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Basque Children in England: Memories of Exile

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ABSTRACT

New approaches in the research on historical events emerged during the 80's. Poststructuralist theories changed the focus of attention, and the history started to be told by its participants. In Spain, the Spanish Civil War started to be analyzed through the eyes of its victims, and oral accounts about its events started to be examined. In this context, the exile gained special importance. Although most of the refugees found their place in France and the USSR, a group of 4,000 Spanish children were exiled in England. They are known as the Basque Children, and they have called the attention of numerous researchers. Although most of the children had returned to Spain by 1939, many others lived for the rest of their lives in England. This study will focus on the education received during their exile and in how this experience affected their identity.

Basque, children, exile, education, identity, refugee

Durante los años 80, los estudios historiográficos contaron con nuevos enfoques gracias a las teorías postestructuralistas en auge. La historia empezó a ser contada por los individuos que la vivieron. En España, la Guerra Civil fue analizada desde la perspectiva de las víctimas y se empezaron a analizar testimonios orales sobre distintos aspectos. En este contexto, el exilio cobró una gran importancia para el estudio del conflicto. A pesar de que la mayoría de refugiados huyeron a Francia y a la URSS, un grupo de 4.000 niños españoles se exiliaron en Inglaterra. Desde entonces se les conoce como los Niños Vascos y han atraído la atención de muchos investigadores. A pesar de que la mayoría regresó a España en 1939, otros muchos decidieron establecerse en Inglaterra de por vida. Este estudio analizará la educación recibida por estos niños durante el exilio y la influencia que esta experiencia tuvo en su identidad.

Niños, vascos, exilio, educación, identidad, refugiados

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INTRODUCTION

In 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, the Republican Government decided to arrange massive plans of evacuation in order to protect the Spanish children. These were hosted by different countries: France, Mexico, the USSR, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark and Britain. An important exodus took place on 21 May 1937, when 4,000 Spanish children, known as the Basque Children, left Bilbao towards Southampton, England, accompanied by 215 teachers and 15 priests. Their exile was possible thanks to some English organizations and the Basque Government, which helped in the organization of the trip. At their arrival, the children were accommodated in a temporary camp and, after some time, they were housed in different colonies and accommodations where they stayed until their repatriation or until the colonies' closure. Most of these exiles had gone back to Spain by 1939, but some others remained there for the rest of their lives. They have become essential for the study of exile during the Spanish Civil War.

Nevertheless, the Basque Children are a recent field of research. A strong social amnesia towards the Spanish Civil War overran the Spanish media during decades. This was the result of the widespread belief that "an essential requirement for peace and harmony among Spaniards means removing (its) consequences" (qtd. in Aguilar 242). It was not until the second half of the 80's that the children gained importance in sociological and historical studies. This turning point was due to the increasing popularity of public commemoration of war events, which facilitates the compilation of personal accounts about distant past conflicts. According to Asphalt, Dawson, and Roper

Social groups suffering injustice, injury or trauma that originates in war have become increasingly prepared to demand public recognition of their experience, testimony and current status as "victims" or "survivors". (...) (M)id-twentieth century has added an urgency and poignancy to the endeavour of collecting their testimony and reflecting on its significance (3).

The attention to these testimonies does not only extend to the public domain, but has spread to historical and political spheres (e.g. *Ley de la Memoria Histórica*). According to Colmeiro, these new focuses are the result of post-structuralist approaches, especially in discourse

analysis, which have challenged the pre-existing canon and its formation. As a result, the margins records have been increasingly re-interpreted, and the personal accounts of previously marginalized groups have called the attention of experts (Colmeiro 20).

The first author to note the relevance of the Basque Children in relation to Spanish Civil War was Dorothy Legarreta. She wrote *The Guernica Generation* (1984), which introduces the Basque exile in both France and Britain. In her work, she uses historical and psychological approaches to examine the conditions of the children during the exile. Within the same line of research, Gregorio Arrien introduced the topic in Spain. Although his work focuses on the study of the Basque Diaspora across the world, he has extensively researched the life of the Basque children specifically. In addition, he has specialized in the Basque ways of education during the Spanish Civil War, both in the Basque country and in exile. The analysis of primary sources is the basis of his investigation, which has provided extensive and valuable information. Among his books *Niños Vascos Evacuados a Gran Bretaña, 1937-1940* (1988) and *¡Salvad a los Niños! Historia del Exilio Vasco en Gran Bretaña, 1937-1940* (2014) stand out.

Adrian Bell and Natalia Benjamin have worked on a commemorative sphere in the field. Both have released or re-edited works for the 75th anniversary of the departure from Bilbao and have centred their work in the compilation of firsthand accounts. In *Only for Three Months* (2007), Bell masterly delves into the processes prior to the evacuation and into the children's life in England (including the period at Stoneham camp, at the colonies, and after the war). The eminence of his work lies in the combination between traditional historical research and oral testimonies by the children, facilitating the examination of the children's feelings towards their experience. Similarly, Benjamin has edited and compiled the personal accounts of the children in *Recuerdos: Basque Children Refugees in Great Britain* (2007). This publication provides a great variety of information about the exile by its protagonists. Both Benjamin and Bell have inspired the research of Susana Sabín-Fernández. She has used their compilations and other personal interviews with the children to explore the exiles' discourse in relation with war commemoration and collective memory. Her doctoral thesis, *The Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK: Memory and*

Memorialisation, offers a close examination of the acts of commemoration carried for the children, the strategies and elements present in their discourse, and the development of multiple identities. Finally, it is important to note that the personal accounts of the children have not only inspired academic research, but also multimedia productions. Izaskun Arandia produced a short film called *To Say Goodbye* (2012) in which some of the refugees told their experiences.

This study aims to delve into two topics that influenced the Basque Children: the education and the struggle between Spanish and English identities. To do so, firsthand accounts are going to be examined, especially those testimonies edited by Benjamin and Bell. To deeply understand the material, it is essential to look at the historical circumstances leading to and taking place during their exile. Before analyzing each topic separately, it is important to examine the general aspects of their discourse. This analysis will be carried out structurally and thematically. Finally, the education and the question of identity will be discussed individually, highlighting the points of connection when necessary. Linguistic, psychological and sociological theories will be taken into account in order to understand some of the processes which are present in and which produce their discourse. The final objective of this paper is to reach alternative information about the education and identity of these children and to establish connections between both topics and other historical and social circumstances happening at the time.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Spanish Civil War proved to be a conflict of international interest, bringing out the political tensions across Europe which would lead to World War II. Hence, it is not surprising the huge military presence of foreign forces in Spain. However, at the very beginning of the war, European powers adopted a policy of non-intervention. An agreement was signed in August 1st, 1936 by Portugal, Germany, Italy, the USSR and Britain accepting not to send military supplies to Spain. By the end of 1937, most of them were implicated in the war, even if defending the non-intervention publicly, but England and France maintained their position until the end. This policy was supported both by the Conservative and the Labour Party in England- although the latter would reject it in October 1937. However, after a time, the situation started to be criticized by public opinion because of its hypocrisy. It was well known that military supply was being provided by countries participating in the Non-Intervention Committee - Portugal, Germany and Italy were supporting the insurgents and the USSR was helping the Republic. Facing this situation, £898,000 were spent by the committee to send observers in order to avoid the arrival of international forces to the Spanish fronts. Ironically, the problem laid in the fact that the Spanish Eastern coast was under the supervision of Italy and Germany, so the plan resulted on a "broken chain of control" in which England was spending a great quantity of money ("Non-Intervention" 4). The press accused "Britain's complete neutrality" for opening "loopholes for the 'Governments' to import men and munitions and thus to extend the period of strife" ("Non-Intervention" 4). In addition to this background, the popularity of new uprising political movements, such as communism and anarchism, increased the dissatisfaction about British government's policy, and public demands asking for an active participation in the war became increasingly common.

All this facilitated the emergence of several committees and associations addressing problems in the conflict. These include a large range of different contributions: from private funding to voluntary work in the Spanish front. They counted with the participation of a great spectre of social spheres. The war also attracted the attention of English Catholic communities because of the religious affinities and the

religious persecutions taking place in the country. It also counted with an unprecedented intervention by women.

An important committee was the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJC). It was headed by the Duchess of Athol -member of the Conservative party- and it counted with the participation of diverse social classes - from wealthy families to unemployed men. As Arrien points out, the committee emerged after a meeting of different English and French personalities in London, during the autumn of 1936, in order to discuss the Spanish matter. The encounter led to the organization of multiple bodies actively participating in the conflict. In January 1937, these were grouped together in the NJC by the initiative of the Duchess of Athol, who opposed to her party interests (“A Salvo de las Bombas” 697).

According to its manifesto, one of its three focuses was "the removal of civilians from the battle areas" ("National Joint Committee” n.pag). Although it worked nationally across the peninsula, the committee centred its attention in strategic points: Madrid and Barcelona. However, the bombing of Guernica placed on the map the Basque Country. The attack was highly condemned by international public opinion because "Guernica was not a military objective" (qtd. in Bell 5) and because of the great number of civil deaths.¹ The attack to the symbolic centre of the Basque culture violated the article 9 of the International Covenant. Foreign press, especially English newspapers, extensively echoed the event demanding the government to take action, and the public opinion moved away from a pacifist position to an anti-fascist stance. The constant recalling on the attack supposed a turning point in the geographical focus of help. At that point, the situation of Bilbao transcended to the media: it suffered from food shortage because of the blockage by the insurgents since almost the beginning of the war.

According to Bell, Ralph Stevens, His Majesty’s Consul in Bilbao, reported this situation to the Foreign Office and, under his own initiative, suggested a plan of evacuation for women and children (6-7). The Duchess of Athol heard his proposal, and the NJC started to organize the evacuation. Even if the initial idea was to evacuate

¹ At the time, the Basque Government reported 1,700 deaths. However, a recent research by the group Gernikazarra Historia Taldea points to 157 deaths (Sillero, n.pag).

children and women, the great quantity of demands made it impossible. Finally, only 4,000 Basque children were evacuated from Bilbao. In addition to the bombing of Guernica, Bilbao was chosen as point of departure having into account other factors. For instance, Great Britain was at the time in charge of supervising the Bay of Biscay because of the Non-Intervention Committee's control plan. Then, it became a strategic point of departure for a potential evacuation. Even if the British Government would continue with the non-intervention plan, the Royal Navy would defend English citizens supervising the evacuation from Francoist attacks. Alpert goes further in determining the reasons why the Basque Country received most of the help, addressing to cultural issues. According to him, the English press and government perceived Basques as different from the rest of Spanish citizens, who were at the time victims of the 'Black Legend' (Alpert 5). This idea is supported by Bell, who reported that Ralph Stevenson "was a pro-Basque rather than pro-Republican" (6).

The evacuation of the Basque Children would not have taken place without the help of Leah Manning. She was a member of the Labour party and was actively working in the conflict with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee (part of the NJC), in charge of supplying medical assistance in the Republican front. Living the consequences of the war in first person, she helped to arrange the Basque Children's evacuation by promoting the dialogue between the Basque Government, the NJC, and other influential associations. Manning established contact with Jose I. de Lizaso, who was the Basque Government representative in England and who coordinated the intervention of Spanish associations. Manning also spread the news about the evacuation "telegraphing many people in (England)" and demanded "that the Basque Government in London should charter two ships for the purpose of evacuating children" ("Spanish Situation" n.pag). The transportation was organized by the Basque Government, which in 4th May 1937 approved the plan and confirmed the sending of "two vessels for the evacuation of 4,000 children to England" ("Spanish Situation" n.pag). After the initial banning by the British government, fearing that this plan would confront their policy, the authorities recognized the "impartial and humanitarian motives" of the evacuation, but rejects "for a number of reasons", which were not explained publicly at that moment ("Spanish War Refugees" 7).

Although it would guard the ships during the trip in order to avoid Francoist attacks, the British government would not finance the evacuation. Therefore, it was extremely important to raise funds and to involucrate the population. In England, different activities were organized by the NJC, other local organizations, and religious societies in order to raise money for the children. In addition, the elevated number of children coming made essential to find numerous and large accommodations for them. The NJC counted with little time to determine where to house the children because the evacuation took place only twenty days after the Basque Government approved it. Only a few places were let for the children before the date. Therefore, it was decided to construct a temporary camp in North Stoneham, near Southampton, where the children would stay until the redistribution to their definitive destinations.

Meanwhile in Spain, the Basque Government organized registration lists for the evacuation of the children. The parents did not know for how long the children would be abroad, but presumably, it would be for a short period - as many of the children reported in their memoirs. Finally, in 21st May 1937, a ship with 4,000 children, 215 teachers and 15 Basque priests left Bilbao in a ship called *Habana*. Three days after, they arrived at Southampton, where they were medically examined and divided into different tents. In most of the cases, they were grouped with their siblings and according to their gender and to their parent's political affiliations. Bell refers to "three separate groups of tents: Basque Nationalist; Socialist; Communist and Anarchist" (63). This division caused problems between the children and, in many cases, was not accurate.

The redistribution to their definitive accommodations was heterogeneous: some were sent to foster homes where they were adopted, others to colonies in charge of "señoritas" and English professionals, a few of them to orphanages, and the rest to Catholic schools. Influential families or schools voluntarily left some of the properties where the colonies were established, and the majority of them consisted on large buildings with extensive outdoor sites – although others consisted on bleak wooden huts or even on a set of tents (Bell 70-71). Below, it will be explained how these different experiences influenced the children and how this redistribution is synonym of diverse levels of education. The time of exile also varies greatly depending on the individual. Most of the children went back home at the end of the Spanish Civil War or even

before. As Maria del Carmen de Andrés reports in her memoirs: "(b)y 1939, many of the children have returned to Spain, their parents having ask for them" (Benjamin 11). These requests were processed by international bodies' networks, which facilitated information about the children's location to their parents, who, in many cases, were exiled themselves. However, sometimes the returning requests were false and made up by Franco's regime, as having those children exiled could cast a negative light on the regime. Some children found their parents imprisoned or killed at their return to Spain. For instance, Maria del Carmen Antolín describes her brother arrival to Spain as follows: "When he did get home, he sent word to Carmen and to Miss Picken that we were not to go back. Mamá was in hospital and Papá was in prison and we had no home" (Benjamin 17). A number of children (400 according to Basque Children Association) remained in England and lived the World War II in the country, and some of them stayed for their whole lives.

GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE MEMOIRS

Previously on this work, it has been mentioned how new structuralist approaches have modified the way in which the analysis of discourse has been carried. These theories have also deconstructed the dichotomies of oral/written and history/History (Colmeiro 20). This has led to a growing field with great relevance in the study of war events: the oral history. According to Shopes,

“(o)ral History”(...) is used to refer to formal, rehearsed accounts of the past presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to informal conversations about “the old days” among family members, neighbours, or co-workers; to printed compilations of stories told about past times and present experiences; and to recorded interviews with individuals deemed to have an important story to tell (1).

Therefore, it is not surprising that *Recuerdos: The Basque Children Refugees in Great Britain* includes both oral and written records. The oral sources, those which have been transcribed, are multiple and varied, and they can be shaped in Shope’s “taxonomy”. Firstly, all of them may be considered “sanctioned” tellers during the first decades of Spanish democracy because of the social amnesia in the media. Secondly, some are retold accounts by family members; others contrast past and present experiences; and some are recorded interviews with the children. Many of the testimonies that have been written rather than transcribed also include oral elements. Some are “reports” or “discourses” widely repeated in commemorations of the evacuation. For instance, Josefina Antolín mimics her discourse in both Benjamin’s work and in *To Say Goodbye*, repeating the same thematic elements - like the resemblance of Stoneham to an Indian camp. Except for previously mentioned examples, as family member’s retellings, most of the accounts are collected in first person singular. The autobiographic component of these testimonies presents consequences that have influenced positively the popularity of these accounts.

El reflejo de la Historia a través de la memoria de sus protagonistas es una fórmula que funciona en las producciones más recientes, donde los relatos en primera persona consiguen una identificación colectiva y llegan a un amplio número de espectadores (Jerez & Sánchez 300).

The "media event" of war memories has "stimulated cultural production of all kinds" (13 Asphalt, Dawson, & Roper) - for instance, filmic productions like *To Say Goodbye*. The change of perspective in the narration of events provokes subjectivity. Consequently, even if these testimonies have historical relevance and provide useful information, they must be studied sceptically: taking into account the factual events and comparing the testimonies between them.

Some aspects of the study of the "memory" according to psychological and sociological approaches must be considered when examining the accounts. Firstly, the memoirs are set in a distant past, which may have influenced the perception of the children (most of whom were octogenarians when compiling the narratives). At the same time, Pennebaker and Banasik claim that the memories which have been acquired between 11 and 20 years old and which provoked emotional reactions are better remembered, as they highly influenced the shaping of individual identity (15). Therefore, the memories will reflect emotionally relevant experiences and aspects about the children's personal identity. Secondly, it is essential to note that the testimonies are framed within a relevant historical background (that is to say, the Spanish Civil War), and that sometimes they are even contextualized in a specific historical event (like the fall of Bilbao). These retrospections are known as "flashbulb memories", which mix personal experiences and history (Pennebaker and Banasik, 4). The children do not focus their attention in the circumstances or consequences that these events had historically, at least literally. They rather narrate their own feelings and experiences derived from them. At the same time, the children introduce historical references, such as exact dates. Such specific information is not likely to have remained in the children's memory, so it must have been consulted afterwards. This suggests that the children have noted the historical importance that these episodes took on afterwards. At the same time, it implies that the memory shaping of these events occurred long after they took place - a recurrent practice according to Neisser (Pennebaker and Banasik 5). Having into account that flashbulb memories "allow individuals to place themselves in the historical context" and "to include themselves in the event" (Pennebaker and Banasik 5), it may be concluded that, by using these retrospections, the children are stating themselves as active participants in and carriers of the history. This promotes the study of their figure. Finally, it is obvious that the children have developed a collective

memory shaping. This has influenced individual reports in several ways. Structurally, most of the narratives follow a similar pattern²: they usually start with the departure from Bilbao, continue with the life at the camp, and finalize describing the children's life at the colonies. Few examples have been found out of this seemingly common composition and only one that does not mention any of these elements (Benjamin 299-307). Interestingly enough, that structure is constrained to the period of time in which the children shared a common experience, suggesting that individual memory has been shaped according to the needs of the collective. Thematic and referential repetitions also appear along the reports. These reiterations are of diverse natures. For instance, some are just made up of one expression or quote. "Only for three months" (referring to the idea that the children were leaving Spain only for a short period) is extensively repeated throughout the memoirs, as Sabín has noted (199). Another example of these repetitions in Benjamin's compilation are the references to the English white bread, by which the children were amazed or which they retained to get it back to Spain. According to Sabín, these repetitions are not coincidental, as they are promoted by the group to reinforced their collective identity.

(T)he repetitions of a number of routines and discourses (...) frame the subject's thinking so that they do not or, moreover, cannot get out of it unless they dare risk being excluded from the group. Individuals become enskilled and accustomed to these repetitions to the extent that they internalise and naturalise them (154).

It is impossible to set the reasons underlying the selection of those specific themes, although there are some elements that can shed light into the question. Going back to the example of the white bread, it is possible to point towards a likely source of inspiration. Examining the press from that time, several examples addressing the fixation of the children with white bread are found. Interestingly enough, these examples incorporate the same components appearing on the testimonies: the obsession

² This concept is related to "mythologization". This process creates a collective discourse by the use of "myths." These are "an invention of the past, often with an idealized or romanticized version of that past" (qtd. in Sabín 22). According to Sabín, some of these "myths" are the narratives of the trip to Stoneham or the idyllic childhood before the evacuation (199- 200). During the reading of the memories, this practice has been noted not only thematically, but also in the use of literary devices. For instance, one of the girls describes the trip to Southampton as follows, "Just a few days later there bust upon us the hell that would turn not just Spain but the whole world into a huge cauldron of fire (...) I was met with a vision of Dante's Inferno" (Benjamin 26).

with bread, the difference between Spanish black bread and English white one, and the conservation of bread for days.

For months their chief diet had been black bread, and when white bread and other foodstuffs were taken out to them (...) the children clamoured round. SAVING THE BREAD. Many of them saved small pieces of bread in their pockets. "They have been used to starvation diet for so long that they have learned not to waste a single crumb" ("4,000 Children" 7).

Similar passages addressing to the vulnerability of the Basque children are present in the English Press³ and have evolved into a common discourse by the children. According to Sabín, this is a "victimhood" discourse, which strengthens the collective discourse. Back to the point, this example suggests that the children probably turned to previously recorded experiences to gain accuracy and consistency. As the memoirs are set in a distant past, this avoids their testimonies to be branded as imprecise and allows them to achieve historical relevance. However, not all the thematic repetitions follow this process. The repetition of an event, as stated before, may have its roots in the emotional importance it had for the children. This, as it is going to be discussed, is the case of the education and the question of identity.

³ One of these examples is the constant repetition in the newspapers of the fear to English airplanes which the children thought to be Franco's.

EDUCATION IN THE MEMOIRS

The question of education is a recurrent theme that, in some way or another, appears in nearly every account compiled in Benjamin's work. Some authors, as Legarreta and Bell, have researched the field following different approaches. However, no bibliography has been found examining the material provided by Benjamin in relation with education. The analysis of firsthand reports will provide a broad understanding not only of how the instruction was carried out and organized, but also of which aspects were better remembered by the children. Three important characteristics make the study of the education especially interesting. Firstly, the education has massively influenced the children's identities and lives, to the point that it even had an impact in their descendants⁴. Secondly, the education of the children was established under genuine circumstances. It must be understood not only as an unlike period of instruction in the children's lives, but also as an intercultural experience in which two national influences co-existed. Finally, the education was the result of urgent circumstances. The children were evacuated rapidly, so no educational plan was followed. The examination of these reports will shed light on the diversity and possibilities in the children's learning. The analysis of the memoirs will determine how the education was supplied and will establish a basis for the latter study of the identity.

To begin with, it is important to look at the children's stay at Stoneham camp. Taking into account that the essential objective at their arrival was to meet their basic needs and that the camp was "not the triumph of organisation" (qtd. in Bell 61), it is not surprising not to find any testimony mentioning academic lessons at such during this period. However, it was necessary to provide the children with some instructive activities because the huge number of them made impossible a constant supervision. The urgent need at the time was, therefore, to organize practical activities for the correct running of the camp rather than instruct the children academically. The presence of Boys Scout and Guide Girls helped in this purpose. As José María Armoleada reports, they became "good Spanish boy scouts", having "competitions for the best-kept tent" and "elections for the tent leader" (Benjamin 20). Bittor Azkunaga remembers that "the

⁴ Susana Sabín-Fernández is the daughter of Basque refugees. Moreover, although Natalia Benjamin is not related to any of the refugees, she became interested in the topic because of her mother, who was assistant in one of the colonies.

boy scouts (...) were in charge of keeping order and the smooth running of the site, (and) were very helpful" (Benjamin 25). The elder children seem to have had more responsibilities. A good example of the unlike role of elder children is found in Fausto Benito's testimony: "Bautista was the older of us. Being 14 or 15 years old he was in charge of the tent, organising and telling us what to do about cleaning it and keeping it in good order" (Benjamin 34). The activities were not only oriented at a "tent" level, but the children carried tasks for the whole camp. For instance, one of the children reported that "you could see in the middle of the camp girls washing their brothers and sister clothes and hanging them out in the middle of the sun" (Benjamin 61).

At best, academic lessons at such started after the children's redistribution to more permanent housing. As previously mentioned, the government did not get involved in the evacuation, so the education was supplied differently according to the place the children were sent to, which resulted in heterogeneous levels of instruction. In addition, many of the children were changed of institution several times, affecting their learning hugely as no constant educational plan was followed. The analysis of education in the colonies is going to be discussed according to the following division: housing at Catholic schools, housing at foster homes, and housing at secular colonies. Before continuing, it is interesting to take a glance at the patterns of redistribution subtly appearing in the testimonies. Firstly, it seems that age and gender were weighed: the girls were frequently sent to more stable accommodations and younger children to foster homes. Although Catholic schools did always take into account the gender, most of the colonies did not separate girls and boys. In addition, the initial division following political concerns at the camp seems to have persisted during the redistribution. Considering the religious persecution perpetrated by part of the Republican side in Spain, it is natural to expect that English Catholic schools were more likely to admit Nationalist children at their accommodations.

The references to Catholic schools are less numerous than the ones describing other accommodations, and only three examples have been found in Benjamin's compilations. The most relevant point about these accommodations is the fact that the children attended lessons with other "English pupils," something that did not occur in other colonies (Benjamin 25). This would facilitate the language acquisition and the

adaptation. However, the accounts suggest a partial isolation from the rest of the English pupils. One of the Basque children described how one nun had to pay special attention to "the group of Spanish boys" (Benjamin 25). Sometimes the children were as well in contact with Spanish individuals, receiving spiritual direction from "Spanish priests" (Benjamin 25). Orphans were also sent to Catholic schools, and the only instance found describes the experience as bad, mentioning constant punishments and a cold treatment (Benjamin 11).

Another option was the fosterage, in which the children lived with an English family. Many important families at the time participated in this plan, as for instance the Cadburys, the Marmites, or the Jaegers. In most of the cases, the children were educated as other members of the family, having the opportunity to attend private schools. The fostered children did not only have lessons with native speakers, but, as previously mentioned, were younger, which sped up their language acquisition. A few accounts describe fostered children not receiving proper school lessons and being badly treated - like "servants" as one of them says (Benjamin 41). It seems that the Basque Children's Committee, created for the supervision and organization of the children, was really attentive to their situation, and those with problems were rapidly sent to other colonies or houses. The fosterage must not be confused with what the children called adoption, in which some families got economically involved in their education. As Carmen Learra points out, "they didn't really adopt us, but they paid for our clothes, for school, etc" (Benjamin 58). In this model the children continued living in secular colonies with the rest of the exiles. This situation allowed some of them to continue with their education, attending schools or academies, or learning a job. However, most of them - even if fostered or adopted - started working for their maintenance at the age of fourteen. As one of the children reports: "(n)ow I was 14, I had to go out to work" (Benjamin 34). Therefore, even if the fostered children were educated in an excellent environment and even if some showed outstanding results, most of the children ended up working without achieving upper levels of education. For instance, Mari Carmen de Andrés was fostered by a family and attended a school where she "was top of the class"; "at 14 Maria left school, her English teacher pleased by her progress. Not only was she top of her class, but also of the school" (Benjamin 12).

Secular colonies were the most common institutions to which the children were sent. Normally, they were in charge of "señoritas"⁵ and other English assistants. They did not only work as teachers, but they also carried tasks in order to maintain the running of the colonies - such as cooking or cleaning. A model of education in this kind of institutions is provided by the report of Eric Hawking, who was an English teacher at Pampisford Rectory (Benjamin 80). Before going in detail into his report, it is worth mentioning that this particular plan was structured by societies and clubs belonging to the University of Cambridge. This level of organization and scholarship is not expected in other colonies where the children were not even supervised properly - as Bittor Azkunaga describes (Benjamin, 26). However, there are characteristics that are echoed in other testimonies, and therefore can be considered common to most of the colonies. Hawking described an schedule divided in two periods: the first one taking place during the morning, and the second one during the afternoon. The first period was shorter for the elder children, who realized housework. Several resemblances had been found out among the memoirs. Moreover, some of the elder children seemed to have skipped classes in order to be in charge of some indispensable tasks in the colonies, as the following example suggests: "(t)hey had an English cook (...) and she too had to leave (...). So Mauri and another girl had to take over the cooking, (...) a job they were not all used to" (Benjamin 14). Back to Cambridge's model, the morning was divided into two lessons, with a break of half-hour in-between dedicated to physical training. Other children have described regular physical exercises and colonies holding big gyms and sport zones. For instance, Eduardo López Sanz, when describing his life at Guildford colony, reports:

We would get up at eight every morning. If it was fine, the first thing we did was to go for a walk on the outskirts of the town. If it was rainy, we'd do some gym in the colony. (...) In the afternoon we'd go for a walk in the town or stay playing in the garden, football, or cycling and many other games [sic] (Benjamin 91).

Although exercise is always an essential part of education, "the committee had agreed from the outset that physical training should have an important place" (Benjamin 80). Although it is impossible to determine the reasons for this decision, it may be suggested that the committee, aware of the difficulties in Spain, wanted to keep the children fit for

⁵ These were Spanish teachers who travelled with the children and helped in their maintenance and education.

potential conflicts and warfare. Back to the schedule's description, the rest of the morning was dedicated to reading and writing lessons for the younger students and history and geography lessons for the elder ones. The most interesting point is that the lessons were taught in Spanish, producing an unbalanced situation between the children at secular colonies and those having attended Catholic or private schools. According to Hawking, it was thought to be essential for the children to learn at least a "rudimentary" basis of Spanish language and culture (Benjamin 80). In addition, they were supposed to stay in England only for a short period – only for three months or even “for a month” (Benjamin, 269). After their resettlement from Stoneham, many of the children did participate in English lessons although late and, in many cases, inadequately. María Teresa Grijalba, when describing the instruction received, states: "(o)nce a week we had a German refugee, called Mrs Truman, who came, in theory to teach us English, but she didn't speak it well herself and we couldn't understand her" (Benjamin 77). Others did not receive this education even if attending to state schools as José María Armolea reports (Benjamin 19). There are several examples where the children learnt English on their own or with the help of no professional people. For instance, Grijalba tried to solve the problem deriving from bad English lessons by her own:

I decided to learn English and read whatever magazines or books came to hand. I tried translating them into Spanish. I set myself the task of learning ten words each day. Eventually I became able to write, read and speak English well (Benjamin 77).

Another girl, Benedicta González, describes her first experience of language acquisition by mentioning the help received by a woman who regularly visited her: "She taught me my first words in English, like bread, milk, coffee, thank you, please, and a few other things" (Benjamin 269). As it is going to be discussed, the late acquisition of English would have a negative influence in the children. Hawking's description continues depicting the second period, taking place during the afternoon. In it, the children worked on manual and artistic activities. The depictions of artistic tasks are really recurrent in the accounts. For instance, Rafael Flores describes his teacher fixation with art: "Tom taught us handicrafts, and took us by car to evening classes in art, woodwork, and cabinet making" (Benjamin 62); also, Alfonso Ruiz affectively remembers his teacher: "Mr. Nicholson showed us the potential of colour, how to mix colours and especially how colours depend on light" (Benjamin 145). The artistic oriented lessons did not only

deal with painting and handcraft, but also with music and dances. It is characteristic the fact that these were focused on Spanish and, especially, Basque folklore. The lessons lead by Hawking would use *El Folklore de la Escuela* (Benjamin 80), and other teachers would develop the *Songs of the Basque Children* (Benjamin 63). Pablo Valtierra also mentions the learning of different traditional music of a wide geographical extension: "(w)e would do flamenco dances and we would sing. I remembered singing *Asturias patria querida* and the famous *Los cuatro muleros* by Garcia Lorca" (Benjamin 166). In this case, the intentioned focus on artistic skills was a plan to help the children in their own maintenance. With the outbreak of World War II, economical help decreased and private funding was then centred in the contemporary conflict. In view of this situation, it was essential for the children to help in their own support. Organizations helping the children arranged different cultural shows where the children would act, dance, or play traditional Spanish pieces. Although there are numerous references to this respect, the following one provided by Pilar Magdaleno displays a great variety of activities:

In order to help pay for our upkeep we would hold sales. The girls would embroider and knit and the boys would make wicker baskets. We also held concerts. (...) We made flamenco dresses for the concerts and would dance and sing traditional songs. We were very imaginative and would make bullfighter outfits and even stage mock bullfights. We would also pick daffodils or snowdrops and sell them to the audience to make extra money. (Benjamin 92-93)

In addition to all these supervised and scheduled activities, the children received additional instruction from non-professional English citizens who wanted to help in their cause. These people regularly visited the children in order to take them to cultural events such as concerts, theatre performances, or cinema projections. These activities were promoted by the Foster Parents' Scheme for Spanish Children and the Basque Children Committee.

Finally, even if the children present a discourse of gratitude towards England over the memoirs, as noted by Sabín (152), it varies if dealing with education. There is a recurrency in the fact that the English Government did not participate in the supervision of the children, something that influenced massively their education. As Maria Teresa Grijalba states:

I feel grateful to England for the warm and considerate welcome that her people extended to us. (...) We were not provided for directly by the British government but by popular subscription and voluntary gifts from English friends. (...) We didn't go to English schools because they didn't allow it (Benjamin 77).

Some of the children link this feeling with the idea that the education received in Spain before the war was better than that received in England. As Benedicta González explains:

I have to say in conclusion that I very much appreciated the people of Scotland, their courtesy, warmth and humanity, which I have never forgotten and which have left their mark on me - for the good. The only negative thing, and I blame this on the war, was the three years education that I missed and never caught up with (Benjamin 76).

Therefore, there are signs of resentment towards the education provided in England, even if it is masked by a discourse of gratitude.

From the provided information, four general and central ideas are extracted. Firstly, the elder children were receiving less instruction than the younger ones. The fact that they had to start working at the age of fourteen resulted in a shorter education in an English environment, which may have complicated their adaptation to England. The younger children, on the other hand, acquired the language more easily, not only because of their age, but also because they were often fostered in English environments. However, as I would later discuss, this produced bigger problems when getting back to Spain. Secondly, the language acquisition was late and, in many cases, self-taught. This may have had a negative impact in the children, especially for those staying for a longer period. At the same time, it produced a feeling of resentment towards British Government. Thirdly, the education of the children was planned not only taking into account academic reasons, but also the Basque Children's Committee's interests - which were mainly to maintain the children economically and to prepare them for potential conflicts. Finally, the home culturally oriented education put an emphasis in their Spanish identity, which has influenced highly their identity, as it is going to be discussed.

THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY: SPANISH AND ENGLISH SELVES

In order to delve into the question of identity and its reflection in the memoirs, it is essential to look at the children's condition as exiles.

An exile is a person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution or for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last a lifetime), hoping to return to his fatherland when circumstances permit - but unable or unwilling to do so as long as the factors that made him an exile persist (qtd. in Berg 3).

Therefore, the Basque children: 1) were connected to their home country to which they thought they would return shortly, 2) but had to adapt themselves to a new country in which they would have to stay for an undefined period. The interconnection to different nations, in this case to Spain and to England, is part of a sociological process known as transnationalism. In it "migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders. Immigrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political - that span borders" (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanto ix). As it is going to be discussed in this section, the children did participate in cross-borders relations in both Spain and England, which facilitates the development of new ways of identity. Sabín has extensively discussed this question in her work, in which she depicts the coexistence of multiple identities in the children's discourse - like the Basque, the English, and the Spanish selves. These also interact with others, like the Scottish -as many of them lived in Scotland during their adulthood. Although some of Sabín's ideas are going to be used in this section, new approaches are going to be applied to the topic. The aim is to reach a broad understanding of the interaction between the Spanish and the English identities specifically and of how these are reflected in the children's discourse. To do so, the processes and cross-national relationships by which these identities were developed are going to be examined.

The starting point regarding national identity was the same for all the children and did not present a struggle - although political issues may have influenced them in

some way. Even if the children were young when arriving at Southampton, a strong awareness of their Spanish identity is evident over the accounts. The most representative narrative, which proves this point and which is extensively repeated through the memoirs, is the "episode" of the fall of Bilbao in 1937. After seven days of battle, the insurgents entered and captured the city Bilbao on 16 June, tipping the balance in favour of the Nationalist army. According to the accounts, this event was communicated to the children through the loudspeakers of the camp. The reactions of the children are depicted similarly in all the examples, and three different elements are repeated in most of them: 1) the despair of the children because of the announcement, 2) an explanation about the significance of Bilbao for them, 3) the children running from the camp. Firstly, it is clear that the children have developed a collective narrative around the event because of the structural repetitions and the constant recalling of the fall. At the same time, they have developed a collective sense of trauma around it, which is proved by the recurrence of the first point. Secondly, the necessity to establish the significance of Bilbao may be understood as the necessity to proclaim themselves as Spanish, but not only to a national extent. Bilbao is understood as the fallen home, the factual world they knew: "For us Spain was Bilbao, the world was Bilbao. Our neighbourhood, our school, our family, our whole life was Bilbao. That's where our parents were" (Benjamin 27). That is to say, that the children are reinforcing their conditions as exiles who could not return to their home/country, highlighting their "victimhood discourse". Finally, the descriptions of children destroying things and running from the camp are in some cases justified as attempts to "board a ship to find our parents and to fight the rebels" (Benjamin 20). The sensitive reaction to this fall demonstrates not only the children's Spanish consciousness, but also an attentive awareness about the Spanish Civil War and the political implications of this conflict. This, even if dealing with young children, is likely to appear in exile individuals whose expatriation was founded in political issues. The fall of Bilbao is not the only episode with political references: the children continuously positioned themselves in anti-fascist attitudes and refer to themselves as "Republicans" (Benjamin 21). As one of the children report: "(a)t the Hogar, we kept our thing for Spain, for the Republican cause, alive. We kept our illusions alive" (Bell 201). Political issues taking place at England at the time may have strengthened this behaviour towards Francoism. Even before the end

of the Spanish Civil War, "questions were asked in Parliament about the "red" boys and many MPs wanted to send (them) back to Spain" (Benjamin 21). At the same time, the press spread the propaganda that all the children were the children of reds, as noted in some reports (Benjamin 123). Facing the need to defend themselves not only against the Spanish regime but also against a foreign hostile environment, they repeatedly and proudly proclaimed themselves politically. This idea must be understood in relation with a sense of pride out of political issues. By reading the accounts, it is clear that the children wanted to claim themselves as Spanish and to distinguish themselves from the rest of England. As Celia Elduque claimed, they used their "Spanish Pride" to fight the "English Pride" (Benjamin 51). Her son told how "the children would go to the playgrounds with swings and slides, which they would take all over to the extent that there would be no longer space for the English children to play" (Benjamin 51). In addition, when "they were shown inventions the British people believed were unheard of in Spain", they replied with "genuine pride" (Benjamin 51). Reactions of trauma, as seen in the narrative of the fall, and pride, sometimes in relation with political concerns, are normal responses to a foreign environment and denote national identity as it "can hardly be imagined without the feelings of trauma and pride that arise from external relations"(Dijink 11).

But why did the children develop that sense of pride? To understand this concept it is essential to look at the concept of "other."

The binary of self and other (...) claim(s), in short, that the existence of an other, a not-self, allows the possibility or recognition of a self. In other words: *I see you. I do not control your body or hear your thoughts. You are separate. You are not me. Therefore, I am me.* (Schalk197. Italics in the original)

That is to say, that the concept of our own self is constructed according to the concept of what that self is not, the so-called other. At a basic level, the notions of self and other are developed at an early stage of language acquisition, in which infants recognize themselves in distinction to other entities, and verbalize this recognition by using their own name and personal pronouns (qtd. in Budwig 162). This concept is, nevertheless, more complex than that, especially when the theory is applied to other disciplines. In the study of the Basque Children, the other and the self must be understood at a sociological level, in which the whole society operates

within this dichotomy. The self is not longer an individual but an "us", a group of individuals sharing the social identities in power within that society or group. The other is, then, the rest of identities standing in an alien position with respect to the "us". As W.E.B. Du Bois describes in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "marginalized peoples" belonging to a certain ethnic group have developed a double-consciousness: on the one hand, they are the other within the global of society; on the other hand, they are also the "us" of their own ethnic group, in which the popular social identities are interpreted as the other (qtd. in Schalk 199). With respect to the Basque Children, Sabín has discussed that they have developed a discourse of "us", in which the children stand as a collective entity in contrast with the other, which is composed by the rest of society - that is England. The most obvious evidence of the acquisition of these concepts by the children is the grammatical structure of their discourse: the dichotomy we / they (Sabín 139). In Benjamin's compilation, these elements become evident in many passages, which even if dealing with individual reports, are written in second person plural: "Our life in Basque House continued happily, with our lessons, our dancing..." (Benjamin 35). Several factors facilitated the children's own conception as other. The late acquisition of English language, to which this work has been previously referred, carried a period of maladjustment and, what is more characteristic, a period of alienation. The children usually had to suffer traumatic experiences because of their inability to communicate. For instance, Juanita describes one of her first struggles in England in relation with her lack of knowledge of English: "(o)ne of the girls took (my teddy bear) and threw him over the wall outside. My sister tried to get him back, but the English people on the other side of the wall couldn't understand us. I was devastated" (Benjamin 16). In addition, the children were socially relegated to involve themselves only with Spanish speakers. Significantly, Juanita describes as one of her best experiences in England her visits to Southampton's dock, where she could actually speak Spanish with the sailors, while, at the same time, she emphasizes her inability to speak English (Benjamin 17). There are many examples along the memoirs in which the children depict activities with Spanish speakers, but they rarely report situations interacting with people not speaking their language - at least, at an early stage in their exile. This situation was, without question, the result of the Spanish oriented education. However, it seems that this isolation was also caused by the institutions in charge, which avoided the interaction between the

Basque Children and other native people, except for those adopting and teaching the children:

If I have one criticism, it is that I think we were too isolated from the inhabitants of Langham. We did not know the younger people, which would have allowed us to have English friends, and we would have chatted with them, and improved our English (Benjamin 143).

The few interactions described with native children are the depictions of football matches, in which the teams were always arranged according to their nationality - so a deep interaction is not expected to have taken place. The children given the opportunity to implicate themselves with other English inhabitants -that is the fostered children- also show an awareness of themselves as "foreigners":

(T)hey were able to keep up their Spanish when they were alone. Espe always insisted that they continued in English if anyone was near them and so the lift of the valleys began to enter their voices and they knew that their "foreignness" could only be detected with difficulty (Benjamin 12).

Interestingly enough, the otherness is in this case specifically linked to the use of language. As Sabín notes, the children were soon aware that by using English they would be able to abandon their position as others (232). At the same time, the double-consciousness introduced by du Bois is present in the children's language acquisition. In this specific context, the other is sometimes linked to the English language, instead of connected to the Spanish one. In the following example, there are several elements to remark: "Tom Whiston attempted to teach us English (...) and wrote the word: "enough" on the board, pronouncing it "inuff". We wanted to say an "eno" (Benjamin 63). This passage does not only express the alien feeling that the English language produced in the children, but also reinforces the group belonging through the use of second person plural, collectivizing the struggling. Facing the confusion with a new language, the children also use the third person plural to position the English native speakers as something alien or foreign for the children as Spanish individuals. For instance, in the following example, the women in charge of Mari Carmen are not referred to by the use of a noun or their names. The third person plural reinforces the sense of strangeness. Again, this passage is a result of the girl's lack of linguistic understanding: "(t)hen they had given Mari Carmen some liquid that they called tea" (Benjamin 10). All the discourse of self/other reinforces their Spanish identity, as the

alienation from a society strengthens the feeling of belonging to another. At the same time, the children tried to move from the otherness to an outstanding position by adopting a proud discourse. That is why they overreact to English attitudes.

However, the feelings about Spain seem to be contradictory. A deeper analysis of the fall of Bilbao sheds light on its tragic consequences. After this episode, the situation of most of the families became extremely difficult. In many cases, the communication between these children and their parents, which had been established through letters, broke off. There are numerous examples addressing this problem. For example, Benjamin transcribed the life of Mauri Antolín, in which she relates: "She didn't have news from her parents for years"(Benjamin 15). In addition, many of the children lost their parents. For instance, Carlo Asensio states: "My mother was a victim of Franco's bombers in Erandio" (Benjamin 23). These situations started to produce a sense of abandonment and loss in the children (Sabín 215). In addition to Bilbao's situation, the political circumstances in Spain complicated their condition as exiles. During the war, they received little help from the Basque Government and, after the war, they could not travel or come back to Spain because of Franco's regime. Herminio Martínez reports that it was not until about 1960 that "the Spanish government offered exiles (...) an *indulto*. This allowed (them) to return to Spain for a period of not more than four weeks" so "(they) would not be subject to the three years of military service in Franco's army" (Benjamin 110). In this situation, England offered an alternative - and started to be contemplated as a potential home. As Maria del Carmen Andrés explains: "Franco could not whisk us away whilst (having) an English passport" (Benjamin 14). However, some of the exiles did not receive the British citizenship- as for instance Herminio-, so many children developed a sense of non-belonging, either to Spain or to England.⁶ As one of the children described in relation with his return to Spain in *To Say Goodbye*, they were alien in both countries (01:03). However, the children began to adapt themselves to the English manners and way of living.

⁶ Sabín has noted how the children felt foreign in both countries (218-219). The traditional dichotomization of national identity - that is to say, the election of a single national identity - had led to the feeling of mutilation. The children note that there is something missing both if they state themselves as Spanish or English.

The processes of adaptation are of diverse kind. For instance, at a physiological level there are signs of adaptation regarding food, as also noted by Sabín (228). There are several examples where the children account for a gradual change in their tolerance to English food. For instance, Juanita mentions how at the very beginning she "just couldn't eat" and, after a time, how she started "eating the now not so strange food" (Benjamin 16). Moreover, after an initial period of social and linguistic struggle, the children were able to initiate an adaptation. This involved the development of multiple relationships operating at the level of home country and host country - that is at a transnational level. Again, the language can draw some general lines to understand the dimensions of this adaptation. After some time, most of the children developed English skills. However, its acquisition took place under special circumstances: "(t)he referents by which people understand themselves change dramatically when they are separated from networks of family, friends, work, and nationality" (Berg 8). From this statement, it can be suggested that, under circumstances of exile, individuals may develop two differentiated referential dimensions. In this case, the first one exclusively belonged to a domestic context, that is, to a Spanish background. This linguistic group incorporated traditional, familial, or cultural referents. As these referents could not be replaced in the new country, the children would not incorporate new forms for them. The second dimension would work similarly, but it would only include referents happening in English contexts. The referents working equally in both languages would not be problematic. This theory can be exemplified by examining other type of transnational relationship: the familial and social bonds. For instance, José Maria Armolea, who writes in English, uses the term "señoritas" referring to the Spanish teachers accompanying the children during their trip, and "teachers" when talking about professionals met afterwards -even if they were Spanish too (Benjamin 21). Therefore, the children linguistically distinguish both referential dimensions, and they do so chronologically and geographically: the same referent would vary in form depending on when and where they were exposed to it. More significant for the study of the familial connections in England and Spain is the way the children refer to their parents. Carmen and Josefina Antolín, as many others, named affectionately their foster parents with English nicknames as "Dad", whereas their biological parents continued to be "Papá and Mamá" (Benjamin 19). With this example, the cross-national relationships did not only

extend to a linguistic level, but also to a familial one, which denotes signs of adaptation -as pointed out by Sabín (228-230). Linguistically, it is also possible to note the accentuation of these bonds as time passed. One of the transcriptions shows how Maria was aware of the development in her relationship with her foster mother, and how time had influenced and strengthened her social bonds in England. Her fostered mother was primarily called Mary, but after a time she was addressed as Mam: "When Mary (now called "Mam" by Maria) (...) "(13). At the same time, the children were usually the object of these new transnational relationships. That is, that they did not only have to develop a way of dealing with new relationships, but had also to accept the way they were treated by those. For instance, they had to adopt new nicknames and ways of designation. Newspapers and public opinion referred to them as Basque Children, which would influence in their collective identity. In their new domestic environment, they would be called by their name, even if in Spain their family probably addressed them with affective nicknames. More specific examples addressing this issue appear in the memoirs. For instance, Maria del Carmen de Andrés was called "Maria" by her foster family, although she is addressed as Mari Carmen along the memoirs, which are transcribed by her husband (Benjamin 12). As previously cited, the use of one's own name is essential when alluding to the self and the identity. As Piaget states:

Infants are aware of their names as part of their "selves" from as early age of one year or two. (...) Children learn to speak their names before they learn to say "I", and they need their names in order to refer to themselves (qtd in Bechar-Israeli 1975).

Therefore, the multiple ways to refer to the children are not only a reflection of the numerous transnational relationships the children were object of, but also give rise to the cohabitation of multiple identities or understandings of the self. All these processes lead to the emergence of an English identity.

The cohabitation of an English identity and a Spanish one is evidently illustrated by the act of determining the permanent place of residence. Especially after the Spanish Civil War, English powers had an urge to centre their strength in the new conflicts arising in Europe. In addition, there was a special interest from the Spanish regime to get back the Spanish exiled children, and the children's parents were constantly claiming for the children to return. Two different experiences stemmed from these

circumstances. The first one affected most of the children, although in unlikely ways: the children were asked to return to Spain. Although most of the reports do not provide a lot of information on this respect, it is interesting how the few descriptions dealing with the children's feelings about returning are mainly negative. Some of them reflect reluctance to return, although it is expressed through an external agent: "the English ladies wanted me to stay, they even offered my parents a job in England" (Benjamin 59); "Mr and Mrs Berry did not want to be separated from me" (Benjamin 56). Others directly express their sorrow for this decision: "Why did we come back?" (Benjamin 60); "her initial feeling was one of sadness at the thought that they were coming home having lost the war" (Benjamin 52). These examples exhibit the tensions between what they considered "home" and the transnational relationships established in England. To this respect, it is as well meaningful the numerous illustrations alluding to a re-adaptation to the Spanish life: that is a break with English connections to reinforce Spanish ones. Probably the most striking example is the story of Teodora Bueno, who at her return to Spain "didn't understand a word (of Spanish) anymore" (Benjamin 41). This situation is a result of her condition as a fostered child, which facilitated the total acquisition of English. The linguistic shift is as well pointed out by some children: "(t)hen, when we returned, when we forgot our English, as nobody spoke it, we only remembered the songs and even those we started forgetting" (Benjamin 60). In addition, there are also some social re-adaptations. The adoption of the English manners, in this case reflected through the utterance of English expressions, was striking in a Spanish context. As Carmen Fernández recounts, and as other children do mention as well, her new unlikely politeness seemed strange for her neighbour, who used to say to her father: "Balbino, these girls have changed a lot, because when they came back from England, how they used to like saying 'Sorry' and 'Thank you'[sic]" (Benjamin 59). Another important domain in which this re-adaptation seems to have influenced the children the most is the personal relationships. Getting back to the example of Teodora, she describes how her fostered mother wrote regularly and how this situation caused the jealousy of her mother: "My mother would say: "She's not your mother. I'm your mother" (Benjamin 41). This example does not only highlight the fact that the children had to habituate to the presence of their parents again, but also shows up hostility. Some of the parents reacted "annoyed" (52) when the children used English expressions and

manners. This situation is even more evident when dealing with families that did not send every child to England. For instance, Herminio Martínez describes her sister as "bitter", "holding against (him) that had had so good '*en Inglaterra*' " (Benjamin 111. Italics in the original). The reaction of the children against these attitudes is normally a reaffirmation of their own suffering during the exile, as the own Herminio expressed with the sentence "(l)ittle did she know". In the same way, Benancio Zorzona asserts in *To Say Goodbye*, that he does not consider himself a lucky person for having avoided hunger in Spain because he was not able to meet his father, his mother and siblings (01:05:49). As a result, the sense of otherness in relation to their native country, to which I have referred before, is reinforced.

The second possibility regarding repatriation was the children's own choice. Some of the children were given the option to get back to Spain or to stay in England. The majority of them chose to stay, especially when older. Even when returning, they expressed an internal conflict between both options. For example, Benedicta González García expresses that

I had two days of mental conflict. On the one hand, I did like (England). In the time I'd been there I had noticed the differences from my own: it had a higher level of education and was more advanced in everything. On the other hand, I remembered my home and parents (...). So I finally decided to return (Benjamin 75).

The children staying in England justify themselves using arguments of diverse nature in order to show loyalty to their country. That is that, even if their decision is to stay in England, they discursively show the place to which they ultimately belong but to which they could not return for several reasons out of their reach. Some of these arguments are political, as Herminio reports: "(w)e could not reconcile ourselves to accepting the Franco regime and returning to what we still consider home" (Benjamin 110); or addressing the issue of adaptation, as Carmén Antolín asserts: "For so many of the children, return to Spain was almost impossible. For some of us, repatriation was possible, but not after World War II. Life as we knew it had changed, we had changed"(Benjamin 19). In any case, the decision to stay did also entail an internal conflict, proving the tensions between both the Spanish and the English identity. Some of the accounts refer to the sense of nostalgia suffered by the children: for instance, referring to Maria del Carmen Andrés, "her husband says the sense of loss is quite often

with her still" (Benjamin 14) and Josefina Antolín asserts that "in (her) heart the little town of Berango will be with (her) always" (Benjamin 9).

It is worth mentioning the fact that both the children staying in England and those returning to Spain developed a collective identity. The most obvious example is the organization of committees and associations. In Spain, *Asociación de Jubilados Evacuados de la Guerra Civil* stands out, and in England, the most active is the *Basque Children of '37 Association* - which is actively working and promoting research on the topic. According to Sabín, the collective identity has been reinforced and developed by some practices. She addresses the public exhibition of personal bonds between the members of the group and to the recurrent commemorations of the events (Sabín 179). However, there are certain aspects prior to the popularity of war commemoration that set the germ for the creation of that collective. Previously, it has been established how these children were grouped and sent to colonies where they had to live together. In addition, they were marginalized from the native population somehow. Therefore, strong social bonds between them are likely to have been developed during this period. In addition, the English press and population were constantly addressing the children collectively, bearing the name of Basque Children. The feeling of group belonging was probably strengthened by the Spanish oriented education, based on traditional and cultural elements. This reinforced the differential elements between the children as Spaniards and the rest of English citizens. At this point, it is appropriate to present the children as an ethnic group in the English context, because ethnic groups are "aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences that distinguish each such discrete culture from all others" (9 Barth). This is supported by Tötölian, who explains that words like refugee, expatriate, exile or ethnic group work in the same semantic domain (qtd. in Sabín 44).

To conclude the analysis of identity, an interview with one of the Basque Children was carried out. Berta Echevarria, who was daughter and niece of "señoritas", provided another view of the exile. She narrates how her life changed because of the war and not because of exile, which was not dramatized during the interview. One of the points which result more interesting about her is the fact that she decided not to participate in any Basque Children's association -even if the work of her aunt was

highly recognized by the Basque refugees. In addition, she does not consider herself a "niña vasca" because her education was not based in this culture: after the war, Basque folklore and language disappeared from the public spheres in Spain. Analyzing her situation, the idea that the sense of "community" was developed in relation with the Basque culture is supported. Moreover, as she has not participated in public commemorations of the war, she has not developed a victimhood discourse (which seems to respond to the Basque Children's common interest). Her special circumstances show how the same experience causes different reactions depending on the individual, even if we normally receive the "collective" version shaped by a group.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was not only to delve into the questions of education and identity with regards to the Basque children and to provide new information to the field, but also to highlight the interrelationships between historical events and personal experiences. These relations have a great importance in the study of history. Even if it is important to focus on the objective narration of events in order to provide the most faithful version of history, it is also interesting to look at the impact that these events had on the people. The example of the Basque Children summarizes the complex relations deriving from a single and simple event. For instance, the lack of involvement by the British Government resulted in a heterogeneous education and in different levels of socialization, as it did not allow the children to attend state schools. At the same time, the children developed feelings of resentment towards the British Government because of this. If this idea is linked with the fact that some of the children did not receive the English citizenship after the war, the result is a sense of no belonging neither to England nor to Spain. The fact that the children did not attend state schools also increased their collective identity because of the isolation they suffered. That is to say that the decision of a foreign government influenced not only the experience of these children, but also their personality and identity.

The study of the memoirs of people participating on what we call history is also important in order to acquire a sense of "reality" about past events. Although the attempt to narrate historical circumstances objectively may be more accurate, oral history introduces its readers into other grounds. For instance, it permits to analyze history in relation with the psychological consequences it produced or to know which events had a greater impact on particular individuals. In this way, history is narrated as it has been experienced. Moreover, oral history allows to incorporate linguistic approaches to the field, which at the same time helps to dig into the relation between memory and discourse. For these reasons, it is essential to support the development of oral history. Although it is important to be aware of the subjectivity and manipulation

that can result from a personal discourse, it can also provide new information to the field and, in this case, a deep understanding of the consequences of the war.

APPENDIX

Interview with Berta Echevarría Rosales (refugee in Colchester 1938-1939)

After the fall of Bilbao, Berta Echevarría Rosales fled from Spain to France with some of her relatives (including her mother, Anita Rosales, and sister). One of her aunts, Celia Echevarría, had travelled to England in the "Habana", becoming the headmistress of Colchester's colony. In 1938, she contacted with Anita in France. As Anita was a teacher, they could go into exile to Colchester with Celia. Berta explains how her situation was different to that experienced by other children: she was only three years old and, because she lived with her mother, the exile was not as traumatic as the war. In 1939, after World War II, Berta and her family returned from exile, leaving behind Celia and another aunt, Berta.

¿Pertenece a algún grupo o asociación de exiliados?

Mira, no. Porque nosotros cuando llegamos, llegamos a Bilbao. Mi madre había estado, por decirlo así, expedientada por estar casada con un republicano y todo eso. Aunque ella había tenido la plaza en propiedad, nosotros no nos pudimos quedar en Vizcaya, nos tuvimos que ir a Guipúzcoa. (...) Luego nos vinimos a Madrid y desde los nueve años he vivido allí, por lo que no he tenido relación. Sé que en Bilbao sí que había unas asociaciones y a mí en alguna ocasión me han llamado. A mi tía Celia le hicieron muchos reconocimientos cuando vino a España y le tenían mucha consideración. Siempre he sentido no formar parte de eso. Pero también en los años estos que ya se empezó a formar la cosa, empezaron a surgir los partidos de ETA... A mí me llamaron en varias ocasiones a casa, pero no... no me incliné por buscarlo tampoco. Porque yo vivo allí desde los nueve años y he hecho el Bachiller y la carrera de Filosofía en Madrid. Aunque he ido mucho a Bilbao, solo era por vacaciones, no a vivir, con lo cual no me he relacionado. Y puede que lo sienta ahora, ¿eh? Si me hubiera gustado.

En cuanto a la cultura vasca, ¿te llegaron a inculcar el folklore y las tradiciones?

Es que es lo que pasa, que ese inculcar la cultura vasca, a mi juicio, era antes, o sea mis tías eran vascas cien por cien. [...] A mí no me pudieron inculcar nada, porque nadie te lo inculcaba. Viviendo en Fuenterrabía, yo era una niña más, mi madre era maestra (...). Entonces, no nos podían inculcar eso. No te lo inculcaban. A nadie se le ocurría. En cambio en Inglaterra sí siguieron inculcando un poco más. Mi tía Berta tuvo mucha relación con todo el Gobierno Vasco en el exilio. Mucho. Pero aquí en España, yo no lo tuve ni en Fuenterrabía donde yo viví, ni en Madrid, ni tampoco cuando veraneaba en Bilbao. Tuvieron que pasar bastantes años para que se volviera a hablar euskera. Desde ese punto de vista no te puedo dar mucha información.

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