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Women’s Exile and Transatlantic Epistolary Ties in the Work of Pilar de Zubiaurre

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Abstract: In this essay, I analyze Pilar de Zubiaurre’s experience of exile by focusing on the articles she published in the magazine Euzko Deya and the letters she wrote and received in Mexico. Among the letters Zubiaurre received, I study those from María Martos de Baeza. My main argument is that for Zubiaurre, writing became a fundamental way to cultivate her transnational contacts and build bridges across the Atlantic. Through her articles, she travels back home in her imagination, while through her letters she connects as directly as possible with her native country. Both kinds of writing have positive consequences for Zubiaurre, by bolstering a sense of emotional security, personal validation, and cultural pride. However, there are also some negative outcomes, such as bigger obstacles to assimilating into the host culture, as well as both frustration and stress, for example when letters are lost or the author cannot fulfill her wish to return home.

Keywords: Basque Country/Pais Vasco, exile/exilio, letters/cartas, María Martos de Baeza, Pilar de Zubiaurre, transnationality/transnacionalidad

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, women’s advances in the public arena during the Second Republic had already started to wane. As a woman who participated in the Spanish intellectual environment, Pilar de Zubiaurre’s life changed forever. Due to their support of the democratic Republican Government, she and her husband, the art critic Ricardo Gutiérrez Abascal—professionally known as “Juan de la Encina”—were forced to leave Spain and endured exile in Mexico for the rest of their lives. The exile Zubiaurre suffered for thirty years caused her name to be forgotten in Francoist Spain, as happened to many other left-wing intellectuals.

Pilar de Zubiaurre (Garai, Spain, 1884–Mexico City, Mexico, 1970) published few writings in her lifetime: two articles promoting the importance of the arts in the Basque nationalist newspaper Bizkaitarra in 1909 and sixteen articles in the magazine Euzko Deya: La voz de los vascos en México between 1944 and 1958. However, she played a critical role in the culture of Spain during the 1920s and 1930s. She participated in the founding and development of the Lyceum Club Femenino, the first female cultural association in Spain, chaired by María de Maeztu. In fact, she held the position of director of the Lyceum’s Literature Section from 1928 until 1932, organizing public presentations by Spanish and foreign intellectuals. Zubiaurre also acted as the long-time manager of her two deaf brothers, Valentín and Ramón de Zubiaurre, famous painters who held exhibitions throughout the world. Moreover, she organized social gatherings, called “Zubiaurre’s Saturdays,” in her brothers’ studio in Madrid. The chief Spanish artists and writers of the first half of the twentieth century attended these gatherings, including Benito Pérez Galdós, the Baroja family, Federico García Lorca, and José Ortega y Gasset.

In this essay, I will analyze Zubiaurre’s experience of exile by focusing on the articles she published in Euzko Deya and the letters she wrote and received while in Mexico. Among the letters Zubiaurre received, I will study those from María Martos de Baeza. Zubiaurre suffered a painful exile and maintained strong transnational ties with her native Basque Country.
My main argument is that she used her writing as a fundamental way to cope with exile and cultivate her transnational contacts. Through her articles, she returns to the past and travels back home in her imagination, while through her letters she connects as directly as possible with her native country and receives current information about relatives and friends. Both kinds of writing have positive consequences for Zubiaurre, by bolstering a sense of emotional security, personal validation, and cultural pride. However, there are also some negative outcomes, such as bigger obstacles to assimilating into the host culture, as well as both frustration and stress, for example when letters are lost or the author cannot fulfill her wish to return home. I also argue that in the Spanish Republican exile, women like Zubiaurre played a fundamental role by keeping alive the memories of the homeland in exile communities and by connecting the Basques/Spaniards in Spain with those abroad.

Zubiaurre’s experience of exile represents a case of transnationalism, a term that Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc define as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (7). Transnational patterns are not a new phenomenon, but rather have a long history (Pedraza 46). Women are considered essential in maintaining transatlantic ties with their homeland. They were most often responsible for writing, sending, and receiving letters, acting as the transmitters of information and news, and they were also in charge of preserving national traditions in exile. Referring specifically to exiled Basque women, Gloria Totoricaguena states that they were “the principal communicators between homeland and host country families, sustaining family and friendship relations through kinship networks and a broad range of social and economic links” (“Shrinking” 294). Such an exchange of information undermines the general conception of estrangement between Spain and the peregrine Spaniards in exile. Furthermore, the connection between the liberals in Spain and the exiles in Spanish America was sustained and vibrant during Franco’s dictatorship.

Zubiaurre’s fluent transatlantic ties exemplify the common perception that women tend to adopt a more relational set of behaviors than do men. Zubiaurre showed during exile a closer attachment to her native land than her husband did. This explains why she decided to return to Spain for eight months in 1951, followed by several annual voyages from 1964 until her death. Zubiaurre also wanted to transmit her cultural pride to her son and grandchildren, and for this reason, she gathered all of them in Garai in 1968 to celebrate her granddaughter’s First Communion. This event illustrates how exiled women pass on their national traditions to subsequent generations.

Most of the exiled women in Mexico were young and married, and they had been housewives in Spain. Once in Mexico, due to the new situation and their family’s economic needs, Spanish women held a variety of jobs, such as sewing, teaching, or working in a family business (Domínguez Prats 85). Their incorporation into the job market meant that they experienced new roles and with it a degree of liberation from patriarchal norms. However, though employed outside the home, women continued to take care of the housework, and in many cases their paid jobs were considered temporary until the economic situation of the family improved. For Zubiaurre, exile brought new opportunities such as working in the office of Dr. Gonzalo Rodríguez Lafora and publishing her work in Euzko Deya. Nevertheless, as soon as the family’s economic situation improved with Juan de la Encina’s teaching position at the National University of Mexico, Zubiaurre stopped working outside the home. As seen in Zubiaurre, women’s exile usually entails both liberation and restriction, since along with more freedom in the new country comes the expectation that women must embody the essence of their transplanted culture and thereby preserve their traditional roles.

Along these lines, in analyzing Zubiaurre’s experience of exile, it is important to understand her status as a member of the bourgeois class. In this regard, women’s experiences of exile, like men’s, are not homogenous; apart from gender, they depend on several factors, including social class. Zubiaurre’s journey to exile as a bourgeois woman differed from that of poor women...
who were arrested and sent to concentration camps after crossing the border into France or imprisoned in Franco’s Spain. She left Spain thanks to Lázaro Cárdenas, president of Mexico, who offered her husband and other Spanish intellectuals positions in the cultural institution La Casa de España, later called El Colegio de México. On her way to exile, Zubiaurre decided to spend nine days in New York, where, accompanied by Zenobia Camprubí and Juan Ramón Jiménez, she visited several sites of interest, such as the Hispanic Society of America and Columbia University.

The Basque Nation Imagined in Exile

Zubiaurre’s close connection to her native land appears clearly in the articles she published in Euzko Deya. Her articles do not belong to only one literary genre, as along with essays, there are short stories, portraits, memoirs, and obituaries. Therefore, in her writings, it is difficult to distinguish between reality, fiction, and autobiography, a frequent tendency in the literature written in exile. The title of Zubiaurre’s section in Euzko Deya, “Evocación,” suggests the nature of the articles. In all of them, the author recalls the landscape, customs, and people she left behind in the Basque Country. In that sense, Zubiaurre’s articles epitomize the exiled literature of Basque nationalism, even though there are no explicit references to politics. In relation to this, Totoricaguena points out that Basque diaspora nationalism generally focuses on Basque culture rather than on political nationalism (“Shrinking” 287).

Zubiaurre’s yearning for her native land in these articles exemplifies what Claudio Guillén calls the “literature of exile” as opposed to the “literature of counter-exile.” For this critic, in the former the author conveys her exile experience in a constant and autobiographical way, as a loss, whereas in the latter, exile allows the author creative freedom and personal enrichment (271). In Edward Said’s view, the exiles who live in agony can be considered as engaging in a “narcissist masochism” or a “fetish of exile” (183). Although Zubiaurre was active in her exile in Mexico, her articles show this egomaniacal side of exile, in which the mourning for the native land takes over her existence. This return to the lost past is a common trend in the works of exiled Spanish writers, even an addiction, according to José Marra-López: “Lo que no han hecho físicamente, volver, lo realizan con la imaginación una y otra vez, mordiendo el fruto prohibido con la agridulce complacencia del toxicómano” (125).

Zubiaurre writes her articles as a means to counteract the sense of loss in exile and to maintain transatlantic ties with her homeland. Her articles testify to the positive consequences of her emotional links with her native country, but suffering is still evident. On one hand, nostalgic memories of her native Basque landscape soothe her diasporic pain, but on the other, the continuous presence of farewells can be interpreted as the impossibility of forgetting that she is in exile and her difficulties in adapting to the host country. That is, in her published writing, Zubiaurre invites her readers—most of them Basque exiles like herself—to move away from their present to an idealized and joyful imagined native country, but, at the same time, she reminds them of their separation from home with constant references to farewells.

Zubiaurre writes her articles by traveling the routes of her memory, generally starting from an association between her Mexican present and her Basque past. In relation to this, Mari Paz Balibrea argues that those in exile develop a circular conception of time through which the return to the past is perceived as the only path towards the future, thus becoming antimodern and even reactionary (88). Numerous of Zubiaurre’s articles begin with the narrator sensing a specific smell or image and the connection of that event with a similar situation that she experienced in the Basque Country. In her first article in Euzko Deya, the weather triggers a memory: “Hoy ha amanecido nublado, lluvioso y con una suave neblina. Pero la lluvia era fina, menuda y mansa. Me recordó nuestro sirimiri. Quise disfrutar de ella, gustar sus sensaciones, sus matices y poder evocar... Evocar...” (159). In other texts, the religious ceremonies, the fireworks set alight to celebrate the holidays, or the landscape become sources of memory.
Not only the narrator, but also some of the characters in Zubiaurre’s articles/stories yearn for the past and remember previous stages of their lives. For example, the schoolteacher in “El Maixua de la aldea” often recalls his adventures traveling around the world as a sailor. In this way, Zubiaurre creates a microcosm marked by the past and dominated by nostalgia. The presence of the past is one of the main characteristics of the nostalgic person, who, according to Svetlana Boym, is able to remember sensory details such as smells, tastes, and sounds (4). Nostalgia is apparent when a person finds the present to be deficient in comparison with the past and there is access to the past through images, objects, or associations (Ritivoi 32). Nostalgia becomes, then, a strategy for overcoming the anxiety of separation from the native country, allowing self-exploration and understanding of one’s identity. Zubiaurre expresses clearly the curative effects of nostalgia at the end of her first article: “Añoro y evoco... Tal vez en el alma angustiada, la evocación transforme su dolor, al sentir sobre ella la caricia maravillosa de las gotitas de rocío . . .” (161). However, in addition to this therapeutic function, nostalgia may also become a prison for the exiled person if she is unable to appreciate the positive aspects of the host country.

Through nostalgia, Zubiaurre transforms the Basque Country into her own lost paradise. She focuses primarily on the rural and coastal landscape. The city, though rarely mentioned, is always invested with a negative connotation. Thus, Zubiaurre develops a traditional spatial conception of national identities, which originally tended to idealize the rural areas as the essence of the nation (Mosse 83). Basque nationalism was especially prone to romanticizing the countryside as a reaction against industrialization (Granja Sainz 20). This tendency also appears in the Basque diaspora, which typically used traditional and folkloric representations of Basque culture instead of contemporary images (Totoricaguena, Basque 460). In Zubiaurre’s stories, the main characters are rural people such as schoolteachers, fishermen, and farm women. Especially important are the constant references to the Basque farmhouse, which in the Basque culture symbolizes the nation and is clearly linked to the woman as mediator and transmitter of national culture (Bullen 200).

In Zubiaurre’s stories, the sea and the mountain are the two most frequently referenced elements of the national landscape, probably because both fishing and farming constitute the main occupations in traditional Basque economy (Douglass and Zulaika 230). In “Nuestro mar” and “La partida de las lanchas,” the sea is the wild force of nature that can become the fishermen’s enemy, but its beauty resides precisely in its inability to be tamed; that is, the sea remains the same as in a previous epoch and symbolizes the ancient energetic character of the Basque people. For Zubiaurre, the sea means a geographic frontier that separates her from her homeland, but at the same time its fluidity allows her to communicate with the Basque Country.

In addition to making the Basque country a vivid reality in Mexico, Zubiaurre is continuously saying goodbye to it, thus underlining her exiled condition. In an exile’s life, to say goodbye is the beginning of a new destiny, marking the separation from what is known and cherished—relatives, friends, culture, land, and language. When leaving the country, the exile experiences multiple feelings: doubts about the future, fear for the situation of the people who remain in the country, and uncertainty about returning. In León and Rebeca Grinberg’s opinion, the moment of farewell plays a fundamental role for the exile: saying goodbye becomes a ritual act that represents the belief in the possibility of reunion and the fear that a reunion will never be realized (156).

Like many exiles, Zubiaurre said goodbye to her homeland on two occasions: when she crossed the frontier into France and when she departed from France aboard a ship headed to America. In her diary entry of September 12, 1938, she expressed her feelings at that moment in these terms: “Estos días he llenado mis ojos de estas montañas y mar que aún son tierra española, para llevarlas tan dentro que las contemple con los ojos cerrados cuando esté a miles de kilómetros de aquí” (299). Once in Mexico, Zubiaurre writes about her departure from France, showing feelings of uncertainty: “En el puerto estaba el ‘Statendam’, enorme, con sus
infinitos pisos de claraboyas sobre la línea del mar. Dijimos adiós con lágrimas en los ojos a la costa francesa; era Europa. ¿Cuándo volveremos y cómo?” (302).

Many characters in Zubiaurre’s stories face bidding a farewell, whether to people they hold dear or to stages of their lives. For example, in “La partida de las lanchas,” women say goodbye to their fisherman-husbands, who must head out to sea for several months at a time. In this story, the description of the farewell reminds the reader of the moment of departure of the many Spaniards who traveled into exile by ship: “En la punta del muelle y arriba, en la blanca ermita, las mujeres lloran y levantan en alto sus pequeñuelos en un adiós supremo” (176). It is not only the characters who say goodbye in Zubiaurre’s stories; also, the narrator bids farewell when she plays the role of secondary character. For example, in “La casa del pintor,” she recalls the moment when, as a child, she left the painter’s village while he said goodbye to her in the distance:

Recuerdo con emoción aún la última vez (lejanísimos tiempos infantiles) en que desde su terraza acechaban ansiosos, él y los suyos, el momento en que el coche de caballos se alejó dejándome lejos, muy lejos, dobló aquella curva, . . . y allí cerca, en una esquina, la casa del viejo pintor, en lo alto la frondosa parra y desde allá un blanco pañuelo diciendo adiós... (172)

A similar situation is narrated in “La última tarde,” where the narrator, together with several friends, leaves Vera del Bidasoa after spending some time accompanied by the Baroja family: “Al día siguiente, muy de mañana, con el sol naciente y la bruma esparsa por valles y montes, un coche de caballos va alejándose de la villa. El grupo de muchachas va en él. En el último recodo ven desaparecer el pueblito con su adusta iglesia...” (191). During exile, Zubiaurre seems to connect the farewell to her homeland at the end of the Spanish Civil War with the farewells of other moments of her life; that is, she portrays herself as a pilgrim who is constantly saying goodbye to people and places. For this reason, we can state that Zubiaurre felt herself to be an outcast even before her political exile, not only because of her gender, but also because of her melancholic character. Furthermore, in many of her diary entries between 1916 and 1918, she also expresses an uprootedness similar to exile in the impossibility of developing her artistic potential and expressing herself freely. It is likely that these experiences before the war marked Zubiaurre’s life in a profound way, creating in her a sense of metaphysical dissatisfaction that only intensified with her political exile. Thus, the exile aggravated Zubiaurre’s already-existing feeling of displacement.

In her articles, Zubiaurre also says goodbye to the relatives and friends who have died. This is a common tendency in other memoirs written by exiles, as easily found in Memoria de la melancolía (1968), by María Teresa León, who relates in the last section her memories of friends who have recently passed away. Zubiaurre also wants to memorialize her dead friends on the pages of history. Several of the articles end with the phrase “In memoriam,” in order to indicate that the main character has died in real life and that the author is paying tribute to him or her. For instance, in “La casa del pintor” and “Historia de una vocación,” the reader realizes in the last lines that Zubiaurre is writing about Antonio de Leuona and her father, respectively. In other cases, the homage is present from the beginning, as in her last three articles, two about Gabriela Mistral and one about Zenobia Camprubí and Juan Ramón Jiménez. In these texts, the title, the accompanying photographs, and the first lines indicate that the author is recalling friends who have recently passed away (Figure 1).

Transatlantic Epistolary Ties

Due to their strong autobiographical content, Zubiaurre’s articles can be considered a continuation of her diaries. Her diary entries were scant in Mexico, most likely because in exile Zubiaurre preferred not to write about her present life, but to focus on her past, on the
Information on her daily life in Mexico is revealed, instead, in her letters, few of which have been preserved by their recipients. On the contrary, Zubiaurre kept many of the letters sent to her by friends and relatives who were both in Spain and in exile elsewhere. Most of them were written by female intellectuals, such as Victoria Kent, Margarita Salinas, Carmen Baroja, Zenobia Camprúbi, and Clemencia Miró. Of all these letters, the most interesting and numerous are by María Martos de Baeza, whose correspondence with Zubiaurre spans from 1938 to 1970. The fact that Zubiaurre treasured these letters until the end of her life shows how important communication and personal relationships were to her.

Letter-writing has traditionally been considered a female activity, as letters, like women, have been associated with the private and domestic sphere (Jolly 82). Since the sixteenth century, male commentators have noted that the natural and improvised style, the variety of themes, the immediacy, and the fragmentation of the letter accord particularly with what they called women’s “spontaneous” expressiveness (Earle 6). Thus, the epistolary form has been labeled a “female” genre and, therefore, a less important literary form (if it is considered “literary” at all). Olga Kenyon states that women’s letter-writing has seldom been taken seriously and has never counted as “real” writing (xiii). Additionally, if the letters were written by or sent to exiled women who barely published and were overshadowed by their relatives’ fame, as in the case of Zubiaurre, critics have given them little consideration.

However, Zubiaurre’s letters are relevant not only because they provide information about renowned intellectuals, such as Gabriela Mistral and Juan Ramón Jiménez, but also because they illustrate the drama of Republican exiles and show exiled women’s decisive role in maintaining links with their native country. Like her articles, these letters helped Zubiaurre to cope with exile, yet some of them were also sources of stress and misunderstanding.

Several critics, among them José María Naharro-Calderón, have pointed out that writing in exile has a therapeutic function (48). For Michael Ugarte, exile represents a symbolic death,
whereas the autobiographical writing of the exile constitutes a rebirth (89). As autobiographical texts, then, Zubiaurre’s letters can be considered products of scriptotherapy, the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment. Suzette Henke proposes that autobiography has the potential to be scriptotherapy because it “generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency” (xvi). Writing and receiving letters allowed Zubiaurre to share her pain openly with friends in similar situations, and thereby both express and receive the solace of empathy. Furthermore, as Oliva M. Espín states in relation to immigrants, it seems likely that in maintaining her transatlantic correspondence, Zubiaurre compensated for her losses and her feelings of grief and guilt in regard to the people she had left in Spain (Women 33).

In the letters Zubiaurre addressed to her two brothers and her mother, she idealizes her homeland and dreams of returning there: “Sueño siempre en el día en que volvamos a reunirnos para vivir los últimos años que nos quedan en paz y en armonía cristiana y verdadera. Dios nos concederá esta dicha. ¡Yo lo espero!” (5 Sept. 1942). At other times, she expresses how important their letters are to her: “Estoy contenta cuando recibo carta vuestra o de Ramón. Entonces me parece que estás cerca y casi reunidos…” (no date). Photographs and other images of the homeland also stand out as important transatlantic ties. As Totoricaguena analyzes in relation to the Basque diaspora, many Basque women use symbols and photographs in their home decorations to express their identities, connect with the Basque Country, and compensate for the lack of physical proximity to homeland (Basque 450). For Zubiaurre, her brother’s paintings help connect her to home: “Gracias a Dios [tus cuadros] ya están colgados en las paredes de mi pequeña casa y soy feliz mirando y mirándolos y recordando los días en que los pintabas en el querido estudio…” (12 July 1949). These examples show that ensconcing herself in her memories and imagining a future reunion with her relatives is one of Zubiaurre’s strategies to cope with exile.

The intimate and comforting connection that Zubiaurre maintained with her female correspondents is evident from the numerous references to their mutual friendships, sometimes even using the term “sister” with each other. Martos de Baeza often mentions in her letters how long she and Zubiaurre have known each other: “En fin, Pilar, repito que leí tu carta del 10 del presente con verdadero gusto, ya que continúas la magnífica amiga de siempre, creo que unos cincuenta y siete, o tal vez más, años de sincera amistad, Pilar” (14 Oct. 1966). For Martos de Baeza, and most likely, too, for Zubiaurre, writing letters to her female friends in exile is a great source of comfort: “A pesar de mis muchas preocupaciones y trabajos, encuentro siempre un especial interés y placer en hablar con las viejas amigas de España entretanto, más ahora, irremediablemente separadas hasta sabe Dios dónde” (24 Aug. 1940).

Martos de Baeza also offers emotional support to Zubiaurre during the latter’s difficult personal times. For instance, when her brother Valentín dies in Spain, Zubiaurre cannot attend his funeral, so Baeza provides a detailed account of Valentín’s last moments. Thus, Zubiaurre can feel as strongly connected to her brother’s passing as possible under such circumstances. The farewell at the end of the letter makes clear that Baeza’s goal is a therapeutic one—she wishes to comfort her friend: “Bien, Pilar, he tratado de distraerte unos minutos y de acompañarte epistolarmente en tu pena, que consideré y considero atroz…” (9 Apr. 1963). The same connection is present when Zubiaurre’s husband dies: “No sabes cuánto me acuerdo de ti, mi gran Pilar” (4 Oct. 1963). Without a doubt, Martos de Baeza’s long correspondence was one of Zubiaurre’s most sustained and sustaining transatlantic ties, a correspondence that must surely have made her exile a little less painful (Figure 2).

The tone of Martos de Baeza’s letters varies from oral to literary and poetic, but in all cases, the missive becomes a clear dialogue with a female friend. Carolyn Steedman underlines this characteristic of the epistolary genre in her understanding that letter writing is not a solitary act of communication, for it demands that one think in terms of another person. Furthermore, letters tend to follow one another, imply one another, and circulate in chronological continuity.
Martos de Baeza often mentions at the beginning of her letters the oral aspect of their epistolary exchange: “No te imaginas cómo te agradezco me dediques esas horas de charla epistolar . . .” (8 Sept. 1956). These references to dialogue serve to bring the writer and the reader closer together.

Martos de Baeza uses other strategies to make herself more present to Zubiaurre, such as mentioning where she is writing from and relating her experience of reading Zubiaurre’s letters. Esther Milne has studied how letters and other kinds of interpersonal communication can convey a sense of immediacy, intimacy, and presence. References to the physical body, the moment of writing, the medium that carries the letter, that is, the “here” and “now” of corporeality help the correspondents to collapse the time and distance that separate them (Milne 14–15). For instance, Martos de Baeza begins her letter dated February 10, 1959, by alluding to the reasons that she is able to write that day: “Aprovecho la desagradable circunstancia de una convalecencia gripal, aún con la garganta más o menos expresiva, ¡gangas del invierno!, para contestar a la tuya del 24 del pasado . . .” (Figure 3). Martos de Baeza also makes frequent references to her reading of Zubiaurre’s last letter: “Excuso decirte el interés con que he repasado cuanto me detallas del final de tu querido Ricardo. . . . Todo, todo lo que me dices lo he leído, hija mía, con el interés que os merecéis y porque todas estas desapariciones en esas tierras americanas nos hacen a todos un efecto de veras penoso” (30 Jan. 1964).

As the correspondence between Martos de Baeza and Zubiaurre lasted well into old age, their letters often include detailed descriptions of illnesses and physical problems. According to Milne, these references to pain are also significant in evoking the presence of the other and creating a stronger sense of intimacy (57). Thus, Baeza’s and Zubiaurre’s last letters can be considered examples of autopathography, the autobiographical narrative of illness or disability (Couser 167). We know through Baeza’s letters that Zubiaurre told her friend about her physical problems. Baeza responds with sympathy: “Sobre todo por tu salud. ¡Pobrecilla! Gracias a Carmen de Mesa otra vez es que estuve al corriente de todo. ¡Imagino lo que habrás sufrido! ¡Tantos meses!” (25 May 1941). Sometimes Baeza gives advice to Zubiaurre and also relates her own physical problems: “Y si tu salud es nada más que mediana, cuidate todo lo que puedas, y a otra cosa mariposa. Yo estoy mal del reuma, llevo tres meses sin salir de casa y veo que
no hay nada que hacer . . .” (22 Jan. 1970). Both women find in each other a good and kind listener; they are close friends who understand each other’s history, cares, and physical pain.

Zubiaurre and Martos de Baeza not only describe their own illnesses, but also those suffered by mutual friends. Therefore, despite her physical separation from them, Zubiaurre becomes a witness to the lives and events of exiles elsewhere and her friends back in Spain. Especially at the beginning of their exile, one in Argentina and the other in Mexico, Martos de Baeza and Zubiaurre shared each other’s letters with their respective exile communities. Martos de Baeza mentions this frequent practice: “Por una carta que recién me dieron a leer en casa de Ossorio, agradezco y me conmueve el recuerdo que haces de mi persona” (5 Mar. 1940). Martos de Baeza’s letters are full of details about the situation of the Republican Spaniards, including the circumstances of many famous intellectuals and artists. In this sense, her letters become a newspaper for the Republican diaspora.\textsuperscript{16}

In addition to providing information in her letters, Martos de Baeza also requests news about the exiles in Mexico. Her wish to know about mutual friends speaks to a need to remain
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connected with her past and it also suggests the split identity of the returned exile. Martos de Baeza is grateful to Zubiaurre for her letters: “En fin, gracias, gracias, Pilar, por tu consecuencia en la amistad y porque debido a ti sé asimismo de otras varias amigas de ahí a quienes quiero de veras y no me resino a ignorarlas en sus respectivas actualidades de vida mexicana” (2 Oct. 1960). Moreover, she expresses her sense of the enduring ties that she and Zubiaurre are keeping alive across the Atlantic, describing it through the metaphor of the bridge: “De nuevo tus líneas, siempre cariñosas, noticiosas . . . , que este servicio de puente que estamos realizando frecuentemente quiere decir mucho acerca de nuestro sentido de la amistad, y mira, Pilar, que nos dure mucho tiempo el puente y la oportunidad de mantenernos firmes en nuestros cometidos” (12 May 1967).

In the transatlantic sorority that Zubiaurre and Martos de Baeza build together, the memory of people who have recently died plays a very significant role. Because of their longevity—Baeza died at the age of 93, and Zubiaurre at 86—both women survived many of their friends. Like Zubiaurre’s articles in Euzko Deya, Martos de Baeza’s letters give detailed information about the deaths of relatives and friends both in Spain and in exile. The loss of friends triggers Martos de Baeza’s memory of a happy past: “Como a ti, la desaparición de Zenobia me ha entristecido mucho, recordando aquellos años de nuestro conocimiento, pues yo padecí a esa pareja como no tenéis idea” (5 Feb. 1957). Many times the letter becomes an elegy, with a descriptive account of the last moments of the dead. A good death is then considered a sign of a respectable life: “En fin, las líneas de hoy son para comunicarte el final, ¡tranquilo final!, de Carmen Monné, acontecido a primeros de enero . . .” (4 Apr. 1959). For Martos de Baeza, the deaths of exiles far away from Spain are especially touching and painful: “Bien, no quiero terminar sin decirte lo muy de veras que he sentido la muerte de Manolo Rivas Cherif, tan buena persona, tan buen oftalmólogo, creo que estaba enfermo desde hacía tiempo. Te ruego, pues, Pilar, que le des el pésame a los familiares, sobre todo Lola y a Cipriano. ¡Otro más de los que se van quedando ahí!” (21 Apr. 1966).

For Zubiaurre, although the letters are mostly a source of comfort, they could sometimes cause frustration and misunderstanding. Margaretta Jolly’s analysis of women’s letters supports this idea: “[J]ust as relationships of care can be intensified in letters, so they can amplify the special painfulness of care’s failure. Here the proliferation of accusatory or aggrieved epistolary essays” (90). This tension between the ethics of care, that is, women’s roles as mediators and nurturers, and their personal autonomy appears in Zubiaurre’s letters. For instance, when she writes to her mother and her brother Valentín, there are moments of conflict regarding her managing of Valentín’s expositions: “Nunca me contestaron Vds. a mis repetidas cartas sobre Pittsburgh. Sólo cuando ellos cansados de ver que yo no recibía contestación de la familia y del interesado, enviaron el cable y por ellos supe que al fin contestaron Vds. Me parece muy mal que hicieran eso conmigo y muy injusto sobre todo” (12 July 1949).

In response to one of Valentín’s letters, Zubiaurre expresses her frustration about what she considers his unappreciative attitude: “Durante más de 50 años nunca hemos tenido ningún disgusto. Ahora que estamos todos cerca de la hora de morir, tenemos que estar más unidos espiritualmente que nunca” (10 Nov. 1960) (Figure 4). The physical distance that separates Zubiaurre and her family creates this type of misunderstanding. A similar situation happens when Zubiaurre reads a Spanish article about her brothers’ painting that she deems inaccurate: “A mí, que fui vuestra traductora, vuestra secretaria, en todos los años difíciles hasta triunfar nadie me puede venir contando historias falsas y menos presentarte a ti como un hermano resentido” (6 Feb. 1968).

In the correspondence between Zubiaurre and Martos de Baeza, the frustration appears when letters are lost or take too long to reach their destinations: “La segunda carta que me devuelven. Ojalá que esta última de hace ocho días por avión te llegue” (24 Aug. 1940). Sometimes, Martos de Baeza complains when Zubiaurre has not answered her: “Te escribi ipso facto. Pero todavía no me has contestado. ¡Figúrate si lo siento! ¡Quién sabe si recibiste mi carta! O posiblemente
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...andes muy atareada. Lo más probable” (5 Mar. 1940). Zubiaurre also shows her disappointment when Martos de Baeza has not written back. Baeza apologizes for her tardiness: “Tienes razón. ¡Cuánto tiempo pensando en escribirte, anunciándoselo así a los amigos, para luego nada, nada, nada! Pero es tal el trajín de vida que llevo, hija mía, que ni lugar a corresponderme con todas vosotras . . .” (30 Mar. 1948).

Some requests and favors from transatlantic friends may also produce anxiety. When Baeza asks Zubiaurre to help her sell the lands she owns in Mexico, there are signs that the task worries Zubiaurre: “Otra vez aquí, casi a vuelta de correo de tu última del 1 de este mes, para tranquilizarte sobre todo de esa tu preocupación con respecto a la molestia que pudiéramos originar al Sr. Aristoy. . . . Bien, siento decirte, querida mía, que o yo me he explicado mal, o tú no has entendido acertadamente mi deseo” (11 Mar. 1955). At other times, the epistolary ties between the two friends are stressful because Martos de Baeza is too busy to write Zubiaurre on time: “Inútiles mis bonísimos deseos de llegar a tiempo este año de felicitarte en tu onomástico
del 62, porque . . ., precisamente en aquellos días lo pasé mal con un catarro nasal muy molesto y luego se han cruzado tantas cosas en las últimas semanas que ni tiempo casi de terminar aquí los quehaceres más importantes” (19 Oct. 1962).

Zubiaurre’s transatlantic connections with her homeland marked her life in exile. Although she was active in her thirty-year exile in Mexico, meeting renowned intellectuals and artists, such as Diego Rivera, and visiting important Mexican places, she remained strongly attached to the Basque Country and Spain. Writing became an important means through which she maintained connections with the other side of the Atlantic. Her articles and letters exemplify to the core the literature of exile because they mix different styles and literary genres and blur the distinction between the public and the private. Although her articles were published in a Basque exile magazine and, therefore, were read by other Basque exiles, the intimate emotions and journeys of the imagination evinced make them autobiographical in nature. On the other hand, her letters do not belong exclusively to the realm of the private, since they were shared with other exiles and traced the lives of a network of friends and acquaintances.

Zubiaurre counteracted the nostalgia she experienced in exile by drawing on her memories of the Basque Country and her contacts with friends and relatives in Spain. In general, her transatlantic ties played a positive and therapeutic function in her life. Her idealization of Basque culture shows national pride and becomes a secure shelter against the uncertainty and feeling of uprootedness that exile causes. However, the excessive weight of the past in the present, as expressed by Zubiaurre’s articles, may have led to a failure to adapt to the host country. The same situation appears in her letters with Martos de Baeza. Zubiaurre’s transatlantic epistolary ties boosted her sense of self-worth and validation. Thus, her correspondence can be considered scriptotherapy, but at moments the letters create misunderstandings and stressful situations.

In exile studies, women have been relegated to secondary roles and treated more as exiles’ wives and mothers than as exiles themselves. A focused attention toward women’s experiences of exile is necessary not only to value the forgotten female exile, but also to understand in depth the functioning of exile communities and their daily lives. Women’s writings in exile—articles, diaries, memoirs, and personal letters, such as those by Zubiaurre—illustrate the key role that women played in the diaspora by keeping alive their national culture through memories and stories, by maintaining contact with friends and family back home, and by developing a fluent communication system of news and information across the Atlantic. Women like Zubiaurre built bridges between Spanish and exile communities, transatlantic bridges in which peace, understanding of differences, and communication were feasible.

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NOTES

1 In addition to exile, there are other reasons for Zubiaurre’s absence from the literary canon. First of all, the few articles she published appeared under two pseudonyms, “Hulda de Garay” and “Landabarrenako Damia” (‘Lady of Landabarrena’). At the same time, Zubiaurre was overshadowed by her family members’ notoriety. In addition to her two brothers’ international success as painters, her father, Valentín María de Zubiaurre (1837–1914), was maestro of the Royal Choir, and her husband was both a famous art critic and the director of the National Museum of Modern Art in Madrid. Zubiaurre’s role inhered principally in supporting her family’s reputation through marketing her brothers’ paintings, supporting her
husband’s career, and maintaining friendships with intellectuals rather than building her own professional status as a writer or a pianist.

2 Euzko Deya: La voz de los vascos en México was the most widely read publication of Basque exiles. First published in Mexico City in March 1943, the magazine folded in March 1973, having put out a total of 392 issues. The magazine was published twice a month until January 1946 (number 68), when it became a monthly publication. The magazine included news, stories, book reviews, articles about Basque villages, society columns, etc. There were also monographs on diverse aspects of Basque culture, such as the family, the mother, and the farm house, as well as discussions about important events, such as the bombing of Gernika.

3 The Lyceum was not only a gathering place for women, but also a cultural center with workshops, talks, and expositions at which women could freely share their literary and artistic works. Given its progressive agenda, the Lyceum was the target of frequent criticism from traditional groups, who rejected the idea that women should participate in the public arena.

4 In her diaries, Zubiaurre relates in detail the cordial and cosmopolitan environment of these gatherings, where there was live music and animated discussions. Based on her interest in culture, Zubiaurre became involved in the creation of Hermes: Revista del País Vasco (1917–22), a periodical that published work from a diverse political spectrum, written by the most relevant intellectuals of the time. Zubiaurre helped Jesús de Sarria, the director of the journal, find feature writers and promote the journal in Madrid.

5 Alongside Pilar de Zubiaurre, Zenobia Campri, Carmen Baroja, and María Martínez Sierra, María Martos de Baeza (1888–1981) was a member of the Generation of ‘98. Although she did not publish any work, she was very active in the Spanish intellectual endeavors of her time. In fact, as Elvira Melián points out, it was Martos de Baeza’s idea to create the Lyceum Club Femenino (381). She married Ricardo Baeza, a well-known translator and literary critic, with whom she lived in exile in Argentina until the late 1940s. Once back in Spain, she participated in cultural gatherings and helped many returning exiles reestablish their lives and careers.

6 Throughout history, Basques have been prone to diasporic movements. As Gloria Totoricaguena states: “Basques have journeyed out of the Pyrenees in the repopulation movements of medieval times, for whaling in the North Atlantic, for the colonization of the Americas, and into the political exile of the Franco years, 1936–75” (Basque 31). Similarly, William Douglass and Jon Bilbao point out that in the nineteenth century almost all the families in the Basque Country had at least one relative residing in the Americas (135). After the Spanish Civil War, Basque nationalist exiles aimed at maintaining the Basque language and culture, mostly through Basque centers called “Euskaletxeak” (Ascunce 75).

7 In fact, in Eleanor Murphy’s opinion, transnationalism can cause such opposite reactions: on the one hand, it is related to greater life satisfaction for the immigrant and can function as a coping mechanism against anxiety or sadness, but on the other, it could also lead to depressive symptoms (88).

8 In addition to maintaining their contacts in Spain, most exiled women were able to adapt to the new country better than did men. Ernestina de Champourcin, another exiled Spanish writer in Mexico and a close friend of Zubiaurre, supported this idea: “[L]as mujeres gozamos por naturaleza de una facilidad de adaptación mayor que los hombres, y quizá también de la consciencia muy viva de las consecuencias que puede tener nuestro hundimiento” (133). Champourcin herself lived happily in exile, unlike her husband, the poet Juan José Domenchina, who dreamed about returning to Spain. Zenobia Campri endured a similar situation: whereas she was relatively content in exile, her husband, the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, refused to speak in English in the United States. These examples do not imply that women did not suffer in exile. On the contrary, they suffered as much as men; however, they generally better accepted their situation.

9 As Oliva Espín states, the migrant community tends to exert a greater control over women’s bodies: “Gender becomes the site to claim the power denied to immigrant men by racism. . . . For people who experience a deep lack of control over their daily lives, controlling women’s sexuality and behavior becomes a symbolic demonstration of orderliness and continuity. It gives them the feeling that not all is lost, not all is changing” (“Gender” 242).

10 Mexico was the main host country for Republican exiles, particularly for those who belonged to the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, working-class exiles tended to remain in Europe (Soldevilla Oria 70). Despite the welcoming attitude of the Mexican government, Spanish exiles were not allowed to participate in politics. Furthermore, most Mexican people showed indifference towards Spanish exiles, and some right-wing Mexican sectors were even clearly opposed to their presence (Soldevilla Oria 71).

11 A predominant characteristic of Zubiaurre’s articles is the Romantic tone, expressed through the interconnection of the landscape and the narrator’s state of mind, the personification and idealization of nature, the melancholic environment with ruined and solitary buildings, the characters’ tragic fate, the
references to the ancient past and especially to Medieval times, and the relevance of oral stories and popular songs. This neoromanticism is accentuated by Zubiaurre’s reliance on long sentences and complex syntax.

12 Another example of the connection between her present and past is expressed in the article “Nuestro mar”: “He bajado desde la elevada meseta a buscar el mar. Traía una doble ilusión, de volver a verlo después de varios años privada del gozo que él me proporciona, y el pensar que mirándolo, mirándolo, la larguísima distancia que me separa del otro continente se iba a acortar, y la ilusión me podría hacer ver el mar nuestro, y con él nuestras costas... tan bellas” (162). In this excerpt, the memory of the Basque country does not arise spontaneously; instead, the author deliberately evokes it because it provides her with a sense of pleasure and tranquility.

13 Basque exiles and Spanish exiles alike idealized the rural nation. Sebastiaan Faber points out that Republican exiles “tended to invoke romantic, essentialist notions of the nation, accompanied by sentimentalist or paternalist notions of the people of folk” (5). For this critic, exiles shared with Francoists a similar obsession and reevaluation of Spain’s national character and destiny (43).

14 For instance, on February 15, 1916, Zubiaurre writes: “Cómo querría yo ser en estos momentos genio perfecto de la música, del ritmo, de la danza, de la gracia. Todo lo que calladamente y a veces sordamente inquieta y ansiosa bulle en mi alma y en mi corazón poderle dar rienda suelta en un magnífico canto de exaltación...” (241). In a text written while still a young woman, significantly entitled “Despedida,” Zubiaurre is already delving into the topic of separation and the painful frustration that can accompany it: “Mañana no veré más estos montes que me hacen sentir de un modo tan especial; tengo una pena, un como dolor impalpable” (323).

15 Only her last three diary entries were written in Mexico, but they are longer than the previous ones. They relate her journey toward exile, her health problems—almost certainly connected to the trials of psychologically adjusting to the host country—and her visit to the city of San Miguel de Allende.

16 Once Baeza had returned to Madrid, she met regularly with her friends from the Lyceum Club Femenino, a practice that confirms her steadfast loyalty to her old ideals: “A las amigas del club las veo mucho; me refiero a las que están aquí. A Matilde Calvo, Matilde Medina, María Bordas, Rafaela Jiménez, todas vinieron justo al día siguiente de mi llegada, alegrándose sinceramente de tenerme nuevamente entre ellas. Pero a la que más veo de todas ellas es a Carmen Baroja porque ahora viven junto al Ritz...” (30 Mar. 1948).

17 Martos de Baeza’s transatlantic condition appears clearly both in her exile in Argentina and in her return to Spain. In Argentina, she helps Spaniards to enter that country legally: “[E]n poco más de un año he conseguido visados para muchos, aunque no todos los que sin duda lo han necesitado...” (3 June 1941). In Spain, she also welcomes returning exiles and helps them to find accommodations. Baeza’s wish is to bring the Republican exiles back to Spain. This explains why, at the request of Ernestina de Champourcin, she promotes Juan José Doménchina’s poetry, circulates Isabel de Palencia’s work, and arranges for a monument to be built in honor of Elena Fortún.

18 José Luis Abellán also uses the metaphor of the bridge between Spain and Latin America when analyzing the consequence of the Spanish exile. According to this critic, Republican exiles had the opportunity not only to comprehend America, but also to develop a new understanding of Spain and the Hispanic values (78–80). Abellán considers that Republican exiles did not take an imperialistic or paternalistic position in relation to the Spanish legacy (82). Faber, however, thinks the opposite: “[T]he Republicans’ hispanismo did not fully succeed in distinguishing itself from the neoconservative traditionalist position of Hispanidad as it was propagated by Francoist ideologues” (48).

19 Adolfo Sánchez Vásquez, a Spanish intellectual in Mexico, expressed similar feelings in relation to death and exile: “[E]l exiliado vive, en su mundo propio, la muerte de cada compatriota. Al aclararse las filas y estrecharse el círculo exiliado, cada quien ve estrecharse el círculo de su propia vida. ‘Uno más que se queda; uno menos que vuelve’, se dice a modo de adiós. Tristes son los entierros, pero ninguno como el del exiliado” (qtd. in Aznar Soler 49–50).

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