

A Fragmented Democratic Transition. Alternative Narratives on 23-F in Basque and Catalan TV Documentaries¹

Enric Castelló
Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Abstract

The coup d'état of 23 February, 1981, remains in the memory of Spaniards as one of the epic episodes of democracy. This article analyses how the Basque public television (ETB) and Catalan Television (TVC) contributed to the account of 23-F. By analysing major reports produced and broadcast by both public corporations at different moments, the author notes a disagreement with the hegemonic discourse that lies in the national conflict and the political interpretation of the democratic transition in Spain. The leading Spanish story spoke of the coup as an "attempt" or a "failure" and of the Transition as a "success", a political model that other transitions to democracy could do well to copy; the contested narratives in these documentaries spoke of an unfinished model based on denials and limitations in which 23-F is a climax and a turning point after which Spain developed a democracy at the cost of political sacrifices.

Keywords

23-F coup d'état; democratic transition; hegemonic narrative; historical memory; television documentary

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Short Bio Note

Enric Castelló (Ph D) is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona, Spain). His research topics are related to cultural studies, memory studies, national identity and media representations. He was founding editor of the *Catalan Journal of Communication and Cultural Studies*. He has been invited researcher at Glasgow Caledonian University and at Loughborough University. He has publishes in a number of international journals including *European Journal of Communication* (Best Article of the Year Award 2007).

Department of Communication Studies, Universitat Rovira i Virgili
Av. Catalunya 35. 43002 Tarragona, Spain
ORCID id: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2154-2450>
enric.castello@urv.cat

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Exploring an open field

The story about the 23-F coup d'état in Spain has been told and retold on countless media and cultural platforms, and in very different political and social contexts. This historical episode has left a lasting mark on the memory of the Spanish people. The availability of both photographs and videos has made the narrative more available and more readily reproducible, since they are used and reused on many different occasions and anniversaries in an exercise of remediation;² the use and reuse of image and narratives of the past through diverse media platforms. The most important footage were recorded by a TVE camera, which showed Colonel Antonio Tejero's violent irruption in the Congress; the sound that was broadcast live by Cadena SER; and the photographs distributed by the EFE Agency that went to the four corners of the Earth in the days after the event. Other images were also widely broadcast: for example, the speech made by King Juan Carlos I on television on the morning of 24 February; the footage recorded by TVE in Valencia, where the Spanish army occupied the city centre with tanks; or the members of parliament being rescued and some of the Civil Guard units clambering out of the Congress windows the next day. They are all icons and sounds that mark the remembrance and reproduction of the event in popular culture and the media.

These materials mediated the coup d'état and served as means for composing stories that, though quite homogeneous and coherent at first, were contested and blurred over the years by all sorts of interpretations, commemorations and statements by politicians, military personalities, etc. Obviously, the political situation prevailing when new statements were made affected how the narratives were told. The ideological positions of the narrators and their biases, of which they may have been aware or not, refurbished the 'narrative room' of 23-F in the rambling residence/account of 20th-century Spanish history. Distortion is intrinsic to human memory, as Halbwachs remarked,³ and in the case we are analyzing here, the 23-F episode is part of the narrative of the democratic transition in Spain. The way we tell it involves adopting an ideological position with regard to the understanding of the transition itself and what this period meant for Spanish society.

To this, it should be added that the media have devoted an enormous number of pages and minutes, reports, documentaries and fictions to mark the occasion of the coup's anniversaries. The coup has been narrated in fictional productions like *23-F. Historia de una traición* (Recio, 2006) or *23-F. El día más difícil del Rey* (Quer, 2009), as well as in soap operas like *Cuéntame cómo pasó*,⁴ humorous vignettes and popular songs. Journalism has produced a considerable volume of essays and reports on what happened, each with their own particular views, re-framings, assumptions and silences. The importance of 23-F in popular culture was catapulted by Javier Cercas' fictional essay *Anatomía de un instante* (2009)⁵ in which he dissects the images from the Congreso de los Diputados and a portrait of Adolfo Suárez and other political

2 Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney. "Introduction. Cultural Memory and its Dynamics" in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin. Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1-14.

3 Maurice Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory* (Chicago IL. University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

4 See episode 235, and RTVE promotional information in <http://www.rtve.es/television/20130108/golpe-estado-del-23f-llega-cuentame-como-paso/597101.shtml>, last access 3 March 2016.

5 Javier Cercas, *Anatomía de un instante* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2009).

players to make a literary statement of facts that was very warmly received by critics and the general public. The desire to revive and reinterpret the facts even prompted *El País* to draw up an on-line minute-by-minute account to mark the 35th anniversary of the event.⁶

Although there is an overwhelming list of journalistic, historical and pseudo-historical essays on the event, little academic interest has been shown in analyzing the narratives about 23-F. The speeches and narratives have remained almost unexamined and represent an almost-virgin research terrain. One of the first scholarly investigations was conducted using a social psychology approach. Just nine years after the coup, a study looked at how 23-F had produced flashbulb memories. From a survey of one hundred and twenty people, it pointed out the differences between two factors: the surprising effect and the emotional arousal. These two factors had very different effects on the production of a detailed memory of the event and its social and personal persistence.⁷ The author argued that flashbulb memory is what remains when individuals freeze the moment they became aware of an exceptional or unexpected event. The 23-F had this effect just as other events did like the death of Franco, the first man on the moon, the Kennedy assassination or, more recently, the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York. That is why several generations of Spaniards can remember almost photographically what they were doing at the time when the coup took place even though the event was not televised live.

However, no discourse or narrative analysis on cultural analysis was done about 23-F until much later and one of the most important studies was by Fernando León-Solís, who focused on the Spanish and Catalan media. For him, the newspapers produced a "dominant" discourse about "redemption" in which the use of metaphors like "therapy" or "rite" established the idea of a failed coup that had reinforced democracy. But he also detected a "divergent" discourse that was a particular characteristic of the Catalan newspaper *Avui* and contrasted with the discourse of such other dailies as *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Catalunya*. For León-Solís, the divergent discourse understood the coup d'état in quite the opposite way to the dominant discourse. The coup was not a failure but a partial success that had led to the "derailment of the Spanish democratic process".⁸ This study is certainly valuable since it was the first to detect some of the elements of a narrative that I continue dissecting here for the Catalan and Basque televisions.

In the field of media analysis it is worth noting the research by José Carlos Rueda Laffond and Carlota Coronado on public television documentaries on the coup. Unlike other Madrid-based scholars, these authors made an incursion into regional productions and noted that Catalan documentaries like *El 23-F a Catalunya/23-F* in Catalonia (2004) acted out a dialogue between Spanish history and Catalan specificity, a "tactic of affinity and contrast [...] comparable to that practiced in parallel by other regional televisions such as ETB [Basque TV channel]".⁹ The authors also included some analysis on television programmes like *23-F, el día más difícil del Rey* (TVE,

6 *El País*, "El 23-F, en directo (35 años después) #ELPAIS23F". *El País*, 24 Feb 2016. http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2016/02/23/actualidad/1456228224_729381.html.

7 José María Ruíz-Vargas, "¿Cómo recuerda usted la noticia del 23-F? Naturaleza y mecanismos de los "recuerdos destello." *Revista de Psicología Social*, 8(1) (1993), 17-32.

8 Fernando León-Solís, "23 F – redemption or derailment of Spanish democracy?" *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 20(3) (2007), 207-229. (p. 227)

9 José Carlos Rueda Laffond and Carlota Coronado. *La mirada televisiva. Ficción y representación histórica en España* (Madrid: Fragua, 2009), 161.



2009), arguing that this fictional series replicated a dominant ideology and noting its presentism (*presentismo*) in the understandings of the past. Subsequently Paul Julian Smith contributed to this discussion with a view on these affirmations, noting the Catalan participation in the productions (companies, locations, actors) -relating this to a supposed "Catalan connection"- and including a gender approach given "the feminization of male authority figures" (the King) in the series.¹⁰

More recently, Francisca López and Enric Castelló presented a compilation of articles offering a cultural analysis of 23-F and provided a wide-ranging look at news, documentaries, television fiction, TV movies, films and other cultural productions such as novels, comics or comedy shows.¹¹ This was perhaps the most specific and extensive cultural analysis published up to that time on 23-F, and the editors concluded that the unity of the discourse had fragmented over the decades into what was "a direct reflection of the breakdown of consensus on democratic transition, or at least, the exhaustion of the narrative or the myth the hegemonic interpretation of the transition (as exemplary)".¹² The compilation made a specific study of how 23-F had been dealt with by the regional television channels, and revealed discrepancies between the various regional approaches. Without going into any great detail, the Basque and Catalan channels were the ones that most clearly participated in the alternative discourse about the coup.¹³

We must also mention the even more recent historiographic approach adopted by Roberto Muñoz, who mapped the discourses used in numerous journalistic and historical essays about the event. He concludes that the doubts raised about the official story in the nineties were turned into a series of more or less well-grounded works that completely compromised this discourse in the first years of the new century. From this point on, Muñoz says, the 23-F narratives fell largely on deaf ears.¹⁴ Still, this lack of interest was broken from time to time, especially when researchers analyzed new narrative sources or there were new developments. This was the case of the mockumentary *Operación Palace/Operation Palace*, broadcast in February 2014 by La Sexta.¹⁵ It argued that 23-F was orchestrated by the government, a group of politicians and some filmmakers, including José Luís Garci. The document generated a great deal of controversy not only about the limits of journalism, but also about the transparency of the state and its citizens, and the quality of democracy in Spain. Despite the huge fuss in the media and professional forums, to date *Operación Palace* has not aroused any great scholarly interest except for a short analysis by Núria Araüna and Marta Montagut. The authors conducted a study of interpretative

10 Paul Julian Smith, "The Television Mini-series as Historical Memory: The Case of 23-F, el día más difícil del Rey (TVE-1, 2009)." *Memory and its Discontents: Spanish Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Luis Martín-Estudillo and Nicholas Spadaccini. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 11 (Fall 2012): 52-63.

11 Francisca López and Enric Castelló, eds. *Cartografías del 23-F. Representaciones en la prensa, la televisión, el cine y la cultura popular* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2014).

12 Francisca López and Enric Castelló. "Cartografía de la nación a través del mito", in *Cartografías del 23-F. Representaciones en la prensa, la televisión, el cine y la cultura popular*, eds. Francisca López and Enric Castelló (Barcelona: Laertes, 2014), pp. 251-274, (p. 259).

13 Enric Castelló, "El golpe a través del caleidoscopio autonómico", in *Cartografías del 23-F. Representaciones en la prensa, la televisión, el cine y la cultura popular*, eds. Francisca López and Enric Castelló (Barcelona: Laertes, 2014), pp. 107-142 (pp. 139-142).

14 Roberto Muñoz Bolaños, "Un análisis incompleto de un acontecimiento excepcional : la literatura sobre el golpe de Estado del 23-F" (1981-2014). *Historiografías*, 9 (2015) 81-109.

15 Jordi Évole, *Operación Palace*. (Spain: La Sexta, 2014).

frameworks in various media and concluded that the documentary and subsequent debates carry out an exercise in postmemory. Araüna and Montagut defend this arguing the significant disparity of reactions of the people and pundits who experienced the coup, much more critical with the use of fake, and the people who did not witness the coup or have any personal memories of it, who were much more willing "to play" with its meanings and open to a far less serious discussion.¹⁶

The set of narrative and discourse analyses on 23-F is acquiring a volume and we are initiating our exploration of an open field. Still, this volume of work lacks a deeper reflection on the role that the story of 23-F plays in the democratic transition in Spain. Here, the volume of historical and cultural studies is even more disperse. Teresa Vilarós' cultural approach to the democratic transition is one of the most influential, but the edited volume by Joan Ramon Resina, the readings by Paul Julian Smith, the cultural and media analysis by Manuel Palacio, the recent collection from Vicente J. Benet, Nancy Berthier, Rafael R. Tranche and Vicente Sánchez Biosca and the constant publication in academic journals of all sorts of papers are proof that the discussion about how cultural and media production understands *la Transición* is more alive than ever.¹⁷ Doubtlessly, given the current political context in Spain in which some politicians are proposing a second transition, this political period is one of the leitmotifs of Spanish cultural studies these days.

In this paper I will not be able to systematize all the interpretations and discursive fringes of what has been interpreted as the Spanish democratic transition. I would merely oversimplify the positions, and sacrifice many nuances and a wide range of contributions. My limited scheme offers two interpretative frames: (1) the transition was an impeccable example of a socio-political transfer from a dictatorship to a democratic state involving negotiations and agreements to make possible coexistence and progress and in which the monarchy played a key role; (2) the transition was a process led by the dictatorial and conservative elites who failed to provide authentic reparation for the victims of Francoism or to recognize the nations that make up the Spanish people. In both narratives there are a set of lexical uses and key actors. For the dominant narrative some of these are "failure" (*fracaso*), "exemplary" (*modélico*), or "attempt" (*intento*, *intentona*), along with key actants such as the King (hero, solver), politicians like Adolfo Suárez, Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado or Santiago Carrillo (brave or courageous agents), and military commanders like Antonio Tejero, Alfonso Armada or Jaime Milans del Bosch (acting as villains, but varnished with a code of honor); and loci like the Congreso de los Diputados and the Palacio de la Zarzuela. For the alternative discourse, the markers are different: "civil plot" (*trama civil*), "regression" (*involución*) or "saber rattling" (*ruido de sable*). Likewise, the actants are also different (including left-wing, nationalist and union leaders), the role of the actants mentioned

16 Núria Araüna and Marta Montagut, "Entre la indignación y la interpretación lúdica: el diálogo intergeneracional ante el falso documental "Operación Palace". *Historia actual on-line*, 38 (2015): 131-146.

17 Teresa Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998); , Joan Ramon Resina, ed. *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy* (Amsterdam. Rodopi, 2000); Paul Julian Smith, *Television in Spain. From Franco to Almodóvar* (Woodbridge. Tamesis, 2006); Manuel Palacio, ed. *El cine y la transición política en España*. (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2011);, Manuel Palacio, ed. *Las imágenes del cambio. Medios audiovisuales en las transiciones a la democracia* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2013). Vicente J. Benet, Nancy Berthier, Rafael R. Tranche and Vicente Sánchez Biosca, *Carisma e imagen política. Líderes y medios de comunicación en la Transición* (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2016).



above is reframed, and the loci are the national loci of power (Generalitat de Catalunya or Casa de Juntas in Gernika).

While the first narrative was the hegemonic discourse in countless historical and media descriptions, including TVE and mainstream dailies, the second belonged to alternative circuits and accounts of all kinds, particularly in the Catalan and Basque media. It is precisely in this interpretative framework that 23-F plays a different narrative role: it is the point at which a truly inclusive project, in terms of national pluralism and democratic participation that placed valuable agency on the people and the peoples of Spain, was thwarted. While the hegemonic story regarded 23-F as the end of the *España negra* (black Spain), for the alternative discourse it was the beginning of a dysfunctional democratic era.

Peripheral views

The counter-hegemonic narrative on the coup circulated not only in Catalonia and the Basque Country, but also in Madrid, Valencia and other cities and regions. It would be very laborious to provide a complete list of all the news that has been produced and broadcast on regional television about 23-F. Therefore, we narrow our focus by looking at a sample of five major public corporations from different regions or *comunidades autónomas* (Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia, Madrid and Valencia) and the long reports or documentaries broadcast between 1984 and 2011 (30th anniversary of the coup). We thus obtain a revealing list (Table 1). In the nineties, when many essays were being written and there was still a great deal of interest in 23-F, television largely ignored the issue and it was not until the 20th anniversary (2001) when historical revisions and memory accounts started to emerge. This provided the momentum for the television narratives that would problematize the hegemonic account about the coup d'état.

Some of these narratives are crucial for understanding the position of each regional television.¹⁸ These key documentaries were largely broadcast on the anniversaries of the coup: on the 20th, *Memòria d'un colp/Memory of a coup* (Canal 9), *23-F des de dins /23-F from inside* (TVC), *20 años después/20 years later* (Canal Sur); on the 25th *Hilbeltza. Febrero negro/Hilbeltza, black February* (ETB, 2006); and on the 30th *Las piezas del 23-F/Pieces of 23-F* (Telemadrid, 2011) and *Memorias do 23-F/23-F Memories* (TVG, 2011). From the point of view of journalistic quality, it should be noted that there was a difference between the Catalan productions (a high standard) and the Valencian, Galician or Andalusian productions (although there are exceptions). But TVC made a huge investigative effort using witnesses, interviews and research, while the productions of the other channels verged on *telenostalgia*.¹⁹

*Table 1. Selection of reports and documentaries about 23-F in the autonomic channels between 1984 and 2011*²⁰

Title	Length	Program/Director	TV Channel	Year
<i>23-F: el fracàs d'un cop</i>	15'	Special/Joan Salvat	TVC	1984

¹⁸ Castelló, op. cit, p. 39.

¹⁹ Castelló, op cit., p. 141.

²⁰ Note that these are not the whole TV productions around 23-F or mentioning (laterally treating) the event, but a selection of the considered more relevant.

<i>d'estat/23-F: the failure of a coup d'état</i>				
<i>23-F. València, una nit d'excepció/23-F. Valencia, a night of exception</i>	32'	Fulles grogues/M. Luisa del Romero	Canal 9	1991
<i>Con el golpe en los balcones/The coup at your heels</i>	48'	Especial/ Mirentxu Purroy	ETB	1996
<i>1981. Un golpe de Estado / 1981. A coup d'état</i>	45'	La transición en Euskadi/Koldo San Sebastián	ETB	1997
<i>23-F. Memòria d'un colp / 23-F Memory of a coup</i>	32'	Especial/Vicente Sanz	Canal 9	2001
<i>20 años después/20 years after</i>	30'	Reporteros/Luís Cátedra and Agustín Olmos	Canal Sur	2001
<i>Las claves del 23-F / The keys to 23-F</i>	50'	Telemadrid/Jesús Palacios	TM	2001
<i>El 23-F des de dins / Inside 23-F</i>	54'	30 minuts/Joan Úbeda	TVC	2001
<i>Colp d'estat del 23-F / The coup d'état of 23-F</i>	30'	Què feies tu?/Eva Vizcarra	Canal 9	2005
<i>El 23-F a Catalunya / 23-F in Catalonia</i>	36'	Dies de transició/Francesc Escribano	TV3	2004
<i>Escàner 23-F / Scanning 23-F</i>	78'	Escàner/Fernando Quintela and Melchor Miralles	Canal 9	2006
<i>Aquel 23-F / That 23-F</i>	15'	Reporteros/Agustín Olmos	Canal Sur	2006
<i>Hilbeltza. Febrero negro / Hilbeltza. Black February</i>	50'	Especial/Begoña Atin	ETB	2006
<i>23-F</i>	15'	Regreso al futuro/Paco Lobatón	Canal Sur	2009
<i>Memorias do 23-F/23-F Memories</i>	15'	Reporteiros/Alfonso Pérez	TVG	2011
<i>Las piezas del 23-F / Pieces of 23-F</i>	45'	Objetivo/Manuel Cerdán	TM	2011

The Basque, Catalan and Madrid televisions –to different degrees and in different directions– were the ones that most developed narratives of dissent to the dominant story of 23-F. It must be stressed that they were very different narratives, since the story from Madrid was influenced by collusive theories that question the role played by the monarchy.

Whatever the case may be, the gaze of regional television was by no means stable during the thirty years after the event. It focused on a jumble of assorted stories and their interpretation was heavily influenced by the hegemonic stories that circulated in the mainstream media, especially in TVE, private and state television and newspapers. The daily newspapers proved to be the true guardians of the dominant narrative until



at least the 20th anniversary of the event, as shown by Arantxa Capdevila.²¹ Here we focus on the story portrayed in the six productions broadcast by the Basque and Catalan televisions in the period under study.

The Catalan reading

Of the regional channels, Televisió de Catalunya was the first to produce a documentary after the coup d'état with *23-F, fracàs d'un cop d'estat/ 23-F the failure of a coup d'état*,²² broadcast in February 1984. Indeed, TV3 had only been broadcasting for a few weeks at that time, which suggests that the program was being prepared even before TV3 started regular broadcasts. The editing avoided a voice over and left the whole story in the hands of such political actors as Jordi Solé-Tura (Socialist MP), Santiago Carrillo (Communist MP), Miquel Roca (Catalan Nationalist MP) and even the president of the Generalitat Jordi Pujol.

Of the people who interpreted the coup, we should highlight journalist Pilar Urbano, who reinforced the hegemonic discourse of the time. Her narrative gave King Juan Carlos I a key role in the "failure" of the coup d'état and Urbano describes it with a maritime metaphor: "The King ... was at the helm. It was he who kept the ship of Spain on course for legal orthodoxy, for the Constitution."²³ Curiously, Pilar Urbano was to problematize this narrative thirty years later with her book *La gran desmemoria*,²⁴ but at that time, and in the context of a recently launched TVC, the Catalan account of the coup d'état was rather orthodox; the fears of a new coup d'état were alive. The proof is that even Jordi Solé Tura described the coups as "the tail, the last stage of the whole process" and Miquel Roca also participated of the hegemonic frame:

"I have a special interest in forgetting 23-F. I think that the best evaluation is to understand that an attempted coup d'état in a well-grounded, well-established democratic regime has failed and will fail again. So, the best we can do is to live free from 23-F syndrome."²⁵

The hegemonic discourse matched the new powers of the Catalan conservatives and centre-right; they had an ambitious nationalist project by which they aimed to restore the Catalan language from the long period of prohibition and discrimination. In this context, President Pujol was a champion of the constitutional order and his narrative in the documentary also aimed to legitimize the young King. The monarch was the guarantor of the new autonomic era. Thus, in a long explanation Jordi Pujol states that the King called him during the night of 23-F "to reassure me". At the same time, the Catalan president gave a speech on the night of 23-F in an attempt to transmit calm to the Catalan people (RNE, Ràdio 4). The fact that the documentary stresses the role played by Pujol during that night is very important because the

21 Capdevila, Arantxa "La disolución de un consenso: el 23-F en la prensa". In F. López & E. Castelló (Eds.), *Cartografías del 23-F. Representaciones en la prensa, la televisión, el cine y la cultura popular* (pp. 33–52). Barcelona: Laertes, 2014. Print.

22 Joan Salvat, *23F. El fracàs d'un cop d'estat* (Barcelona: Televisió de Catalunya, 1984).

23 "El Rey... fue precisamente el timón, que mantuvo la nave de España en la singladura de la ortodoxia legal, de la Constitución", all translations by the author.

24 Urbano, Pilar. *La gran desmemoria* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2014).

25 "Tinc un especial interès en oblidar-me del 23-F. Penso que la millor valoració és comprendre que un intent de cop d'estat en un règim democràtic, sentat, arrelat, va fracassar, que tornaria a fracasar i que, per tant, el millor que podem fer és viure alliberats de la síndrome del 23-F"



Catalan audience had an “alternative” to the King. Juan Carlos I was the figure who made the path to democracy possible in Catalonia where an alternative nationalist project was to be developed. Other voices, like that of the journalist Carles Sentís – who had a Francoist past– did deny the true intention of the coup: “Mister Tejero, more than a coup d’état, made a video, an international video.”²⁶

Still, in 1984 we found in TVC the seed of a counter-hegemonic narrative in the intervention of the songwriter Raimon. He pointed out that the “civil and economic plot” had yet to be investigated. During the first years after 23-F, one of the “alternative” narrative markers was the reference to the “civil plot”, because the dominant discourse on the event was quick to restrict all responsibility to the military establishment and discounted any collaboration outside a select group of commanders. At that moment, the mere mention of this concept –with the addition of the “economic” element which suggested some sort of funding in the shade– was a truly provocative statement.

Just the title of the production, which used the word “failure” (*fracàs*), clearly marked the moderate understanding that the Catalan television had of the coup; the “failure” meant that there would be no consequences. The expression of any dissent was extremely measured and came from the mouths of artists, first Raimon, and then La Trinca. The documentary ends with “La dansa del sabre”/“Saber dance”, a song written the day after the coup that gives an ironic account of the coup d’état and which makes reference to “saber rattling”.²⁷ The programme included a strategically inserted fragment of one of the final verses with the tense “and long life to the King! What else can we do!” (*I visca el Rei! Vés quin remei!*). In 1984 there was no more room for a counter-narrative in the newly formed Catalan television, at least in such a “serious” format as a television report. And the comedy shows at that time did not have the political tone they acquired much later. Still, it is worth stressing that alternative narratives were on show.

There was an enormous difference between the Catalan narratives of the eighties and the narratives of the new century. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the coup, TVC produced a well-researched programme on 23-F. The TVC team of investigative journalism is one of the most powerful in Spain, specially on the historical and collective memory and they largely work for the programme *30 minuts/30 minutes*. The truth is that by 2001, because the anniversary, the narrative diversity about 23-F had well and truly emerged. On the one hand, the narratives of “remembrance” had broken into television given that the length of time (20 years) since the coup had opened up a generational crack between young Spaniards with few or no memories of the coup (those who were 18-30 years old at that time), those who had memories of the coup but no memories of the dictatorship (those who were around 40), and those who had suffered the dictatorship and the worst years of repression (over 40). In the latter group, we should distinguish those with memories of the war and the worst post-war years. I would say that this is the moment that we can start talking about a postmemory production with regard to 23-F, a concept that was better developed by Araüna and Montagut in their analysis of the 2015 *Salvados* mockumentary on 23-F (*Évole*).

On the 20th anniversary the narrative fringes also exploited the idea of the conspiracy (*el Elefante Blanco*/the White Elephant, *el hombre de la maleta*/the man in

26 “El senyor Tejero, més que un cop d’estat, el que va fer va ser un vídeo, un vídeo internacional”.

27 La Trinca “La dansa del sabre”. *Nou de trinca* (Ariola-Eurodisc, 1981).

the suitcase). With *23F des de dins/Inside 23F*,²⁸ TVC aimed to shed light on all this narrative disorder with a journalistic investigation to clarify and present a comprehensive account of what happened on the night of 23F, how the coup was conceived and to what extent this story was closed or unfinished. The programme begins with the shocking account of Alfonso Armada strolling through his garden of camellias. Armada, convicted for the coup but quickly reprieved for health reasons by the socialist government of Felipe González, says that he is happy because the result of the coup “was terrific”. “Everyone says that it strengthened monarchy” –and then he adds: “To me, everything about 23 February is satisfactory.” This narrative contrasts with the hegemonic discourse of the “failed” coup and lights the narrative fuse that will guide the documentary. Moreover, the narrative is now precisely expressed by Armada, one of the guilty actors of the coup.

El 23-F des de dins features uncommon and valuable witnesses like General José Juste, former commander of the Brunete Armored Division which was ready to march on Madrid that night. Overall, the presence of military agents in the documentary is remarkable because by the twentieth anniversary of the coup the idea that there was a “true story”, untold and unknown to the general public, had taken a firm hold, and this story had to come from the very top of military command. For example, at the end of the documentary Armada recognizes that he would be very happy if other people had been involved in the coup and had not been blamed. Meanwhile, General Luis Pinilla accepted that:

“they did not get to the bottom of the issue, and I think they did well because at the bottom they would have found a large number of military leaders, and I think they did well. I even think that the King may have been given instructions to be understanding and diplomatic, to let things calm down and only catch two or three scapegoats.”²⁹

For the dominant discourse 23-F is a closed narrative and this is perhaps the most notable, surreptitious tension in *El 23-F des de dins*.³⁰ Is this story really over? In narrative analysis the struggle between closed and open always creates friction and closure always comes out on top: the audience seek a closed story. Thus, the “mechanics of narration” also play in favour of the hegemonic discourse, in which the story is closed and complete: the trial of a group of military commanders and Civil Guard agents led by Alfonso Armada, Jaime Milans del Bosch and Antonio Tejero put an end to a story that reinforced the Constitution and the democracy, thanks to the role of the King (the hero). This story also prevented any political implications since the coup had failed. Problematizing such a closed structure requires a major effort by the narrator who starts the documentary with the above mentioned statement by Armada. Sabino Fernández Campo, the former head of the Casa del Rey, appeared in *Inside 23-F* and, in a way, imposed this closure at the end:

28 Joan Úbeda, *El 23F des de dins*. Barcelona: Televisió de Catalunya, 2001.

29 “Creo que se hizo bien por que el fondo hubiera sido una parte muy importante de la cúpula militar y creo que se obró muy bien. Incluso puede que hubiera alguna consigna del Rey en el sentido de ser comprensivo, de ser diplomático, de dejar que las cosas se fueran remansando por si mismo y nada más que coger dos o tres que fueron cabezas de turco realmente”.

³⁰ The documentary won an Ondas Award in 2001.

“It is often better to stop when things have happened, the effects have passed or are no longer doing their worst, and not to investigate any further, because otherwise the story would constantly be stirring up events that is better to leave alone and not open up wounds that we must ensure are healed.”³¹

This idea is an epitome of the hegemonic discourse produced and circulated by the Spanish establishment about the Civil War and the dictatorship. By including it TVC exposes the struggle between the different powers and the impulse to reopen that story. Counter narratives are not only about lexical uses, actants and loci; they are also about the structure of the story. The whole story about the coup d'état has still not been written.

Finally I would like to highlight “El 23-F en Catalunya/23-F in Catalonia”, one of the sixteen episodes in the *Dies of Transició/Transition Days*.³² The entire narrative by the Catalan television about 23-F is a complex interpretation of what the democratic transition was, not a mere “exemplary model”. The account provided by “23-F in Catalonia” is similar to that of *Inside 23-F*, but it is worth noting the role played by Jordi Pujol here and how different it is from the role he played twenty years before in the first production analyzed. In this respect, the “Pujolist view” always refused to publicly accept that 23-F had had any great impact on political life in Spain and largely accepted the hegemonic discourse on Spanish mainstream media. The most that Pujol dared to suggest on the occasion of this production was: “After [the coup] something happened that had begun earlier: a certain autonomic regression.”³³ As we will see in the Basque case, “autonomic regression” is one of the main markers of the dissent narratives about the coup: it explains that, in 1982, the events of 23-F led to the passing of the LOAPA,³⁴ which meant a rearrangement of the autonomic model. It must be said that Pujol’s argument is very cautious because he refers to a “certain” regression that “had begun earlier” because it seems that this law was already being considered by Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo in his investiture speech in February 1981. Artists such as Jordi Dauder will still actively offer alternative views on the issue as he considers that the coup had positive consequences for the Crown.

A cross reading of TVC narrative suggests that the hegemonic narrative of the coup certainly had a place in Catalan television, although there was evidence of alternative narratives (civil plots not investigated, facts not clarified during the trial, characters whose performance was questionable, etc.). The tension between the two stories was tempered by the intervention of political and economic elites. A stage of Catalan national construction had just begun under the democratic transition, the constitution and the monarchy. The eighties was not the right time to problematize this scheme; the time would come at a later date, when the autonomic model was to become a

31 “Hay muchas veces en que es mejor detenerse ya cuando las cosas han pasado, los efectos se han producido, o han dejado de producirse los más desfavorables, y no investigar más porqué sino la historia sería un continuo remover de acontecimientos que es mejor dejarlos extinguir y no urgar en heridas que hay que procurar que queden cicatrizadas”.

32 Escribano, Francesc. *El 23-F a Catalunya (Dies de Transició)*. Barcelona: Televisió de Catalunya, 2004.

33 “Després d’això ve una cosa que ja havia començat de totes maneres, que és una certa regressió autonòmica”.

34 LOAPA. Ley Orgánica de Armonización del Proceso Autonómico/Law for the Harmonization of the Autonomic Process

hindrance to the development of the Catalan project. The dissent of the "Catalan narrative" was indeed related to the national project and the idea that 23-F could have meant a "regression" not only of this project but also of other aspects of democratic life.

The Basque view

One of the features of the Basque story about the 23-F story is the role played by ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna/Basque Country and Freedom). While the armed organization hardly appears in the Catalan documentaries, it is present to some extent in other regional and statewide televisions according to which the bloody period of assassinations by the terrorists was one of the reasons for the coup. This argument was commonly expressed by military and Civil Guard commanders who stressed the inability of the government to stop the attacks. The second feature peculiar to the Basque story is not an actor but an episode in particular locus: the Casa de Juntas in Gernika. This episode was the first official visit of King Juan Carlos I to the Basque Country and the events took place in early February 1981, when the monarch was interrupted by a group of representatives of Herri Batasuna and LAIA who sang *Eusko Gudariak*,³⁵ the republican anthem of the Basque Army during the Civil War. The activists were violently evicted and later prosecuted for insulting the King. The incident produced a great deal of tension and the monarch, visibly shaken in the images, was later questioned.

Both of the features mentioned above are present in *Con el golpe en los talones/The coup at your heels*,³⁶ a special programme to mark the fifteenth anniversary of 23-F. The Basque story was by far more alternative than the Catalan one in the nineties, and this alternative nature was highlighted by various narrative elements, ranging from the use of contrasting sources of information and eye-witness accounts, to structures and images. Viewing this documentary, then, is a very different experience. The images of the hegemonic story show common hackneyed shots taken by TVE of the irruption of the Civil Guard into the Spanish Congress and shooting at the ceiling while Colonel Tejero shouts "Todos al suelo, coño!" Also common is the struggle with Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado and Adolfo Suárez who refuse to dive for cover, an attitude that is portrayed as much more courageous than that of the other MPs. These are the images of Javier Cercas' *Anatomía* (2009). These snapshots are also consistent with the images broadcast by EFE, which replicate the narrative of three brave politicians (Santiago Carrillo along with Mellado and Suárez) and show the dignity of legitimating democratic power. The alternative Basque narrative also shows these moments, but subsequent images blur their meaning. *Con el golpe en los talones* shows the MPs taking cover behind their seats for several minutes. For a long time the whole of Congress can be seen on their knees before the Civil Guard and their *tricornios*. It is a devastating image and almost unseen in other documentaries.

In this documentary Milagros Rubio (a member of the left-wing nationalist ANAI),³⁷ Juan José Pujana (former president of the Basque parliament) and Mario Fernández (former vice-lehendakari) largely agree on the argument that the politicians stood to attention to military agents. For Rubio, for example, the perpetrators of the coup partially reached their objectives: "They won the fear of citizens, they won a setback,

³⁵ Herri Batasuna, Popular Union and LAIA, Langile Abertzale Iraultzaileen Alderdi/Party of Revolutionary Patriot Workers

³⁶ Mirentxu Purroy, *Con el golpe en los talones*. (Euskadi: Euskal Telebista, 1996).

³⁷ Asociación Navarra de Ayuntamientos de Izquierdas/Navarra Association of Left-Wing Councils

even in law-making.”³⁸ In this argument the first outcome of the coup was the LOAPA. Professor Emilio Majuelo intervenes as an expert to reinforce the discourse that LOAPA was the immediate political consequence of the coup and the “exaltation of the monarchy”. The vice-lehendakari Mario Fernández also insists that the whole basic law-making process and the cuts in the autonomic process “are sons of LOAPA”, which is a “dead but in excellent health.”³⁹ Perhaps Juan José Pujana gave clearest expression to the outcome of 23-F: “Since 23-F we have witnessed a clear involution of the autonomic process. This is easy to check day-by-day, law-by-law. President Calvo Sotelo was kidnapped by the coup because they were socialist governments.”⁴⁰ These narratives on the coup problematized the affirmation that it had failed. On the contrary, it was a political success.

A year later, this material was supplemented with one episode in the series *La Transición en Euskadi/The Transition in Euskadi*, entitled “1981, un golpe de estado”/“1981. A coup d’état”.⁴¹ The ETB documentaries perhaps insist most in explaining political contexts; it is the price that must be paid by alternative narratives as hegemonic accounts rely on a framework of understandings that is taken for granted. In this respect, this documentary carefully put the focus on “what happened”, but also on “why it happened”, “when” and “how”. To better articulate this alternative discourse, the Basque television documentaries use voice-overs to provide a particular view on the facts. Again, the incidents at the Casa de Juntas are used to explain the political conflict of the moment, along with the kidnapping and murder of the director of the Central Lemoiz José María Ryan by ETA. These events are described alongside the demonstrations in the streets called against the “brutal murder of José Arregui”.⁴² Among the witnesses, the documentary includes voices from Jon Hidígoras (Herri Batasuna), that are almost absent in all dominant accounts of the Transition.

Quite unlike the Catalan story, the Basque narratives make politicians the main characters of the story and give them a voice. The leader of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), Xabier Arzalluz, describes a personal memory of the moment using the flashbulb memory approach. He remembers the moment when he saw the image of the deputies taking cover under their seats and he ironically decodes: “I burst out laughing [...] there were some guys wearing *tricornios* firing their guns from the presidential table, and everybody was under their seats. Frankly it was tragic, yet funny.”⁴³ The comic register of 23F is not completely new and was used even by the former President Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo in an interview in which he described the episode as a “zarzuela, operetta or *opera buffa*”. This ironical tone, verging on mockery, meant that the narrative brought discredit to the Spanish Congress, and closely resembled the nationalist discourse in the Basque country. The final proof of

38 “Ganaron el temor de los ciudadanos, ganaron retroceso, incluso legalmente”.

39 The comment refers to the fact that LOAPA was partially revoked after a Constitutional Court sentence in 1983.

40 “Desde el 23-F se ha producido una involución del proceso autonómico evidente. Y eso se puede constatar día a día, ley por ley. El presidente Calvo Sotelo fue un secuestrado del Golpe y los gobiernos socialistas también”.

41 Koldo San Sebastián, “1981. Un golpe de estado” (*La Transición en Euskadi*). Euskadi: Euskal Telebista, 1997.

42 *El País*, “Fuerzas mayoritarias y la izquierda ‘abertzale’ se manifiestan sin incidentes en Euskadi en protesta por la muerte de Arregui”. *El País*, 17 Feb 1981. Web. http://elpais.com/diario/1981/02/17/espana/351212403_850215.html, last access 9 November 2016.

43 “Me entró la risa (...), con unos tíos tirando tiros con tricornio desde la mesa del presidente, y todos debajo del escaño. Francamente es trágico, pero a la vez es cómico”.



the position taken by the documentary is illustrated by the voice-over, almost at the end:

"The military returned to their barracks but the LOAPA was passed as their inheritance. It was a law that interrupted the autonomy process and was considered to be an appropriate measure to avoid a second coup. The so called civil plot of the coup was discussed for years afterwards."⁴⁴

The Basque vision was fully deployed in the ETB documentary *Hilbeltza. Febrero negro/Hilbeltza, black February*.⁴⁵ We can say that *Hilbeltza* is one of the best television narratives with a contextual profile, even though it provides a strictly Basque viewpoint. It tells the story of the political events that took place in February 1981 including again the Gernika scene; the murder of José María Ryan; the torture and death in prison of the ETA member Jose Arregui;⁴⁶ the reaction and demonstrations in Euskadi and his crowded funeral in Zizurkil; and the general strike. The voice-over stresses that "the whole democratic transition was saber rattling" that led to a coup d'état and the "political and military manoeuvres orchestrated by a broad sector represented by Colonel Tejero." The document contains various interpretations of the coup and its aftermath. Carlos Garaikoetxea (former lehendakari), Marcelino Oreja (former executive delegate in the Basque Country during the UCD government) and Iñaki Esnaola (Basque MP by Herri Batasuna) offer a wide range of views. Esnaola offers one of the more radical views when he states that the LOAPA was a product of the moment, and that a pact of State established "the chess board". The 23-F counter-narratives coincide in considering the coup as the moment that set the rules by which the political game would be played from that point on.

But *Hilbeltza* does not conceal the hegemonic discourse and it is clearly expressed by Marcelino Oreja, who in one of the first interventions states: "How am I going to forget that in 1980 there were 109 deaths." He is referring to the number of people murdered by ETA. For Oreja:

"We can understand that moment in 1981 very well, not because of the effect of 23-F, which is the only thing we remember. I think it was almost irrelevant. It was everything else that had to be sorted out at the time and, happily, it was."⁴⁷

Hilbeltza, like other Basque documentaries, provided a counter narrative to the hegemonic discourse promoted by the Spanish government. The narratives were constructed using arranged storytelling

44 "Los militares volvieron a los cuarteles pero como herencia se gesta la LOAPA, una ley que recortaba el proceso autonómico iniciado y que era considerada como una medida oportuna para evitar un segundo golpe. Durante años se mantuvo un debate sobre lo que se llamó la trama civil del golpe".

45 Atin, Begoña. *Hilbeltza. Febrero negro*. Euskadi: Euskal Telebista, 2006. Television.

46 *El País*, "El informe forense reconoce que José Arregui fue torturado", 17 Feb 1981.

http://elpais.com/diario/1981/02/17/espana/351212404_850215.html, last access 9 November 2016.

47 "Se comprende muy bien que en estos momentos del año 1981, no ya por lo que significa ese efecto del 23 de Febrero que es lo único que recordamos. Creo que es un hecho casi irrelevante. Es todo lo demás lo que es necesario en ese momento enderezar y que felizmente se enderezó".



structures, profiling alternative agents and actors, and locating the action in different places.

The alternative stories

It is really problematic to talk about a unified "Catalan" or "Basque" narrative on any historical moment or event. I took the liberty of grouping the two narratives together to express the existence of a particular viewpoint with regard to the meanings of the coup d'état perpetrated in Spain during the evening of 23 February 1981. The alternative narratives were by no means exclusive to the Basque or Catalan media, of course; they were also present on other left-wing platforms. But neither were the alternative accounts exclusive to left-wing parties, because the far-right also drew up a narrative grounded on a conspiracy that tried to compromise the Royal House, the Intelligence Center (Centro Nacional de Inteligencia) and other institutions.

In this article I have argued that Catalan and Basque television participated differently in these alternative visions of 23-F. My view is that these alternative stories were related to the national conflict alive in both regions and the uncomfortable position of the Catalan and Basque communities in regards to the democratic Transition in Spain.

Since the 1990s ETB has offered an alternative version that focuses on political actors and contesting the idea that 23-F was a failure. The eye-witness accounts and narratives pointed out that the coup d'état was productive in terms of policies and laws. In particular, the coup slowed down the progress that Spain was making towards a truly decentralized state. ETB did not hide the hegemonic positions but gave ample room for contesting them, and offered an account of the Transition in which the military forces had, with some success, moulded the political agenda.

In the narratives of the Catalan documentaries there are greater nuances. They were very close to the hegemonic narratives of the 1980s, when the nationalist, centre and moderate right-wing parties in Catalonia were true allies of the state powers. The thirst for democracy prompted the narratives to replicate the "will of failure". Thus, more than making assertions, the early documentaries were expressing a desire. In the following decades, TVC narratives were more alternative and understood the 23-F event as part of a more national frame: the autonomic system was not developing as expected and the coup may have meant a regression. Catalan political representatives were always cautious about saying so openly, but media narratives included this diversity in their explanation of the facts.

At the time of ending this article (February 2016), the Spanish congress is having some trouble in investing a new president; some political forces have talked about a second transition, the political party Podemos is reframing the current situation and describing it as the inheritance of the lack of democracy in the country, and the Catalan problem is more alive than ever. This context marked the annual coup d'état anniversary, which, after 35 years now, has again led to discussion about what 23-F meant for Spanish political life and what its consequences are for citizens today.