

Artikulu honek gatazka osteko tokietan iraganaren eta orainaldiaren arteko dinamika korapilatsuak aztertzen ditu Iban Zalduaren "Gerra zibilak" (2009) ipuinean eta Ramon Saizarbitoriaren *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* (2000) nobela laburrean azaldu bezala. Testuok iraganarekiko jarrera jakin batzuen ondorio afektibo eta materialak azalarazten dituzte, baita gizarteak historia mingarriei eta beren ondareari konponbidea aurkitzeko duen erantzukizuna nabarmendu ere.

Giltza-Hitzak: Memoria historikoa. Gerra Zibila. Indarkeria politikoa. Atzera begirako politika. Afektuak. Euskal literatura.

Este artículo examina la compleja dinámica entre el pasado y el presente en escenarios de (pos)conflicto tal y como figura en el cuento "Gerra zibilak" (2009) de Iban Zaldúa y la novela breve *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* (2000) de Ramón Saizarbitoria. Dichos textos muestran los efectos afectivos y materiales de ciertas actitudes hacia el pasado así como la responsabilidad de la sociedad de cara a la resolución de historias dolorosas y sus legados.

Palabras Clave: Memoria histórica. Guerra civil. Violencia política. Políticas retrospectivas. Afecto. Literatura vasca.

Cet article analyse les dynamiques complexes entre le passé et le présent dans les scénarios (post-)conflits, comme l'illustrent la nouvelle d'Iban Zaldúa, "Gerra zibilak" (2009) et la novella de Ramon Saizarbitoria, "Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua" (2000). Les textes révèlent les effets affectifs et matériels d'engagements particuliers avec le passé et la responsabilité de la société dans la résolution d'histoires douloureuses et de leurs héritages.

Mots-clés : Mémoire historique. Guerre civile. Violence politique. Politique rétrospective. Affect. Littérature basque.

Wrestling with the Past: War, Loss, and the Politics of Memory in Iban Zaldúa's "Gerra zibilak" and Ramon Saizarbitoria's *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua*¹

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Since the "memory boom" erupted between the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been an incessant debate over the nature of cultural and historical memory and, more broadly, over the relationship between the past and the present. Basque literature hasn't been immune to the influence of these debates, often exploring different approaches to the question of memory and the politics it engages in the context of the tumultuous second half of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, a period that witnessed the Spanish Civil War, the Francoist regime, the emergence and dismantling of ETA, the dirty war between the Spanish state and the Basque armed organization, and the transition to democracy.² Such is the case of the two texts analyzed in this article, Iban Zaldúa's short story, "Gerra zibilak" (2009. "Civil Wars," 2012) and Ramon Saizarbitoria's novella, *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* (2000. "The Old Soldier's Lost War," 2012).³ Published in the early 2000s, a time of recrudescence of political violence, the texts engage with and respond to the narratives on the war and ETA's violence and their overall effect on civil society. "Gerra zibilak" offers a cautionary story on retrospective historical views that promote a Manichean understanding of the relationship between the past and the present. As the short story aims to show, these views can lead not only to the ossification of thinking and thus to social paralysis; they can also prevent peaceful coexistence in societies with violent pasts. "Gerra zibilak" conveys these notions through the literary device that I call "memory looping" which reflects the collapsing of past and present that occurs when memories about not experienced and long ended events are perceived not as recollections of the past but as the present itself. In the story, organized around the diary entries of an unnamed soldier, the characters believe to be fighting in the Spanish Civil War, unaware that the war ended decades earlier. The originality of the story lies in its structure: the timeline of the story is kept intentionally vague until the very end, when the narrator's unit is intercepted by the Ertzaintza, the autonomous police force for the Basque Country. Once it is revealed that the characters of the story have been caught in a memory loop, the reader is confronted with their and, by extension, society's implication (Rothberg, 2019) in sustaining and participating in the politics of memory that create such temporal distortions.

Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua, on the other hand, warns against clear cut distinctions between the past and the present which can obscure the ongoing effects of past harmful practices and thus help perpetuate structures of oppression and suffering. The novella tells the story of a veteran *gudari*, a soldier of the Basque Battalion that fought in the Spanish Civil War, who lost one of his legs in the conflict. In the early days of the democratic Spanish state, the protagonist initiates the procedures to obtain a military pension for his injuries but these procedures are difficult to navigate, not only because of the complexity of the bureaucratic process but most importantly because he is unable to tell his story of loss in a State that has chosen to forget the past in the name of reconciliation. The counter-narrative on the war offered by the Basque Nationalist party also presents limits, since its focus on male muscular nationalism excludes the articulation of other forms of feeling. Thus, the protagonist's

² There has also been an increase of scholarly publications and doctoral theses examining the politics of memory and memory politics in Basque literature on the Spanish Civil War and the political conflict, see for example, ARROITA (2015), KORTAZAR and SERRANO MARIEZKURRENA (2012), OLAZIREGI (2008, 2011), ORTIZ and RODRIGUEZ (2020), SERRANO MAIZKURRENA (2019), and TOLEDO LEZETA (2009).

³ This article is based on the original texts in Basque. I will refer to the English translation for quoting purposes only, unless stated otherwise.

story is lost in the interstices of what can and cannot be told in official and counter-narratives about the war, making the process of healing difficult.

The juxtaposition of these two texts raises pertinent questions about the use and abuse of memory, and gives insight into the affective and material effects of particular engagements with a conflictive past. Moreover, it stresses the performative work that the texts do in involving and implicating the reader in the critique they offer and, in the case of *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua*, in creating an archive of feelings for future generations to dig up and fathom its meaning.

1. Caught in a Memory Loop

Iban Zaldúa's short story, "Gerra zibilak" opens with a quote by François Fénelon, a French Roman Catholic bishop and writer from the 17th-18th century, which states that "all wars are civil wars, because all humans are equal" (Zaldúa, 2012: 135). This is probably the best-known version of Fénelon's statement, uttered at a time when there was a wide-spread fear among 18th-century European intelligentsia of the expansion of war across the continent which would jeopardize the cultural unity they believed existed in Europe (Armitage, 2017: 198). In it, the bishop appeals to the unique status ascribed to civil wars to then turn it on its head and affirm that there are no "better" or "worse" wars; rather, all wars are tragic because the shared condition of those involved: they are human and thus equal to each other. Here, equality rests not in genealogy of the blood and soil type, which is the aspect used to emphasize the particularity of civil wars—these are wars within national boundaries, between members of the same social fabric—but in a universalist and abstract notion of what it means to be human and the rights ascribed to this condition. The original version, however, states: "toutes les guerres son civiles; car c'est toujours l'homme contre l'homme qui répand son propre sang, qui déchire ses propres entrailles" (Fénelon, 1857: 149). Here the abhorrence of war is based not on an abstract idea of equality as an intrinsic human right but as an attribute of the material and therefore precarious condition of human life, which in turn makes the cost of war more tangible. As Judith Butler points out, to have a body makes humans vulnerable to one another and to the environment that surround us; bodies can be injured and also killed (Butler, 2009). Because of this shared condition, Fénelon's statement makes the injuring of the human body through the mechanisms of war a reciprocal as well as a reflexive action: "men" fight against each other, shedding their own blood (*répand son propre sang*) and tearing their own entrails (*déchire ses propres entrailles*). The message embedded in the French bishop's statement seems appropriate for the context of the story that "Gerra zibilak" tells: the Basque political conflict that cost the lives of around 1,468 people and injured almost 3,600, while also causing the incarceration of a thousand individuals.

The decades of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the short story was first published, witnessed an intensification of ETA's violence after two failed peace talks between the armed group and the Spanish government and many in society were left wondering if the Basque Country would ever be able to achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict as Northern Ireland had already done in 1998 through

the Good Friday Agreement.⁴ For the Basque political establishment that had recently inaugurated the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum, flagship of a neoliberal urban revitalization plan in which the Basque public institutions invested a considerable amount of money in hopes that it would help revitalize the economy and make the Basque Country more attractive to international tourism,⁵ the conflict was more than a problem: it was anachronistic, something not proper of a 21st century European nation. ETA militants understood their actions as a continuation of the struggle for sovereignty initiated by the 1936 war. They referred to themselves as *gudariak*, the name given to the combatants who constituted *Euzko Gudarostea* or the Basque Battalion that fought alongside the army of the Second Spanish Republic, and adopted *Euzko Gudariak*, a song on the defense of the Basque Country against the nationalist Spanish army, as their anthem (Casquete, 2012: 430).⁶ Yet the war ended in 1939, and whereas ETA's actions may have been justifiable during the period of terror established by General Francisco Franco's dictatorship, two decades into democracy they were more difficult to understand. On the other hand, during this period the Spanish state took its tactics to fight ETA to new extremes. Following magistrate of the Audiencia Nacional Baltasar Garzón's predicament that "todo es ETA" (all is ETA), in 2002 the Spanish government passed the Ley de Partidos, which allowed the banning of any party presumed to directly or indirectly condone terrorism or sympathize with a terrorist organization. The Ley de Partidos was highly controversial as it automatically rendered suspicious any individual, activity or organization that defended Basque culture and the right to self-determination. In the following years, the Spanish state set a record number of arrests, and proceeded to ban political organizations such as the left-wing independentist party Batasuna, the first political party to be banned since the Francoist dictatorship, as well as Basque media such as *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, the only newspaper written fully in Basque.⁷

"Gerra zibilak" doesn't focus on concrete events, but rather creates an allegorical scenario to critically explore the narratives and politics of memory that shaped the understanding of the conflict and led to the spiral of violence and counter-violence. More particularly, the short story takes issue with narratives that are based on a retrospective Manichean interpretation of history, one that treats the past as if it still were the present (the war never ended, we are still fighting the same war), emphasizing the exceptionalism of particular events (against Fénelon, not all wars are the same), and challenging the possibility of closure. Such narratives run the risk of creating a distorted understanding of both present and past, a distortion that "Gerra zibilak" conveys through the literary device that I call "memory looping." If time looping refers to a situation in which a period of time is repeated so that the characters have to re-live a series of events again and again, memory looping involves a past event that is experienced by the characters as if it still were the present. It is not so much a continuation of

⁴ The 2006 peace talks between ETA and PSOE's government were influenced by the Northern Irish Good Friday agreement, but were short-lived.

⁵ The Guggenheim Bilbao Museum opened its doors in 1997. For more on the polemic that surrounded the planning and building of the museum see ZULAIKA, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa: Museums, Architecture, and City Renewal* (2003).

⁶ In its inception, ETA, like other liberation movements happening at that time in other parts of the world, followed a Marxist oriented ideology and was committed to the freedom of the Basque Country, its integration into a federalist Europe, and the socialist transformation of society. Although the connection to the civil war had always been present in ETA's understanding of its own existence, it is not until the 1980s that the members of the armed organization began to call themselves *gudariak*.

⁷ In the 2003 operation against *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, the director and the members of the Advisory Board were arrested and some of them tortured by the Spanish police. The charges against the newspaper were dismissed by the Spanish justice system seven years later for lack of evidence. In 1998, another newspaper, *Egin*, was closed on similar grounds that were also dismissed eleven years later.

the past in the present but the collapsing of both that occurs when what is believed to be the present is a projection of the memories of a long-ended event. In the case of "Gerra zibilak," the characters believe to be fighting in a war they have only heard about and which in fact ended long time ago. Yet the success and credibility of memory looping relies as much in the characters ability to sustain their own narrative as in the readers willing engagement with it. Likewise, as the short story aims to demonstrate, Manichean interpretations of the past necessitate society's continued investment to be effective.

Set in Baztan Valley in Nafarroa (Navarre), "Gerra zibilak" begins with a diary entry by an unknown soldier noting that this is going to be the last notebook he will be writing on, as his unit is undergoing a shortage of paper. Consequently, he will have to forget about writing a proper diary and focus instead on recording "the most noteworthy things" (Zaldúa, 2012: 135) happening where they are currently stationed. In the following entries the narrator explains that there is a lot of action in the area so he and his unit, which later we learn comprises four other common soldiers and a sergeant, will have to avoid venturing down the valley and eventually abandon their current location. One of the soldiers asks the sergeant if the *requetés*, the Carlist militia mostly from Nafarroa that fought on behalf of Franco during the 1936 war, are getting closer but the sergeant evades to give a clear answer, responding instead that they will wait until they hear from the army commanders (Zaldúa, 2012: 135-36). Not in these or in the following entries does the narrator specify what year it is, so the reader is left to speculate when exactly the events described happened. The few clues we have—the action is taking place in Baztan; there may be *requetés* in the area; the narrator and the rest of his unit are part of a Basque army—point in the direction of the war that broke out in 1936, when right-wing Spanish military officers revolted against the Second Spanish Republic, and ended in 1939 with the victory of the rebels. The army the sergeant refers to would thus be the *Euzko gudaroste* commanded by the Basque Government, which fought alongside the army of the Second Republic and which comprised Basque nationalists, communists, socialists, and anarchists. The narrator's unit would have belonged to the Basque Nationalist battalion as we gather from his account of the rituals the soldiers perform when things are calm, such as the raising of the flag on religious or politically significant dates.⁸ We are also left to assume that the narrator is a man for the Basque Nationalist battalion didn't include female combatants among its ranks.

However, as the narrator's recollection progresses, we begin to notice some discrepancies between what has been officially recorded about the war and the events that are being described to us. After an exchange of fire with a group of *requetés* in which no casualties are reported, the narrator indicates to have seen a woman among the soldiers they just fought against. Although women fought on equal terms with their male counterparts from the beginning of the war until July 1937, when the majority of women were removed from combat, female combatants, also known as *milicianas*, did so in communist, anarchist, socialist, and other leftist Republican army units. In the rebel bloc in general and in *requeté* battalions in particular, on the other hand, such level of inclusivity on the battlefields did not exist as it was considered antagonistic to their ideal of womanhood, which bound women to the home and family. Instead, women or *Margaritas*, as *requeté* female supporters were known, were assigned rearguard duties (Lines, 2009). Therefore, it would have been highly improbable to spot a

⁸ The dates mentioned by the narrator correspond to the births of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, of founding father of Basque nationalism Sabino Arana, and of Jose Antonio Aguirre, the first *lehendakari* or president of the Basque Government.

female combatant in a *requeté* unit as the narrator affirms to have done, hence the laughter with which the other soldiers receive the comment.

Soon after the episode just described, the question of gender in the battlefields of the Civil War resurfaces once again, this time to reveal a shocking and largely unpredicted twist. Taking advantage of a moment of tranquility, the narrator goes to a creek to bathe and is followed by another soldier who jumps on him as soon as he takes off his clothes. After wrestling for a short while, the narrator gives up but the aggressor, rather than taking advantage of the situation, backs off with "a cry of disgust." The narrator then explains that she just got her period, and the sight of her menstrual blood repelled her attacker (Zaldúa, 2012: 149). One way of interpreting this new piece of information with regards to the narrator's identity (she is a woman, not a man) is that perhaps we are being offered a counter-(hi)story, one that asks the reader to imagine the past—in this case, women's participation in the Civil War—differently with an eye on the present and future of gender relations in the Basque context. From this perspective the past becomes a space of speculation, fluid and open rather than predetermined and closed, to explore alternative scenarios to the present. This interpretation, however, is further complicated by an encounter between the narrator's unit and some other *requetés*. Much to the narrator's surprise, the seven men and women who her unit apprehends speak *Euskara* from Bizkaia like the narrator's unit, but *requetés* were originally from Nafarroa, therefore, if fluent in Basque, they should have spoken in the Navarrese dialect. On closer inspection the narrator notices that they are all elderly and that the uniforms they are wearing don't look like uniforms "but [are] rather shapeless rags," as if years of wearing environments had deteriorated their original state. The only survivor of the group (the other six are killed in the exchange of fire between the narrator's unit and them) explains that he is not in Franco's army but in the army of Carlos VII and that his patrol was "part of General Carasa's army, sent to that area of the mountain when the Liberals were spotted there in the fall of 1875..." (Zaldúa, 2012: 147). The event the old captive is referring to dates back to the Second Carlist War, a conflict that ended with the defeat of the Carlists by the Liberals in 1876, nearly six decades before the war where the narrator's unit is fighting began.⁹ The captive explains that he and his now-dead fellow soldiers are the great-grandchildren of the members of the original patrol whose fight they have carried on for decades now, kidnapping women from the farms in the area to procure younger members so they could continue with "their duty." As the narrator observes, "[f]or them, the war hasn't finished yet" (Zaldúa, 2012: 148).

The old Carlist's story offers an unsettling insight into the kinds of reality distortion that can occur when a Manichean interpretation of the past takes over the present, so much so that the narrator and her comrades begin to worry about whether they too will end up like him, trapped in a memory loop and unable to move forward. For this reason, it becomes an imperative for the narrator and her unit to contact the outside world, to assure themselves that the war they are fighting is real and not an imaginary construct. However, without the proper means of communication—the only radio they have is broken—and without a real grasp of how dangerous the area is, this task proves to be a challenge. The situation is further complicated by the sudden death by fever of their sergeant, the only person in the unit who due to his old age had experienced first-hand some of the events that the rest of the unit members have only heard about as stories (Zaldúa, 2012: 149). The tension further increases as the narrator's unit spots some military trucks approaching their location, leaving the characters to wonder

⁹ Fulgencio Carasa was a Spanish military who during the Carlist Wars became Major General of the troops in Bizkaia.

if this is the end for them. At this point the diary entries are interrupted by a report from the Ertzaintza, the police force for the Basque Autonomous Community founded in 1982, that is, in the early days of the democratic era. The report is dated July 14, 1997 and gives account of the arrest of six individuals claiming to be members of the Basque Army patrol, Gorbeya company, Arana Goiri battalion, whose duty was to patrol the area "seeking information on supposed Francoist infiltrators in the army." The report notes that if the detainees' testimony were accepted, it would mean that they have been on patrol for sixty years, "continuing the group from generation to generation," having allowed the incorporation of women to their ranks since the 1940s (Zaldúa, 2012: 150-51). The report infers that there are no grounds to believe that the detainees have any connection with ETA or the kidnapping victim the Basque autonomous police were searching for, as "unfortunate news" recently received from the city of Lasarte (Gipuzkoa) indicate that the case is closed (Zaldúa, 2012: 151). There are also other aspects that don't match the profile of the armed organization, such as the uniforms the detainees are wearing and the weapons found in them. Thus, the report concludes that there is no need to make this information public not to raise any alarms (Zaldúa, 2012: 152).

The abrupt ending of "Gerra zibilak" feels like a slap in the face, not only for what it reveals about the story itself but also for the reflection it offers on the role of history and memory in contemporary Basque Country and society's implication in sustaining and perpetuating narratives that avoid closure. The credibility and hence success of the story relies as much in the characters' efforts to sustain their narrative as in the reader's complicity in recognizing and accepting the events the narrator describes in her diary entries as episodes from the Civil War. The reader's involvement in supporting the story is not the result of a mere suspension of disbelief that all literary work requires for the sake of enjoyment; it rather illustrates a willing participation in the act of re-membering, that is, in the process of reassembling and re-signifying the past as the narrator is telling the story. It is for this reason that it comes as a shock for the reader that the narrator and her unit mates, like the intercepted Carlists, have been caught in a memory loop, reliving a war that ended six decades ago.

The story doesn't end there, however. The arrest of the members of the Basque Army patrol brings us to present times, more specifically to one of the darkest episodes in the armed conflict between ETA and the Spanish state. The kidnapping victim mentioned in the Ertzaintza's report refers to Miguel Angel Blanco, the Partido Popular city councilman from the city of Ermua (Bizkaia) who was kidnapped by ETA on July 10, 1997.¹⁰ Just as the narrator's unit had mistaken the Carlists for *requetés*, the Ertzaintza report acknowledges an initial presupposition that the narrator and her unit had links to ETA and could even be behind Blanco's kidnapping. The "unfortunate news" from Lasarte and the lack of evidence leads them to discard this hypothesis, yet the very iteration of such possibility demonstrates to what extent the interpretation of conflict (what are believed to be the material and ideological causes that have led to it) can affect the sense of reality to the point of distorting it to establish its own (dystopian) reality where, as in Garzon's predicament, everything becomes ETA or, in the context of the story and of ETA's actions, the civil war never ended. In both cases, the fixation with a particular interpretation may hinder the possibility to acknowledge the suffering of all in conflictive situations. It

¹⁰ ETA gave the Spanish Government 48 hours to end dispersion (the policy of dispersing ETA prisoners in 40 prisons across the Spanish state to restrict contacts between them but also to keep them far from family members) and bring all Basque political prisoners to the Basque Country, or else they would execute the councilman. Hundreds of thousands of people across the Spanish state and the Basque Country took the streets to demand the release of Blanco, but 50 minutes after the deadline expired he was found with two shots in his head in a forest in Lasarte. He died hours later at the hospital.

is in this context that Fénelon's words become relevant to the story as they remind us that any kind of violent event affects fellow humans and ourselves.

2. Like a Lost Limb

An important aspect of "Gerra zibilak" is the materialization of the need to differentiate between past and present so that there is no appropriation of the suffering of others to justify violent actions as the only way to achieve political change. Put differently, ETA members could have had a filiation to the *gudari* who fought and lost the war, that is, they could have been their biological descendants, but they were not and couldn't be *gudariak*. The lives and lived experiences of the latter are irreplaceable. Nevertheless, that an event such as the 1936-39 war ended doesn't mean that its effects are no longer felt in society or that there can't exist any connection between the war and contemporary forms of political violence. As Berber Bevernage points out, to treat the relation between past and present as mutually exclusive entities, an ideological trait of both dominant retrospective politics and (liberal) *post-histoire* philosophy of history, can obscure the structural continuities between the chronological past and the chronological present and the responsibility contemporary humanity bears toward ongoing injustices (Bevernage, 2015). War, any kind of violent event, affects deeply the social fabric and bonds between people; it takes time to mourn and repair the physical, material, and psychological losses it causes. But the process of healing is more complicated, if possible at all, in cases where the loss is not acknowledged or given much value. Fénelon's original statement emphasizes the precarious condition of all human life, but the fact remains that not all human lives are valued the same way and their suffering and loss are not considered such (Butler, 2009).

In the case of the Spanish Civil War, it ended with the defeat of the democratically elected Second Republic and was followed by a dictatorship that oppressed those on the losing side, repressed their memories, and established a narrative on the war that emphasized the heroism of the rebels and the treason of the Republic and its allies. The end of the dictatorship after the death by natural causes of Franco and the transition to a democratic constitutional monarchy didn't put an end to the politics of memory of the fascist regime, neither did it completely dismantled the structures upon which it rested. Rather, the political parties involved in the change of political order chose "to forget." The so-called Pact of Silence, an unofficial and unwritten agreement between political elites, established as a condition for democracy to triumph the complete obliteration of the past. Furthermore, the 1977 Amnesty Law prevented the prosecution of the over 130,000 forced disappearances stemming from the Civil War and dictatorship.¹¹ Thus, the memories of those who fought with the Republic and of the victims of the dictatorship were once again left in the dark. In this type of context where the pain of loss finds neither an adequate expression nor recognition, the memory of the past becomes like a lost limb, a ghostly presence of an absence that affects and constraints the lives of individuals and which prevents them from healing. It is these stories of affect that are lost in the interstices of official and

¹¹ In 2008 judge Baltasar Garzón was forced to drop an investigation on the crimes committed during the war and under Franco's rule as the Supreme Court found that he had exceeded his authority by ignoring the Amnesty Law.

counter-narratives on the war that Ramon Saizarbitoria's *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* excavates and collects for present and future generations to examine.

Saizarbitoria's novella focuses on the story of an old *gudari*, a former combatant of *Euzko Gudarostea*, who lost his girlfriend and one of his legs in the war. Almost five decades later, under the newly established democratic Spanish state, the old *gudari* initiates the procedures to obtain a military pension for his disability. Soon after the Civil War ended, Franco's regime established the Benemérito Cuerpo de Mutilados de Guerra por la Patria (BCMGP), an association that safeguarded the interests of ex-combatants wounded in the war while fighting for the rebel side. Based on the degree of mutilation, the "mutilated knights" enjoyed advantages, considerable economic support, privileged access to state administrative positions, and had no need to wait in line in stores and most services as a sign of status and importance in a time of scarcity and rationing (Wright, 2016). However, no such advantages were granted to those wounded while fighting for the Republican side and this continued to be the case until the end of the dictatorship.

Between 1976 and 1982, a period that encompasses the transition to democracy and the first democratic government, some changes were made to the Decree 670, which regulates compensations to those mutilated in the war. The amendments sought more egalitarian measures for those who fought on for the Republic and initiated a pension program to adequately compensate them. Yet this measure that is supposed to grant some recognition and monetary compensation to the wounded veterans of the Republican side only triggers bad memories for the protagonist and leads him to question the possibility of redress and reparation through the justice system. First of all, navigating the complex bureaucratic process to obtain a disability pension is not an easy task for the common citizen. The narrator has no clue about what an "*acta notarial de referencia*," the document he will need to present at the Military Court in Burgos (Spain), is and how it differs from an "*acta notarial de presencia*" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 89).¹² The narrator's frustration is further intensified by the language required to function throughout the bureaucratic process (Spanish, a language he is not fluent in) and by the cost of the procedures. He also considers a "stupid task" to having to explain to a notary how his leg was blown up "because if the story were a lie, telling it to the notary wouldn't make it true" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 91). To make matters more complicated, the notary shows no "particular interest" in the old soldier's case and brusquely interrupts his and his two witnesses' accounts, asking them to "get to the point, get to the point" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 91). As a consequence, the notary's report is shorter than the old soldier's testimony and contains errors and omissions that, although they don't alter the fact that the protagonist was injured in the war, are significant for the understanding of what actually transpired at the trenches. The report is also written in the notary's own words "and not, as was required—if [the protagonist] had understood the girl from the town hall, at least—in] the words of the storyteller" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 95). The notary's disinterest in capturing his testimony accurately is not only an affront to the *gudari*; it also makes him wonder whether it matters or not that this is *his* story. Yet although no one better than the old soldier knows what happened to him and wishes his voice to be properly conveyed in the affidavit, the power to determine the authenticity of his testimony and therefore to decide what goes in the document lies with the notary. The notary not only has the legal authority to establish what the truth is; he also provides the frame through which that truth can be told.

¹² These two terms appear in Spanish in the original text in Basque.

The question of legal authority and the space that it can open up (or not) for different voices becomes relevant in the context of *The Old Soldier's Lost War*: the early days of the democratic Spanish state, a state that had chosen to forget the past in order to move forward as exemplified by the Pact of Silence. According to Colmeiro,

The historically unprecedented transformation of the Spanish political system, characterized by a consensual multi-party transition, rather than by revolution, coup or war, was predicated upon the "social contract" of the burial of the past—no reopening of old wounds and no questions asked. Fundamentally, this political transformation followed the model of the "transition as a transaction" between political elites. This negotiated burial of the past implicated that political amnesty was thus predicated upon historical amnesia. As a result, the memories of the civil war and of Franco's legacy became a new cultural taboo, and therefore acquired the spectral quality of ghosts, nor here nor there. (Colmeiro, 2011: 24-25)

The Pact of Silence is based on the idea that in a civil war such as the Spanish one there are no victors: both sides committed crimes and also suffered considerable losses. To think otherwise would be akin to engaging in a zero-sum game which would challenge the democratization process. However, by declaring everyone a victim, the Pact not only distorts historical facts (the war began as an uprising against a legitimate democratic government and was followed by a fascist dictatorship); it also evacuates responsibility and thus accountability for what transpired during the war and Franco's regime. The Pact's approach to the meaning of civil war bears no resemblance to what Fénelon implies when stating that all wars are civil wars. Whereas the French bishop aims to discredit war as a means to solving political, economic, social and/or cultural differences by focusing on the vulnerability of the human body, the Pact of Silence perpetuates the marginalization and silencing of the Republican victims of the war and of the dictatorship whereas the memories created by the latter are left untouched and unchallenged. It is no wonder, then, that the old *gudari* is skeptical about the possibility of telling *his* story. Nevertheless, he is left with no other choice but to let the public institutions frame the narrative of his loss in whichever way they want if he wants to be compensated for his disability. However, this prospect doesn't bother him as much as the trip he will have to make to the Military Court in Burgos (Spain) to get his body injury examined and verified, a location he and his comrade Luis Amiano had promised to each other to never visit (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 102).

As *lieu de mémoire*, Burgos condenses and evokes a palimpsest of events associated with the oppression and victimhood of Basques after the war and way into the Francoist regime: the pseudo-trials against those who fought on the losing side, the random execution of prisoners, the work camps. The enduring impact of such traumatic experiences is evident from the fact that the protagonist always carries with him a photograph of the one hundred Basque condemned to death in the Burgos jail as both an illustration and reminder of the horrors that he himself witnessed and was victim of (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 102). The photograph's demand to never forget those one hundred men becomes even more urgent in the context of the post-Francoist Spanish state, where the Pact of Silence created the conditions for the sanitizing of the past, propagating a new collective memory and silencing the victims of the dictatorship. The latter, the narrator reminds us, include "many young Basques" who were arrested and, as in the case of Angel Otaegi, who the old *gudari* briefly mentions,

executed during the Francoist regime for political dissidence.¹³ Due to the particular significance of Burgos, it would be both traumatic and humiliating for the narrator to travel to this location to show his disabled leg in front of the same Military Court that sentenced him to labor camps. Whatever the circumstances might be, the moment of showing his injured limb in front of strangers, a moment he describes as “endless,” puts the narrator in a vulnerable position as he is expecting to be judged negatively and thus rejected because of his “ugly stump.” In his mind, revealing his “stump”—the absence of a limb—is akin to revealing something about himself: that he is not a “whole” man. For this reason, years after the war ended, he went to a brothel “because he had to know if a woman would accept his deficiency” (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 99). For the narrator, his lost limb is both a sign and a reminder that the rebels not only won the war but they also deprived him of a leg, and with it, they took part of his masculinity and sense of self (Olaziregi, 2008: 396) away. Yet, paradoxically, it is now up to those who caused his disability and trauma to decide whether he qualifies for a pension and how much compensation he deserves for his loss. This situation raises questions about how adequate monetary compensation can be in situations where there hasn't been any political reparation, hence the old *gudari*'s reluctance to display his loss in front of his aggressors.

The old *gudari*'s relationship with his disability, however, is far more complex than the episode above illustrates. One could read the old *gudari*'s refusal, despite everyone's recommendation, to replace the wooden leg that he has been wearing for a “good orthopedic [one]” as an act of resistance and subversion against the repression of memory and the elimination of accountability. A “good orthopedic leg” would make walking easier and increase his quality of life, but it would also mask his disability and his struggle to deal with it. By choosing to show his loss publicly, the protagonist acknowledges that he will be the target of “rude stares” yet he may also spark the curiosity of strangers who may want to know what happened to him (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 90). However, he admits that he is often at a loss for words whenever he has to explain his condition as the formula he often uses—“I lost it in the war”—is too “limited” and doesn't capture the fullness of his experience and trauma as a wounded veteran (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 100). The statement “I lost it in the war” seems inadequate also given the efforts to empty the word “war” of meaning or to radically shift the ground of its interpretation. Indeed, an insidious aspect of the Pact of Silence and of the transition to democracy as such is the sense of normalcy and normativity that it instills in society, paving the way for the transformation of hard-fought rights into commodities through displays of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995; Olaziregi and Otaegi, 2011: 59). In one particular instance, the old *gudari* is struck by the *ikurriña* or Basque flag depicted on the lighter of a young man; he is not used to seeing a symbol of Basque sovereignty for whom many risked their lives “as a worthless and common thing” (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 103).¹⁴ The

¹³ It is estimated that in 1968, 434 people were arrested in the Basque Country, 1,953 in 1969, and 831 in 1970. The case of Otaegi is of special significance as he was among the last people executed by the Francoist regime, barely two months before the dictator's death. ETA member Otaegi was tried in August 1975 in a court-martial along with his comrade Juan Paredes “Txiki” and FRAP (Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriota) members José Luis Sánchez Bravo, Ramón García Sanz, and Humberto Baena. Otaegi was accused of having provided information that caused the death of Civil Guard Gregorio Posadas Zurrón. Despite the international outcry that followed the trial, the death sentence was ratified by the Council of Ministers led by Franco and the execution took place on September 27, 1975. On November 19, 2012 a commission for the evaluation of victims of police and political violence between the years 1960 and 1978 organized by the Basque Parliament and Government declared Txiki and Otaegi victims of the violation of human rights and of violence motivated by politics as they were deprived of the right for a just trial.

¹⁴ One of the real-life episodes that the old *gudari* recalls and that illustrate the risks taken by many is when Joseba Elosegí placed an *ikurriña* on the Good Shepherd Cathedral in Donostia on July 18, 1946, for which he was sentenced to six months

commodification of the *ikurriña*, however, is based on the silencing and obscuring of the histories of violence embedded in the production of the post-dictatorship state—the *ikurriña* flies not in recognition of Basque sovereignty, for which the old *gudari* and his comrades fought in the war and lost, but as a concession of the democratization process through the Estatuto de Autonomías of 1978.¹⁵

The same Estatuto that legalizes the *ikurriña* makes it possible for the Autonomous Communities interested in such endeavor to recuperate or, as the old *gudari* puts it, to “reclaim” the names the streets had before the dictatorship. The protagonist explains the measure as responding to a “current trend... to put things in their proper place” (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 106), thus highlighting how necessary he considers to recuperate the original street names while at the same time he acknowledges that the impulse behind the initiative is no more than a “current trend.” That is, there is no proper engagement with the history behind the back and forth renaming of the streets and what it may signify in the present moment. The emptiness of the initiative becomes evident when a taxi driver tells the old *gudari* how confusing he finds the “new” street names and wonders if it wouldn’t be better to use numbers, “like in New York” (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 106). The driver’s difficulty navigating the recently renamed streets indicates his lack of familiarity with how things were before the dictatorship, which in turn makes the old street names look “new” to him. We don’t know if this lack of familiarity is the result of the Francoist regime’s manipulation of collective memory or if it is tied to the taxi driver’s age—perhaps the street names had already been changed by the time he was born, in which case the first hypothesis would still be plausible as the dictatorship would have prevented access to the original street names. Whatever the reason, for the taxi driver the renaming of the streets only makes sense from a utilitarian and normative perspective: street names make it easier to navigate the city and to orient oneself spatially. In this sense, the ordinance to rename the streets contradicts such purpose as it has made orientation in the city difficult for him. However, for the old *gudari* orientation in Donostia had already been altered by the forceful occupation of the city, thus for him the renaming of the streets should not be a normalizing and normative action but a disruption of the established order so that the space can be reclaimed (Ahmed, 2006). Yet this is an approach that is not conveyed by the street renaming initiative, so for the taxi driver it makes little difference if the streets are named or renamed after new or old names.

If the Pact of Silence, invested as it is in the erasure and eradication of historical memory, leaves no room for histories like the old *gudari*’s, the counter-narrative established by the Basque Nationalist Party also presents limitations as to how well it captures the complexity of the war and the experiences of those involved in it. The Party’s discourse on the war is shaped by masculine muscular nationalism (Banerjee, 2012), which emphasizes the heroism of Basque nationalists while nullifying the efforts of the rest of political parties fighting for the Republic in Basque territory. Such vision is best captured by the figure of the *gudari*, the Basque soldier par excellence (Casquete, 2012: 430). However, as the old *gudari* observes, the Party’s discourse is at odds with the recriminations from the socialists, who fought side by side with Basque nationalists in the *Euzko Gudaroste*, with regard to the Party’s delay in joining the war and their decision to surrender to the Italian without informing the Republic. Echoing

in prison. A former *gudari*, Elozegi protagonized another anti-regime action that made international headlines: on September 18, 1970 he set himself on fire in front of Franco at the Atano III pelota court in Donostia during the World Championship of Pelota to protest the bombing of Gernika which he had witnessed as a young man.

¹⁵ The Estatuto was approved in the Basque Autonomous Community one year later and Navarre, which although historically a Basque territory became its own autonomous community after the war, did so in 1982.

the official line, fellow *gudari* and now defunct Amiano's response to the first accusation used to be that the "reds" were not trustworthy due to their anti-religious inclinations whereas he would dismiss the second one as just nonsense or would blame it on the Germans for their air superiority (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 107, 110). Yet the protagonist acknowledges that fighting for the Republic not only was the right decision but it also helped the Party cement an honorable and lasting legacy: "... thanks to entering war on the side of the Republicans—that is, thanks to losing the war—they had won; they had won their dignity, for themselves and for generations to come. That's what he thought" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 107). The idea of defeat is irreconcilable with Amiano's and, by extension, the Party's interpretation of the war as it poses a threat to the muscular masculinity upon which it rests, hence the need to find a scapegoat toward which to channel their pain for having lost the war. For the old *gudari*, however, what matters is that they fought and lost for the right cause—to defend the freedom of Basques and the Republic—and for that reason alone they proved and kept their dignity. Although this is what he thinks, it is also what he has never dared to say aloud not to upset his friend Amiano for going against the official line. Now, however, the old *gudari* regrets not having shared with his comrade this and other thoughts that have been popping into his head for quite some time, such as that "it would have been better if we hadn't gone to war," an idea that Amiano would have found "not treacherous, just cowardly" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 108). The thought that not going to war may have been a better option both perplexes and intrigues the old *gudari* not only because it contradicts what he has believed up to this point, but also because, if he were to agree with its premise, it would indicate that he lost his leg and his girlfriend for nothing. The latter profoundly disturbs the protagonist, yet he also considers the possibility that, because he lost so much, it would be understandable to regret having gone to war.

"As a specifically political feeling," Ann Cvetkovich writes, "regret resembles the forms of disappointment and despair about the failures of activism that I and others have explored under the rubric of political depression. But whereas political despair can be the product of doing what you think are all the right things and still not getting what you want, regret captures the circumstances of having tried something that you now recognize to have been wrong and even harmful to others" (Lorenz, 2013: 35). In the old *gudari*'s case, it is not so much the harm done to others but the harm done to him that animates the feeling of regret—if they hadn't gone to war, he and many others wouldn't have been injured or killed. Yet at the same time that he recognizes the connection between his participation in the war and his loss, he also acknowledges that going to war was an ethical imperative given what was at stake. The old *gudari*'s ambivalent feelings toward the war are an illustration of the "contradictory nature of emotional life," which Cvetkovich discusses in relationship to Edith Piaf's "Je ne regrette rien," a song that "articulates a tough refusal of feeling (one that can underwrite forms of historical amnesia) while at the same time indulges in feeling through its refusal, particularly through the mournfulness of vocal sound itself" (Lorenz, 2013: 35). Unlike the "I" of Piaf's song, the old *gudari* does not refuse to feel; if anything, he is bursting with feeling. Yet these feelings find no expression in the official records due to the democratic Spanish state's investment in forgetting the past, nor in the Basque Nationalist Party's counter-narrative as its focus on male muscular heroism denies the possibility of feeling otherwise. In this context, the old *gudari*'s loss becomes incommensurable thus he regrets and rejects the event that cause his loss: the war.

Guided by the impulse to undo his loss, the old *gudari* goes back to the old front line to dig his leg out from where his comrade Amiano supposedly buried it. This is not a mere act of restoring, as Joan

Ramon Resina has suggested, "his body's integrity, to heal his wound, to undo his lack, to work out his trauma" (Resina, 2017: 605); rather, by reclaiming that which was taken away from him, the old *gudari* aims to rewrite his story, a story in which he would no longer be interpellated by the discourses on the war. Much to his surprise, for all the horror he experienced there, the old front line looks very peaceful now, almost idyllic. The only trace of the war is a monolith almost hidden by weeds with an inscription that states both in Basque and Spanish, "Here Euzkadi halted the invader 10-4-1936, 4-20-1937 and 4-23-1937" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 134). According to Resina, the monument calls attention to "the freezing of Basque nationalism's historical memory at the instant immediately before its constitutive trauma: the bombing of Gernika three days after the presumed victory celebrated in the monolith" (Resina, 2017: 608). A *lieu de mémoire* par excellence, Gernika occupies a central place in the collective memory of Basque people (Mees, 2007: 531). Due to the association between the city and Basque sovereignty, the bombing of Gernika on April 26, 1937 was regarded as a direct attack against Basque people and Basque identity as such. From that moment on, Gernika became what Resina refers to as "the constitutive trauma" of Basque nationalism's historical memory: an incommensurable loss that is yet to be articulated. However, taken at its face value, the monolith tells us a different (hi)story, one which reflects the masculine muscular narrative Amiano and by extension the Basque Nationalist Party tell about the war: the dates on the plaque correspond to the battles in which *Euzko Gudarostea* defeated the rebels. The losses that took place in that very same location were left out of the inscription and there is no equivalent memorial for them; it seems like they didn't happen. The old *gudari*, however, remembers it all. As he walks across the fields, he notices the marks on the landscape, imperceptible to any eye but that of a former combatant, and a burst of emotions gets hold of him as he begins to recall vividly the day of the attack that cost him his leg and his beloved girlfriend. Once he reaches the spot where his friend buried his leg, the old *gudari* begins to dig furiously with his hands until it hurts and then removes his wooden leg to use it as a spade. His digging is interrupted, however, by a sharp pain in his chest and minutes later his body lies lifeless ironically on the same location where he survived an air attack.

3. Conclusion: Continuing the Search

Taken together, "Gerra zibilak" and *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* shed light on the dynamics between the past and the present in post-conflict scenarios such as the Basque one. The "post-" in post-conflict shouldn't be understood as the end of a period and the beginning of a new, unrelated one, but rather, as the two texts reveal, it ought to be read as a point of transition between what happened and what comes next. This transition between "then" and "now" is complex and complicated in contexts of violence, its consequences devastating if not approached and negotiated adequately. Zaldúa's short story, for example, captures the dangers of retrospective historical views that tend to interpret the present from a narrow and capricious understanding of the past (the collapse of past and present), which can lead to old and new forms of violence. Saizarbitoria's novella, on the other hand, looks at the festering wounds caused by unacknowledged and unresolved histories of loss (the traces of the past in the present). Throughout these two complementary readings of the relationship between the past and the present, there is a critique on public institution's role in the management of painful histories as well as an emphasis on the responsibility that society bears upon the resolution of such histories and their legacies which becomes more salient in their respective endings. Both "Gerra

zibilak" and *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* end with the Basque police force's account of the events (the arrest of the protagonist and her unit in one case, the discovery of the old *gudari's* body in the other) and the decision to not release any information to the public. In the former, this decision is made after having assessed that the arrested individuals pose no physical threat and hence there is no need to alarm society. From the Ertzaintza's standpoint, the real danger is ETA but, against judge Garzon's predicament, they don't believe that every incident is connected to ETA. By ruling out any connection between the armed activity of the military unit and ETA's, the Ertzaintza resist being caught in narratives that lead to memory loops that fuel rather than prevent conflict. Nevertheless, the Ertzaintza's gatekeeping attitude toward the sharing of information with the public shouldn't be left unchallenged. Why assume that society would be alarmed upon learning about the existence of the protagonist and her unit mates? After all, the release of information could be taken as an opportunity to collectively discuss the conditions that lead to the perpetuation of conflict and the role different actors (from public institutions to society in general) play in it. Therefore, what does the Basque police force want to protect society from? Is it really a matter of safety or of decision making? Indeed, the Ertzaintza's actions reflect how much of the latter with regard to conflict assessment is left in the hands of public institutions without involving the population, as a truly functioning democracy establishes.¹⁶ However, although this is the dynamic that "Gerra zibilak" recreates on the pages, it is also what undoes as the reader becomes both witness and reflexively implicated in the story.

In *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua*, on the other hand, it is not clear what leads the Basque police to not inform the public of their findings although the reasons could be similar to the ones already stated. However, we are told that, "[a]lthough the media, as requested by the police, barely mentioned the discovery of an old man's body at Asensio," the news of the finding of the old *gudari's* body not only circulate by word of mouth but also trigger a reaction as many people, "especially young people" feel the need to visit the location and "to dig in and examine the black earth, without really knowing what they were looking for, continuing the search that he had begun" (Saizarbitoria, 2012: 134). This episode illustrates the failure of public institutions to offer an adequate response to the old *gudari's* loss at the same time that posits its faith in the capacity of citizens to work toward change. At this point, the protagonist's body is unreadable for the individuals gathered at Asensio, which proves the pervasiveness of the narratives that conditioned his life while alive and continue to do so now that he is dead. However, young people's investment in continuing the old *gudari's* search, even if they don't know what exactly they are looking for, offers a hopeful message that future generations will take upon themselves the task to excavate and unbury the histories of feeling that are still to be told about the war. Although this is a future yet to come,¹⁷ it is also what *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua* performs through the telling of the old *gudari's* story. In this sense, Saizarbitoria's novella operates as an archive of feelings (Cvetkovich, 2003), a repository of feelings and emotions about the war.

"Gerra zibilak" and *Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua*, each in their own way, invite us readers and members of society to critically examine the narratives on the past in which we also participate so that

¹⁶ In the case of the Basque conflict, civilian-led initiatives have been and continue to be paramount to the ongoing peace process.

¹⁷ As I write these lines, the Spanish senate has already approved the Law of Democratic Memory with the goal to acknowledge the victims of the war and Franco's dictatorship. The 1977 Amnesty Law, however, will continue to be in force. The Association for the Recuperation of the Historical Memory has harshly criticized the initiative as it doesn't guarantee the rights of the victims of the Francoist regime to truth, justice, and reparation.

the search for resolution of conflict doesn't perpetuate old and create new structures of pain and suffering.

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