

Mariasun Landa's *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado*: Missing '68 & The Making of a Writer

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Escribir consiste en saber estar sola
[Writing consists of knowing how to be alone] Mariasun Landa¹
Under the shock of fiction, reality becomes problematic, Paul Ricoeur²

The making of a writer with two linguistic dwellings

When Mariasun Landa's, *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado* [*The Party in the Room Next Door*], was published in Spanish in 2007 after a highly prestigious literary trajectory as a children's writer in Basque, the controversy surrounding the switch of language deeply distorted the critical reception of her fictionalised memoirs (based on her experiences as a young woman in Paris in the aftermath of the student protests of May 1968). The *ABC* literary reviewer Juan Ángel Juristo puts some of the hostility of the reception in a nutshell when he claims that he was not looking forward to reading yet another memoir of 68 and that he was not expecting to like Landa's book as much as he did.³ Two factors determined the fact that this excellent book was, to a certain extent, buried: first of all, in the Spanish context, the plethora of publications about 68 just before or during the thirty-year anniversary of this historical event; and second, in the Basque diglossic context, the move from the minority to the hegemonic language. Both those factors confuse

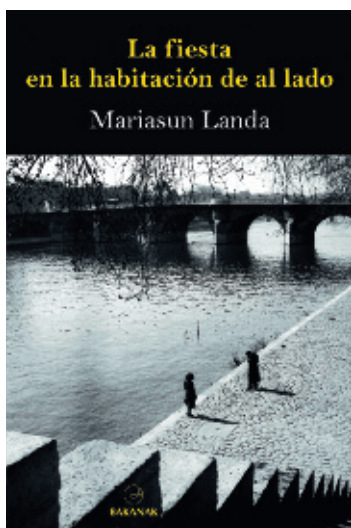
1. SALA, Teresa, "La buena literatura infantil y juvenil no aburre al adulto". In: *Euskonews* at <http://www.euskonews.com/0098zbk/elkar9801es.html>. Note that this is an interview with Mariasun Landa.

2. VALDÉS, Mario ed., *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p.133.

3. JURISTO, Juan Ángel, "Reseña de *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado*". In: *ABC*, 23/3/2008, 24.

matters: Landa's is not a nostalgic gaze but one that focuses on the future writer, and as such the future children's author in Basque is written into this *Bildungsroman* in Spanish. The aspects that have been missed in the reception of this work are those that make it most interesting as an object of study in life-writing, namely the complex correlation between temporality and subjectivity reminiscent of Deleuze's reading of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* as an apprenticeship in writing literature.⁴

We refer to the topic of violence in Basque literature as a key socio-political theme but we should also consider the act of writing as a violent act in the very same sociolinguistic context. Mariasun Landa offers an overview of the problematic engagement with language in the modern Basque context as the "linguistic wound" in her essay 'Five reasons for writing in the language of the neighborhood'.⁵ What does this problematic engagement with the language signify in Landa's particular case during the Franco period? She started writing in Basque after the process of the standardisation of Basque language was under way. However, as a new speaker, she has a very specific profile: her San Sebastian born-and-bred family were all Basque speakers but did not teach her the language when she was a child as a consequence of a break in transmission during the repressive Franco years. She had the very frustrating experience of not being able to speak to her grandfather who was a monolingual Basque speaker and she only learnt Basque after she returned from a period of residence in Paris, where she took a degree in Philosophy. On her return from Paris she decided to immerse herself fully in learning Basque and became a primary school teacher in a predominantly Basque-speaking area in order to become



<https://www.erein.eus/media/portadas/x/portada532>.

fully proficient. In the 1970s, she worked in the emerging Basque school system, *ikastola*,⁶ when textbooks did not really exist, but teachers used photocopies and material was created as they went along. This was the time when Landa first

4. DELEUZE, Gilles, *Proust and Signs*, London: Continuum, 2000.

5. LANDA, Mariasun, 'Five reasons for writing in the language of the neighborhood'. In: OLAZIREGLI, Mari Jose ed., *Writers in between Languages: Minority Literatures in the Global Scene*, Reno: Nevada University Press, 2009, p. 73. NB: All translations from Spanish and Basque are mine, except where indicated.

6. Basque schools started up as private schools with the funding of a collective of parents.

started writing for children and her career as a writer ever since has focused on this readership.

Her work belongs to the genre of critical realism; she approaches taboo, difficult, subjects in her stories for children, often creating very strong female characters. Many books centre around childhood fears; hers is certainly not a romantic vision of childhood, far from it. Her breakthrough story was *Txan Fantasma* (1984), translated into English as *Karmentxu and the Little Ghost*, where she tells the story of the ghost that protects the mentally ill Karmentxu.⁷ In terms of translations and international recognition, her output is as important as that of another writer in the Basque language, Bernardo Atxaga, but because of the 'minor' quality of her chosen genre she does not get as much mainstream recognition in her own cultural context as she does in the Spanish state and abroad –for instance in 2001 she was selected for the White Raven list and in 2008 the association OELPI (Organización Española para el Libro Infantil y Juvenil) [Books for Children and Young Adults Spanish Association] put her name forward for the highly prestigious Andersen Prize.⁸ After this professional trajectory her first piece of fiction for an adult readership was her autobiography and, at this point, she chose the Spanish language. Landa's vision of the connections between her life and language is nuanced, one of mutual hospitality, cannot be read against the grain of identity politics. She uses the metaphor of the two dwellings to explain her complex relationship with both Basque and Spanish:

My attitude, when I translate myself, is similar to that of a person who has two residences: both are his or her property, both are necessary, he or she comes and goes between both of them, and in both of them, there is shelter and pleasure. Because perhaps translating and/or self-translating is somewhat like voluntarily and gladly opening the door of one of the houses to whatever comes from the other. I believe that this is one of many forms that can be adopted by an inspiring dialogue between two languages.⁹

She has translated her own work as a children's writer, thus as a self-translator she has worked with both languages. Nonetheless, her first novel, published simultaneously in both languages by the publishing house Erein, was translated into Basque by someone else: the translator Jesus Mari Lasa Barandiaran. Despite the fact that this was her first foray away from children's writing and into the adult market, there is continuity in literary terms in the fact that memory is a recurrent theme in both types of literary output. Indeed, in the critical study *Intimismoaz haraindi* (1999) [*The Other Side of Intimacy*] Mari Jose Olaziregi focused on all these issues when writing on Landa's work in the context of literature written by women. In this end-of-the-millennium assessment of women writers in the Basque literary scene, she states:

7. LANDA, Mariasun, *Karmentxu and the Little Ghost*, Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996; the original publication *Txan fantasma*, San Sebastian: Elkar, 1984.

8. For an overview of her work including translations and international prizes go to: <http://www.transcript-review.org/en/issue/transcript-20-basque/mariasun-landa->

9. LANDA, "Five Reasons for Writing" p. 73.

Emakume idazle garaikide askorengan bezela, Landaren diskurtso pseudoautobiografikoak memoria du ardatz narratibo. "Gogoratzen duguna besterik ez gara" edo, bestela esanda, "memoriarik ez duena ez da": horiek bezelako ideiek sakon baldintzatu dute memoriaren erabilpena literatura femeninoan. Landaren kasuan etengabea da haurtzaroko oroitzapen eta bizipenak bere lanetan erabiltzea.

[As is the case with many contemporary writers, the narrative axis of Landa's pseudo-autobiographical discourse is memory. 'We are what we remember' or in other words 'what we do not remember does not exist': ideas of this nature have conditioned women's literature. In the case of Landa there is a constant use of childhood memories and experiences.]¹⁰

From literature for children that is constructed around memories, a literature of the 'ni' ('I') and the subject formation of the child, using a very intimate tone in the literature she has written for children she embarks on an autobiography of a young adult with a gaze that focuses on the small scale. There is a break in terms of language but this is not the case in terms of recurrent literary themes. In her fictionalised memoirs she was interested in creating a sense of intimacy with the reader, something that she also seeks in her children's literature. The dimension of intimacy is based on the fact that she was writing about her life and that she lived that period in Spanish and French, wanting to learn Basque but frustrated at not being able to do so. She wanted to tell her story of a nineteen-year old and this was one of the biggest challenges for her, to recreate that voice and gaze in a genuine manner. The narrator had to know as much as she knew then, and the choice of language was intrinsic to the choices she made as a writer in telling her story. It was primarily a literary decision to reflect her inner world during that period.

In the writing of memories there is a balancing act between distance and intimacy: remembering the way we were (forgotten over time), and at the same time establishing an intimate dialogue with the readership. Landa's approach to life-writing is that she uses her life as narrative material, but it still should be read as a novel, that is, following the paradigm set by Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg; a literary text based on reality but one that the reader reads as a novel without asking more or less from text as h/she would from a novel.¹¹ She agrees with this view of literature in the notes she published on the novel.¹² She seeks the identification of the reader through questioning oneself and in that questioning (a search for intimacy between the writer and the reader as in "could this have happened to me?") is included the fact that all lives include events and dreams, narrating not only what happened but also what could have happened.

10. OLAZIREGI, Mari Jose 'Intimismoaz haraindi: emakumezkoek idatzitako euskal literatura', *Oihenart*, nº 17, 1999, p. 37. NB: All translations from Spanish and Basque are mine, except where indicated.

11. O'HEALY, Anne-Marie, *A Woman Writer in Contemporary Italy: Natalia Ginzburg*, Ph.D, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976, p. 116.

12. LANDA, Mariasun, "La fiesta en la habitación de al lado inguruko oharak". In: *Erlea*, nº 6 2012, p. 58

68 as construction and utopia

Landa arrived in Paris in October 1968, so she missed the main events of May, hence the title of this article, moreover it was an event to which she was not invited. She was not equipped to understand it, she spoke a different language, she was, to all intents and purposes, an alien at a time when the relatively short train journey from San Sebastian to Paris could not bridge a serious cultural gap in women's experiences and expectations. She became a writer in order to be able to experience events vicariously, to bridge this gap in life experience: 'Creo que prefería el París soñado [...] [I believe that I preferred the Paris of my dreams].¹³ And in her notes she states that a life is as much lived as dreamt.¹⁴

The Spanish in the novel reflects the struggle of a young Basque speaker of Spanish with literary pretensions. Her style of thinking and writing in Spanish when she was nineteen is part of the psychological portrayal facilitated by life-writing. As Juristo points out, the gaze is what makes this narrative distinct from other memoirs that merely offer testimony, or the experience of being there. It is the gaze combined with an intimacy common in the diaries kept by the very young when entering and making sense of the adult world. However in Landa's case, her writing captures a retrospective gaze moving forward in time rather than the countless memorialist projects of the period, as described by Eduardo Haro Teglen:

El mes de mayo de 1968 se había agotado: parecía, en principio, que para nada. Con los años, sus participantes se fueron integrando a las sociedades que combatían, en los puestos de dirección que se guardaban para los licenciados y doctores, y en las mismas condiciones que sus antecesores. Hoy muchos de ellos recuerdan mayo con una cierta sonrisa de nostalgia. Más bien como una fiesta, como unos alegres días de juventud, como un sarampión. Como una enfermedad infantil. Les es más grato recordar desde sus despachos de presidente-director general, o -se ha dado el caso- de ministros.

[May 68 was over: it seemed in principle that it had happened for nothing. With the passing of the years, the participants had become fully integrated members of the societies they had fought against, in management posts intended for university graduates and PhDs and in the same conditions as their predecessors. Today many of them remember May with a certain nostalgic smile. More like a party, like the happy days of youth, like having German measles. Like a childhood illness. They'd rather remember it from the office of a President-Chief Executive or – should it be the case - of a government Minister.]¹⁵

It is important to focus on what is actually being remembered in Landa's memoirs since she does offer a carefully crafted cultural history mediated via the gaze of her younger self. Although the text plays with the fact that she missed the main event, the very label 'May 68' is a construction to begin with: as Haro Teglen remarks, the movement started in the University of Nanterre in March and the initial graffiti and slogans referred to this month and not May; it was the final revo-

13. LANDA, Mariasun, *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado*, San Sebastian: Erein, 2007, p. 23. All page references will be to this edition.

14. LANDA, Mariasun, "La fiesta en la habitación de al lado inguruko oharra", p. 58.

15. HARO TEGLEN, Eduardo, *El 68: Las revoluciones imaginarias*, Madrid: El País, 1988, p. 114.

lutionary push that coincided with the end of May and June.¹⁶ In Haro Teglen's account 'May 68' is a constructed, mediated, historical moment. Moreover there is no single 'May 68', there are several versions of 68 across Europe, and if the impact of 68 in Spain was different under the Franco dictatorship, even within this general context the Basque case was in itself distinctive. Gurutz Jauregi refers to 'Our May 68' to distinguish it from the other 68s and, according to him, ETA grew out of the extreme contradictions of the Basque Generation of 1968:

Durante la década de los sesenta Euskadi vivió tiempos de grandes protestas sociales que culminaron en una situación cercana a la insurrección civil tanto en el verano de 1968, tras el atentado que costó la vida al comisario Melitón Manzanos, como sobre todo en 1970, con motivo del Proceso de Burgos.

[During the Sixties Euskadi went through times of great social unrest that culminated in a scenario close to civil insurrection during the summer of 1968, after the attack that resulted in the death of the police officer Melitón Manzanos, as was also the case in 1970 sparked off by the Proceso de Burgos.]¹⁷

June '68, that is one month after ETA turns from a non-violent form of resistance against the dictatorship to a violent one, first the death of a policeman and then an ETA activist happens at that time— Txabi Etxebarrieta is killed by the Spanish police on the hunt after Etxebarrieta and his partner kill a Spanish policeman who had stopped them in a routine traffic check. Etxebarrieta's killing in-



16. HARO TEGLEN, *El 68*, p. 85.

17. JAUREGI, Gurutz. 'Nuestro "Mayo del 68"'. In: *Haritzaren negua: 'Ama Lur' y el País Vasco de los años 60*, San Sebastian: Filmoteca Vasca, 1993, p. 8. The Trial in Burgos condemned sixteen members of ETA to death during the Franco regime.

spires Jorge Oteiza's *Pietà* in the Basilica of Arantzazu, and one of the most iconic images of the Basque Sixties is created: Oteiza, a non-believer, created the façade for this project, generating controversy by adding two apostles (it is an open group rather than a closed one, open to those who are going to join in the future) and by creating a *Pietà* where he claimed the body of Christ is that of the fallen ETA activist. The expanded group of apostles –one of the most controversial aspects of Oteiza's project that added to the delayed approval by the Catholic church even though the basilica was opened in 1955– reflects the reading of the political action as a collective one in Badiou and as he points out “‘Collective’ is not a numerical concept here.”¹⁸

This is when religion and politics come together in the foundation of radical nationalism. The mother of Christ in this rendition of the *Pietà* is not a passive figure but is looking up demanding justice from God as described by Joseba Zamalloa.¹⁹ Joseba Zulaika studied in depth the sacramental identification with the Son by ETA activists in his study on Basque violence.²⁰ The central image of the *Pietà* has been read by Juan Arana as the intertwining of religion and nationalism.²¹ In a similar manner, but from an ideologically revisionist perspective, Jon Juaristi sees the killing of Txabi Etxebarrieta as the foundational moment of ETA. Thirty years on, Etxebarrieta's partner –in the only witness account of the action – claimed that the killing of Partines the policeman was totally arbitrary and that Etxebarrieta was high on drugs when it happened; based on this new historical evidence, Juaristi sees in the arbitrariness of this death (unlike the planned nature of the well-known torturer Manzanar's killing) the expression, in his reading, of the ahistorical nature of the armed group, ‘sabemos que esa religión nacionalista surgirá (o resurgirá) en torno al cadáver de Javier Etxebarrieta Ortiz, transustanciado en Txabi Etxebarrieta, proto-mártir’²² [we know that the nationalist religion will surge (or resurge) around the body of Javier Etxebarrieta Ortiz, transubstantiated in Txabi Etxebarrieta, the proto-martyr]. In his essay, *Sacra Némesis*, this killing will be replayed endlessly by Jon Juaristi in an attempt to deny the foundational narrative of the Basque Sixties. Landa's intimate account is written against the grain of both monumental nationalist and anti-nationalist masculine narratives. As the critic Elixabete Ansa mentions only in the late 60s the Marianist ideology of sacrifice and its patriarchal representations will be challenged by a new generation of writers and artists.²³

18. BADIOU, Alain, *Theoretical Writings*, London: Continuum, 2004, p. 153.

19. PELAY OROZCO, Miguel, *Oteiza*, Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1978, pp. 378-82.

20. ZULAIKA, Joseba, *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament*, Reno: University of Nevada Reno, 1988.

21. ARANA, Juan, *Jorge Oteiza: Art as sacrament, avant-garde and magic*, Reno: University of Nevada, PhD dissertation, 2008.

22. JUARISTI, Jon, *Sacra Némesis*, Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1999, p. 108.

23. ANSA, Elixabete, Mayo del 68: Oteiza y la cultura política de los sesenta, Iruñea: Pamiela, 2019, pp. 116-7.

Academics Joseba Zulaika and Juan Arana have followed the philosopher Alain Badiou to offer a reading of Oteiza's thought at this point, particularly the notion of *vérité*. Truth is thus a matter of *conviction* first and foremost, and every subject demonstrates 'what a conviction is capable of, here, now, and forever' (SP, 31). The word truth (*vérité*), as Badiou uses it, connotes something close to the English expressions 'to be true to something' or 'to be faithful to something.' What Badiou calls subjectivization essentially describes the experience of identification with a *cause*, or better, the active experience of conversion or commitment to a cause—a cause with which one can identify oneself without reserve. 'Either you participate, declare the founding event, and draw the consequences, or you remain outside it', he writes. 'This distinction without intermediary or mediation is entirely subjective' (SP, 22). The identity of the subject rests entirely, unconditionally, on this commitment. *I am, because I am (or we are) struggling* (for a new society, a new art, a new scientific order, etc.). It is only in such rare moments of pure engagement, Badiou suggests, that we become all that we can be, that is, that we are carried beyond our normal limits, beyond the range of predictable response.²⁴

Zulaika establishes a well argued comparison between Badiou's approach to St. Paul and Oteiza's towards Loyola reaching the conclusion that:

Although we may reject many of Oteiza's and Loyola's opinions, we admire Oteiza and Loyola because, in the process, they *made* themselves as authors and as people. Such learning of 'the art of living' is practised above all in writing, and in conversion. The only way to imitate Loyola, as Oteiza always knew, was on the basis of self-creation in Oteiza's own style. And in the culture of his own epoch; only an immutable Decision could produce the self-creation of his own Subject.²⁵

The subject of the new collective of apostles, the potential subject of revolutionary change, is not the focus in these nostalgic readings, '68 is the object of nostalgia rather than the making of the subject and that the figure of the male activist's body is mythologised is still seen as the embodiment of the real without taking into account that there is a narrative in history too as Hayden White's approach to historiography shows.²⁶ The boundaries between real and imagined are not as neat as many of the accounts of this period would claim.

The division between the foundational narrative of the sacrifice dramatised by the Pietà and the open collective of apostles can be read against the grain of the concepts of ideology and utopia as outlined by Paul Ricoeur in a series of seminal lectures; "the glace from Utopia" is at work in Landa's memoirs:

24. HALLWARD, Peter, *Badiou: a Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003, xxvi.

25. ZULAIKA, Joseba, 'Loyola/Oteiza: the Subject of the Immutable Decision', unpublished paper delivered as part of the workshop on Oteiza's Radical Thought, 21st February 2009, University of Aberdeen, p. 14.

26. 'What is involved, then, in that finding of the "true story", that discovery of the "real story" within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of "historical records"? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general [...]', WHITE, Hayden, *The Content of the Form*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1987, p. 4.

My presupposition at this more general level, which I shall develop further in the lectures on utopia, is that imagination works in two different ways. On the one hand, imagination may function to preserve an order. In this case the function of the imagination is to stage a process of identification that mirrors the order. Imagination has the appearance here of a picture. On the other hand, though, imagination may have a disruptive function; it may work as a breakthrough. Its image in this case is productive, an imagining of something else, the elsewhere. In each of its three roles, ideology represents the first kind of imagination; it has a function of preservation, of conservation. Utopia, in contrast, represents the second kind of imagination; it is always the glance from nowhere.²⁷

The autobiographical pact and fiction

There is a fidelity to the event in Landa's memoir that avoids the commodification of 1968 as an object by focusing on the process: the event, the subject. What she learned informs her own teaching process, she still speaks about the potentiality of 68, as we can see in the 2018 round table celebrated in San Sebastian.²⁸ Moreover by using her own life as literary material she ended up writing a *Bildungsroman* than the genre of autofiction currently predominant in Spanish Peninsular literature. Hers follows the structure of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact. Lejeune has claimed that he summarises the autobiographical pact in his university lectures using the formula that the writer of autobiographies does not necessarily tell the truth but tells that he is telling the truth; the pact between writer and reader is based on this last statement and it is an act of speech.²⁹ In this regard Landa has claimed to be interested in the intimacy and trust created by the autobiographical pact and to have no interest in autofiction as a genre, as she claims in her notes on the novel.³⁰ Manuel Alberca's words are useful here:

El autor de autoficciones no se conforma solo con contar la vida que ha vivido, sino en imaginar una de las muchas vidas posibles que le podría haber tocado en suerte vivir. De manera que el escritor de autoficciones no trata sólo de narrar lo que fue sino también lo que pudo haber sido. Esto le permite vivir, en los márgenes de la escritura, vidas distintas a la suya.

[The writer of autofiction is not happy simply narrating what he has lived but imagining one of the many lives that he could have had the chance to live. In this way, the writer of autofiction narrates not only what was, but also what could have been. This allows him, in the margins of writing, to live different lives from his own.]³¹

27. RICOEUR, Paul, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 265-66.

28. SAN TELMO MUSEUM, Round table about Feminism and May 68 with Pilar Folguera, Mariasun, Landa, 10th March 2018, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81acWZRZcVU>.

29. LEJEUNE, Philippe. *Pour l'autobiographie*, Paris: Seuil, 1998, p. 234.

30. LANDA, Mariasun, "La fiesta en la habitación de al lado inguruko oharrak", In: *Erlea*, nº6, 2012, pp. 56-58.

31. ALBERCA, Manuel, *El pacto ambiguo: de la novela autobiográfica a la autoficción*, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2007, p. 33.

Landa's is a fictional autobiography, and she makes it very clear that it is not autofiction. Instead she is exploring the vicarious nature of writing literature by returning to her aesthetic and political education in Paris: the making of the writer in the text comes from her attempts to live other lives through literature. I would take the argument a step further: are not Alberca's words on autofiction another way of describing the narrative imagination?

The autobiographical pact is based on truth-telling: the writer will tell the reader his or her truth. However Landa's memoir offers an alternative to the grand narratives based on religion and politics by following an autobiographical pact, but one that is not teleological. She creates a narrative in which her protagonist has to choose between Lucas, a Spanish political activist and romantic figure, and José Javier, a Basque seminarist and a more 'familiar' option. Her narrative reflects a world of uncertainties in terms of identity-formation, albeit based on the pact of truth-telling between writer and reader.

Deleuze refers to the signs constituting different worlds (wordly signs, signs of love, material signs and signs of art).³² The person in love tries obsessively to identify the 'signs of love'. Therefore, because she is part of a love triangle, Landa's heroine is always deciphering these signs and once she understands them, she enters the world of art, the only one, according to Deleuze, that can transform all the others. Even though the signs of love are important, Landa also offers a historically accurate account of the class and ethnic divides among the Spanish exile community, in other words the 'wordly signs'. In contrast, many other accounts of the Basque 68 offer anachronistic accounts, such as that highlighted in Insausti's contextualisation of the seminal documentary of this period, *Ama-Lur* (1968):

La misma ETA había asimilado las reivindicaciones obreras y las teorías marxistas, superando así el dilema planteado por la utilización con fines colonizadores de los trabajadores inmigrantes llegados del sur español. El debate se había desplazado, por tanto, a la diferenciación entre el nacionalismo burgués y el nacionalismo de izquierdas, decantándose del lado más progresista en el diseño sociocultural de un país independiente [...].³³ [ETA itself had taken up workers' claims and Marxist theories, thus bypassing the dilemma caused by the employment (with colonising aims) of immigrants from Southern Spain. Therefore the debate had switched to making a distinction between bourgeois nationalism and left-wing nationalism, prioritising the most progressive faction in the sociocultural design of an independent country].

However, this process started much later, not in the Sixties. As the historian Carrie Hamilton has shown, many ETA women activists only came into contact with working-class women in prison, a crucial space for their political education in the Seventies and Eighties.³⁴ Landa does not offer a decontextualised reading of '68, and her experiences as a foreigner in Paris outline the class differences.

32. DELEUZE, *Proust and Signs*, pp. 3-10.

33. INSAUSTI, Mikel, *Ama Lur* (1968), Iruñea: Ekhe, 2007, p. 17.

34. HAMILTON, *Carrie Women and ETA*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

This intimate *Bildungsroman* forms the basis of the creation of a literary voice that challenges the views on the genre of autobiography covered by Georges Gusdorf in 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography'³⁵ whereby the genre is a reflection of Western man and as genre it is determined and shaped by cultural location and gender.³⁶ In *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado* Landa is creating the alternative feminine room, a voice that will speak about nation and language in a different manner, the aporia is that she writes her journey as the need to learn Spanish and become a Basque subject in Spanish –just as she writes about May 1968– pointing at the impossibility of writing the event. At the core of the text is this missed event than can be only be accessed vicariously. The short train distance from San Sebastian to Paris was not the same at the time in sociocultural terms: it was the abrupt change from a tightly-controlled Francoist Catholic society to a world where women's roles were very different. One of the epigraphs in the book refers to Virginia Woolf's 'A room of one's own' that expresses an alternative subjectivity to Gusdorf's phallogocentric definition of autobiography.³⁷

Even though there are constant echoes of Hemingway's novel *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises* [1926], including the famous words of one of the epigraphs of the novel, 'París era una fiesta',³⁸ the narrative proposes an alternative view of the postmodernist boxing match already established with Hemingway as in Enrique Vila-Matas' recollection of the the same period, *París no se acaba nunca* [Paris never ends] published in 2003: 'El pasado decía Proust, no sólo es fugaz, es que no se mueve de sitio. Con París pasa lo mismo, jamás ha salido de viaje. Y encima es interminable, no se acaba nunca'³⁹ [The past, said Proust, is not only fleeting, it never moves. The same thing applies to Paris, it has never gone on a journey. And furthermore it is never-ending, it never ends]. Vila-Matas writes about his life in Paris from the perspective of Enrique Vila-Matas, the mature, well-known writer at the top of his game, both author and character. He dazzles the reader by mixing fact and fiction in a playful manner. In Alberca's reading of autofiction: 'La conclusión para la mayoría de ellos es siempre la misma: la biografía es el resultado de lo vivido tanto como de lo inventado'⁴⁰ [The conclusion for most writers of autofiction is always the same: biography is a result of both what one lives and what one invents]. In Landa's vision of literature (before autofiction), this was always the case, therefore for her the literary imagination already includes events, dreams and desires, and she states in her analysis of the novel she mentions Ricouer's

35. GUSDORF, Georges, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography". In: OLNEY, James, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 28-48.

36. For an analysis of the restrictive nature of the definition of the autobiography as the lives of great men see SMITH, Sidonie and WATSON, Julia, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

37. LANDA, *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado*, p. 29.

38. LANDA, *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado*, p. 65.

39. VILA-MATAS, Enrique, *París no se acaba nunca*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 2009, p. 8.

40. ALBERCA, *El pacto ambiguo*, p. 35.

view that living life as narrative is what we humans do and the need to tell that life is a very basic human need.⁴¹ There is also an argument to be made that Landa's work is more ground-breaking than autofiction, since, when following the pursuit of the literary (or searching for truth in the same way as Proust), the relationship between text and narrator is far more complex, as in the concept Deleuze names 'transversality', explained thus:

For if a work of art communicates with a public and even gives rise to them, if it communicates with other works of other artists and gives rise to works to come, it is always within this dimension of transversality, in which unity and totality are established for themselves, without unifying or totalling objects or subjects.⁴²

However, Landa is going against the trends in Spanish fiction. She is not interested in the fact that she was in Paris, writing through a nostalgic lens of the figure of the writer as a privileged vantage point. Instead, Landa wants to write herself as a writer in the making, with all the potential inherent in the process.

As mentioned above, in recent years autofiction has come to dominate Spanish and Basque literature. For example, not long after publication of her memoirs two Spanish National Literary Prizes have been awarded to works that fit within this genre, and, as a result, it has come to define life-writing in the Spanish context.⁴³ Landa's view is that writing fiction (not necessarily autofiction) is about imagining other possible lives, and that this is what literature has always been about. In this sense, this novel is not yet another nostalgic gaze towards the past, May 68, an event both real and imagined, but about her making as a writer, her own subjectivity in the making. The distance from San Sebastian to Paris was relatively short, but the real distance was between Francoist Catholic society and a world where women's roles were very different.

Landa intimated to the author of this article that absolutely everything in her novel was real, including the letters and even the very Cortazarian name Lucas,⁴⁴ with the one exception of the encounter with the Iranian girl in the last section at the very crucial point when she has to decide whether to stay and study Philosophy in Paris or return back home to San Sebastian. This girl is the only fictional character in the book, in the same manner as the dialectic nature of Jorge Semprún's memoir *Le grand voyage* (1963) is expressed by a fictional traveling partner, 'el muchacho de Semur' [the guy from Semur]. According to Brett Kaplan:

Because so much remembering takes place during the time and space of the journey to the camp, and because Gérard and the guy from Semur become so intertwined, when the narrator finally lays down the heavy body of the guy from Semur, he laments, 'c'est comme si je déposais ma propre vie passée, tous les souvenirs qui me relient encore au monde

41. LANDA, Mariasun, "La fiesta en la habitación de al lado inguruko oharrak", p. 58

42. DELEUZE, *Proust and Signs*, pp. 108-109.

43. Spanish National Literary Prize 2009: Kirmen Uribe, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*; 2011: Marcos Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*.

44. As in Julio Cortázar's *Un tal Lucas* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1979).

d'autrefois' (215) [it's as though I were laying down my own past, all the memories linking me to the world of the past]. The body of the guy from Semur has absorbed the identity of the narrator during the last moments before that identity must be traded in for a number in Buchenwald.⁴⁵

Whilst in Semprún's memoirs the fictional guy from Semur embodies the traumatic past, in Landa's novel the Iranian girl embodies the future as pure potential. The inner struggle is dramatised in a dialogue rather than a monologue, the fictional Iranian girl being her future self (with the life-knowledge, the readings and attitude she longed for at the time), the literary girl yet to be written in life by Landa. The young Landa tells the Iranian girl:

En realidad quiero ser escritora. Bueno de hecho tengo un par de libros de poemas que me gustaría publicar... Pero últimamente me inclino más por el ensayo. Me refiero a reflexionar sobre el mundo que nos ha tocado vivir.... Así experimenté que se dice mucho mas fácilmente lo que se desea a quien no se conoce, aunque sea a cambio de mentir.⁴⁶ [In fact I want to be a writer. Well, actually, I already have a couple of books of poems that I'd like to publish... but lately I've been leaning towards the essay form. I mean thinking about the world that we are living in. In this manner I realised that it's much easier to tell someone one does not know what one desires, even though it is in exchange for a lie.]

Conclusion

In this process she challenges the way this key historical episode has been narrated. Her aim was not to write yet another memoir about 1968 in Paris but instead, by writing about 68 as a missed event, not only does she offer a cultural history of a generation that belonged to one of the 'other' 68's, but also the complex non-linear network established by the reading of signs and time in writing literature. By focusing on 68 as a missed event (rather than a nostalgic witnessing, basically stating 'I was there and I saw it', as countless memoirs of the period do), her account goes hand in hand with new readings of the potentiality of 68 as an event. As Kirsten Campbell and Brett St Louis ask: 'What forms of politics might be possible in times like these? With this predicament in mind, we take the fortieth anniversary of "1968" as offering an important opportunity, not to look back but, instead, to look forward and in particular to explore the issue of left political possibility.'⁴⁷ This is 68 as subject formation, and not the lost object that many accounts that fix on the real focus on.

In the same way Deleuze, in his critical study *Proust and Signs*, establishes that *À la recherche du temps perdu* is about the future (the making of the writer),

45. KAPLAN, Brett, "The Bitter Residue of Death": Jorge Semprún and the Aesthetics of Holocaust Memory'. In: *Comparative Literature*, nº 55/4, Autumn, 2003, p. 322.

46. LANDA, *La fiesta en la habitación de al lado*, p. 132.

47. CAMPBELL, Kirsten and ST LOUIS, Brett, "After '68: the Left and Twenty-first Century Political Projects". In: *New Formations*, nº 65, 2008, p. 8.

and not about the past, which is the way it is usually read. Unlike Vila-Matas's Proustian vision of Paris anchored in the past, Landa's is one of reading the signs surrounding her in order to become a writer, one which requires the ability to read and decipher the world of signs to be able to read the present into a future text, as Deleuze highlights: 'What is involved is not an exposition of involuntary memory, but the narrative of an apprenticeship: more precisely, the apprenticeship of a man of letters.'⁴⁸ Landa's memoirs concentrate on the making of a future literary voice in the context of the anti-Francoist exile community in Paris and, in the process of writing herself, she shows that autobiographies can still be subversive in their search for truth. Writing her own life by establishing a complex network between past, present and future, Mariasun Landa's memoirs really do encapsulate the 1968 slogan: "Be realistic, demand the impossible".



48. DELEUZE, *Proust and Signs*, p. 3.

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