



Gregorio  
Ordóñez  
**A POSSIBLE LIFE**

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Fundación  
Gregorio Ordóñez

# A POSSIBLE LIFE

This is the story of a short but intense life. The story of a persevering and honest man. At thirty-six years old, Gregorio Ordóñez was president of Partido Popular in Guipúzcoa, a member of the Basque Parliament, and First Deputy Mayor of San Sebastián. A citizen who chose the most difficult path, but the only path possible for him: challenging nationalism and the terrorist organisation ETA. He became his city's most charismatic and controversial leader, and his example inspired many other local people to break their silence and exercise a freedom previously gagged.

His murder just before the local elections in 1995 shocked many Basques and Spaniards and swept away the rights of thousands of voters in Donostia. This occasion invites us to reflect on life and death in the Basque Country in the 1980s and 1990s. Above all it is a tribute to the memory of Gregorio Ordóñez and the memory of all ETA's victims.

# THE MURDER

"I adored my son, and you killed him. I spent my whole life toiling honestly in tough jobs, working night and day to support my children and to do good to others. And I was happy. You used the fastest and most cowardly procedure of a bullet in the head to kill my son. You have ruined my life."

**Consuelo Fenollar, Gregorio's mother**

"There are some people whose personality, strength, enthusiasm and example leave an indelible mark on your life. Gregorio was one of those people, and that makes his absence eternal."

**María San Gil, witness to the murder and former president of Partido Popular in the Basque Country**

# A POSSIBLE REVOLUTION

The year 1983 signalled eight years since the death of Franco, six since the first free elections, and five since the approval of the Spanish Constitution. The Transition from dictatorship to democracy had won worldwide praise, and a considerable number of countries were to follow suit subsequently. The previous year, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) had won an absolute majority in the local elections, and was exercising power in full institutional normality. The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV-EAJ) was in charge of the Basque Government emerged from the autonomous elections of 1980.

The co-existence of almost forty million Spaniards, however, was marred by a serious anomaly: the acts of a bloody terrorist group, ETA, the hard-line Basque separatists. By 1982 they had killed 392 people, and another 41 would be murdered in 1983. Most victims had been members of the State Security Forces and the Army, or had been singled out as police informants. And some of them were politicians, too: the terrorists had engaged in a manhunt against Basque rightists, especially members of Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD) in the Basque Country, where the party had all but disappeared.

Gregorio Ordóñez put down his political roots with Alianza Popular, a party with no representatives in San Sebastián, and only a dozen or so members. He was twenty-five years old, and he had two major reasons for doing so: "I got into politics for two reasons: because I love my country very much and I had no wish to see it subjected to the yoke of ETA gunmen, and also because I refused to accept the procedures of a verbal gunman, Mr Arzalluz", President of PNV-EAJ from 1980 to 2004.

# A POSSIBLE CITY

When Gregorio Ordóñez arrived at San Sebastián Town Hall, the city was at a crossroads. It had a population of just over 172,000 and a privileged setting in one of Europe's most affluent regions, but visitor statistics were in the doldrums, and there was a dearth of tourist and housing infrastructures. The permanent scourge of terrorism and fear within society were hampering the city's development. "Major events cannot come to anything if a group working against the people of Donostia are burning foreign cars or ruining any initiatives that are established", said Gregorio.

He was the first politician at the Town Hall every morning, he had meetings with dozens of people on a daily basis, and featured on the front pages of local and regional newspapers. "Blue-and-white politics is the best I can do, working for and on behalf of San Sebastián. Our primary loyalty is to the people of the city", he claimed.

His electoral success made him an essential component of the successive municipal councils including other parties. Gregorio was a councillor in the Town Planning Legal Department, the Department of Tourism and the Planning Department; he used all three platforms to promote San Sebastián, push for new housing and argue for the construction of a new bullring, among other infrastructures. A new general town planning scheme was being put together at that time, and it was approved months after Gregorio's murder. All his work encompassed a single goal: to solve the problems of his fellow citizens, and transform San Sebastián into an open, free city.

"Donostia is lucky enough to have a clear geography that explains its urban development, and so when we come back to it this gives us the feeling we are seeing the city we knew. The strength of its geography, and also respect for the by-laws and regulations established - overseen by the authorities down through the years - mean that new architectural work is barely perceived. This explains the continued growth of the city over time. Donostia is still, fortunately, the city it always was. Working there as an architect - something I consider a genuine gift in the course of my professional career - has shown me this is so. Now, however, there is one thing that makes the city quite different from the way it was twenty-five years ago: local people can walk its streets without fear, knowing that co-existence is possible. I would even venture to say that the city is now another city."

**Rafael Moneo, architect, winner of the Pritzker Architecture Prize and of the Principe de Asturias Arts Award**

# A POSSIBLE DISCOURSE

Gregorio Ordóñez's no-nonsense straight talking hit Basque society to rouse a collective conscience. He broke up the official nationalist line by claiming that "it is possible to be Spanish on the basis of our Basque singularity" and that "the Basque concept is not the property of any party". He spoke out against the strategies of Herri Batasuna (HB), the political wing of the terrorist organisation ETA, and urged his fellow citizens to break their silence and help him in his struggle for its "social illegalisation". He felt that expelling ETA from the institutions was a democratic emergency: "When ETA and HB have been banished from the Basque Country, we will retrieve freedom and progress". He was also aware that every vote he wrested from the political formation - which was later made illegal in 2003 - was another step towards life and freedom. "What is important is not that my party wins, but that HB loses."

Gregorio's voice was heard amidst indiscriminate attacks such as Barcelona and Zaragoza in 1987; amidst terrorist campaigns targeting infrastructures such as the nuclear plant at Lemóniz and the Leizarán highway; despite constant pressure in the streets in the form of *kale borroka* rioting. Above personal threats. Gregorio also joined public pacifist initiatives such as wearing a blue ribbon to demand the release of businessman Julio Iglesias Zamora, kidnapped by ETA in 1993 and held captive for 116 days. Gregorio could only have one discourse: the discourse of freedom.

# A POSSIBLE FREEDOM

“I only realised the true value of freedom when I met ordinary people in the Basque Country who risked their lives every day to defend it. I had yearned for freedom when I was very young, in the last dark years of the dictatorship, and thought I knew something about it from my readings of history books. But when I went to the Basque Country and met people there who faced harassment or were willing to take part in acts of rebellion against the blackmailing gunmen and their accomplices, I genuinely realised what it meant not to give in to fear or submission. I’ve never forgotten that example. I don’t want to forget it.”

**Antonio Muñoz Molina, writer, Member of the Spanish Royal Academy and winner of the Príncipe de Asturias Literature Award**

# BACK TO THE ORIGINS

In 1924, Gregorio Ordóñez Millán was only three when he was taken to the Casa de la Beneficencia home in Teruel, and he spent his childhood at the town's seminary. When the Spanish civil war broke out, the teenager was sent to a small village in Valencia, Terrateig. It was there that he met Consuelo Fenollar Bataller. Gregorio emigrated to Caracas in 1952 and five years later, on 5 February 1957, Consuelo sailed from Barcelona to Venezuela. She was thirty-one years old. They were reunited in the Venezuelan capital, they got married and their children were born: Gregorio, in 1958, and Consuelo, in 1959. Concerned with their children's education amid "lax and largely non-religious" customs, the couple decided to return to Spain. In 1965 they settled in San Sebastián, where they co-managed the Tauki laundry in the Uliá district. The business operated at full capacity 365 days a year in the golden age of tourism in San Sebastián, which at the time was one of Spain's safest tourist destinations. The family lived on the premises and all of them worked in the business, even the children after they came home from school.

"I know I have someone guiding my destiny, and that person is my brother. That's how I feel it is. There's a reason for my entire struggle: I owe it to him."

**Consuelo Ordóñez, Gregorio's sister and founder of the Collective of Victims of Terrorism (COVITE), with Cristina Cuesta and Teresa Díaz Bada**

The society glimpsed through this window is not the outcome of any coincidence. Our recent past shows us that, at decisive moments in history, a handful of citizens, often young, rebellious and brave, have acted as the driving force to change the world: they emerged in Tiananmen square, they led the Arab springs, or their lives were lost on the beaches of Normandy during the Second World War to liberate Europe. One day, not so long ago, Guipúzcoa was Spanish democracy's Omaha beach. A small expeditionary group of committed citizens, many of them in their prime, who risked everything because they believed freedom was a cause worth fighting for. Goyo was one of them. His efforts, his drive and his perseverance have staunchly withstood the passage of time, and are back to remind us that we must go on: "Open the window, look outside and see what people want, to live in peace, for work and freedom to flourish in the Basque Country."

- “There are three choices here: to live like a coward, hiding away in the sewers, get out if you have the money, or stay, with all the consequences that entails. That’s what I did.”
- “Negotiating with HB is ridiculous, because HB is behind all the acts of violence, and there’s no difference between someone giving the orders and killing and someone carrying out orders - it’s the same filth.” 1992.
- “Egin aims the gun and ETA fires it”, following the murder of nightclub businessman José Antonio Santamaría. 1993.
- “The only thing we can negotiate with ETA is the colour of the prison bars.” 1993.
- “Choosing HB is choosing death, trash and a bullet in the head.” 1993.
- “If there was no ETA, I probably wouldn’t be in politics.” 1994.
- “Some reinserted prisoners have blood on their hands, blood dripping from their hands. They’re welcomed with a band and music. What they ought to do is keep their shame under wraps.”
- “What people want is normality, to be Spanish on the basis of our singularity as Basques from Donostia, and to live together in peace.”
- “We’re getting more votes because fear is receding.” 1994.
- “The horizon of Basque nationalism is as dark as its past.” 1992.
- “The Basque Country needs social and moral regeneration.” 1994.
- “My mother always told me that you should only be radical about honesty, and I do as she said.”
- “In the Basque Country, the only kind of independence that is of any importance is the independence of individuals, and we’re still a long way from that.”
- “I’m only radical in two things: in the sharp end of the fight against violence, and in honesty.”
- “We can’t waste time with Basque independence.”
- “I’m not the type who goes begging for a position in the party. For me, the ideas I believe in and the way I am are beyond any job perks.”
- “Narrow-minded nationalism makes no sense in the 21st century.”
- “I have no interest in staying in politics, but in serving my fellow citizens through San Sebastián Town Hall.”
- “The motto ‘Always at your service’ means that, instead of politicising issues, we are in favour of working day by day for and to the benefit of everyone, regardless of their affiliation.”
- “We have a clear mandate from society, and that mandate is to change the way in which Basque politics are conducted.”
- “Blue-and-white politics is the best I can do, working for and on behalf of San Sebastián. Our primary loyalty is to the people of the city.”
- Following his murder, Partido Popular won the local elections in San Sebastián.
- “It is my wish that the new mayor will be the mayor of all the people of Donostia, and will work to improve the city, irrespective of political parties.”
- **1983: Councillor, Town Planning Legal Department.**
- **1987: Councillor, Tourism Department.**
- **1990: Member of the Basque Parliament.**
- **1991: First Deputy Mayor of San Sebastián and Town Planning Councillor.**
- **1995: Mayoral candidate in San Sebastián.**

# VIDEOS



Declaración de principios



El tiempo y la ciudad



La muerte temprana