly all in Irish, as all three members were fluent, native speakers. At a time when less than five percent of the total Irish population spoke Irish, their popularity was both unexpected and thrilling, signaling a generational shift among young Republicans that had the potential to do what their predecessors had been prevented from doing – live to see a thirty-two county Ireland, and teach their children to speak Irish there. That was their real mission, Niall said, to celebrate and strengthen the Irish language. Not, as Unionist and English media insisted, to condone the IRA's actions, or to encourage violence against Protestants. Their music was more provocative than strictly political, almost comically sexual, full of references to and outright praises of the IRA, yes, but even more full of lyrics about drug use. Their name was an allusion to the common practice of "kneecapping" where members of the Provisional IRA (the Provos) or Loyalist gangs like the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) shot out or shattered the kneecaps of anyone showing "antisocial behavior" most often drug use or drug trafficking. The group's positionality was something of a paradox – they lauded the IRA's message and mocked their generational conservatism, simultaneously.

However, their political sensibilities, both musically and personally, were undeniable. "Was your da in ETA, then?" he asked me, completely casually, twenty minutes after we'd met. He had to repeat the question because I hadn't understood it – *ETA*, in the Belfast accent, is pronounced "Etta." We were in the living room of the small house he and the other frontman of the band shared in the Falls, which looked more like a university-allocated student house than anything else. I had met Niall through Instagram when, in response to a question about whether

Kneecap would ever tour in Euskadi, he'd posted "We would love a gig in the Basque Country get it sorted #goraeta[11]." I had understood that any of our conversations would be informed by our shared interest in political militant movements, but I had never in my life been asked about which family members of mine might have been in ETA so casually, or with such an obvious note of optimistic curiosity. We went to a pub near the city center, a cosmopolitan, bustling mess of fast- and high-fashion shops that bore no visible trace of the city's infamous political turmoil. In this nondescript locale, the door was locked, and you needed to be known to the bartender in order to be let in. Inside, two teenage boys recognized Niall and asked him for a picture, and an older man with a hand amputated at the wrist sat in the corner, drinking by himself. My unvocalized suspicion that a bomb had something to do with the loss of his hand was silently confirmed by a quick glance from my guide.

The following days followed a similar dizzying pattern, where I was taken to small pubs, and introduced to an array of students, bartenders, Irish traditional musicians, the children of men who had been on the no-wash protest[12], and the grandchildren of famous political writers, with the same phrase: *this is Sofía, she's Basque, she's doing some kind of thesis research.* The advice Seamus had given me on the Dublin Aircoach proved immediately to be true: my Basqueness and my obvious fascination with Irish culture and youth Republicanism were so welcomed that I found myself on many occasions deeply moved by the kindness of Irish strangers. From their recommendations, I was able to visit several sites that embodied my specific research interests: Basque-Irish solidarity, commemorative practices, and the reception of militant Irish women.

[11] Literally translates to "Long live ETA," this phrase is very similar to the IRA's "Up the 'RA" and while it is use is still very, very controversial in Spain proper, it can be seen scrawled on lampposts and stone walls, on stickers and bathroom doors, as often as its Irish counterpart.

[12] Also known as the "dirty protesters" or the "blanket men," these Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks of the Long Kesh prison protested in order to be treated as "political prisoners" rather than "common criminals." This protest is widely thought to have been the first step towards the hunger strikes that claimed the lives of many Republicans, including Bobby Sands.

Fig. 1 Mural depicting the 1916 Easter Rising and a Sinn Féin sign on Beechmont Avenue, with a handmade sign reading "RPG" Avenue; Fig. 2 Memorial to the residents of the Falls Road who died while in the IRA, taken July 22, 2022.

Very few of the people I met that week knew much or were particularly concerned with the Mother and Baby Homes and the Magdalene Laundries, which did not come as much of a surprise to me, given that most of the similar institutions were Protestant-run in Belfast. None of the people I spoke with, all of them five to ten years older than me, seemed at all interested in speaking about sectarianism, except for when they referenced the way the Unionist government had bolstered the infrastructure of the north around Catholic exclusion. They were not interested in criticizing Protestants, or defending Catholicism, only Catholics who had been maligned. Aside from the general questions I was asked to gauge my knowledge of the inherent difference between Protestants and Catholics – *where do Protestants keep their toasters?*[13] – which were gently

[13] A: in the cupboard.

cajoling, but never with any real malice to them, Protestants hardly came up at all. The chief concern of the new Republican generation, from what I saw, was incorporating the most progressive, radical elements of Republicanism into art, schooling, and community-building, and focusing on who the "real enemy" was: not the Protestants, not the working-class Loyalists, but the Unionist elite, and the police state they'd built with the British government's help.

By the time I returned in January, I expected the lack of discussion of the Mother and Baby Homes and the Magdalene Laundries and understood it not to imply any staunch reticence towards critiquing the Church. I had learned that the public stances adopted by the Republicans I met regarding controversial moments in the Troubles were not without nuance in private. This typically came to my attention when someone else raised the issue, referencing pedantic or hostile conversations they'd had with Unionists or English people on the assumption that I had equally frustrating, regular interactions with Spaniards. In these moments, we agreed, it was best to remain firm in the face of some offensive comment about how all political prisoners deserved to die like animals, or how we were all terrorist sympathizers, or how all Catholics were scared of birth control. Any hesitation or concession would only seem to prove the arguments of the Loyalists or the Spaniards right. But in conversations in like-minded company, qualms were permissible and even encouraged.

"I mean, some of what they've done was *so* wrong," Niall said once, after we'd been talking about how mythical individual IRA and ETA members had seemed when we were younger, like the Colombia Three[14], or Josu Urrutikoetxea[15]. I was surprised by this – I'd been careful not to

[14] Nial Connolly, James Monahan, and Martin McCauley, three Irish men who escaped a life sentence in Colombia in 2003 after being arrested in 2001 for training FARC rebels. This incident had the potential to "halt" the ongoing peace process and was highly controversial (Murphy, 2005).

[15] Also known as Josu Ternera, Urrutikoetxea is one of ETA's most infamous living members. He has been imprisoned multiple times and is known for his media appearances, which do not involve any visible remorse on his

mention the specifics of my research, wary of offending anyone by introducing gender politics into the conversation. I recovered quickly, citing my points of intense contention with ETA's actions: the Hipercor supermarket bombing and the bombings of the civil guard barracks that killed children (Gallardo Rivera, 2021). Here, I saw us perform the private reformulations of the public stances we had on these issues – bombs with high civilian casualties were, predictably, amongst the chief arguments made by Spaniards and Unionists. It was almost formulaic, which I realized was a result of it being a learned behavior, and one that we had both performed throughout our lives in order to fit into our social environments, even if we did believe it to be sincere. In conversations with an ideological opponent, the police negligence and intended targets were always at the core of the rebuttal: these were hardly no-warning bombs, law enforcement had hours to clear out those places, they knew that there was a bomb there and deliberately did not clear the area to change public opinion and ETA/the IRA's targets were material goods/ Loyalist paramilitaries…

But with no one there to disagree with we admitted that placing bombs in public areas and trusting that the police would do enough to clear the places out was a decision we'd have a hard time coping with. Encouraged, I said Yoyes's case was the one that troubled me the most. Yoyes, I explained, was a commando leader who left ETA in the mid-eighties, after the worst of the violence (Aretxaga, 1988). On suspicion that she had begun to talk to the Spanish government to testify, an ETA gunman blew her head off in front of her five-year-old son. As a child, I was told that the man who killed her did so while saying *una comandante no abandona a sus soldados* (a commander does not abandon her soldiers.) He looked a little sick. I waited for him to make the connection to the famous case Dolours Price was implicated in, but he didn't (DenHoed, 2020).

part. He was also involved in the 1973 Operation Ogro, which killed Prime Minister, Luis Carrero Blanco (Guittet, 2021).

We moved back to the cinematic aspects, the prison boat escape, the Colombia Three's manifesto, and the escape from Long Kesh (McKeown, 2009). I brought an adolescent hero of mine, Larry Marley, the mastermind behind the escape from the famous prison designed just for IRA members, who had stayed behind to finish out his prison term so he could go back home to his family at the end of it. He was killed by a UVF member just two years after leaving prison (Toolis, 2011). His son, I said, was one of the most prolific sexual abusers in the IRA's history (Moore, 2019). The details, which had emerged at a similar time as the information about Gerry Adams's brother and father, were horrifying (BBC, 2018). "Oh, I didn't know about that," he said, and changed the subject.

By January, I was somewhat concerned that what I had initially read as a fundamental opposition to violence against women or children, and in particular, sexual violence, was mere discomfort with the subject, and specifically discussing it with a woman. In the first months, it seemed that my concerns were not baseless: I was having so much success getting people to talk to me, but only about the glamorous bits of our shared militant tradition, and any mentions of sexual violence towards women by the church, or the forced adoptions, produced notable discomfort. At the first mention of Euskadi, I was immediately and jovially brought into a nearly visible inner circle. One man that I met at a student bar, Liam, would initiate a congratulatory fist bump periodically, whenever I said something about ETA that sounded familiar to him, or even when I knew what specific key players in the IRA's history he was talking about, to celebrate our shared understanding. One night, with no prompting, he pulled up his uncle's arrest record on his phone and shoved it in my face across the crowded table. "Just so you *know* I'm qualified to talk about this," he said. "My credentials."

Everyone I spoke to seemed confused as to why I was studying forced adoptions and not simply the Basque-Irish relationship. I would explain that a serious academic study of ETA in any sense was not the sort of thing that would win me any favors in Spain, nor would it help my chances in the American academic environment. They accepted this reasoning, remarking that Spain was "even more backward" than the Unionist and English governments, but they still found my interest in the Homes and Laundries perplexing. "Is it not just cows and culchies there?" Liam asked me once. "I can't stand how they talk." Liam's immediate dismissal of the more rural Irish people (the "culchies") reminded me very much of the almost instinctual dismissal of the Galicians I heard all across the Spanish state, even from people who were very interested in politics, like Liam. Their dismissal was never an outright rejection or assertion that the ideological makeup of those places was irrelevant, it was more an initial assumption that the *real* political complexity occurred in high-concentration areas, like Belfast or Dublin.

It wasn't that these impassioned young men, like my guide the previous summer, were unwilling to criticize some of the IRA's actions or the church as an institution. It typically only took two conversations with the men for them to offer up their qualms with hardline Republicanism. I began to be aware that in these conversations we were both actively engaging in a performance in our declaratory celebrations of these militants, which went hand in hand with equally declarative condemnations of the state bodies at work. The criticisms of the church, in contrast, were more exasperated than anything else. They tended to listen to my criticisms of the Church, and its behavior as an extension of Franco in its treatment of women and "deviants" as a whole, and sigh or shake their heads. One recent graduate, Kieran, even went as far as to say, with faint disgust, "They're no different over here, to be fair."

We considered this for a while, without speaking. Technically, of course, these two branches of the church had entirely different foundations – in Galicia, the church functioned in a directly fascistic sense, and in Euskadi, the relative radicality of individual priests and parishes did nothing to stop thousands from dying violent deaths, only directly intervening in the course of events to throw them elaborate funerals cloaked in narratives of Catholic martyrdom (Rooney, 2007). In the Republic, the church had bolstered and strengthened the young state after its partial victory against the British, and in the north, they'd been inextricable from the majority of Republican narratives (Toolis, 2011). And yet, in both places, at least tens of thousands of children had been taken from their mothers, and thousands of them had died in the act. What did it mean that the mere presence of church influence at the state level seemed to signal mass abuse towards women, regardless of the political landscape? What did it mean that Republican Catholicism and Fascist Catholicism produced similar results? At one point, an American friend joined in the unfinished critique. Kieran and I both stopped his comparison to American Catholicism. "It's different here," Kieran said. "An exiled priest gave my father his first copy of the Communist Manifesto," I said, nearly at the same time, prompting us both to laugh at our inane need to defend the church from American protestant misinterpretation.

Kieran's criticisms of the church hinged on sexual violence as well, but almost entirely on the issue of pedophilia in the Catholic church. I found that most of the young northern Irish men were willing to take very harsh stances on sexual abuse towards children, often saying that they would kill those priests themselves and that it was a shame that no one had yet, etc. These stances almost always seemed to imply that the "shame" in question should be placed on the men who did not protect the vulnerable around them, which reinforced a common notion of adult men as inherent protectors, and everyone else as potential victims. Not only does this not entirely account

for adult male victims of sexual violence, but it also shifts the focus to what "good" men *failed* to do, away from what most men *actively* did in these situations. By implying that it was "men's work" to protect the vulnerable, they could imagine an ideal future, and turn away from the present reality, in which men had performed, protected, and safeguarded this violence against the vulnerable through their silence on clergy abuse they were aware of. They occasionally leaned into the interpretation that pedophiles who were men were acting that way because they were homosexual, and not because they were pedophiles, adding a whole other dimension to their oft-vocalized desires to cause them physical harm, as if the impulse to react violently was less about the unimaginable suffering of the child, and more about the excuse to beat up a man they thought was "one of the bad" gays. None of them ever brought up the Laundries or the Homes, and while many of them were shocked at the data I referenced, others insisted that was an issue specific to the south. At that point, I understood that my positionality allowed me to hear the insider criticisms of the IRA, or of the Church, even criticisms about how Sinn Féin didn't do enough for abortion. But simultaneously, my gender and the gender of the majority of victims made the subject of gendered violence one to avoid.

For the first few months, Belfast proved as fruitless as Dublin, in terms of finding people who would talk to me about the subjects I felt I was there to talk about. In Dublin, the issue with finding interlocutors was that the city moved very quickly and was preoccupied with the encroaching reality that it was becoming too expensive to live in. Since the 2008 recession, Dublin's affordability has severely worsened, and by some calculations, the city is now more expensive to live in than Paris. Frequently, I was told that it wasn't just that Belfast tended to be cheaper, it was that while more infamous for its political violence, it was significantly cleaner and objectively safer than Dublin. Belfast has, for nearly a century, been a place with very little crime

that is not political. For all their public image of being world-weary, the members of the rap group that I spoke with were shocked at the stories I told them about the daily sexual harassment in the U.S. This was not to say, of course, that any of the informants believed that Belfast, or the north as a whole, were safe havens for women and marginalized people. Rather, the dominance of "political crime" was such that "ordinary crime" appeared much less frequent, and much less justifiable. Things like property damage (buildings or cars burnt out) were relatively commonplace and seen by the youth as more immature and exasperating than anything else. Instances of sexual violence against women even in the "casual" senses that we were accustomed to in the U.S., (street harassment, physical harassment on public transit, etc.) while not nonexistent, were heavily admonished, and treated as soundly unacceptable.

I focused on the study of commemoration in these cities. There were often placards to honor the memory of the dead in the places where they'd died, typically young people who had perished in road-related accidents. West Belfast was full of Republican memorial cemeteries, including the Milltown cemetery[16], and equally full of commemorative murals to IRA members. Dublin's commemoration of the Easter Rising is one of its biggest tourist draws, and it is fine-tuned, from the GPO to the square at Trinity College. Nowhere, in these careful, grandiose depictions of Irish resilience, endurance, and suffering, did I see a mention of the women and children who passed through or died in the Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries.

By late February, when I was able to establish firm enough connections to begin conducting semi-structured interviews with women, I was able to confirm what I had previously suspected to

[16] Three IRA members who were killed extrajudicially in Gibraltar by the British Army, Danial McCann, Seán Savage, and Mairéad Farrell, were laid to rest in Milltown Cemetery in 1988. The funeral drew massive crowds due to both the fame of the volunteers and the brutality of their deaths. Michael Stone, a member of the Loyalist paramilitary group Ulster Defence Association, shot into the crowds and threw grenades. He killed three and injured sixty (Morrissey, 2020).

be true: that talking to Irish men about the conditions of Irish women before talking to Irish women would help me to understand the female frustration with their male counterparts. Amongst the women, ranging from 17 to 25, there was a continuing lack of deep awareness regarding the Homes and Laundries, but I believe this is due more to generational and geographic differences than anything else, given that the majority of the women I spoke with had very developed political views. These women, while no less secure in their Irish identity, and frequently just as fond of references to the IRA, tended to have analyzed their relationship to their national identity through the lens of gender far more often than any of the men I spoke to. This was primarily due to their knowledge of clerical abuse against women and children, whether it was the more obvious abuse of power present in the Homes and Laundries, or the attempts to limit bodily autonomy through abortion policies. The women I spoke to in Belfast would explain their Republicanism through a feminist-socialist framing, the same kind they utilized in their criticism of the church as an institution. Critiques of the church were not critiques of the Catholic identity, which they recognized the stigma towards, but critiques towards a hegemonic, exploitative institution, whose followers' sensibilities were such that the local parties had to bow to them. This, a student named Saoirse said, was inherently contradictory to the radical nature of real Republicanism. The true Republican tradition rejected stratification and forced obedience and vehemently sought out self-determination. Saoirse found the fact that the main Republican party, Sinn Féin, to have a particularly frustrating voting record when it came to women's issues, and one that she felt was contradictory to the deliberately radical and progressive message they had been espousing for a near-century. To have Sinn Féin remain opposed, unsupportive, or outright silent on the much-contested issue of abortion made their desire for *national* self-determination and autonomy feel a bit ironic, she said, given that bodily autonomy was given no real support (Holborow, 2018). "They

say all that grand stuff," she said, "but like, when it comes to the church? When it comes to abortion? Then what? Nothing. And how do they vote? And what do they say? The same as everyone else."

While many of the women I spoke with were not intimately familiar with the history of the Homes and the Laundries, they were able to seamlessly incorporate them into their critiques of the church and of the absence of a productive state inquiry into historical abuse. However, each of them pointed out to me that they had been pointed in the direction of a critical perspective by an older woman in their life. In Saoirse's case, this was her mother, who was a staunch critic of the church, even though they lived in Ballymena, a town an hour's drive from Belfast, with a violent history and a staunch Protestant majority (Chrisafis, 2005). In the case of a recent secondary school graduate, Anne, she attributed her perspective to a class she'd taken a few years back in school when one of the teachers – at a Catholic school – had encouraged them to debate about abortion. Some of the perspectives of the other students, she'd said, had been shocking, and deeply conservative. She'd begun to think about how contradictory it was for a woman to believe in restrictions imposed on her by a male-led institution. Nearly all of the women I spoke to mentioned their schooling having an impact on their views about abortion, the forced adoptions, female sexuality, and the church in general. I asked them the same set of questions I asked the men, careful to always ask if they thought their schooling had been sufficient regarding historical abuse of any kind and if they thought that we would ever know the full extent of state violence on either side of the Irish border. Where the men I spoke with tended to resist general questions such as those, answering with anecdotal examples, or changing the subject, the women, invariably, responded the same: no.

ETA rarely came up in these conversations. For the first time, the *robo de niños* was what granted me access. In these spaces, university bathrooms, the outdoor sections of nightclubs, parks, and drugstore aisles, what mattered was that I was from a place where the same church had done the same damage to women and that talking about that damage didn't negate my national identity. In fact, in sharp contrast with my initial foray into Belfast, we barely talked about the IRA. Like ETA, it was only mentioned somewhat ruefully, without any shred of the conservative critique, more disappointment in what could have been, or should have been, than anything else. Rather than taking this as a direct signaling of some inherent hypocrisy in the IRA's structure, I came to think of these brief mentions as more of indicators of the sophistication and intricacy of Republican feminism – where practicians of it were constantly having to reckon with their positionality. In order to advocate for a re-unification of Ireland and better living conditions for all those within it, they had to constantly be reminded that many of the loudest voices within that movement would not use their platform to advocate for women's bodily autonomy. In order to fully embody their feminism, they had to consider the fact that their material conditions, and those of every woman they knew, remained impacted by the legacy of British colonialism given that as citizens of Northern Ireland, they were paying taxes to the Crown.

After being approached by a student who had overheard the subject of this thesis, I learned that her great-grandmother had died in one of these institutions in Galway. Catriona told me that her mother found it very difficult to speak about the subject, and rarely raised it, recalling her own father's pain when speaking of his mother's life. The nuns had not released her body or any of her information to him, even after her death. Catriona, who had grown up in London with a fully Irish background, told me she'd also come to Belfast to get closer to some aspect of her political-national identity, and found the absence of dialogue surrounding the institutions similarly

troubling. She and her mother had gone to visit the old institution together, and the state had turned it into a private school. The art classroom, she said, still looked like a makeshift hospital.

5.2 Cork and Galway

In both of my trips from Belfast to Cork and Galway, there was no point where I was unaware that my destination was a mass grave, and yet both times I found myself not fully prepared for what I saw. Having spent several months in Belfast already, coupled with the fact that I had only then entirely finished compiling, sorting, and translating all the horrifying information from the SOS site, I assumed that my research and experience were close to a full understanding of these cases. I knew that in Bessborough House, in Cork, run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Jesus and Mary, at least seventy children had died by 1943, after only 21 years of activity (Garrett, 365). I knew that the conditions there were extremely poor, and that 75 percent of the children born there in 1943 died within their first year of life (Commission, p. 22). I knew that there were at least 923 children associated with Bessborough House who died and that there were no proper records kept of their burials (Commission, p. 29). It is still difficult to describe how it felt to see for myself that the institution was still open and operating, with no visible evidence of what had happened on its grounds.

I arrived there on my second day in Cork, in mid-May. The previous day, I had spent an entire afternoon walking through St. Joseph's cemetery, in a suburban neighborhood in the city, attempting to find the graves of women who had been held in the Magdalene Laundry, after finding a record of their burial there. I was unsuccessful – the cemetery is very large, and the inscriptions on most of the tombstones were faded. In Ireland, I often found myself encumbered by the fact that I did not want to appear disrespectful in religious settings, something I could not seem to avoid when in Galicia or Euskadi. When I had first moved there, I was holding on to a certain fantastical notion about Irish Catholicism as inherently Republican and felt somehow closer to it ideologically than I did to any of the churches in Galicia, which I often refused to step foot in, as a consequence of my upbringing.

Fig. 3, St. Joseph's Cemetery, Cork City, Cork.

I had visited several churches on my first trip to Belfast, and expected to continue doing so on Sundays. Once I came back, I had finished the archival portion of my research and began to feel a deep reticence towards going to mass. Not quite what Galicia tends to evoke in its communist minority, who do not even enter the church for funerals, waiting outside for the mass to conclude. But I had begun to categorize the behavior of the church, the clergy, and even some of the churchgoers the same way that I did in Euskadi – not with outright rejection or disdain, but it was

becoming difficult to interpret their actions as sincere, rather than performative. I was growing increasingly concerned by how this could affect my research and in particular my analysis, as I could not walk past a church in Belfast without thinking about the 14,000 women who had passed through the northern Homes and Laundries, and until how recently those institutions had closed. The Marianville Good Shepherd Sisters Mother and Baby Home in Belfast closed in 1990. Any insinuation that the church could play a role in a radical movement defending the rights of the vulnerable was in my mind, involuntarily and immediately associated with the incarceration of pregnant twelve-year-old girls, meant to repent, or the still-standing buildings where these institutions had operated.

In Cork, on my way to St. Joseph's, I stopped to photograph several Catholic shrines, and the walls inside St. Mary's Dominican church. There, I met John, who was in his early fifties and worked for the church in some aspect that he did not clarify. He asked if I was Spanish, due to my name, and was delighted when I explained that I was Basque instead, pulling me aside in the empty church to ask if I "was alright." I was so perplexed by this question that I assumed he could somehow physically see the religious crisis I had been having for the better part of the year. "Not here to cause any trouble, are you?" he said. "Basque in Belfast, is all." It was not all that different from my first conversation with Seamus, nearly a year before, where my 'nationality' evoked in them the assumption that I was in Ireland in some clandestine sense, or looking for political allies. After I clarified that I was nothing more than another student studying abroad, simply doing research, we discussed the state of the Basque independence movement for a while, and how it contrasted with the Catalan movement, and John said that he felt that the decision to abandon the armed struggle had been an error, both in my part of the world and in his. Like many men of his generation, he was perfectly comfortable making grandiose statements about the "necessity" or the

"glory" of militant resistance. I found that men of John's age seemed to speak with authority about the political violence they had witnessed without any concern that someone would take offense or not believe them.

"Just turning their backs on absolutely everyone," he said, shaking his head. He spoke about how Sinn Féin had become a "bunch of mafiosos" and how they'd fallen through on their promises. Thinking he might have been referring to their decision to continue the hunger strike in Long Kesh when they knew the British government would not concede – a debate that continues to split the ranks of Irish Republicans – and relying on the notion that he would lean into our age and gender differences and over-explain at any opportunity, I asked him to elaborate. He said there were three issues: abortion, immigration, and poverty. Initially, I found myself thrilled by the linkage between Ireland's north and south, that a middle-aged clergyman from Cork and a nineteen-year-old student from Belfast would have the same qualms about Sinn Féin's voting record not matching up with their public facade of radical liberation for all. Then, John began a five-minute speech about how the issues ruining Ireland's economy, and ensuring that the dreams of James Connolly and all those others involved in the Easter Rising went to waste, were due to young women choosing not to be mothers, immigrants "taking Ireland from the Irish," and leaving the rest of them with no jobs as a result. The dissonance between what he felt was the "Belfast stance" on these issues, and what the Republican youth of Belfast actually felt regarding them, was immense. John and I had stepped outside the church and were overlooking the River Lee when he asked what specifically my research was about. At the mention that I was on my way to St. Joseph's cemetery to look for the tombs of some of the women from the Magdalene Laundries, his excited expression faltered and was replaced by a deliberately neutral one. Conservative Irish men, much like the Galicians, tended to be good at avoiding confrontation, or wary of letting silences last, lest

they gave off the impression that I had offended them. In Ireland, this expression held a degree of sincerity in it (despite being, of course, a performance) that I attributed mostly to the fact that I was not Irish, and not a man his own age. While doubtlessly John disliked any mention of the Laundries, I was not one of his own, and he did not attempt to "correct" me, or assure me that those women had deserved to be there. Instead, he simply returned to a modified version of his earlier narrative, adjusting for the variables of my age, my foreignness, and my gender. I left St. Mary's with a business card for a local conservative youth group that held meetings in the church after hours, wondering if his perception of Basque-Irish solidarity had also been shaken.

At St. Joseph's my proximity to exploitation felt immense, and I found myself carefully observing the demeanor of the few other people in the cemetery. In an effort to blend in, despite being roughly fifty years younger than the others, I began to read each inscription carefully and tried to commit each name, each age, each word of belonging: *daughter, sister, friend,* to memory. Nearly at the end of my time in Ireland, I was engaging in a commemorative practice of my own design, that had begun with my archival research, and my determination to copy down each location of the institutions, of their graves, and the name of every patient, and every adopted child, and every dead child, as if copying them down would commit them to my memory, and somehow undo the feeling that the angle of my research had become one of scavenging, rather than analyzing.

I had assumed that the failure to find the graves of the women from the Laundries would be the worst of it, given that I knew that I'd be able to find Bessborough House. The cab driver was in his mid-sixties, and friendly. I had the exchange that occurred nearly every time I took a cab in Ireland where the drivers were middle-aged, and very kind, or perhaps bored, and stumbled over the generational impasse between us to tell me that I "didn't really look American." This

driver, Paul, was excited at the mention of the Basque Country, asking me if I knew anything at all about the Cork Brigade of the IRA, and even more excited when I said that I did. Similarly to Liam from Belfast, however, he was perplexed by my presence in Cork, if I was Basque and doing research in Belfast. When I asked him if he had ever heard of the Bessborough House, he nodded grimly. He had grown up in the area, he said, and his parents had told him all sorts of awful things about the place, particularly during the fifties and sixties. He said he hadn't put together from the address on the taxi app that that's where he was taking me, that sometimes he took parents and their children up there from the city. He was similarly disturbed by the fact that it continued to operate as a "family intervention center." Paul had no issue condemning the church, and pointing out the insufficiency of the inquiries done.

"You haven't made an appointment with them, have you?" he said, as we drove into the increasingly rural landscape. "They'll hardly tell you anything."

When I said that I hadn't, he said that I ought to tell the guard at the gate that I *had* made one, just to get us through the long driveway. I sensed that Paul had become nervous, subconsciously positioning us on the same side, if only until I was past the gate. For the length of the trip, he had ushered me into the protection of Basque-Irish solidarity, even though he knew nothing about me, and understood that my research would not focus on our shared political proclivities. He had been talking steadily on the long drive up, mostly the typical advice I received from older Irishmen, which buses to take, how I should have picked another hostel, and how he didn't like hostels in general, how it would be hard to find people my age with any knowledge of the Bessborough house because his generation had only found out about it through vague recollections from their parents. Once we passed through the gate – the guard didn't ask us anything at all – Paul looked at the long stretch of fields of wildflowers that ringed the property

and told me that it was all privately owned, by the religious order, most likely. The fact that the "family intervention center" likely wasn't making much of a profit didn't matter, he said, as long as it remained privately owned. As long as the fields were private property, they wouldn't dig them up.

"All of this," he said, waving an arm at the fields of flowers, "it's all full of dead bodies. Who knows how many?"

Fig. 4, Bessborough House, Co. Cork. Credit: Irish Examiner, 2019

The receptionist inside the building told me all the staff were out on a team-building retreat, and that photographs of the building were prohibited, likely to protect the privacy of the families that went there. When photographing the fields, the sense of participation in a still-incomprehensible commemoration ritual returned, and I was left with dozens of nearly identical photographs of the fields of yellow flowers and weeds, taking care to capture as much of the fields as were visible. The driveway leading up to the property was gravel, the kind that can be laid over a dirt surface, over and over again. I left on foot, wondering if here, too, I was walking over dead bodies.

Fig. 5, Fig. 6, Fields at Bessborough House

After my trip to Cork, I anticipated that the mass grave at Tuam, Co. Galway, would be similar. In a sense, my research in Ireland had begun and would end with Tuam. The site was both the first case I had ever looked into and the case that catapulted the Mother and Baby Homes to the national spotlight in 2014, when an unmarked grave containing the bodies of 796 children, primarily infants, was discovered near a septic tank in the small town of Tuam. A local historian, Catherine Coreless, discovered that the deaths could be attributed to the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home and that they occurred over thirty-six years, from the institution's opening in 1925 to when it closed in 1961 (Garret, 2017). Given that this case effectively broke open the story of the Mother and Baby Homes, I stopped by the Tuam town cemetery before the gravesite, to see if there had been any commemorative headstone or plaque set up in the nine years since the discovery of the mass grave. There were none. In order to reach the gravesite, I had to pass by a memorial to six fallen IRA volunteers, who died in 1923. The "Tuam Martyrs" were not the typical commemorated IRA volunteers, who were killed by the British government. The Free State government shot them by firing squad in 1923 because they opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty (Kiley, 2023). This memorial was made official in 1985, making one thing clear: the Irish Republic could

reckon with the state-sanctioned violence of its past, and even admit to wrongdoing, but only in select cases. That precise location in Tuam is also where those six IRA members were killed, the memorial is made out of the wall they were killed against, making its proximity to another site of mass death all the more poignant.

Fig. 7, Memorial to six IRA members, killed in 1923

To enter the gravesite, I had to walk directly into the suburban neighborhood's private streets, practically in someone's back garden. The site is not visible from the street, like the Republican memorial. When approaching the Bon Secours mass grave memorial, the eye is most immediately drawn to the large metal numbers, reading "796." Almost immediately after, I noticed the shoes, dozens of them, placed against the walls in a line. Yellowing sheets of paper with the children's names were tacked up under plastic. On top of some of the baby shoes, there were stuffed animals, waterlogged and smeared with dirt. Some of them were propping up signs with individual baby's names on them. A metal sign with marker writing on it read:

My Baby

I carried you for nine months and brought you into the world

But the nuns took you away I look for you all my life but could not find you

I am old and weak and if I should die and you are in heaven please ask the lord

To open the gates and let me in so I can hould you in my arms for ever

Tell the lord to close the gates behind me so nobody can take you away

A mother's love for her baby. They are all angels in heaven

It was written by PJ Haverty, who survived his time in the Home. Photographs of survivors, now in their old age, were pinned to the stones inside of plastic bags. The site is small, standing out starkly inside of the old walls. It was exceedingly difficult, even when I was very familiar with the specifics of the case, to imagine that 796 children's remains could have fit into a place that size.

Fig. 8, Memorial for the mass grave of the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, Tuam, Co. Galway.

Fig. 9, Stuffed animals and laminated dedications left at the gravesite in Tuam. Fig. 10, Names of those who passed through and died in the home.

5.3 Conclusions

Belfast, Dublin, Cork, and Galway, at the surface level, are all places that have perfected the practice of commemoration. Every few streets, there are murals of the Easter Rising, of Bobby Sands, of the Gibraltar Three, and sculptures dedicated to fallen Republicans, even to the soldiers of the international brigade in Spain. That recollection, that constant reference to "the RA," or to individual agents in it, to the faceless, brutal entity of "the Brits" or "the loyalists," appeared just as frequently in conversation. In Belfast, the lack of commemorative practices (sculptures, murals, conversations, or other artistic representations) dedicated to the Catholic Church's abuse cannot be simply described as a consequence of sectarian Republicanism or of "blind faith." Instead, it

seems much more like the result of a generational gap in knowledge, and a gap along the "gender divide" in the north. The radical progressivism of the male young Republicans I met never seemed to deliberately ignore the suffering of women. I do not doubt that any of them would staunchly object to the mistreatment of women were it to occur in front of them, or to someone in their proximity – in fact, many of them seemed to have frequent vigilante fantasies regarding this same scenario – but the act of connecting the "plague" of male violence that could affect the women in their lives to the perpetrators of it that lurked in the wings of the church their grandmothers longed to attend freely proved to be more difficult. Similarly, the constant clashes with Unionists and Loyalists had made criticisms of the church as a whole feel like a step towards admitting that there was some basis for the social exclusion of Catholics. For the most part, young Republican women had no such qualms regarding their critiques of the church as an institution. While they did not ever deny that the Catholic population of the north had been scapegoated in order to excise further control over the Irish and that individual priests and deeply religious people were not incapable of carrying out very radical lives, the overall record and mission of the Catholic church was not one that they felt an abiding loyalty to. While this was mostly interpreted through their relationship to their conceptions of sexuality, sexual orientation, and abortion discourse, none of them reacted adversely or reluctantly to the suggestion that Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes were earlier symptoms of the same problem.

In Cork and Galway, criticisms of the church were much more specific to the older generation, with strong memories of the abuses carried out in the fifties and sixties. While most of them were supporters of the IRA, particularly in its 70's-era period of activity, they did not have the same habit of associating support for an end to British hegemony with support for the Catholic Church, as was common in the north. In places like Cork and Galway, criticisms of the church and

support for the IRA or any form of Republicanism are widely considered left-leaning positions, except in the rare case of men like John from St. Mary's in Cork, who not unlike Eamon De Valera, utilized the Republican rhetoric to condemn the "immoral behaviors" of modern women. Among the younger generations, the Mother and Baby Homes and the Magdalene Laundries are very rarely discussed. There are frequent references to the IRA and militant republicanism, but in a jovial, nostalgic sense, or a celebratory one, rather than as a committed model to follow. The absence of widespread commemorative gestures, artistic or political, in these cities is one I attribute to the male dissonance regarding institutional Catholicism and violence against women. The destabilizing potential of including these women and children in their mainstream commemorative practices is immense, so it becomes a fringe activity, practiced only by those whose sense of national self is not undone by the idea that the Republican state did not live up to the ideals of the Republican movement, despite being better than British dominion.

I began to question a lot about my position as a researcher in Ireland, particularly about my reasons for interpreting certain interactions as disingenuous or as revelatory regarding hypocrisy or irony in the male Republican youth. I realized that I'd had no similar qualms about pointing out hypocrisy in Galician mainstream culture and Basque *abertzale* culture. I knew that any criticisms of these subcultures would not undo the fact that half of my background is rooted in these places, and I knew that my analysis of these ironies or hypocrisies wouldn't suffer from an attempt to cite them as proof of the fundamental self-sabotaging mission of the Galicians, or the "senseless violence" of the Basques. Contrastingly, in Ireland, I was keenly aware that while I had received more than the typical guest's admission into certain areas, I was still a guest. I began to become preoccupied with presenting my findings in a way that distinguished them from the British liberal feminist approach which, like the Spanish counterpart, tended to oversimplify the

complexities of Irish gender dynamics, leaning into a condescending analysis that seemed to imply that the poverty and destitution in some parts of Ireland were the "price" to be paid for electing conservatives – political or religious– to government.

By the time I began my fieldwork in Ireland, I had already done my archival research, and as such, I had begun to abandon the notion that in comparing the Iberian and Irish cases of forced adoptions, the Irish state response would come out as a model to follow. I had subconsciously believed this might be the case at the beginning of this project, not because the abuse had occurred at a lesser scale, or because it had been done by the left-leaning side of their civil war, but because I believed, based on the existing reports and the media coverage, that these abuses were talked about to some degree, while in Spain this continues to feel impossible. I assumed that the fact that the total number of children who had died in some of these institutions was known and that they had been investigated, or excavated in some cases, would translate to a greater cultural reckoning than the one in actuality.

One of the most crucial and difficult things to remember in this process was to set aside my continuing disappointment with the reality of how Ireland has "dealt" with these abuses, at the political and social level. I began to realize that the reason I'd been so adamant about doing ethnographic work on such a sensitive issue in a place where I had something of an entry point of political solidarity was not simply because I felt that I would not give in to the desire to sensationalize my findings or use them to signal a collective "flaw" of any sort in the society. My decision was also based on the fact that the north of Ireland, like Euskadi, is typically only studied in academic contexts when speaking of the political violence exclusive to the IRA and the state provocations and responses. Similarly, the Republic, in particular the more rural areas, much like Galicia, tends to be spoken about with a degree of paternalistic fascination regarding the

economically disenfranchised and conservative culture. I intended to study the lingering impact of these abuses on the gender dynamics, commemoration practices, and national identity of my generation in Ireland. I did not set out to prove that the Irish were better equipped to deal with violence against the vulnerable, nor did I seek to establish that their professions of radicalism and progressivism fell apart when women entered the equation. My many long, wonderful, and nuanced conversations with Irish women of varying ages and backgrounds make it clear to me that those two conclusions are insincere and incomplete.

6.0 Field Site: Iberia

Initially, I believed that my fieldwork in the Spanish state would be determined primarily by a series of decisions I took. Who to talk to, where to talk to them, which hospitals and clinics to visit, which languages to speak, what to even *call* the place. However, I found that my ability to do ethnographic work within Iberia depended entirely on my willingness to legibly adapt to a predetermined set of mores. My identifiability as an insider was far more cumbersome than I had expected, anticipating that my occasionally starkly visible American-ness, my lack of familiarity with slang terms or tiny, instrumental rituals, like properly signaling a waiter or hand rolling a cigarette, would be my primary handicap. In review now, it is easier for me to understand the anthropological preference for outsider status – no one is expecting you to know how to behave (Anderson, 2021: 123). In a sense, every interaction I had in these places contained a deeper degree of performance than I had expected. Perhaps if I were a "real American" or a "*guiri*[17]" of any sort, I would have been able to ask uncomfortable questions under the guise of innocence or ignorance, or I would have been able to explain my questions less thoroughly, encouraging the interviewee to elaborate on their own in response to my ineptness, as I did in Ireland. In these places, no one was eager to fill in the blanks for me. With the exception of one location, my grandmother's village, Coirós, much of the fieldwork that I did was very atypical. In relatively large cities, like

[17] Similar to "gringo," *guiri* is used in Spain to denote an unwelcome foreigner, typically American or British. The word has its origins in Euskera.

Vigo, A Coruña, and Bilbao, my work centered much more on the silent acts of recollection and observation, rather than conversation.

While this thesis is in a sense an attempt to study recollection, I cannot deny the instrumental and occasionally frustrating role that my own memory played in my research. During the archival process, the litany of terms and phrases that I came across in the texts sparked a series of memories for me from years before, often disjointed or vague – hearing the phrase '*todo es ETA' (everything is ETA)* on the radio, watching the arrests of ETA members, with jackets thrown over their heads as they were shoved into squad cars, the careful language used in the media to describe the King's "abdication" and the sharp contrast it had with the language used to describe it in my home. I began to remember the first times I grew aware of the *robo de niños* in any real way, where I was, eight years old and sitting on a stone wall in Coiros while my father explained to me what little was known at that time, the hospitals, the nuns, the missing documents. I remembered that in towns like Coirós, you learned things with the added notion of a 'and nothing can be done about it, so don't bother talking about it' that went unsaid. It was these particular kinds of memories, this specific form of knowledge production that had silence as an implicit requirement, that I wanted to study through this project. Or, more specifically, that structure of learning, involving speaking and hearing information related to state violence, committing that information to memory, and somehow knowing never to speak of it.

I kept my interviews very minimal regarding Galicia. Partially because I had found so much through the SOS forum, but also because I understood the rhythms of Galicia and I knew what conducting interviews would mean. My decision to not seek out interviews with victims was a very deliberate one, drawing from Wilson's analysis (Wilson, 2003). In the same way I knew which buses to take into town, how to anticipate their cantankerous drivers and frequent delays,

and which taverns to avoid, which dishes to never order in the few I would actually go to, I knew that no one would tell me anything in Galicia. Not in places like A Coruña or Vigo, which bore little trace of the politics of the past or present. And not in a village like Coiros, where everyone knew whose daughter I was, and whose niece, and whose granddaughter.

In Bilbao and Donostia I was already certain that my "insider" status would not grant me entrance to any conversations with real locals. Instead, I eavesdropped, like I always had – at fifteen, I began to consider myself an ardent *abertzale* sympathizer simply through a summer of eavesdropping – and cataloged as much as I could. I focused not just on statements, but on silence – what went unsaid in conversations, what graffiti and protest signs did not mention. There have been copious studies on the politics of graffiti, vernacular, and kinship structures in Euskadi but very few studies on political silence (Labyani, 2009, Zulaika, 1989).

Oddly enough, the bulk of my semi-structured interviews with Spaniards and Basques and those in their orbit occurred in Belfast, which had a large number of Erasmus students who initially welcomed me into their fold. They were mostly from wealthy Madrid families and kept almost entirely to themselves. They assumed I was Spanish because of my appearance, and seemed bemused at my correction. Spaniards, I've found, tend to react with exasperation or disdain when someone clarifies that they're "Basque, not Spanish," but with confusion or amusement when they hear "Galician, not Spanish." While these Erasmus students were initially happy to introduce me to Belfast from their point of view the realization that the two "Spains" we hailed from were very different was one that settled in quickly. Upon their realization that my larger family was not only not at all wealthy, in fact solidly working class and from two relatively anonymous rural towns in Euskadi and Galicia, my friendship became decidedly less sought-after. Admittedly, I did little to help further a relationship with them as potential interlocuters, as I find it generally difficult to

maintain polite conversation with people whose parents are employed by a government that contributed, directly or indirectly, to the deaths of some of my family members. While I was uncertain of the particular way in which their families were related to the state, their wealth and obvious conservative ideology created stark imbalances in all of our conversations, even those that were determinedly not about politics. Even though they had initially sought me out as "one of them," and I had intended to take advantage of this entry point in order to thoroughly examine their perspective, none of us seemed able to get over our differences. There is a particular tension inherent in "native anthropology," which arises most obviously when the questions you are hoping to have an easier time asking as an "insider" are precisely what mark you as an "outsider." And there was another, more subtle tension, specific to the realization that even if certain controversial topics were never broached, my markedly different socioeconomic status would classify me as "belonging" to an entirely different part of the country from them.

On one of the few nights that I did join them, they made no less than three terrorist jokes about me. I was interested in their lack of integration into Belfast, seeing as all of them spoke English and attended classes at Queen's. When I asked them if the IRA commemorations and in-jokes ever bothered them, due to their similarities to ETA – without even mentioning the *ikurriñas*, and *presoak etxera* [18]stickers that can be found in several places on the west side of the city – they told me that for the most part, they never thought of them. Belfast, to them, was a part of the United Kingdom, and not much else. Some of them even attended the King's coronation in the spring. They did not seem to understand my fascination with the fact that they had totally normalized the rejection of ETA – to the point where they were perfectly comfortable making terrorist jokes to a Basque girl they had just met, on the assumption that they were completely situated on the moral

[18] *Ikurriña*, or *ikurrina* is the Basque national flag, and *presoak etxera* is a popular slogan in support of political prisoners. *Presoak* refers to the prisoners, and *extera* means "to the home," so literally: *prisoners back to the home.*

high ground and I couldn't possibly disagree with them, even when they were calling *me* a terrorist – and that with that in mind, they had come to the one place in the world that celebrated ETA with fewer qualms than some Basque cities. One of the last times I ever spent any deliberate amount of time with them, I explained the specifics of my research into forced adoptions in Ireland. The situation, I said, was almost identical to what the nuns did on the fascists' orders in Spain.

"What do you mean?" said Natalia, who was from Madrid. I explained to her that I was also researching the *robo de niños,* and asked her what she had heard about them. "Well, I knew there were a lot of cases, maybe, but I don't know if the nuns *stole* them," she said. She was puzzled when I asked her if she thought that at least tens of thousands of newborns had left the hospitals on their own accord. My conversations with these Erasmus students gave me a clear insight into why the *robo de niños* had not been and could not be investigated by a society in which the overwhelming majority of the wealth and power was managed by a small group people who shared the same carefully revisionist approach to their recent history.

6.1 Vigo and A Coruña

My fieldwork in Vigo and A Coruña felt quite untraditional. I had spent so many months sorting and cataloging the data from the SOS site, and recalling every instance the forced adoptions had been mentioned to me by a relative or family friend, that getting "insider knowledge" felt

much less urgent than it did in Ireland. In a sense, I had been doing "fieldwork" there for many years, in my attempts to determine how my neighbors and community members viewed the history we clearly thought about constantly. I knew quite well how to anticipate the responses and the silences my questions would provoke. But in some cases, this made me much less willing to ask them, out of fear of "compromising" any existing relationships, a fear which I did not have to consider as much in Ireland, given my lack of permanent connections there. Additionally, the years of experience I had in Galicia made it clear to me that taxi drivers and people I met in bars would not be so forthcoming with information as in Ireland.

I took the train to Vigo, roughly three hours away from Coiros, where I was staying. I was going to visit the locations of the four most prevalent hospitals and clinics, with suspected forced adoptions from 1956 to 1991, Hospital Municipal de Vigo (now known as Nicolas Peña), Xeral de Vigo (previously called Almirante Vierna), Clinica de Perpetuo Socorro, and the Red Cross. There were forty-six submissions on the SOS site regarding these locations that fit comfortably within the pattern established by the few state-led investigations into the *robo de niños* (Vicedo, 2019). In Vigo, there was no trace of what had transpired in these hospitals and clinics and very little visible political public discourse, when compared to Coruña or Santiago.

Fig. 11, Hospital Xeral (Almirante Vierna); Fig. 12, former Clinica de Perpetuo Socorro.

The city is run by the Galician socialist party (not the Spanish Socialist party, the PSOE, most famous for their death squads and centrism) which is somewhat rare in Galicia, given that the mainstream conservative party, the Partido Popular, tends to hold the absolute majority[19]. The city had some relatively sanitized graffiti and equally tame independentist stickers, and nothing at all indicating that less than thirty or forty years ago, it had been a hotbed of child trafficking.

[19] It's important to note that the Galician socialist party is not the same thing as the Galician communist-independentist party, the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) which is far more progressive.

Fig. 13, Vigo Red Cross; Fig. 14, Clinica Nicolas Peña (formerly Hospital Municipal de Vigo)

There was a similar lack of evidence of the past in A Coruña. Walking through Vigo, I felt like a tourist, taking in the city at a surface level and worrying I was dismissing it without recognizing any of the scars of the past that it bore. Unlike Ireland, the chances of striking up a conversation with a kindhearted stranger in Galicia are relatively low. Most significantly, any exchange with a stranger depended entirely on their belief that I was one of them, and never went much further than a discussion of the present weather conditions. Any mention of the adoption black market, or Franco for that matter, produces a remarkably similar reaction: a glance downward, a polite non-reply, and a change of subject.

Fig. 15, A deserted private detective's office in A Coruña

Compared to a city like Santiago, which has a much stronger independentist presence, A Coruña bears little evidence of the dictatorship. As is common in Galicia, the poor feel invisible in the cities, and the presence of visible countercultures (skaters, punks, *okupas*[20], etc.) is extremely minimal at first glance. Three years before I officially began my research, a young gay man was

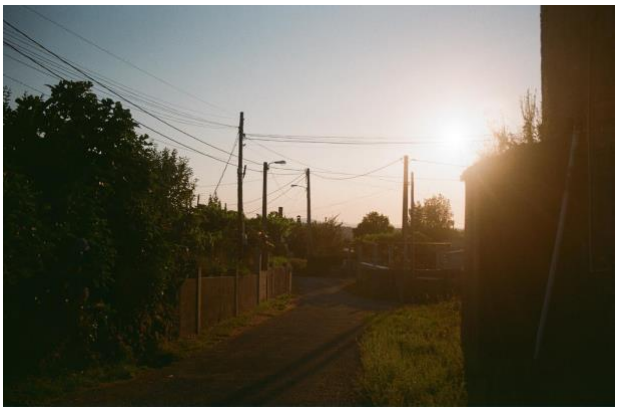
[20] Politically motivated squatters who occupy empty buildings and stop evictions.

beaten to death outside of a nightclub in the middle of the city, and the newspapers initially did not call it a “homophobic incident” until the city, and many others across the community, came out in protest to mourn the victim (Perez, 2021).

The hospitals and clinics in Galicia where there was a high concentration of probable thefts are all still open. The majority of them have changed their concentration, going from general hospitals to oncology centers, or university hospitals. Countless friends, neighbors, and family members of mine have received medical treatment at these hospitals. My cousins were born in one of the clinics with the highest concentration of theft allegations, well into the eighties and nineties. None of them had any idea about the amount of children that may have been taken from those hospitals and clinics by nuns, doctors, and nurses.

6.2 Coirós

Fig. 16, The back roads of Figueiras, Coirós.



While A Coruña is a place you could live in your whole life and not think about the war, Coirós is the kind of town that still keeps to those old divisions. With a population of roughly 1,800, and an infrastructure built entirely around the national highway, Coirós occasionally appears like a hostile environment for all living things. It's a mainly conservative town, but before that, a town where politics are considered impolite to speak of directly. Neighbors only suspect which political parties they vote for, and determine this primarily through a series of inferences based on one's actions, such as the clothes they wear, or how much Galician they speak.

I picked Coirós as one focal point for this project, as someone both "in" and "out" of my grandmother's village. But I also picked Coirós because it is the town where I realized what legacy a civil war leaves behind, which can be seen so clearly in the carefully maintained separations that still determine the townspeople's relationships. In truth, I started this project after years of hearing stories from people in Coirós about the *robo de niños,* with notions of finding out everything I could about the methods, frequency, and common occurrences in the forced adoptions in order to potentially present leads, or some confirmation that long-held suspicions were not a product of delusion or hysteria. Having concluded the research, I can say that starting out, I did not allow myself to anticipate the complexities of research this "close to home" or the aftermath of any findings.

The structure of Coirós is essentially a phone tree, with limbs of varying influence. To get a property dispute of any sort fixed, you need the mayor's influence, though people don't like to say it so plainly. Once, ten minutes after commenting to a relative through marriage only the vaguest notions of what my research was about "communists and the war, and all that," I received a Whatsapp message from her nephew, Fran, one of the more prolific fascists I have ever met. *I got your information from your father,* the message read, and it included three PDFs of wholly

revisionist history of the Civil War. I was intrigued by how willing Fran was to talk to me about the *robos* and the other nightmares of the dictatorship, both because I was more accustomed to the typical right-wing strategy of pretending that state violence didn't exist and wasn't worth talking about, and because he'd become less and less interested in arguing with me over the years. To my surprise, Fran presented an entirely new approach regarding the legacy of fascist violence in Galicia, rather than to deny, or downplay it, he agreed enthusiastically to all my remarks about how this subject *had* to be talked about, if only for the sake of our children's cognizance of their ancestry, and out of respect for the victims, who had been forced into silence for so long. I began to wonder if, in my immense frustration at always being half-excluded from Coiros on the basis of my Basqueness, I had begun to develop something of a superiority complex, buying into the *Madrileña*[21] notion that the people of this village were backward and stupid, which I had always sworn to never do. Fran's easy agreement stunned me, and temporarily forced me to re-order all the categories I had applied to him. Then, he began to speak in earnest, talking rapid-fire about how the violence *absolutely* had to be unearthed and condemned, because otherwise we couldn't heal from it. He was, of course, referring to the "Republican violence" that stemmed from the leftist citizens of the second Republic objecting to the fascist coup d'etat that started the civil war[22]. Somehow, although I had always been aware that there were people in my general vicinity who understood the war in a fundamentally different way than I did, I had never heard such a personalized re-writing of history. In Fran's mind, the only aggression of the civil war was done by the godless communists whose only mission was to kill priests and small children, and their grievances with Franco were hardly worth mentioning. Though our conversation lasted well over

[21] Meaning: *woman from Madrid,* often used to denote a degree of cosmopolitan condescension.
[22] This is a popular stance adopted by the right-wing, and it is often employed in response to questions about the otherwise undeniable brutality of the fascists during and after the war.

an hour, he managed to avoid answering any questions that implied some degree of undeniable state violence. In response to broad, open-ended questions, like *tell me about your first memories of the political conflict that shaped Galicia,* he spoke for a long time, often tangentially, or wistfully. When faced with more specific questions, regarding what he had heard about the *robos*, Fran became quiet and answered curtly. He had seen that documentary on *La Sexta* a few years back, but not much else. I read him the names of the hospitals I'd visited, and asked if he knew that there were dozens of credible cases attributed to these places, spanning decades. He went back to talking about the collapse of Western values. Fran's initial desire to have his position interpreted as "legitimate" by a leftist-independentist vanished almost immediately when met with specific lines of questioning, which he appeared to find personally offensive. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he found my unwillingness to participate reciprocally in the performance to be the offensive element. While I believe this is a marker of general gender dynamics amongst Spaniards, with 74% of Spanish men asserting that they believed women's rights had gone "far enough" in 2020 (Ipsos, 2020) I also find that it is influenced by dynamics specific to inhabitants of towns like Coirós. Fran knew nearly my whole family, and I knew his. He had seen me grow up and had offered to give me an interview immediately – apparently believing that the expected social niceties of our connection would steer the conversation. Fran, like many who vote similarly, valued amiability and respectability and was holding me, even in our conversation about state violence, to a standard of "acceptable" behavior informed by the Catholic right wing. His increasing lack of collaboration betrayed both his frustration with the leftist habit of confronting conformity by explicitly referencing right-wing brutality and his expectation that because I was a young woman well-known to him, a "daughter of the town" in some sense, I would adhere to his standard of social norms.

Not all of Coriós' inhabitants are so blatantly committed to "correcting" any notions of communism in young women. One of the few households I was ever encouraged to speak to within our neighborhood belonged to Amelia and Roberto, a middle-aged couple who had moved back to Coirós after Amelia's father, Manolo, had died. Manolo was a mythical figure in the stories I heard as a child, a man who had worked in the fields with my grandparents and great-grandparents and was referred to simply as *grande,* one of the highest honors you'd bestow on a simple countryman like himself. Roberto was now at the age where young men started to refer to him as *grande,* as well. Amelia and Roberto brought me into their world, carefully emphasizing that it was *my* world, too, if I should choose to pay attention. Their children are grown and their grandchildren are still quite young, and they relished the task of curing me of my big-city sensibilities, taking care to avoid answering the questions I was actually asking, and giving me answers to the questions they thought I *should* have been asking, instead. In an attempt to figure out which political party Roberto voted for, I wound up listening to an hour-long sermon about the hypocrisy of the animal rights movement. Roberto and Amelia were disinterested in talking about independentism, not dismissive, but not swayed or motivated by the ideals of the young communist bloc. Broad political topics, in general, were subjects to stay away from with them, a common feature in Coirós. They performed, more effectively than anyone I had ever met, the skillful traditional dance of bringing up something incredibly painful with incredible lightness. They had both known many of my family members who had died and wanted very badly to talk about them.

In my experience, loss is very particular in Galicia. On the one hand, it is virtually everywhere, due to emigration, poverty, the war, and the drug epidemic that ravaged the community in the cocaine boom of the eighties. On the other hand, it is virtually everywhere, so it almost does not necessitate discussion. Loss is assumed, rather than noticed. As a child, I often felt

overwhelmed in Coirós, particularly after learning about the *robo de niños* and the reality of the dictatorship, and the way it had impacted my family. Everywhere I went, I felt as though I was tripping over a memory, or stepping on a grave. This both increased my desire to approach this subject anthropologically and heightened my frustration and uncertainty in the fieldwork process when I found myself unconsciously disappointed or relieved by the dynamics I was able to explore. In a sense, I had lived a lifetime engaging in a commemoration ritual similar to the one I found myself instinctively performing in Ireland. I was afraid of what forgetting any tragedy would do to my ability to recognize them. With Amelia in particular, I was grateful to confirm my long-held suspicion that Galician "passivity" or "apathy" was actually a coping mechanism. Amelia was uncomfortable with topics like the *robo de niños,* or ETA. She was perfectly comfortable discussing the loss of her father, or my uncles and grandmother, telling me nearly gruesome details that I had not asked for, and would have preferred not to know. I came to understand that this was because they were already common knowledge and had been discussed by everyone but me, at length. She was not informing me of a cruel reality I did not want to think about, she was introducing me to the mourning and grieving rituals that she felt I was entitled to participate in (Poska, 1994). These losses were acceptable to mourn, were publicly recognized, and were participant-based, so she knew how to talk about them. No one had killed the family members we were discussing, so while their deaths were not treated as "less tragic" their mention did not create an opportunity for discussion of violent or state-sanctioned deaths.

Amelia was far from the only person uncomfortable with the subject of forced adoptions, or specific approaches to death. It's not that Coirós did not allow for scandalous gossip, it's that the subjects had to be determined by the residents to succeed in getting any real information. For example, for the last decade, there has been an arsonist active in the village, and Roberto was more

than happy to tell me all that he knew about it, and not at all disturbed by the fact that they were living in proximity to someone who set fires for no apparent reason, not even to claim insurance benefits. But in general, particularly in our neighborhood, it was best to avoid the subject of rural murders, given that several decades ago, one of the neighbors had hacked his brother-in-law to pieces with a scythe. He was sent to a mental institution, even though in those days the punishment was the *garrote vil*[23], so the prevalent theory was that he was a friend of the fascists.

Even some families were split regarding the issue. I spoke with one man who was so convinced that his older brother had been stolen that he went in search of any documentation of the birth and supposed death, feeling vindicated when he found none. He was convinced that this case was one among thousands, and was seriously considering opening his family's graves to see if there were any remains of the baby there. We spoke for a while about the complexities of this procedure, as seen in Ruíz Armesto's work, the remains left behind after several decades of the decomposition of a newborn in a very damp area like Galicia can often be very minimal, if at all visible. He remained convinced that a theft had occurred but ultimately did not want to open the graves to see if his suspicions were true. His younger brother, who did not know he was considering opening the family tombs, grew incensed the moment I referenced his brother's suspicions. "Tell him to *stop* talking about that shit," he said. "That's enough now. Tell him to stop with this." It wasn't that the younger of the two brothers denied that the thefts had ever taken place, or that Galicia, in particular, suffered an epidemic of them, it was that he was so preoccupied with the already present grief in his family that the mere suggestion that there might be more was taken as an insult, and attention-seeking, un-self-aware behavior on his brother's part. This, the younger brother said, could be attributed to the fact that he no longer lived in Coriós, and had

[23] A Franco-era form of execution that involves sticking a large screw into the back of someone's head. Similar to how pigs are killed.

forgotten “how things worked” there. We were at the Betanzos train station, which is another relatively forgotten, unused relic of the past. We sat in silence until the train arrived, and then, even though we had made plans to speak about this specific subject, never spoke of the lost children ever again.

Fig. 17, Coirós in June, 2023.

6.3 Bilbao

For the entirety of this project, I assumed that among the multitude of memories of political graffiti I had from Bilbao, there were one or two phrases about the stolen children that I had simply forgotten. There are few places as politically decorated as Bilbao. I had grown up seeing slogans in favor of abortion, immigration, amnesty for political prisoners, the IRA, the PLO, and even the Kashmiri liberation movement, on one occasion. When I returned in March of 2023, I was puzzled

by my inability to find any trace of the legacy of this specific abuse levied onto the city by the dictatorship and democratic regime. Bilbao is not a city that pretends that the transition was an earnest one, and this is visible if one looks in the right places. However, given the relative increase of more cosmopolitan industries, such as finance and marketing (Bilbao used to be a solidly industrial city), as well as the academic field, the political composition of the city has shifted more toward the cosmopolitan (Carter, 2016:124). This was a shift that began long before I was born, and has not done much to erase the city's *abertzale* population, who still drape their *Presoak Extera* flags over every balcony, and plaster the stickers on any and all lampposts. However, the percentage of the population fundamentally disinterested in serious political debate that considers their own positionality is not irrelevant. I remember overhearing the phrase "*no soy vasco, soy bilbaíno" (I'm not Basque, I'm from Bilbao)* as a child. I was disappointed, but not altogether surprised at my inability to find any reference to or trace of the *robo de niños* when I visited it in March, along with a similarly disquietingly empty Donostia.

When I returned in June, however, I had established from the SOS page that there were three locations in Bilbao with probable theft of children. When I visited them, I saw pro-union, anti-cop, anti-police brutality, and pro-independence graffiti and stickers, even on the actual buildings that had functioned as central points in what was little more than a human trafficking ring, and I had to check several times that I had gotten the address right. There was no proof of the specific violence that had occurred in these places, only of the larger state violence that had in part created the environment itself. It wasn't that cities like Bilbao and Donostia were opposed to radicalism (even outright praise of ETA), it was that for some reason, the mention of these abuses was incompatible with the political temperature of the city. I felt that this was due to the relative undeniability of much of the "visible" political violence, which has still not been accepted by the

dominant Spanish narrative, despite the overwhelming evidence of human rights violations in Euskadi. Currently, there are over 5,000 untried cases of police torture in Euskadi, with over 2,000 of them specific to the five years of "democratic transition" (Landa Gorostia, 2013). I propose that the constant task of attempting to pressure the Spanish state to admit to *any* of its violence, even the most obvious sort – the Spanish government continues, nearly 90 years later, to refuse to admit to the total death toll of the bombing of Gernika – has made it difficult to focus on or even prove more "invisible" violence directed towards women and children.

I sought out the perspective of an older woman, Sandra, who had been living in Bilbao for approximately fifty years. She was surprised by my choice of subject, but adamant that it should be explored. Given the transitions she had witnessed Bilbao endure, I'd deliberately courted her perspective. I was shocked to hear how succinctly she condemned the adoption market, while at the same time casually admitting it was how she had "gotten" her son. Sandra's case was one of the fortunate ones – the mother, by her own account, had wanted to give up the baby for adoption – as was increasingly common in the eighties. Despite her relatively wholesome experience with adoption, she was clear that the whole process was an industry and a frequently exploitative one at that. She shared an anecdote about a woman who worked as a domestic laborer and had a sister with intellectual disabilities who realized she was pregnant. The nuns who assisted the birth and apparently with the adoption agency agreed to watch the child while the mother worked. And just like in the case that occurred in Malaga in the sixties, the child was given up with no information to the mother. Sandra heard about this story through the mother's sister and supported their legal battle to get the baby back, which miraculously succeeded. "A nightmare," she said, shaking her head. I wondered if she was considering her own participation in this industry, or feeling thankful for her lack of involvement with and objection to the more directly exploitative side of it.

As in Belfast, I began to reckon with how much my research was affecting my perception of the subject. Had I become fundamentally opposed to adoption, now? Did I have the same qualms with it that I did with surrogacy, or any commodification of the reproductive system and a person's body? I found myself almost reeling, unable to figure out if what I was feeling was a fundamental opposition to women who might have wanted to keep their child, or terminate their pregnancy being forced (or financially compensated for their willingness) to bear and give up their child; or if it was a reaction to the year-long ritual of attempting to commit as many of these cases to memory as I could. I was concerned about the impact that this might have on my methodology, and did my best to not only seek out interviews with people who I thought would resoundingly confirm the narrative I believed or people who would offer a brash, baseless denial. I wondered if Bilbao actually *was* becoming more conservative, or if I was simply, for the first time, growing disillusioned with the *abertzaleak* who had so shaped my ideology, and failed to advocate for or even mention these women.

That night, as a result of a political argument, a neo-Nazi stabbed a man in Barakaldo, the precise neighborhood of Bilbao I happened to be staying in, which was enough to dissuade my notion that I was imagining Bilbao's increasing conservatism (Pérez, 2023). Almost a year later, I have still not come to any conclusion regarding my own complex feelings toward adoption and the reproductive tourism industry.

6.4 Conclusions

These individual field sites have similar factors affecting their ability to reckon with memory – the frequency of violence, the patriarchal roots that seem impossible to fully interrogate, and the total absence of consequences faced by the state (Gruber, 2022). I would say that nothing has defined the complex social "progress" of these autonomous communities quite like the role of memory. On the one hand, those who have decided to participate in the practice of commemorating and understanding the violent history of their past have seemingly been able to foster relatively progressive communities that focus on linguistic and cultural preservation, feminism, and mutual aid, particularly when compared to other major Spanish cities. On the other hand, this "selective memory" clearly does exclude a significant amount of narratives from the right wing, which is often the majority (Robben, 2005). Additionally, the selectivity of it makes it so that the progress is also equally selective in where it occurs. In cities like Vigo and A Coruña, the high volume of cases that occurred there are merely some of the instances of intricate, organized brutality that lingers underneath the sanitized, cosmopolitan surface. Were they to interrogate these abuses, they would have to confront the embeddedness of corruption and state violence at virtually every level of their infrastructure. Moving away from state violence as "legitimate" could in turn make the citizens few the state itself as illegitimate (Anderson, 1983: 255).

In major Basque cities, like Bilbao, the enormity of visible, undeniable, and yet contested state violence is so present, that the addition of a "new" sort of violence to interrogate felt almost impossible to me. Much like in Belfast, I find my interpretation of this silence to be too complex to dismiss as a mere bit of hypocrisy from ETA and the *abertzaleak.* While I found my initial

analysis to be confirmed – that the violence of the state has reached so far, and gone so unanswered that it has halted progress in many aspects – I also found that there is perhaps a similar fear in the hearts of the *abertzaleak* as there is within the "mainstream" Spaniards. If they have to expand their understanding of violence even further, and understand that there are a multitude of stories that they have not heard yet, and may never hear, then what happens? How can a people sustain themselves on the notion of uncovering, discussing, and demanding justice for violence against their vulnerable, when the likelihood that the justice ever materializes seems to shrink every day, particularly with increased reinforcement of state violence as "legitimate" (Anderson, 1983) when it goes unanswered for?

7.0 Analysis: Participant Observation

In the process of doing this research, I often wondered how ethnographers whose work I admired knew how to be "finished" with their projects. While I understood that the timeline and the general page limit of the BPhil were well-established, I found myself unable to feel that my work was finished. Even now, having written and re-written the sections that this thesis will comprise of, there is still so much more I wish I could say. In a sense, I feel that I did what I set out to do – study both the lingering impact of forced adoptions and how Basqueness granted or prevented access in certain circles. I cannot avoid the notion that what I have had to leave out of this thesis could fit in another one altogether, all the microinteractions, all of the unexpected connections, and most importantly, all of the stories I heard but had no space, or no right, to tell.

Belfast is a good place to try and learn participant observation, at least on the west side of the city. It turned out to be to my extreme benefit to have done my research ahead of time, as (aside from my nationality) the one thing that was most useful to my progress was my understanding of which terms to use: Provos, volunteers, internment, no-wash protest, North *of* Ireland, etc; and what certain terms meant: peelers, Huns, culchies, etc., as well as which answers to provide to questions, and which names to reference. The sincerity and openness of the city's inhabitants are not performative, but in a way reliant on the effort of the visitor, which I would attribute to the frequency of interactions they've had with visitors that seemed entirely informed by offensive stereotypes. Particularly with the women I met, the easy, immediate camaraderie that resulted from

my explanation of my research and my plans to visit certain locations across Ireland was hugely productive, and the most encouraging aspect of the entire project.

However, my interactions with men, while largely informative, were laden with a further issue. At the risk of sounding self-centered, many of my conversations with young men, particularly in Belfast and in Cork, contained the complex issue of a degree of propositioning on their part. Before beginning any conversation in earnest, I was careful to describe the scope of my project and explain that in the rare case that I ended up referencing any of the information I received from them, I would change their name and all identifying information. I made sure to include that I could not financially compensate them for their participation and that I completely understood if they changed their mind halfway through, or preferred not to speak with me at all, given the inherently exploitative nature of ethnographic research. I thought that by deliberately seeking out informants with no traumatic emotional ties to the forced adoptions, I could avoid the more directly exploitative elements of the discipline, which proved successful. However, I did not account for the fact that given that none of the young male Republicans I spoke with had deep emotional stakes regarding the Homes and Laundries, and that they felt entirely comfortable in their Republican identity, they had no qualms about attempting to "finish" our conversations with a romantic or sexual proposition. This apparent expectation of "reciprocity" became even more apparent in bars and nightclubs, when I often wound up in conversations with men I did not know, as men and women tended to travel in small groups in these places, and the expectation was that if one of "theirs" wanted to talk to one of "ours" the rest of us had an obligation to maintain a conversation with our corresponding group member. Frequently, I canceled interviews I had set up with men I had met this way, or with men who I had been introduced to through other men who had that expectation of sexual reciprocity following their interviews.

This is an issue that I have heard relatively little about in undergraduate anthropology spaces, and while uncomfortable, I think that it needs to be considered as one of the ethnographic factors to consider. While we may be prepared to recognize flirtatious hints or propositions in our own languages and dialects, interpreting them in other environments is not simple. Additionally, the level of forwardness we may use as a barometer for inappropriate behavior has to be adjusted in accordance with location. The intricate "shyness" of Irish men is famous, and it is not always easy to decipher. Aside from the discomfort and uncertainty that these experiences frequently elicited in me, they also caused me to doubt the accuracy and validity of much of the information I received through these conversations, and to doubt the ethics of including it in my analysis. On the one hand, I was concerned that the expectation that our conversations might finish "favorably" for the men motivated them to exaggerate, or to be overly agreeable to my analysis. I began to question the role of performance in these conversations, and if that would skew my overall interpretations. On the other hand, I felt that it was too simple to give in to any dregs of irritation I felt and include all the details of the conversations I had with these men, given that they'd freely volunteered the information. I began to wonder if, given their expectations, the information was really freely given, and if I wasn't crossing some boundary in including it in my analysis.

7.1 Increasing Discomfort

Throughout my fieldwork, I came to find that two types of discomfort arose in the majority of cases. The first can be most simply interpreted as one provoked by the uncomfortable subject of violence against women and children, and more specifically, the specific violence that implied a critique of the states that had caused it. This was most common in cities like Cork, Galway, Vigo, and A Coruña, and occurred in people of all genders. Typically, in Ireland, this would not end a conversation, but it would halt the progress of it, and signal an end to that particular subject's discussion. I only ever experienced this particular discomfort from men, and in part, I think that discomfort can be attributed to the extreme hospitality of the older Irish generation. These men were almost relentlessly respectful, and in their attempts to consider my status as a guest in their country, and as a young woman, they found themselves at something of a loss for words when approached with the subject of large-scale abuse towards women my age. Partially, I believe this had something to do with their desire to keep any mentions or notions of any sort of sexuality far away from our conversations, anticipating that it would make me uncomfortable, or offend someone of my generation.

In Galicia, where the same generation was less traditionally friendly, and my presence was far less welcome, any discomfort on their end typically informally signaled the end of our conversation. However, this interaction was not specific to the older generations of Galician city-dwellers. The palpable discomfort emanating from the Spanish Erasmus students in Belfast was similarly immediate, and nearly always triggered by the mention of the *robos*, which they were

perfectly comfortable dismissing as "improbable" and not considering them much further as a result.

In conversations with leftists in Belfast and Bilbao, the discomfort provoked by mentions of the IRA and ETA's long silence on these specific experiences very rarely ended a conversation. If anything, it prompted me to over-explain my position, clarifying that I was not attempting to pin down or condemn either organization for their lack of visible awareness of these abuses, merely interested in the premise. This was not scoffed at or dismissed, and my proposal that this phenomenon was less indicative of a fundamental hypocrisy in the revolutionary mission of the groups, and more so pointed to the consequences of battering a society with seemingly unending violence was frequently accepted. Occasionally, I worried that the "semi-structured" nature of these conversations was slipping into more pointed questions or outright leading statements on my part. However, one of the key elements that factored into my ability to not grievously offend many young Republicans with my apparent criticisms of the IRA was my assertion that I had similar qualms with my own relationship to ETA. In offering up my own critique before giving them the space to return one of their own, I found that shame or reluctance towards criticisms of the militant groups rarely had a place in these conversations.

In Coirós, the feeling of discomfort primarily came from the taboo nature of the subjects of state violence or violence against women, and from the fact that I was expected to know better than to bring them up. It took considerable work to make myself seem like someone who understood the dynamics which controlled the flow of Coirós, and not simply the *guiri* daughter of someone who used to be from there, a long time ago. Without exaggerating, I would say that this took at least three summers of deliberate action on my part, trying to establish sufficient confidence with my neighbors and family friends (and others) so that I could begin to ask my own

uncomfortable questions, rather than waiting for someone else to bring these subjects up in the near-daily discussions of local grief and scandal. Of course, building up three years' worth of goodwill and then using that specific goodwill to ask conservatives about why their professions of "family-first" did not match up with the actions of the state they so firmly believed in proved to be complicated. More often than not, the shifts in conversation that arose when I brought up the *robos* or state violence of any sort were accompanied by either a pointed, chastising look directed at me, or an equally pointed, knowing look directed at the floor, or another person in the room who was eavesdropping. These looks implied one of two things: that I should know better than to ask questions with such pain and controversy attached to them for something that, to them, was little more than a school project; or that despite my careful temperament and extreme politeness, I was no different from my other family members. My unwillingness to abide by these invisible rules was what effectively revoked my "insider" status at each turn and simultaneously reaffirmed that I *did* belong in the town, so long as I was content with being treated like an outsider within, like the rest of my family. Despite the fact that my ancestors had helped to build the town's infrastructure, or that I had spent much more time there than in Euskadi, or that I spoke *much* more Galician than Euskera, despite how much I apparently looked like these relatives of mine, when asking these questions I confirmed something about myself to them: that at the end of the day, I would always be too Basque to be properly Galician.

7.2 The Basque Question

As I established, my national identity played a significant role in granting me conversations and general access while in Ireland. In Euskadi, the fact that I fit the phenotype, dressed right (hiking boots and cargo pants tend to be a foolproof option), had a proper Basque name, and spoke enough Euskera to get by helped me pass through the cities unnoticed, and undisturbed. My ability to move through places like Bilbao and Donostia, photographing clinics and political graffiti, without being immediately identifiable as a star-struck *guiri*, or worse, a politically-simplistic Spaniard, spared me a tremendous amount of annoyance. However, as evidenced by even my interactions with the Erasmus students, my fealty to my contested nationality could be more of a hindrance than anything else, in some contexts. My presence limited the jokes and generalizations they could make, though often that had more to do with my financial situation than anything else. At the end of the day, it wasn't the fact that I *was* Basque that offended them. In reality, the controversy regarding my identity was about the fact that, despite being presented with the opportunity to be forgiven for my Basqueness and join the wealthy Spanish social circle, I chose to continue identifying as I always had.

I knew that ETA would have something to do with the reception to my research in Coirós because I was talking about political violence, but also because the memory of ETA hangs over virtually every interaction that I've had there. ETA is so synonymous with state criticism for the conservatives, that despite the fact that I made a point to rarely, if ever, mention it in my interviews, it consistently came up. One particularly memorable instance was while speaking with Amelia. It was the day we had mourned the loss of her dog together, and I had tentatively, and naively,

allowed myself to think that I had started to understand how to navigate Coirós like a native. I noticed that she appeared flattered by my sincere interest in her life, in the history she had seen, and any political convictions she might have had. Galician women, particularly in rural communities, tend to receive very little positive attention. When I was a child, it was still common for older women to have less than ten photographs of themselves. Amelia was shy and demure but confessed to me that once, she had felt so overcome that she did attend a political protest. "Only one," she said, almost secretively. "Miguel Angel Blanco's rally."

Miguel Angel Blanco was a young conservative politician murdered by ETA in 1997 after they kidnapped him to force the Spanish government to release many of the extrajudicially held Basque political prisoners. When the government did not meet their demands, they shot him. His death generated widespread outrage from the Spanish mainstream and was considered shocking even in Euskadi (Garza, 1998). I understood Amelia's conviction – by that point, Spain was beyond ever understanding ETA's ideology, and felt that their presence was a blight on the country, and the only real threat to their modernity. I debated asking her if she knew the names of any of the men who died at his same age by "suicide" in their prison cells, or in shootouts with the police, or in interrogation room tortures, but decided not to. Instead, I asked her if she ever thought that the time spent talking about ETA, even now, when they had been inactive for almost fifteen years, might have been used to talk about something else.

"I don't see how," she said. "What else is there?

8.0 Conclusion

The time I spent in Ireland, Galicia, and Euskadi furthered my belief in my theory that the rigid existing definitions of "political violence" as something that only encompassed militant violence and state response prevented an interpretation of these forced adoptions as a form of political violence. Furthermore, the enduring legacy of that strict definition, when combined with the obvious suffering of the Irish, Galician, and Basque people under state control and state-supported material precarity, made it profoundly difficult to recognize the forced adoptions as political *gendered* violence, as well.

The many conversations I had with young Republicans in Belfast and Cork enabled me to understand that what was lacking was not an awareness of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse towards the vulnerable. They were not unaware of issues like clergy abuse, violations of bodily autonomy, and normalization of domestic violence, and did not see discussing them as a threat to their Irish or masculine identities – in fact, their Irish-Republican-male identity was in many ways deeply linked to their professions of disgust toward that sort of violence, and professions of a general desire to protect past and future victims of it. However, this earnest commitment to the "protection" of Ireland's vulnerable carries within it echoes of the early stages of the post-war Free State government – asserting that the best path forward for securing a safe future for women and a thorough examination of the past is through a Republican national victory in reunification. Of course, the primary difference here is that their vision of "women's safety" varied greatly from the

time of De Valera, and would be broadly considered feminist. While the argument there is not at all illogical, it is packaged in and sustained by the nostalgia-heavy Republican narratives that dominate places like Belfast, and exist in a more muted sense in cities like Cork. There is undoubtedly an argument to be made that the conditions that pose harm to Irish women today – poverty, drug addiction, alcohol addiction, housing insecurity, and the male violence they face as a "result" of these stressors – are in part due to British colonialism, which some could say decimated the economic conditions of the island from the beginning of the occupation to the present UK-designated territories in the north. What does not often make its way into this analysis among the Republicans is an acknowledgment of the fact that, while the British occupation may have increased many of these struggles faced by women, the establishment of an Irish Republic only adapted and intensified those struggles, rather than decreasing them or doing away with them altogether. The Magdalene Laundries were operational decades before their peak in the Republic – the Free State made what was a flawed and complex approach to "Christian charity" into a system of forced labor and surveillance (O'Mahoney, 2018).

Among older men, as was the case with John from the St. Mary's Cathedral in Cork, there was a clear dissonance between their commitment to nostalgia and their willingness to interpret the imbalance of power that defined the 20th century for women. They saw no issue with calling for a "return to arms" from Sinn Féin and groups like ETA or the Catalan exiles while simultaneously condemning abortion, pre-marital sex, and any LGBT+ identity, even though the majority of the supporters for these movements they viewed as parallel were deeply socially progressive. This was the greatest evidence of the disconnect between the Southern Republican nostalgia from the elderly Fianna Fail and Fine Gael supporters, or the adamant defenders of the Church – their commitment to the Republican movement seemed to hinge on a utopian imagining

of the thirty-two county Republic as an ethnically homogenous, strictly Roman Catholic, heterosexual middle class. At the same time, the majority of the Millennial and Generation Z supporters of Sinn Féin (or Basque and Catalan independentism) wanted self-determination and autonomy not to secure an "Ireland for the Irish," but because they rejected colonial imposition, and they rejected the dominant state-generated narratives imposed by the British and Irish states. What men like John seemed unwilling to reckon with was the fact that the inheritors of the Republican movement were in large part socially marginalized, and drawn toward the liberatory nature of Republicanism to secure not just a liberated Ireland, but one where the safety of immigrants, women, and the LGBT+ community was defended and ensured. The political stance of "conservative Republicans" can by definition not recognize the suffering of the women and children who passed through and died in the Homes and Laundries – not only because it casts a revelatory light on the state they remain begrudgingly faithful to, but also because it implies a potential disconnect between their ideology and that of the movement as a whole. If they begin to recognize and admit to the violence of the past inflicted *by* them, rather than by a faceless enemy, this allows for a potential reexamining of the harm they may be inflicting in the current moment. Which, in turn, may force them to reexamine their feelings toward and relationship with the groups they claim are "ruining" Ireland.

While the younger generation of Republicans tended to be markedly more progressive throughout the entire island, and the older northern generation seemed significantly more progressive when compared to their southern counterparts, the progressive Republican approach to the question of gender parity is not without its own blind spots. They diverged from the conservatives who maintain an equal desire for a unified Ireland primarily in their vision of the future – it would be very out of place for a young or northern Republican to "blame" immigrants

or LGBT+ community members for the social problems facing Ireland on both sides of the border (even if some of the older, more traditional members might hold similar, private views). Their vision for a unified Ireland is in part informed by their desire to not reproduce a traditional bourgeoise state, with all of its implied structural abuses of women – which, of course, was the ultimate result of the first Irish "liberation" from England. However, they had no answers for how to approach widespread abuse and no proposed solution to remedy or attempt to repair the pain of the past. Nor did they have an answer for the enduring silence from the militant movement on the Laundries and Homes, though they did not typically take offense to any reference to that silence. Even though they were prepared to confront that the movement they supported was fundamentally flawed in its relative abandonment of "deviant" women, and entirely prepared to reject that the traditional state model would protect women and vulnerable people, they were not prepared to imagine an entirely different future. In the same way, while the younger generation did not take personal offense to *internal* criticisms of the Catholic church, often readily asserting that it was "backward" or "misogynistic" in its treatment of women, they still felt compelled to defend it from any Protestant criticism. This is not evidence of an illogical fealty to tradition. It is a result of centuries and then decades of intensified oppression as a result of British occupation and Unionist governance. The grave violations of human rights that, to this day, have not been fully admitted to or "rectified" were so intense and so infuriating to the general public that countering that state-generated narrative became the priority, and it remains as such. The result of this is the absence of a proper "space" for the victims of the Laundries and the Homes among the larger conversation of Irish victims of state violence.

The situation in the Basque Country continues to run parallel to the one in Ireland, where, despite the high degree of political sophistication and the intricacy of the progressive movements,

there is a notable difference given to militant narratives as opposed to "regular women's" stories. I believe that this stems from the same root cause as in the Irish case – that a consistent absence of justice for state victims has a devastating impact on the social fabric of a community, and increases the visibility of those who confront the state in obvious ways and decreases the visibility of those who are "silent" victims of the state. One of the consequences of this is that as new generations enter the political arena, the potential to seek justice for those silent victims diminishes, not because the newer generations are uninterested in their stories but because they simply have no way of knowing those stories if they do not hear about them from an older peer, as these narratives are not often discussed without being dismissed as a "conspiracy." Another consequence is that even amongst the older generations, who are relatively aware that the *robo de niños* adapted from the Francoist *Auxilio Social* approach to an adoption black market, there is a general lack of interrogation of the remaining impacts of this. Proud, lifelong leftists, such as Sandra, often exhibit a particular blind spot when it comes to interpreting the *robos* with the same progressive nuance they apply to other social issues.

Ultimately, I believe that if attempts to hold the Spanish state accountable for their abuses towards the Basques pre- and post-transition had been successful, then there would be a markedly different approach to the *robos* and other abuses inflicted on "silent" victims. In retrospect, I noticed my own participation in this selective remembrance. While my decision to focus on Galicia and Euskadi was obviously informed by my partial belonging to these cultures, it was also based on my belief that they most clearly exemplified the reality of Spanish state brutality and deliberately selective memorialization. However, my focus on these two northern communities prevented me from being able to adequately study and analyze the impact of the *robos* on the *gitano* community, who live primarily in the southern and eastern regions of Andalucía and

Valencia. My own frustration with the enduring lack of accountability and justice afforded to my communities resulted in my participation in a sort of selective outrage, where I was primarily focusing on the victimhood of people whom I shared an identity with.

In Galicia, the absence of visible outrage directed towards the state appears stark when compared to the political culture of the Basque Country or even Catalunya. Its position as an autonomous community with its own language, cultural traditions, and experience of repression at the hands of the Spanish state places it in the ideal position to cultivate revolutionary sentiment. The absence of outrage for the "stolen children" then becomes simply another forgotten element of the past that is not dwelled on, or interrogated. Cities like Vigo and A Coruña are not welcoming to or structured around change, political or otherwise. The lack of any commemoration or memorialization not just of the stolen children, whose existence remains debatable, but of the other, undeniable victims of Francoism, is a testament to the post-transition commitment to *pasar la página* (turning the page). The Galician reticence towards criticism of the state appears more logical when considered along the poor economic conditions of the community, and the seemingly eternal dominion of the conservative party (PP). Their geographic location and extreme weather positions them as somewhat inherently separate from the rest of Spain, even to those who staunchly consider themselves Spaniards. Any independent sentiment, whether politically progressive or a simple mention that given its location, Galicia would more accurately be situated in the UK time zone, as opposed to the Spanish one, can potentially emphasize their "separateness" and subject them to being even more forgotten. Their acceptance into Spanish society fully, in a way that may secure them some economic favor, then entirely relies on their adherence to the "Spanish way" of doing things. If, as several historians have posited, the "Spanish way" is deliberately forgetting the

past to make room for any hope for the future, the absence of recognition for Galician victims is a small part of a larger attempt to re-write history (Baby, 2012; Guelle, 2022; Woodworth, 2001).

In a place like Coirós, where the potential to achieve even the marginal financial success that is possible in cities like Vigo and A Coruña is far less likely, the lack of discussion of past abuses and current political issues is even more apparent. The absence of similar expectations to be rewarded for their adherence to a "cosmopolitan city lifestyle" that does not question the state or the ruling class, can easily be read as a defeatist position regarding their economic disenfranchisement, or even a fundamental belief that the horrors of state violence were not so objectionable. There is even a saying that is very common in Galicia, *ni tan mal, no?* which translates to *not so bad, right?* and is frequently said in the lulls in conversation after discussing something objectively difficult, such as a lack of job prospects, or the death of a loved one. It is my belief that the concept of *ni tan mal* encapsulates the difference between interpretations of Galician conformity and the actual impetus behind it. While *ni tan mal* can be taken as evidence that Galicians, and Galician women in particular, are simply accustomed to seeing no justice for victims in the past and expecting no real shift in gender and class dynamics in the present and future, my time in Coriós has left me certain that this is too simplistic a reading. While there is a tremendous role played by the absence of hope, it would be more accurate to say that the behavior of Coirós's residents is informed more by their desire to fit into the town's established dynamics than by fundamental hopelessness. Fran and Amelia's commitment to only discussing politics and loss in "acceptable" ways, and their respective frustration and shock or intrigue when presented with my willing departure from those norms is not a testament to their ignorance or apathy. Rather, it indicates that their willingness to engage with the norms and mores that, for better or worse, have maintained balance in Coirós since the war, and the transition, is an active, conscious one.

Their repeated reiterations of their disinterest in engaging with "inconvenient" narratives of violence, such as the *robos* or any of the other victims of Francoism allows them to maintain the town's balance, in the same way that repeating "convenient" narratives about the "enduring threat" of ETA allows them to maintain their belief that the way that the state acts is justified at the end of the day. To confront the fact that there are still people whose lives are ruined by state violence, or that ETA is no longer active, and in all likelihood would never have targeted them or anyone they knew, would be to confront the notion that they have structured their town, their conversations, their relationships and their systems of belief on a set of state-generated narratives that are at least partially false.

Finally, the most pronounced and relevant difference between these two cases is not in the specific methods they used to arrange the adoptions, or in the varying levels of awareness that the younger generations have of these abuses. The states involved all directly contributed to the mass abuse of women and children, and did so under the guise of religious doctrine and national stability. The primary difference lies in the fact that while the Irish and Northern Irish states have launched inquiries into the specifics of these abuses and begun the long process of admitting their culpability, the Spanish state continues to maintain the narrative that the forced and irregular adoptions only occurred in the immediate post-war period, effectively ignoring the majority of the victims. Ultimately then, while it is fair to say that the involvement of the Catholic Church in a state recovering from a civil war will yield institutional violence against women and children regardless of whether the state is directed by fascists or republicans, a state operated by fascists is incapable of reckoning with state and church violence, even fifty years after a "transition to democracy" and a republican-run state is more prepared to embark on the – albeit imperfect – journey of recognition and reparation.

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