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## Chapter 4 *Nicholas Manganas* "Narratives of Terror in Spain since 9/11: Contesting the Concept of Perpetual War"

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Email: [cerc@cerc.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:cerc@cerc.unimelb.edu.au)

Website: <http://www.cerc.unimelb.edu.au/>

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**Nicholas Manganas** is working towards his PhD in International Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. His thesis focuses on mass-mediated narratives of terrorism in Spain and looks at how these narratives are publicly negotiated through the process of recuperating public memory.

Nicholas has articles in the forthcoming issues of *Comparative Literature and Culture* and *Culture, Theory and Critique*. He has also worked extensively with various media organizations in Sydney and has written numerous articles for local niche publications.

[Nicholas.Manganas@student.uts.edu.au](mailto:Nicholas.Manganas@student.uts.edu.au)

## NARRATIVES OF TERROR IN SPAIN SINCE 9/11: CONTESTING THE CONCEPT OF PERPETUAL WAR

Nicholas Manganas

*This article seeks to explore the mass-mediated narratives that have been produced in the post 9/11 era in Spain to contest Hardt and Negri's compelling argument in *Multitude* that the September 11 attacks opened a new era of war and that 'war is becoming a general phenomenon, global and interminable' (2000: 4). This article posits that Spaniards do not consider themselves to be operating in a state of 'perpetual war'. Instead, the post-9/11 narratives on terror operate on a more fundamental "national" level, arguably leading to a re-awakening of *las dos Españas* (conservative and liberal Spains) that led to civil war (1936-39) and culminated in the Franco dictatorship. This article will explore two key events in contemporary Spanish politics: the March 11, 2004 attacks in Madrid that led to the ousting of the conservative government; and ETA's declaration of a 'permanent' ceasefire in March 2006. I argue that the mass-mediated narratives currently fomenting around these two events in Spanish political discourse override global and 'pan-European' narratives of terrorism, questioning the effectiveness of the global US-led 'war on terror.'*

### THE 9/11 PARADIGM SHIFT

The attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington on September 11, 2001, effectively positioned the 'war on terror' at the centre of global political discourse. The 'war on terror' can be considered as a US-led war that is intentionally broad enough to encompass so-called rogue states, declared 'failed' states, national liberation struggles, remnants of the Cold War apparatus, and any security issues that can be filtered through the 'terrorism' discourse. In effect, any 'threat' or 'violence' that is not 'state' sanctioned neatly fits into the 'war on terror' narrative, at least as articulated by the U.S. Government and its allies. State terror is a significant omission from this discourse: the crimes of states are generally not illegitimate unless they are committed by 'rogue' states such as Iraq, Iran or North Korea. This discourse has also crept into an array of other issues of global concern: mass migration from developing countries into the

"west", the difficulties in "integrating" immigrants with different "values" into western communities, and many such issues that are encompassed in national identity debates and struggles. Many political theorists thus argue that 9/11 was a paradigm shift in transnational relations, the start of a new era after a ten year interregnum period that began with the end of the Cold War (1991–2001). There are notable exceptions such as Noam Chomsky, who argues that a 'war on terror' was first articulated by former US President Ronald Reagan and that the only thing that changed on 9/11 was the identity of the victims. That is to say that, for the first time, it was the United States, the world's sole superpower that was under attack; a superpower with the power and communication reach to change the global security apparatus and re-articulate the global security discourse.

But most scholars and media pundits agree that some kind of ill-defined paradigm shift did begin with 9/11. One of the most infamous interpretations of this shift has been articulated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Multitude* (2004), their follow up to their seminal text *Empire* (2000). Hardt and Negri argue that the unending nature of the new war (the global war on terror) takes on a generalised character with the result that war has become a permanent social relation.<sup>1</sup> By updating Foucault's conceptualisation of 'biopower,' Hardt and Negri claim that this new type of war has become the general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination. Unlike disciplinary power, which is addressed to bodies through instruments such as surveillance, training and punishment, 'biopower' refers to the control of 'life,' dealing with the population as political problem.<sup>2</sup> This technology of power, Foucault insisted, is not society, but a new body, "a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted."<sup>3</sup> The aim of this new technology of power is not to discipline the body, but "to take control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularised."<sup>4</sup> One of the inevitable consequences of the process of biopower is that it spurs the installation of an array of security mechanisms around the random element inherent in a population of living beings.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2004), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p.245.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.245.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.247.

Thus, according to Hardt and Negri, in the twenty-first century, biopower remains a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it.<sup>5</sup> This is because the global ‘war on terror’ has become a new threat against the human species, precisely because of its random nature. The terrorist threat has caused the state security apparatus to become a key institution in the control of the population. The significance of the ‘war on terror’ or ‘total war’ is that war itself has become a ‘regime of biopower’ According to Hardt and Negri, when power becomes entirely biopolitical, “the whole social body is comprised by power’s machine and developed in its virtuality.”<sup>6</sup> Power is thus expressed as “a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population – and at the same time across the entirety of social relations.”<sup>7</sup> The post-September 11 era, despite its hyperreality (or perhaps because of it), has thus become deeply embedded in the political and social narratives of the state. Discourses of terrorism thus interconnect with state narratives, to the extent that they reproduce social and political life.

Yet despite Hardt and Negri’s compelling argument in *Multitude*, that the September 11 attacks opened a new era of war and that “war is becoming a general phenomenon, global and interminable,”<sup>8</sup> local interrogations of the terror phenomena persist: do Europeans consider themselves to be existing in a state of ‘perpetual war’? And by extension, how do individual member states of the EU respond to the global war on terror, particularly member states such as Spain and the UK with a long history of terrorist attacks within their borders? Spain is particularly interesting because in that country this phenomenon is not new. For decades, the Spanish state has grappled with the dilemma that Basque terrorism has posed to Spanish unity. This paper argues that while September 11, 2001 might have delivered Spanish attention to the global field of terror, the March 11, 2004 attacks effectively returned the frontline to the Castilian heartland.

Yet the hegemonic mediated narrative of the September 11 attacks in the U.S.A. presented a challenge to Europeans. Europeans were told that they

<sup>5</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.23-24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

too were under attack. The narrative script argues that it was not American imperialism under attack – not the Empire – but rather freedom itself. Europeans, just like Americans, were free people – democratic and heirs of the enlightenment tradition. Europeans were told that they were going to be next because they too represented modernity, rationalism and freedom. The ‘enlightened states’ are under attack by *those* against modernity and *those* who cling to outdated traditions that no longer belong in a globalised and civilised world. Europeans underestimated, however, the extent of the shock that the September 11 attacks had on the U.S. administration. After September 11, however, most European states “wanted a well-defined policy against Al Qaeda rather than on a range of real or potential state sponsors of terrorism”.<sup>9</sup> Europeans were worried about being dragged into a wider, protracted conflict. Despite the oft-repeated claims by politicians and conservative commentators from both sides of the Atlantic that all Western states are under attack because of their ‘values,’ the only two serious bombings on Western targets since 9/11 have occurred in Spain and the United Kingdom, the two states that were the U.S.A.’s most fervent European supporters in the invasion of Iraq. According to many political commentators, the Madrid and London attacks have made Europe the frontline on the ‘war on terror’ Despite, or because of, the complexity of the post 9/11 era, the effects of these attacks are experienced differentially. In the UK, the London attacks prompted Prime Minister Tony Blair to rhetorically and militarily dismantle ‘Londonistan.’ Yet, in Spain, the new Socialist Prime Minister José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero’s has called for an ‘Alliance of Civilizations’. A proposal to fight ‘hostile perceptions’ is very different from the US led global war on terror that seeks to fight ‘terrorism’ with a military response. This article seeks to understand the Spanish response in terms of the constraints of its historical narratives.

## NARRATIVES OF TERROR, NARRATIVES OF STATE

In the early twenty-first century few if any terms are as loaded with ideological and symbolic meaning, and yet difficult to pin down, as ‘terrorism.’ The concept of a ‘war on terror’ is similarly elusive. The ‘war on terror’ cannot (and should not) be reduced to a response to one ‘terrorist attack,’ even one of the magnitude of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the

<sup>9</sup> Anouar Boukhars and Steve. A. Yetiv, ‘9/11 and the Growing Euro-American chasm over the Middle East’, *European Security*, Vol.12, No.1, 2003, p.67.

United States. Instead, the ‘war on terror’ as a concept should be more fluid and radical in its presumptions. This article posits that the best way to understand the concept of the ‘war on terror’ is to conceptualise it as a (meta)narrative. This approach will highlight that the ‘war on terror’, like any (meta)narrative, is unstable and articulated and contested in interesting and diverse ways throughout different parts of the world.

According to M. C. Lemon, narrative as a mode of theory is inherently “messy” for philosophical or scientific purposes.<sup>10</sup> This is because narrative lacks the coherence of philosophy because its practitioners rarely examine their own premises, and it also lacks science’s ‘laws’ of causality, determinateness and inevitability. Narrative is not a specific theory, but a set of assumptions about how people behave and how the world works.<sup>11</sup> Narrative is received through tradition and experience but need not necessarily embody a textual form. The importance of narratives lies in the fact that they often deal with those events in the histories of specific cultures that are ‘traumatic’ in nature and the meaning of which is either problematical or overdetermined.<sup>12</sup>

The discipline of historiography, in particular, recognises narrative (and narrativity) to be concepts of social epistemology and social ontology.<sup>13</sup> That is, it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities. According to Margaret Somers, it matters not whether we are social scientists or subjects of historical research but “that we come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by our location (usually unconsciously) in social narratives and networks of relations that are rarely of our own making.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, we are always embedded in social narratives; whether we recognise it or not, our social identities are constituted through narrativity. The debate about the role of narrative in historiography is therefore useful because it

<sup>10</sup> M. C. Lemon, ‘The Structure of Narrative’ in G. Roberts (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader*, London, Routledge, 2003, p.110.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> H. White, ‘The Historical Text as Literary Artefact’ in G. Roberts (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.222.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Somers, ‘Narrative, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-Class Formation’ in G. Roberts (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.362.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.360.

can help establish whether the ‘war on terror’ is intrinsically linked to the construction of knowledge, mythologies and national identities. Historiographical debates also highlight that narrative can be a practically oriented attempt to reshape effective collective understandings of the past.

For the purpose of exploring the ‘war on terror’, I am particularly interested in what Margaret Somers calls metanarrativity.<sup>15</sup> Metanarrativity refers to the ‘master-narratives’ in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history and as social scientists. Our sociological theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of these master-narratives – Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment – even though they usually operate beyond our awareness. These narratives can be the epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs. Communism, the Individual vs. Society. They may also be progressive narratives of teleological unfolding: Marxism and the triumph of class struggle; Liberalism and the triumph of liberty; the Rise of Nationalism; or of Islam.<sup>16</sup> This (meta)narrative category is akin to the postmodern conception of ‘Grand Narratives’ as conceptualised by the French cultural theorist Jean François Lyotard. Indeed, what Hardt and Negri call the ‘regime of biopower’ can also be embodied in the theory of metanarrativity since the global US-led ‘war on terror’ has become one of the epic dramas or ‘grand narratives’ of our time.

The narrative approach will therefore be useful in understanding Hardt and Negri’s conceptualisation of the ‘war on terror’ as a ‘regime of biopower’ that produces and reproduces all aspects of social life. Put simply, war, according to Hardt and Negri (in the form of terrorism and/or counter-terrorism) is becoming the primary organising principle of society in our era, and thus, such a war to create and maintain social order can have no end.<sup>17</sup> One cannot win such a war; rather it has to be won again every day. Rather cynically, Hardt and Negri add, “war has thus become virtually indistinguishable from police activity.”<sup>18</sup> But what I want to highlight here is that the social and political ramifications of ‘total war’ or the ‘regime of biopower’ can only be understood in narrative form. Theoretical knowledge cannot adequately explain the process whereby the unending nature of the war against terrorism becomes a permanent social relation. Narrativism, on

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.362.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, p.14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the other hand, is better positioned to explore which public discourses are socially predominant based on the existing distribution of power, and which discourses are politically contested. Moreover, a narrative approach will indicate whether ‘perpetual’ or ‘total’ war is a global as well as a pan-European phenomenon, or simply a narrative that works and fits in some states better than others. That is, does the US-sponsored ‘war on terror’ narrative work in Spain, a country whose former government supported the invasion of Iraq and consequently suffered the worst terrorist attacks on European soil since the Second World War?

This question leads to a more fundamental question. To what extent is the state itself ultimately just another narrative, a fiction imagined and imbued with material foundation? Phillip Abrams takes an alternative approach to traditional state theory and was one of the first theorists to argue that the state is a powerful illusion and should be approached as a ‘Mask’.<sup>19</sup> For Abrams, the true mode of existence of the state is not material but ideological. The state does not exist; for him, what exists is the *belief* that the state exists. According to Abrams, the obvious reason for this misrecognition is the state’s legitimating function of concealing the true, social basis and functions of political power. Although Abrams’s conceptualisation of the state as ‘Mask’ is useful it is also problematic. When Abrams asserts that the state does not exist and assumes that the state is simply an illusion he fails to recognise the state as something with real social existence.<sup>20</sup> The critical task of deconstructing the state can, however, be used to explain and demystify the processes and practices that produce the state’s social existence. Such a deconstruction works to negate the state’s claim to universality and naturalness. Begoña Aretxaga posits that the state materialises not only through rules and bureaucratic routines (Foucault) but also through a world of fantasy so thoroughly narrativized and imbued with affect, fear and desire, that it becomes a plausible reality.<sup>21</sup> Although the state is “an effect of a heterogeneous and contradictory ensemble of discourses and practices,” this does not mean that the state does not have any reality at all, that it is only an illusion.<sup>22</sup> In Spain’s

<sup>19</sup> Begoña Aretxaga, ‘Paramilitary Death Squads in Spain’ in B. Campbell and A. Brenner (eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

Basque Country, in particular, the state is experienced in all its materiality and violence. The state might be an effect but it is not less real because of that.

Thus, if we also conceive the state itself as a narrative – a narrative that drives forward a national agenda – then it clearly intersects with the meta(narrative) of the ‘war on terror’. What is at stake, however, is the extent to which national or state narratives adopt the discursive parameters of the ‘war on terror’. In Jean Baudrillard’s quintessential book *America* he captured the US position in the international system by claiming,

Today, America no longer has the same hegemony, no longer enjoys the same monopoly, but it is, in a sense, uncontested and uncontestable. It used to be a world power; it has now become a model (business, the market, free enterprise, performance) – and a universal one – even reaching as far as China. The international style is now American.<sup>23</sup>

The implication is that geo-political hegemony in the world is rather an unnecessary abstraction. ‘America’ has claim to something greater – it is the world model; it sets the trends, the agenda, and the ‘global narrative’ if you will. In contrast, the schemata of narrative concurrences outlined above posits that in the post 9/11 era even this monopoly of narrative power is no longer incontestable. ‘America’ might promote a (meta)narrative of ‘total’ war against ‘terrorism’ but it is by no means universal.

That is not to suggest that a US-led global ‘war on terror’ does not have far-reaching implications. Rather, it opens the possibility of determining the narrative implications of the ‘war on terror’ as operating in multiple locations around the world, always with distinct outcomes and processes. Hence, according to Suman Gupta in *The Replication of Violence*:

The spectre of ‘international terrorism’, which in its very turn of phrase conjures a threat that cannot be easily managed, that seeps across boundaries and cannot be restrained and may threaten the world eventually, has been anticipated with a sort of horrified thrill by the West as a contamination that may appear (much to

<sup>23</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1988), p.116.

the glee of xenophobes and conservatives) from *outside* – from ultra-left groups, from Islamic fundamentalist groups – but still reassuringly *outside*.<sup>24</sup>

More interestingly, Gupta continues:

That “international terrorist” acts have now *actually materialised with such all-too-tangible effect within the Western context* is a substantial shock: ‘international terrorism’ appears to have suddenly become more than a xenophobe’s or conservative’s nightmare or a media fad or a Hollywood fantasy, it appears to have become a serious and urgent and in some sense *within-our-zone* affair crying out for a renewed academic assessment and a concerted political effort. ... it is not simply the case that that which seemed somewhat far-fetched and fantastical before has proved to be quite real and tangible; instead the realm of the real and tangible has itself become indistinguishable from the fantastical and far-fetched. Too many scare-mongering theories and Hollywood fantasies that were reassuringly distant have simply moved in close, become real, without wholly losing the almost-virtual veneer.<sup>25</sup>

The symmetry between large scale international terrorist attacks and Hollywood has been readily seized upon by many theorists highlighting the hyperreality of the real and – impossible to imagine – terrorist attack. Gupta highlights what has usually been a fundamental dichotomy: the unassailable division between *inside* and *outside*, as if a foreign external virus has entered *within-our-zone* defeating what was once a full-proof immune system. The ‘terrorist’ attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 demonstrate the precariousness of the inside/outside division. In both cases, the “terrorists” were locals, and in the London case, even British citizens. Yet, there are also other fundamentals that must, for Gupta, be taken into account. To what extent has the realm of the real and the tangible become indistinguishable from the fantastical and the far-fetched? Perhaps the answer to this question cannot be objectively demonstrated and perhaps it is a question that applies differently in disparate contexts. It begs attention that, because the Spanish state has a long history of internal violence and terrorism, violence is not necessarily narrativised as *fantastical*. On the contrary, historical narratives of the Spanish nation(s)/state have a long

<sup>24</sup> Suman Gupta, *The Replication of Violence: Thoughts on International Terrorism after September 11th 2001* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p.5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

trajectory of coming to grips with random violent attacks even if prior acts of terrorism in Europe, such as by ETA in Spain and the IRA in Britain (the two groups responsible for the most amount of deaths in Europe in the past 25 years), were clearly linked to nationalist or politically oriented goals. The random nature of the Madrid and London attacks, and the apparent lack of meaning behind the ‘message’ of these attacks, was indeed a challenge to the democratic governments of those states and the broader EU. Yet compared to the USA, European reaction to this ‘new’ type of terrorism is still contained in what are, in comparison, rather benign national scripts: terrorism is perceived as a challenge that must be overcome rationally by combining intelligence, police operations, and negotiation. As the next section argues, the Spanish experience indicates that although a global ‘war on terror’ narrative obviously impacts on state narratives, these narratives are by no means absolute and (over)determined. Rather, these narratives are in many disparate ways contested by various constituencies in Spain, with the overriding driving force being domestic or internal forces, usually linked to historical narratives. In sum, the narrative of the ‘war on terror’ does not have the same impact in Spain as it does elsewhere, because its population has been on the receiving end of various forms of violence for decades, if not centuries.

## HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES, MYTHOLOGICAL DISCONTINUITIES

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault highlighted that the idea of discontinuity has assumed a major role in the historical disciplines.<sup>26</sup> According to Foucault, “for history in its classical form, the discontinuous was both the given and the unthinkable: the raw material of history, which presented itself in the form of dispersed events – decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries; the material which, through analysis, had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events”.<sup>27</sup> Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation and it was therefore the historian’s task to remove the discontinuous from history. According to Foucault, it has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis. Foucault was thus rather prescient in the early 1970s when he stated that “The cry goes up that one is murdering history whenever, in a

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

historical analysis – and especially if it is concerned with thought, ideas, or knowledge – one is seen to be using in too obvious a way the categories of discontinuity and difference, the notions of threshold, rupture and transformation, the description of series and limits.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Foucault was referring specifically to the disciplines of ideas (the history of science, the history of knowledge etc.), disciplines that were more or less self-contained in an academic context. But in the early twenty-first century the role of discontinuity in history is more controversial than ever in some states, if only because the debate has extended beyond the academic frontier and into popular mass-mediated narratives that tell the story of the ‘nation’ to the ‘masses.’ This is especially true within the Spanish state where the battle lines between conservative and progressive views of history have been drawn exactly as Foucault foretold. On the one side, the Spanish left and regional nationalists are attempting to highlight the discontinuities of historical narratives that have until recently remained unchallenged. On the other side, conservatives and the Spanish right argue in a sense that the left is ‘murdering’ history by challenging long-standing historical narratives and the pacts of compromise that were enacted during Spain’s transition to democracy.

The idea that political problems are best settled by violence is a commonplace of Spanish history and literature. Paul Preston, the most notable historian on modern Spain, highlights that historical writing by Spanish émigrés after the Civil War, but also in Spain itself since the death of Franco, has been an all-consuming quest for an explanation for the country’s plethora of civil wars.<sup>29</sup> According to Preston, “the consequent cultural/national character interpretations provided implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, teleological versions of Spain’s history, characterising the national past in terms of a propensity to pitiless blood-lust and savage discord.”<sup>30</sup> A desire to reconcile national identity, even humanity, with the excesses of civil war and violence is not unique to Spain. What is unique, however, is that since Spain was denied liberation in 1945, “the question of coming to terms with the past has been rendered difficult by the fact that ‘the past’ continued for nearly forty years after the

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge, Fascism and the military in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

war’s conclusion and indeed beyond.”<sup>31</sup> Preston is referring here to the Franco dictatorship that promoted a one-sided view of history and that stumbled into the 1970s like a parochial fragment of the past when the rest of Western Europe had left the politics of the 1930s in the dustbins of history.

Indeed, Spain is not the only state with a traumatic history; much of Europe has a long historical trajectory of military dictatorships, internal and external wars and violent uprisings. Nor can one argue that Spain is unique in Europe with the presence of a violent ‘separatist’ struggle or a number of ideological ‘terrorist’ groups from both the left and the right. However, the particular configurations of terror and terrorism within its recent history, positions Spain as a clear instance where the effectiveness of the global ‘war on terror’ as a narrative of ‘total’ or ‘perpetual’ war is contested, if not outright rejected. In a modern country, where the violent materiality of the state is still very much a haunting presence (albeit through historical narratives), the ‘war on terror’ cannot function as a global inter-civilisational battle. Instead, the fight against ‘terrorism’ is very much a localised event that intersects not only with historical narratives but also with domestic politics that often do not coincide with the hegemonic ‘global’ narratives that usually emanate from the U.S.A.

This article does not have the scope to reiterate the complex nature of Spanish modern history (particularly the Franco dictatorship), nor the precarious transition to dictatorship that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Instead, by examining two recent events in contemporary Spain: the March 11, 2004 attacks in Madrid; and ETA’s declaration of a permanent ceasefire on March 22, 2006 its remit is to argue that these two events contest Hardt and Negri’s conceptualisation of ‘perpetual’ or ‘total war’.

#### **(a) March 11, 2004**

For Europeans, the post-September 11 era is a further layer on top of a multitude of conflicting and ideological confrontations. After September 11, Europe stood side by side with the US not simply because of western solidarity but, as Gupta argues, because “a “war against international terrorism’ could be coherently understood as a war against an abstraction –

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.33.

one that had manifested itself in the happening world *as an abstraction* with such frightening consequences – that no political state could officially have any objection to fighting.”<sup>32</sup> For Spain, however, the participation in the ‘war on terror’ became problematic on March 11, 2004, when ten bombs blew up in and around Madrid’s Atocha station, killing 191 people and wounding another 1500. The March 11 attacks were executed by thirteen Islamic ‘terrorists’, 911 days after September 9, 2001, who imitated the *modus operandi* of the 9/11 terrorists (four trains, four planes).<sup>33</sup> The attack occurred three days before the March 14 national election when it was generally believed that José María Aznar would lead the Popular Party (PP) into its third term in office. In a narrative of events that will go down in popular Spanish history as an iconic event in the ‘nation’s’ history, the PP promptly blamed the attack on the Basque Separatist group ETA despite evidence indicating that it was an Islamist group that had most likely perpetrated the attack in the context of the wider global war on terror. Three days later, in a climate of civil division and suspicion, the people unexpectedly ejected the government from power and elected the Socialists (PSOE) under the leadership of José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero’s Socialist Party. The PSOE, in turn, immediately withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq and in the process was perceived by conservative political commentators around the world, to have sabotaged its relations with the world’s sole superpower the United States.

In *Politics out of History*, Wendy Brown argues that “when constitutive cultural and political narratives are disturbed and undermined, insecurity, anxiety and hopelessness washes across the political landscape.”<sup>34</sup> This is the precise scenario that the conservative Popular Party (PP) government found itself in the three days between the March 11 attack and the March 14 national election in 2004. Any political party (especially when in campaign mode) communicates to the electorate a narrative that it hopes will convince the people to elect it into office. The effectiveness of this narrative is naturally challenged during times of national crisis. Yet it is conventional wisdom that people usually give their governments certain leeway during times of crisis or terror. The March 11 attacks need not have spelled political disaster for Aznar and the PP and it could be argued that

<sup>32</sup> Suman Gupta, *The Replication of Violence*, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> Enrique Gil Calvo, *11/14-M: El Cambio Trágico de la Masacre al Vuelco Electoral* (Madrid: Adhara Editorial, 2005), p.9.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy Brown, *Politics out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.5.

the attacks could have presented the incumbent government with an opportunity to solidify its electoral position. So why did the PP’s ‘ETA blame narrative’ backfire?

Three days before the election, the PP government understandably did not want to admit that the Madrid attack had anything to do with the wider ‘war on terror’. Spain’s participation in the war in Iraq was controversial enough, but the government was loath to admit the possibility that somehow Spain was being punished for it. After all, the message that the PP promoted to the Spanish people was that the government was reclaiming Spain’s past ‘glory’ by aligning itself with the world’s superpower the U.S.A. and distancing itself from the European Union. Although much of the international community (and indeed some of the Spanish media as well) perceived the March 2004 elections as an act of cowardice in the face of the global war on terrorism, there was a general feeling in Spain that the election demonstrated the ‘maturity’ of the Spanish people that rejected the ‘manipulation’ of the event by the government. Paddy Woodworth also argues that the Spanish electorate responded quickly to a fast-changing and complex crisis.<sup>35</sup> Spanish voters did not vote out of fear; Spanish democracy has been intimidated for more than 30 years by bombings and shootings. Moreover, for Woodworth, the maturity of Spanish democracy was demonstrated by the Spanish police and intelligence services which refused to be misled by the government and quickly and professionally tracked down the most likely culprits.<sup>36</sup> But interestingly, it is the Spanish conservatives who offer more insight into those three days and how the attacks intersected with historically contested narratives.

In *Terrorismo y democracia tras el 11-M*, Edurne Uriarte, a conservative columnist for the right-wing Spanish daily *ABC* exemplifies quite well the Spanish right’s perception of the March 11 attacks and the subsequent PP defeat.<sup>37</sup> Uriarte argues that an emotional discourse about solidarity and the values and unity of the Spanish people against terrorism permeates the official narratives of terror in Spain and the strength of these popular narratives is such that neither politicians, the media, nor intellectuals dare to question them. According to Uriarte, the March 12 demonstrations

<sup>35</sup> Paddy Woodworth, ‘Spain Changes Course: Aznar’s Legacy, Zapatero’s Prospects’, *World Policy Journal*, Vol.21, No.2, 2004, pp.7-26.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p.22.

<sup>37</sup> Edurne Uriarte, *Terrorismo y Democracia Tras el 11-M* (Madrid: Espasa e Hoy, 2004).

throughout Spanish cities that were meant to condemn the attack; instead they became a condemnation of the government which was considered responsible for the attacks. Although the protesters claim that the people only denounced the manipulation of information by the government in the hours following the attack, Uriarte does not understand why the people wanted to know the identity of the killers and not more information about the act itself.<sup>38</sup> For the first time in the Spanish history of terrorism, Uriarte claims, the central point was not the crime itself or its perpetrators but the role of the government naming the identity of the perpetrators immediately after the attack. Thus, according to Uriarte, the context of panic in the people caused this 'obsession' with the 'truth' – as if knowing the identity of the perpetrators would alleviate momentarily the reality of the massacre.<sup>39</sup> For Uriarte, when fear wins, the guilty party is no longer the aggressor but those who were meant to protect us – the government.<sup>40</sup> After the attacks, the people wanted to return to a life of tranquility and security. Thus, they believed that the only way to achieve this would be to eliminate the factors that had provoked Al Qaeda – the presence of Spanish troops in Iraq. She argues that this reaction is a consequence of the role of the phantom of dictatorship that still dominates Spanish politics. Uriarte perceives the phantom of dictatorship as Spain's main weakness, leading Spaniards to want to stay on the margins of the 'war on terror'. According to Uriarte, the Spanish left abused this 'weakness' during the 2004 general elections by accusing the PP of being the 'inheritors' of Francoism.

In this instance, the global 'war on terror' narrative failed to galvanise and unite the Spanish electorate after the Madrid attacks. Such political unity in the face of terror was readily apparent in the U.S.A. after the September 11 attacks, in Australia after the Bali bombings and to a great extent in the United Kingdom after the London attacks. Yet, in Spain, the historical divisions between left and right, republican and nationalist, centre and periphery, re-emerged to split the Spanish electorate. To what extent the former Spanish conservative government was punished because it 'manipulated' the truth is debatable. However, what the March 11 attacks indicate is that the former Spanish government perceived a threat to its electoral chances if the perpetrators of the March 11 attacks were Islamists and thus argued against all evidence that the domestic terrorist group ETA

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.39.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.17.

had likely been the perpetrators. Moreover, the Spanish electorate saw the danger in participating in a US-led 'war on terror' that operates in a state of 'total' or 'perpetual' war and voted in the Socialist Party which had promised to remove Spanish troops from Iraq and re-align itself firmly with the 'peaceful' EU. Total war is a hard sell to an electorate who is already struggling to negotiate historical narratives and internal schisms and ruptures. The global 'war on terror' (meta)narrative cannot compete with or override domestic politics still coming to terms with the state's multiple histories.

### (b) ETA and the Politics of Ceasefire

For over forty years, the conflict between the Spanish government and the Basque separatist group ETA has, mostly, dominated the political mass-mediated narratives of the Spanish state. Although the significance of ETA has recently been diminished due to successful police operations coordinated by Spanish and French authorities, it was the September 11, 2001 'terrorist' attacks in the United States and the March 11, 2004 attacks in Madrid that ultimately made ETA's strategy of targeted assassinations and attacks untenable. On March 22, 2006 ETA unilaterally announced a 'permanent' ceasefire, paving the way for negotiations with the Spanish government. This so-called 'peace process' is currently underway but has already been politicised by various constituencies in Spain, each politically invested in the outcome of this process. The Spanish mass-media is already pointing to a re-awakening of *las dos Españas* (conservative and liberal Spains) that led to civil war and culminated in the Franco dictatorship. The fact that political and media elites perceive this process in such historically contested terms is evidence that the ETA peace process is not just about the dissolution of a 'terrorist' group, but rather the dissolution of a spectral enemy that encompasses many of the historical conflicts within the Spanish state. For this reason, ETA's ceasefire announcement has pitted two 'Spains' against each other in a battle not for peace, but for a re-imagining of the (Spanish) 'nation.' According to Basque novelist Bernado Atxaga writing in *The New York Times*:

Now, after the cease-fire, no satellite can send us a map of the future, but everyone wants to be a weatherman or a prophet. Some lovers of metaphor speak of Pandora's Box and foresee great hatreds let loose. Others believe that pessimism is a sign of intelligence, and they recommend taking ETA's

communiqué with many grains of salt. At the opposite extreme are those who call for a reconciliation, right this minute, between the country's two sensibilities...<sup>41</sup>

On the one side, the Socialist government, together with regional nationalists, and the outlawed Batasuna party (the alleged political front of ETA), view the ETA peace process as a stepping-stone to righting historical wrongs and reforming Spain's Statute of Autonomies. Of course, the Socialist government is treading carefully and is cautious in its public statements and noncommittal about any promises that it might or may have already made to ETA. But for the macho Spanish right (and perhaps many macho Socialist old-timers), this is mushy nonsense because a non-state 'terrorist' group can never be trusted. But Prime Minister Zapatero's conciliatory message has struck a chord with the electorate, which has grown tired of the right's confrontational politics (if the 2004 election result three days after the March 11 attacks is any indication). His ability to capitalize on ETA's demise could guarantee Zapatero a second term in office as well as his place in history and this prospect terrifies the Spanish right. There would be a satisfying symmetry, however, if a prime minister who was elected after a huge terrorist outrage wrongly blamed on ETA, secured re-election based on dismantling ETA. Zapatero's socialists absorbed the lesson that the Basque conflict, like most terrorist wars, is political, not just military, and requires a political solution.

On the other side, the conservative Popular Party [PP], victims of ETA terrorism, and a minority of Spanish citizens (at least for the moment) have increasingly used Francoist vitriol in its oft-repeated mantra that Spain must not pay a "political price" to the "terrorists," even for a peace agreement. Since the Socialists took office in April 2004, the Popular Party has had harsh words for Zapatero's approach to the entire Basque question, accusing him of surrendering to ETA. For two years, the PP and its media supporters (particularly the newspaper *El Mundo*) have persisted in promoting the most bizarre conspiracy theories about the March 11 bombings, suggesting that an unholy alliance of sectors of the PSOE, the police, Islamists and ETA members plotted to eject the conservatives from power. The opposition leader Rajoy has accused Zapatero of "betraying the dead." The split between the PP and the PSOE has shattered the bipartisanship, which had previously characterised Spain's counter-terrorism policy with an

<sup>41</sup> Bernado Atxaga, 'The Basque Spring' in *The New York Times*, March 29, 2006, p.23.

implacable hostility to any Basque peace process. This is exemplified by the PP's refusal to join any political talks involving ETA's political wing, Batasuna, which is currently illegal.

And what is the political price? Subsequent ETA communiqués have highlighted that ETA refuses to disarm until independence for the Basque Country is achieved (including the French Basque provinces and Navarre). The devil, of course, will be in the detail, in this case the detail of the definitions. Is it, for example, a political act to grant early release to terrorist prisoners? PP statements still maintain that any concessions to the prisoners would be a betrayal of ETA's victims, and of democracy itself. Is the granting of more autonomy to the Basque Country a political concession, when Catalonia, another Spanish 'nation' has just won more autonomy? Is it a political concession to relocate Basque prisoners back to the Basque Country even if it has been demanded by groups such as Amnesty International to comply with international human rights protocols?

A common view of the Spanish right is that the 'terrorists' should never be able to achieve their objectives just because they stopped killing. It would be a way of winning, to receive a prize for the cessation of violence without anybody demanding responsibility for their crimes. It would not be just or democratic. The ends cannot justify the means. How can you teach a child that violence is not an acceptable means to reach your objectives, if they see ETA achieve theirs? The Basque struggle must only be continued within existing democratic institutions.

The rhetoric of not paying a political price at any costs is a call to maintain the status quo because by insisting that the Spanish government not pay a political price it undermines any legitimate Basque national claims by Basque moderates. It has been widely reported by journalists from the Spanish left that the PP would prefer some degree of Basque violence rather than negotiating increased autonomy for the Basque Country. For the Spanish right, ETA's presence has meant that the greater problem of Basque independence has never needed to be addressed. ETA has served as a kind of internal spectral enemy that must be 'contained.' To an extent, this position is an anachronism, but it is a powerful one in a country that has worked so effectively to erase violence from its popular narratives. The PP position recognises that the disbandment of ETA ultimately means that

the Spanish state will have to renegotiate the historical pacts of compromise agreed after Franco's death and Spain's transition to democracy, pacts that have served to placate Spanish conservatives and that have, up till now, helped maintain a remarkable level of stability in a country once torn by a traumatic history.

The context of the massive differences between the left and the right in regards to the 'peace process' with ETA might be understandable. This is not just about the PP breaking all political ties with the government on the grounds that it is betraying the 'dead' by talking to ETA, and insisting that Batasuna remain illegal. After all, much of this can be attributed to the PP attempting to gain electoral leverage on these issues. But 60 years after the end of the Civil War, *las dos Españas* is still amply evident in much of Spanish political discourse, exacerbated by what an ETA peace process might mean for the future of the Spanish state. The political narratives circulating around these issues have been interpreted in the context of the long lasting theory of the two Spains. In *El País*, Félix de Azúa wrote that, "Slowly, and with understandable caution, we have been moving back toward the eternal order of things in this country, the intransigent division between good and bad, red and blue, Christians and Moors."<sup>42</sup> Even victims of terrorism cannot agree. The victims of ETA violence identify with the conservatives and their zero tolerance approach, whilst the victims of the March 11 attacks in Madrid identify with the Socialist government and blame the PP's pro-American foreign policy for the attacks. Recently one of Spain's most prominent victims of terrorism, Maite Pagazaurtundua said that we are back in the two Spains spoken of by the poet Antonio Machado: "One of them is supposed to freeze your heart, but now it seems that both are likely to do so."<sup>43</sup>

ETA's declaration of a permanent ceasefire has once again shifted the domestic agenda within Spanish borders. Indeed, the Spanish right dictum of *not paying any political price* obviously aligns itself quite neatly with a Hardt and Negrian conceptualization of 'perpetual' war. To a certain degree the narrative of 'perpetual' war is mobilised against ETA, but still this narrative in Spain is not all consuming since domestic practicalities ensure that 'perpetual' war can never interrupt more fundamental historical

<sup>42</sup> Félix de Azúa, 'Whose side are you on?' in *El País (English Edition)*, 11 March, 2006, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

narratives. Dialogue or peace negotiations without political concessions will obviously be doomed to failure and the cycle of violence will once again be kick started. On the other hand, however, there is overwhelming support for peace in Spain, not just from the Socialist government, but from many constituencies in Spain who want to see the cycle of violence end, even if some political concessions are granted to ETA. The current peace process is facing immense obstacles but the dominant narrative in Spain is clear: the violence must end; not just the violence from rogue 'terrorist' groups such as ETA, but also the violence that comes from the state, both domestically and internationally.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of 'total' or 'perpetual' war as articulated by Hardt and Negri as some kind of emerging police state has been immensely influential in the academic press over the last few years. There is a danger, however, of universalising this concept to the detriment of sound analysis. The narrative approach that this article utilised highlights that 'perpetual' war and the 'war on terror' operate discursively and thus are dependent on various national tropes to function successfully. In Spain, these concepts remain problematic due to the specific and traumatic histories of that state, and contest to a certain degree the functionality of total war in a society still in the process of reconciling deeply embedded ideological and regional divisions. There is no doubt that the (meta)narrative of the 'war on terror' is currently dominating global political discourse. Yet, national narratives are still the driving force of domestic politics. The Spanish experience highlights that the tension between (meta)narratives and national narratives potentially destabilise historical pacts of compromise that have served to provide political stability. It also highlights that the (meta)narrative of the 'war on terror' whilst potentially constructing a global police state is to a certain extent a contested narrative, and a narrative that fits better within some states than others

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