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Núm. 101

Transatlantic Letters: An Epistolary Exchange between Basque and US Students on Violence and Community

Annabel Martín
María Pilar Rodríguez
(eds.)

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Transatlantic Conversations: The Starting Point

Annabel Martín and María Pilar Rodríguez

This project centers on coexistence and social violence through the eyes of a very special set of individuals. It is the outcome of a long period of close intellectual and academic collaboration between the editors, Annabel Martín and Pilar Rodríguez, strengthened by a friendship that goes back decades. Although the topics that we have addressed in our research have often been in different fields such as in film and literary analysis or in gender studies, in Annabel's case, her deep concern for questions linked to political violence, terrorism, and its victims in the Basque context has led her to publish many articles and book chapters in which her reflections combine a philosophical and political viewpoint with a sense of ethical and moral responsibility as she writes about the role of the arts in peace-making processes. This positioning is profoundly innovative and uncommon in this area of study. Similarly, based on the ethical commitment in her research, teaching, and work as a public voice in the cultural life of Donostia-San Sebastián, Pilar has edited a series of books that encourage rigorous reflections on political violence in Euskadi, works that place a special emphasis on victims of terrorism from a variety of perspectives. The goal of providing a multifaceted vision of this issue led her to prepare *Imágenes de la memoria. Víctimas del dolor y la violencia terrorista (*Images of Terrorism. Victims of Suffering and Terrorist Violence) (Biblioteca Nueva, 2015) and *Mujeres víctimas del dolor y la violencia terrorista* (Female Victims of Suffering and Terrorist Violence) (Biblioteca Nueva, 2017), books that include research by other experts on cultural analysis and violence, including work by both Pilar and Annabel. More recently, the notion of restorative justice has been explored in depth in the

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book that we edited together entitled *Tras las huellas del terrorismo en Euskadi: Justicia restaurativa, convivencia y reconciliación* (Following the Footsteps of Terrorism in the Basque Country: Restorative Justice, Coexistence, and Reconciliation) (Dykinson, 2019). In this book, research by specialists in restorative justice was combined with both the personal reflections of the individuals directly involved in organizing the encounters at the Nanclares de la Oca prison (Araba) and with the testimony of victims who took part in the various restorative justice encounters concerning either Basque terrorist violence or Spanish state terrorism. Each of us penned a chapter and the book was meant to be our small contribution to this difficult and painful conversation.

The project that concerns us here, however, belongs to a different kind of initiative. Researchers do not play the leading role nor does the writing strictly fall within the academic sphere. Instead, it gives a voice to eight students with an extraordinary capacity to critically analyze their local and global contexts. The experience emerged from the conversations that three students from Dartmouth College (Lucas Joshi, Rachel Kent, and Naren Radhakrishnan) and five from Deusto University (Paula del Barrio, Pablo Bellido, Unai Murua, Zuriñe Iglesias, and Naiara Nájera) held over e-mail and videoconferencing throughout the course of a year (from March 2020 to March 2021). Annabel launched the initiative when she put the group from her *Bullets and Letters: Basque Terrorism and the Arts* seminar in touch with a small group of Pilar's students in San Sebastian. Her goal was to provide her students with a more direct and personal approach to the Basque Country and to the problems of social coexistence after the end of ETA's terrorism campaign. The idea was to find a way of making the impact of political violence on young people in the Basque Country today come alive for a group of American students who were unfamiliar with Basque history and who lived five thousand kilometers away. How could she bring her students' American experiences of life, that seemed so removed, closer to the reality shown in the literary, filmic, and philosophical texts that were the focus of the seminar? The result went beyond our expectations as the two groups immediately connected, so much so, that it became clear that there was an urgent need to discuss their respective social and political realities across the Atlantic.

These conversations took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when confinement and isolation became our modus vivendi and contact with the world and with people outside our immediate circle was established online, our computer or mobile screens becoming our links to the outside world. The year that these conversations took place also turned turbulent from a political and social point of view. In the US, social violence reached a turning point with the murder of George

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Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, a killing that transformed the summer of 2020 into one that was marked by significant anti-racist social protests all over the US, including the towns and cities from where the Dartmouth students are from. We also witnessed the havoc wreaked by the pandemic on the most vulnerable and marginalized social and racial groups in both countries together with the respective radicalization of national politics because of the rise of the extreme right on both sides of the Atlantic. In the US, the climax of this process was the assault on the US Congress on the 6th of January 2021, an attack inspired, at the very least, by the ideology of Trumpism and its minions. How were the letters of our students not going to reveal the need to compare contexts and to reflect on contemporary shortcomings? What began as an academic approach to the challenges faced by Basque society as seen through the eyes of those who had accepted from an older generation the baton of historic responsibility, memory, and reconciliation, had evolved into a profound exchange among a group of young people who reacted intelligently and with commitment to the challenges of the current political and social situations they faced. Their writing exposes the imperative to reimagine a social sphere based on values that propagate civic coexistence.

What kind of world will these students inherit? Young people are constantly accused of showing disregard for social inequities, of lacking empathy with those who suffer, of being disinterested in the past, of resorting to selfish individualism when faced with the crumbling of the social contracts that we expected would keep us safe. Lucas, Naiara, Naren, Pablo, Paula, Rachel, Unai, and Zuriñe represent social and political commitment, intellectual curiosity, an interest in history, and a capacity to critique the texts and contexts that make up their lives. It is important to highlight that they have written these letters voluntarily, without obtaining any academic credit or material benefit, not even in terms of academic recognition at their universities. It has been a huge commitment and an equally important investment of their time in the middle of classes, exams, thesis writing, and internships. It is difficult to convey just how much we appreciate and admire what they have achieved.

Researching violence is never easy. As the specialized literature explains, resorting to violence and terror violates the moral foundation of every society. This explains why those who carry the necropolitical flag need to construct discourses that legitimize their actions and gain the support of particular sectors of society. These letters showcase some extraordinary research into the very concept of violence, into the possibility or impossibility of justifying its use in extreme situations, into exploring situations in the past and present where violence is prevalent, and, of course, into discussing degrees of responsibility and involvement. The

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maturity of the writing is striking and contradicts facile opinions about a helpless or apathetic generation. The transnational links that have been established are also worth mentioning. The letters display an effort to understand propositions and approaches from geographical, living, cultural, and political realities that are far removed. These texts come to life as they exhibit a strong capacity for empathy, a tireless quest to understand the position of others. They teach us that we can imagine a brighter future by delving into the errors of the past and the contradictions of the present. These letters shed light and hope on a committed and lucid generation, one that can make the world around them a more ethical and just place.

A distinguished set of individuals also wanted to walk with us, individuals with a prominent trajectory in the cultural, political, social, and academic worlds; friends and colleagues who have contributed with wonderfully incisive reflections of their life experiences with violence and of their aspirations for a better future, free of these tragedies. We have been very fortunate to have contributions by several of the key players in the restorative justice encounters such as Iñaki García Arrizabalaga, Maixabel Lasa, Esther Pascual, and Txema Urkijo. Other figures from the world of culture and academia like Bernardo Atxaga, Luisa Etxenike, and Cristina Ortiz also wanted to be part of this journey, long-time friends with whom we share an extensive history of collaboration and involvement. Their participation in this book has been entirely altruistic, hence, our deep thanks for this gift, one that readers will enjoy in either Spanish or English thanks to Allan Owen's translations. It was important for us to ensure that the book had a broad reading audience and that our students' families could savor their daughter or son's text in its original language. We also wish to express our appreciation to the Departamento de Igualdad, Justicia y Políticas Sociales of the Basque Government, to the University of Deusto, and to Dartmouth College for their support and funding of the translation and publication of this book.

For those of us who have been working in academia, research, and teaching for several decades, this type of project brings a breath of fresh air to a panorama focused on short-term accomplishments and success is usually measured in terms of individual benefit. We would both like to express our faith in today's youth and in the value of friendship for building a place for "the common". This book is the result of this type of collaboration, complicity, and mutual support. It demonstrates a much-needed ethos of proximity to the Other so that networks of solidarity like those exemplified here can prosper.

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Facing the Challenge

Maixabel Lasa

Legorreta, Gipuzkoa, 2021

It is an honor for me to write the prologue of this book, a book whose authors fully deserve my recognition, bearing in mind that many of them have not experienced the tragedy that so many of us have undergone either directly or indirectly through relatives, friends, acquaintances...

I am aware that many young people have never heard of ETA, nor of what the terrorist actions carried out by the Spanish Basque Battalion (I), the Anti-Communist Apostolic Alliance (AAA), or the Anti-Terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL) involved. They are unfamiliar with the recent history of our country, but I'm focusing on the reflections of these young men and women, who are also real: "they exist", they know what happened, and they have been able to bring up issues that are vital in helping us rebuild our lives together:

— Delegitimize the use of violence.
— Respect for those who are different.
— Accept responsibility for what transpired in the Basque Country.
— As far as responsibilities go, self-criticism is key.

We all need to face up to the facts: those who hid behind an idea or a political project to justify the violation of human rights; those who protected themselves behind the power they exercised because they held the State monopoly of the use of force and transgressed its limits; those who legitimized and justified their criminal actions; those who kept quiet out of fear, cowardice, or selfishness; those who expressed contempt and indifference towards the plight of their neighbors and to

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so much unjustifiable suffering; those who were late in expressing their rejection of the violation of human rights of all kinds or in showing solidarity with every victim. EVERYONE.

Self-criticism does not make us weaker; it makes us more coherent.

So that we do not make the same mistakes again, it is vital that we construct a comprehensive and inclusive memory of our recent past, one that acknowledges all the violations of human rights that took place and is not afraid of addressing the atrocities of that dark period of Basque history. We must not fall into the traps that some have laid, those who hide behind the theory that this was a conflict between two warring sides. This position glosses over the reality of the underrepresented victims of terrorism as well as those who were victims of human rights violations at the hands of law enforcement agents.

Memory is the construction of the past in the present, an instrument of interpellation that invokes and encourages reflection.

Anyone who claims that memory is stirring up a past that is better forgotten so that we can look towards the future is utterly mistaken.

It is quite the opposite. Memory is one of the great values for the future and remembering is the best possible guarantee for learning. When we learn, memory is put to good use.

This policy of creating a collective memory also needs to be based on the delegitimization of violence and on the protection of human rights. It needs to fight against every attempt to justify our violent past and accept that this is its main purpose.

For example, in regards to what Unai writes, the restorative justice meetings played a crucial role in the policy of memory and self-critique outlined here because they offer answers to questions that traditional judicial channels cannot provide. I would like to share my own experience in this matter. I participated in the meetings that, at the prisoners' own requests, were organized by Office for Victims of Terrorism of the Basque Government.

These meetings were an unprecedented project given how ETA was still active. We had no idea what the outcome could be, but we were brave enough to launch the meetings in early 2011. Esther Pascual was the chief mediator in charge of the encounters, meetings that officially came to an end in late 2012 when the Socialist party lost the general elections, although more meetings were held outside institutional channels. I took part in the meetings out of personal conviction. I have always defended the idea that we all deserve a second chance. This group of prisoners had publicly expressed their rejection of the violence carried out by ETA, and, of course, of their own participation in those crimes. They were able to self-critique their actions, given the pain they

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had caused the families, the absurdity of their motives; in short, they defended the delegitimization of violence.

After meeting with them, I also realized that these meetings had done me good, providing me with peace of mind. I learned that two of the people who took part in the murder of Juan Mari Jauregi (my husband) were convinced that they would not do it again. They do not feel proud of having been members of ETA and they affirm that this violence should never have taken place to begin with. In their words, killing was and still is unacceptable.

A third person was involved in Juan Mari's assassination. I don't know where to find him, nor do I know what his situation might be. However, I still haven't lost hope that he might follow in their footsteps. I'll be waiting for him.

Once again, I'd like to thank Rachel, Unai, Naren, Zuriñe, Lucas, Paula, Naiara, and Pablo.

Fond regards,
Maixabel

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A Beacon: A Short Letter to the Students from Dartmouth College and the University of Deusto

Bernardo Atxaga

Zalduondo, Araba, 2021

I'm also embracing this warm epistolary style to see whether, by imposing on you a little bit, I can touch the place where people of your age live. It's not easy. Time is a territory, and each generation occupies one of its own. The boundaries are also very strict, and deep relationships rarely occur, for example, between people aged twenty and those who are seventy. Let's be frank: this letter of mine, even if useful as a prologue, won't do you much good. What will be of use to you will be what you share, your current conversations, and future ones during the 21st century of which you are part. What can I do, then? I think that, quite simply, I can give you some advice.

"Advice", that is a word that rhymes with "old" in Spanish (consejo-viejo), a reason why many people reject it and try to express themselves in a lighthearted way, in an overly informal tone, tweeting, and adopting the slang spread on our devices. This won't be my approach, but I will avoid the word, and will use "beacon" instead. You know what beacons are; they are the signs that are set up to indicate spots that are dangerous and sometimes used to guide traffic. I'd like my words to mean: "Look out!"; "Be careful here!" To do this I must talk to you about something that, borrowing language from religion, I'll call Evil.

There are so few who accept their responsibility in crime. Anyone interested in the notion of Evil knows this. Just bear in mind what the

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perpetrators of the thousands of crimes that the Angel of History contemplated claimed. According to them, there were justifiable grounds for acting as they did. Calling them "Cains" —like the poet León Felipe did when he referred to General Franco's Falangists as the "Eternal Cains"— may well be a concession, given how the first murderer at least had the humanity to feel ashamed of his behavior. Don't forget that they called Hitler "the poet", and that a Spanish journalist at that time, Jacinto Miquelarena, a reporter in Berlin during the Second World War, described him as the epitome of human perfection.

But you already know all this, and I am lapsing into rhetoric reminding you of these things. You also know that they had millions of followers; you've seen many members of these hordes in photographs and documentaries, fired-up, crazed, and brutal. What you might not know, or not so much, is that there were many more, millions of people, who collaborated in these crimes in a grey, cold, and parasitical way, and who did so —I'm continuing to use religious language— because they were evil- hearted. If you want a good example of this, read the monographic issue of the French magazine *Autrement* entitled *La délation*, regarding the events that transpired in Aix-en-Provence during the Nazi government. So many anonymous accusations were received at Military Headquarters that the head of the post issued a proclamation stating that he would only accept accusations that were signed. In the same issue of the magazine details are provided of what was discovered later: those who informed on dentists were mostly dentists, and there was a similar correlation among teachers, lawyers, and other professionals. There were hundreds of thousands of cases in France. And the same thing happened in Spain, during the Civil War and even afterwards. When Franco's troops occupied a region, fugitives were hounded by thousands of pursuers. People were all ears; whispered accusations were on everybody's lips; there were a great many people who on their own initiative picked up a gun and went out to hunt them down. Afterwards, the loot was shared out: some furniture here, some land over there; and beyond that, an administrative permit to work as a taxi driver.

The reference to being evil-hearted may seem a bit weak to you, as you may think that the motive that drove these parasites to crime was basically economic. As Alina Sokol, a professor at Dartmouth College who was my neighbor in Hanover, would say to me "This is obvious. It's like saying that Quevedo wasn't sincere when he wrote love sonnets when he was sixty". However, what lies behind the obvious? Nobody would blatantly calculate this sort of thing —"if my colleague is taken to Auschwitz, I'll take up his professorship"— unless something

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inside them, invisible to everyone else, didn't give them carte blanche to do so; as well as carte blanche to put these calculations into practice. A poem by Paul Éluard expresses the idea much more beautifully. It is recited by the actress María Casares in the short film *Guernica* by Alain Resnais and Robert Hessens, while drawings and paintings by Picasso are displayed on screen:

> "Why did we fear thunder and lightning? How naïve are we! Thunder is an angel, lightning, its wings. We had never gone down to the cellar, so as not to look straight at the horror of nature".

Once again, I'm pushing the limits of rhetoric. It's beyond a doubt that the intimate side of people has to do with everything that is real, including violence and crime. The awareness of this has led philosophers, writers, anthropologists, and psychologists to write their books, artists to create their work, teachers to teach what, in general, could be described as a phenomenology of subjectivity… I just wrote, "It is beyond a doubt", and there I have been really rhetorical. Because let's not delude ourselves: it is in doubt. The economists, the *hardliners* who talk about *soft* sciences, the crows that caw at the humanities and who are right on target where they spout their filth, are lately more defiant than ever, and we need, to counter this, to insist that there is no reality that is more complex than society; no universe as incomprehensible as the world of an individual; no map more mysterious than the human face; no science as necessary as politics. However, this letter is not the place to defend this. Ultimately, this will be one of the tasks you will have throughout your lives. My aim is more modest. I've already told you what that is: offering you some advice, pointing out the beacons.

When someone studies society, they become part of the issue at hand; they are part and parcel of the matter. Getting to know society means getting to know yourself, going down to the cellar that Paul Éluard mentioned in his poem, although —I confess this is taking advantage of the epistolary register— with more presence of mind than I had in my early adolescence, when I was worried about the fact that Hitler and Mussolini had the same astrological sign as I did. Studying society is, and must be, a Socratic practice. It would be a huge error —Careful! Look out!— to lose respect for the complexity of life and the world, to study this or that social conflict like someone observing a storm from their living-room window —the image is from Kant; to think that they form part, by right, just because they say so, of that angelic group of people who live in an unspoiled realm, without any responsibilities, serving as witnesses to all those who do act wickedly. The

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motto on the beacon could be: "Humility, friends!" As far as these social aspects are concerned, the arrogant will never learn much.

I'll close my letter with some praise. With regard to self-knowledge, there is nothing more beneficial than writing. Writing is *revealing*. Letters also have a confessional element that increases the possibility of attaining this knowledge, as can be seen in the ones that you, as students from Dartmouth and Deusto, have exchanged. In this sense, it was a wise move by professors Annabel Martín and Pilar Rodríguez to launch a project that in the end has given rise to this 21st-century book, which is also apt for many people like me from the 20th century.

BA

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Chapter One

Rachel and Unai

Letter One

Unai,

As I write to you, my country is burning around me. Well, burning might be slightly overdramatic, but there certainly are police precincts, government buildings, and unlucky civilian businesses caught in the crossfire that are going up in flames at this very moment. Protestors around the country are crying out for black blood spilled senselessly and demanding change now.

There are clouds of confusion surrounding the looting. There is confusion as to who is actually responsible, whether it's protestors and Black fox frustrated that their more peaceful expressions have gone unheard for so long and thus have decided to speak up to a cruel capitalist system by undermining what it holds most dear: property; whether it's white supremacists using the protests as a guise and inciting mayhem to criminalize Black people; or whether it's simply YouTubers like Jake Paul trying to go viral. There is confusion as to whether the looting is a useful strategy of disruption or whether it only serves to destroy and pile up more rubble, especially in neighborhoods with businesses run predominantly by immigrants and people of color like Minneapolis's East Lake Street, which has suffered significant destruction in the past week. There is confusion as to whether we should even be calling it looting, whether that doesn't invoke and perpetuate the harmful racial stereotypes that got us here in the first place.

A close family friend of mine works in public healthcare in Chicago and manages many clinics in underserved neighborhoods, and several of the clinics have been broken into and ransacked over the past few days. I'll admit, I struggle to find usefulness in the undermining of social services for marginalized communities, especially amidst a pandemic we know disproportionately impacts low-income communities

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of color. Former President Barack Obama, a Chicago resident himself, laments those who have "resorted to violence…compounding the destruction of neighborhoods that are often already short on services and investment and detracting from the larger cause", ultimately concluding that we should not "excuse violence, or rationalize it, or participate in it" (Obama, 2020). It's worth noting that President Obama then goes on to advocate in favor of the American justice system, the very system that produces much of the racial injustice in the United States. Similarly, Angela Davis, a prominent Black feminist, activist, and scholar, asserts that one can be both a victim of racism and a noninnocent "perpetrator of injury" (Davis, 2012). On the other side of the debate, many have cited Martin Luther King, Jr., who stated, "A riot is the language of the unheard", to argue that Black people have exhausted every other manner of protest, that only because of the violence has the movement finally captured national attention and occupied so much airtime across the country (Barbaro, 2020). Studies such as McAdam's review of the Civil Rights era and McBay's review of United States protests from 1800-1945 have found that violence can lead to favorable outcomes for protestors (as cited in Henry, 2020); meanwhile, Chenoweth and Stephan's review of 323 conflicts found that nonviolent tactics were twice as successful (2011).

However, there is decidedly less confusion surrounding the overt, superfluous force police have deployed to counteract protestors, regardless of whether or not they are peaceful (and, it appears, in most cases they are). Many activists who have been working against police brutality and racism long before it suddenly became trendy in these past few weeks are not surprised: violence from those in power is not a mistake but a sign that the system is working exactly as it was designed to function. On many occasions, the police have fired tear gas and rubber bullets into crowds of civilians, sending protestors to the hospital and eroding any notions that the police are committed to the safety of their civilians. One need only open any social media platform and browse for a minute or so to be barraged with recordings of the state's cruel and inhumane violence.

And then there are the actual lives lost. In my own city of Indianapolis, three were shot during protests last night, one fatally. I read the headlines, which made it in the national newspapers, this morning. Seeing "Indianapolis" in the *New York Times* is, unfortunately, almost never a good thing. I scanned quickly through the article, searching for the four definitive letters I did not want to see but knew I would find: dead. Amidst all the chaos, the article said, there wasn't any information on the perpetrator or the victim. Eventually, my eyes glazed over. I clicked

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my phone off, placed it down on the counter, and slowly walked over to the couch, where I collapsed in a hollow, wordless heap.

Does it matter who the victim was? Of course, it means the world to their family and friends —their lives are forever altered, marked by a gap that won't ever be quite filled again. But I mean to say, does it matter if the victim was a police, a protestor, a civilian, a body black, white, or brown? Of course, it matters politically (Mate, 2020), whether the perpetrator was vested with power and privilege by their position or identities, whether the victim was innocent or marginalized by *their* position or identities, whether this was an act of ruthless subjugation or an act of rebellion against a creaking, cruel system. But I mean to say, blood on the streets runs red, regardless. A life ended is a life ended and a premature death always leaves behind grief and victims.

I came to this class already having formed my own ideas that condemned violence, regardless of the situation. Much of the course's content has confirmed these preconceptions of mine. We learned from Reyes Mate, a Spanish philosopher, who in an interview concurs with Hannah Arendt and says, "La forma que hemos inventado hasta ahora más operativa para evitar que la historia se repita es el perdón[1]". Here he is speaking of "el perdón como estructura lógica[2]" that negates the nefarious pattern of action-reaction (Canal Europa[3], n.d.). Watching this interview, the young girl inside me who was raised on Bible passages and rosaries nodded enthusiastically —yes, we should forgive seventy and seven times over. In the same interview, he states, "La violencia, una vez que la pones en marcha, tiene su propia logica, independentemiente de las intenciones de los que la ponen en marcha[4]". Learning about the herd mentality of ETA and reading testimonies of *ex etarras*, a number of whom comment that they may have had doubts while in the organization but were by that point too deeply entrenched to extract themselves, substantiated Mate's point. Later, we studied feminism as an antithesis and possible antidote to terrorism. In her work *Demon Lover*, Robin Morgan emphasizes the foundational role notions of connectivity play in feminism (1989). It seemed to me that there was unequivocally no room for violence, which is a fundamentally divisive force, in this version of feminism. Finally, we watched several films, including *Lasa eta Zabala, Trece*

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[1] The most operative way we have invented so far to prevent history from repeating itself is forgiveness.

[2] Forgiveness as a logical structure.

[3] https://www.gipuzkoa.eus/es/web/kultura/-/reyes-mate

[4] Violence, once you start it, has its own logic, regardless of the intentions of those who start it.

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entre mil, and *Al final del tunel*, which tell the painful, weighty stories of victims and perpetrators alike from both sides of the conflict. It was these films, more than anything else we watched or read, that persuaded me against the expediency of violence. The barely perceptible crack in victims' voices as they spoke of their lost family members, the mental duress of the perpetrators as they struggled with their remorse, the grief that the next generation already carries in their bones and their collective memories —all this could have been avoided, I thought to myself. Certainly, there had to have been another way. In light of all this mounting evidence, I rather easily allowed myself to rest satisfactorily in my total condemnation of all types of violence. Because the conflict we were studying, the Basque independence movement and the terrorism of ETA, was distant from the front step of my own door, it was rather easy to theorize, pass judgements, and claim a detached moral high ground.

And then the guns were fired in my own country, blasting through beating hearts and any illusion of impartiality I held before. Now, I am grieving for my society, and I wonder how we will overcome all this harm —both harms more immediate and proximate and harms that run deep and long all the way back to 1492. I am both heartened and discouraged by what has transpired in Euskadi–heartened by the fact that many now denounce past violence with cries of "never more", discouraged by how reconciliation efforts appear to have fizzled out unrealized, and, more than anything else, uncertain about the tenuousness that seems to linger just beneath the surface-level peace. The ambiguous lack of a decisive resolution in Euskadi mirrors my uncertainty about the upheaval unfolding in the United States right now, and particularly the role violence should play —if any role at all. I know beyond a doubt that I will never participate in the violence myself. But I also recognize that it is impossible to condemn the violence of some protestors while not also condemning the deep, structural violence that has engendered their situation in the first place, a violence against which I woefully have been insufficiently outspoken up to this point. And so, I am left doggy paddling in a sea of ambivalence and shame.

Perhaps by the time this book gets published, the violence will have ceased; hopefully, it will not be replaced by the same complacency and silent oppression as before but rather by the long, purposeful march towards liberation. In the meantime, I will wade through my uncertainties, continue to listen, and refuse to shy away from the personal obligation of responding ethically. In particular, I am drawing on all we have learned in the context of the Basque independence movement. For a book that's supposed to be about this movement–one that happened almost a decade ago on another continent —I've sure spent a lot of time talking about a conflict

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going on now in the United States. But I do so precisely for those differences, because despite distances in time and space, what occurred and what is occurring are in many ways similar. People are fighting for an ideology (regardless of whether that ideology is "right" or "wrong"), and a small but significant minority of those people are using violent ends in pursuit of those ideologies. The state is likewise responding with violence to try to quell the insurgents, though it is argued, as in Euskadi, that the state itself is the originator and caretaker of the violent conditions that produce the violent reactions. At the same time, I want to acknowledge the marked differences between the two, namely that the conflict today in the United States is racialized and takes place in a settler-colonial state. By drawing a comparison here between this rising movement in the United States for an end to police brutality and racial oppression and the Basque independence conflict, it is not my aim to smooth over distinctions or to depoliticize; rather, through this intervention I hope to demonstrate the underlying commonalities that connect the two struggles.

Unai, as I continue to search for understanding in the midst of this fight for racial equity, I would love to hear your thoughts. What role does violence play in the pursuit of justice? Can it ever be justified, or does it only serve to replicate the inescapable chain of action-reaction? Does the defense of an ideology ever necessitate destruction, even the destruction of a human life? And are pardon and/or reconciliation possible and efficacious in imagining and enacting a truly just future?

A few parting thoughts: last night I saw a photo of a protestor holding a sign that read something along the lines of, "You protest against the violence, but we learned it from *you*". This protestor was onto something–the foundations of this country rest on broken bodies, looted land, and violences more horrible than I could imagine. In the eye for an eye morality that holds us hostage till this day, and in light of ongoing racial oppression, those who choose to rebel violently against violent power have every right to do so. But I wonder if, in a world where the name of the game is violent domination, the most radical action is to overthrow that tyranny with peaceful, nonviolent acts. If it's revolution we're really after, can our new, reimagined society be truly just if it rests on a foundation of violence?

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* * *

Rachel,

Shocking. Yes, that's the word I'd choose. Well, hang on. If I really think about it, it's risky to leave concern and uncertainty out of the equation. Even fear has a place among my candidates. I'm not sure which one of them to opt for, whether just for one, all of them, or none. Rachel, I wouldn't be able to define in just one word the feelings that I get from watching the scenes that have been coming out of the United States during the last few weeks. Of course, I'm telling you all this from the comfort of my chair in my study, without experiencing firsthand everything that's happening over there, without seeing with my own eyes how the streets that you could walk around peacefully less than a month ago have turned from one day to the next into a genuine battlefield, with barricades and trenches everywhere, where any available object becomes a weapon to hurl at the enemy. Just like in a war, anything goes.

I don't know if it also exists in English or whether you have an equivalent expression; there probably is, but in Spanish there's a saying that goes like this: "Humans are the only animals to trip twice over the same stone". Utterly spot-on. In my opinion it even falls short, as how often have we seen that violence is not the right way to achieve what we believe in? Countless times. But likewise, I wonder: What principles should people stick to, when after trying every possible peaceful means

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of showing their disagreement with a particular situation, these strategies have been ignored again and again?

After considering these questions and realizing that I don't have enough knowledge to answer either of them apart from with a mere monosyllable or a phrase like: "violence is not the solution", —careful, I must make clear that I think that violence will never be valid, even when what you are fighting for is the most utterly just cause in the world. Nevertheless, I'd like to go into its genealogy in greater depth, and avoid commonplace ideas, so I decided to read various articles having to do with violence, its causes, whether it is justified or not, and whether its use can ever be legitimate.

I have tried to approach the concept of violence to deconstruct it and establish what ideas its meaning is based on, or at least to detect what I think are the essential concepts you need to be able to understand it. As they say, "sometimes, less is more" and the fact is that the view put forward by Hannah Arendt, the German political theorist and author of books like *On violence* (1970) (quoted in Hilb, 2001, p. 18) with regard to violence, despite being simple, is quite sufficient: "Violence is an instrumental means to achieve an extrinsic goal". This ten-word definition has been enough for me to identify that, firstly, it is a tool used by human beings, and secondly, that it is closely linked to achieving a specific aim or goal.

At this point, there is something missing, the puzzle is incomplete. I'm missing a piece. Or rather, the piece, the one that has become the focal point of violence for me, the one that gives it a deeper meaning. And it's a good thing that on my way I came across Miquel Rodrigo, a professor in communication theory at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, because without him I could never have discovered that culture, yes, culture, is the key to understanding the origin of possible violent behavior, culture defined as the social construct of a specific community, made up of music, symbols, traditions, language, and its history, an aspect that I'll pay more attention to in the next paragraph (Rodrigo, 2003, p. 18).

Along the same lines, Humberto Trujillo, a professor at the University of Granada, argues that "people relate to their environment based on how they perceive and interpret it (reality). Perceptions have a clear effect on emotional levels of aggressiveness and, therefore, on the violent act as a behavioral result of that" (Trujillo, 2009, p. 166).

I am quite sure that the relationships that anyone has with the other members of their society are a determining factor of their community, just like their history, which is specific and unique. The point I'm not sure about at this moment is: are both equally important in de-

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termining violent conduct or behavior? The Spanish Royal Academy dictionary defines the word, history, as the "entire series of political, social, economic, and cultural events or facts of a people or a nation" (RAE, 2020). Personally, history is a field of knowledge that has always fascinated me: learning about where we come from, what milestones or moments have marked our ancestors' life and have had their effect on later generations, analyzing the evolution of thought and why not, imagining what the world would be like if certain events had never happened.

Taking advantage of the fact that the book focuses on ETA, I sometimes think about whether it would have existed without the establishment of the Franco regime. I don't think so. Obviously Basque nationalism would have continued to exist, but I really doubt that an organization like ETA would have emerged. I don't know, these are just mere presuppositions. Getting back to the subject —sorry, but I start writing and begin to unknowingly wander off the subject— history is inherently objective. This is beyond dispute. However, this is told by an individual, by someone who has a background, experiences, and a life story that add an element of subjectivity to how the facts are narrated. In this regard, Rodrigo thinks that "the correlation of forces that exists in a society is going to be a crucial factor when it comes to imposing one's viewpoint, interpretation of reality, and values" (Rodrigo, 2003, p. 17). Let's not delude ourselves, he does have a point and more so when the narrator has experienced all these events first-hand. Can his/her discourse influence the listener's perception of reality? Of course, it can. Is there a probability that these words can induce them to violence? Anything is possible. Does that mean that the story loses credibility? Not at all. Because history is a landscape and as such it can be observed from different places; as a result, the fact that I can't see an island, a tree, or a mountain from where I stand doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. If I move and change my position, I'll see it.

So, what is the problem? The answer is simple: our total inability to accept a plurality of narratives, thinking, and ways of experiencing and interpreting reality. We think that the only valid history is the one that my people and I have experienced, without stopping to think that the persons standing in front of us also have something say, that just like me, these individuals have the right to express themselves, to be heard and to tell us that the island, tree, or mountain that we can't see and don't want to see, is actually there. This involves a collective effort. I don't know if we are really up to it. The lack of these skills is what constantly causes conflicting situations that most of the time end up in violence.

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Relax! There is a cure. It's free and within everyone's reach. It's called understanding. It makes sense that in the Afro-American community in the United States, fed up with seeing how the police mistreats them after years of fighting against racism, and seeing that they continue to be victims of countless injustices, would take to the streets, protest, and make use of violence, just as it was when ETA was formed and took its first steps. If I had been born in the Basque Country during Franco's dictatorship, I don't know if I would have taken part in the organization, but I perfectly understand that, after seeing how your culture, your language, and your traditions are trampled on and suppressed, you decide to rise and fight. However, I am in no way justifying the use of violence because understanding and justifying don't share the same meaning. The former refers to making sense of its existence, whereas the latter alludes to making value judgements that make it possible to assess and legitimize violence (Rodrigo, 2003, p. 15). I go for the former.

From all that I have read, I was struck by the fact that violence can not only be justified or not, (an etiological strategy, focusing on individuals and their circumstances), but it can also be classified as being worthy or unworthy (teleological perspective, centering on studying the aim that the use of the violence being carried out is pursuing) (Rodrigo, 2003, p. 18). Who determines which cause is worthy? The person affected by the conflict or a third party who is not tainted by the context and circumstances that have caused the problematic situation? Antonio Gómez Ramos, Doctor of Philosophy from the Autonomous University of Madrid (Gómez, 2020, p. 4), reveals a decisive determining factor that leads an individual to decide, why not say it, to take the law into their own hands: "Whoever uses violence does so fulfilling a need that they consider to be objective; but whoever applies violence also compulsively fulfills a need that is utterly beyond them. They are not free but are driven by a superior power which they have no control over whatsoever".

I interpret violence as a last resort, the course of action that you always want to avoid, one that is constantly calling out to you and that you should reject as often as necessary. However, it's smart; it knows you better than you think, and it attacks you in moments of uncertainty and confusion, when your despair is so intense that you even start to approve of it and you fall at its feet. At the start of the relationship, you still see yourself as being mentally strong. "I'm the one that's in control", you persuade yourself. You're deluded. Time goes by and you start to realize that your petty attempts to achieve your goal are useless. You grow weaker and more despondent. You're weaker

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and weaker and violence knows it. Now, when your exhaustion is at its peak, it comes up to you and says: "Take a good look at the scales. How are they? Imbalanced, right? I'm the only one who can help you to restore justice. Go right ahead". There is no turning back now. The meaning of your life has changed completely; all you live for now is managing to redress the scales. Anyone who gets in your way must be removed, regardless of who it is, what they think, or where they are from. It doesn't matter. They're an obstacle and as such must be eliminated. You start with the first one. Then the second and third ones come along, and so on because remember: "the scale must be balanced".

This is the greatest danger, that the means end up justifying the ends or even worse: they become the goal itself. Reality ends up being distorted and the goal blurred. Hilb (Hilb, 2001, p. 23) states that, "violence can only be rational if it pursues short-term aims", and adds that it is only rational if it is not calculated, as, in that case, it becomes irrational. When isn't the use of violence premeditated? It's one thing to respond aggressively to a stimulus and react violently or use force at a particular moment in time because of specific circumstances. It's quite another to sabotage an event, smash up sculptures or plaques in honor of someone, or loot someone's business just because of who they are. In these examples there is a plan that has been mapped out. All the details have been carefully examined and meticulously measured to prevent mistakes.

What for? For nothing. I'm lying, though. It is useful. It's what fuels the conflict, an innate generator of more violence, an ideal tool to increase hatred, and an excellent means to ensure that the rift between people who think differently is even greater. Its use makes absolutely no sense. It is resorting to what you condemn, causing situations around you that you want to put an end to, to harming your colleagues and innocent people who have nothing to do with your struggle; furthermore, it will very likely end up harming people that share the same ideas as you, but who prefer to stay in the background. It is becoming what you once swore to eradicate. From being dominated to becoming dominant. And what is worse, it is ensuring that a just and worthy cause that is worth fighting for loses the sense, legitimacy, and support that it had in the beginning.

Sometimes I have the feeling that we forget that we are all people. We live in a polarized, tense, and increasingly extreme atmosphere. We are building a society that prioritizes ideologies over people —there are ideas that have no place in the 21st century; we must root them out. Do you know what we are going to achieve if we carry on like this?

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We'll create the perfect breeding ground for violence to become established among us so that it can be used more and more often.

Rachel, it's in our hands to turn the situation around. We are the present and the future. We need to be quite clear about what we want to be and how we want to achieve this. Violence definitely doesn't form part of my plans.

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Letter Two

Unai,

I agree with you in every way that violence will never be the path I choose. Yet, I struggle to propose a law that would unequivocally condemn every instance of violence in every age in every corner of the world. This seems to me an endeavor risking the pitfalls of reductionism, an ethic too blunt to encompass all the conditional nuance that may drive an individual or group to violent means. Every situation which spawns violence is unique and formed by its own particular fluid relations that are constantly being renegotiated. I have certainly not thought long and hard enough —have not *had* to think long and hard enough, for I have fortunately lived in bliss and evaded such desperation— of all the circumstances that could engender violence. Further, I am caught wondering whether violence might ever have generative power —can destruction be a necessary precondition for recreation? The West of the U.S. is in the thick of wildfire season right now, and it's only when fires make their way through the forests that new life springs forth —for example, highly prized mushrooms like matsutake and morels are known to poke their heads out from the ashes. The destruction is the forest's natural reset, a blank canvas of a type; in the face of archaic sociopolitical systems that creak with every move and threaten to crash just like old trees, could this sort of move be necessary? Might the possibility of building from the ground up afforded by destruction be necessary to start anew? But of course, ecological disturbances like wildfires differ from socially produced human violence, and the metaphor may not extend as far as I'm humbly offering.

All this to say, I have not arrived yet at the point where I feel confident in issuing an indisputable denunciation against violence in all its forms, though perhaps minds greater than my own could manage.

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What I do feel confident in postulating, however, is a universal ethic to supplant, heal, and circumvent violence. Unai, you touched on this ethic I have in mind: you wrote of the diversity of historical perspectives, how an entity so seemingly objective and matter-of-fact as the past is rather molded by subjectivity —and, I might add, that those dominant subjectivities emerge along rigid lines of power and privilege. You rightly told of how, in light of history's partiality, one must strive to transcend the hegemonic stories they've been told and seek out new perspectives, to move themselves in order to see the metaphorical island, tree, or mountain that's been hidden just beyond their view. But you worried about our collective inability to move beyond ourselves and consider the humanity of others, to understand the validity of their thoughts and experiences even if they run contrary to our own. "No sé si estamos muy por la labor[5]", you say. If we were to assess the likelihood of our success based on evidence up to this point, I'd have to agree. But I think we'd also both agree that any world we want to imagine and work toward must move beyond the constraints of our past. For this ambitious but vital worldmaking project, we must pick up our tools and set to work equipped with a renewed vigor for empathy. My life experience may be short, but after studying conflicts like that of Pais Vasco and living through the ongoing eruption of centuries of racial oppression in the United States, I know this much. It is empathy that has the power to help us move beyond our individualism, empathy that illuminates the threads that connect us and intertwine to form the fabric of the lively worlds we inhabit; violence, on the other hand, erases these ties. Violence relies on alienation and an ardent denial of that which empathy most fundamentally supposes, which is the condition of being interconnected to the other through our mutual dependence and vulnerability, despite any difference. According to Judith Butler (2004), "violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another" (p. 27). Even on a neurobiological level, empathy is posited as the converse of violence: the presence of one impedes the presence of the other. The areas of the prefrontal cortex responsible for extreme violent behavior are the precise regions that have the capacity for great empathy (Chialant *et al.*, 2016).

As far as contending with societal violence, empathy offers us at least three crucial ways forward. First, empathy helps us understand what drives others to violence —and moves us to change those con-

[5] I don't know if we are willing to do that.

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ditions. At the time I pen this letter, the protests continue, though it is only the most hard-pressed cities and the staunchest of advocates who remain in the streets; most have tired and returned to their homes, workplaces, and regular lives, sating their consciences by having done their civic duty for a few weeks. But, in the places where demonstrations for racial justice and anti-police brutality are still occurring, the federal government has cracked down with an iron rod, deploying unmarked federal agents to swarm city streets, most egregiously in Portland, Oregon, from where images emerged looking not unlike battle scenes. Many of us across the country gaped in horror as we watched footage of law enforcement officials in full riot gear beating citizens, throwing them to the ground, shooting them with rubber bullets, and spraying tear gas into their faces. If I'm being honest, I've stopped watching these videos because they only serve to sink me deeper and deeper into a pit of helplessness against such a vast, violent machine. In places like Portland, Chicago, Albuquerque, and Kansas City, we see immediate violence enacted by the protestors begetting more immediate violence from the government —unsurprising, really, from this current administration and indeed this nation.

It would be easy to condemn the protestors' violent displays as rash, counterproductive, and complicit in setting off this chain of violence; and one could even conclude that they are no better than any police officer who would likewise violently assault or kill. But let us not forget the slower, structural violence that produced the conditions driving protestors to the streets in the first place. Let us not forget the pervasiveness, unfathomability, and efficacy of centuries' worth of oppressive racial violence that makes Blacks in the United States protest, not as if their very lives depend on it, but because their lives do indeed depend on it: compared to whites, Blacks are 2.8 times more likely to die from police violence (Degue *et al.*, 2016), and Blacks' life expectancy is on average more than three years less than whites (CDC, 2017). These alarming statistics are due to persistent, systemic racism that values Black lives less than white lives and manifests in our education, healthcare, justice, finance, and labor systems. The violent behavior of protestors cannot be considered outside the context of the structural violence producing it. We might also consider the conditions that create violent police officers in the first place, which extend far beyond any individuals' inclinations and instead reside in the structures of a carceral, white-dominated state that condones and even rewards aggressive, unyielding enforcement of the law. It is no wonder that police officers enmeshed in a system founded on the violence of slave catchers perpetuate this legacy today (Hansen, 2019). Rather than attacking individuals,

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empathy urges us to move outside our supposed moral convictions and consider histories —and presents— other than our own.

This historically rooted empathy is fundamental for approaching the Basque conflict as well. ETA may have begun as a study group but given that the organization was studying a history and current reality undergirded by violence, one can understand how it might turn toward violence in the pursuit of Basque independence. It is not difficult to imagine that a people mired in the violence catalyzed by the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent harsh, bloody regime of Franco would turn to violence as their supposed only recourse for asserting an unjustly repressed collective identity and seeking vengeance for the *gudaris*[6] (Fernández Soldevilla, 2020), their mythical notion of a wronged ancestral group. And it is likewise no wonder that ETA continued with its displays of violence when the supposed democratic Spanish state retaliated in the 1980s by initiating its "dirty war", sending agents from GAL to torture and kill Basque insurgents (Woodworth, 2008). Empathy can also lead us to understand how opponents of ETA, no doubt feeling their loved ones' safety threatened, could have staged these violent counterattacks.

It is also empathy that will guide us in coming to terms with those who have wronged us, or even with our own selves, when we have done harm, and to make a future of coexistence possible. In the aftermath of terrorist and state violence in País Vasco, restorative justice was central in striving for this coexistence, particularly through the Nanclares de la Oca program. Restorative justice moves beyond mere retributive justice to assert the "protagonismo de las víctimas en la resolución de los conflictos de índole penal, sin olvidar al victimario y su contexto social[7]" (Pascual Rodríguez, 2013, p. 23-24). It is founded on the recognition that, once weapons have been laid down, fragmented communities must be picked up and put back together again; relationships between the victims and perpetrators must be repaired. The Nanclares de la Oca project facilitated encounters between victims and perpetrators in the Nanclares de la Oca prison in the midst of a lengthy, careful process of intensive *auto-crítica* (self-criticism), coming to terms with the past, and reimagining the future. Speaking of his own experience with the program, ex-etarra Luis María Carrasco Asenguinolaza says, "La justicia restaurativa… permite al victimario construir un relato de los hechos más ajustado a la realidad y le ofrece una valiosa oportuni-

[6] Basque fighters

[7] The protagonism of the victims in the resolution of conflicts of a criminal nature, without forgetting the perpetrator and his social context.

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dad de cambio, regeneración ética y rectificación. Le brinda una oportunidad para restaurar su propia vida, para iniciar un nuevo camino trazado en sentido inverso a lo que constituyó su pasado, a todo lo que le encadena y le somete a él. En eso consistió mi propia experiencia[8]" (Carrasco Aseguinolaza, 2013, p. 278).

Maixabel Lasa, who participated in the program, has been among the most outspoken of victims. She elected to meet with Carrasco, the very man who had murdered her husband, not for individual benefit but rather for a small yet fundamental step toward healing Basque society. She came into the meeting "simplemente pensando en que esto podría ser un granito de arena en el camino hacia la futura convivencia que, esperamos o no, ellos van a salir. Más tarde o más pronto, no sé, pero cuando cumplan sus condenas saldrán a la calle y van a tener que convivir[9]" (Lasa, 2014). Lasa's conclusion here stems from her firm conviction that all have a right to "una segunda oportunidad[10]" (Lasa, 2014) —a second chance to return from the alienation of violence and take up the path toward coexistence. Such a conviction is made possible only through the strongest ethic of empathy that unfailingly asserts the humanity of the other, even when they have breached the humanity of others. Empathy likewise played a key role in Carrasco's process of *duelo* (mourning) and *auto-crítica* (self-criticism). In an account of his preparation for his encounter with Lasa, Carrasco recounts how his remorse stemmed from the recognition that he was culpable for "haber destruido su proyecto de vida en común y sus sueños compartidos[11]" (Carrasco Aseguinolaza, 2013, p. 280). Such a recognition is inconceivably difficult because it indubitably incriminates his past actions, but such is the capacity of empathy for getting beyond one's own person and taking on the lives of others. But I need not tell you this story, Unai —for in addition to being among the most visionary of individuals to emerge in the wake of the Basque conflict, Maixabel is your aunt. I'm sure that for you, this story is one that is truly living, far beyond any accounts of *encuentros* I've read or YouTube interviews I've watched. And

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[8] Restorative justice… allows the perpetrator to build a narrative of the events that is more adjusted to reality and offers him a valuable opportunity for change, ethical regeneration and rectification. It gives him an opportunity to restore his own life, to start a new path traced in the opposite direction to what was his past, to everything that chains him and submits him to it. That was my own experience.

[9] Just thinking that this could be a grain of sand on the way to the future coexistence that, we hope or not, they are going to leave. Sooner or later, I don't know, but when they serve their sentences, they will go out and have to live together.

[10] A second chance.

[11] Have destroyed a life project in common and their shared dreams.

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by "living", what I mean to say is this: as I've gotten to know you, it's become increasingly clear that your aunt's commitment to empathy has unequivocally taken root in *you,* in your propensity to think of and be moved on behalf of another. Violence may in some cases produce the conditions for regeneration, but in you I have come to know beyond a shadow of a doubt the life-making powers of empathy.

This empathy exhibited by you, Maixabel, and restorative justice efforts in País Vasco also operates in transformative justice work in the United States, in which activists, particularly those in the abolitionist tradition, seek to overcome and move beyond past and present harms. Transformative justice calls into question the societal conditions that permit violence to occur in the first place and advocates for a wide scale overhaul of these structures. Some prefer transformative justice to restorative justice because the latter focuses too narrowly on interpersonal relationships and harms while failing to wholly address the structural causes, and because "restorative" implies a past ideal to which one hopes to return, an ideal that is ultimately romanticized and unfounded. Under the framework of abolitionist transformative justice, incarcerating perpetrators —even, as is most relevant for this present moment, police officers who kill Black people— is a perpetuation of the current system enmeshed in violence. Abolitionists Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie say, "Demands for arrests and prosecutions of killer cops are inconsistent with demands to #DefundPolice because they have proven to be sources of violence, not safety. We can't claim the system must be dismantled because it is a danger to Black lives and at the same time legitimize it by turning to it for justice" (Kaba and Ritchie, 2020). Instead, abolitionists invoke the capacities of imagination to envision systems of accountability outside the violence of the criminal justice system. The abolitionist commitment to collective liberation, in lieu of a desire to inflict the same violence that has ensnared Black communities for centuries, relies on a radical recognition of the humanity of all that is so wide it includes even perpetrators. Despite their semantic and functional differences, both restorative and transformative justice rest on empathy to transcend hegemonic structures of violence and work towards just, peaceful, collective futures.

In addition to enabling understanding of past violence and laying the foundations for coexistence, empathy offers us a remedy to avoid and detonate future instances of violence. Any instance of violence begs the question, asked by Butler, "Who counts as human?" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). In fact, to execute violence against another, Butler argues, that individual or group must first be "derealized", or have the fact of their life negated. Once unreal, violence enacted against the other is

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not an infraction against or affront to human life as the other was not granted the status of living to begin with (Butler, 2004). Borrowing from Levinas, Butler proposes "the face" as the essential recognition of the humanity of another, the force affirming the moral imperative, "thou shalt not kill". To do away with another human is by necessity to dehumanize them and forgo this face that pleads on behalf of their life. Further, any violence against the other, while not literal murder, is a killing of a type that once again rests on denying their face. Police officers who shoot unarmed Black individuals must first kill off any notions of that person's face in their mind before they can pull the trigger; they must cease to recognize that that person is a father, daughter, mother-in-law, nephew, that they have a story, a beating heart, a warm plate waiting for them on the dinner table that will soon grow cold, a job to get to the following morning. Terrorists who place car bombs likewise need to dissociate a victim's humanity from their human self and reduce their prey to nothing more than an undesirable political ideology in order to fulfill their murderous act. State agents who torture and execute radicals need to dismiss the insurgents as mere blights. Even protesters who employ violent means, perhaps destroying storefronts and taking inventory, must vehemently negate that the recipients of this violence could lose their livelihoods. The nullification of the other's face is a necessary precondition to violence. What is not granted a face, or the status of life, in the first place cannot be killed, and thus, violence is rationalized —better yet, violence is not violence at all, but rather an empty, non-ethical act.

Empathy, on the other hand, demands that I look into and admit the face of the other. It implores me to believe that, despite difference, this human in front of me lives a life as rich and complex as my own. It draws me into an "ethical outrage" on behalf of the other (Butler, 2004, p. 151) that both renders impossible the enactment of violence against them and implicates me in their existence. Empathy initially opens our eyes to the many injustices waged against an oppressed class that in turn cause them to rise up and, lacking other alternatives, enact violence; and empathy, coupled with a fierce commitment to liberation, then leads us to the streets, courtrooms, statehouses, soup kitchens, town meetings, and our neighbors' doorsteps to combat these injustices on behalf of the other. Lilla Watson rightly noted how each person's living is wound around another's, saying, "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together". Empathy allows us to see the ways our own liberations are in actuality entangled in collective liberation and debunks the myth of individual-

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ized advancement. It opens our eyes to the "thick" worlds we inhabit (Haraway, 2016) in which the rule of thumb is layered interconnectedness rather than the alienation brought about by violence.

Unai, I share in your awareness of the weight pressing urgently on us to heal past rifts wrought by violence and afford it no place in our imaginations of the future. Nevertheless, the fact remains that our world today is incredibly violent. It may be naïve to simply wish the violence away —in fact, doing so could be unempathetic— but meeting that violence with radical empathy could be our best bet to deconstruct it. In that case, may our empathy be soft and expansive enough to break the rigid, iron chains of violence that to this day hold us captive.

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* * *

Rachel,

It is undeniable that your desire to shape a law to regulate violence on a global scale, regardless of the nature and intensity with which it is used, would be a fantastic advancement in guaranteeing and protecting basic human rights. However, the ambitious nature of your proposal is proportional to the problems that may well appear along the way to setting it up, such as the obligation of various states to take the stand and admit having taken part in the absurdity of war or the refusal of so many others to abandon capital punishment. Yes, it is surprising that in the XXI century (sometimes it's hard to believe that this is the space-time that we live in) various countries, all over the world, have laws in their respective legal systems that violate the integrity and dignity that is inherent to all human beings without any scruples whatsoever. The best example of this is undoubtedly the death penalty. It is inconceivable that in the same place where rights and freedoms are defended, violent practices disguised as justice are allowed and accommodated. Having said that, getting back on track again, let's hope someday that proposals like yours could be taken into consideration by institutions and organizations. The medium-long term goal would be to design a plan that in various stages, might favor a decrease in the use of violence until it was reduced to an insignificant speck of dust and a memory of times gone by. I don't know if all that we've been talking about is part of the real plans of any state. Their active intervention would be a factor that is absolutely essential; unfortunately, there's no time to lose and you know better than me that it is vital to take the first steps. What better way to start than to work on empathy; but at the same time, backed up by the will of the people. If you don't really want something, if you don't try, nothing around you is going to change.

Rachel, I'm going to tell you a little story. It's something that has been waiting for me for quite some time, an outstanding debt that I owed myself and that I have settled this summer. Looking at this with a certain degree of perspective, I'm surprised that I haven't done this much earlier bearing in mind my interest in ETA and terrorism in the Basque Country. I've attended a great many memorials, several institu-

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tional events, quite a few round tables, and even a play, but I had never previously plunged into literature to address the subject, knowing at first hand that, even though I have put this "appointment" off for almost five years, it was waiting for me with open arms, anxious for me to get to know its story. I'm talking about the book, *Patria* (Homeland) written by Fernando Aramburu in 2016. A work that perfectly exemplifies the reality endured for decades in small towns in the Basque Country, told through the story of Miren and Bittori, two friends, two families, who see how their paths separate and split as the Basque conflict gets worse. It describes the scenario in which violence, accompanied by hatred, the fear of being stigmatized, and trepidation about the opinion of others overcomes empathy, hiding it away and nearly removing it from the board. The best possible illustration of tossing a coin that determines the fate of those who take part and that lands tails up.

Maybe I've been late reading the book, although, as fate would have it, my reading it happened at just the right moment. Thanks to this text, I have understood, in greater detail, how devastating it can become to not stop violence in time. In the same way, it has allowed me to reflect on how difficult it is under certain circumstances to act in an empathic manner, in other words, of being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. The skill of knowing how to read and detect the emotional state of the person who I have facing me, and above all, the capacity to personally feel what other people are feeling, to experience to a greater or lesser extent how something ignites inside you, moves, raises your awareness, and depending on the impact that it has made, pushes you to act. I have also learnt that this consists of a dual process that contains cognitive and affective elements. The former refers to an intellectual, analytical, and thoughtful aspect, whereas the latter has to do with the personal sphere in which we tend to search for complicity using our feelings (Moya-Albiol, 2011, p. 15). This is the complication that I was alluding to: the struggle between the head and the heart, a duel that we have all faced at some time or are going to experience, and why not admit it, a skirmish that sometimes prevents us from being supportive because we are stuck in our ideals, making us move several steps back on our path to understanding. I have concluded that our empathy is selective. Before talking about this, I'd like to share certain concerns that I have with you.

Various neurological studies claim that "certain regions of the brain, such as the prefrontal cortex, the temporal lobe, the amygdala, and other structures in the limbic system, play a vital role in empathy". From the limbic system, the place where the emotions cohabit, information is passed on to the temporal, prefrontal part of the cerebral cortex where,

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as if this were a traffic light, certain emotions are allowed to be expressed in detriment to others (Moya-Albiol, 2011, p. 18). Researchers are still not completely sure, but there is a hypothesis that when empathy is activated, violence cannot see the sunlight, although it is also true that the development of interpersonal skills also plays a fundamental role in making this impossible. So far, so good. So, what is it that I'm concerned about? Empathy itself.

Rachel, in your letter you define empathy as the tool that helps us to understand what drives someone to exercise violence. It enables us to identify the conditioning factors and at the same time provide answers for getting the situation back on track. This should be its function. "With great power comes great responsibility", Uncle Ben reminded Peter Parker in their final conversation in the car. The same thing happens with empathy: depending on who makes use of it, the purposes that it is used for may be harmful, for example, for recruiting new members to form part of a terrorist gang. Maybe I'm mistaken and I'm confusing empathy with the mixture resulting from combining different amounts of it with persuasion and desperation. I don't know. What I'm more certain about is that, for one person to trust another, the speaker must be an expert in how to squeeze all the potential out of empathy. José Carlos Bermejo describes it as follows: "empathy is a kind of super-power. It can help us to know how others feel, even without saying much. There are those who say that some people are branded as being sensitive", that is, "they have a more developed ability to detect and interpret gestures, tones of voice, volume, etc., due to their capacity for empathy" (Bermejo, 2020, p. 3). It is also essential for receivers to feel appreciated, and to see how people connect with them and to see themselves reflected in the words that they hear.

It is obvious that there are countless reasons that may encourage someone to embark on this kind of adventure. One is feeling marginalized. Trujillo classifies marginality in two groups: genuine marginality, defined as the inability to "satisfy basic needs" or "being persecuted for a criminal act", while perceived marginality is characterized, among other things, by being the result of feeling "discriminated for political, cultural, religious or ethical reasons" (Trujillo, 2009, p. 175). Regardless of the origins, in most cases, all roads branch off and instead of leading to Rome, their destination is the collapse of their psychological immunity, which turns the citizens who live and walk through its streets into people with little resistance. Highly impressionable. Puppets. This is how I imagine their stay: shortly after arriving, especially in the first few days, you don't understand what is going on, why you have got this far. Thousands of questions overwhelm you: "Why me?"

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or "What have I done to deserve this?" You don't have answers for any of them. Time goes by, you're more and more unsure about things, you're still plunged into uncertainty, incredulous; you can't believe that this is really happening to you. You also look around you and you see that you're on your own, without any kind of help or emotional support. The world is not heading in the same direction as you are. Little by little, you trigger your defense mechanisms, convinced that everyone around you is to blame, and that you are the victim of a witch hunt that aims to get rid of you. Then, when you least expect it, the person you've spent so long waiting for turns up: your guardian and mentor. The only one who has deigned to approach you, who sits by your side and listens to you. While you are speaking, you can see in his face that he is looking at you. He nods his head. He understands you. To your surprise, he confesses that he also lived in this wild unpredictable city until he came across the light, hope, and happiness. He suggests that you accompany him. Before taking his hand you ask yourself: "Why does he want to help me? What has he seen in me? Is he telling the truth or is he trying to deceive me?" You watch him. You see his smile and you remember everything that has happened to you. You've got nothing to lose, so in the end you accept without realizing that you are signing your death warrant twice over.

Apart from the fraudulent use of empathy, my main concern is selective empathy, mentioned above. I start out from the premise that we as people are the result and product of the environment in which we are raised, of the conversations that we hear, the news and media that we consume, and the people with whom we interact. Each of us has a specific perception of the reality that we form part of and follow certain principles and ethical values that we acquire and build upon as time goes by. Therefore, it is logical that people have hardly any problems in empathizing with those individuals who display greater compatibility with the parameters with which they identify. This is quite clear. However, we live in a pluralistic context. We share classrooms, offices, buses, and neighborhoods with people who are totally different from us, and to make matters worse, we are forced, quote-unquote, to do the same with individuals that we cannot bear, people that we consider to be our antithesis for countless reasons, people who, whenever we come across them, we try to avoid. My question now is this: are we really empathetic? Probably all of us, including myself, would answer with an emphatic "yes". I raise a second question: are you empathetic with everyone around you? I reply, "no". Why? Why do we allow our background or experiences to play such a decisive role when it comes to behaving as we should? When I refer to being selective, to exhibit-

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ing relative empathy (I'm coining this term) this is what I mean: to the fact that on occasions, and mainly with certain people, we depend too much on the result shown by the scale of empathy. When the scale inclines towards rationality, their flaws start to emerge: their ideology, their behavior, the things that they have done, or the statements that they have made on a subject that directly concerns us. If, on the other hand, it inclines towards the emotional, our pride and memories come into play, and of course, how can you even think of trying to empathize with someone who in the past caused you so much pain and harm?

Anyone reading this little sermon would think to themselves: "Hang on! Now comes the standard moralistic response: we must help our neighbor because they are also people and as such deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. And you ask yourself, where on earth did this guy come from? But wait a minute. Why does this lad expect me to have anything to do with him? Or what's even worse, how does he want me, for example, to have any appreciation for a murderer, to look at him and think that he's someone with rights? If he really thinks that I'm going to behave like that, he's got another thing coming". I don't blame him. I used to think like that, I felt that it was impossible that someone could be empathetic with a capital E, but I was wrong. And you, Rachel, just like me, you know perfectly well what kind of mirror we need to achieve empathy in absolute terms: we need to give up our prejudices (or at least reduce their influence) so that we can see ourselves as others see us.

I know that the task that I am proposing is not simple, but it is time to break the chains that make us cling so stubbornly, as you point out, to our moral convictions and to start to consider not just the past, but also the present of other people, just as much as or even more than our own. We need a cleansing and decontamination process, to remove the harmful thoughts, behavior, attitudes, and ideas that hold us down so that we can start a new era that, although seeming over-optimistic, can be built. The Basque Country can vouch for this, although owing to the circumstances and context, these initial steps had to be taken in silence and in the most absolute secrecy. That's right; I'm talking about the restorative encounters.

I've often considered it. I've been really struck by the fact (and I still am) that the Basque conflict, especially since ETA abandoned the armed struggle in 2011, has not been given the importance that it really deserves, nor has it been addressed with the right contemporary approach either. It's hardly been part of the public agenda, something that is completely logical too. I totally understand that Basque society, after seeing how the darkest chapter in its history came to an end,

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breathed a sigh of relief, put away all its memories in a chest in the hope that a new, more promising, and hopeful future was starting to come into view at the end of the tunnel of violence. And this has been the case. Life has gone on, but with the specter and echo of so many years of suffering hovering around our consciences. Not with the aim of tormenting us or wanting to become entrenched in the past, but as a messenger, a specter that reminds us that there are still wounds left to heal. And this is where restorative encounters played a fundamental role, as they provide responses that legal channels do not offer.

Reading a little about the origin of restorative justice and the results of applying it in Spain, on its implementation to construct coexistence in the Basque Country, I came across the story of Emilio and Jesús, two individuals who would never have imagined that their lives would be linked forever on the morning of the 11th of March 2004. On that day, following his usual routine, Jesús took the train to go to work, when suddenly, the car that he was travelling in blew up, and he became a victim of a horrific bombing in which he lost part of his hearing, had his legs burnt, and had to be operated on three times to heal his shoulder, as well as suffering psychological after-effects since then (Pascual & Ríos 2020, p. 4). Emilio, as soon as he found out about what happened on the Madrid commuter trains, immediately decided to turn himself in to the police. He was the one who sold the explosives to the terrorists who caused the death of 192 people and wounded 150. As I read further, I felt a kind of uneasiness in my stomach that I had never experienced before. And I was surprised, as beforehand I was familiar with testimony from the victims and perpetrators of ETA's crimes describing their participation in the Nanclares de la Oca meetings, but I don't know what happened to me with this story. Perhaps reading the transcript of the interview helped to transport me to that meeting, and just for a moment, to feel I was Jesús, the man whose life they had destroyed. But I could also get right inside Emilio and suffer his guilt, this tenant who had signed a contract for life with his soul that stipulates that he will receive constant visits from his friends remorse and repentance, a profound hatred of his own existence, and endless negative feelings. I didn't know how to react when I still felt that I was Emilio. I read the following words from Jesús: "although I feel all this pain that I have told you about, I want you to know that I don't want you to feel any more pain. You've got enough with your sentence, and it doesn't make any sense for you to suffer even more. I don't want that".

This is why I cannot grasp how a project with this quality, size, and importance in encouraging social change, and whose aim, according

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to Esther Pascual, mediator in the restorative encounters between victims and perpetrators of ETA's crimes, is "for people on both sides to be able to move on from the past, heal their wounds, and open up to the future" (Pascual & Ríos, 2014, p. 430), has come to an end overnight. The mediator, as far as her participation in the meetings held at the prison in Vitoria is concerned, states that, "we knew that we were accepting a really complicated challenge, that could lead to mistakes, misunderstandings, and even partisan manipulation" (Pascual & Ríos, 2014, p. 431). Unfortunately, this has been the case. The fact is that I still can't see what is wrong with these conversations. Some consider them to be a way to whitewash terrorists; others believe that they humiliate the victims. On the other hand, these conversations merely exhibit how people, once "their wounds are healed and their humanity restored" can live without being "chained to the past, which opens up the possibility of a different future than the one dictated by the wrongs of the past" (Pascual & Ríos, 2014, p. 430). This is something that we all need to understand.

This is the reason that drives me to ask for a public space in which all the leading players, in this case, in the Basque conflict, can present their testimony and experiences, as they are an example that coexistence and social peace can be a tangible reality with empathy and determination. Memory, reparation, and justice. A lot of people are always rattling off these three words, but then they are the first to place obstacles, not just one, but several, to prevent the organization of programs like the restorative encounters. I wonder: what greater recognition can there be for victims and their families than to hear those who one day committed horrendous crimes like the torture or murder of an individual now openly recognize that they were wrong and ask for forgiveness for the suffering that they have caused? However, not just any old "apology" will do; this must be sincere and the direct result of repentance, but of course, that depends on the compassion of each individual. There is not much that we can do. With these words I would like to thank and applaud all those victims and perpetrators of ETA's crimes; the former, for showing solidarity and for teaching us that we all deserve a second chance; the latter, for their bravery and courage to publicly come out and discredit violence, the armed struggle, and for laying the preliminary foundations for the new society of which we want to form part. There are still more who haven't taken this step, but they'll get there. Not all of them have been able yet to accept their responsibilities and condemn what they have done. For example, those who launched the "Dirty War" by the Spanish state, or other particular sectors of the Basque nationalist left. Better late than never.

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In a conversation with Jordi Évole, Chema Herzog, who was a city councilor in Rentería, said the following: "coexistence is based on putting an end to nursing grievances, because grievances lead to resentment. And resentment leads to vengeance, and vengeance, to the struggle of our future children and grandchildren. If we want to live together in harmony, we need to keep the idea of justice and reparation clearly in mind. Everyone, all of us. Everyone needs to come down from their never-ending claims, or place limits on their resentment, because otherwise all this will just carry on" (Salvados, 2014). Here are the answers. You wondered whether violence has any generative capacity. The truth is, I don't know. What it does offer is the opportunity to rebuild everything that it destroyed. So, we have no choice but to start work on building the bridges that unite instead of divide us.

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Letter Three

Unai,

I write to you as 2020, a year that will be undoubtedly memorialized in our history books and consciences, draws to a close. Here in the United States, though our historic summer of unrest and wave of Black Lives Matter protests have ended, though Joe Biden has been elected as president, uneasiness persists. The air is heavy, for those who care to notice or who have no choice but to do so.

Still, they continue killing Black people. Just this month, the federal government executed Brandon Bernard, a 40-year-old Black man who was imprisoned for a crime he committed at age 18. But it does not matter that a decision he made as a teenager doomed the rest of his life and ultimately his death. It does not matter that the majority of his jury wanted his sentence overturned and that information was withheld in his original trial. It *does* matter that the state continues to lawfully kill people, and disproportionately Black men (Carrega, 2020). It matters that his co-conspirator, Christopher Vailva, also Black, was murdered earlier this year. It matters that Bernard's prison mate, Alfred Bourgeois, also Black, was killed the following day. It matters that the legal alternative to the death penalty is life imprisonment, which is effectively death by another name and a more protracted method. It matters that in the past month, Joshua Feast, Casey Goodson, and Andre Maurice Hill, all Black, have each been shot and killed by police. This is not meant to be a callous laundry list, but it appears as such because of our state's systematic violence and policing. The death penalty is the best example of state-sanctioned violation of our inherent human dignity, you say, and indeed the logic that legitimates the death penalty, a logic predicated on the negation of one's humanity, permeates the United States' entire "justice" system all the way down.

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Many may have put down their protest signs and returned to their regular lives, satisfied in having staved off a second term for Trump, but do not let this fool you: we have not reached any semblance of a resolution. The dark, rotten core of the problem remains, not to be remediated by a blue White House. Uneasiness persists. I know a similar veil of discontent covers the Basque Country as well. ETA may have dissolved almost a decade ago, but has a resolution truly been reached? You put it beautifully: "La vida ha seguido, pero con el fantasma, con el eco, de tantos años de sufrimiento revoloteando por nuestras conciencias[12]". In English, we'd say the matter has been "swept under the rug" —buried in our collective imaginary and moved past without proper rectification. In both the United States and the Basque Country, we still have yet to fully reckon with our pasts. In sweeping them under the rug and largely carrying on as usual, we have up till now failed to seize our opportunity to rebuild.

We initially set out here to talk about the genealogy of violence, and thus far we've talked about its roots and its lived present —but what of its future? Let me briefly clarify— I do not mean to say I wish for violence to continue, only that the fact remains that we are today still enmeshed in its stronghold and must contend with this reality in our envisioning of the future.

In my previous letter, I mentioned violence's potential to be generative, and after thinking about it some more, I realized that if this potential does indeed exist, it is in that violence doesn't leave a vacuum in its wake. Rather, from the debris of its devastation emerges a web of obligations that begets all those implicated, *víctima* and *victimario*, to create. The reason for this ethical entanglement is straightforward, I think: violence tends to make our world less livable for the collective. Even if one group gains increased prosperity in the short run, discontent among the disadvantaged will continue to foment and contest that privileged group's livelihoods in the long run. For human life to flourish once more, it is absolutely crucial that we create the proper conditions. If there is any hope of living, and living *well*, hay que *reconstruir*. This rebuilding is actually something we as human beings have historically specialized in —we've been called on to do it on numerous occasions throughout our history, picking up the remains and starting anew— but what we've lacked in the past is rebuilding in an equitable way that would prevent once and for all any future violence. To achieve this, we

[12] Life has gone on, but with the ghost, with the echo, of so many years of suffering fluttering through our consciences.

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have to imagine a future beyond that which up to this point we have been capable of imagining. What past violence does in all this, then, is provide us with the requisite space and even the imperative necessity to go forth and be bold creators and innovators.

I suppose that my ultimate motivation in focusing on the futuristic implications of violence is to finish this project on a hopeful note. It is also, I confess, a self-preserving impulse. In all honesty, writing about these issues has been *hard*. At times I stare at my blinking cursor, punctuating a paragraph of doom and gloom, and I am unsure how we might extract ourselves from the mess we have made. Believing in a future free from violence, practically unthinkable as it may be given historical precedent, is a necessary coping mechanism, the only thing keeping us from dejectedly laying down our tools of creation. It is an assertion that horrific violence has occurred and that we must carry the importance of the past with us, as you've aptly explained in previous letters. It is also the hopeful asking: what do we do now? What do we have the *opportunity* to occasion?

But before we go about envisioning the future, I want to pause here to address a central concern you raised in your last letter. "He llegado a la conclusión de que nuestra empatía es selectiva[13]", you wrote, and I've been mulling this over in my mind for a while now —because you're absolutely right. I think this is in part for good: if we take empathy to be, as you say, "la habilidad para sentir en tus propias carnes los sentimientos del resto[14]", then being always —empathetic would turn one into an unsalvageable puddle of others' emotions and desires, constantly overwhelmed by the impulse to act on behalf of the other. So, it makes sense that at times we must be capable of turning our empathy off, if only to attend to our own needs for a moment. Empathy is not a constant state; it is rather but one emotional ability that we humans possess. But if this is true, can empathy then be a reliable tool to overcome violence in every scenario?

Joan Tronto, one of the most preeminent scholars of care ethics, is helpful for thinking about this conundrum. In 1990, when care ethics were first gaining traction, Tronto quintessentially defined care as all that we do to "maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible". Though she does not specifically denominate empathy as a quality of care, for the purposes of our conversation, it would dovetail well in her framework with what she

[13] I have come to the conclusion that our empathy is selective.
[14] the ability to feel in your own flesh the feelings of others.

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calls attentiveness, that is, "a suspension of one's self-interest, and a capacity genuinely to look from the perspective of the one in need" (Tronto, 2013, p. 34). In this understanding, empathy is not sufficient to ensure good care (responsibility, competence, and responsiveness are also essential), but it is a necessary first step to attune yourself to the needs and wants of the person in front of you. Yet we are still left with the fact that people exercise empathy differentially, non-innocently, and sometimes not at all —that we are selective in when we choose to be empathetic. It seems, then, that the responsibility to empathize (and to subsequently turn that empathy into caring action) is best not left to the individual; rather, *it must be baked into our society and politics*. Tronto herself, disappointed with the lack of a wide-scale uptake of care ethics in national politics even decades after her groundbreaking treatise on care ethics was published, devoted an entire book called *Caring Democracy* to this matter. Empathy and the care it enables cannot be left to the domain of the market nor to the individual. We urgently need to move beyond defaulting to neoliberal logic and begin to prioritize processes that facilitate attentiveness to the plight of others from the personal to global level (Tronto, 2013). Rather than "institutionalizing disconnection", as they currently do, our institutions must emphasize our interconnectedness; instead of permitting us to slip into habits of "coarsening" and closing ourselves off to those around us, they must encourage us to open ourselves to "sensitizing" (Morgan, 1989, p. 52-53). This is a prickly proposition, I know —it would entail a discussion of feelings and personal lived experiences out in the public sphere, or worse, in town halls and national forums— but if we want to dream of a society that ardently asserts the humanity of all, we better start allowing ourselves to be fully human, emotions included.

Making empathy and care increasingly public matters would also strengthen mechanisms of accountability for the kind of selective empathy that could, for instance, lead someone like a young adult in the Basque Country to join an organization like ETA, privileging a very particular, warped empathetic connection while turning off potential empathetic pathways toward those whom ETA would target. As I discussed in my second letter, shutting these avenues of empathy down is necessary to be able to negate another's humanity and harm or kill them. By mainstreaming empathy in our public institutions, the burden is no longer on the individual to decide how and when to deploy their empathetic capabilities, instead resting in the discernment of the collective. (The sharing of such a responsibility does, however, require strong democratic institutions, which is a topic for another book altogether.)

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So, to overcome violence we must write empathetic care into our courts, legislatures, executive offices, and citizens' collectives. But here's the catch: care is never absolute and always relational (Tronto, 2013). This is because, as humans, we are incontestably in shifting relations with each other in ways that impact for better or for worse, directly or indirectly, strongly or weakly. This dialectical way of being unfortunately does not lend itself well to producing fixed prescriptive legislation —it would be easy to imagine how laws that might engender caring outcomes in one context, say, an urban city, would lead to bad care in other contexts, like a rural countryside. But, while it may be impossible to create legislation that provides step by step instructions on how to care, it is possible to write laws and institutionalize processes that facilitate care by inviting us to open ourselves to the lives of others and acknowledge our interconnectivity. What, then, might this look like in practice?

Nanclares de la Oca is a great example of empathy legitimized in public process, particularly in its implementation of restorative justice. The basic pretense of restorative justice is "el hecho de que la persona ofensora tiene responsabilidades que asumir y obligaciones que satisfacer hacia las personas a quienes ha dañado[15]" (Pascual Rodríguez and Olalde Altarejos, 2013, p. 24). Importantly, a restorative justice process is one in which *víctima* (victim), *victimario* (victimizer), and any other implicated parties participate alongside each other. Further, "la justicia restaurativa asume que los humanos son profundamente relacionales[16]" (Pranis, 2007, p. 57, as cited in Pascual Rodríguez and Olalde Altarejos, 2013, p. 32). Working from this baseline of relationality as opposed to presumed uniformity and stagnancy, not one *encuentro* produced the same outcomes —ethical, practical, collective, personal, or otherwise— as another, due to the fundamental recognition that each situation and every person involved was unique. Throughout the project, empathy was both a prerequisite and a product. The period of preparation before the in-person *encuentro* was six to eight months, time enough for intensive interaction and relationship building with *víctima* and *victimario*. Participants were expected to enter the *encuentros* no longer desiring violence and being open to listening, a disposition that revolved both around personal initiative and cultivation during the period of preparation. The *encuentros* themselves, which at their core required that one lend an ear to another, were an invitation to mo-

[15] The fact that the offending person has responsibilities to assume and obligations to fulfill towards the persons whom he has harmed.

[16] Restorative justice assumes humans are deeply relational.

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mentarily suspend one's own self-interests, as Tronto says, and to learn firsthand of the other's story. Thus, being empathetic was normalized and further facilitated. Notably, this restorative justice project did not replace the Basque state's typical retributive justice proceedings but was rather secondary to punitive court rulings. The ultimate arbiter of justice, in this case, was a judge issuing a prison sentence. The initiative had very real outcomes that should be celebrated, but it stopped short of completely transforming juridical praxis and ideology.

But the nagging question here is the fleetingness of the project —why was it cut short and why have its methods not been adopted elsewhere? Unai, you lament the fact that the Basque conflict and ensuing resolution has not received the press they deserve, and I wholeheartedly agree. Even having traveled to Spain twice, I had never caught wind of the groundbreaking restorative justice initiatives put into place —all that I knew of the Basque conflict was the faded nationalist graffiti that still peppers the trails of the Camino de Santiago in some of the more rural Basque towns. Not until taking Annabel's class did I learn about Nanclares de la Oca and other related efforts. Similarly, though I'd heard of Nelson Mandela before, I'd never been taught about South Africa's bold Truth and Reconciliation Commission that sought to heal the nation post-Apartheid until I studied for a term in South Africa and was immersed in the topic. As a foreigner, I can tell you these matters rarely appear in our history books or news. What is the reason for this omission? Is it that the world is not ready to talk about this kind of daringness? Are we so separated that we cannot acknowledge our interconnectivity and ensuing ethical obligations to each other? Is this separation, which voids the potential for profound empathy, the ultimate violence (Morgan, 1989)?

But here I am getting too entrenched in the disappointing present, when I have said I shall talk about the open future. I do not know with certainty what prevented Basque restorative justice efforts from really catching on. I do know, however, that the uneasiness with which I began this letter persists. And, so long as discontent remains, the window to create anew is still open. The indubitable, resolute human instinct that better worlds are possible is what begets the impulse to dream and realize those worlds. In those worlds, empathy cannot only be an afterthought left to the discretion of individuals or conceptualized as a superhuman power relegated to the efforts of committed activists and public servants, as in the Nanclares de la Oca project. It must be integrated into our laws, workspaces, social contracts, economies, and communities so that we are constantly invited to acknowledge and embrace our interconnectivity, so that we may never erase the face of the

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others around us and allow ourselves to slip into violence again (Butler, 2004). Such a future would allow no room for flagrant violations of humanity such as state-sanctioned murder or acts of terrorism.

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* * *

Rachel,

The phrase "A new year, a new life" has never really convinced me. I can understand its metaphorical, and of course, motivational sense, given that the turn of the year provides us with the opportunity to go back to square one and restart the game. Apart from the aims, challenges, or goals that each of us sets for ourselves, the fascinating ability that human beings have to complicate the conditions on this 365-day-long journey will never cease to amaze me. In theory, for each year we have lived, things should get less difficult, as we have a greater degree of experience and are perfectly aware of which direction we should take and which ones we should avoid at all costs; but instead, either we are allergic to simplicity, or we just love it when the odds are stacked against us. I opt for the latter. In the end, it is always part of the essence and natural charm of a person to go for the difficult. What is this business of playing at beginner level? Life like this, Rachel, is no fun. The greater the problems, the more inaccessible the solutions, and the more the clashes and rivalry between players create tension and animosity, the better. It's far more entertaining. It isn't just me saying this. We can see this in the short transition period that we have had from 2020 to 2021. At the time that I'm writing these lines, the Capitol, a

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heavily guarded building with a security system that is more than adequate, has been stormed with astonishing ease by hundreds of supporters of Donald Trump, who don't tend to cope too well with losing (I'm not going to tell you anything you don't know).

The New Year isn't going down too well in Europe either. In the Netherlands a high percentage of citizens has not approved of the curfew imposed by the government to curb the increase in COVID infections. They are perfectly entitled to protest, that is undeniable; however, the way that they have gone about this has not been particularly appropriate and the fact is that for several nights, in a sign of disapproval, protesters have looted shops, burnt cars and attacked the security forces. Up to now, 500 people have been arrested and a dozen policemen wounded in Rotterdam (*El País,* 2021). In France, a 15-year-old youngster has been left in a coma after being brutally beaten up by ten people (*20 Minutos,* 2021). On the other hand, in Spain the vaccination campaign is now underway. According to the plan that has been designed, the first people to receive the vaccine are nursing home residents, front-line health care workers and highly dependent people who do not live in nursing homes. Oh yeah, I forgot, the politicians as well, in what is undeniably an act of courage, solidarity, and commitment to the nation on their part. And, just to finish off this brief overview of what the early stages of 2021 have been like, the icing on the cake: the Basque Country. The last few days have taken me back to the *Euskal Astea* that we used to hold each year at the ikastola. Specifically, back to Fridays, which was the day marked down in every student's timetable, as this was the day in which we used to take on students from other grades in different sporting disciplines. As I was saying, I can see myself, when I was about five or six years old, gawking at the older students taking part in a tug-of-war. This is a sport in which two teams face each other, grip a rope, and by pulling on it must manage to drag their opponents over to their area. On this occasion, the contenders are, on the one side, those who claim that murder can be fair and on the other, those who downplay the torture carried out by the State because cases are below average. I don't know what to say. Years of ostracism and darkness that, with their blood, sweat, and tears, and struggle and demands, have gradually been left behind so that these characters can then justify what happened.

I'm speaking for myself, but when I read your letters, the issues that you raise, the arguments that you put forward, and the critical frame of mind that you have, I firmly believe that this exchange of letters has helped both of us take a closer look at violence and get to know it better. Personally, if I hadn't taken part in this project, I would never

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have read about the origins of violence, which psychological and social factors drive an individual to exercise it, nor would I have wondered whether it has any regenerative capacity or not. And I'll stop there. If anyone had asked me this question five or six years ago, or even earlier, I would have categorically replied in the negative. I haven't the slightest doubt that the first thing that would have occurred to me as soon as I heard these words would have been something like: "This guy, what nonsense! How is a destructive phenomenon going to provide possibilities for regeneration?" To a certain extent, I wasn't wrong. Did the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 or the tsunami in Japan a year later really have this capacity? You only need to see the scenes of collapsed buildings, rubble, people who are lost, desperate and aimless, with no idea of what to do or where to go. They lost everything in a matter of seconds. The same thing occurs with violence. When all's said and done, it is still just another natural catastrophe, an irresistible force that destroys everything in its path without ever caring that its victims have names and surnames, a life, family, friends, and thousands of vivid memories and so many others still to experience. At this moment in time, my response is totally the opposite, although with certain nuances that I'll point out later.

It's obvious that the person I was when I was 16 or 17 is quite different from who I am now at 21, even more so in the case of the subject we are dealing with here. When I reflect and analyze myself with hindsight, I can see that my perception of how we need to fight terrorism has evolved. I have left behind the old vindictive Unai who used to swell with anger whenever he spoke about anything having to do with ETA, a reactionary individual who couldn't conceive of any other solution apart from violence. If justice had depended on me, with a bit of luck, the best punishment would have been for them to have spent the rest of their life in prison. At that time, no matter how much I saw and heard, I wasn't aware of what was right before my eyes (maybe the lack of maturity and analysis had something to do with it). I was utterly unaware that the best possible benchmark and example that showed that other paths are possible was here at home, in my family. After realizing this, during the last five years I have restricted myself to settling down, keeping quiet, and learning from them. I must confess one thing: I am still unable to really take in what they have done. No matter how connected I am with their history, or how much I think I know their response, they continue to surprise me. It's incredible. They have shown that there is another way of doing things that work and are important for coexistence. If they have done it, I have no choice but to follow them.

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Bruno Bettelheim, the Austrian psychologist and psychoanalyst, defined violence as "the behavior of someone unable to imagine any other solution to a problem that is annoying them" (quoted in Fisas, 2011: 4). In other words, it is driven by the impotence of not being able to manage or control adverse situations or circumstances whose scope goes beyond any imaginable solution that, consequently, leaves no alternative but to resort to force or physical, verbal, or mental aggression. Up to now we have spoken about empathy as a possible antidote. To this recipe, you have added the importance of caring. I'm going to do the same with another ingredient: education. Jacques Delors, who was President of the European Commission and the author of *The Treasure Within* (1996), establishes that education must be based on the following pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (quoted in Fisas, 2001). We must train people to acquire critical, rebellious, non-conformist, and inquisitive thinking, people who want to discover the reasons for things, individuals who question and are participative and purposeful. Who knows whether mixing them together, from this moment on, we might obtain the definitive vaccine to eradicate a virus that has been rampant among us since the very first day of our existence?

We fear conflicts. Why? Because of the negative sense of the term, and especially, due to an incorrect interpretation of the word. One of the first images that the brain associates with this concept are two trenches, opposing sides in search of victory. A battle. Only one of them can be left standing. Immersed in the struggle, the underlying reasons, the strategies that you are going to implement, or the number of combatants who may fall have little or no importance. It all boils down to a question of winners and losers. And, of course, nobody wants to be defeated. Nonetheless, is conflict really a wartime situation? What is the drawback to discord? We want to have it all, but this is worth nothing. We want to be free, authentic, and unique, different from the rest; however, we find it impossible to achieve without the sense of protection that forming part of a collective provides. We do defend pluralism, until we face someone whose convictions are totally opposed to our own. This is when the alarm bells go off, and while feelings of rejection start to build up, we are compelled to pull out our tag gun just waiting for the right moment to press the trigger.

Duality. Dichotomy. This is how we see the world, as if it were a constant struggle: you against me, you against us. In black and white. Sometimes, and I'm the first to do this, we forget that we can conjugate the first-person plural and that grey areas also exist. Do you know what the best examples of areas of convergence are and what

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their biggest asset is? Yes, that's right, conflicts. Fisas, the head of the School for a Culture of Peace, that forms part of the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the author of numerous books that focus on peace and conflict resolution, explains that "conflict is an increase in diversity" (Fisas, 2011). That is why education plays a fundamental role in transforming what appears to be inevitable and preventing things that can be avoided. Regarding the former, success lies in a change in attitude, in taking advantage of the direction that the problem is following so that, when we are well-positioned, we can take control and guide it to our advantage. As the Catalan author puts it, it serves "to clarify relations, provide additional pathways of thought, and open up possibilities"; discovering new directions that, as you say in your letter, Rachel, allow us to be innovative and creative, accessible, participatory, and inclusive.

As for the latter, moments of inclusion are unexpected and on occasions, imperceptible. The scenario to be avoided is one in which, despite being aware of the conflict, we downplay it because time heals all wounds. Or almost all of them. So, it is essential to develop tools so that it can be detected in its early stages and the problem identified before this tiny flame is lit by fuel or any other kind of flammable materials that turn it into a huge ball of fire that is impossible to control. No conflict starts out being intense, but if its existence isn't recognized or acknowledged, then violence does slowly start to appear and submit its credentials as the prime candidate to put an end to the disagreement in its own way. Without going into many details, this is how ETA began, as a result of the indifference of the country's leaders who did not try to find an outlet to a situation that required an immediate response. The counter reached zero and all hell broke loose. The rest is history.

If I claimed before that I have glimpsed a certain capacity for regeneration in the bowels of violence, even if only as a tiny beam of light, this is because it provides a second chance; however, this should never exist, as what came before this should never have occurred. Consequently, nobody wants to be the one to receive this opportunity, never mind address it. It's a double-bottom chest. The upper level does have its charm, let's not fool ourselves: it makes it possible to start over, make amends, address responsibilities, and build a new society. Then it's the lower level's turn. It's empty, but inside it we find these questions: "At what cost?"; "Was all the pain and suffering necessary to realize that this was the wrong path?"; and what is worse, "Why for so long?" booms out.

However, opportunities like these cannot be wasted. I interpret this as being an invitation to carry out a process of introspection, but not as

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individuals, as a group. Questioning ourselves, trying to find out what mistakes we have made, and looking for the origins of our problems, working on aptitudes like caring that you yourself have mentioned and that are really essential. Nor can I forget conscience and awareness-raising or closeness. It's time to abandon our pride and our inflexible approach to reality and find room in our individual narratives for other stories. To compromise and find grey areas and our points in common and to take these as a starting point, as we have both repeated on numerous occasions, to build a better and fairer society.

There is a song by Urko, one of the standard bearers of Basque music in the 1970s in the Basque Country, called *Guk euskaraz, zuk zergatik ez* (We Speak Basque, Why Don't You?) whose lyrics remind me of the start of the peace process and the future that we must achieve here:

Euskara putzu sakon
eta ilun bat zen,
eta zuek denok
ur gazi bat
atera zenuten
handik nekez

Orain zuen birtutez
zuen indarrez
euskara
itsaso urdin
eta zabal
bat izanen da
eta guria da[17]

With all our strength and virtues, we can create a Basque Country where there's room for all of us. Rachel, in your letter you wonder why we don't institutionalize processes that favor or help to encourage car-

[17] Basque was in
A deep dark well
And you all
Painstakingly
Brought up salty water from there.

Now with your virtue
And with your strength
Basque
Will be a broad blue sea
and it's ours.

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ing, by including them in our laws, workspaces, and social environment. I could only answer as follows: it's now or never. We are rarely going to find a more favorable context than the one we have today for putting it into practice. 2020 has been the needle that has burst our bubble and the gust of wind that has removed the blindfold from our eyes. Who would have said that a virus, imperceptible and intangible for human beings, would be responsible for giving us the reality check that, if we really think about it, we needed? The state of our foundations has been revealed in every sense, from our consciousness and sub-consciousness to our social structure and it has been shown that, regardless of our purchasing power, race, sex, level of studies, or profession, we are vulnerable. We are the same. We are people.

In my opinion, you have hit the nail right on the head: interconnectivity. The philosopher Carol Gilligan, a disciple of Kohlberg and the theorist of the ethics of care, describes the world in the following way: "a web of relationships that we feel immersed in where we acknowledge responsibility to others" (quoted in Medina-Vicent, 2016: 93). What's the obstacle to this? Only us. And the pandemic is making this quite clear. I don't know what measures are in force in the United States to curb the spread of the coronavirus, nor how you are coping with them. What I do know is that over here, even though almost a year has gone by since all this began, there are people who still have not learnt, or even worse, do not want to learn the lesson. I'll give you some examples: clandestine parties and discotheques. They're closing the bars and restaurants? No problem, I'll get together with friends at home, and it's all taken care of. In Donostia, there's no *Tamborrada* this year? A hundred of us meet up in the Plaza of the Constitution and celebrate it without wearing masks or respecting social distancing rules and placing leisure and pleasure before other people's health. We don't care about people who live alongside us, so how are we going to care about people who are miles away? It's me and my interests that come first, and then everyone else's: Hobbes's state of nature at its finest.

If this is how we behave regarding something that, in theory does affect us, I don't want to imagine how things will be with subjects we don't care about (although the fact is that they do affect us). Unfortunately, the subject that we are dealing with is susceptible to social indifference. Furthermore, if you add the cancellation of the restorative meetings to this, this sense of detachment is even greater. Until recently, I thought I understood why they had suspended them. Now I know: it's envy. They are really furious. They cannot bear to see how a victim and their perpetrator, the sufferer and their executioner, provide a lesson in humanity. You break down their preconceptions. This

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second chance that they are granted is synonymous with defeat for the politicians. They think that the victims and perpetrators, their narratives and grief, are their own personal property. And this is not the case. Rachel, there cannot be any "legitimized empathy" (I loved this description) if those who govern us do not know what it means.

2021. I hope that this number one means the start of a new period, because this is what we need and deserve.

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Chapter Two

Naiara and Pablo

Letter One

Dear **Pablo**,

2020 continues to surprise us. This year is merely proof that what we know can change in a second. Our health is in danger, the borders are closed, and as if this were a Cold War, countries are competing to be the first to create a vaccine that will save us and "while they're at it", it provides them with certain financial benefits and gives them the status of a world power.

In the meantime, the Basque Country is going through weeks of political rallies for the forthcoming Autonomous Elections on the 12th of July with the same old discourses and ideas among citizens about what politics are good for. The use of ideology as a way of rejecting others has become standard practice to such an extent that politics no longer offer a discourse in favor of union and understanding. They don't spend time debating ideas anymore; a new version of politics has gone viral, one where politicians are put into bottles that are constantly being shaken and crashing into each other. What's worrying is that no one tries to open the bottle and stop being shaken about. Instead, politicians leap around to further agitate the bottle so that they can bang into the others even more.

Shortly before having to go and vote, I wonder about the meaning of politics, or rather about contemporary politicians. Politics, in fact, have always had meaning. Societies require an organization so that citizens can get along and plan how to live together in harmony. The Basque Country, with the past that it has had, in which we haven't gotten along with each other and caused ourselves so much harm, needs more than ever a top-rate kind of politics, one that reaffirms its essential purpose of searching for coexistence within a plural society and of encouraging union and respect. But as I've said before, they merely make the bottle shake even more.

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ETA's history has left its mark on all of us. Throughout my life I have felt that we live in two groups: us and the others. I don't know what specifically differentiates us, though; I don't know what we set ourselves apart for, but I've always been haunted by the feeling of having to define my position between "us" and the "others". When I was young, I used to travel to other autonomous communities and children used to make remarks about ETA and me being a terrorist just because I was Basque, and they automatically created a barrier between me and them. I felt I was the other, the Basque, the one who was different. When I've defined my position here, some thought I was taking a stand with "us", and others, with the "others". And they have often made me feel part of the others when I didn't even know who the others were. For those children, the others were the Basques; for me, the others were the terrorists; for other people that I have come across in my life, the others were the Spanish, or the fascists, or the oppressors, and sometimes I formed part of these groups and other times I didn't. So, in the eyes of one group, I was a terrorist, in the eyes of another group I was a fascist, and in my own eyes I didn't know what I was. What I was quite sure was that we all have one thing in common: we all share the need to stake out groups in society, to try finding our peers, our identity in the herd that we form as a population. And all of us, absolutely all of us, identify the others as the bad guys and our people as the good guys.

The polarization of people is merely proof of our need to make us believe that the people whose ideas we do not share are the bad guys, the others, the ones who will never be part of our group. It's a simplistic way to acquire a moral superiority that we don't really have because, although we don't like to recognize this, we are not so different. Feeling morally superior, feeling that we have all the answers is a way of legitimizing our ideas. Maybe by thinking more deeply and thoroughly, we could all end up reassessing what we think, but this entails putting our individual and community identities at risk, and that is frightening.

Just imagine ending up like Socrates and that you conclude that you only know that you know nothing. It's frightening to feel lost, not knowing who you are and what you stand for. Knowledge brings freedom, but this freedom just makes you feel lost, because the freer that you are, the more ground you cover and the more you realize how long the road is, until you reach a point where you are aware of how little you know about life. And in my humble opinion, this is what unites us all as a society: the fear of the unknown and of being discovered in that place. We clip our own wings, so we never reach that unfamiliar horizon and live with that feeling of being lost and not knowing who we

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are. This fear is the basis for restricting ourselves regarding the person we have designated as "the other", and we prevent our mind from recreating a state of empathy towards the other that might break down our preconceptions and lead to unexplored conclusions. Imagine managing to empathize with a member of ETA, and even understanding their motives, reaching a new reality where there is no longer an "us" and "them".

Questioning the thoughts that you have creates respect, but there is no need to consider it to be a denial of what we are and have been. Everyone is what they have decided to be; some have been what life has made them, but the essence that we have developed is what we are now.

When we talk about living in harmony in the Basque Country, we merely encourage ourselves to take the step to question the positions we have held in the past, in other words, to establish a new common ground in which we are no longer divided as a society and where we trust and highlight the importance of those who are different from us. This is not about placing victims and perpetrators on an equal footing. Our individual lives and experiences cannot be placed on the same level. However, this new strategy would attempt to put the human worth of each individual on an equal footing, to scrape off the surface that differentiates us, and to take a deeper look at things. Nor is this an attempt to justify any unjustifiable action, but rather to take a closer look at the motivations so that it can lead us to better understand the other. Hopefully, from there on, we can break down the divisions that have caused us so much harm as a people. My intention when saying this is not to encourage people to justify the actions of members of ETA due to an empathy that covers up and blinds us to the atrocities that they have committed, an empathy that would merely banalize the suffering of victims, for the sake of understanding the other. This is not my intention. All I am trying to find is a solution that allows us to live together in harmony and that drives us to offer sincere forgiveness, one that is the beginning of a complete, genuine, and lasting peace.

Achieving peace does not mean thinking like the other, but rather understanding the motives that can lead the other to carry out the actions that they have committed. This is not a matter of justifying or of taking sides, but of analyzing the situation so that with better knowledge, we focus more on the solution than on the guilt. Members of ETA may justify their struggle, will have recourse to historical and political grounds that they think enable them to legitimize their ideas and their actions, but at this point, Basque society has no need to rerun past debates. Instead, it must move on and focus on how to overcome this

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period, so that all parts of Basque society can move forward together in peace, so that they come together and definitively put an end to the divisions among people.

I know that this is complicated, especially for the victims. In addition to having suffered the loss of a loved one or having lived in fear for years, the victims must now display a brave conciliatory stance for the general good. This is difficult, I know. How can you fight for the good of a society that has treated you cruelly? Why offer hope when they have snatched this from you? Why do good when they have done you wrong? It is obvious that the victims have a basic task to perform in the reconstruction of a broken society, and it is obvious that for many of them the burden that has been placed on them is unfair, but if they do not forgive, if they do not move on, the rest of us will stagnate and will not be able to close the wounds in our homeland. They are the only ones with the power to say that forgiveness is possible and that we can become one again.

At the present time, the stability we have achieved up to now is being undermined by the feverish political atmosphere that is so turbulent and volatile. Warlike hateful discourses pervade the Basque Country which was on its way to achieving calm. Ideologies vary according to personal interests and needs. Politics are no longer part of morality, a part of who we are, a part of our identity. Today, politics vary in accordance with the times, fashion, and convenience, and when ideology becomes a mere trend and not a form of political awareness, this is when society falls apart and becomes dangerous.

Now, when it's better to look good rather than to do good, bringing victims and perpetrators closer together is becoming harder and more difficult, and quite honestly, I'm worried about the comments that I hear from both sides. I'm frightened that the advances that have been made regarding getting closer to the other will become undone and we will go back to the bitter relations that prevailed in past times. I'm frightened that the progress that citizens have made will come to a standstill because of politicians who are only looking for a few more votes.

* * *

Dear **Naiara**,

The year 2020, as you say is proving to be a year with great changes in society. Our lives have dramatically changed. From one day to the next, we have realized that we are a tiny speck of dust in the vast tapestry formed by the universe.

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For many years, we thought that, after the beginning of the modern age, life would be all roses, peace, and love. But far from what we expected we have run into a brick wall in the form of a virus that has managed to bring the entire planet to a standstill. In the meantime, as you say, we Basques are facing elections that are being held at the worst possible time. However, even though they are being held in a period of turmoil, fear, and deprivation they are still essential to ensure that our society can have a prosperous future.

Or that's what they make us believe...

During the lockdown, we have had a lot of time to do many things that we didn't manage to do before because we lived our lives at such an intense pace. Now that the virus has us confined to our homes, we have found short periods of time in which we have been able to think about the things that really matter.

One of the things that I have often reflected on is the political class in this country, and the suffering that we have endured in the Basque Country. After thinking about it a great deal, I have reached a conclusion that has really opened my mind. As you say, at such a difficult time as this, the parties should stop quarrelling and work together to forge a better future and a solution that helps us see the light at the end of the tunnel that we are stuck in because of this damn pandemic. However, unfortunately the reality of the situation has revealed that the ideologies and problems of the past carry a lot of weight in the language that politicians use to address us.

It is quite normal for parties to show that they must adhere to their ideological principles. In fact, we would all find it strange that they didn't follow their moral guidelines since we, as the individuals that form this society, have certain principles and we don't just change them depending on the situation that we find ourselves in. But, of course, faced with situations like the one that we unfortunately have had to go through, the political class has repeatedly tried to sell an image to the electorate that each political grouping was the best suited to solve the problems that arose from the pandemic. However, the sad fact is that there are thousands of people in our country who have died, thousands of families that no longer have any means to survive, and thousands of citizens who have lost the jobs that gave them a degree of stability.

After thinking a lot about this and collecting and gathering information about the supposed solutions to the problems that emerged during the last government's term of office, and above all, focusing on the most recent agreements that have been reached to provide rapid responses to the problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, on the 12th of July 2020 I decided not to take part in the elections to

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the Basque parliament. I came to this decision for several reasons. First of all, this is closely linked to the history that we have endured in the Basque Country. During the awful years when the ETA terrorist organization covered the streets in blood utterly unscrupulously, the political parties condemned the situation but didn't manage to reach any kind of consensus because of their ideologies, or because of their own special interests.

Although it is true that a lot of people that had links to some of the parties organized peace projects and worked hard to stop the violence in the Basque Country, none of them managed to stop the terrorist gang for various reasons. Some out of fear, terror, and even direct personal threats; others because they were murdered for their ideas about achieving a plural society in which we could all live together despite thinking differently; and others because they were directly silenced and shunned by their own parties who considered them to be a nuisance. Basque society dictated the end of this story when it rejected and demonstrated against the violence carried out by the terrorist organization. The political parties joined these movements, but they didn't manage to agree on any basic premises to defeat the terrorist gang.

The second question has to do with an inner malaise. The fact is that, after thinking again I realized that we just don't matter to them at all. Since the pandemic began, none of the parties has negotiated with the citizenry in mind. Proof of this was that the elections were held without considering the fact that outbreaks were starting to appear all over the Basque Country. Therefore, I noticed that the only thing that mattered to them was to ensure four more years in government without taking into account the fact that citizens could fall ill.

The truth is that I shouldn't be outraged about this at this point in life, as this happens on many occasions with all sorts of matters. For example, while most of us in the Basque Country are trying to move on after what happened not so long ago regarding the armed struggle, all the political parties continue to bring up the subject after the ETA terrorist organization has been defeated. I've realized that the political class doesn't move forward at the same pace as we the individuals that make up society do. Instead, they remain stuck in the past and try to use what happened as a political tool. This is how they manage to pit us against each other in a struggle that won't get us anywhere. Furthermore, this is how they distract us to focus on these problems so that we forget about the ones that currently exist.

I don't mean with all this that we must quickly move on. On the contrary, we must learn from the mistakes of the past so that they do not happen again. As you say, we must all join this fight without excep-

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tion, as we all find ourselves in this jungle that we call society. I feel it is important that I give you my point of view on the feeling of belonging that you mention on several occasions. I've spent many years of my life observing situations in which many people felt discriminated against by others merely because they were from somewhere else or felt part of another place. After reflecting, debating, and above all listening to a lot of people, I formed my own opinion on the subject. I noticed that almost all the situations in which this kind of discrimination occurs are formed or created by a single common denominator. This common denominator is known as "nationalism", but many of us call it "patriotism". The problem that we had in the Basque Country was closely linked to an extreme patriotism or nationalism that led to violence that was unjustifiable.

At the present time I don't feel that I am from anywhere; what's more I prefer not to think about these subjects that lead us to problems from the past. I only think about changing society for the better. I want to build a society in which none of us feels excluded because we think differently. I want to build a society in which the focal point of life is the individual and not their ideas. Nevertheless, I do feel a certain appreciation for the land where I was born and for its culture. However, the appreciation that I feel is not something that I consider when it comes to reflecting on important matters. Because if there is one thing that history does show us it is that in times when we have prioritized the feeling of belonging to a specific place over community, we have not progressed together. Instead, this has led us to separate and exclude people who think differently from the rest of us.

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Letter Two

Dear **Pablo**,

I feel that your letter reflects the widespread weariness that I can sense in society, the kind of lethargy caused by always being at an impasse where citizens need one thing and politicians are looking for something else. Politicians cling to ideas that are outdated and bore us as a matter of course because of what they do. It is undeniable that political ideas sometimes separate us from each other, as if they were an impenetrable shield to protect our souls from thoughts deemed incorrect. However, we forget that ideas make us who we are and that changing them also makes us brave. You mention how important it is for political parties to endure and reflect their moral principles in society, but sometimes, rather than expressing an ideological conviction, it seems that some parties say what they say because it provides them with certain political benefits.

The principles that we have are part of our *raison d'être*. However, when many political parties made their rejection of ETA one of the principles of their party, I wonder if this was really because it was part of their *raison d'être*. Some political parties used Basque terrorism as an electoral weapon to reach more people and to appear to be the only ones capable of achieving a solution and justice for the country. They used attacks by ETA to increase their votes and to hide their failures and mistakes, and they made use of ETA to discredit people who dared to criticize what the party said and did. In the 2004 elections they showed what ETA was for some of them.

ETA became a tool to gain power. They played with the suffering of many people as if they were puppets; they moved people in the direction that they wanted when they wanted. Public faces of the suffering of ETA's victims became public faces of certain political parties. Other faces were targeted by society and an inquisitorial style of politics was created

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that considered the only solution to be the rejection of anyone who wasn't like them. Society was damaged, quite logically, and the powers that be, instead of continuing to be mentors in the struggle, soaked up the discourse of the victims and turned pain into policies based on gut feelings, where the emotional reaction of the population traced the route that the discourses and actions of the political parties followed. This led to the "humanization" of politics, thereby legislating on the basis of suffering, facing up to social confrontation on the basis of resentment, and putting an end to terrorism on the basis of hatred. At the same time, the other, anyone who didn't belong to one's own side, was dehumanized. The reactions at the grass-roots level were what guided politicians, who were interested in attracting supporters and gaining popularity. Although it is true that there were politicians who worked in good faith, sadly, the attention of society and history was taken away by those politicians who were the most inflammatory and self-centered. Some politicians portrayed themselves in society as the personification of civility, morality, and competence. These are the same politicians that were part of a state that had paramilitary groups committing outrages against people who interfered with the interests of the State, political parties that support a global system in which rich countries exploit and bully poor countries, or were complicit in selling weapons that perpetuated terrorism in other countries. Popular terrorism against state terrorism. Nobody was seeking peace; all of them were seeking power.

This is the society that we have inherited. Humanized politics against dehumanized people; the good against the bad; Basques against Spaniards; Basques against Basques. We perpetuate inflicting harm on the other when we cannot even say that the good guys are actually good. It's the form that differentiates them, but not the content. You can't talk about ETA's victims without remembering the victims of GAL, the Triple A, or the Spanish Basque Battalion. All of them, both the former and the latter, quite simply waged a dirty war that harmed the rest of us. However, the victims deserve respect. We boast that we are a country that champions and guarantees the fundamental rights of people, but in a split second we effortlessly undermine the rights of whoever we please. Victims, whatever side they may be on, are victims. One person's suffering cannot override the suffering of another, and there are no mechanisms or grounds to rank suffering. We only have grounds to ensure that politicians, rather than drowning in a sea of tears, comply with their political responsibility and become more analytical and decisive regarding the problems that affect citizens. Politics aren't individual, but collective, and the feelings of a few cannot provide a response for everyone.

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An example of the lack of empathy with certain victims is the situation of the relatives of terrorists, who must travel thousands of miles to visit their loved ones. Locking up prisoners a long way from their homes merely creates wounds in their families. Nowadays, it is not unusual to hear people trivializing the suffering of the relatives of terrorist prisoners. We have reached a point where we are unable to distinguish between the criminal and the criminal's family. They say that terrorism leads to a psychological war, and distancing prisoners from their families is definitely a reflection of this tactic of forcing your adversary to submit, but this kind of war based on suffering and hatred can only be understood in the case of victims with a thirst for vengeance, not in a politician with the responsibility of governing a country and setting up a policy based on positive progress. In a country like Spain, prison law points out that the system must focus on ensuring the integration and inclusion of all prisoners in society. This entails guaranteeing they can be close to their families so that their emotional bonds with their local environment are not damaged. There will be people who do not care about prisoners' well-being or their families, but the well-being of all human beings, even when they are incarcerated, is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; therefore, these are rights that shouldn't be called into question by citizens, and especially not by politicians. Dehumanizing the other is merely going to make them incapable of ever changing. As a result, prisoners and their families also become victims of a system that allows them to be harmed and punished. The line between victims and perpetrators becomes blurred and further complicates a social problem that already exists and makes it more difficult for the two sides to reach an understanding. We are beyond "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"; we need to move forward.

You said that you wanted to build a society in which life focused on the individual and not on their ideas. Well, to do that, we need to put all individuals on the same level, without taking their ideas into account. This entails doing the same with terrorists, however unfair that may seem. Nevertheless, leaving someone's ideas aside is a heavenly utopia, turning the earth into a paradise where there is only peace and kindness. We need our ideas as food with which to feed ourselves. Ideas provide us with our identity; they give us a purpose and a reason to live. Without ideas we would be vacuous; there would be nothing to distinguish us from other animal species. Ideas are the result of our intelligence. The more you think, the more you understand; the more you understand, the more human you become. The nationalism that you criticize is merely an expression of what some are, a part of their identity and personality. Nationalism has always been shown in a nega-

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tive sense, as being exclusive and discriminatory. It is understood as a way of thinking that justifies intolerance and the rejection of the other, but I disagree with this understanding of the term. Although nationalism takes many forms and in some of its aspects it gives rise to the will to make a nation superior and exclusive, I prefer a concept that is more in line with the valorization of cultural identity without prejudice to diversity and coexistence. Certainly, ETA used its nationalistic sense as an excuse to commit all kinds of atrocities. In this regard, I would like to highlight the words of philosopher Victoria Camps, who states that "to educate in peace is to educate in internationalization, tolerance, and recognition of diversity. It is therefore advisable to avoid at all costs that nationalisms, on the rise today, become the cause of endless confrontations. The only acceptable concept of a nation is one compatible with an attitude of openness and respect for others. Cultural identities are only valid and positive if they constitute a source of security that is not based on the systematic exclusion of other cultures" (Camps, V., 1993). In this sense, I understand that the desire to promote a Basque identity will be acceptable as long as it does not serve as an excuse to attack other identities. But at the same time, I also understand that the possibility of the very existence of a Basque identity turns indescribable given how each individual delimits said "identity". And to make matters more complicated, each person's Basque identity must also coexist with other types of markers such as gender, social class, sexual orientation, or race, among others. In this way, I believe that you can be a nationalist and tolerant at the same time, without combining the concept of exclusion with the nationalist feeling, like you do, Pablo. Thus, we should promote a nationalism that makes us friends of our people, not enemies. I understand the link that you make because our past has demonstrated it, but I consider that the nationalism that one can feel can only vary in behaviors of rejection and hatred if this feeling is not based on the values of human rights, peace, and tolerance. Therefore, rather than focusing on our national identities, we must focus on our human values. Although cultures, languages, or borders can divide us on an identitarian, political, social and / or legal level, human values are the real reason why we can build a society capable of living together in peace. That is where we meet and unite as citizens of the world. When we talk about Basque nationalism, I understand that we are talking about the will to conserve and unite around a language and a culture. In this way, I understand that a Basque nationalist can be someone who understands the existence of a Basque people around Euskara and Basque culture. This same idea can occur in other ways, since the characteristics associated with the creation of a collective may be differ-

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ent in the mind of each person. In this way, nationalists could also be called, for example, those citizens of a colonized territory who fought against another colonial group; or those that are grouped around a religion (as happened in Ireland). Due to ETA's activity, the will to promote and preserve the characteristics of a territory or group has often been associated as a threat to peace and coexistence.

Previous generations fought for peace, and we are merely providing grounds for going backwards as far as coexistence is concerned. Peace isn't something that can be fitted into a limited period of time, but rather it is spread over time indefinitely. Just like Gabriel García Márquez said, peace is a gerund, and we need to be constantly making peace so that there continues to be peace. Whereas we are being distracted from what really matters, and we have become a country that shows that power is more important than coexistence, where getting closer to the other is a sign of ideological weakness, where identity is a weapon and not just the way we are, where forgiving is losing the war, and where dehumanizing people is our way of conducting politics. Keeping this society as it is or changing it is in our hands. Nonetheless, how can this dangerous trend be changed? How can we pass on a less divided society to the next generation? Do we, and the politicians, really want to close this chapter? What should be the history that our heirs should read?

* * *

Dear **Naiara**,

The general weariness that we show as a society, from my point of view, is not a reason to be sad, but quite the opposite. As I understand things, a society that shows that it agrees with all the decisions that politicians make is worse because their conformity demonstrates that they clearly have little desire for change.

As for what you say about the political class, I total agree. For decades they have used both the victims and executioners as tools to gain the backing of the electorate. But although it sounds really sad, the truth is that they continue to do so. A good example of this is that they have recently made use of two workers who were buried at the landfill in Zaldíbar as one of the key issues at their campaign rallies, despite the fact that the families of both men said that they disagreed with this.

However, I don't think that the dispersal policy that you refer to is a revenge strategy. Going back to 1989, the dispersal policy for prisoners who formed part of the Basque National Liberation Movement

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was launched to ensure that people who were sentenced for crimes related to the armed struggle and the liberation of the Basque people were kept far apart from each other to prevent them from escaping and communicating with people from the gang itself. At the present time this policy is still in force, and although it's been watered down, it should be repealed. Given that the terrorist group no longer exists, the only people affected by this are the relatives of prisoners who are being punished for crimes that they haven't committed. Repealing the law on dispersal would be a point in favor of coexistence, as the prisoners will still be serving their sentences for the crimes that they have committed, but at least their relatives will be able to visit them without having to travel so far, and without having to risk their lives on the roads.

But of course, if we are talking about coexistence and humanity, and especially about moving on to a better future, we mustn't forget the relatives of victims murdered by the terrorist group ETA. A few years ago, I was walking through my neighborhood with a friend, and I saw how a group of people were applauding the murderer of a prison officer on the day he had been released from prison. All that seemed like something out of film: children and adults were glorifying someone in a ceremony of sorts with dances and flowers for murdering someone, and all this took place in the street, to be precise, in the Plaza de Pinares in San Sebastián.

All these kinds of events do not help to create coexistence. I'm not saying that the friends and relatives of the prisoner shouldn't celebrate his release. But I do think that the most logical and empathetic approach would be a celebration in private premises, as this would mean that the victims are respected. As you say, if we want all Basques to live together in harmony, then we must take all the victims into account, on both sides. We must bear in mind both the victims of ETA, and those of the GAL etc., not forgetting, as you stress, that in the war that went on not long ago there were no winners, although many old-school politicians continually tell us that it was the state that won in the fight against terrorism. We all lost in this war!

As far as ideas are concerned, I totally agree with you: human beings would be nothing without having certain ideals to guide and lead them from day to day to act as they do. However, on the other hand, there are ideals that have led us on the road to ruin as a society. More than once I have told you what led me to criticize nationalism in all its forms. This critique that emerged after reflecting on what people in my family suffered because of certain kinds of outrageous nationalism is nothing new to me.

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The idea that you have of nationalism is the same as the one that the father of this movement had. Johann Gottfried Herder was a German, 18th-century poet and philosopher, and, for many people, Herder was the man who created the concept of belonging to a group, a land, and a culture. In his early writings, Herder describes how people cannot live only by eating, drinking, and sleeping. Apart from all the above, they need to feel part of a group, as human beings are inherently social. Each group has its own customs, its own lifestyle, its own culture, and even its own language that makes them unique. The German philosopher believed in the idea that people, groups, or nations could live together peacefully. That is, Herder believed that no nations, people, or group should feel superior to any other.

The actual reality that has taken shape from the 18th century to the 21st century as far as the concept of nationalism is concerned has been quite different to the German philosopher's early theories. To be quite sincere, I don't know what the situation of the concept of nationalism is like in other nations. In Spain, the Basque Country, Catalonia, and even Galicia, the concept of nationalism that the political parties present is the antithesis of Johann Gottfried Herder's nationalist principles. Isaiah Berlin, one of the great champions of research into human behavior and the impact that ideals have on the individual, mentioned in several interviews that the nationalism that has been present for various centuries in our society aims to constantly stir up arguments among the different nations so that one of them can be superior to the others. At the present time we understand the concept of the nation to be something that must be defended against others.

However, my own experience has taught me that the nation and homeland are an absurd invention of the political class to keep citizens at each other's throats so that they forget what really matters. The great sage Adolfo Aristarain in his film *Martín (Hache)* demonstrated that what is important about a country is the person and not the flag. The world that I want to leave to others is no utopia or fantasy. What really matters is the individual, not where people come from, their race, or their ideas. The problem is that a lot of people do believe that this is utopian, but the reality check that they get when they travel and get to know different cultures is just too much for them. Before becoming a volunteer in an association that helps migrants to settle in Spain, I had absolutely no idea about African and Arab culture. When I got to know these people better, I saw that they think quite differently. The have a vision of people that is totally different: they just believe in the qualities of the individual. They couldn't care less where you are from. This viewpoint is something that is not very widespread here in the West.

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As for the questions that you ask me, the truth is that they are excellent questions. Unfortunately, I don't think that I can provide a definitive response to all of them. In one of them you ask me what we should do to pass on a less divided society to the next generation. Maybe the situation that we'll leave our children won't be very different to the one we currently face. I know that this is a rather negative perspective, but in turn it is realistic. The reason for this is quite simple: first of all, to change a divided society, we need the people who govern this society to have at least a slight interest in wanting to address this, for they reflect the individuals that make up the group or nation.

Secondly, if the people that govern us don't have the slightest interest in changing society so that we all pull together, it is the citizens themselves in society that must keep the pressure on and peacefully demonstrate to ask for change. Although on many occasions demonstrating does not get a response, we must not give up, because if we persist, we can make them listen to us.

The problem that I see lies in the fact that the politicians do not have the slightest interest in changing this society because it benefits them. And secondly, people themselves are not prepared to change it, not because they don't want to, but because we live in a very conformist society. It is difficult for us to act for the common good. We live in a highly individualistic society where, if "they" don't cause us any harm, we look the other way.

As I've said before, I do not have absolute answers but I do think that we can change this society and rebuild it through small acts in our everyday lives. Just like you, I think that it's in our hands to leave a better future for the next generation. It'll be complicated; that's for sure, but we'll manage to change the direction in which we are currently going.

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Letter Three

Dear **Pablo**,

As you rightly say, changes are difficult to obtain, but an active citizenry can bring about small changes that make it possible to reap great rewards. Society has the responsibility of speaking out to demand the change that we need, and, in tune with this, we are venturing forward with this book, a book that will provide our voice and our contribution. We won't achieve major change, but we are smoothing the way towards reaching our goal of consolidating peace and coexistence in the Basque Country.

Through words we have looked each other in the eye to discover the other and we have gone on from there to rediscover ourselves. Although we share a history, a people, and a generation, each of us has ended up representing different images. Nevertheless, with great determination, you and I have managed to combine two different versions of identity in an emphatic vision focused on a united future. This exercise has helped us to see how different experiences and ideals are not aspects that should separate us but are personal characteristics that each of us have that should attract us towards the other so that we can discover and learn from them.

Reading and understanding you has been the best possible exercise for opening my mind. We have spoken about borders and all the problems that they have caused us, but in these letters, we have seen that the only borders that restrict and cause us harm are the frontiers in our minds. We have looked each other in the eye, and we have discovered ourselves in the image of the other, and instead of looking at our differences and considering them to provide a justification for rejecting the other, we have accepted and valued them, because our vision has been able to travel well beyond what we could imagine.

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Leaving our fears aside and daring to express our ideas about such a sensitive issue makes us stronger. Putting our written thoughts down on paper can make us feel dizzy. However, I don't regret having embarked on a journey that has made me learn so much. I appreciate having had a colleague who has read what I wrote without judging me and made me learn with his words. I appreciate that your thoughts are different than mine because this makes me reflect more deeply. I value the fact that we have looked at each other and gone beyond words to always see the person rather than the ideology. We have looked right into our souls and that is where we have come together.

Thank you,
Naiara

* * *

Dear **Naiara**,

I have no doubt that in the Basque Country we will manage to reach a degree of coexistence. It is possible that neither you nor I will get to see a society in which people set aside their quarrels to live together in peace. It is a very complex, very long process. As I said, I am not the one to tell everyone what they should do, but I would like to create a society in which people can look each other in the eye and see that they are not so different; a society in which the ideas that each of us hold are equally important and are neither better nor worse; a society in which there are no first and second class citizens, but merely people who just want to get ahead. I want and can see the need to build a community whose ideals are based on respect and listening so that we can understand each other. We've already suffered too much; it's time to love, respect and listen to each other.

With these letters we show that much can be achieved by listening and reflecting with the aim of understanding someone different. We can rethink things, see a different perspective, see similarities between us, and even consider things that we couldn't do beforehand. This is a simple listening exercise that can have overwhelming results. I've really enjoyed being able to speak and express myself freely without being judged for it. I've really appreciated reading your letters because it has made me think things over and see that we share many things in common although we might have different ideas. I think that we both believe in people and feel that it is possible to achieve change in this society.

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I really appreciate that you have shared your thoughts and ideas with me. This might seem a strange thing to say, but quite often it is very difficult to express yourself out of fear of what people will say. As I have already stated, what we are sowing will one day yield its fruits. Maybe it won't reach everyone, but I am sure that the people that read us will follow the trail that we leave and little by little we will achieve a better society. However, it is important to ensure that we do not forget; that we tell the truth about what happened; that we remember the victims and respect their families. And of course, that we fight to achieve a better society for our children and grandchildren. A society that is more united, more social, more caring, and more empathetic. We are and will be agents of change, we have already built too many walls. It's time to build bridges!

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Chapter 3

Lucas and Paula

Letter One

Dear **Paula**,

Sometimes I think back onto what life had been before the pandemic. How were we different? Systemic inequity and chosen ignorance had long plagued our world before any one crisis began. What had the world of only a few months ago not shared with our lives today? Maybe we, not the world, had been the different ones: unaware of how contagious our judgement had touched the souls of those we loved and loathed the most.

My home is known and felt for many reasons. If I were to take a moment to sit and piece together a list, I do not know what would come first. In all of the United States, Easton, Maryland held one of the first free communities for Black Americans, even before the inception of the nineteenth century. We did not talk about it too often in school, though when we did, I couldn't help but think of my great-great grandparents. Born enslaved in Mississippi, they would later shed the shackles of slavery and educate the children of formerly enslaved people on a plot of land given by a wealthy businessman. By the time I reach the second spot on the list of Easton, I would have to write of its embodiment of the confederacy. Where our community became home to the first free settlement of color in all of the land, our town additionally held the last confederate statue in all of Maryland. I think that just may be the story of the United States, an endless narrative of timeless contradictions.

The promise of the American Dream calls the heart of every person willing to roll up their sleeves and settle into hard work. But the dream is flittering. And by the moment you have realized that the obstacles of institutional injustice are almost insurmountable, you have woken up. I suppose we're all having trouble laying our head down and falling back to sleep.

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What does true patriotism look like? I'm not sure I've ever really seen it nor felt it; have you?

When I was in my last year of high school, I chose Dolores Huerta's words of "¡Sí, Se Puede!" as the quote for my yearbook picture. I had long admired her resilient message of persistence for the pursuit of justice. There are moments when movements that touch the ideals of "the abstract", lose a type of grounding in the reality of community. But not for Dolores Huerta. She challenged the practiced meaning of "justice", while too empowering women to take on leadership roles across the community. Much like her words filled with action, the grassroots party Podemos has risen across Spain. And in particular, Podemos has grown in popularity throughout the Basque Country, a beacon for leftist support. When I first learned of the political movement, I thought back to the work of Dolores Huerta in balancing the promise of the abstract with the tangible change of the present. Perhaps Podemos is set to accomplish the same, advocating for the inclusion of meaningful reform to a hearth of cultural interaction and tradition: the Basque Country.

I remember when you first described the community in San Sebastián to me, Paula. You shared that the people are as friendly as they are loyal, supporting one another in an always close-knit fashion. It's almost like, you meet your best friends on the very first day of school and grow together endlessly side-by-side. These systems of support are integral to the well-being of communities and their youth. Though as intimate as support systems are, can governments act as one too? Investing in the education, welfare, and health of every community, compassionate governance may just set the standard to which all other support systems are measured against. What is to happen when governmental apathy stands in the way of connectivity?

I thought I would share a story with you that I read only a short while ago.

There is a mountain called Luvina, hidden in the countryside of Mexico. The mountainous community lives alongside, and with the towering stones in front of them. Where the men leave Luvina in search of work, the women stay, watching over the souls of their ancestors. Though it is Juan Rulfo's story of *Luvina* that transcends Mexico, bringing to light the apathy of the reformed government and standing to represent the marginalization of indigenous communities across Latin America, the mountain and its dwellers emerged as the community's sole support system. In one way, the community's coexistence with the mountain fulfills a certain element of 'lo fantástico'. Embracing the supernatural as a grounding force, the women of Luvina become the guardians of a world that has failed to guard them. The disconnect be-

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tween the mountain and its country remains ever so forceful, though it seems that disconnectivity may always meet a feeling of normalization.

Maybe that's the exceptional purpose of movements like Podemos: achieving connectivity through a shared sentiment of disconnectivity. Could there be one ideology that encapsulates connectivity? I remember listening to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ponder the same question, one she responded to with the idea that simply stating 'human rights' is a "vague expression" that fails to fully address the prevalence of specific marginalization. If we were to heed the words of Robin Morgan, perhaps at the core of Podemos lies a feminist sentiment unique to the Basque Country; feminism in the interpretation of gender equality and the progressive agenda of Podemos, but additionally feminism as the search for true, community-wide connectivity. Though where feminism lies, heteronormativity too prevails. It is the promise of the abstract, the intangible tangible that enticed the cause of Basque nationalism in the days of ETA. The call for young men to build on the work of their forefathers is based on a timeless story of heteronormativity. I suppose there is a sense of peace in thinking of the abstract to aid the plight of the reality. But when the abstract comes to supersede the terrain of the present, heteronormativity outlasts the connectivity of feminism. To achieve connectivity, it is feminism that must disrupt the status quo of its community. Can feminism and heteronormativity intersect, coexist with one another? Or is the place of feminism, like the rise of Podemos, a direct reaction to the prevailing terrorism incorporated into the Basque struggle for independence?

Where is there to go for the Basque people? Where ETA has been disbanded, its intergenerational trauma lives in the daily interactions of its country. However, it is not only ETA or the violence sanctioned by the Spanish government that are the sole accomplices for the postmemory of the Basque people.

Where is there to go? The calming answer might be "forward", but the painful answer may come with the reexamination of the past's woes. If postmemory stands for the inescapable legacy of trauma, what can heal a still bleeding wound?

Restorative justice is a curious thing to me. I suppose I'm always tempted to call it simply "justice", but that too would be an injustice. It is "restorative" that reminds us of the failures of the past to rectify the trauma of today. But restorative justice cannot be confined to the community organizations working to bring closure to the loved ones of the victims of violence. Restorative justice must be the intentional work of any government in recognizing the transgressions of their history. It is the active addressing of injustice to not only restore what justice should have been, but also to create a path toward all future right-doing and impartiality.

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Is there a limit to the reach of restorative justice, or can it too work to address the overarching violence from a holistic perspective? That is to say, is there a place within the process of restorative justice to examine the roots of terrorism, disconnectivity? To ensure the longevity of justice, perhaps the process would also address the circumstances in which terrorism could thrive in any community. Then again, if there is any one thing to be drawn from the spread of terrorism, it might just be the disparity of its participants. Though networks of support run deep in the loyal hearts of the Basque Country, it can be those with the greatest support that turn to the violence in sufficing the call for something greater.

The narrative of terrorism is one felt in every community. It is the systematic hinderance of people of color, as it is the violent means of achieving independence. Terrorism disrupts, much like feminism, but only terrorism has no tangible end in sight.

Paula, I wonder about the narrative of violence in the Basque Country. While terrorism is not unique to any one place, the traumatic legacy of terrorism within one community cannot be discounted. Who am I to comment, to share my thoughts on a situation of such complexity? The story of the Basques has always been one of quantification. Who are they similar too? What do their language, customs, and community culture most remind us of? When we work to separate the Basque narrative into neatly defined chapters, we too indulge in the quantifying of a narrative that is anything but quantifiable. Maybe we have always lived under a pandemic, a crisis of identity and the fallibility of connectivity.

Where do we go from here? The path forward becomes more reminiscent of the path we have been on for the entirety of our lifetime. Maybe postmemory is never supposed to leave our minds. It is the intergenerational connection that keeps us together in a time of precedented divide. This virus has indisputably disrupted the status quo of our being. Though it still remains to see what path this pandemic will take following its challenge to our sense of normalcy: a tangible, connectivity through the lens of feminism, or the ever-insatiable pursuit that embodies the trajectory of terrorism.

Sí, nosotros podemos.

Always,
Lucas

* * *

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Dear **Lucas**

The pandemic is definitely an event that has opened our eyes and made us appreciate what really matters. We have seen how, in just a few months, our globalized world has been threatened by an invisible being that knows no nations, races, or frontiers, but have we really learnt anything from all this? I think that we are an individualistic society that has still not taken in "the new normal". Not just on a global level, but in Spain itself the hostility among autonomous communities and the mistrust and lack of coordination among them are clear.

I like the way that you question the meaning of home and homeland. I consider that each of us has a different way of understanding what this means. Personally, I think that all of us belong to our homeland, but that there's no reason why it should always coincide with your neighbors´ homeland. You can consider that your homeland is a small town in Andalusia, while someone else may proudly proclaim that they are Asturian or Basque, and you may even have a broader concept that includes all Spaniards, a definition that matches Spain's political borders.

Thanks to your letter, Lucas, I've been able to learn about Dolores Huerta, who is definitely a very important figure. Nevertheless, I don't think that any party in Spain can carry out inclusive reforms, considering the way they have behaved during the toughest period that our country has faced since the Civil War. They all say they stand for our national interest, but do they really know what that means? Demagogy has totally taken over all political discourse and citizens' immediate needs hardly matter. This translates into the different parties acting in accordance with their own narrow interests.

However, those American politics that are so aggressive, heartless, and dehumanizing never cease to amaze me. A country entirely made up of migrants and yet that emphasizes the differences among them as if they were irreconcilable, and yet, nonethelesss, a place where you can love a single land and flag. It's sad yet admirable at the same time: sad because they manage to pit groups against each other by generalizing and emphasizing their differences; admirable because you find a rallying point in the symbols that identify your nation.

Thanks to my university experience in San Sebastián I have gotten to know the Basque community. In the past, I had only been able to hear clichés about particular historical events. When I arrived in San Sebastián for the first time, I was drawn to the beauty of its architecture and its mountains. It is definitely one of the most beautiful regions that I have had the pleasure of getting to know. However, something

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that attracted me even more were its values of loyalty and genuineness that I have always admired in people. I'm not going to lie to you. In the beginning, it's complicated to establish close relationships with the Basques. I don't know if their reserved character is due to what they have had to go through or because it's always been a characteristic of theirs. At first, it's really difficult to feel "part of a community". Their feeling of belonging to a specific group is so strong that it's difficult for those of us who come to the Basque Country for the first time to integrate, but as my grandfather used to say, "Good things always take time".

As for social movements and political parties, I think that when people go into politics, their interests change, and it all gets theatrical and becomes unreal. Their first steps are always full of good intentions, but once they are inside the political scene, they forget about their purpose and what led them to embark on this path in their day. In politics, people don't debate; they don't respect anyone who thinks differently; and far less can they be representative of anyone or anything. Changes are brought about by the small actions of individuals on an everyday basis, for being able to say "that's enough" at certain times, or by working for their own personal goals, ignoring the fact, for example, that you are a woman facing additional challenges because of your gender. Politics create conflicts and differences among groups where there really aren't any, in everyday life. As you can see, I hate how political movements take over social aims and exclusively make them a party issue.

To a certain extent, this may have happened with what ETA was in its day. In its early years, there were people who shared its ideas. However, once the armed struggle began and even more so when a democratic system was established in Spain, it began to make no sense. In my opinion, their intentions could no longer justify violence. The Basque people have such a strong identity that it doesn't need parties, associations, or movements that bind together its values. Citizens are the best ambassadors of their culture and values, but what differentiates patriotism from nationalism? While patriotism is a feeling of identifying with a specific territory that matches what is recognized as a state, nationalism goes beyond political borders. Both movements make it possible to generalize and to differentiate certain groups from others.

ETA was a reality that shouldn't be hidden or overshadowed. People need to know the history of what happened not just in the Basque Country, but in Spain as well. My generation's lack of knowledge of the events is quite clear. If we don't want history to be repeated, we need to learn about it. If we want to understand what caused the emergence of ETA, we also need to understand this history. During the first year of

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my degree, a professor presented us a text by Umberto Eco, *Inventing the Enemy,* a book in praise of tolerance that shows the irrationality that pervades our contemporary society.

Restorative justice is new and in its infancy in our country. Our justice system tends not to listen to the victim and to only address the legal consequences of a crime. However, it is a procedure that clearly bears in mind legal certainty. It is a definitely more democratic and humane form of justice, but it is important to examine its feasibility in the different cases that come to court, especially in crimes of terrorism. I support the idea of enabling victims to find closure. Will it allow forgiveness and reconciliation rather than opting for punishment and resentment? I wonder whether it is possible to rule out punishment for serious crimes that have been committed and how this could fit into the Spanish legal system, but of course, I consider that listening to the victim must be a process that we need to include in our system, a conversation that will enable us to progress as a society.

I don't know if the pandemic will make us prosper as a society or whether, on the contrary, it will show our more selfish side. Do you consider that people have begun to appreciate things that had been forgotten? Do you think that we only care about our own personal welfare or do we really think about the general interest?

Best wishes, Lucas.

Your friend,
Paula

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Letter Two

Dear **Paula**,

Almost mystifying it has been to believe that only five months ago, the world we once lived in was almost nothing alike what it has become today. At least, that is what I have come to hear, from near and from far. I suppose to some degree, I have started to believe it too. Only, each generation has shared more than their fair share of tragedy, within and beyond home. In the midst of it all —a world always rich with crisis— we are met with the calls of "patriotic pride": a civic responsibility of sorts, to be and feel proud of the places in which we dwell.

Though in itself, pride presents us with a prickly path. How can we navigate our sense of deep rootedness without becoming exceptionally centered in our community, at the expense of those around us? Can we be patriotic yet still profoundly concerned with the well-being beyond the comfort of our walls? I leave thinking that spaces are not innately created for a sense of patriotism; they are forged instead by a sense of belonging.

I think I belong to you in the same way you belong to me, Paula. Individually, we share the task in welcoming ourselves so that together, the space we have created radiates community, empathy, belonging. Spaces are unique that way, designed to encapsulate this sense of belonging so that its participants can feel it too.

We establish connection through appreciation of space, large and small. They are intimate, as they are community oriented. Space reserved for personal introspection share a similar purpose to those set aside for gathering and collectivity; each play a profound role in constructing our own notion of our most inherent phenomenon, belonging.

The day following the massacre of Sandy Hook, we were asked to raise our school's flag to half-mast, a sign of our solidarity with the vic-

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tims, family, and community now deeply immersed in mourning. That had been the first time I thought schools —and the innate spaces they create— to be non-immune from the pain of the outside world. Only five years later, when a few classmates and I led a schoolwide walkout after the shooting of Marjory Stoneman Douglass did I come to feel the profound desensitization of our young generation. But this hyperawareness, now translating to a feeling of commonplace as we witness the continuance of our world's present-day tragedies, has a distinct relationship with the phenomenon of belonging.

It severs the rope. The threads tightly woven by space —both personal and communal— are broken in the instant of violence and the subsequent desensitization to it. To feel belonging to a space no longer free from violence, would be to feel belonging to a space no longer there.

I feel we belong to politics in the same way that politics belong to each and every one of us. Our generation, Paula, has shown such tangible activism in demanding meaningful action from our elected leaders. After all, as the imminent dangers of the climate crisis, authoritarianism, and heteronormativity persist in actualizing, we are well beyond the moments in which hope and more open rhetoric can prevail.

Since the rise of our generation's everyday champion, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, it can become easy to forget the exclusivity political movements have long endured. On the basis on sex, sexuality, race, and class, political movements geared toward social reform often sacrifice many elements in order to achieve an attainable degree of success. And while this notion may explain political exclusivity, it mustn't justify it.

Movements reveal the evolution of space, but I believe we too reveal the evolution of movements. We change, our new spaces do too, for better and for worse. Though, it would be unwise to say that evolution occurs as pure happenstance. It is painful, as it necessary. Maybe there is one shared catalyst in this process for change, or maybe spaces have simply adapted through the introduction of a new sense of belonging.

As world tragedy continues in its unfolding, the movement of people from place to place has only risen. In search for a better life, migrants bring stories of hardship and of social turbulence into landscapes much different from their own. Through this quest for a tangible sense of belonging, migration shares the burden of political movement, only often without a choice in doing so.

My father was born in the city of Ahmedabad, centered in the northern and western coast of India. When he was two, he and his par-

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ents left their home to move to the United States. They sought to fulfill the "American Dream", like the so many before and after their journey. In a new space, filled with new customs, people, and spices (or I suppose, maybe lack thereof), my grandparents' new sense of belonging was not deeply rooted in any one place. They loved India, but they came to feel grounded in the United States too. Belonging transcended space because space transcends confinement.

There is a beautiful documentary, Paula, that I hope may share in my family's story.

It's called *Extranjeras*, directed by Helena Taberna, a woman I have only just begun to learn more about. The film highlights the lives of several immigrant women, their dreams, and their actuality amid a new space. What has changed, and what has remained the same for the women who come to find opportunity on the backdrop of Spain?

Not all stories of migration begin and conclude like that of my grandparents. Even within my own family, the difference of opportunity that embodied my Indian family's journey to this country, and that of my Black relatives is, simply put, incomparable. Built on the kidnapping, enslaving, and forced transporting of African peoples, perhaps the American Dream has nothing to do with endurance, grit, and almost everything to do with the 'othering' of its own people.

For the women in this documentary, I suppose the notion of othering rings true. Where the United States, among so many other countries, has chosen forceful intervention as its path to diplomacy, the victims of its violence can no longer find any sense or feeling of belonging in a space no longer their own. It is these stories, the ones of sacrifice, will, and feminist connectivity, that the women describe their impact in the already well-established spaces around them.

Helena Taberna brings light to the everyday manner in which "*las extranjeras*" mold a new, multicultural Spanish landscape. Skilled in hybridism, women are tasked as the chief maintenance officers for preserving cultural traditions, as they are for supporting the well-being of their families. But it is much more than that. In the midst of adapting, yet remaining grounded in cultural heritage, the women resist the categorization of being "the other". Othering, the subtle and overarching attempt on the part of nativist sentiment to paint immigrant communities as those who do not *belong*, remains the active, embedded experience of the women portrayed.

I remember being told I was ineligible to join our school's Black student association on the account of not being "Black enough". I didn't know the name for it then, though I suppose "othering" might do. As our world achieves more connectivity, cultures achieve the same. We

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see, and we feel, multiculturalism across our communities. Perhaps it is the greatest symbol of belonging; our belonging to one another is greater than any belonging to one culture, space, nation. But I can only guess that there is great pain in this connectivity too. I am a son of multicultural connectivity; I am both "too much" as I am "not enough" of every one of our family's cultures. Belonging and I are *extranjeros* to each another.

And so, we ask, what is belonging? Surely a sense of belonging differs itself from that of patriotism and a narrow-set pride. If not "political", what category could belonging wedge itself into? Perhaps there are none broad enough, yet so deeply personal, that could encompass the phenomenon of our humanity.

For the people of the Basque Country, belonging has always seemed to go hand-in-hand with the notion of independence. Maybe one day that freedom will finally arrive, and so too will a new sense of belonging to a new sense of space.

We cannot see it, feel it, or even firmly conclude that it is there; belonging is elusive that way, resisting definition like the resistance movements it espouses.

If I could leave you with one question, Paula, it would be about the word in itself. Belonging is to actively *be longing*, but if not for ourselves, what is it that we are endlessly longing for?

Con los pies en la tierra, y los ojos en la luna.

Always,
Lucas

* * *

My dear friend, **Lucas**,

Your letters are full of interesting reflections. Although they emerge from your experiences in the United States, they could have come about in the context that my country is going through at the moment. In the current pandemic, we have experienced first-hand that our planet is interconnected given how we have suffered problems that began on the other side of the world. Nonetheless, as you have clearly stressed, our generation doesn't seem to have any capacity to remember pain.

Each of us has experienced a tragedy. We thought that we were invincible. We could never have imagined that we could experience first-hand the pain that our ancestors had experienced. We have attributed our ignorance of history to the lack of information that we were given

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in the classroom or to the silence that built up around ETA's violence as it was a taboo subject by our society. However, we have shown that this is not the case: we forget because we don't want to remember; we don't want to remember so we don't sacrifice part of our well-being for the common good.

In Spain, just a few months ago, we emerged from a lockdown that lasted for months. On the first few days that the government let us out onto the streets, you could feel the fear in each of us. Neighbors hardly exchanged a smile and we tried to double the distance recommended as being safe for social interaction. The mere fact of feeling a slight breeze on your face was a reason to be cheerful. As the restrictions eased, we got closer to each other. Nobody would now say that we are still on a health alert if we weren't constantly reminded of this by the mask on our faces and the daily statistics about those who are fighting to overcome the disease.

I consider the feeling of belonging to a place to be an individual thing. The problem emerges when a collective or a group wants to appropriate the ability to feel "native". Who is Basque? Anyone whose parents, grandparents, and other generations were born and lived in the Basque Country? Anyone who was born in this land? Or anyone who has lived and worked here for years? As you rightly say: "to feel belonging to a space no longer free from violence, would be to feel belonging to a space no longer there". There are people who have even made their place disappear out of love for it. They have destroyed lives to be built, families to be enjoyed, and spaces to belong to.

Perhaps violence doesn't eliminate the feeling of belonging that others have, but it does lead to the fracturing of the community. As a result, certain individuals don't share the patriotism that some feel, but that doesn't mean that they have to give up their culture, their history, and their traditions. That is why violence is the worst weapon to "fight" for your community. It doesn't link a community together; it just completely destroys it.

In fact, we are the reflection and driving force for social change just as reflection and social change are the core of our community. We try to modify spaces so that those individuals who want to be integrated can adapt better to them. However, I get the feeling that we have lost the power to bring about change; the desire to make our surroundings a better place.

I want to thank you for recommending the documentary *Extranjeras.* I'm surprised by the optimism in these people's eyes and the possibilities that they can see within our borders. It makes me wonder who must perform the task of adapting. Migrants have to learn the culture,

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customs, and language. In this way, their adaptation process will be easier; however, the community mustn't look away, as they shouldn't be considered the "other", but rather a future "us". They are the individuals who enrich and make our society evolve.

The problem appears when they are considered to be an attack on our identity, on what we imagine to be as a society. What these people do not understand is that the feeling of belonging is a personal matter. It is lived on an individual plane that depends on how those new identities are created and experienced. Each individual sees reality through their own eyes for it is filtered through their lived experiences. That is why it is unreasonable to assume that their processes of adaptation will lead to the disappearance or modification of the space we once called "ours".

The refugee crisis has meant that thousands of people need a new place that they can call home. Countries have seen this as an attack on what is "theirs" and, instead of coming to their aid, have chosen to place more obstacles in their path (if that were possible). Aren't politicians our representatives? Shouldn't they embody our needs? Could it be that the lack of knowledge of our ancestors' suffering and of our own history has also resulted in indifference to pain?

Nevertheless, I consider that it is not so much the economic model that is not working, but the model of the state and its political design. We could say that capitalism is what drives the inclusion of people, because when it's all said and done whoever works hard obtains a double benefit: one for their family and one for their community. I believe that the loss of our community's identity is what we fear the most. However, we can't expect these immigrants to make a commitment to us and not demand one back. They have left their homes because they understand that the future of their family is here. Their desire to have a decent job that enables them to make their families progress may never be repaid by our community unless we make that happen.

Their feeling can be identified with the quote by Marisol Morales with which you closed your letter: "the aims and goals that these people have are lofty and ambitious; however, they do not omit reality, nor do they forget the way". I hope that our generation makes this quote our own and that we understand our past, its stories, and the future that we must build.

"Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times". This may be the reason that our ancestors knew how to value each period of stability and prosperity; they knew how to see what was beautiful in each phase and tried to help the "other" when a problem emerged.

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The inability to remember results in being ignorant about what we may face, in not finding the wound that needs to heal, and in not wanting to fight for the common good. Nothing is ever enough to make us happy; we value material or earthly pleasures; we prefer to show the good that already exists in our lives rather than asking for help when something worries us. It is no longer our past and our experiences that shape us as individuals, but our profiles on social media and our interactions on these. There will come a time when we won't be able to distinguish fact from fiction, so we won't know how to solve real problems because we won't know what they are.

Thanks for each of your reflections.
I look forward to your next letter.

Best wishes,
Paula

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Letter Three

Dear **Paula**,

A year of correspondence has felt both longer and shorter than anything I could have imagined. I cannot thank you enough for sharing all that has defined your journey in the Basque Country. Back and forth and back again, these letters have captured moments at their very inception. Small and fleeting as they may seem, I know we both have come to see just how extraordinary they have been.

When I first wrote to you, all those months ago now, I wanted to ask you about where you saw yourself in the backdrop of a community with its own uniquely centered identity. You told me about the friendships there: long-standing and reflective of a type of community that truly had known one another, and itself. I wondered what it could be like, living in that kind of community, one that has always been community-oriented. Seemingly enough, Paula, it turned out that I knew more about it than what had first met the eye.

Until the beginning of the pandemic, I had lived in one of those small towns where, as Judith Harris writes, our paved, one-way streets were "named for flowers and accomplished men". The first time I had described my home to you, I spoke of its dual identity: an allegiance to the early cause of Black freedom and with a heart beating to the Confederacy. If I might, I hope I can add a second chapter.

I remember how excited I felt seeing my preschool teacher sit in the front row of our high school's graduation; though, I was far from the only one. She had seen so many of us on that stage come through her classroom decorated by bright colors and an always-growing photo array on the cabinets. They were the same faces I had grown to love all throughout our shared adolescence.

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The girl that sat next to me at our ceremony was the same girl that had first taken the seat next to me at our computer station; the boy a few rows behind me was the same one I had met on the slides, and then again for the many meals in between; and the best friend I had made on those very first days still thankfully calls me her best friend too. When you look a bit closer, it becomes apparent that perhaps I really do come from that kind of community you first wrote to me of: towns made up of pre-school friends that, in a few years' time, are only remembered as "friends". Even as the narrative of the Basque people has time and time again been made the Other in its own community, its story of loyalty sees commonality across time and space.

At the end of high school, I remember smiling at all the handwritten notes in our yearbook. The many lines of "Stay in touch" and "Don't be a stranger!" brought a feeling of such nostalgia for the first time I had come into contact with so many of my friends. In the same moments we had searched for our own understanding of identity, we knew that at the heart, our small town was inextricable from our view of life. There were many days where I felt othered by my own home, but I have never known my community to, in its entirety, be maligned as the Other.

I wonder if our letters have become something of a high school letter. For as trivial as that may sound, we shared in one another's stories of fear and hope that remind me of a perfectly imperfect present. I suppose letters, even those written on the sticky post-it notes, have that innate power. In the midst of an ever-globalized world, letters are both the progress of our lives as they are the protest to the often disingenuity of our growing connectivity.

It is hard to imagine writing notes of joy and love in the yearbook of 2020. Nonetheless, there is gratitude that must be noted: for pressing pause on the many directions of my family, for revisiting friendships that I had thought to have been long set aside, and for finding a pen pal along the way to share in the tumultuousness that has encapsulated the days and long nights of this year.

To the Basque Country, I would write of the gratitude I feel for depicting a story of immense loss, vulnerability, and unending othering. I have had the chance to study and read and reread the first-hand accounts of the victims of an unspeakable violence that holds lasting memory.

And finally, to the pandemic, I would only express fear for what is still to come. Even as the hope of vaccination spreads —a joy that is almost infectious— we continue to remain in the midst of a world tragedy without a tangible end in sight. In the more than a decade that has passed since the screening of Helena Taberna's documentary, the sentiment of migration and the search for belonging stand as true then as they are today.

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When we learn about time, as early as those years in our preschool classrooms, it seems to center around the idea of progress, of moving forward, always. We move beyond what has been into a future liberated from the story of the past. Perhaps the pandemic will finally shatter our learned viewpoint.

Our progress has never been defined by the movement from Point A to Point B. Looking at ourselves and our history as such merely reinforces a reliance on normativity. For this has never been a story of past, present, and future; it is the cycle of timeless dependency.

The protests we have seen and stood alongside for unequivocal justice for Black lives are not rooted in any one modern-day awakening of the United States' colonialist and capitalist history. A future of equity stands not as a movement for tomorrow, but instead as the demanding for the rupture of our country's cycle. Our time in the pandemic has only helped chart what has been the blueprint of our American community. Though starkly different from the Basque context, our dependency on the ideal of 'American exceptionalism' is a form of indulgence for the Other. It is as though, becoming the Other has allowed the story of the American experience to be written as a progression of liberty, excluding the cycle it has sustained of tragedy rooted in the violence of othering the rest, the different, the world.

Maybe my letter cannot solely be addressed to the year of 2020. After all, this year cannot be remembered as the only one filled with the adversity of our lifetime. We have lived seemingly on the cusp, plateau, and cusp once more of sickness, of death, and of constant search for the rebirth to our story.

And yours, Paula? What would you write?

Perhaps one day we will find the time to write a second chapter.

Though for now, Paula, stay in touch. And please, don't be a stranger.

Your dear friend,
Lucas

* * *

San Sebastián, January 2021

Dear **Lucas**,

First of all, I want to thank you for how you have opened up and shown me your experiences and beliefs. Thanks to this wonderful experience, I've been able to get to know a part of the United States, and

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it has enabled me to grow as a person and "travel" through your experiences, feelings, and knowledge. One of the things that most worried me during the pandemic was that it would "clip my wings". I was afraid I wouldn't be able to discover new corners of the world again, get to know new people, or be able to interact with others. What I didn't know is that difficulties always open new opportunities and this is where you come in, Lucas, and our letters.

This damn virus has cast a dark shadow over 2020, but it has allowed me to grow, to get to know myself a bit better, and above all to appreciate the people around me. New people have also turned up with ideas and from a background quite different from mine (or so I thought), but I've felt really at home with them. And if it hadn't been for this year, who knows whether this project would have continued.

I must acknowledge that what I've most liked about you is your boundless curiosity to learn about me, about where I'm from, and especially what I think and why. It's a quality that I hope you never lose because it makes you unique.

It's funny how some people feel that by altering the last number of the year things are going to change by magic. However, like all things in life, you need hard work, desire, and sacrifice to make progress. Not everything is just a click away, and I think that this is the lesson that we're going to learn in 2021.

It is odd how just six days after it began, the year has taught us our first lesson. The latest events in the United States have shown, from my point of view, that we are a very intolerant and impressionable society. Worst of all, we have gone backwards. Don't they realize what a struggle it was for our parents and grandparents to get to this point? Just like you, I often ask why this is, and at times it usually leads to many conversations with the people around me. To be quite sincere, our social networks and the internet are a gateway to a huge amount of information, but unfortunately it is used very selectively.

To a certain extent, it reminds me of the situation that might have occurred in the Basque Country with the armed struggle. It starts with rhetoric, speeches whose sole purpose is to distort reality and manipulate the masses. This is repeated until it is considered to be the truth. It is undoubtedly a dangerous technique. Paradoxically, I don't think that even the people who use it realize the consequences it has.

Maybe I'm mistaken, but what happened at the Capitol was both predictable and unpredictable at the same time. On the one hand, the discourse about electoral fraud was fueled right since the day of the elections, stirring up (even more so if possible) the differences among those who think differently. On the other hand, not even Donald Trump

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himself knew that what he said was so powerful that it could question the very system that had given him the victory four years earlier.

I really enjoyed the trip to your school. Adolescence, although it is sometimes a rather difficult stage in life, it is also very special and it is where we start to develop an identity of our own. You have managed to put a smile on my face and bring back certain memories of my own. I particularly enjoyed those letters in which you talk about your graduation day as a community symbol, a feeling of wanting to keep in touch, and not losing the essence of having belonged to and grown up at your high school. For me, our correspondence represents the desire to want to learn and understand; the desire to break out of my comfort zone and listen to someone who has something to teach me. However, both have a common thread running through them: the fact that the letters will be useful when we read them again in the future, to show the progress that we have made.

I have also felt scared about the pandemic, although once I got "used to it", my fear turned to uncertainty. I agree with you that it will radically disrupt the way we think and look at history. What I am most concerned about is the change that has occurred in people. Have we really progressed towards being a more caring society? Sincerely, I don't think so.

I have the feeling that everyone acts for their own benefit, although they boast about how they are denouncing injustices and irregularities that endanger everyone's health. Although you have to generalize to take stock of the year and provide a comprehensive picture, the truth is that I don't like doing this simply because there is no entity formed by "everybody", "the Basques", or "the Americans", only by Lucas, Paula, etc.

I've begun this letter with a brief review of my 2020 and I'd like to take my leave by really looking forward to 2021. Despite the events that we have experienced, I still expect a great deal from the new year. I want to face it as a challenge, but at the same time I want it to provide me with lessons and opportunities to help me overcome all the uncertainty.

I also want to be bold enough to shout out and express what I feel. Only with these actions can you really show what freedom of expression is. I want to highlight what I think without being afraid of the response of others, of "what people will say", but I want to always do this respectfully. I want to care for the people who make me feel good and above all I want to look after myself, so that I don't do any harm to those who love me.

And while we're at it, I hope that in 2021 you'll get the chance to spend your exchange year in Spain and that we can meet up in a small

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café or walk around the streets in my beautiful San Sebastián so that, just like me, you end up falling in love with every nook and cranny of this city.

I'm sure that at some point we'll end up writing the second part; what I don't know is where from.

I have been very lucky to share this journey with you.

I hope that one day we'll meet in person: *Stay in touch.*

Your friend,
Paula

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Chapter 4

Naren and Zuriñe

Letter One

Prologue: Postmemory

When we first discussed writing a book with students from San Sebastian on Basque nationalism, I was completely perplexed. While it would be a good learning experience, I had always believed that the right to comment on past discrimination and violence is reserved for direct participants and their families. My Basque peers contribute deep perspectives based on their families' experiences living through the constant violence between terrorist groups and the Spanish state. In stark contrast, my Dartmouth classmates and I have studied Basque terrorism for the past ten weeks in a predominantly academic setting. Like many of you, I asked myself: as an Indian-American who grew up outside of Chicago, what insight could I possibly bring to a discussion on violence and restorative justice in the Basque country?

My journey to justify the value of my own perspective to this discussion led me to a concept known as "postmemory". Coined by Marianne Hirsch, an English Professor at Columbia University, postmemory describes "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those that came before —to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up". She categorizes postmemory as being "communicative" or "cultural". Communicative postmemory relies on the intergenerational exchange of memories by adults who witnessed an event and can pass on their affective condition to that event to their descendants; this is the traditional view of memory that informed my initial reluctance to participate. Additionally, cultural postmemory is not intergenerational but rather trans-generational, and rests on a systemic acknowledgement of past atrocities. Hirsch describes that communicative memory, starting at a familial level, invigorates broader

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cultural postmemory by injecting individual experiences into societal memorial structures and discussions. In short, my own study of Basque nationalism alongside my outside perspective on the conflict allows the memories of the victims to persist in contemporary issues, bringing more meaning to the discussion overall.

In this manner, I encourage you to engage with the broader themes of violence and justice in this book and bring meaning to your own everyday experiences. The transmission of memory from a cultural perspective serves, in Hirsch's words, as "a living link to the past". Memory, in its truest form, allows us to learn from the past and bring about change in our society today. As I write this, peaceful protests and riots are exploding across the United States in response to the murder of George Floyd by four Minneapolis police officers and the systemic violence against Black people. While the political talking points differ between Basque nationalism and the Black Lives Matter movement, the themes of violence and the difficulties of restorative justice are painfully evident in both. Although I acknowledge that my perspective is limited to cultural postmemory, I suggest that we pull from the Basque separatist movement to inform our own understanding of the violence and restorative justice demanded by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Social Change through Violence

Dear **Zuriñe**,

On Memorial Day of 2020, George Floyd was murdered in broad daylight by four Minneapolis police officers, igniting simultaneous protests and riots across the United States. In the fight against police brutality, America has found itself amidst a national discussion on the justification of violence, on part of the police as well as by protestors in the form of rioting and looting. Some moderates are hesitant to fully support protestors given the breaking of windows, burning of property, and theft that have accompanied some peaceful demonstrations.

New Yorkers have called for the resignation of Mayor Bill de Blasio and Governor Andrew Cuomo at their reluctance to deploy the national guard against violent protestors. Nevertheless, US police and the government are complicit in using violence as a form of control. As we've both seen on the news, the rampant police brutality against Black people has resulted in the deaths of countless innocent men, women, and children, most recently being George Floyd while in police custody and Breonna Taylor in the safety of her own home. In response to the in-

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creasing frequency of looting, President Trump publicly announced his disapproval with the phrase "when the looting starts, the shooting starts", language repeated from segregationists during the Civil Rights Movement. Despite voicing support for peaceful protesting, Trump asked Washington DC police to deploy tear gas on a crowd of peaceful protestors so that he could deliver a speech, proclaiming himself the president of "law and order" and calling for governors to use 'decisive force' in maintaining order. Do you believe that Trump's stance is the right course of action for the president? Achille Mbembe would describe this state violence as acts of "necropolitics", a phrase he coined to describe a state's sovereign right to kill, predominantly based on race. Mbembe elaborates that this necropower comes from the delineation of those who are disposable and those who are valuable; this distinction is evident in the treatment of protestors by the police and President Trump, who use violent methods to control crowds of peaceful protestors. The question is clear, Zuriñe: are protestors in the Black Lives Matter movement justified in their use of looting, vandalism, and rioting to combat the American government's necropolitics?

The discussion on responding to violence propagated by the state and necropolitics has been an age-old question. Many moderates today point to the nonviolence preached by Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi as the most potent force for political change, condemning rioting and looting. As King wrote in his first book *Stride Towards Freedom*, nonviolence seeks to win the "friendship and understanding" of the opponent, not to humiliate him. During the Civil Rights Movement, Southern governments and white citizens would go to extreme lengths to maintain control through necropolitics; King and other Black activists believed that this violence from oppressors would help garner support in Northern states through extensive coverage by the media. Although King remained resolute in his stance on nonviolence at the lack of progress, other activists like Malcom X advocated for violent methods of protest. In his book *Two Speeches*, Malcolm X prioritized getting "meaningful and immediate" by "fighting to overcome". An injustice, in his eyes, deserved to be met with physical force. These two leaders represent ideological alternatives that center on the utility of violence to effect societal change, a debate that continues in our discussions today. Zuriñe, do you think there is a correct perspective among the two?

During the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the Basque Country saw the birth of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in 1959. Founded as a response to the oppression of Basque culture by the Franco regime, including prohibition of Euskera and Basque first names, ETA focused on

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protest through action rather than ideology. From bombing Francoist monuments to flying the banned *ikurriña* from church towers, the organization pursued a series of symbolic and dangerous operations undermining the power of the Spanish state, a campaign reflecting the ideals of Malcolm X. In the 1960s, ETA graduated to an insurrection strategy involving assassination, which led to the killings of *Guardia Civil* officers and even Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973. Upon Franco's death, the country underwent a swift transition to democracy, and, in 1979, the Basque Statute of Autonomy was passed. This provided broad concessions for Basque self-governance, including control of taxation and fiscal matters, healthcare, education, and public safety.

While ETA employed violence, including murder, to achieve its right to self-governance under an authoritarian regime, critics argue that Black people in the United States have the required democratic tools at their disposal to enact change. In this case, why use violence? The key distinction between the Basque conflict and struggles of Black people in the United States is the systemic racism that impedes progress. Despite decades of peaceful protests in response to the murders of Black people at the hands of the police, in 2020, Black Americans are approximately two-and-a-half times more likely to be killed by police than their white counterparts. Peaceful protesting in the recent past has seldom contributed the drastic reform of the police bureau and an overall of the law enforcement system. That being said, do you think violence is a necessary requisite for significant social change? In the case of Baltimore, following the 2015 murder of Freddie Gray while held in police custody, indignant protestors looted and set fire to a CVS store in West Baltimore, an area of high chronic poverty. The Department of Justice found that the Baltimore City Police Department had engaged in conduct that violates the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the US Constitution; in 2017, the city entered a Consent Decree, committing to enacting community-centric policing and widespread police reform.

Despite the unpopularity of rioting and looting, it's clear that underprivileged groups turn to violent forms of protest to make their voices heard, like in Baltimore. As Dynes and Quarantelli find in their 1968 study on looting, while the looting that takes place at these protests is sometimes interpreted as evidence of human depravity, vandalism focuses on objects or buildings of symbolic value, such as a police car or a bank. I interpret this as protestors rebelling against institutions that perpetuate systemic racism, specifically law enforcement and capitalism. In this manner, widespread looting serves as a "mass protest of our domi-

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nant conceptions of poverty", per the study. Additionally, violent protests can serve to reclaim state control as described by necropolitics. The systemic discrimination faced by Black people touches all facets of life, ranging from healthcare access to generational wealth inequality and poverty, both of which directly impact an individual's quality of life.

Furthermore, protestors and police can build on each other's actions, whether negative or positive. When police use violent tactics of control, including rubber bullets, pepper spray, batons, and flash bombs, protestors are in turn pushed to aggressive demonstrations, including looting, rioting, and vandalism. In fact, in Minneapolis following Floyd's death, police found that using less violent tactics of crowd control in place of tear gas resulted in calmer protesting less inclined to violence. This concept of a "negative feedback loop" originated long before today's Black Lives Matter movement. In the Basque Country, this process has been employed extensively by ETA and other Basque nationalist groups to garner widespread support for their cause. Per Patty Woodworth in his text *Dark History*, the group's armed actions would provoke the dictatorship into taking more drastic and indiscriminate measures against the populace, increasing support for the revolutionaries. In his *La letal fascinación por las armas*, Fernandez Gaizka describes ETA's fight against the Francoist regime through the spiral of action-reaction-action. In 1968, ETA assassinated a *Guardia Civil* officer, José Pardines, and, soon thereafter, the assassin, Francisco Etxebarrieta, was killed by the *Guardia Civil*. In 24 hours, ETA had found both its first victim and martyr. Zuriñe, how did your family perceive ETA after Etxebarrieta's death?

However, as Gaizka elaborates, this spiral of violence only served to permanently affix ETA to the ideologies of radical nationalism and terrorism. Following the Basque Country's Statute of Autonomy in 1979, many Basque nationalists were unsatisfied, citing their desire to vote on complete secession from Spain. As Woodworth put it, "Spanish democracy may be flawed, but it offers all the classic liberties the Basques need to pursue a more independent relationship with Madrid by peaceful means". Furthermore, over the last few decades, the Basque people have never been resolute in a referendum for independence, where even Basque leaders have remained "chronically ambiguous on the question of total independence". Nevertheless, in the 1980s, ETA unequivocally became a terrorist organization, operating despite existing democratic channels, proving their recklessness with civilian lives. From the ideology of Malcolm X, a revolt such as this would be justified due to the Spanish Constitution's shortcomings in addressing Basque nationalist demands for the complete right to determine independence.

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Zuriñe, do you think the Basque people could have feasibly pursued autonomy via democratic means? Either way, ETA's reliance on violent forms of protest led to the launch of the Spanish "Dirty War" against ETA from 1983 to 1986, where the government-sponsored Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL) resorted to classic state-sponsored terror tactics. In the Basque Country, what could have been resolved through democratic means, instead motivated the next generation of Basques to radicalize, prolonging the conflict well into the 21st century.

The Basque conflict thus outlines a pertinent question to Black Lives Matter activists calling for more violent forms of protest: how violent? Despite the justified intentions behind looting, the action-reaction spiral between protestors and police can exacerbate tensions and prolong the timeline to police reform. As Omar Wasow, a professor of politics at Princeton, notes, during the Civil Rights Movement, a significant number of white moderates were "open to policies that advanced racial equality and were also very concerned with order". The strategy of nonviolence preached by King and his peers threaded the needle of advancing racial equality while building allies in moderate white communities. This nonviolent protest aimed to leverage the violence employed by police chiefs in the South to publicize spectacles of violence that would garner sympathizers. Nevertheless, when militant leaders such as Malcolm X emerged advocating for self-defense and violence, white, moderate Democrats who supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964 defected to the Republican Party in 1968 in the hopes of restoring "order".

The contemporary Black Lives Matter movement currently grapples with this same issue of exercising nonviolence. The Basque Country and the Civil Rights Movement, alongside present-day studies, highlight the justifications for violent forms of protest in achieving human rights. Nevertheless, when protest tactics shift to more violent resistance in response to excessive police force, the public narrative shifts away from historical police brutality to looting and arson. Unfortunately, systemic racism pervades the media in the present day, and violent forms of protest will only muddle the initial frame of justice to one of crime.

King's focus on white moderates pervades to today's political climate as clearly portrayed by The White House's policy stance over the past few weeks. By proclaiming himself a president of "law and order", Trump feeds into the majority mindset across America of prioritizing order above advances for racial equality, as was the case in the 1960s. In his speech at Lafayette Square, Trump vowed to deploy state power against those calling for due process in the police system, stating that "America needs… justice, not chaos". In a similar vein, numerous media outlets have brushed the nationwide protests calling for police reform

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under the greater rug of chaos; media outlets from *The New York Times* to *The Washington Post* emphasized that peaceful demonstrations had sunk into chaos. Both the President and the media demonstrate the systemic racism present in our country by propagating a false narrative of chaos rather than calling for true justice for Black Americans. Unfortunately, I believe King's position holds just as true today as it did nearly fifty years ago – only nonviolence can lead to decisive and effective change to law enforcement and the broader American justice system.

Naren

* * *

Naren,

It's not easy to talk about this subject which is so close and yet so removed. Close because it is the history of the Basque Country, our beloved homeland. However, at the same time it is distant because our generation has not experienced ETA's violence firsthand. We were still young, and we were not aware of it. It's a complex subject that is difficult to explain. We're not looking for answers; we're actually looking for questions.

As you've said, Naren, the response to violence is usually more violence. Violence is a spiral that is never-ending; it's an action-reaction device. But why is violence being used in the 21st century? Hasn't it been made quite clear to us that violence is not a just means of achieving our aims?

Throughout history, political and social changes have been brought about using force, by coups, wars, revolutions… Even so, do we still believe that it is worth using violence to achieve political and social change? Hasn't it been made quite clear to us that sacrificing lives to achieve a goal is not justified under any circumstance? It's a debate that is still open. Otherwise, why is it causing all this uproar in the US?

During the dictatorship, the Basques who believed in democratic values felt oppressed by Franco's regime, whose only response was repression. Faced with this totalitarian regime, in the 1960s, ETA was influenced by the liberation movements that emerged in the world: the Vietnam War, the Algerian war of independence, the independence movements in Africa, the revolution in Cuba, Salvador Allende in Chile, the Prague Spring... Revolutionary movements were being launched in the world and these movements deeply influenced the internal organization of ETA.

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In the Basque Country we know how important ETA's 5th Assembly was in the political path that it followed. In your case, Naren, I can understand that you don't know about the importance of this 5th Assembly, so I'll try explaining it to you. The 5th Assembly had two parts; the first one was held in 1966 and there the militants spoke about the need to create an exclusively Basque workers' front in the Basque Country, to move away from the Spanish national workers' front. They criticized the fact that the latter had a state-based (centralized) philosophy and that they were straying away from a nationalist program. The second part of the 5th Assembly was held in March 1967, and they laid the foundations there for what would be their primary missions: socialism and independence. Before this Assembly, ETA's members were arguing about the ideological line it should follow. One of the organization's most charismatic leaders, Txabi Etxebarrieta, played an important role in these discussions.

The main problem was how to reconcile socialism and nationalism. Marxist literature in the XIX and XX centuries separated nationalism from patriotism. Furthermore, it disparaged nationalism because it thought that it had been invented by the bourgeoisie to defend their class interests. This is what Etxebarrieta argued regarding the incompatibility of nationalism with socialism: "There are a lot of people who think that it's reactionary to be a nationalist; that you can't be nationalist and internationalist at the same time. Often, we don't realize that there are two types of nationalism: the nationalism of the powerful and the nationalism of the oppressed. It's utterly obvious that ours is in support of the latter"[18] (Valencia, 2011, p. 37).

The repression carried out by Franco's regime in the Basque Country was harsh and ETA wanted to address this situation. At first, the organization responded to this repression with actions like burning the Spanish flag, organizing demonstrations to raise awareness about a free Basque Country, burning rubbish bins... In the end, Txabi Etxebarrieta was the first to pull the trigger, and from then on, ETA organized terrorist attacks to achieve its political goals.

With Franco's death, and after the transition, Spain became a democratic state governed by the rule of law. ETA, faced with this new situation, continued carrying out terrorist attacks because they thought that the Statute of Autonomy and level of self-government were not

[18] Son muchos quienes piensan que el ser nacionalista es reaccionario; que no se puede ser, a un mismo tiempo, nacionalista e internacionalista. Muchas veces no nos damos cuenta de que hay dos tipos de nacionalismo. El de los poderosos y el de los oprimidos. Salta a la vista que el nuestro está con los segundos.

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enough to achieve their goal, which was to sever all links with the Spanish state. Furthermore, ETA was not created like a political party; instead, it first emerged as a movement. Therefore, some members of the organization were not willing for ETA to become a political party.

During the contemporary democratic period, Felipe González's socialist government used unlawful methods to fight ETA. In the late 1980s the press carried out investigations to find out whether the government had actually been directly involved or not in a dirty war against ETA, that is, to show that the Government had financed groups of mercenaries, controlled by the Army, to fight ETA illegally.

The most emblematic case was the one involving Lasa and Zabala. These two young men were kidnapped by the GAL (the Anti-Terrorist Liberation Groups) and tortured and murdered by members of the Guardia Civil in 1983. There is a film about this case directed by Pablo Malo called *Lasa eta Zabala* (2014).

I remember that when I was 16, I went to see the film with my father. We went to see it basically because Lasa and Zabala were from Tolosa and we are from Ibarra (a village next to Tolosa). It was a subject that had a profound effect on us. At the time, I didn't know much about ETA or the GAL. I went to see the film without any preconceptions because I didn't really know the context it was set in either. I remember one thing, though: after finishing watching the film, I said to my father in Basque, "Guardia Zibil hauek, egin duten guztia eta gero, ez zuten beraien kondena osoa bete? Baina nola da posible hori?" Naren, this is what I asked my father: "After all that they have done, aren't these Civil Guards going to serve their sentences in full? But, how is this possible?" It was a film that shocked me. There were moments in the film that I couldn't watch because there were really graphic, powerful scenes.

Now, after reflecting more deeply on this subject I think that human rights and the dignity of the individual are more important than any political ideology. There are red lines that cannot be crossed and that were crossed. How can an individual be capable of torturing someone? How can an individual not feel empathy for someone else? Why was there and why is there still so much hatred? Naren, I think that we still need to delve further into living together in harmony and showing respect for the individual.

Another one of the first operations that the GAL carried out was the kidnapping of Segundo Marey. He was kidnapped in the French town of Hendaye when members of the GAL mistook him for one of the leaders of ETA and was finally freed after ten days in captivity.

After this happened, professionals, intellectuals and lawyers filed a lawsuit before the National High Court against deputy superintend-

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ent José Amedo and inspector Michel Rodríguez, who they accused of being members of the GAL. This was the first trial in the "dirty war" in which the accused were convicted.

Later on, the accused declared that high-ranking members of the government were involved in the "dirty war". These included Barrionuevo, ex-Home Secretary, and the Secretary of State for Security, Rafael Vera. They were sentenced to 10 years in prison, although they had been incarcerated for hardly 4 months when José María Aznar's government (Popular Party) granted them a partial pardon and they were released.

The impunity they enjoyed shows that Spain wasn't a democratic state. How is it possible that certain people are convicted and then go unpunished? Where is the division of powers of the state? I remember that Rafael Vera appeared on the "360 grados" program on EITB 2 (the Basque public television network) on "Intxaurrondo: A State within the Guardia Civil". The interviewer, Eider Hurtado, asked Vera if the state had anything to do with the GAL or if the state took part in the "dirty war" and he answered, "They attacked us, and we defended ourselves". Apart from that, Hurtado asked him if he was sorry or if he wanted to ask the victims for forgiveness and he didn't show any sympathy or signs of repentance.

As a result of this, on the 15th of June 2020 *La Razón,* a national newspaper in Spain, published a report by the CIA on the GAL. This report said that González had agreed to set up a group of mercenaries to fight terrorists unlawfully. This organization was waging a "dirty war against members of ETA in hiding in France".

This report was made public in 1987, but to date nothing has been done to investigate what happened. EH Bildu (Euskal Herria Bildu), ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia), EAJ (Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea), the Plural Group, and finally, Unidas Podemos now want to take a step forward and proposed setting up a commission to investigate "the links and responsibilities of the governments led by Felipe González and GAL". However, a few weeks ago, the parliamentary committee rejected the proposal to set up this commission with the votes of PSOE, PP, and Vox.

This is a clear example of how there is still a lot left to be done. Why don't they take the investigation further? They need to get to the heart of the matter, but it seems that some people don't want to dig any deeper. Investigations have been carried out to shed light on the events and it also looks like there is evidence that confirms that the head of the government was directly involved in this dirty war. However, why don't they accept responsibility? Why do they categorically

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deny that they were involved? Why are the victims not taken into account? Where are their rights? These are questions that remain unanswered, for the time being. I often wonder why we refuse to acknowledge the past and to talk about it openly.

As a result of this, the Official Secrets Act passed in 1968 at the height of the dictatorship is still in force in Spain. This is a law intended to protect the interests of the state. It looks like the Parliament will support the procedure to reform the Official Secrets Act proposed by the PNV on the 23rd of June 2020. The reform of this law aims to establish a procedure to declassify historical documents and reduce the time period previously set for this. The far right is the only party that has expressed its opposition to this law and the Ciudadanos party has said that it will abstain.

Little by little steps are being taken to shed light on what happened during Franco's regime, the coup on the 23rd of February 1981, or the participation of the GAL in the fight against terrorism. I think that it is vital to reveal these state secrets to achieve the transparency that each and every one of the victims of the state and of terrorism deserves as well as for all citizens. Don't citizens have the right to know what transpired? Why are these historical documents hidden? Furthermore, it is outrageous that there is a law that was passed during the dictatorship, that was modified superficially in 1978, and that is still on the books.

We still have a long way to go, Naren.

Zuriñe

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Letter Two

Neoliberalism's Threat to Democracy

Dear **Zuriñe**,

As I'm sure you're aware, over the past year, the United States has been fraught with political and social tension. From the Black Lives Matter movement, Donald Trump's attempts to discredit his electoral defeat to Joe Biden, and the 2021 storming of the US Capitol, peace and democracy in our country have been threatened on numerous fronts. It's clear that, when left unchecked, democratic ideals can dwindle in favor of brash nationalism. The failure of these same tenets is inherent in any social injustice, from police brutality to systemic racism. But could there be an underlying cause, apart from prejudice, for social injustice and, consequently, a weakened democracy?

One of the biggest achievements of Western democracy is undoubtedly a society prime for economic growth, equipped with the tools to maintain healthy levels of competition and innovation while maximizing national wealth. These are the goals of capitalist societies, the societies you and I live in. However, the question I'd like to address in this letter is this: do our ideals of free speech, due process, education, and equal opportunity become compromised in the face of neoliberal economics? Specifically, corporate interests at times may pass selfish interests off as national interests when these corporations state that they create more collective wealth and better living conditions for the people. Moreover, should a country's government subordinate its democratic ideals to economic growth and capital enhancement?

In the United States, we often justify our political views through an economic lens. For example, let's take President Obama's 2013 State

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of the Union speech. As Wendy Brown describes in her *Undoing the Demos*, Obama focused on revitalizing the liberal agenda in the form of an "economic stimulus package", pointing to economic growth as a reason to, for example, pursue minimum wage reform, immigration reform, and investment in education. On the surface, whether the pursuit is economic growth or equality, the end result is the same. However, by reframing these progressive values as driving economic growth, Obama sought to transform the image of the tax-happy Democrat into a pragmatic economic analyst, redefining social justice and government investment as economic stimuli. In college, as an (admittedly stereotypical) socially liberal economics major, I latched on to Obama's perspective in this speech. I defended liberal immigration policy and aggressive environmental protection legislation due to their long-term economic benefits. In my eyes, economic logic took precedence over all —the ultimate goal was to maximize every citizen's wealth, and, to achieve this, the reasonable conclusion was to maximize America's economic growth.

When capital enhancement becomes the United States' priority, however, democracy takes a back seat. In normal times, this shouldn't matter, since democracy is oftentimes viewed as a permanent achievement of Western society. As long as our rights, liberties, and elections are maintained, democracy will persist —at least that's what we thought. Looking back on the events of the past year, from the Black Lives Matter protests of the summer of 2020 to the January 6th Capitol riots, it's painfully clear that democracy must be cultivated, tended for, and mindfully practiced. And this requires a reshift in focus: democratic ideals cannot be collapsed with economic ones.

Let me alleviate my economics professors' fears: the benefits of healthy competition, conscientious government interference, and the free market are not lost on me. While a discussion for another letter (or book), I do believe that certain free-market economic policies lead to maximizing long-term economic output. However, in my eyes, the most important element of democracy is our ideals, not our total economic output. When we compromise or rewrite our democratic values, including equal opportunity and liberty in the name of economic growth, this sets a dangerous precedent for future considerations, whether it be the whims of a deranged president, social media's erasure of our privacy, or QAnon conspiracy theories circulating the internet. Most importantly, just as Obama repurposed progressive social policies as economic growth drivers, the same can be done in reverse deeming discriminatory policy as a necessity for economic prosperity. One must only look back on the Trump administration's series of policy goals. The border wall was touted by the right for the jobs it created and protected, while the series of tax cuts were crucial

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to bolstering GDP growth. From the perspective of our democracy, however, the border wall provoked racism across the country and tax cuts exacerbated our country's income inequality. Justifying policy from the lens of economic development rather than democratic ideals leaves the door open to accelerating social inequality, undermining this country's core tenets of liberty, equality, and freedom. As Butler describes, there is value outside of the metric of economic prosperity, specifically in the form of social justice, that should be accounted for in policy making.

The deprioritization of democratic ideals in the public forum isn't just limited to the United States. As President Biden took public office this year, the largest protest in history rages on in the world's largest democracy —India. The Indian Farmers' Protest centers on the Indian agriculture acts of 2020, commonly referred to as the Farm Bills, passed by the Parliament of India on September 27th, 2020. Under the previous laws, farmers were required to sell their produce at an auction at their state's Agricultural Produce Market Committee, where they were guaranteed to be paid the government-agreed minimum price. There were also restrictions on who could purchase produce at these exchanges. With the passing of the Farm Bills, spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this process was dismantled in favor of farmers being allowed to sell to anyone, with no minimum price guarantee. From the perspective of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the leading political party in India, dismantling this committee structure would lead to increased competition while allowing farmers to decide their own prices. These laws also open up the Indian agriculture industry to foreign investment. While this could drive increased demand for produce, allowing farmers to charge higher prices, it also opens the door to deflated prices when supply is too high.

Due to these laws, tens of thousands of farmers have marched on India's capital, New Delhi, pitching sprawling camps on the highways surrounding the city. As Simran Singh describes, "in the past, when Indian agricultural workers have protested for fair prices and working conditions, the Indian government has responded with violent crackdowns that include documented torture, human rights abuses, and extrajudicial killings". Nevertheless, PM Modi and the BJP view the deregulation of the agriculture sector as a boon for small farmers, essentially democratizing pricing power. While farmers are the largest voter block in the country, representing 58% of India's 1.3 billion population, Modi's new policies barely consulted voters, further fueling outrage across the country. In the 2014 election, the BJP promised in their general election manifesto that crop prices would be fixed at levels 50% higher than production costs. Despite these promises, Modi's government pushed forward with these laws, which did not guarantee price increases, nor did they account for

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farmers' wishes. In response, beginning in November, irate farmers drove down to protest in the country's capital of New Delhi, only to be met with police blockades on the outskirts of the city. Violence occasionally erupted, with police firing tear gas and water cannons to prevent protestors from entering the capital. According to Samyukta Kisan Morcha, the body representing protestors, and as reported on CNN, at least 147 farmers have died over the past few months while protesting due to a variety of causes, including suicide, road accidents, and exposure to cold weather.

To continue our discussion from my last letter, this is a case in point example of necropolitics, where PM Modi and the Indian government utilize violence to defend privatizing the agricultural sector. Despite farmers comprising 40% of the Indian workforce, investment in agriculture as a percentage of total investment fluctuates between 6% and 7% since 2015. More surprisingly, while PM Modi promised farmers' incomes would double between 2016 and 2022, farmer debt relief became a political talking point during the 2019 election cycle. Despite the BJP's promises, the Indian government has taken a series of undemocratic measures to contain protestors, including press censorship, journalist detention, internet shutdowns, and violence during protests. Certain Hindu nationalists have used this series of events to call for genocide against protestors, eerily resembling the 1984 pogroms, a campaign of extra-judicial murders of Sikhs in response to Sikh protests for better governmental support for agriculture. In 1984, PM Indira Gandhi responded by calling for a military assault on the Golden Temple, a Sikh holy site, which led to her assassination by her two Sikh body gaurds months later. In both cases, today and in 1984, the original impetus was protesting for improvements in governmental support for agriculture, in other words, a rejection of the inequities that stem from unfair labor practices within neoliberal economics.

Taking India as an example, if social injustice occurs inadvertently due to economic policy, is it an injustice or simply circumstantial? From my perspective, the key is the end result, as the Farm Bills for example open the door to further inequality. In many cases, less government regulation has a net positive effect on economic output. However, what gets lost in the concept of "net economic output"? Who gets forgotten in the process? What values have been compromised? As a nation, we've forgotten that we must continuously strive to maintain our democratic ideals, and that they are not a given. When we place more importance on economic strength compared to democratic ideals, we will inevitably do the same for social injustice. I look forward to your helping me think this through, Zuriñe.

Naren

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* * *

Dear **Naren**,

Violence does more harm than good. Although it is true that it has always existed, and I think that it always will, if democratic values are not stable. A weak democracy brings about economic and social problems regarding coexistence and violence. Nowadays we know that total democracy is a utopia. Democracies do exist, but they are imperfect. However, it is better to have imperfect democracies than a society in which there is no democracy, where people don't have the power to make decisions. As you have quite rightly said, Naren, violence erodes democratic values and, as a result, calls into question the legitimacy of the democratic system.

In the Basque Country, after the transition, the Spanish Constitution was enacted in 1978 and the foundations of a democratic system were established, based on a parliamentary monarchy. These foundations were not very strong; it was a weak, newly-created democracy that had just emerged from a 40-year-long dictatorship.

Among the Basques, some thought that democracy would bring new freedoms and rights for citizens as well as for the Basque Coun-

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try. Others thought that the situation wouldn't change much from what had transpired before, and that the Basque Country would continue to depend on the Spanish and French states. And others also thought that the Basque Country, without being a united independent country, could have its own identity and autonomy as a part of Spain and France.

After 40 years of dictatorship, repression, and violence, a new path was opening, an alternative path. I think that inside ETA there were doubts about which path to follow, whether to lay down its arms and follow a non-violent path, or to continue fighting until it achieved its goal, the independence of the Basque Country.

I'm going to try and take a close look at both positions and provide some possible arguments. Those who thought that ETA should stop fighting would have thought that a new path was opening where there was no longer an oppressive state. They believed that a democratic system would bring about new rights and freedoms and that in this democratic system, a new path could also be negotiated and agreed on for the Basque Country: the possibility of independence from Spain and France. They were aware that it would be difficult to achieve but that it was worth following the path of democracy to fulfill this goal because in a democratic system it made no sense to use force to attain your ambitions. Basque society had already suffered quite a lot and it was time to move away from violence and a divided society and for everyone to follow a common path, the road to peace.

On the other hand, those who thought that ETA should carry on fighting thought that this new democratic system was just a lie and a farce. They believed that the Spanish state would continue its customary harsh treatment and oppression of the Basque people, and that the change to a democratic system would not alter the Basque Country's subordinate position with Spain either. And furthermore, given how ETA had still not achieved its goal, that meant it had to continue to use violence to get the state to give in and accept the independence of the Basque Country.

As we all know, ETA continued to carry out terrorist acts and decided to follow the path of violence. I have often tried to put myself in the shoes of someone from ETA, and to think what can go through someone's mind when they use violence to achieve their political aims. Maybe, they believed that they were fighting for a just cause, that they were fighting for the liberation of the Basque Country, and that this was quite legitimate because they were fighting against a state that also used violence to fight against them. It was a state that didn't let them decide their future as a people, given how the Basque Country wanted to be independent and this state wouldn't allow them to call

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a referendum on this issue. So, within this logic, the only possible way to make the Spanish state accept Basque independence was through force.

However, I am also convinced that there would have been members of ETA, especially the younger ones, who didn't even know the reasons why they were fighting. Why would someone join ETA? I suppose there would be all sorts of reasons. There would be those who wanted to support the cause; others who would join pressured or influenced by their friends; and others who would commit without really knowing what they were getting into.

What kind of society do terrorists imagine? Do they think that a peaceful society can be built after causing so much harm by killing so many people? Let's just imagine that ETA had managed to achieve independence for the Basque Country. Would they have thought that they could build a free, just, and democratic society?

It is a question that is difficult to answer. Someone who is violent may imagine an idyllic society in which everyone forms part of the same movement or shares its ideology, a society, however, where only those who think like them will be accepted. Those who don't would have two options: one, to keep their heads down and say nothing, and the other, to speak out, with all that would involve. We mustn't forget that the violent have imposed this way of life, this course of action, and way of understanding how society works. And imposed is the right word. The perpetrators of violence think that they are fighting for their people and a common cause. They ignore that perhaps not everyone thinks like they do and that this method of achieving independence may not be the ideal way to build a democratic society. An independent Basque Country achieved by force would become a divided, conflictive, and intolerant society.

ETA's members wanted to establish a socialist Basque state. Taking this as a starting point, they imagined a society based on communist values, an anti-capitalist society independent of Spain and France. I find it very hard to picture the kind of society that the perpetrators of violence had in mind. It is hard for me to think of how someone can imagine a democratic society based on murder, kidnapping, and economic blackmail.

No society tolerates violence. It is like a snowball that gets bigger and bigger, and you don't know how big it is going to get or when it's going to stop. But what is quite clear is how it will end. Violence never ends well, and you only need to look at our country to see the result, that is, if we think it's over. Although violence has stopped now, there are still wounds to be healed in society.

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On the one hand, ETA's victims felt abandoned by the Basque people. Faced with terrorist attacks, many looked the other way and others even encouraged them to leave the Basque Country. Some of those who looked the other way thought that ETA's actions were legitimate and justified. Others, out of fear that ETA would also do them harm, kept quiet and showed no sympathy for the victims' families. For others, the armed struggle had nothing to do with them and they preferred to sit on the fence. For one reason or another, in the Basque Country many showed their indifference to the violence carried out by ETA. And these values, based on individualism and a lack of solidarity and social cohesion, are the same values that capitalism foists on us, as you have rightly said, Naren. In the same way that the economic basis of the violence that you see in the USA and in India erodes democratic values, the same grinding down of principles could be seen in the Basque Country in the face of the violence carried out by ETA.

The use of force leads to a society that is divided and at odds with itself. And this is what happened in the Basque Country. ETA's violence caused division and confrontation. There were two sides: either you were with ETA, or ETA turned against you. For this reason, a lot of people preferred to do nothing about the terrorist attacks, to do nothing for the victims' families, and to not express their position against ETA. Society stood still and displayed a lack of affection and solidarity. In my opinion, most of the population wouldn't have agreed with what ETA was doing, but many of them didn't speak out. They kept silence because anyone who did speak out against ETA could be eliminated. And this is where those values based on individualism and a lack of solidarity appear, where everyone just thinks about saving themselves and shows no care for anyone else.

In ETA's final years, especially after Miguel Ángel Blanco's death in 1997, support for ETA's violence declined. Although associations like Gesto por la Paz in the Basque Country had already begun its civic protests against violence the year before, from then on, the protests and demonstrations against ETA increased. A part of Basque society spoke out and firmly condemned ETA's violence. And this was a step forward towards solidarity and social cohesion.

This change was extremely important because from then on, more and more people condemned ETA's violence and did so publicly. And this played a very important role, as far as an organization like ETA was concerned, in discrediting violence, by saying that it was wrong to use violence for any purpose, and that the end didn't justify the means.

Zuriñe

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Letter Three

The Media in Our Democracy

Dear **Zuriñe**,

Democracy as it commonly exists today hinges upon a few key criteria no matter the country, whether in the United States or Euskal Herria. As the United States Bill of Rights clearly lays out, free speech and press are both tantamount to a functioning democratic society, among other factors such as security or privacy. Zuriñe, as you astutely pointed out, communities can only maintain functioning democracies when citizens are involved and work to stay informed on current issues. While there are several potential inhibitors to this participation, including violence, another key element of this process is the media. As the founders of the United States so aptly witnessed during the American Revolution, the press plays a pivotal role in guiding national political views and bridging the gap between the average citizen and the nuances of public policy. The media distributes the information that voters base their decisions on and open the doors to further deliberation. Benedict Anderson discusses this phenomenon in his book *Imagined Communities*, arguing that the press creates a public sphere, and, therefore, the basis for a nation. The press is the key driver in generating a democratic culture extending beyond any society's political system, which becomes ingrained in public consciousness over time.

As you described, Zuriñe, freedom of expression plays a tantamount role in maintaining a democracy. In the case of Euskal Herria, the fear of backlash from ETA silenced a significant portion of the population from voicing their concerns. Without open public discourse on ETA's as-

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sassinations across the country, democracy crumbles. The assassinations and threats to prominent journalists weakened the public sphere by propagating fear among citizens; out of concern for their safety, people choose self-imposed censorship rather than speaking out. In this manner, the popular discourse in publications and media is dulled down, becoming a muted alternative to the true discourse of citizens amongst themselves. Furthermore, as you point out, bystanders are drawn into the conflict via pressure —a dangerous precedent to set for youth. The assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco demonstrates the positive force of the media in breaking down such barriers to discussion. The press facilitated the virality of the ensuing movements against violence. Following his death, the public condemnation and discourse against ETA's violence peaked —a true step towards solidarity.

In this manner, it is evident how crucial a democratic media is to maintaining political discourse, which is the bread and butter of any democracy. Without fair and free expression in the media, the public has no alternative medium for transparent discourse to guide public policy. In many countries, a prohibitive media may look like a leading Palestinian journalist being jailed in the West Bank due to broadcasting sessions of the Palestinian Legislative Council, or dozens of Indian journalists facing arrest due to negative reporting on the BJP's handling of the Indian response to coronavirus. However, the lack of transparency in the media does not always manifest so clearly in the public forum. As Cornel West describes in his book *Democracy Matters*, the United States' market-driven media is fueled by the country's ideological polarization and the media's monopolistic structure. In this manner, over time, the American media has severely narrowed the scope of our political dialogue. West asserts that escalating authoritarianism in the form of monitoring viewpoints, both in the media and in broader society, has led to a dramatic drop in the kind of questioning and common discussion that typically serves as the requisite for democratic experimentation. Zuriñe, what do you think led to the polarization of thought in our societies? Do you think the same can be said for Euskal Herria?

West elaborates that, for the United States, the prevailing conservative culture has made progressives and liberals the enemies of Republicans, rather than fellow citizens. Taking President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign as an example (and subsequently his 2020 campaign), it is clear how different news media outlets portrayed events depending on their political leanings. According to a paper by researchers from Microsoft Research and Stanford University, while story selection by different media outlets does not differ significantly, news organizations typically express their ideological bias by

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disproportionately criticizing one side in a report. When Americans restrict themselves to a few news outlets that they identify with politically, they miss out on the fair political discourse and debate that is required to be an engaged voter. In some cases, certain news outlets have extended their ideological bias to simply not respecting the basic tenets of their profession: independence and facts. In these instances, the line between propaganda and news reporting blurs. Today, we see a shift at the extremes of our political spectrum towards propaganda, where citizens chase validation of their opinions rather than information based in both sides of a story. Moreover, to put it bluntly, when voters restrict themselves to certain viewpoints, they tarnish their role in maintaining a fair and just democracy.

But what happens when this political isolation and seclusion occurs unbeknownst to voters? Is this a problem with our democracy or with the methods of discourse that exist in our society today? In our time, social media has become a force that encourages this political isolation by serving as an echo chamber of sorts. On Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, etc. (the list goes on), voters are exposed to a plethora of political viewpoints on events and current issues, regardless of whether they seek it or not. As a premise, social media serves as a window into people's lives, and a key aspect of this is their opinions and beliefs. To continue Benedict Anderson's argument, social media serves as a networked public sphere, where new discourses for imagining community are created. However, this public sphere has its limits: most of us are friends with people similar to us —similar geographies, education levels, professions, and, cumulatively, political leanings. Furthermore, especially for voters who do not take substantial time to educate themselves via more objective sources, social media is their main source of political discourse and news. As such, rather than challenging viewpoints and providing a diversity of political content, social media simply serves to validate people's opinions with those of their friends and family (who all likely agree on hot-button issues, electoral candidates, etc.). Even more concerning, social media sites are incentivized to provide content that users enjoy so that they spend more time on the website. It's more profitable, in this way, to show posts and opinions that users agree with, so they feel validated and justified when on these applications —a dangerous combination for a well-functioning democracy.

We witnessed the result of such echo chambers earlier this year during the storming of the US Capitol. Former President Donald Trump, following his loss to President Joe Biden, called for his supporters to attend a rally on Capitol Hill before the January 6 Congressional vote count, tweeting "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be

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wild!" Unfortunately, prior intelligence indicates that Trump's instigatory comments motivated his fringe supporters to take to the web to plan the ensuing attack on the Capitol. The British security firm G4S conducted a risk analysis suggesting that there would be violent groups in the Capitol between the Congressional vote count and Inauguration Day, based on the online posts advocating for violence. Moreover, these posts were linked by Advance Democracy, a nonpartisan governance watchdog, to accounts related to QAnon, a cult and far-right conspiracy theory that "Satan-worshipping, cannibalistic pedophiles plotted to overthrow President Trump" while he was in office. The absurdity speaks for itself and emphasizes the potential for online echo chambers in propagating misinformation.

In this manner, West provided some foresight into the role that biased media sources can play in proliferating authoritarianism —mainly, via the lack of transparent and intellectually honest political discourse. In many ways, history can repeat itself by forgetting about the vital role the media plays in maintaining our respective democracies, both traditional news outlets as well as social media tech giants. I look forward to hearing your view on how the media influences us today, Zuriñe.

Over the course of these three letters, it's become increasingly clear to me how social and political violence pervades our society, both in the past and the present. When Professor Martín pitched this project to us, I questioned my ability to contribute —what personal experiences did I have to bring to the table? Over the course of these letters, I've learned, from you and our peers, that the themes of violence and restorative justice in Basque nationalism inform our interpretation of these same phenomena in our society today via postmemory —whether the Black Lives Movement or the January 6 Capitol Riots. Zuriñe, it's been extremely rewarding to discuss how the violence both of our societies experience stem from nearly identical phenomena (whether discrimination, economic inequality, or biased media). I look forward to keeping in touch with you over the coming years!

Naren Radhakrishnan

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Dear **Naren**,

I agree with you that the media influences citizens when it comes to forming public opinion, and on many occasions, this may go against the values of democracy. At the present time, after ten years have already gone by since ETA announced the definitive end of its armed activity, four years since it definitively disarmed, and three years since its definitive dissolution, there are examples of media that do not help at all in the debate on how to make coexistence in the Basque Country a reality.

The media talks about ETA as if it were still active. And it's not just the media that does this, but certain politicians as well. When Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, for example, was the spokesperson for the Partido Popular, she claimed in an interview in *El Correo* (a local newspaper) that the situation nowadays is worse than when the terrorists were killing people. This kind of hate speech doesn't help to forge a healthy coexistence. Statements like these are unacceptable. What do they want to achieve by this? What is their purpose? The only possible answer that occurs to me is that they want to spark controversy about the subject, so that people talk about it, and the unstable foundations of early coexistence come tumbling down. Peaceful coexistence needs time; it cannot be built overnight. Biased information, unacceptable statements, and hate speech are nothing but obstacles to peace.

Of course, the media outlets are "free" to give their opinion and criticize any attitudes, ways of thinking, or acting that they feel are reprehensible. And I place "free" in inverted commas for there are certain codes of ethics that a journalist cannot breach. However, a red line has been crossed here. There are certain ways of practicing journalism that are not suitable for forming healthy public opinion. The media were created to meet a social function, to generate healthy debate among citizens, and act as a fourth power to be able to control the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. It should be an intermediary between these branches and citizens.

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I think that nowadays the function that the media should theoretically be fulfilling is gradually disappearing, in favor of business interests. With the emergence of ICTs, the situation has changed as well, and priority is now given to immediacy rather than to the veracity and quality of journalistic content. By saying this, I don't want to generalize that all the media act like this, because there are exceptions. Even so, the situation in Spain regarding the media is not ideal. They are a long way from fulfilling the task that they ought to be performing in principle. Nowadays, immediacy, business interests, profits, and partisan interests take precedence.

Having said this, I think that the latest remarks that Pablo Casado made about ETA prisoners, when he suggested that the victims of ETA should have a say about the prison conditions of ETA prisoners, are really scary. The worse thing about this is that the media that are sympathetic to the ideology of the Partido Popular do not criticize the remarks that Casado made and as we well know, silence gives consent. We are talking about human rights, about the right of prisoners to serve their sentence close to home, in their region. This is a basic right, and it is not being followed. ETA prisoners are scattered all over Spain and their relatives need to travel for hundreds of miles to go and visit them. Just thinking that the victims of ETA might have a say in this seems irresponsible to me. This is not the way to build coexistence. And the worse thing is that these remarks were made while he was campaigning for the autonomous elections in the Community of Madrid, where there will probably be people who support these remarks.

The media can and must also help to build a healthy level of coexistence in the Basque Country. Along with all the victims who were casualties of this conflict, they ought to provide keys to help strengthen coexistence. Other acts that do not help to build coexistence are the welcome receptions given to ETA prisoners when they are released from prison. I think it's fine that they are welcomed given how they all have the right to be received by their relatives and close friends. What I find inadmissible is that they are provided with a public homage, because this may well be a lack of respect for ETA's victims. I feel the same about the honors given to members of the Army or the Guardia Civil, which also shows a lack of respect for the victims of torture by these bodies. I don't support one thing or the other.

Naren, as you have rightly stressed, I also agree with you that the media plays an important role in democracy, and, in particular, here in the Basque Country, they may be crucial to achieving coexistence. I think that hate speech and narratives about winners and losers don't contribute to the debate. We need to give a voice to all the victims af-

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fected by the conflict and to always treat them respectfully. Because, in my opinion, when you lose respect, you lose the argument, which is what should take precedence.

To close, it's been a pleasure to take part in this project. Just like you, Naren, at first, I had my doubts and above all fears about whether I could contribute anything to this book. I was afraid because it is a delicate subject and I have never expressed my opinion in public, and this imposed a sense of purpose and caution. I have tried to provide my perspective and viewpoint about this conflict, and I think I have managed to do so. I think that each of us has done our bit and provided our point of views. We have learned from each other, and I, Naren, have learned from you that these problems with violence don't just happen here, but also occur in other countries, as you have described really well in India and in the United States. And although the motive, reason and purpose of violence are different, in the end, the consequences are similar: a divided and conflicting country.

I hope that one day we will be able to step out of the virtual realm and meet up in person, Naren. It would be a pleasure to get to know you and be able to discuss these issues face to face.

Thanks for everything!

With all my respect,
Zuriñe

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Chapter 5: Walking Together

Luisa Etxenike, Iñaki García Arrizabalaga, Cristina Ortiz-Ceberio, Esther Pascual and Txema Urkijo

Luisa Etxenike

An Open Letter to the Basque and US Students Participating in the Project: *Transatlantic Letters: An Epistolary Exchange Between Basque and US Students on Violence and Community*

San Sebastián, 2021

Dear **Rachel, Unai, Naren, Zuriñe, Lucas, Paula, Naiara, Pablo,**

I am really glad about having the chance to take part with you in this intergenerational transatlantic exchange. This is the perfect context for sharing these thoughts with you. Let me start by recalling an election Sunday in San Sebastián.

I was walking to the polling station where I was supposed to vote when I passed by one of the billboards set up to display electoral propaganda, and I saw the same old "spectacle"; the scene that has accompanied the Basques when expressing their democratic voting rights for decades in the Basque Country. There were only a few posters left intact on this billboard. Others —basically the ones put up by the Basque Socialist Party and the Popular Party— had been partially or almost completely torn down, so that their message was left null and void. All of them had been desecrated in this way —and I choose this term on purpose because there are also things that are secularly sacred, and I believe that exercising your right to vote falls in that category. All of the candidates, except for one had been destroyed. The one still intact was the candidate running for the Popular Party, and you could perfectly see the reason why the same people who had ripped down the rest had decided to keep this one intact: the woman in the poster had a target clearly drawn on her forehead.

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With these images in my head, I went to vote on that Sunday, and just like me, so did many of my fellow citizens. Because this is how we Basques have lived and chosen our representatives against this backdrop, with displays like this, for nearly forty years. And I choose that day and these images to start these reflections because they eloquently tell a story about what terrorism has meant in the Basque Country: a constant and brutal assault on democracy, and on plural political expression in Basque society.

Terrorized, murdered, threatened, and intimidated political representatives of the Basques: our teachers, journalists, judges, businesspeople, and other members of civil society and of the security forces. It was an attempt to try silencing the political plurality of Basque society, to impose a single voice: its own and that of its minions.

Therefore, I think that it is not only inaccurate but also profoundly and radically unfair to describe what happened in the Basque Country as a "conflict". There was no such conflict; there were not two opposing sides —Basques against Spaniards, for example, or one country against another. What was actually involved was a Basque society working to first build and then develop democratic coexistence and a terrorist group trying to prevent this from taking root through crime, extortion, threats, and by blocking —as in the example that I mentioned at the beginning— free, open, plural, public debate.

I would now like to recall, among so many hundreds of victims, José Luis López de la Calle, a journalist murdered for expressing his opinions in a newspaper. ETA shot him dead, one Sunday morning, when he was returning home after having breakfast and buying several newspapers. It was raining. I'm afraid that to consider what happened in the Basque Country to have been a "conflict" means having forgotten a lot of things, including the distance separating a pen or an umbrella from a gun.

ETA attacked our democracy for almost forty years. Of course, I'm not forgetting that during this period other criminal organizations like the GAL were also active (from 1983 to 1987), nor that police abuse and violence occurred. I consider these to be similar desecrations of democracy, intolerable attacks on the most basic of human rights. In this sense, they resemble ETA terrorism; however, they also differ, the key distinction being their lack of social acceptance. I have never seen a piece of graffiti demanding "GAL more machine guns". I have never seen in any of our streets demonstrations or crowds of people requesting something similar or demanding police torture. I have never known anyone who has expressed their support for these intolerable practices either privately or in public. But I have had to witness the other side:

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a huge amount of graffiti and posters in support of ETA or containing death threats; or thousands of people demonstrating in the streets, chanting "Gora ETA militarra" or "ETA more machine guns". In other words, I have had to stomach people asking ETA to eliminate their own fellow citizens. Without the support of this segment of society, expressed through a great deal of support and collusion, both logistical and material, terrorism would not have been able to survive for so long.

All this took place. And now it's up to us to choose the right words to tell this story —to make it real for you. Words that are sincere, with no nooks and crannies to hide in, so as to favor confusion, misrepresentation, or ambiguity. Using the right vocabulary to talk about the past will enable us to speak about the present sincerely and decently and be able to imagine the future. All the enemies of democracy attack language; they all try to distort the meaning of words, to make them say what they don't mean. We don't need to turn to Orwell's *1984* to appreciate the destruction caused by *Newspeak*, by replacing real vocabulary with a "fictional" one, molded in accordance with the interests of the authorities, of any authority. All we need to do is to take a close look at the news, at the still burning images of the assault on the US Capitol, which shook us like all attacks on the symbols and foundations of democracy do, in the same way that anything that rocks what we believed to be definitively established do, things so firm and undisputed, believed to be invulnerable. We will definitely remember those final moments of Donald Trump's presidency, but we shouldn't forget that his term in office began manipulating language, with infamous alternative facts, a term coined by presidential advisor, Kellyanne Conway, to cover up statements by the White House Press Secretary, Sean Spicer, that were quite simply false. We must never forget that this presidency continued to express itself too often in fake news mode with recourse to other kinds of fabricated discourse.

Words have to be looked at head-on; this is something that we writers know really well. We must not be frightened of what words may say, but rather of what they achieve when they are stolen: concealing, silencing, or keeping things in the dark. So, we could say that democracy is based on the appropriate choice of vocabulary as well as on the actions that accompany every choice of words. This is why I think that we have to thoroughly question the terms that are being imposed as "truth" in the narrative of the events that transpired in the Basque Country. In addition to the word "conflict" that I previously discussed, I personally don't think that terms like "reconciliation" are fair either, because once again it seems to refer to two conflicting sides. Likewise, I find concepts like "restorative justice" to be problematic because I

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don't think this model of justice should be central to the political debate, insofar as it bases its approach on a personal and/or private form of logic and interrogation. In my opinion, this reasoning is not powerful enough to lay the foundations for a new kind of social coexistence.

What I consider to be just is that those who caused the damage should explicitly and clearly accept their responsibility and sign up for a new social pact imbued with the democratic values that they abandoned. This would entail a fresh commitment perfectly recognizable in the everyday practice of political and social life. Unfortunately, we haven't reached this goal yet. Among the Basque nationalist left there is still a long ethical and democratic way to go. Here I include the recent statement by Maddalen Iriarte, the *EH Bildu* spokesperson in the Basque parliament, words particularly eloquent and worrying coming from a leading politician, where she claims that "the damage caused by ETA has been recognized. Whether it was fair or unfair.... Each individual here will have their own narrative". I cannot help but emphatically reject the possibility and the mere formulation of a narrative that considers the damage caused by ETA to be just or compatible with respect for democracy.

All societies need unanimous support —or a large enough majority so that it seems unanimous— for democratic values. No one should feel the need to abandon their ideals, and no one should be afraid to defend them. No matter where, in the Basque Country or in the US, we all need to face up to our responsibilities. We need to acknowledge our errors and make amends. We learn from our success, and we carry this on. But remember, there is a way of causing harm that involves doing nothing. Yes, terrorism speaks for itself when it attacks, but it also speaks for the society that gives it refuge. For a long time, a large part of Basque society looked the other way or didn't acknowledge what was happening around it; many did not reach out to the victims of terrorism. Likewise, a large part of US society also looks the other way or doesn't recognize what goes on every day; it is blind to the many victims of discrimination, exclusion, and violence. I'd like to recall these verses by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who in "Cassandra", one of the poems in *Mycenae Lookout* reads: *No such a thing as innocent bystanding*. I agree with this. There is no innocence in passivity; it is not enough just to get angry. Morality and justice lie in our actions and in our gestures.

Democracies always have room for improvement; it is our duty to better them. Democracies, however, are never safe. We won't forget the US Speaker of the House's lectern being desecrated and carried around like a trophy amidst all the screaming. This is a reminder

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of why democracy's defense and betterment are a permanent task for each and every one of us. If we want a fair world, we need to be just ourselves; if we are hungry to see more solidarity in the world, we need to be more proactive; if we want to root out violence, we need to stop being destructive on small and large scales. And the same could be said for respect, tolerance, and the ability to accept the challenges of otherness and difference. *I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do*, wrote James Baldwin. Democracies are not what they say they are; they are what they do. We can only attempt and repeatedly try to attain these values, I insist, with action.

These thoughts share the same themes you discuss in your letters, and, hence, they hopefully come full circle, as mentioned at the beginning of mine, with an added touch of affect and responsibility, things that really matter to me. The present belongs to all of us equally; the past doesn't. Unlike my generation, you don't have any first-hand memories of the events that transpired in the Basque Country during the years of terrorism. Therefore, our legacy is the passing on of that reality from one generation to the next, those memories. This task is vital because memory is the umbilical cord through which the present draws from the past, and the quality of that legacy directly depends on which "nutrients" are chosen and on just how healthily or harmfully they are fed to you.

As I just stated, in today's world democracy means using a credible and sincere vocabulary to convey reality. The truth is always complex, and it is often difficult to convey all dimensions. Sincerity, on the other hand, is very simple: it unassumingly means not lying. Therefore, our task is to define the truth as only what we truly know, and not to call truth to what we know isn't true. In the Basque case, this means not to blur or conceal the responsibility of those who inflicted violence on others, nor the responsibility of their collaborators and accomplices. Here truth also means raising awareness by asking questions, researching, and bringing our discoveries into the open. And, it also demands choosing what to pass on to the next generations, i.e., deciding what to pass on to you, and what to hold back, and not convert into an intergenerational legacy.

In *The Owl's Night*, one of the poems in the collection, *The Mortal Phoenix* —the title is a wonderful declaration of principles— the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish wonders: *Was that difficult man my father, who would have me carry the burden of his history?* I always keep these words in mind, like a beacon. I believe that we must pass on history but not the burden of history. It's easier written here than done, but it has to do, in my opinion, with protecting you from the

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wounds of the past so that they cannot cross intergenerational barriers. Wounds belong to the generation that has suffered and inflicted them. We should only bequeath to the next generation the scars that cause no pain and do not spread infections. Scars, not wounds because inheriting unblemished skin wouldn't be fair or useful to your generation either. Wounds form part of experience; scars are this experience turned into awareness, in other words, into the will of societies that agree that past horrors should never take place again.

I insist that we must pass on history but not the burden of history. Each one of us needs to do so based on the possibilities that our political, academic, artistic, or personal forums provide. This must be based on our convictions, but these should never turn into alibis that create confusion and ambiguity or avoid responsibilities. Our convictions need to be conveyed in sincere, clear, and precise words. And that is why, to close, I'd like to clearly express my position on another point that is closely linked to the violence here in the Basque Country: I don't think that the word "the people" should ever be the center of democratic debate because in democracies there are no people. In democracies, there are societies, formed by citizens who are different but equal at the core: in the recognition and exercise of their rights. I cannot forget that in the Basque Country some have killed while invoking the Basque "people". Well, I'd like to tell you that I also reject this association being attributed to me. My most intimate self as a Basque rejects this. My surnames have a geographical origin, and I was born in San Sebastián, but I am not part of a people. I'm a Basque citizen because I live in the Basque Country, which is my home, and a Spanish citizen because I live in Spain, which is my home, and a European citizen because I live in Europe, which is also my home. And, I also aspire to be a citizen of a home that is much larger: the global society that provides all of us with one document, the same "papers", so to speak, i.e., the acknowledgment of our humanity, rights, and duties.

Luisa Etxenike

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Iñaki García Arrizabalaga

Coexistence Will Always Be Unfinished Business

Bilbao, 2021

Dear **Lucas, Naiara, Naren, Pablo, Paula, Rachel, Unai, and Zuriñe,**

I must confess that reflecting on and writing about the challenges that social coexistence poses at the present time for young adults in their early twenties is not an easy task for me. It is not simple because, although I didn't want things to be that way, the experiences that I went through when I was young and that are demanding their legitimate space today, are providing a context for my thoughts. My father was murdered by a Basque terrorist organization when I was 19. I was a university student like you are today, but you are the real protagonists of this book. I was a young man who, I suppose, like everyone at that age, wanted to live and enjoy life, but I also wanted to change the world and build a better society. And suddenly, overnight, I realized (they made me realize) that the ground had given way beneath my feet, that I was no longer going to enjoy anything, that it was no longer worth changing or building anything, that it was hopeless, there was no future, there was no light. Quite simply, there was nothing left. In short: terrorist violence stole my youth from me. That is why I feel really embarrassed and irrationally shy talking to people of your age. And yet, my professional activity as a teacher means that I am in daily contact with young adults age 19 to 22. However, it's not the same talking to them about marketing or market research as it is about terrorist vio-

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lence and coexistence, although, in all fairness, I have to say that on the numerous occasions that I have done so, I have felt really comfortable and their interest, empathy, respect, and desire to learn about their recent past have left me very pleasantly surprised.

The fundamental message that I would like to pass on to your generation is that you should be aware that social coexistence, just like democracy in general, cannot be built or defended on its own, through a kind of natural inertia or divine mandate. People build (and destroy) coexistence through their acts, in what they do and avoid doing; both their actions and their omissions matter. That is why you need to know that coexistence will be what you want it to be; the path that you are building. As the title of this letter states, coexistence will always be unfinished business, a work in progress.

It is my generation's responsibility to pass on a clear message to you that paradoxically, we didn't know how to understand or apply ourselves: that recognizing and accepting the dignity of each human being and committing ourselves to the importance of deliberation in resolving conflict provide the best groundwork for securing social coexistence. In this sense, you are more fortunate, because, despite its cautious first steps, the education system has started to introduce these values in certain educational modules on peace and coexistence. These subjects were taboo for us. When I was your age, talking about them in schools was, in the best of cases, science fiction. It was most commonly viewed as a provocation, as wanting to sow discord, confrontation, and tension. "We shouldn't talk about those subjects", they used to say. So, you see talking about human dignity was banned here. We could talk about the Vietnam War, about May 68 in France or the Prague Spring, but not about what was going on right under our noses. This book, which is an incitement to peaceful coexistence, wouldn't have been understood like that four decades ago, when they murdered my father. This book couldn't have come into being four decades ago; it was not the right time.

Let me go deeper into the reasons why my generation found it impossible to build an acceptable level of social coexistence. Recognising and accepting the dignity of all human beings is such a basic message that it is embarrassing to have to point it out. And yet, how vital it is! How genuinely revolutionary it is to put it into practice! It shakes up everything. It is radical —in the sense that it gets right to the root of things— and it changes everything. Accepting this principle means recognizing that there is absolutely no justification for the use of violence as a tool to obtain any kind of benefits at the expense of someone else. That is why I ask you to never trivialize or downplay murder,

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kidnapping, torture, extortion, or threats, because the dignity of all human beings is an absolute that does not allow for any nuances or relativization. Allow me to give you a piece of information. At the moment, I am conducting research on the interest and opinion of Basque youth (18 to 25 years of age) about the violence and terrorism experienced in the Basque Country in the last few decades. The preliminary results show that, even in 2021, 14% of those young Basque people surveyed agree that ETA was justified and another 28% are still not sure if it was or not. Just see for yourselves whether there is still a long way to go to discredit what is unjustifiable. And I wonder and I ask you: how can we make today's youth understand, for example, that murder is not the banalization of evil, but an irreversible act against the absolute value of human dignity? How can we get these young people to internalize a minimum standard of ethics that makes them understand that all these acts have been, are, and will be, quite simply, unacceptable, intolerable, and unjustifiable? I don't know. I've no answer to this. It's like talking about love to someone who has never really been in love. They'll never understand... until they actually fall in love. There are things that you either experience or feel or you won't ever be able to understand them. However, as I said, although it must be done against all odds, we must defend the absolute value of human dignity, because there is a trend among individuals, organized political groups, and entire governments to consider human dignity to be a mere tool to serve their political goals. Unfortunately, examples of this trend abound everywhere. I ask you to never get used to considering this attitude as being "normal" in the sphere of coexistence, and to never lower your guard in the fight against these injustices. Always remember what Anne Frank said: "What happened cannot be undone, but we can prevent it from ever happening again".

Be attentive and active, because coexistence took a long time to take root, and it is still fragile. And some people may discover that it's very easy to bring it crashing down. There will be, because there always have been, people who look the other way. People who are self-interested and who only want to hear about their rights and freedoms, but who do not want to make any commitment to acquiring and securing these for others, people who think that freedom and democracy emerged spontaneously, that they just fell out of the sky. In this respect, I conceive of being young as being anathema to being selfish from a social point of view. If you have no desire to change the world when you're young, then what have we got left? If some day you feel that you're satisfied and content with what you've achieved, if you think that everything is fine and there's nothing more to be done or im-

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proved, then shake off your lethargy and tweak your consciences, because peaceful coexistence is a never-ending task and it can only be enhanced with higher levels of democracy and freedom, which must be exercised responsibly.

On your path to building and defending social coexistence, don't fall into the trap of believing that it is time to "let bygones be bygones" and act as if nothing ever happened in the last few decades, promoting a kind of collective amnesia. And if you do so, because it is an option that is socially accepted and has been well-marketed, then this will merely be a denial of a significant part of your own reality, of your heritage. You'll deny it, but it will still be there. You have inherited the situation that we have left you. You must tirelessly strive to learn where we went wrong and not commit the same mistakes. Once again, force of habit here means forgetting and "not caring in the slightest" about all these issues, because people prefer an easy comfortable life. This is short-term gain, but long-term pain. If you really want to learn to not repeat the mistakes we have made, if you want to learn from them to build your future, then you mustn't forget what happened in this country. Forgetting is something that we cannot afford as a society, and you must fight against this as a generation. Forgetting merely papers over the cracks and is a rotten foundation on which you won't be able to build any kind of stable coexistence in the long term. That is why I am encouraging you to consider the subject of memory in a positive sense, as something to be built up, as a right that you are entitled to as free citizens, as a right that you are all summoned to exercise and protect in a responsible forward-looking way.

The act of not forgetting, of preserving memory, is also a simple tribute to the victims of terrorism, for whom, if murder meant their death, then oblivion is now their extermination. I know that the act of empathizing with the victims, with those who have suffered, is not an easy thing to do. The victims remind us of the past. And I can assure you that, in our case, it is a past of which we do not feel proud. You will discover, for example, the sometimes extreme and humiliating callousness, lack of visibility, and disregard with which on too many occasions this society has treated the victims of terrorism. How then can we be empathetic, and not be insensitive to pain, and recognize the victims if we refuse, by act or omission, to learn what happened in our recent past? You must help us to ensure, after decades of murders, kidnappings, torture, threats, extortion, and fear, that there is an idea that has been vanquished: of believing and implementing the perverse principle that the end justified the means. We cannot change the past, but we can change how we as a society assess what happened to us.

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And this responsibility is ours. I think that those of us who are getting on in years have the responsibility and duty to our children, who are now your age, to explain to them, with no feelings of revenge, what really happened, the story of what we had to go through, a narrative about our recent history that includes the victims' perspectives and discredits violence forever as a means for political action. I'm not naïve and I'm quite sure that, although in my generation we all have the same obligation to do this, not everyone will, nor will everyone have to follow the same path because we are not all equally responsible for this violent past. But this is a different subject for another book...

In any case, I think that all of us —yes, all of us— want to free you from this heavy burden that we have had to bear, so that you can be free to enjoy a decent level of social coexistence.

Dear Lucas, Naiara, Naren, Pablo, Paula, Rachel, Unai, and Zuriñe, I'll close now. I haven't met you in person, but I'd like to thank you for everything that your reflections have inspired in me and have made me feel. I hope you will be happy and find your place in the world so that, from that space, you can help to improve the world of those who come after you.

Best wishes to you all,
Iñaki

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Cristina Ortiz

Green Bay, Wisconsin, 2021

To the students of Dartmouth College and of the University of Deusto:

I appreciate the opportunity that Annabel Martín and María Pilar Rodríguez have given me to take part in this project by letting me add my voice to this transatlantic bridge that your correspondence and exchange of ideas are constructing. It is precisely this network of interconnections that your words and reflections are stitching together, the linking of disparate experiences and circumstances that you describe in your letters, and the attention you pay in your texts to each other's arguments, that, in my opinion, serve as the best way to address the subject in question: violence and the possibility of coexistence. Perhaps you will not reach resounding or definitive conclusions, but you are committed to determining that the best and most irrefutable antidote to violence is precisely to go and meet the Other (or Others) and claim and recognize our shared humanity. As Rachel mentions in her letter, "violence relies on alienation". In fact, violence is the enemy of this attitude of openness to the Other; it crushes and denies this space. However, its reach goes beyond the act of violence itself as it prevents us from going into things in greater critical depth and it makes us feel disconnected as violence restricts viewpoints because it is based on the belief in the unilateral supreme value that an idea has above all others and even above life. That is why "a dictatorship that does not make use of violence is unthinkable and unsustainable" (Zweig, p. 29). This is why in the final analysis violence challenges the pluralism that is intrinsic to us as people and societies.

However, contributing to the dialogue on such a complex and much-studied subject like violence also means right from the outset fighting

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against the inertia of avoiding lapsing into commonplaces or abstract generalizations. In her introduction to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt alerts us to this danger: trying to "understand" the nature of evil through abstractions can make us indifferent to the specific nature of reality[19]. As an antidote to this risk, the German philosopher proposes that thought must be rooted in "the impact of reality and the shock of experience" (Arendt, p. viii). Therefore, intellectual effort alone is not enough: we also need to feel intrinsically moved, touched by a reality whose complexity we sometimes do not totally understand. Emotional involvement in this subject is just as important as rational involvement. As the philosopher Victoria Camps sums up: "it's not enough to know what is good, we need to desire it; it's not enough to know what is evil, we need to despise it" (p.21). At the same time, trying to decipher the keys to violence means delving into a question about the human condition that transcends our immediate reality and leads us to face a moral challenge in which we debate between light and darkness, an area in which it is impossible in certain cases not to feel that we are walking on shifting sands between confusion and doubt. The questions in your letters reflect this conflict: Are all kinds of violence the same? Is violence justified in certain contexts? How can a society achieve peaceful coexistence after a period of violence? What are the bases needed to construct coexistence? "Imagine ending up like Socrates and you come to the conclusion that you only know that you know nothing", as Naiara frankly puts it. However, faced with these questions we must also ask ourselves: is there a more important task? In the context of the Basque Country, for example, for many years silence regarding these subjects, a lack of debate, and even indifference, had been the usual response to a situation of violence that undermined the social fabric and coexistence of that society. Recently, a political science professor at the University of the Basque Country carried out a study that shows that even ten years after ETA has stopped killing, there is still a significant number of young adults between 20 and 25 years of age who prefer to avoid talking about this violent past. For that matter, many Basque teenagers between 15 and 18 years of age don't even know what ETA was[20]. The silence, the refusal

[19] "The conviction that everything that happens on earth must be comprehensible to man can lead to interpreting history by commonplaces. Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalizations that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt". (viii)

[20] "Se mantiene un halo de silencio y de prevención. Hay mucha gente que mide mucho y toma muchas medidas de precaución. Y es curioso, porque ellos no han vivido los

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to debate, and not wanting to talk is a burden with huge repercussions for a society in a context of post-violence. Among other things, it makes it impossible to move forward together towards reconciliation.

The thoughts on violence that I am sharing here are anchored in my personal experience, as I am someone who has spent a significant part of my life coming and going from one side of the Atlantic to the other and experiencing a kind of transhumance which has allowed me, like Lucas's parents[21] and other emigrants, to feel that I am from one and many places at the same time. I have my loyalties divided among several geographical spaces, and a wide variety of circumstances make up my emotional map. However, one place where I feel completely at home is in the classroom. In class, I understand my task to be that of an instigator, more than anything else. "To instigate what?" you might well ask. Well, to encourage my students to shift away from the dangers of indifference, the kind of indifference "that defines us as consumer-spectators of reality" (Garcés, p. 98) and keeps us from being committed individuals. I won't say here that I always manage to do this, but I do insist on trying. Since Aristotle, education has had an ethical commitment and for this reason, it is generally given a significant role in solidifying civic life, in educating mindful and committed citizens. But it goes without saying that this is not always the case: it is often precisely in the classroom where the flight from thought occurs most rapidly, the place where we try to avoid the kind of uncertainty that controversial subjects cause. Furthermore, the current decline in the study of the humanities in favor of a more utilitarian education is, in my opinion, a good example of this kind of disavowal.

I didn't receive my education about violence in the classroom (or not totally). I spent my childhood in the Basque Country during Franco's dictatorship and, like a lot of people in my generation, I grew up listening to stories told in a whisper about the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period: stories about people buried alive, about "promenades", about informers willing to betray a neighbor out of personal revenge, or to steal what wasn't theirs. Some were stories about violence and horror, others, about human ingenuity in the struggle against endless hunger and shortages. These stories were never intended for children, at least not in my case; they were stories for adults, "grown-up business" they used to say at the time, which enabled the survivors

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peores años de la ruptura de la convivencia, aunque sí han recibido un mensaje de 'Ojo, este tema tensiona y es mejor evitarlo". Ordaz, Pablo "La ficción conduce a la memoria".

[21] Lucas, a student from Dartmouth College wonders in his letter: "what does happen when people share a sense of belonging to more than just one space?"

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of the Civil War to exorcize the pain that their memories caused them and left children outside their circle of confessions. However, as a child I had a great capacity to make myself "invisible" and while I pretended to play, as inconspicuously as possible, I used to listen to these stories, that although they weren't intended for me, from a very early age, they made me face up to the horror of discovering that inflicting the most brutal cruelty on another human being seemed to form part of human nature. Who had this seed of evil inside them? Did I? How could you recognize it? How could I fight it?

ETA provided me with the next step in this learning process about barbarism, as it began killing in the climate of fear and darkness that Franco's dictatorship represented for many of us and didn't stop until 2011, when the organization announced its "definitive cessation of armed activity". Nonetheless, as was the case with many others, for a certain time I also thought that ETA's actions were the only possible way to fight against a cruel and foul dictatorship like Franco's. The first killing carried out by ETA that I was fully aware of, when I was only five years old, was the assassination of Melitón Manzanas. This was followed by others, including the assassination of Luis Carrero Blanco, Franco's right-hand man, who had a song composed for his death that we used to sing and dance to at traditional festivals which anyone from the Basque Country from my generation can still hum. So, as I grew up against this background, a world of good guys and bad guys began to take shape, convinced that what ETA was doing was to make it more difficult for Franco to continue his authoritarian regime. I had no idea that ETA was going to become the new head of a monster that, with the advent of democracy, would continue to kidnap, extort, and kill people even more, much more. As we know, ETA murdered more people during the democratic period than during the dictatorship, and even attacked people who had fought against Franco's regime and were in its prisons when the young men who pulled the trigger still hadn't been born. The thing is, when you justify using violence as a means of changing an unjust situation, what you don't usually consider is that things may get out of hand. But maybe it is intrinsic to violence that it precisely "gets out of hand"?[22] There is a sense of deep crisis that eats away at everything that always accompanies the exercise of violence. Another example: the fact that the Spanish state decided to respond to ETA's actions "with its own medicine" by waging a "dirty war" by

[22] "What if violence is precisely the kind of phenomena that is constantly 'getting out of hand'?" (Butler, p. 15).

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supporting the GAL, didn't help to finish off ETA. Instead, it did help to erode the credibility of the democratic system. We've seen something similar happen recently in the United States. Footage of a policeman kneeling on George Floyd's neck while he was pinned to the ground until he choked him to death, while other policemen just watched this atrocity without getting involved, showed the real effect that opting for violence entails: achieving a degree of barbarism and total inhumanity. The silence and failure to intervene in the face of this atrocity makes us just as guilty. As many of you point out in your letters, it is impossible to watch these images of violence repeated on television over and over again without breaking down and asking what may be the right response to such a huge injustice? Unfortunately, this wasn't an isolated event, nor was it new. In 1991 we also watched on television the scene recorded by a passerby in which Rodney King was repeatedly beaten by the police while he was handcuffed on the ground. The root of this problem is not just the police. The deaths of Treyvon Martin or Ahmaud Arbery and so many others are there to remind us that the roots of racial hatred are profound and ideological. Nonetheless, it is Martin Luther King Jr. who empowers us to remember that the choice that we have when faced with injustice is not between the use of violence or non-violence; the dilemma is to choose between non-violence or non-existence[23]. The fact is that accepting violence as a tool for social change, exploiting violence or justifying it for any purpose, whether this is political or of any other kind, means accepting its most perverse consequences, which occur when dehumanizing your adversary. And this, as Martin Luther King Jr. points out, would mean losing our humanity, because what conception of the world is violence predicated on? Violence is based on a one-sided, monolithic logic that is closed-in on itself according to which the "I" (or the people that I consider to be "like me", or "my kind" or "people exactly like me") is detached from "the other" (those who are different, radical otherness) until there is no longer any recognition of their humanity whatsoever. This binary thinking rigidly divides the world into black/white, friends/enemies, us/the others etc. Xenophobia, racism, violence against women, the disciplining of bodies and forms of violence used to maintain order, or power through coercive methods stem from this divisive way of thinking. The consequences of this not only affect our relations with other people and with the world, but also draw an internal border within ourselves.

[23] Quoted in Butler, Judith: "The choice today is no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence" (Martin Luther King Jr.).

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For this reason, after Auschwitz, the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno demanded a "reorientation of thought and action", that is, to search for a new *episteme* that would prevent the repetition of the horror that we had experienced[24]. Reorienting thought means reformulating a way of understanding how we can live in the world in a radically different way. During the years when ETA was at its worst, the so-called "years of lead", a group of people emerged in the Basque Country who refused to give up when faced with a violent scenario in which daily life was interpreted as if transpiring in a war zone. With each new terrorist outrage, regardless of who had committed it or against who it had been carried out, against all odds, and on many occasions, in the face of threats and insults, they protested in silence for fifteen minutes in public places, and through their silence and presence they not only managed to become the most significant social movement against terrorism in the Basque Country, but also showed that the voracious hatred that was ravaging us as a society could (and should) be challenged. I am referring, of course, to the organization, *Gesto por la Paz* (Gestures for Peace). In reality, the silence at their gatherings was not silent, but contained a major question that they were posing to the rest of Basque society and that could be read on their placards: "Why not peace?" (Gómez Moral, p. 14). Despite its apparent simplicity, the question posed a great challenge: the invitation to construct a different reality, one that would be less cruel and unjust.

Healing the wounds caused by violence and rebuilding a society torn apart by this means focusing on the need for a profound reflection process that will lead us to "another reality", a place where the use of violence cannot find any legitimation at all; a place where we are perceived as being caregivers, and not as aggressors. I would like to believe that education is the cornerstone that can facilitate the regeneration of Basque society. Education must not only be understood in terms of what happens in schools; many other social agents, including artists, also play a crucial role. The role that different artistic medium, especially film and literature, are playing in the Basque Country is proving to be crucial in stimulating debate and fighting against amnesia and indifference to this violent past. The attempts to establish restorative justice also point out a path we can follow. However, today's youth with their questions and inquiries, are the people who I think demonstrate that this debate is far from being closed and this needs to be highlighted.

[24] Robles, Gustavo: "Theodor W. Adorno: la crítica al sujeto después de Auschwitz" (p.121).

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That's why I encourage you to continue to ask questions, debate, and imagine new and fairer ways of being in the world. In this respect, your letters are a breath of fresh air and a step in the right direction.

Cristina

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Esther Pascual

Madrid, 2021

Dear students,

It is thrilling to read you. Each paragraph is full of emotion: indignation, rage, anger, doubts, fears, rifts… and it all exudes life. I say life, because never do you yield to despair, nor do you surrender to the violence that drags death and suffering along with it, sometimes unintentionally, and other times considered necessary throughout history.

As you know, I had the privilege to mediate the first restorative meetings between victims and ex-members of the ETA terrorist organization. It is precisely from this perspective that I'd like to share some thoughts regarding your reflections on violence, especially in these times in the West where everything is increasingly polarized and open wounds never heal. Mediocrity has become the norm in international politics, and we can't aspire to having leaders who are good, just less bad.

After the preparatory interviews with each of the ex-terrorists, I had a recurring thought that I couldn't get out of my head. If I had been born in the 1950s in a Basque town and had gone through some of the experiences that they spoke about, would I have wanted to join ETA? Would I have dared to take up arms to fight against repression, dictatorship, and in many cases against injustice? Because as you rightly say, at first, ETA as a movement fought for great ideals and many of the young people who joined had a clear and decisive calling in pursuit of these values and aspirations.

I saw myself as a young woman, with an irrepressible drive to fight against injustice, against abuse, against inequality, etc., but my

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"social capital[25]" never led me down violent paths. It didn't even cross my mind that this could be a route for change. However, if my family and social and cultural environments had been different, would I have engaged in armed struggle too? I'll never be able to say for certain. I'll never know because an individual's identity is context specific; it varies according to external circumstances. Individuals are the way they are and exhibit particular behaviors based on the environment and the life that they have had to endure. Reality is always multifaceted, and everything depends on your vantage point, or to put it another way, who we are depends on the pain through which you see the world. Human beings are capable of the best and of the worst at the same time.

I was relieved to think that I had been fortunate not to have been born there at that time. This also led me to think that if I had lived during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, what would I have done? Would I have been brave enough to join the resistance and fight, or would I have just sat things out and passively looked the other way? It is so easy with the benefit of hindsight to criticize or demand that others act heroically without having experienced the genuine sense of fear that they must have felt.

Listening to their stories, experiences, and suffering brought me closer to understanding —but not justifying— their decision to join the organization, although it is true that the people who were in ETA in the 1960s have very little to do with those from the 1980s, 1990s, and the year 2000. The ideals that the former fought for were laid to rest as time went by and the senseless unrestrained violence perpetrated in

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[25] The concept of social capital appears and is explained in the "Theory of Informal Age-Specific Social Control" by Sampson and Laub that focuses on two questions to explain juvenile delinquency from the perspective of evolutionary criminology: the lack of self-control and the lack of social capital. According to this theory, people desist from offending if they are linked to social institutions. These bonds mean that informal social control is exercised on individuals: the weaker the bonds of an individual with other individuals and social institutions are, the more likely it is that they will offend. Of course, not just informal, but also formal social control is important. However, this social control depends on age. In childhood and adolescence, the decisive institutions for the social control of individuals are the family, the school, the peer group, and the juvenile justice administration system. In the case of young adults these are higher education or professional institutions, work, and their friendships or partners. In adulthood, the institutions of critical control are their jobs, living as couples or marriage, fatherhood or motherhood, investment in the community, and the justice administration system.

The authors also include a concept of social capital that controls delinquency when exercised together with social controls, strickly speaking. Throughout people's lives, we carry out a series of social investments: friendships, a good job, etc. Crime could jeopardize this social capital, a reason why solid social capital will tend to prevent individual delinquency.

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later years by members of ETA, who in most cases lacked any decent "social capital", has been their legacy: death, pain, and destruction.

In the preparatory interviews with each one of them, I was able to understand how someone can turn into a terrorist. It requires a long process. You're not born a terrorist; you're not born to perpetrate violence. Youth, rebelliousness, and a lack of awareness open the door to joining the organization. And once they are inside, there's no turning back. Adapting Jaime Gil de Biedma's poem *I'll never be young again*[26] to what some of the ex-terrorists have said about their personal experience, would read:

> That the terrorists meant business,
> One only starts to grasp later:
> Like all youngsters, I was going
> To come and take life by storm.
>
> I wanted to leave a mark
> And bow out later amid applause:
> Living without struggle or collusion were merely
> The dimensions of the stage.
>
> Time has elapsed though,
> And the unsavory truth has dawned:
> Sowing grief, death, and failure,
> Is the only plot in this play.

And so, unable now to turn back, and fearing that they will kill you if you don't kill because now, you're on the inside, the terrorists start to objectify their victims so that they can pull the trigger, but without looking at them in the eye, making things easier. They confess that the first killing is difficult, and so is the second, but then they become numb to death and the murders become automatic, your mind justifies all acts of violence just so you can carry on living and killing. It's not until you're locked up in your cell, alone, for years that you start to wonder what this was all for. FOR NOTHING.

However, despite all the pain and destruction for which they were responsible, I was really struck by the humanity that they showed. How is this possible? How can someone who has murdered 5, 10 or 15 people evoke humanity and compassion? You find these values by looking them straight in the eyes and listening to a heart which is genuinely repentant; seeing for yourself that they do suffer because of what they have torn apart and destroyed, elicits sympathy in you for them when

[26] *Poemas póstumos* 1968.

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you see how they acknowledge the irreversible suffering that they have caused. Their dignity as human beings gets restored through their repentance (although many people don't like the word) and recognition of the damage they have caused, without attempting to make excuses or justifying the reasons for their past actions.

Here lies the key for the victimizer in the restorative encounters: in the recognition of the damage they have caused, in their refusal to find a reason to justify the crimes, in their acceptance of the offences, and in the need to make amends to the victim in some small way. This could be as simple as answering their questions, or explaining why they killed, how they murdered, or how they felt afterward.

Acknowledging all this requires great courage, the same courage they had to muster to engage in armed struggle. It means admitting that their lives have been futile and that their sole contribution to life has been to perpetrate violence in its crudest form. Facing up to this kind of self-critical awareness is very challenging and not everyone is able to do so.

After having been able to see the immense suffering that violence causes in both directions, in whoever must bear it without having had the choice, and in whoever exercises it despite having been able to choose, I can conclude that as a society we must continue trying to find alternative means to peacefully solve conflicts. We must always recall Blas de Otero's[27] words: *siempre me queda la palabra*.

Now that we are going through a tumultuous period, one where the fuse of violence may be lit at any time, now more than ever, we need creativity and dialogue so as not to stir up more horror in this century either.

Warm regards and my most sincere congratulations for your reflections, critiques, and contributions.

Esther Pascual

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[27] If I have lost life, time, everything
That I tossed away, like a ring, into the water,
If I have lost my voice in the undergrowth,
I still have permission to speak.
If I have suffered thirst, hunger, everything
That was mine and it ended up being nothing,
If I have reaped shadows in silence,
I still have permission to speak.
If I opened my lips to see the face
Pure and terrible, of my homeland,
If I opened my lips so far that they were torn apart,
I still have permission to speak.
Blas de Otero, «I ask for peace and permission to speak.

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Txema Urkijo

Madrid, 2021

Nature gave us a mouth with which to speak and two ears with which to listen. Was that fair, doubling down on listening rather than speaking? However, we human beings insist far too often on contradicting mother nature, by inverting the ratio. We underestimate the practice of listening on numerous occasions so much so that communication gets muddled.

Coexistence needs to be based on some key pillars and this requires starting with the most basic of concepts. Without listening there is no proper communication; without communication, it is difficult to maintain social harmony which, in return, is subject to the ups and downs of the frequent conflicts that are inherent to all types of social interactions.

Another source of problems for coexistence is the limited capacity we have in accepting diversity, pluralism, and as a result, disagreement with others. Our deficit in respect and tolerance towards different opinions is alarming. We have not been properly schooled in tolerance and hence we cannot accept divergent thinking as normal, nor debating and —why not— even discussing and contrasting ideas. This creates attitudes that encourage intolerance and a lack of communication: a breeding ground for social divisions, fragmentation, and entrenchment.

I would also say that the third major aspect of healthy social coexistence is empathy. After listening to, understanding, and accepting disagreement and controversy, putting yourself in someone's shoes enhances understanding because it incorporates both ways of reasoning or thinking, their emotions and feelings, and it helps to create favorable conditions for relationships and coexistence in any social group.

In this case, empathy acts as a kind of social glue, as a neural connection in our collective brain.

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The epistolary relationship that you have established reveals that my brief introductory thoughts won't really discover anything new to you. There are some magnificent references to all this in your letters, something I find very encouraging. Not just because of the present and the future that you represent, but because it underscores that you have placed your education in good hands, that these skills have been instilled and encouraged in you, skills that are not only vital but are also, unfortunately, rare. This means that this will have a knock-on effect that gives one bit of hope for the future.

Your reflections are extremely interesting because they address some key questions for any sphere of coexistence which has been disrupted by violence. It is comforting to hear your positioning against violence, especially when your opposition originates in and is based on sound ethical and political arguments.

In connection with your comments, one can sense that it is vitally necessary to firmly adopt a set of universal values that must form the apex of any system of social coexistence. This is an idea that was already outlined by the French revolutionaries in the late 18th century and later developed, to be global in their scope, by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is no coincidence that this happened after the horrors of the Second World War and the Jewish Holocaust. Such was the degree of inhumanity of that tragedy, that countries were able to reach an agreement and recognise the existence of this basic core of universal values that had to be respected in every society and every country in the world, as they are inherent to the human condition and affect their essence and dignity. They are a common ideal for all peoples and nations.

Today, on a theoretical plane at least, we share the conviction that we must build coexistence in our societies on these ethical and political foundations. The right to life is recognized as a supreme basic good, and as the precondition that provides the possibility of exercising other rights.

This is a radical commitment to life and to the use of dialogue as the only legitimate method for conflict resolution at all levels of social relations, including our interpersonal ones.

When we witness or take a close look at the tragedy represented by the dead, maimed, threatened, blackmailed, etc., because of political violence, we cannot help but wonder how is it possible for human beings to reach these extremes?

The Jewish-German thinker, Hannah Arendt, in her essential book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. The banality of evil*, on the trial of Nazi offi-

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cial, Adolf Eichmann, in Israel, described how he was not a sociopath or a mentally unstable individual, as they were trying to convince public opinion. She claimed that Eichmann did his job "efficiently" carrying out his superiors' orders with the aim of increasing his power and influence within a criminal system. That is, he wasn't a monster but an ordinary, normal person, who, in certain circumstances, had been able to reach these extremes of horror.

Arendt wrote, "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together".

Another key figure, the Franco-Lebanese contemporary thinker and writer, Amin Maalouf, wrote in 1999 a genuine masterpiece, a book I would not only recommend that you read, but would also describe as indispensable. I'm referring to his short essay, *In the Name of Identity* (in Spanish translated as *Deadly Identities*).

The thread running through the book starts from a question: why do so many people kill and die in conflicts related with identity? Identity is a concept that Maalouf refuses to define but that he accepts is made up of numerous elements, one of which is surprisingly the relinquishing of birthplace as being a defining factor of identity, one that in turn, of course, always underscores a sense of belonging. And it is in this complex space that the author places a crucial factor to explain identitarian violence: fanaticism or the emotional mindset that leads people to kill and to die in the name of identity.

Maalouf condemns the kind of religious or political fanaticism that continues to permeate so many attitudes and advocates for an emphatic battle against deadly identities. In his opinion, relationships among people from different origins are not improving today; instead, they are getting worse. He doesn't believe that a real effort is being made to create real change, one based on wisdom, perseverance, and decisiveness. He notes that "identities continue to be deadly in many places".

Maalouf feels that it is difficult to stop this kind of criminal fanaticism, in which today's youth, under the influence of individuals that exploit them, attack easy targets or kill ordinary people who are just walking in the street and who do not form part of political and institutional life. That is why he focuses on what he considers to be the real struggle: to win the battle of the minds.

After these theoretical remarks, I now come to some thoughts on the Basque Country. I won't dwell much on the obvious, i.e., on the re-

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jection of the political violence carried out by ETA or, to a much lesser, by groups on the far right. Essentially, these forms of terrorism placed a political idea above the lives of individuals, and justified murder on the altar of the political project that they claimed to defend.

As many have either deliberately or unwittingly forgotten, it is a good idea to remember that the people who opted to use violence made their decision freely and willingly, without anything or anyone forcing them to do so. Other people who shared their same ideology and political aims opted, however, to follow peaceful and democratic methods in the defense of those ideals. The notion that violence was unavoidable is a lie deployed to justify the practice of terror. Without going any deeper, one needs to remember, for example, that political repression also took place in other parts of Spain, but there was no violent response on the same scale as the one provided by ETA.

Basque society (Spanish society as well, but to a much lesser extent) has suffered the physical, psychological, and sociological wounds that are characteristic of decades of political violence. In psychological terms, this is a genuine social trauma that has affected several generations.

It is advisable not to forget that the ETA terrorist movement emerged when the dying embers of the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War and the repression by Franco's dictatorship that followed had still not waned. This situation means that the harmful effects on social coexistence of both of these combine or overlap.

It is not going too far to talk about ruptures in social relations.

Despite the fact that nearly twelve years have gone by since ETA carried out its last murder in Spain and almost ten years since it announced the definitive end of its activity, many of the wounds it caused have not yet healed. Most of them are kept hidden, and the victims suffer in private. This makes it particularly difficult for younger generations to understand their pain because you have not witnessed this drama firsthand. Many of these wounds are imperceptible or practically invisible, but they exist; they really do.

For this reason, curing and healing these offences must be a priority for Basque society. We need to devote significant effort and energy to this cause. In this sense, victims have a leading role to play in this process, i.e., those individuals who have directly suffered the consequences of violence and have endured pain and suffering.

Experiences like the one that you already know about involving the restorative meetings between reformed ETA prisoners and victims of its terrorist violence, have become a benchmark for the pedagogical potential that the victims have as active agents in the process of reconstructing social relations.

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To ensure that the healing of wounds and the improvement in peaceful coexistence in Basque society is real and substantial, public policies on memory are needed. Future generations need to understand the legacy they inherit regarding the struggles to achieve peace and freedom in our country, as well as the suffering that was caused, a memory written under the inalienable premise of discrediting violence and all violations of human rights. There was never any justification for armed conflict.

Memory has a markedly pedagogical sense and represents a right that not only victims have, as people directly affected by violence, but all citizens as well. At the same time, public authorities have a correlative duty to foster the right conditions to ensure that this right can be exercised.

Public memory policies must reach the education system and provide the right tools to convey this knowledge, this legacy, and encourage debate.

If that were the case, the younger generation would have the opportunity to establish its own memory, a new generation that will be able to see things with the distance that we didn't have. This will be a dynamic evolving heritage, but always revolving around those basic principles that are essential for healthy coexistence, the ones I mentioned at the beginning within the framework of the universal values contained in the international declaration of human rights. In short, to go back to Amin Maalouf, you face the challenge of winning the battle of the minds.

This is a task that concerns all of you. It is a responsibility that, far from being a burden, should motivate you to build your future. Aurrera!

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Authors: A Biographical Note

Bernardo Atxaga (**Joseba Irazu Garmendia**, Asteasu, Gipuzkoa, 1951) belongs to the group of young Basque writers that began publishing in their mother language, Euskara, in the seventies. A graduate in Economics from the University of Bilbao, he later studied Philosophy at the University of Barcelona. He is the author of several books, including *Bi anai* 1985; in English, *Two Brothers*, 2001), *Obabakoak* (1988, Euskadi Prize, Spanish National Award for Narrative, finalist for the IMPAC European Literary Award; in English, 1992), *Gizona bere bakardadean* 1993; in English, *The Lone Man*, 1996), *Zeru horiek* (1995; in English, *The Lone Woman*, 1999), *Soinujolearen semea* (2003, Grinzane Cavour Award, Mondello Prize, Times Literary Supplement Translation Prize; in English, *The Accordionist's Son*, 2007), *Zazpi etxe Frantzian* (2009, longlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize; in English, *Seven Houses in France*, 2011) and *Nevadako egunak* (2013). His books have been translated into thirty-four languages.

Paula del Barrio Torres was born in Valladolid. She is a double major in Law and Communication Studies at the University of Deusto, San Sebastian (Spain) and participates in the Gipuzkoa Talentia program sponsored by the Basque Government. During her time at Deusto she has been a member of organizations like ELSA-Deusto, ELSA-Spain, and Team Europe. She has also participated in competitions for Law School students, meriting high recognition in the Basque Government's Quizz41, the IE School's Legal Challenge, and ELSA-Deusto's Moot Court. Paula loves to write since she was a child. She carries out this passion publishing in *Legal Today.* In her free time, Paula loves travelling and learning about different cultures as well as sports like swimming and track.

Pablo Bellido Cascón is double majoring in Law and Communication Studies at the University of Deusto, San Sebastian (Spain). He also

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volunteers for Loiolaetxea, an association that strives to find alternative avenues for individuals transitioning out of spaces of marginality and exclusion. Pablo is passionate about investigative-audiovisual journalism, a field he wishes to professionally pursue in the future. He also considers himself to be a staunch defender of human rights and wants to carry out a career that will give voice to the most vulnerable.

Luisa Etxenike was born in San Sebastian. She is the author of the novels *Cruzar el agua, Aves del paraíso, Absoluta presencia*, *El detective de sonidos*, *El ángulo ciego* (Euskadi Literary Award 2009), *Los peces negros*, *Vino*, *El mal más grave,* and *Efectos secundarios*; the plays *La entrevista/The Interview, La herencia* (Buero Vallejo Award 2017), and *Gernika es ahora*; the book of poetry *El arte de la pesca;* and several short-story collections. She is the director of the digital cultural platform *Canal Europa* and of the literary festival *Un mundo de escritoras.* In 2007 she was awarded the distinction of Chevalier de l' Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government. www.luisaetxenike.net

Iñaki García Arrizabalaga holds a PhD in Economic and Business Science. He is an Associate Professor and researcher at Deusto Business School (University of Deusto, San Sebastián, Spain). He is a recurring guest speaker on peace and coexistence for the official educational programs of the Basque and Navarre Governments aimed at secondary school and university students. His father was killed in 1980 by a terrorist group close to ETA.

Zuriñe Iglesias Sarasola studies Law and Communication at the University of Deusto, San Sebastián (Spain). She loves to read and study political history, especially the history of armed conflicts, one being that of the Basque Country, a conflict that involved members of her family. She lives in Euskal Herria and two family members suffered the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War and Franco dictatorship. This has motivated her to extensively research the Basque conflict in books, academic journals, opinion pieces, films, and even television series. Her hobbies include keeping up to date on national and international current events. She likes to follow and analyze the rights that nations have attained, nations that have their own identity, culture, customs, and language. She is interested in understanding the routes towards independence that other nations have followed. In this book, Zuriñe openly expresses her thoughts on political violence in public for the first time. She hopes to understand the underlying logic and causes of past violence and reflects on the challenges facing Euskal Herria on the road to peaceful coexistence.

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Lucas Joshi is a graduating student at Dartmouth College (Hanover, United States) with a double major in Spanish and Portuguese literature. He is the co-founder and co-editor in chief of the cultural magazine, *Dear Dartmouth-An Undergraduate Publication*, founder and president of the anti-colonialist book club, *Chapter Two*, and founder of the bilingual program, *Read Conmigo*, of Howe Library (Hanover, New Hampshire). He is a recipient of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and is currently working on the research and writing of the thesis entitled "Unmaking Utopia: Paving the Road of Reconciliation within the Basque Context". He intends to pursue postgraduate study on the topic of Luso-Indian literature and culture.

Rachel Kent graduated from Dartmouth College in 2021, where she studied Human Geography, Environmental Studies, and Hispanic Studies. At Dartmouth, she was awarded Salutatorian, Stamps Scholar, Class Marshal, Dartmouth Legacy Award, Phi Beta Kappa, and the Rachel Carson Award in the Geography Department. Rachel's academic pursuits are grounded in the imperative to feed ourselves in a way that nourishes rather than destroys our communities and environment. For her senior honors thesis, she conducted ethnographic research on creating social relations that care for both human and non-human lives through farming practices, particularly as a counter to the destructive tendencies of capitalist agriculture. Rachel also practices her passion for sustainable, just food systems through her work with several New England farms and food access initiatives. In September 2021, she began a Master of Gastronomy: World Food Cultures and Mobility at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy as a recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship.

Maixabel Lasa Iturrioz was born in 1951 and is retired. She has a daughter and three grandchildren. Maixabel was the former director of the Office for Victims of Terrorism under the Basque Government from 2001-2012. She sponsored and participated in several peace and reconciliation projects from her leadership position, particularly, the Glencree project, the victim-teacher education project, and the restorative justice project. In her case, she met with two of the individuals that assassinated her husband, Juan María Jauregi in 2000, one of whom is the protagonist together with Maixabel of the documentary *Zubiak* (Bridges) by Jon Sistiaga (2019). In fall 2021 the film *Maixabel,* directed by Iciar Bollaín, on her life and civic engagement, was released and received high critical acclaim, and three Goya Awards in February 2022. Maixabel has been and is a powerful advocate for peace and coexistence.

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Annabel Martín is an Associate Professor of Spanish, Comparative Literature, and Women's Gender, and Sexualities Studies at Dartmouth College (USA) and was the founding director of the Gender Research Institute (GRID) at that institution. She has published extensively on nationalism, gender, historical memory, Basque terrorist violence, reconciliation, as well as on film, gender and tourism in 1960s *desarrollista* Spain, and on the importance of the humanities and gender studies in educational curricula. Annabel is the author of *La gramática de la felicidad: Relecturas franquistas y posmodernas del melodrama* (2005), co-editor with María Pilar Rodríguez of *Tras las huellas del terrorismo en Euskadi: Justicia restaurativa, convivencia y reconciliación* (2019), and is preparing a manuscript on the role of the arts and culture in processes of reconciliation as they pertain to the deepening of democracy in Euskadi. In 2019 she held the Bernardo Atxaga Chair of Basque Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York (Instituto Etxepare-Gobierno Vasco).

Unai Murua is double majoring in Law and Communication Studies at the University of Deusto, San Sebastian (Spain). Since he was a child, the Basque conflict has had a strong presence in his life, thus making one of the darkest moments of Basque history an object of intense scrutiny for him. He has attended many conferences and events on ETA, peace, and processes of reconciliation. This has made him a firm believer in the responsibility that his generation holds in receiving and furthering the legacy that others have strived to establish before them. His participation in this book symbolizes his first contribution, a small stepping stone on the route towards a better and more just Euskadi.

Naiara Nájera Etxeandia studies Law and Communication at the University of Deusto, San Sebastian (Spain), in addition to studies in Cooperation and Development. Her interest and commitment to social justice has driven her to participate in several social justice projects in Spain, Morocco, and Burkina Faso. Currently, she has undertaken several research projects on human rights and sustainable development, two of her interests, in addition to those of gender and cultures of nonviolence and peace. Naiara is also an avid traveler who enjoys learning about different cultural identities and languages. She hopes her participation in this book contributes to creating a more empathic, understanding, and community-centered society, one where individual and community dignity is prioritized over special interests.

Cristina Ortiz Ceberio (PhD, University of Cincinnati) is a Professor of Humanities and Global Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green

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Bay (USA) and Chair of Humanistic Studies. She received the Patricia W. Baer Professorship in Education (2015-2019). Cristina has numerous articles published on cinema and contemporary literature in academic journals in Spain and the United States. Among her most recent publications is *Ellas cuentan: Representaciones artísticas de la violencia en el País Vasco desde la perspectiva de género.* Madrid: Dykinson, 2020 —co-authored with Maria Pilar Rodriguez— which has been translated into English as *Affective landscapes: Representation of Terrorism and Violence by Basque Female Authors* (New York, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021). Her current lines of research focus on gender and nationalism in contemporary literature. Email: ortizc@uwgb.edu.

Esther Pascual Rodríguez is the undergraduate director of the degree in Criminology at the University Francisco de Vitoria (Madrid). She joined higher education six years ago, and makes it compatible with her law practice (started in 2001) and with her work in mediation (ongoing since 2005) in coordination with the Association for Mediation and Peace-Making of Madrid. This association pioneered programs for penitentiary and penal mediation, designing pilot programs that have become widespread in Spain. She is the author of various publications on sentencing and restorative justice. One especially important book of hers on this topic is *Los ojos del otro. Los encuentros restaurativos entre víctimas y ex miembros de ETA* (2013), a book that narrates the overwhelmingly powerful, humane, and transformative experience that those particular encounters embody from the theoretical perspective of the facilitator. Esther Pascual participated in the restorative justice encounters between victims and former members of ETA as a mediator and as the coordinator of the project when other facilitators joined the team, as well as being the author of the intervention protocols that were put in place. She holds a Ph.D. from the Universidad Complutense (Madrid) (2012) with a thesis on mediation entitled: *La mediación en el sistema penal: Propuestas para un modelo reparador, humano y garantista.* Esther also trains mediators and considers herself to be a lifelong apprentice.

Naren Radhakrishnan is a twenty-two year old raised in Grayslake, IL, a suburb of Greater Chicago. After attending boarding school in Illinois, he studied Economics, Computer Science, and Hispanic Studies at Dartmouth College, graduating in 2020 into the midst of the pandemic. In the summer of 2020, he founded a national, student-run consulting and design non-profit that collaborated with underrepresented minority small business owners. Today, Naren works as a health-

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care and technology growth investor based in Boston. He spends his free time staying active in the outdoors, dusting off his guitar, and exploring Boston.

María Pilar Rodríguez is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Deusto (Spain) and Director of the Ph.D. program in Leisure, Culture and Communication for Human Development. She holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University and until 2002 she taught at Columbia University (New York, USA). María Pilar has extensively published on literature, film, culture, and gender studies. She is the Principal Investigator of the Communication research team at her university and recognized by the Basque Government. Her last two books are *Affective Landscapes: Representations of Terrorism and Violence by Basque Female Authors* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021, co-written with Cristina Ortiz) and *Basque Cinema: A Cultural and Political History* (London: IB Tauris, 2015, co-written with Rob Stone).

Txema Urkijo was, until very recently, the director of the department of Memory within the Office of Human Rights and Memory of the city of Madrid, and until May 2016, he was an advisor to the Commission on Historical Memory of the city of Madrid. Prior to working for the municipal government of Madrid, he held different positions within the Basque Government in the areas of Peace, Co-existence, Human Rights, and Victims of Terrorism between 2002-2014. Urkijo was the director of the Office of Human Rights (February 2002-October 2005), Advisor to the Office of Victims of Terrorism (February 2006-December 2012), and Policy Coordinator for Victims of Terrorism for the Department of Peace and Coexistence (January 2013-April 2014). Urkijo is the recipient of Spain's 2013 National Prize in Human Rights, awarded by the Association Pro-Human Rights of Spain, a prize he shares with two other colleagues on his team at the Office for Victims of Terrorism of the Basque Government. Urkijo was a member of the leadership of the peace NGO Gesto por la Paz de Euskal Herria (Gestures for Peace of the Basque Country) from 1988 until its dissolution in June 2013. He was a member of its Permanent Commission from 1991-2000. Http://txemaurkijo.com. @txemaurkijo

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This book brings together the letters that eight college-age students, three from Dartmouth College (Lucas Joshi, Rachel Kent, and Naren Radhakrishan) and five from the University of Deusto (Pablo Bellido, Paula del Barrio, Zuriñe Iglesias, Unai Murua, and Naiara Nájera) exchanged over email and videoconferencing from March to December 2020. This initiative was made possible thanks to the collaboration between two faculty members and colleagues, Annabel Martín (Dartmouth College) and María Pilar Rodríguez (University of Deusto) when they introduced their students to each other in the context of a seminar being taught at Dartmouth College on the postETA context. The letters focus on the broad theme of political violence and the challenges that both Basque and US society face regarding coexistence and the idea of community. The letters dwell upon the world these young adults are inheriting, on social engagement in their respective communities, and on their personal experiences when facing these challenges. The letters are profound, intimate, and exhibit a deep curiosity for understanding and learning from the different contexts. Topics include racial violence, the victims of political violence, immigration, political activism, the use of violence for political struggle, fear and self-censorship, civil disobedience, the effects of neoliberal capitalism on communities, civil rights, issues of identity, etc. The volume includes an introduction penned by the editors, a short prologue by Bernardo Atxaga, and a letter that Maixabel Lasa writes to this next generation of social activists. The book ends with an intergenerational fifth chapter where Esther Pascual, the mediator of the restorative justice project at the Nanclares de Oca Prison, Luisa Etxenike, writer, Cristina Ortiz, academic (U of Wisconsin-Green Bay), Txema Urkijo, former director of the Basque Government's Office for Victims of Terrorism, and Iñaki García Arrizabalaga, academic (Deusto) and ETA victim, address the challenges these students face regarding the building of community in today's world.

Annabel Martín is an Associate Professor of Spanish, Comparative Literature, and Women's Gender, and Sexualities Studies at Dartmouth College (USA) and was the founding director of the Gender Research Institute (GRID) at that institution.

María Pilar Rodríguez is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Deusto and director of the Doctorate in Leisure, Culture, and Communication for Human Development. She is the Principal Investigator of the Communication Research Group.

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