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**WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE BASQUE
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND
RECONCILIATION PROCESS**

Invisibilised Peacebuilding, Memory and Justice: A Feminist, Holistic and
Intersectional Reading

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Gatazkak zeharkatu, gatazka eutsi eta gatazkan zehar bizitzaren sostengu izan diren emakume guztiei, baina bereziki izekoei eta nire inspirazio handiena den Amama Juditheri.

Eskerrak bihotz handienaz eta eskuzabaltasun osoz izandako sostengu, borroka eta konpromisoagatik.

Ondare gisa utzi diguzuen zaintza-sareak josteko eta mantentzeko irakaspen zoragarriagatik, nik ere ehuntzen eta zaintzen jarraitu nahi dudan altxor handiena delako.

Oinarrizko balioak; mugimendu, keinu eta detaile xumeetan bihotzez irakasteagatik.

Pairatutakoagatik, baina batez ere borrokatu eta zuen bizia eta albokoena ausardiaz sostengatzeagatik.

Nor naizen eta nor garen erakutsi eta bidea argitzen digun iparrorratzean iparra izategatik.

...
Maite zaituztegun pertsonen bizitzetan gatazkaren sendagileak izan zaretelako.

To all the women who have endured, sustained, and carried life through conflict, but especially to my aunts and grandmother Judith, my most significant source of inspiration.

A heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude for your support, your struggle, and your unwavering commitment.

Thank you for the beautiful teachings you have passed down to us on how to weave and sustain care networks. I also wish to continue nurturing and protecting this legacy as one of the greatest treasures.

It is for teaching us fundamental values through movement, gestures, and the quiet details of everyday life.

For all that you have endured, but above all, for the courage with which you have fought and supported your own lives and those around you.

For being the guiding light in the compass that shows us who we are and helps illuminate the path ahead.

...
Because in the lives of those who love you, you have been healers of conflict.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANV	Acción Nacionalista Vasca
CAPV	Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
EAE	Eusko Abertzale Ekintza
EHAK	Eusko Abertzaleak – Komunistak
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
GAL	Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
ICC	International Criminal Court
IVAC	Instituto Vasco de Criminología
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAS	Organisation of American States
PNV	Partido Nacionalista Vasco
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

ABSTRACT

This thesis critically explores the role of women in the Basque peace process (2005–2020), analysing their participation in armed struggle, civil society, memory practices, and grassroots peacebuilding. It examines how their agency has been made invisible or selectively recognised within dominant state narratives, particularly those shaped by Spanish institutions, that privilege formal actors and reinforce binaries such as victim or perpetrator.

Grounded in feminist and intersectional theories of peace, care, and epistemic justice, and informed by Basque feminist scholarship, the study rethinks conflict transformation from the margins. It highlights women's alternative forms of resistance, collective care, and memory-making, showing how they sustained the social fabric amid violence and reimagined peace from below. Often dismissed as informal or apolitical, these contributions are essential to reconciliation and democratisation.

This research is innovative in two respects: first, it centres feminist memory work and relational justice as key to long-term peace, challenging transitional justice frameworks focused on elite negotiations; second, it dismantles binaries such as public/private, formal/informal politics, and perpetrator/victim, showing how women's agency transcends these categories.

The thesis situates women's contributions within broader human rights and democratic discourses, arguing that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without recognising women's emotional, social, and political labour.

1. INTRODUCTION

Various academic disciplines have studied war and peace, with multiple approaches offering complementary perspectives, thus building a deep understanding of all aspects of war and peace. From an anthropological point of view, it can be affirmed that the hypothesis of innate violence to justify war as something innate to human nature (Van der Dennen, 1999), or we could go hand in hand with the perspective on the culture of peace and assert, as De Rivera (2004) maintains, that peace is a socially constructed phenomenon that depends on cultural factors. However, the phenomenon of war can also be analysed from a Marxist perspective, alluding to the fact that war is a manifestation of the class struggle and, therefore, something inevitable within the capitalist system (Balibar, 2010).

For this reason, war and peace can be understood from many perspectives and fields of study, each with its specific academic perspective. It is also how conflicts and their impact act on each individual and each context, since there are as many ways as people involved and affected by a conflict to understand it. However, it is clear that, as in all aspects of this system and society, gender and its construct directly affect the perception of it; that is why, according to Cockburn (2010), conflict is not experienced uniformly, but is profoundly shaped by gender. Women, frequently excluded from conventional narratives, offer perspectives and lived experiences that challenge dominant discourses and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of conflict.

This research begins with the premise that conflict does not impact all sectors of society equally, and its effects differ significantly across gender lines. Authors such as Orwell (1954) have argued that history is narrated by the victors, and from a gender critique, Scott (1986) asserts that this history has been told predominantly from a male perspective, silencing the female experience.

Regarding the contextualization of this research, the analysis is based on the Basque conflict, which, from the outset, raises a conceptual problem: How to define this conflict? To properly understand it, it is first necessary to distinguish between political and armed conflicts. Edward Azar's theory on protracted social conflicts suggests that persistent and structural violence may emerge when a state fails to meet fundamental human needs, particularly those related to identity, security, and political inclusion. This type of conflict is not occasional but sustained over time, often driven by underlying issues such as ethnicity, ideology, struggles over territorial self-determination, or unequal power distribution (Azar, 1990)

Complementing this perspective, the categories of antagonism and political exclusion developed by Laclau and Mouffe allow us to understand how these structural frustrations transform into armed conflict through processes of political subjectivisation. According to the authors:

"The origin of this lack is not a mythical loss but a situation produced by the configuration of the social totality. The lack of work, food, housing, or enslaved people is socially produced, and the ability to signify this lack and translate it into a demand involves a discursive and subjective intervention. Antagonism produces the politicisation of society through subjectivation and introduces a conflict in and over the legal system. This operation involves establishing a demand in the public space and defining relationships with others, including the enemy." (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2004, cited in Retamozo & Stoessel, 2014)

From this theoretical articulation, it can be argued that the Basque armed conflict cannot be understood solely as a military phenomenon but as an extreme manifestation of an unresolved structural political conflict rooted in demands for identity, recognition, and autonomy. This is why, as Galardi (2025) states in his thesis, the Basque conflict lies in a clash of political demands, such as nationalism, interspersed with other current social problems. However, if it is only defined this way, the issue could not be placed in a specific time frame. Therefore, this research starts from contextualising the Basque conflict by focusing on the armed conflict and its peace process. Taking into account that ETA did not use violence in its first 10 years since its creation, there may be discrepancies with the dates. However, even with López Adán's temporal determination, we could have a problem: the consequences of the conflict still exist today. As she points out, it is difficult to maintain that the conflict is over (Galardi, 2025). However, when discussing the armed conflict and its subsequent peace process, this research will consider the period from 2005 to 2020 and its relevant context to understand the key aspects of the peace process.

The second categorization is found in the definition of the Basque Country, that is, what refers to in this research the Basque Country, its philosophical and legal definition, and what it refers to, since "The term 'Basque Country' usually refers to the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV), an administrative and legal entity defined in the 1979 Statute of Autonomy, although historically the term Euskal Herria¹ encompasses a broader territory." (Uriarte, 2012). "From a legal perspective, the current

¹ *Euskal Herria* is a cultural and linguistic concept referring to the historical Basque territories across both Spain and France, rooted in a shared Basque identity rather than administrative boundaries (Zulaika, 1988; Douglass & Bilbao, 1975).

definition of the Basque Country is regulated by the Statute of Gernika, which delimits its powers and territory within the Spanish constitutional framework." (Legarreta, 2019).

However, from a more philosophical perspective, "Basque identity is based on cultural, linguistic, and symbolic elements that make up a distinct national community, whose political recognition does not always coincide with its legal and institutional boundaries" (Zabalo & Saratxo, 2015). Because of this, in this research, when referring to the Basque Country, we refer to the seven historical provinces that comprise it: Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Nafarroa, Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea, and Zuberoa (Letamendia, 1997).

The third categorisation lies in the concept of 'woman', since when discussing the role of women in the peace process, the concept of 'woman' must first be defined. Therefore, this introduction outlines the rationale for employing the category 'woman' in this research on armed conflict and the peace process from a gender perspective, acknowledging that women are not a homogeneous group. Their experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and political affiliation, which influence how they are affected by conflict and how they participate in peacebuilding. This analysis draws on three approaches: the sex-gender system, the critique of binary logic, and the historical context. In order to justify that the use of the category 'woman' does not go hand in hand with an essentialist or exclusionary vision, but rather, considering the context of this research, it is considered the most appropriate.

Regarding the sex-gender system, since the second half of the 20th century, the introduction of the category of gender in feminist thought marked a before and after by allowing the oppression of women to be considered outside of biological nature. This distinction between sex and gender allowed gender to be conceptualised as a cultural and symbolic construction, while sex was initially conceived as a 'neutral' biological basis (Suzzi, 2016). However, theorist Judith Butler proposes that "gender is not about cultural meanings that cover up a natural sex, but rather, on the contrary, it is the gender that institutes sexual difference as a given of nature." (Butler, 2007, cited in Suzzi, 2016). It is through this theorisation of sex/gender that this research understands the system from Butler's perspective.

Furthermore, it is important to question the binarism on which the system is based since, as Maraina De Santo (2012) points out, the critique of binarism denaturalizes what the sex/gender system establishes as the only possibility of identification and identity, excluding all realities that do not fit into the binary categories of man and woman. Taking this into account, this research aims to be written from a non-

existentialist perspective, recognising the sex/gender system that excludes dissident identities. Thus, it is decided to use the category of 'woman' strategically and critically, aware of its limits and political value within this research. As Galardi (2025) argues, it is evident that different roles and functions are stereotypically attributed and assigned in contexts of armed conflict. The category of 'woman' will be used in this research as a category of analysis, given the historical, political, and social context, considering the framework of the sex/gender system and the hetero-patriarchal system.

Once the perspective of the study and the pertinent clarifications have been contextualised, this introduction must highlight the importance of women and the importance of research with a gender perspective that values and recognises women as non-static subjects with influence in society. Considering the above, this research aims to analyse women's participation in resolving the Basque conflict, examining the extent to which they have been considered and significantly included in the peace process and the real impact of their participation on the political and social stabilisation of the conflict. The research question is: 'To what extent have women been considered and significantly included in the Basque Country peace process, and what has been the real impact of their participation on the political and social stabilisation and resolution of the Basque conflict? '

The research is conducted from a gender perspective and covers the period between 2005 and 2020. Although the peace process is generally considered to have occurred between 2009 and 2018, the starting point of 2005 is included to capture earlier political developments that helped shape the process. In particular, the aftermath of the collapse of the 2004–2006 negotiation process.² In October 2009, after Arnaldo Otegi and others were arrested, the Altsasu Declaration was promoted as a foundation for structuring internal debate. Once this deliberative process concluded, the 'Zutik Euskal Herria' resolution was presented as the result of that collective reflection. Finally, on May 3, 2018, ETA announced its dissolution as an organisation (Aiertza, 2019). The timeframe has been expanded to allow for a more comprehensive analysis and a better understanding of the process as a whole. It is noteworthy how, in this 2025, Berria (2025) reports that Bake Bidea and the Bakegileak have brought their journey to an end after years of promoting the Basque peace process; however, in their statement, they acknowledge that there is still a long way to go toward achieving a just and lasting peace.

² The 2004–2006 negotiation process refers to the failed peace talks between ETA and the Spanish government during José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's administration, which collapsed after the 2006 Madrid Barajas airport bombing.

The hypothesis is based on the historical and social reality in which women have traditionally occupied secondary or invisible positions in contexts of armed conflict and subsequent peacebuilding processes (De Oliveira Schuck & Brito, 2019). This research aims to highlight that, during the Basque Country peace process between 2005 and 2020, women have made important contributions from multiple perspectives and levels of social involvement: women militants or members of ETA, women organized in civil society active in disarmament initiatives, women victims of ETA, and women politically involved in the direction set by the Basque Nationalist Left.

This paper argues that peacebuilding is an essentially holistic, complex, and multidimensional process that unfolds not only in institutional and political spheres but also in community, social, and everyday life, spaces where women have played a key but undervalued role as they are not part of institutional processes (Villellas Ariño, 2018). From this perspective, this paper proposes to analyse how women, from both sides of the conflict and through diverse and plural experiences, have significantly contributed to this broad and transversal peacebuilding process.

To this end, it seeks to analyse primarily the trends and concrete actions carried out by these women in community, social, political, and institutional contexts, thus highlighting the importance of making their actual role visible at all process stages from diverse and complementary perspectives. Beyond that, it aims to understand how these contributions, which are often informal, relational and affective, reshape traditional understandings of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Placing women's actions at the centre of the analysis, it argues for redefining what counts as peacebuilding and who is recognised as a political actor in transitional processes. Regarding the general objective, the paper seeks to comprehensively and multidimensionally analyse the actual contributions made by women during the Basque Country peace process (2005-2020), precisely and in detail, examining their role from different social contexts. The additional goal is to determine whether these contributions have received sufficient recognition from social and institutional spheres.

This thesis explores and critically reflects on women's roles, experiences, and contributions to the Basque Country during the peace process between 2005 and 2020. Using a feminist and intersectional perspective, it focuses on how women in various positions, such as former members of ETA, participants in civil society and victims of political violence, have shaped, supported or questioned the processes of disarmament, memory and reconciliation. Rather than treating women as a single or secondary group, the research brings their voices and practices to the forefront, paying attention to the tensions, silences

and contradictions that emerge when their presence is fully considered. Based on these findings, the thesis explores the possible causes and consequences of these contributions' limited visibility or recognition. It examines how these dynamics have helped shape the feminist social fabric that characterises the Basque Country today.

Across the world, peace processes have often excluded the voices and experiences of women, even though they are deeply affected by violence and play key roles in sustaining life during and after conflict. Too often, peace has been negotiated in male-dominated spaces that ignore the realities of those who resist, care and rebuild from the ground up. This thesis is situated within a growing international push to question that exclusion. It draws on the global debates around gender and peace, particularly those shaped by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognises the need to include women as victims and active participants in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The Basque conflict has been extensively researched from multiple disciplines for many years. However, it is true that in recent years, critical feminist literature has emerged that begins to make female involvement visible beyond the traditional roles of victim or caregiver. One of the most significant contributions is that of Zuriñe Rodríguez Lara (2017), who explores the motivations, experiences, and contradictions of women actively participating in ETA. Her study, based on 25 testimonies, shows how clandestinity, exile, and violence influence gender relations within the armed organisation, revealing tensions between empowerment and subordination. On the other hand, Carrie Hamilton (2007) offered a comparative and historical approach, analysing how nationalist discourses and militarist logic have shaped women's representation and role in ETA. She denounces that, even in revolutionary contexts, traditional gender roles and stigmas about female sexuality are perpetuated.

On the other hand, Iker Casanova (2007) offers an inside look at ETA's political and organisational history. Although his work does not explicitly incorporate a gender perspective, it is essential for understanding the context in which women joined the movement. Beyond the historical and political perspective, studies such as that of Villellas Ariño et al. (2018) recover experiences like that of Ahotsak, a transversal women's platform promoting dialogue and reconciliation during peace. Their work highlights female leadership in nonviolent initiatives, which is usually ignored in traditional historiography. From a radically critical perspective, Rodríguez and Etxebarrieta (2016) in Lisipe propose a reading of the conflict from the perspective of the struggle against patriarchy, denouncing how official discourses – both those of the State and ETA – have systematically marginalised structural

violence against women and excluded their experiences from peace and memory processes. Last but not least, in recent academic circles, two highly significant doctoral research projects stand out: Dañobeitia Ceballos (2024) analyses the political and repressive experience of women militants of the Basque Nationalist Left in the 1990s, highlighting the tensions between feminism and militant culture in a punitive and patriarchal context. Galardi (2025) addresses the violence suffered by women linked to militants in the 1980s and 1990s, using a critical feminist ethnography that articulates everyday and community resistance.

This thesis unfolds across six chapters. It begins by outlining the research questions, objectives, methodology and theoretical lens. The second chapter traces the political and historical background of the Basque conflict and peace process. The third chapter offers the conceptual and legal foundations, drawing from feminist and intersectional approaches to peace, and engaging with frameworks like UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW. From there, the thesis turns to the experiences of women. The fourth chapter focuses on those who participated in ETA and their role in the organisation's demilitarisation. The fifth looks at women active in civil society and their efforts in disarmament and reconciliation. Finally, the sixth chapter explores how women victims have engaged with memory, justice and reparation, contributing to broader reflections on peace.

This work adopts a qualitative and feminist methodology, focusing on the analysis of discourses, documents, and regulatory frameworks linked to the Basque conflict and the peace process, with special attention to the role played by women. From a situated, critical, and non-neutral epistemology, it is assumed that relations of power, gender, ideology, and historical context influence all knowledge. This research does not seek to represent realities statistically but rather to interpret meanings, silences, and resistance surrounding women's experiences in a deeply politicised armed conflict.

Regarding the methodological approach of this research, the primary approach is qualitative and inspired by intersectional feminist thinking, which incorporates tools from critical discourse analysis, political hermeneutics, and international legal normative analysis. The objective is to identify the role of women in the conflict and understand how they have been represented, to what extent they have been rendered invisible in the peace process, and what their contributions have been. Therefore, the analysis is based on three complementary methodological axes. The first is a critical bibliographic review, with special attention to doctoral theses, academic articles, and essays that address the Basque conflict from gender, memory, and peace perspectives. The second is a documentary analysis of institutional texts, ETA

communiqués, Spanish state resolutions, proposals from women's organisations (such as Ahotsak, Gernika Gogoratuz, or Egiari Zor), public memoirs, cultural materials, and activist works. The third is a normative and legal analysis, focusing on the main instruments of international humanitarian law and human rights law (Resolution 1325, CEDAW, the Rome Statute, and the Istanbul Convention), assessing their application – or lack thereof – in the Basque case.

This research is grounded in a feminist, situated and non-neutral epistemology. I do not approach this work as an external observer, but as someone who has lived through the consequences of the Basque conflict and grown up within its social, political and emotional landscape. This is not just a historical or academic topic for me: it is part of my life story, my family's memory, and the women who have surrounded and shaped me. My grandmother, my great-aunts, and many other women resisted, sustained and cared amid violence and silence. Their experiences, along with those of my broader community and my own, are not treated here as objects of study, but as sources of knowledge. Acknowledging this position is essential: it allows me to approach the topic with critical distance and emotional honesty. Rather than diminishing academic rigour, this embodied perspective enriches it. It reaffirms that all knowledge is situated and partial (Haraway, 1988), shaped by who we are, where we speak from, and to whom we are accountable (Collins, 1990).

2. CONTEXTUALISING THE BASQUE CONFLICT AND THE PEACE PROCESS

2.1 Historical Evolution of the Basque Conflict

To understand the peace process, it is essential first to understand the conflict itself. Therefore, this chapter aims to provide a contextual overview of the Basque conflict to situate the peace process better. It begins with a historical account of the conflict's development. As outlined in the introduction, this thesis understands the conflict spanning from 1968 to 2011, following the definition proposed by Emilio López Adán (2021). The peace process, as previously justified, is considered to cover the period from 2005 to 2020. However, contextualisation goes further. To fully understand the conflict, we must understand the historical situation of the Basque territory and its struggle for sovereignty, which dates back centuries. Between the 13th and 16th centuries, the southern Basque territories were conquered thanks to military and political manoeuvres by the Castilian-Spanish crown. However, the Spanish monarchy respected the *fueros*, the legal codes that granted rights to have their own civil law, fiscal independence, exemption from military recruitment, and so on, thus granting a significant level of autonomy (Casanova, 2007).

One of the essential elements of the conflict relates to its territorial nature. It is commonly accepted that the Basque people are a cultural community that speaks a common language (Euskara or Basque) north and south of the Pyrenees, between the Adour and Ebro Rivers in the western part of the mountain range (Alonso, 2004). At one time, this cultural community was politically represented as a State through the Kingdom of Navarre, encompassing large areas both south and north of the Pyrenees (Egaña, 1996). However, first in the south of the Pyrenees, with the aforementioned military, political, and economic annexation manoeuvres that ultimately incorporated the southern part of the Kingdom of Navarre into the Crown of Castile, and then in the north, where until the 18th century, a small part of the Kingdom of Navarre maintained its sovereignty in the small territory still today called 'Lower Navarre' (Jurío, 1997).

With the French Revolution and liberal movements in Europe, Spanish and French liberalism sought to impose a unitary state, contrary to the legal diversity they maintained with the *fueros* (charters). This is why the Basque community saw Carlism in the Castilian region as an option for resistance and preserving autonomy (López Tabar, 2003). However, the Carlists were ultimately defeated, leading to the liberal-

centralist model's imposition in Spain and the gradual disappearance of the *fueros* (Corcuera Atienza, 2001).

This process, combined with industrialisation, provoked fears in specific sectors of Basque society about the dissolution of their national cultural identity. This led to the creation of the Basque Nationalist Party in 1895, founded by Sabino Arana (Casanova, 2007). This context and this creation led to an ideological division between immigrant workers, who supported socialist movements, and Basque nationalism, which Arana shaped around conservative, Catholic, and xenophobic principles (Letamendia, 1994).

During this period, Renobales (2005) documents how a small political group called ANV promoted a more modern and progressive nationalism. ANV was founded in 1930 by liberal nationalist groups who rejected the racism and sectarianism of Aranism and defended both Basque sovereignty and workers' rights (Renobales, 2005). It won numerous municipal councillors and fell just 200 votes short of sending a representative to the parliament in Madrid.

After the fascist victory in the Civil War, repression was intense in the Basque Country and Navarre, targeting Basque culture and progressive sectors. In municipalities such as Barakaldo and Basauri, the population increased fivefold or even sevenfold (Garay Emparanza, 2020). In this context, in 1958, a group of young Basques dissatisfied with how the PNV was confronting Francoism founded ETA (Casanova, 2007). ETA was created to unite the struggle for national liberation with social transformation. Despite Franco's repression, youth organisations like EKIN had already laid the groundwork for this political awakening.

Although Spain transitioned to democracy after Franco's death, the process lacked genuine transitional justice. The 1978 Constitution was expected to transform the system without purging the dictatorship's institutions, and many repressive structures remained intact (Bengoetxea, 2020). The Basque Country experienced particularly strong repression during the dictatorship, which contributed to greater mistrust of the new democratic order (Aguilar, 2001; Bengoetxea, 2020).

ETA's long history is marked by ideological shifts, internal divisions, and strategic changes (Whitfield, 2014). The Spanish state pursued a hardline security approach that often blurred the lines between armed members, political supporters, and the broader Basque society. Practices such as unjustified arrests, torture, and illegal actions by groups like the GAL (Agirreazkuenaga, 2011) shaped the state's response.

ETA consistently argued that the division of the Basque territory following the Spanish transition – separating the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre – obstructed the development of a unified national project. Its core demand in negotiations was always to secure guarantees for greater autonomy and cross-border collaboration between Basque regions under Spanish and French administration (Zallo, 2011).

Below, I will attach a timeline with the most notable events in the history of ETA and, therefore, of the conflict I created, extracting information from Iker Casanova's book.

TIMELINE:

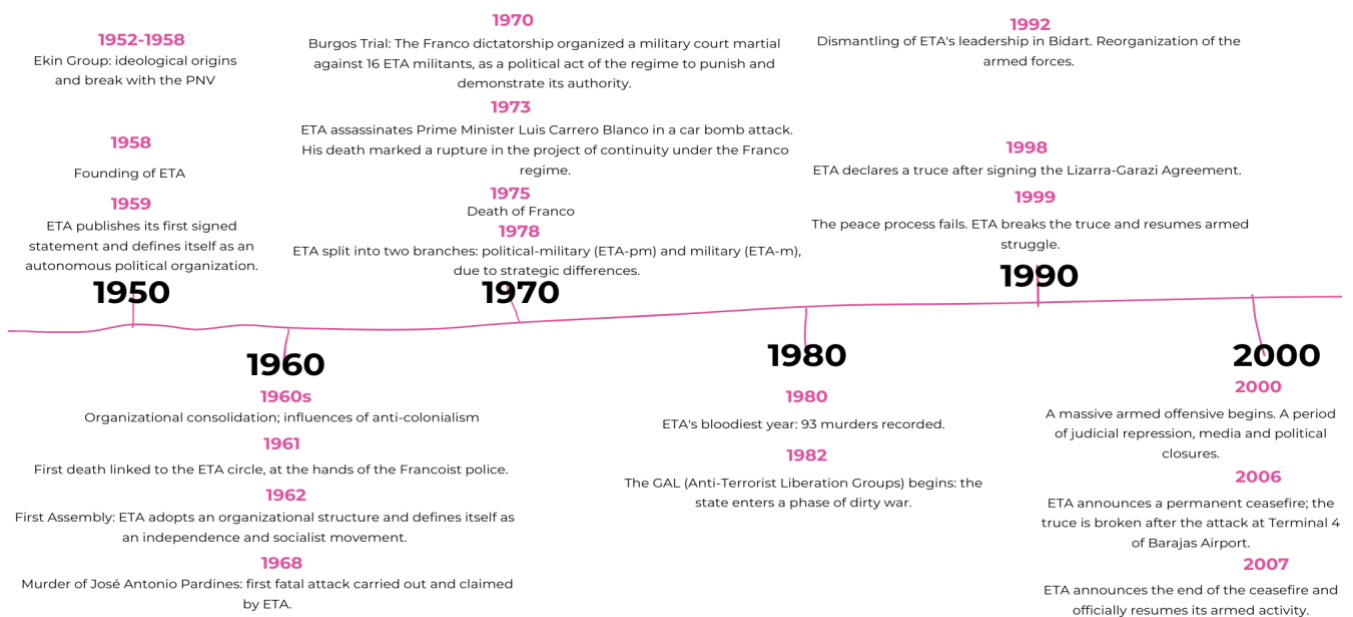


Figure 1

Historical timeline of the Basque conflict. Own elaboration based on Casanova (2007).

Therefore, to recap, after the Spanish Civil War, the Franco regime instituted intense repression against the historical nationalities of the Spanish State. Basques, Catalans, and Galicians were subjected to systematic policies of erasing their languages, cultures, and institutions to impose a single, centralised national identity (Preston, 2011). It is in this context that ETA emerged. This national liberation

movement underwent various phases and strategies during a half-century struggle against a State that often used illegal strategies to suppress political and armed dissent.

“The Basque Government has carried out the most accurate approximations of the numbers reported. The Basque Government produced a report on breaches of human rights from 1960 to 2013 based on research by Carmena, Landa, Mugica, and Uriarte (2013). It gives the following numbers: victims killed by ETA were 837; victims wounded by ETA are 2,600; victims killed by State-related terrorism (paramilitaries) were 73; victims wounded by State-related terrorism are 426; victims killed by the action of State agents were 94 and victims wounded by the action of State agents are 746. This report does not include cases of torture. Another Basque Government research report on torture and degrading treatment between the years 1960 and 2014 documented 4,000 cases of alleged torture by State agents. It was carried out by IVAC and the team of Etxeberria, Martin and Pego (2016) and contains Conclusions and Recommendations” (Bengoetxea, 2020).

There are different perspectives on understanding an armed national liberation group. However, this thesis aims to focus on the fact that the core of it is a political conflict and consider that the participants of these armed groups "are rational agents with political ends" (Díaz-Maroto, 2016, citing Sánchez-Cuenca).

2.2 Chronology of the Basque Peace Process

Some say that the peace process began when ETA and the PSOE held talks between 1986 and 1989, with Algeria as the mediator (Çakır, 2017). During the 1980s, ETA intensified its armed activity in political unrest, which was marked by the majority's rejection of Spain's entry into NATO in the Basque Country and Navarre. This rejection, especially among young people who had not experienced Franco's regime, reaffirmed the territory's distinct character. At the same time, the Basque nationalist left, represented by Herri Batasuna, won a significant electoral victory in the European elections for the first time, consolidating its position as the political arm of the Basque National Liberation Movement (Ortega, 2004). To analyse the reasons for the continued armed activity after the arrival of a democratic regime, in addition to the explanation of the transition offered by Klare (1998), the international context

must be taken into consideration, with the rise of successful guerrilla groups such as the Algerian and Cuban ones in previous decades, and the Sandinista and Salvadoran ones already at this time.

Furthermore, it must be considered that in the decade between Franco's death and these first negotiations, the Spanish State confronted ETA's armed activity with numerous illegal paramilitary strategies (such as the aforementioned GAL) and counterinsurgency plans inspired by the fight against guerrilla groups in Latin America, such as Plan ZEN (Special Zone North), which included infiltration techniques, disinformation, arbitrary detentions, torture, and coordination with illegal structures such as the GAL (Egaña & Giacopuzzi, 2010). To better understand the context, it is worth noting that many of the Spanish interlocutors in these initial negotiations (such as the Interior Minister, José Barrionuevo, and the Security Director, Rafael Vera) were later convicted for their involvement in dirty war activities linked to the GAL (Spanish National Liberation Front). However, the partial completion of their sentences was interpreted by broad sectors of Basque society as a sign of structural impunity that runs throughout the fight against ETA and has significantly eroded the legitimacy of the State among large segments of the Basque population (Egaña & Giacopuzzi, 2010).

As Bengoetxea (2020) argues, ending violence in the Basque conflict included different phases of dialogue and negotiation. These ranged from secret meetings held in places like Algiers, Switzerland, Loyola, and Oslo to international conferences like the one held in Aiete in October 2011. This process involved international mediators, committees tasked with verifying commitments, and spaces for deliberation with institutions and civil society. Previous initiatives such as the Brussels Declaration in 2010 – supported by Nobel Peace Prize laureates – and the Gernika Agreement, which called on ETA to cease its armed activity definitively, were key steps that paved the way for the final ceasefire announced a few days after the Aiete conference. (Paraphrase based on Bengoetxea, 2020)

As Whitfield (2015) points out, all Spanish governments held talks with ETA, but these did not bear fruit for various reasons. The main one was ETA's lack of trust in the guarantees for the State's compliance with the agreements. This led to a gradual evolution in each negotiation process, with ETA attempting to find new strategies to secure guarantees and ways to comply with the agreements.

After the breakdown of the Algiers negotiations, one of the significant steps promoted by the Basque nationalist movement was the creation of Udalbiltza, a network of Basque municipal institutions spanning territories on both sides of the Pyrenees. This platform sought to lay the foundations for a sovereignist political structure based on municipalism to advance a process of nation-building from

below (Bullain López, 2019). Spanish obstacles to allowing the development of new institutional structures for collaboration between Navarre and the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, along with the lack of commitment to deactivating the extraordinary repressive measures implemented in the previous years of the fight against ETA, also led to the failure of this attempt, thus causing the conflict to enter a deadlock, with neither side showing any genuine willingness to negotiate.

The Spanish State's use of various repressive strategies has never helped establish an adequate resolution framework. This is even less so given the enormous distrust generated among a segment of Basque society by the abysmal imbalance in the application of punitive justice to those responsible for the various acts of violence occurring in the conflict. According to Bezunartea (2014), the judicial treatment of those involved in the Basque conflict has been profoundly unequal. While militants of the independence movement (both armed and non-violent) have suffered all kinds of severe judicial reprisals (together thousands of years of imprisonment, isolation, and distancing hundreds of kilometres from their families), members of the State security forces and Spanish armed paramilitary groups have enjoyed almost total impunity throughout these decades. The few cases prosecuted have resulted in even fewer convictions and have ended with almost no consequences for those affected.

It is also important to note that, as Whitfield (2015) points out, the Spanish State rejected any external involvement in resolving the Basque conflict, as this implied an unacceptable encroachment on its sovereignty; initiatives seeking international support and ideas for conflict resolution were being propagated from the Basque Country. The pacifist organisation Elkarri, for example, invited international experts to gain a closer look at the situation, including conflict resolution specialists from the United States who had been following the Basque case since the 1990s, as well as leading figures from the peace process in Northern Ireland. One of these was the priest Alec Reid, known for facilitating dialogue between Gerry Adams (Sinn Féin) and John Hume (Social Democratic and Labour Party), and who also maintained ties with Batasuna³ for a decade. On the other hand, international actors also began to intervene, such as the Geneva-based Humanitarian Dialogue Centre, which established contact with ETA in 2003, and the South African lawyer Brian Currin, recommended by Sinn Féin to Batasuna during the same period. (Whitfield, 2015)

³ Batasuna was a Basque nationalist political party that was banned by the Spanish state in 2003 under accusations of being linked to ETA.

The process that led to the end of ETA's violence cannot be understood without considering the roles played by different actors at different times. As Teresa Whitfield argues (in Çakır, 2017), President Zapatero's⁴ initiative in 2005 was a crucial starting point. Although the process failed in 2007, from that moment on, Batasuna promoted important changes within the Basque nationalist left. Furthermore, although international involvement was limited, its contribution was key at specific moments.

ETA's breach of the ceasefire with the attack at Barajas Airport once again left the process up in the air. Following this event, the Spanish government formally concluded the dialogue process (Whitfield, 2015). In this context, it is important to understand how the international landscape has also changed. While in the years of ETA's emergence, there was a certain international legitimacy toward liberation struggles, by the turn of the 21st century, this space for recognition had narrowed significantly (Çakır, 2017), limiting the possibilities of the pro-independence left.

At the same time, the State intensified its judicial and political offensive. The closure of the newspaper *Egunkaria* in 2003 (at the time the only daily newspaper published entirely in Basque) and the outlawing of Batasuna were widely perceived as decisions driven by the political establishment, specifically by the government of José María Aznar⁵. Which provoked a strong social response (Lecours, 2007). This was compounded by years of successive outlawing of leftist Basque nationalist parties such as EAE, Sortu, Bildu, and EHAK.

Beginning in the second half of the 2000s, the Basque Nationalist Left promoted a strategic shift that would ultimately prove decisive in opening a new political cycle in the Basque Country. In contrast to the previous model of accumulating forces that combined institutional, social, and armed action, given the certainty that the negotiating strategy always left the subsequent fulfilment of these commitments in the hands of the State, a new orientation emerged, centred on placing the guarantees of progress in the process in the hands of the Basque people themselves, which translated into an exclusively political path. This change did not occur externally but was embraced internally by the Basque Nationalist Left and, ultimately, also recognised by ETA, which in January 2010 publicly announced its support for this new strategy (Letamendia, 2013).

⁴ José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was the Prime Minister of Spain from 2004 to 2011, representing the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

⁵ José María Aznar was the Prime Minister of Spain from 1996 to 2004, representing the conservative Popular Party (Partido Popular).

The transition was accompanied and supported by various international actors with experience in peace processes, such as the HD Centre and Sinn Féin, who shared useful tools, contacts, and lessons learned (Whitfield, 2015). One of the milestones in this journey was the Brussels Declaration, which directly urged ETA to declare a permanent and verifiable ceasefire (Whitfield, 2015)

This process culminated on October 20, 2011, when ETA responded to the call issued by the Aiete Conference by publicly declaring the definitive cessation of its armed activity and calling on the governments of Spain and France to engage in dialogue (Letamendia, 2013; Whitfield, 2015).

According to other actors, and in varying order depending on their ideological affiliations, the reasons centre on the decline in social support for the armed struggle, pressure from State security forces, the failure of previous truces, and the changing international context, which was increasingly less favourable to forms of political violence (Çakır, 2017).

In any case, its unilateral nature distinguishes the Basque case from other international conflict resolution processes. There were no real negotiations or political recognition of the conflict by the State. ETA's dissolution primarily resulted from pressure exerted by Basque society and a harsh judicial strategy by the Spanish State (Bengoetxea, 2020).

However, State institutions continue to maintain a reductionist view of the conflict, focused solely on ETA's violence, as reflected in the approach of the Victims' Memorial Centre (Bengoetxea, 2020). In contrast to this partial narrative, initiatives such as the Gogora Institute have proposed a broader interpretation, recognising that ETA was responsible for a significant portion of the violence, but not the only one (Bengoetxea, 2020). Along these lines, authors such as Letamendia (2013) warn that a real resolution to the conflict will not be possible without acknowledging the existence of multiple and conflicting forms of political violence. The lack of satisfaction with the demands of both ETA and broad sectors of Basque society leads some authors to speak of an incomplete process. There were no formal negotiations, many actors were excluded from the resolution framework, and no real political commitment was reached (Çakır, 2017).

In this context, transitional justice cannot be limited to the institutional sphere. As Bengoetxea (2020) points out, the role of civil society has been and continues to be essential. Collectives, citizen platforms, and human rights groups, often with the support of Basque institutions, have promoted their agenda based on recognising all victims and constructing a plural memory.

The future perspective of this type of transitional justice aims to build a new social pact based on recognising the harm caused, respect for human rights, and a commitment to peace (Bengoetxea, 2020). Along this path, European integration has played an important role as a political framework in economic terms and as a benchmark for democracy and respect for the rule of law (Bengoetxea, 2020).

However, as Whitfield (2015) warns, security measures are not enough for peace to be sustainable; a political strategy is required. It is essential to respect victims without turning them into actors with veto power over decisions and to overcome the taboo that stigmatises political dialogue as a concession to terrorism. Even when international organisations are not formally involved, they can play a helpful role in mediating and supporting the processes. In short, it remains necessary to build a genuine peace process.

Therefore, the overall assessment of the process is ambivalent. Although the definitive end of armed violence was achieved, the fundamental political demands of both ETA and a significant portion of Basque society have not been met (Çakır, 2017). There were no real negotiations, no inclusion of all stakeholders, and no broad political agreement. Furthermore, the current State model, even with an advanced autonomous system, has failed to stabilise territorial tensions, as demonstrated by the ongoing conflict in Catalonia (Çakır, 2017).

From the perspective of the Basque nationalist left, consolidating peace requires moving towards a double agreement: an internal one between the different sensibilities of Basque nationalism and a broader one between nationalists and non-nationalists, which allows for the articulation of a new framework for coexistence and political recognition (Letamendia, 2013).

3. GENDER, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter establishes a theoretical and critical foundation for analysing the relationship between gender, conflict, and peacebuilding from a feminist perspective. The approach adopted is interdisciplinary, drawing on contributions from anthropology, critical psychology, feminist philosophy, and law, not as separate disciplines, but as frameworks that run transversely through the analysis. These perspectives enable us to challenge normative assumptions, make power relations visible, and expand our understanding of peace processes beyond the strictly institutional or legal framework.

The guiding thesis of this chapter is that gender operates as a deeply ingrained power structure, both within the system at large and in contexts of conflict and peace. As Connell (1997) points out, gender cannot be reduced to a social role, but rather constitutes a structural axis that, along with class and race, sustains systems of domination. From this critical perspective, the chapter seeks to dismantle essentialist approaches that associate women with caregiving or passive victimisation and analyses the diverse and unequal ways in which conflicts affect both genders, both symbolically and materially.

This chapter is structured in four main sections. First, it outlines the international legal and institutional framework that addresses the relationship between gender and peace, focusing on instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Rome Statute, the Istanbul Convention, and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. However, it is important to note that these mechanisms are not directly applicable to the Basque case, since the Spanish state has consistently framed the situation not as a political or internal armed conflict, but rather as a matter of terrorism. This framing has profound implications: it limits the recognition of structural and gendered forms of violence, impedes the use of transitional justice frameworks, and conditions the way international reports and legal instruments interpret the situation.

Second, the chapter engages with critical feminist perspectives on human rights, challenging the androcentric underpinnings of mainstream legal frameworks and incorporating contributions from radical, Marxist, decolonial, and ecofeminist approaches. The third section explores feminist conceptualisations of peace, particularly the distinction between negative and positive peace, and includes Parlevliet's holistic framework for human rights in post-conflict settings. Lastly, the chapter

concludes with a critical synthesis of the concepts and debates presented, laying the groundwork for their application to the Basque case in the subsequent chapters.

3.1 International Legal and Institutional Framework on Gender and Peace

To address the International Legal and Institutional Framework, it is essential to begin by discussing how, since the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945 in San Francisco, it has marked the beginning of an international order supposedly based on the principles of cooperation, peace, and human rights. Authors such as Reanda (1999) affirm that the principle of "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" (United Nations, 1945, art. 1, para. 3) was not only a normative starting point recognizing women's rights but also represented a step forward for their inclusion in international affairs, both in times of peace and armed conflict. For this reason, in 1946, one year after the signing of the United Nations Charter, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was created. This body, dependent on the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was the first intergovernmental mechanism with a specific mandate to promote women's rights globally (UN Women, n.d.). Two years later, in 1948, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 1 of which establishes that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that these rights should be applied without distinction as to sex (United Nations, 1948). This declaration served as the basis for the development of subsequent treaties. In 1967, following the work of the CSW, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted. Although it was not legally binding, it constituted a normative instrument for transition to binding treaties such as CEDAW (Charlesworth, 1994).

1949 the Four Geneva Conventions, the basis of modern international humanitarian law, were signed. These texts codify the protection of persons in armed conflict, including civilians and, in particular, women. Article 3, common to the four conventions, protects persons not directly participating in hostilities and is considered a mini-charter of human rights applicable in internal armed conflicts (ICRC, 2010). Subsequently, on June 8, 1977, Additional Protocols I and II were adopted, which strengthened this protection, more clearly incorporating the prohibition of sexual violence in war contexts (Meron, 2000). Beginning in 1975, the World Conferences on Women began as part of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985). The first conference in Mexico established three key objectives: equality,

development, and peace (CNDH, n.d.). It was followed by the Copenhagen conference (1980), which focused on employment, health, and education; Nairobi (1985), which recognised the need to integrate women at all levels of social life; and finally, Beijing (1995), which gave rise to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which constitutes the most comprehensive action plan for women's rights to date (United Nations, 1995). This normative and institutional evolution in the area of human rights and gender created the conditions for the emergence, starting in the 1980s and 1990s, of international treaties of great legal significance, such as CEDAW (1979), the Rome Statute (1998) and the Istanbul Convention (2011), culminating in 2000 with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325, which would mark a turning point in the articulation between gender, peace and international security.

3.1.1 CEDAW, Rome Statute, Istanbul Convention

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution 34/180 and entered into force in 1981. It is a legally binding instrument for States Parties, establishing an international legal framework that defines discrimination against women and proposes a national action agenda to eliminate it (UN Women, 2009). It defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex (...) in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field” (CEDAW, 1979, art. 1). The treaty adopts a comprehensive human rights approach that encompasses both legal and substantive equality (Byrnes & Freeman, 2012). States Parties must eliminate discriminatory laws, practices, or customs, promote political participation, education, employment, health, and family life equality, and adopt temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality (CEDAW, 1979, arts. 2–5). The CEDAW Committee monitors the treaty's implementation through reviewing periodic reports submitted by States Parties, issuing general recommendations, and establishing an individual complaints procedure through the Optional Protocol (UN Women, 2009). CEDAW has been interpreted as a living treaty whose scope evolves through general recommendations, such as Recommendation 30 on the role of women in conflict prevention and Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence (Freeman, Chinkin, & Rudolf, 2012). The Rome Statute, adopted on July 17, 1998, establishes the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute individuals responsible for the most serious crimes against the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression (ICC, 1998). For the first time in the history of international criminal law, sexual and gender-based violence is

explicitly included as war crimes and crimes against humanity, encompassing acts such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and enforced sterilization (ICC, 1998, arts. 7 and 8). States Parties are obligated to incorporate the crimes outlined in the Statute into their national legislation, cooperate with the Court in investigations and the surrender of suspects, and ensure that there is no impunity for international crimes, including those related to gender-based violence (Askin, 2003). The Court can act when a State Party refers a situation, the UN Security Council makes a referral, or the ICC Prosecutor initiates an *ex officio* investigation. Furthermore, it establishes an obligation to guarantee the protection of victims, especially women and girls, throughout the judicial process (ICC, 1998, art. 68). The Rome Statute marked a turning point in international criminal law by considering sexual violence not as a secondary crime, but as a central component of mass violence (Chappell, 2010).

The Istanbul Convention, adopted by the Council of Europe in 2011 and force since 2014, is the first legally binding treaty focused exclusively on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, establishing mandatory minimum standards for States Parties (Council of Europe, 2011). It defines violence against women as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination against women, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, as well as specific practices such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, forced abortion, and forced sterilization (Istanbul Convention, art. 3). States must prevent violence through education, campaigns, and specialized training, protect victims through support services, shelters, and helplines, prosecute perpetrators, and adopt a coordinated, multisectoral approach in all actions (Hagemann-White et al., 2010). Monitoring compliance with the treaty is carried out by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence (GREVIO), which conducts reviews of national reports, visits States, and issues specific recommendations (Council of Europe, 2011). The treaty recognises that gender violence is a manifestation of structural power and demands not only penal responses, but also cultural and institutional transformations aimed at substantive equality and the elimination of the foundations of patriarchy (Kelly, 2010).

It can be argued that official reports and institutional analyses on violence and gender in Spain rarely address the Basque conflict as a political conflict, since the Spanish state has consistently framed it as a fight against ETA, conceived as a terrorist group, rather than as an internal or political armed conflict. This narrative has had direct consequences on which forms of violence are recognised and how they are acknowledged.

First, the Spanish State has systematically denied the political nature of the conflict, reducing it to a matter of terrorism. As a result, structural analyses concerning national, territorial, or self-determination dimensions are excluded, and frameworks such as transitional justice or peace processes are rendered inapplicable (Cockburn, Maquieira, and Beaumont, cited in Goikoetxea, 2022). Second, authors like Zulaika and Douglass have warned of the depoliticizing and decontextualizing effect of the terrorism label, which shifts all responsibility to the armed group while erasing discussions about military repression, the elimination of historical legal frameworks (*fueros*), or the denial of cultural and social rights (Zulaika & Douglass, 1996).

In this context, international reports from bodies such as CEDAW or GREVIO rely almost exclusively on state-provided data. If the Spanish state does not recognise that there was an armed conflict with components of sovereignty, political repression, and state violence, these reports will not address it either. The GREVIO (2024) report focuses on gender-based violence in domestic or institutional contexts. However, it entirely ignores violence linked to the Basque conflict, such as torture or the actions of the GAL.

Finally, this perspective directly conditions how violence is analysed through a gender lens. Feminist historiography on the Basque conflict has demonstrated that many women were affected by repression (detention, isolation, criminalisation) and took part as militants, caregivers, or mediators. However, their experiences are only represented in the official narrative as victims ("moral figures") or as terrorists, never as political subjects or agents of peace. The supposed neutrality of the state thus becomes a way to render gendered political violence invisible.

In addition to these global legal instruments, it is important to recognise regional frameworks that have significantly contributed to the protection of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women*, commonly known as the Belém do Pará Convention (1994), was the first binding international treaty to define violence against women as a violation of human rights and an obstacle to the whole exercise of citizenship (OAS, 1994). Similarly, the Maputo Protocol, officially the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (2003), adopted by the African Union, provides a comprehensive and progressive framework for women's rights in Africa, including specific provisions on sexual and reproductive health, protection in armed conflict, and political participation (African Union, 2003). These regional instruments expand the normative landscape and highlight the

importance of culturally and contextually specific approaches to gender-based violence and women's participation in peacebuilding.

3.1.2 UN Security Council Resolution 1325

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, established the international agenda on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), recognizing the differential impact of armed conflict on women and girls, as well as their active role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Besozzi, 2022; UN Security Council, 2000). Its adoption was the result of years of advocacy by the feminist and peace movement, influenced by key precedents such as the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action in 2000 (Coomaraswamy et al., 2015). Furthermore, the context in which the resolution was adopted was notable: even male diplomats expressed progressive views on the need to incorporate women into peace processes, challenging the traditional narrative that relegated them solely to victims (Cohn, 2004).

The resolution is structured around four fundamental pillars: violence prevention, protection of women's rights, participation in peace and security processes, and recovery for women survivors of violence. Since R1325, ten additional resolutions have been adopted that expand this normative framework (UN Women, 2020). It has become a political tool that feminist organisations use to pressure governments and international institutions, legitimising women's participation in decision-making spaces (Besozzi, 2022; Kvinna till Kvinna, 2020). The resolution also proposes transformative measures, including the incorporation of a gender perspective into all phases of the peace process – from disarmament to post-conflict reconstruction – to the inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations, and gender training for UN staff (Cohn, 2004).

However, there are significant limitations. First, R1325 lacks legally binding force, which limits its enforceability, unlike treaties such as CEDAW. Its implementation, therefore, depends on the will of States and the advocacy capacity of civil society (Shepherd, 2021). The limited dialogue between the United Nations system and women's organisations at the local level has also been noted, which weakens accountability mechanisms (Anderlini, 2007). As Cohn (2004) warns, despite its unanimous adoption, the Security Council lacks robust mechanisms for implementing its resolutions, and most subsequent

resolutions do not include any substantive references to gender, highlighting a gap between institutional discourse and practice.

The institutionalisation of the WPS agenda has not guaranteed structural transformation either. Women's participation in peace processes remains marginal: between 1992 and 2019, only 13% of negotiators and 6% of mediators were women, and their presence is often limited to the role of victims, not as agents with the capacity to influence (UN Women, 2020; Paffenholz et al., 2016). Regarding sexual violence in conflict, although R1820 (2008) recognises it as a war crime, impunity persists, and the political will of States to prosecute it is weak (Bastick, Grimm, & Kunz, 2007). Added to this is the lack of sustained attention from key actors, such as US feminists and some NGOs, who have largely ignored the political potential of this resolution, despite its binding nature (Cohn, 2004).

As of 2024, 112 countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security, a significant increase from previous years (PeaceWomen, 2024). However, only 43 of these NAPs currently include specific budget allocations for implementation, reflecting a persistent gap between policy commitments and practical enforcement (PeaceWomen, 2024). While Resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions have laid a crucial normative foundation, their effectiveness depends heavily on national implementation, political will, and financial support. The absence of dedicated funding mechanisms continues to limit the transformative potential of the WPS agenda. In addition, women remain underrepresented in peace processes globally: between 1992 and 2019, only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes were women (UN Women, 2020). These statistics underscore the ongoing challenges in translating the principles of Resolution 1325 into structural change.

In conclusion, Resolution 1325 has been key in institutionalising the gender perspective in security agendas and has provided a legitimate basis for the demands of the feminist movement in conflict contexts. However, its real impact is limited. It is constrained by a lack of enforcement mechanisms, inadequate structural transformation, and a disconnect between discourse and implementation. For this agenda to fulfil its transformative potential, a profound reformulation is required that integrates a human rights approach, adequate budgets, demilitarisation strategies, and the effective participation of women as agents of peace. As Cohn (2004) emphasises, if fully implemented, R1325 would transform women's experience in conflict and global conceptions of peace and security.

3.2 Critical Feminist Approaches to Human Rights

Feminist thought has been a key driver for decades in dismantling the notion that human rights are neutral or universal principles. In reality, many feminist scholars have shown that the so-called universality of rights has often excluded the lived experiences, needs and worldviews of women and other marginalised people. It is striking how human rights law, despite its emancipatory discourse, was initially shaped in patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist contexts. Authors like Facio (2011), Maquieira (2011) and Cook (1994) have all emphasised that the subject of law, as imagined in international treaties and conventions, continues to be this abstract figure: white, male, rational, Western, and property-owning. That is the model. Everything else is the exception.

As a consequence of that structural bias, women's specific rights have long been treated as "secondary" or simply overlooked. Not only that, but historically, the rights prioritised are civil and political, while economic, social, and cultural rights have remained on the sidelines. This hierarchy has had very concrete effects. Feminist movements, especially from the 1980s onwards, began to seriously question this architecture. They didn't just ask to be included – they questioned the whole foundation. Events like the Vienna Conference in 1993 or the Beijing Platform in 1995 became milestones not because they were perfect, but because, for the first time, the idea that "women's rights are human rights" gained traction (Llanos Mardones, 2021). That might sound obvious now, but it wasn't always.

Still, the inclusion of gender in the international system has often been superficial. Many feminist scholars have pointed this out – Reilly (2007) and Mendia Azkue (2021), for example, show how the gender perspective is frequently used as a checkbox, something formal and technical, without any real intention to question power relations. Reilly (2007) insists on the need to rethink justice from a more transformative lens – one that connects grassroots feminist activism with legal and institutional tools. And it makes sense. In practice, as Mendia Azkue (2021) found in her research on post-conflict settings in El Salvador and Bosnia-Herzegovina, women did play key roles in rebuilding communities. But their work was often framed in terms of care, humanitarian tasks, or reconciliation, and not recognised as political or transformative action. That kind of framing ends up reinforcing the very structures feminists are trying to challenge.

There are also deeper, structural critiques. Nancy Fraser (2000), for example, talks about the need to stop seeing redistribution and recognition as separate goals. For her, justice means combining the two: recognising difference while also addressing material inequality. And honestly, this idea resonates with

many of the struggles we still see today. Similarly, Marxist feminists have criticised how the international human rights system often uses a liberal vocabulary, focused on abstract individual freedoms, without acknowledging that rights are meaningless if you don't have the basic material conditions to exercise them (González, 2011). It's one thing to "have the right" to education, but it's another thing entirely to be able to access it when you're a woman in a rural area with no transport, money, or institutional support. The same goes for other so-called guaranteed rights.

And then there are critiques like the one from Žižek (2005), who – although not a feminist – argues that the human rights discourse has sometimes served as a cover for Western interventionism. It's a harsh critique, but not completely off-base. In the name of "protecting rights," many military interventions have been justified, often ignoring the people they're supposed to help.

Decolonial thinkers take this even further. For them, the issue is that rights have been unequally applied and that the whole framework is an extension of Western modernity. From this point of view, the language of rights itself is part of the problem. Karina Bidaseca (2010) and Ariel Salleh (2010), among others, advocate for alternative frameworks rooted in Indigenous, collective, and non-Western worldviews. These are not just theoretical arguments – they speak from lived experiences in the Global South, where people have found that the liberal human rights model does not reflect their realities or needs.

Ecofeminism adds yet another layer. Vandana Shiva (2006), for example, argues that human rights shouldn't only apply to humans. That might sound extreme at first, but in her view, rights must include the earth, the water, and the ecosystems we depend on. This isn't only about saving the planet – it's also about justice. Because environmental degradation affects women disproportionately, especially in rural and Indigenous communities.

Another important contribution from feminism is the critique of the public/private divide. Traditional human rights frameworks often focus on violations committed by the state in public life – torture, censorship, and political persecution. But what about domestic violence? Or emotional abuse? Or the economic dependency that keeps many women tied to situations of exploitation? Feminist theorists have argued for decades that private spaces are also political. Concepts like "everyday human rights" try to bring attention to those more subtle, but deeply harmful forms of injustice (Llanos Mardones, 2021; Roosevelt, 1958). The idea is to rethink what counts as violence and who gets to be protected.

Intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw (1989), has also reshaped how we think about rights. It's not enough to speak of "women" in the abstract. Race, class, disability, sexuality, migration status – all these axes of identity shape the way people experience inequality. And ignoring that complexity makes rights discourse hollow. Apart from this, Parlevliet (2010) offers a useful way to integrate all of these critiques into a more comprehensive framework. She sees human rights not as fixed legal formulas, but as social relationships and processes that can (and should) be oriented toward equity and transformation. This approach is particularly relevant in post-conflict contexts, where institutions are being rebuilt. South Africa and Nepal are examples of places where inclusive, participatory processes have worked. Not perfectly, but better than imposed models. In the end, critical feminist approaches to human rights do more than point out flaws – they offer alternatives. They remind us that it's not just about including women in systems that were never made for them, but about transforming those systems altogether. From everyday life to legal institutions, and from local activism to global policy, feminisms push us to ask uncomfortable questions and to imagine rights as tools for justice, not just slogans.

Building on these critical reflections, it is also important to integrate key feminist theoretical contributions that inform the broader understanding of peace and gender in conflict settings. To deepen the critical analysis of gender and peacebuilding, it is also essential to incorporate key theoretical perspectives that have shaped feminist peace research. Scholars such as Carol Cohn (2013) have analysed how gendered language and militarised masculinities influence international security discourse, while Sara Ruddick (1995) introduced the concept of "maternal thinking" to explore how care ethics could inform peace practices. Raewyn Connell (1995) contributed with her theory of hegemonic masculinity, which reveals how dominant forms of masculinity sustain systems of violence and exclusion. In the context of feminist ethics, Virginia Held (2006) has argued that care and relational interdependence are essential foundations for rethinking justice and peace. Integrating these perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how gender operates not only as an identity category but as a structuring force in the production of peace and conflict.

3.3 Feminist Conceptualisations of Peace: Positive and Holistic Peace

For decades, peace has often been conceptualised through a relatively narrow lens. Influential thinkers such as Johan Galtung (1969) made an important contribution by distinguishing between negative and positive peace, two concepts that have shaped the foundations of peace studies. While

negative peace refers to the mere absence of direct violence or armed conflict, positive peace implies the presence of justice, equality, and the conditions for sustainable and harmonious coexistence. This distinction was, at its time, groundbreaking. However, as feminist scholars have argued, even the idea of “positive peace” needs to be further investigated if it is to serve as a genuinely inclusive and transformative goal.

From a feminist perspective, peace cannot be understood without acknowledging the power relations that structure everyday life. The notion that peace is merely the cessation of war is not only insufficient – it is, in many ways, misleading. Structural violence, symbolic violence, and everyday gendered inequalities persist even in so-called peaceful societies. As Cockburn (2010) points out, women and other marginalised groups often continue to live in situations of injustice and oppression long after a formal ceasefire has been signed. The continuation of these forms of violence – domestic violence, economic precarity, racialised exclusion – is incompatible with any meaningful notion of peace.

Authors like Confortini (2006) and Cohn (2013) have emphasised that peace, in feminist terms, must be reimagined as a deeply transformative process. It is not just about ending violence; it is about reconfiguring social structures, dismantling gender hierarchies, and promoting interdependent forms of life based on care, empathy, and collective responsibility. This is a fundamentally different vision than the one offered by traditional peacebuilding models, which often focus on state institutions, security arrangements, or elite negotiations. Feminist peace, by contrast, begins in the community, in relationships, in the home – even in the body.

The idea of care as a political and peace-oriented value has been particularly relevant in feminist thinking. While care work has historically been feminised and undervalued, feminist theorists have redefined it as a core component of a peaceful society. Building peace means creating the material and emotional conditions in which people can care for one another without exploitation or exhaustion. This reframing challenges both the militaristic logic of state-centred peacebuilding and the neoliberal frameworks that reduce individuals to economic agents. It also exposes the ways in which global capitalism, patriarchy, and racism intersect to produce unsustainable and unequal forms of life – forms that no ceasefire or treaty can resolve by themselves.

In this sense, the feminist critique of peace is not only conceptual but also practical. It is rooted in the experiences of women who have been excluded from formal peace processes, yet have been central to sustaining life and rebuilding communities in the aftermath of conflict. Feminist peace is not an abstract

ideal; it is a lived practice. And it is from this everyday practice that feminist scholars draw their theories. Cohn (2013), for instance, writes about how listening to women in post-conflict settings shifts our entire understanding of what peace means. Their testimonies speak of resilience, grief, unpaid labour, emotional labour, and hope. These are not just background details – they are the essence of what a peaceful society must care for.

Parlevliet (2010) offers a framework that resonates strongly with these feminist concerns. Her holistic approach to human rights in conflict and post-conflict contexts moves away from static legal definitions and instead emphasises process, relationship, and context. According to her, peace cannot be understood as a state to be achieved and maintained – it must be seen as a social and political practice oriented toward the transformation of unequal power relations. This idea – that peace is something we do, not something we declare – is deeply compatible with feminist thought.

What Parlevliet contributes, specifically, is a way to bridge the gap between legal instruments and lived realities. While documents such as CEDAW or Resolution 1325 provide crucial frameworks, they often fall short in practice, precisely because they are not grounded in the everyday complexities of people's lives. A holistic approach, as she proposes, demands that we pay attention to those complexities – to the nuances of context, to the voices of those traditionally excluded, to the dynamics of power that shape what “peace” actually looks like on the ground. Feminist scholars have long argued the same: without transforming the everyday, no legal structure will be enough.

Another key contribution of feminist thought is the emphasis on intersectionality. While gender is often the entry point for feminist analyses of peace, it cannot be understood in isolation. Race, class, sexuality, migration status, and ability all intersect to produce different experiences of violence and exclusion. Thus, a peace that does not account for these intersections will inevitably reproduce inequalities. A white, middle-class woman in an urban context and a racialised woman in a rural area may both face gendered oppression, but the forms and impacts of that oppression will differ significantly. Feminist peacebuilding recognizes and incorporates these differences rather than erasing them in the name of universality.

Furthermore, feminist conceptualisations of peace are inherently sceptical of militarism. War and militarisation, from this perspective, are not exceptional events but rather extreme expressions of everyday violence and patriarchy. The logic of domination, hierarchy, and control that underpins military institutions is the same logic that structures domestic abuse, economic exploitation, and state violence

against marginalised communities. This insight challenges the assumption that peace can be built through security strategies that rely on armed actors, surveillance, or the suppression of dissent.

It is also worth noting that feminist approaches do not treat peace as an endpoint. Peace is never “finished.” It is an ongoing, contested, and fragile process that requires continuous work, reflection, and adaptation. This understanding contrasts sharply with mainstream peacebuilding projects, which often operate on timelines and benchmarks designed to produce measurable outcomes within institutional cycles. Feminist peace cannot be measured solely by the number of women at negotiation tables or the adoption of certain laws. It must be evaluated by how people live – by whether their basic needs are met, whether their voices are heard, and whether they feel safe, valued, and empowered.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the Basque case, which will be addressed in the following chapters. Applying a feminist and holistic approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the post-conflict dynamics in the region. Rather than focusing solely on political agreements or institutional reforms, it becomes possible to analyse how women have contributed to peace through activism, care work, and community leadership, and how their efforts have been recognised or marginalised. The framework offered by Parlevliet (2010), in dialogue with the works of Cockburn (2010), Confortini (2006), and Cohn (2013), provides valuable tools for such an analysis.

In sum, feminist conceptualisations of peace offer a powerful alternative to traditional models that focus narrowly on the absence of violence. They invite us to imagine peace as a process grounded in care, justice, and equality; as a practice rooted in everyday life; and as a political project that must confront and transform structural oppression. This vision is not utopian – it is urgent. And it is only through such a lens that peace can be truly inclusive, sustainable, and just.

3.4 Modalities of Women's Inclusion in Peace Processes

When we talk about women’s participation in peace processes, the discussion often gets stuck on numbers: how many women were at the table, how many signed an agreement, how many held formal roles. While visibility matters, reducing inclusion to headcounts is deeply insufficient. Feminist scholars and peacebuilding practitioners have been pointing this out for years, arguing that the quality, form, and impact of participation are just as important as the quantity. In this context, the work of Paffenholz et al.

(2016) has been a major contribution to moving beyond simplistic metrics. Instead of asking whether women were “present or absent,” they invite us to look at how women have participated – and how that participation has influenced peace outcomes.

In their research based on forty peace and transition processes worldwide, Paffenholz and her colleagues identify a variety of ways in which women engage, ranging from formal to informal and direct to indirect involvement. These include participation at negotiation tables, roles as observers or in consultative forums, engagement through national dialogues and implementation bodies, civil society mobilisations, as well as less visible forms of influence through community relationships or proximity to negotiators. What’s crucial about their approach is that it doesn’t create a hierarchy between these forms of engagement; rather, it reveals how each can play a transformative role depending on the context.

In fact, many of the most powerful contributions women have made to peace processes have emerged from outside formal spaces. In Liberia, for example, women’s sustained grassroots mobilisation and nonviolent protests significantly influenced the peace agenda, even without official recognition or seats at the negotiation table (Anderlini, 2007). Similarly, in Colombia, feminist and women’s organisations pushed successfully for a gender perspective to be included in the peace agreement, despite significant institutional barriers (Boutron & Díaz, 2019). These cases demonstrate that impact cannot be measured solely by formal presence.

Paffenholz et al. (2016) also warn against assuming that the inclusion of women automatically leads to feminist or transformative outcomes. The mere presence of women in a process that is already hierarchical, militarised, and technocratic does not necessarily lead to different results. What determines impact is the context and conditions in which women participate – factors like access to information, ability to organise collectively, the degree of institutional openness, and whether the peace process is designed to be participatory at all.

This is a crucial point that shifts the focus from individual participation to systemic support. It’s not just about letting women in; it’s about ensuring that the spaces they enter are ones in which they can act meaningfully. Otherwise, inclusion becomes symbolic, even harmful, if it legitimises processes that do not fundamentally question the status quo. Tokenistic inclusion, where women are added to panels or commissions to fulfil quotas or international expectations, can actually reinforce exclusion by masking deeper inequalities.

Applying this lens to the Basque case opens up new ways of thinking about women's contributions to peace. If we focus only on formal institutional negotiations, we might conclude that women's participation was limited or marginal. But by looking at different modalities, we can start to map a much richer and more complex picture. What forms of informal influence did women exert? Were there feminist organisations that contributed to public debate or implementation phases? Did women act as bridge-builders between polarised communities? These are the kinds of questions that the modalities framework helps us ask – and answer.

One of the most important contributions of Paffenholz et al. (2016) is the recognition that peacebuilding happens in many places at once. It's not limited to conference rooms or political forums. It happens in communities, in demonstrations, in local organising, and in quiet negotiations that never make headlines. By acknowledging the full range of participation, we challenge the idea that peace is created only by elites or formal actors.

At the same time, their analysis highlights the challenges women face when trying to move from informal influence to formal decision-making. Social norms, institutional resistance, and lack of access to resources often prevent women from making that transition. In some cases, women are only included in the early or “softer” phases of a peace process, such as community dialogue or humanitarian work, but are excluded from the negotiation and implementation of political decisions. This selective inclusion reinforces traditional gender roles and fails to take advantage of women’s full potential as peacebuilders.

Yet even within these limitations, women continue to find creative ways to participate. They organise across movements, build alliances with sympathetic actors inside institutions, and mobilise communities around demands for justice and inclusion. These strategies are not just reactive – they are proactive and visionary. They reflect a feminist approach to peace that sees participation not as a privilege granted from above, but as a right and necessity emerging from below.

In this way, the modalities framework offers a typology and a political tool. It helps scholars, activists, and policymakers see what has often been rendered invisible. It also provides criteria for evaluating whether a peace process is truly inclusive: Are women only present, or are they influencing outcomes? Are they supported by resources and networks, or isolated and instrumentalised? Are their agendas being taken seriously, or simply tolerated?

This approach is essential if we want to understand the complexity of women's roles in peacebuilding globally and in specific contexts like the Basque Country. In the chapters that follow, this framework will serve as a valuable guide for identifying and analysing the multiple forms of participation that women have employed, and for assessing their actual impact on the shaping of peace.

This chapter has explored feminist critiques of the dominant human rights and peacebuilding frameworks, emphasizing the need to move beyond formal inclusion and toward deep structural transformation. Through the contributions of authors such as Parlevliet, Paffenholz, Cohn, and others, we have seen that peace is not merely the absence of violence, but the presence of justice, care, and equity in everyday life. Feminist approaches highlight the importance of recognising the multiple ways women contribute to peace – often outside official spaces, and often in ways overlooked by traditional analyses. These insights are not only theoretical: they provide essential tools for understanding peacebuilding in specific contexts. In the following chapters, they will guide the analysis of the Basque conflict and its peace process, with special attention to the roles played by women, including ETA militants, civil society activists, victims, and political leaders. From this perspective, we will seek to highlight their contributions, tensions, and challenges in a process that, although culminating in the end of armed violence, remains open regarding justice, memory, and reconciliation.

4. WOMEN MILITANTS IN ETA

This chapter explores the role of women within the armed organisation ETA, focusing on how they navigated political commitment, gender hierarchies, and the contradictions of militant life. Far from the common portrayals that reduce them to passive victims or isolated exceptions, it examines their political and personal motivations, influence on the demilitarisation process, and place (often marginalised) in historical memory. Drawing on feminist and intersectional theory, the chapter challenges simplistic narratives and foregrounds the complex, ambiguous, and often invisible forms of agency women enacted within the armed struggle.

4.1 Genealogy of Female Participation in ETA

Femenías (2000) argues that Foucauldian feminism has adopted genealogy as a critical tool to question the historical construction of gender. From this perspective, genealogy allows us to reconstruct the emergence of specific ideas, practices, roles, and discourses, showing that they are neither natural nor universal, but rather the result of concrete historical processes marked by power relations, exclusions, and symbolic disputes. Its purpose is to denaturalise what is often perceived as obvious or essential, for example, what it means to be a woman or what is understood by power, revealing the historicity of these notions. Thus, the social and political realities cease to be fixed and stable and are understood as dynamic constructions shaped by struggles. This chapter proposes a genealogy of the ideas, practices, roles, and discourses that have shaped women's participation in the armed struggle in the Basque Country. This aims to understand how these women navigated the tensions between political activism, patriarchal structure, and feminine subjectivity, analysing their experience from a gender perspective, and later, examining their role in the peace process.

4.1.1 Political, Personal, and Collective Motivations

Different currents of feminist thought have offered diverse interpretations of women's participation in violent activities, particularly in contexts of war or political conflict. From a liberal feminist perspective, this participation has been interpreted as a form of access to full citizenship, equating the right to fight with the possibility of entering the public sphere on equal terms with men

(Steans, 1998). Furthermore, it has been argued that war contexts generate social transformations that can favour empowerment and the reconfiguration of gender roles traditionally assigned to women (Zarkov, 2006). However, from another perspective, it has been considered that women's access to military roles does not necessarily imply autonomy, but rather may be part of a patriarchal logic that instrumentalises their bodies for strategic purposes, without actually changing their subordinate position (Steans, 1998; Tickner, 2001). It has been noted, however, that the levels of independence achieved by women during conflicts tend to fade once social order is restored.

Other viewpoints and authors maintain that there is a feminine inclination toward peace and question women's involvement in violent acts, considering it a renunciation of their own ethical and political principles (Steans, 1998). However, this view has also been problematized by pointing out that the association between femininity and pacifism perpetuates stereotypes of passivity, reinforcing the image of women as victims and denying them their potential political agency (Tickner, 1992; Zarkov, 2006). Finally, postcolonial feminism argues that women's participation in armed struggles should not be understood as contradictory to their gender, but rather as a form of resistance to colonial and patriarchal systems of power (Hutchings, 2007). This approach also questions the categories constructed from Western contexts that link war exclusively with masculinity and insists on making visible the experiences of women in the Global South, destabilising universalist narratives of political violence. Along these lines, the way in which violence is legitimised through discourses that appeal to a logic of protection is also problematized, where the protected subject is feminised and represented as passive, while the figure of the protector is associated with the masculine and the exercise of power. This asymmetrical relationship not only perpetuates gender stereotypes but also exposes women to specific forms of violence, placing them in a position of dependence and vulnerability towards those who are supposed to protect them (Steans, 1998).

Women's participation in ETA cannot be understood as a homogeneous phenomenon or disconnected from its historical, social, and emotional contexts. Far from the narrative that presents women as passive elements or drawn by sentimental ties, various studies show that their decision to join an armed organisation responded to a complex combination of personal and political factors. Rodríguez Lara (2017) shows that many women decided to join ETA driven by a strong ideological commitment to the struggle for Basque independence, but also influenced by personal experiences such as the loss of family members or Franco's repression. For some, militancy offered an escape from the limitations of the traditional role of wife or mother, generating new spaces for action and autonomy. In this sense, militancy

was also experienced as a form of self-affirmation against dominant patriarchal structures. Hamilton (2007) agrees, noting that while men and women shared political motives, the social conditions for accessing militancy were not the same. Women faced additional obstacles derived from their gender, such as a reduced presence in public or cultural spaces, or more intense surveillance by their families. Even so, they managed to integrate into militant networks through personal ties, often linked to community, family, or cultural circles. As Rodríguez Lara (2017) points out, studies on armed conflict have historically maintained an androcentric bias that has contributed to making women's active participation in these contexts invisible. Even within academic feminism itself, female participation in armed groups has been scarcely addressed, thus reinforcing the image of women exclusively as victims, caregivers, or figures in the domestic sphere. This vision has tended to reproduce the peaceful woman-violent man pairing, treating the cases of female combatants as exceptional and deviant from the norm.

Rodríguez Lara (2017) in her research on female militancy in ETA, proposes a more complex perspective that considers both the diverse motivations, from political repression to the desire for emancipation, and the obstacles they faced, including cultural gender mandates and family limitations. Even so, external factors such as the tactical utility of their gender and the lack of militant cadres facilitated their incorporation, which they themselves enhanced through their own strategies: seeking support networks among women, avoiding traditional recruitment spaces, or taking advantage of internal structures to integrate without going through mixed mechanisms.

Once within the organisation, women experienced contradictions marked by clandestinity and gender mandates. The demand to reproduce an apparent normality to protect themselves led to a sexual division of militant labour and their marginalisation from leadership roles or the use of weapons. At the same time, living with other male militants represented an ambivalent space, where inequalities, struggles for equality, and experiences of personal autonomy intersected. From this perspective, Rodríguez Lara defends the need for a comprehensive approach that allows us to reconstruct women's participation in armed conflicts from a more plural, complex, and situated perspective.

Therefore, the incorporation of women into ETA cannot be interpreted from a simplistic or essentialist perspective. It was a complex political act, conditioned by personal, historical, and structural factors, influenced by both the repressive context of Franco's regime and the desire for social transformation and individual emancipation. This approach allows us to avoid reductionist views that present women as victims or exceptions, and instead, situate them as active political agents who made decisions in a deeply masculinised environment.

4.1.2 Assigned Roles, Internal Hierarchies, and Sexualization

To understand women's participation in ETA, it is essential to consider that, although some women managed to occupy relevant positions within the organisation, its internal structure reproduced a clear sexual division of labour. Despite the egalitarian rhetoric that ETA publicly promoted, in practice, many militants were relegated to logistical, support, or roles linked to the Cultural Front. At the same time, armed forces and strategic decision-making continued to be dominated by men (Rodríguez Lara, 2017). This functional distribution was neither casual nor neutral: it responded to deeply rooted gender logics, reflecting the same patriarchal patterns present in broader society.

This phenomenon is part of the sexual division of labour, a structuring principle of the sex-gender system that permeates all social institutions and contexts, including armed organisations. As Mendia Azkue (2014) has pointed out, this division does not disappear even in peace processes, where women are often instrumentalised. And, by equivalence, armed struggle itself is not exempt from this sexual division of labour and power dynamics based on the sex-gender system. Connell (1997) helps us understand this reality by proposing the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which she defines as a dominant model of masculinity that prevails over other gender identities, both masculine and feminine.

However, is gender a static and fixed identity, inherent to human beings? Butler (2007) argues that gender is not a fixed identity but a construction produced through the repetition of social norms. This is why the dilemma of femininity and armed struggle is extrapolated to high levels of confrontation, since the values attributed to femininity are shattered when women become part of the violence. Therefore, the roles women occupied were not the result of a supposed inability to engage in violent action, but rather the product of social and political expectations that placed them in positions of care, subordination, or invisibility within the armed struggle itself.

In addition to this, sexual division of labour and the patriarchal subordination that the militants themselves suffered, many women experienced dynamics of sexualisation by their male colleagues. These realities directly confront the revolutionary ideological framework of the armed organisation, reflecting how patriarchal logic can infiltrate even contexts of radical militancy. Domestic burdens, the unequal distribution of daily tasks, and the pressure to demonstrate their commitment "like men" were part of the everyday forms of inequality within the organisation (Rodríguez Lara, 2017).

What is presented here is not an isolated case, but rather an expression of a structural logic that permeates all social and political spheres, including those that claim to be emancipatory or egalitarian. From revolutionary organisations to institutions like the UN and peacebuilding processes, the patriarchal system persistently operates, shaping hierarchies, exclusions, and forms of subordination that are rarely openly acknowledged. Understanding this reality in no way implies denying women's agency; on the contrary, it allows us to value it in all its dimensions. Contextualising their actions within the multiple oppressions they faced – not only class or political, but also gender-based – reveals an even more complex and courageous struggle. It is precisely in this critical perspective, which neither idealises nor silences, that we can grant a deeper, more real, and more just recognition to the women who have been part of these processes.

4.1.3 Internal Contradictions: Feminism, Militancy, and Dissidence

Women's participation in ETA not only involved joining the armed struggle, but also a continuous process of negotiating the tensions arising from being part of a nationalist, masculine, and hierarchical organisation. Many militants had to confront an environment where their political commitment was valued only if it conformed to the moulds established by the movement's logic, leaving little room for questioning from a feminist perspective.

Rodríguez and Etxebarrieta (2016) demonstrate that these tensions were not merely circumstantial but structural. Their testimonies and analyses reveal how female militants experienced intense contradictions between their involvement in a collective project and the silencing of their experiences as women within that same project. In many cases, feminism was seen as a threat to internal cohesion, as if the demand for gender equality weakened the nationalist cause. This logic forced many women to choose between their political loyalty and their feminist identity, in a constant renegotiation of their personal and collective boundaries.

These contradictions can be understood through the framework of intersectionality developed by Crenshaw (1989), who argues that women do not experience a single form of oppression, but rather multiple systems that interact simultaneously. In the case of ETA militants, their experience was shaped by their gender, but also by their political affiliation, their social origins, and the repressive context of the Spanish State. This intersection generated a situation of particular vulnerability, where being a

militant woman meant challenging the State system and resisting forms of domination within the movement itself.

Silencing internal inequalities was a common practice in many revolutionary movements, and ETA was no exception. Criticism of internal machismo was often seen as an "unnecessary division" or even a betrayal. This type of institutional delegitimisation reinforced the invisibility of women's experiences and hindered the articulation of feminist activism within the armed independence movement.

Despite this, many women found strategies to resist: from creating informal support networks to reinterpreting their activism through feminist lenses. The contradiction was not paralysing, but rather a space of productive tension from which some could redefine their struggle and their place within the organisation.

Ultimately, ETA's female militants not only faced State repression and social stigma but also an internal structure that challenged their political agency. Analysing these tensions allows us to question the myth of an egalitarian organisation. It reveals how, even in spaces that proclaim themselves revolutionary, patriarchy can continue to operate in persistent and subtle ways.

4.2 Women's Influence on the Abandonment of Armed Struggle

Addressing ETA's abandonment of armed struggle without paying attention to the role of women militants constitutes not only a significant omission but also a distortion of the internal processes that led to this change. Although their involvement has often been underestimated, women played a crucial role in both the ideological debates and the practical dynamics that led to the definitive renunciation of violence. Their action, often carried out in the shadows, on the margins of official recognition, or from subordinate positions within the organisation, cannot be ignored.

4.2.1 Initiatives from Within: Pressure for Strategic Change

The progressive deterioration of the social and political conditions that supported armed activity created a breeding ground for self-criticism within ETA and the Basque Nationalist Left. This context fostered the emergence of new discourses on the legitimacy of violence. Letamendia (2013) documents

how this strategic shift was not simply the result of a rational cost-benefit analysis by the ruling elites. It was preceded and accompanied by multiple voices from the grassroots, many of whom were women.

These women, generally excluded from decision-making spaces, began to express their discomfort with the continued presence of armed violence. They did so not exclusively from strategic reasoning, but from an ethical and political sensibility that prioritised rebuilding the damaged social fabric, recovering lost legitimacy, and the need to build new forms of nonviolent political participation. Many articulated their positions from personal experiences marked by exile, imprisonment, or clandestinity, giving them particular authority in internal debates.

From informal organisational spaces, grassroots committees, feminist networks, or even from their daily lives shared with other activists, they promoted a paradigm shift that questioned not only the methods but also the hierarchies and internal culture of the organisation. These actions were not necessarily recognized as strategic, but they were. Their contribution to the progressive delegitimisation of violence was fundamental to generating the conditions that made the political shift viable.

As Parlevliet (2010) points out, authentic peace is not simply the absence of violence, but the transformation of the human and social relations that underpin the conflict. Women, by contributing from a relational, communal, and emotional perspective, contributed to this transformation from a position that, although marginalised, was enormously influential.

4.2.2 Unrecognized Contributions: Invisibility and Marginal Agency

The invisibility of these contributions is not a coincidence, but the result of a power structure that persists even in contexts of change. In official accounts of the end of ETA, the names that are repeatedly mentioned are male, belonging to former leaders, spokespersons, or negotiators. When women are mentioned, they are presented in emotional or victim-like narratives, never as political actors with the capacity to influence.

This pattern is also observed internationally. Paffenholz et al. (2016) identify how, in multiple peace processes, women's participation has been minimized or exploited. They are invited to dialogue spaces to legitimize the processes, but their real influence on strategic decisions is rarely recognized. In the Basque case, many women actively participated in building bridges between the armed movement and

civil society, maintained spaces for dialogue even in adverse conditions. They promoted new forms of struggle through symbolic and everyday life.

The fact that their names do not appear in dominant narratives, that their voices have been silenced or depoliticised, is not an accident. It is a reflection of a political culture that continues to reproduce patriarchy, even in its most progressive forms. Recognising the political agency of these women today is not an act of charity or symbolic correction, but an analytical and political necessity to understand the complexity of the process.

4.2.3 Women's Participation in the Basque Peace Process: Visibility, Exclusion, and Symbolic Roles

Suppose the peace process in the Basque Country is understood as a holistic transformation, beyond a mere demobilisation agreement or cessation of hostilities. In that case, it is essential to analyse how women participated (or were excluded) in the key moments of the symbolic and political closure of the armed conflict. Unlike other contexts where formal negotiations with international presence and equal participation occurred (such as in Colombia or Liberia), the Basque process was asymmetrical, unilateral, and deeply marked by patriarchal structures in its origin and outcome.

The definitive cessation of violence by ETA (2011), its disarmament (2017), and the dissolution of the organisation (2018) were accompanied by public events, communiqués, and symbolic representations. In all of them, the presence of men was overwhelming. The visible spokespersons, mediators, and emissaries of the process were, for the most part, men. This reflected the organisation's previous hierarchies and contributed to reproducing a deeply biased image of who could speak on behalf of the conflict and its closure.

As Paffenholz et al. (2016) point out, even in contexts where women have been active in the resistance, their voices are systematically excluded from transition processes or placed in secondary roles: victims, moral witnesses, or emotional figures, but rarely as political agents. This logic was repeated in the Basque case, where women activists were left out of the official narrative of the conflict's end despite their internal influence on the strategic shift.

This phenomenon reflects what Ní Aoláin et al. (2011) call "peace without gender": a type of conflict end that does not incorporate the structural dimensions of gender and tends to reinforce traditional hierarchies under the guise of reconciliation. The omission of women from the public moments of the closure symbolises, therefore, not only a narrative exclusion but a continuation of the patriarchal logic that structured both violence and militancy.

From an international perspective, the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) establishes that women must participate fully and meaningfully in all phases of peace processes. CEDAW, as well as the UN Women Global Report on Women, Peace and Security (2020), reinforce this requirement, not as a symbolic gesture, but as a necessary condition for achieving sustainable peace. In the Basque case, there was no mechanism to guarantee this participation, nor was a structural gender perspective integrated into the closure of the armed conflict.

However, outside of official settings, many women did experience this process as a space for political and critical reorganisation. Some reinterpreted their role from feminist perspectives, publicly denounced the exclusions, and promoted alternative spaces for memory, justice, and reparation. These actions, although disconnected from the formal process, are an integral part of a feminist conception of peace that focuses on social relations, power structures, and the material conditions of life (Cockburn, 2007).

Thus, when analyzing the end of the basque conflict from a critical and gender perspective, what emerges is a tension: on the one hand, the real possibility of having undergone a transformative transition, driven by decades of female resistance, agency, and participation; on the other, the reproduction of a symbolically masculinised closure that omitted those same trajectories. This tension cannot be resolved with a subsequent or symbolic inclusion, but instead requires a profound review of the criteria from which peace narratives are constructed.

As Shepherd (2017) points out, peace narratives are not innocent: they constitute frameworks of meaning that determine who was an actor, who was a victim, who was redeemed, and who was forgotten. ETA women militants, like many other political subjects active in contexts of violence, deserve to be recognised not only for what they suffered, but for what they did, transformed, and redefined. This is one of the pending tasks for a genuinely inclusive peace.

4.3 Tensions and Paradoxes of Female Agency in Armed Conflict

Women's participation in armed organisations such as ETA raises fundamental tensions for feminist studies of gender and violence. Acknowledging their presence and critically analysing the conditions that enable their political agency in historically masculine, hierarchical, and militarised structures is crucial. This section delves into two axes: on the one hand, the ambivalences of exercising violence from a subordinate position, and on the other, the way in which this agency has been remembered -or silenced- in the collective memory.

4.3.1 The Paradox of Emancipation Through Violence

In contexts of armed conflict, women's participation in violent actions can be seen as a disruption of traditional frameworks of femininity. However, from a critical feminist perspective, authors such as Cohn (2008) warn that this type of participation can reproduce the structures it seeks to subvert. The military logic, centred on discipline, hierarchy, and strength, does not dissolve simply because of the presence of women. Many women have had to "prove" their commitment by adopting attitudes reinforcing the group's virility codes, silencing their needs, or concealing their differences.

This paradox can be conceptualised as a form of restricted or conditioned agency (Mahmood, 2005): power is exercised, yes, but from a position that requires constant negotiation with the limits imposed by the structure. ETA's female militants had to fit into a model of militancy that was not designed for them and that, in many cases, harassed any gender dissent.

However, this does not mean they were merely passive. Many redefined their experience, challenged the rules, sought alliances with other comrades, or promoted internal debates about machismo within the organisation. As Rodríguez and Etxebarrieta (2016) point out, some women articulated practices of feminist resistance even within the context of armed conflict. But their margins of manoeuvre were narrow, and the consequences of transgressing the masculine order were high.

This ambiguity persists even in subsequent public accounts. While society recognises some women as victims or moral figures, few are valued as political actors. A woman's use of violence continues to be perceived as an anomaly, a deviation, a symptom to be explained. In contrast, when a man exercises violence in an armed conflict, his role is inscribed within a heroic or strategic narrative. This difference

is not merely symbolic: it profoundly affects how historical legacies and the possibilities for political redemption are configured.

4.3.2 Reconfiguring the Historical Memory of Female Militants

The collective memory surrounding ETA's female militants has been shaped by a double operation of silencing and stigmatisation. On the one hand, they have been excluded from heroic and political narratives; on the other, they have been reduced to archetypes functional to the patriarchal order: the suffering mother, the manipulated young woman, the repentant woman. They are rarely presented as subjects with full moral and political agency.

Yoyes is an emblematic case. An ETA leader and later a dissident, she was murdered in 1986 after leaving the organisation. Her figure has been revived through multiple discourses: as a victim, as a traitor, as a martyr. However, her decision-making capacity, her complex political trajectory, and her strategic contributions are rarely recognised. As Scott (1986) warns, history not only remembers facts, it also produces meanings. And these meanings are structured around axes of power that define whose voices deserve to be heard.

This exclusion has profound implications. First, it impedes a full understanding of the conflict. Failure to recognise the true role of female activists in ETA's formation, maintenance, and transformation impoverishes the interpretation of the phenomenon. Second, it reproduces epistemic violence: it denies women their status as subjects of knowledge, capable of analysing, acting, and deciding for themselves.

The reconfiguration of this memory does not simply involve adding female names to official chronologies. It requires a transformation of the categories through which we interpret politics, violence, and history. As Butler (2004) points out, it entails destabilising the normative frameworks that define which lives matter, which actions are legitimate, and which bodies can be remembered without scandal. Faced with this task, critical feminism offers powerful tools: the notion of situated memory, an intersectional reading of the conflict, and a denunciation of the "neutrality" of official narratives. These approaches make it possible to make contradictions visible, rescue silenced voices, and construct a more plural and honest narrative about the Basque Country's recent past.

This chapter has shown that women within ETA were not mere exceptions or passive victims, but rather active political subjects whose trajectories were marked by tensions between revolutionary militancy and

patriarchal subordination. Despite their ideological commitment, many faced dynamics of sexualization, masculine hierarchies, and exclusion from real power. Some managed to exercise forms of informal agency and challenged these structures from within, opening fissures in the movement's dominant discourse. Their role in the transition to a political path was key, but it was rendered invisible in official accounts of the end of violence. Accounting for their participation requires critically reviewing the binary frameworks of victim/perpetrator and recognising the ethical complexity of women who served in armed contexts.

5. WOMEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEACEBUILDING

5.1 Beyond the Official Peace: Limits, Narratives, and Feminist Critiques

The so-called Basque peace process – culminating in the definitive cessation of ETA's armed activity in 2011, the disarmament in 2017, and the organisation's official dissolution in 2018 – has often been portrayed in institutional and media narratives as a successful transition from violence to peace. These portrayals, however, rest on a rather narrow understanding of peace as the simple cessation of armed activity. They often neglect the complex, uneven, and gendered realities that underpinned the conflict and its aftermath.

From the outset, the peace process was not characterised by bilateral negotiations or the inclusive participation of all relevant actors. Instead, it was largely unilateral, driven by internal deliberations within ETA and strategic reorientation within the Basque pro-independence left. Critically, it lacked any formal negotiation mechanism between ETA and the Spanish state. The state, steadfast in its refusal to acknowledge the conflict as political, continued to frame it through a counter-terrorist lens – an approach that foreclosed meaningful dialogue and suppressed structural analyses of violence.

From a feminist and critical standpoint, this transition reveals a series of structural and symbolic exclusions. Most notably, the process unfolded with minimal involvement from civil society, and even less from women, whose political roles were rendered invisible in the dominant narratives. The public rituals that marked the symbolic closure of the conflict – press conferences, declarations, official commemorative acts – were orchestrated and performed almost exclusively by men: state representatives, party leaders, and former militants. In this respect, peace was not only negotiated without women – it was staged without them.

This performative exclusion is symptomatic of a broader issue. As Fraser (2000) and Butler (2004) argue, political recognition is not merely symbolic; it is a condition for redistributing dignity and agency. Yet, the Spanish state's policy of victim recognition has been selective at best. While immense institutional effort has gone into memorialising victims of ETA, those harmed by state violence – including torture, extrajudicial killings, unlawful detentions, and systematic political persecution – remain largely invisible.

Their stories are rarely heard, their suffering unacknowledged, their claims for justice unanswered. This asymmetry undermines any pretence of democratic reconciliation.

Feminist conceptualisations of peace offer a powerful counter-narrative. Scholars like Cockburn (2007), Cohn (2004), and Tronto (1993) advocate for a holistic, situated understanding of peace – one that includes not only political agreements but also social justice, gender equality, and the reconstruction of everyday life. From this vantage point, peace is not a static outcome but a lived and relational process. It is constructed in homes, in community centres, through informal care networks, and in quiet acts of resistance. Basque women – as caregivers, neighbours, educators, and community mediators – have long been constructing these infrastructures of peace, even if they are rarely celebrated as such.

The unilateralism of disarmament, combined with the absence of symmetrical dialogue, left crucial questions unresolved. The status of political prisoners, the truth about state violence, the moral legitimacy of different forms of resistance – these remain open wounds. And yet, the dominant discourse insists on closure. It calls for silence, for forgetting, for moving on. But forgetting is not healing, and closure imposed from above is not peace – it is erasure.

Even as the Basque pro-independence left has made strides in embracing democratic and pluralist strategies, the absence of a negotiated settlement has left a void in public memory and justice. This is precisely why feminist, grassroots, and community-led interventions matter. They have continued to name the violence, to hold space for plural experiences, and to build relational pathways toward coexistence. Their work is not just reparative; it is visionary.

In light of these dynamics, the Basque peace process should not be viewed as a definitive endpoint. Rather, it marks the beginning of a slow, uneven, and contested journey toward justice, recognition, and transformation. It is a journey shaped not only by the decisions of institutions but by the everyday struggles of those who have refused to let the past be buried without acknowledgment.

As the following sections will show, women – in many different roles, from neighborhood activists to silent resisters – have been vital to reconfiguring the very meaning of peace in the Basque Country. Their practices and politics reveal that peace is not a finish line. It is an ongoing, fragile, and deeply political project. One that demands not only the absence of weapons but the presence of care, memory, and mutual recognition.

5.2 Initiatives for Disarmament

The disarmament process in the Basque Country was not confined to formal institutions or political negotiations. On the contrary, it was deeply shaped by grassroots mobilisations and civic interventions, many of which were initiated, led, or sustained by women. These initiatives arose from the ground up, often anticipating formal political developments and exerting a quiet but transformative influence on public discourse, cultural imagination, and civic action. As Villellas Ariño (2018) affirms, women's organisations were not passive observers but vital agents who created openings for peace where institutional channels faltered or stalled.

Among the most emblematic of these initiatives was Ahotsak, a pluralist platform launched in 2006. Comprised of women from diverse political and ideological traditions, Ahotsak was created in the wake of a tentative ceasefire declared by ETA and amid the collapse of official negotiations. What set Ahotsak apart was its insistence on a transversal feminist politics: rather than aligning with any one party or bloc, it emphasised core values such as nonviolence, inclusivity, and ethical dialogue (Rodríguez & Etxebarrieta, 2016; Villellas Ariño et al., 2018). At a time when political actors were entrenched in blame and distrust, Ahotsak envisioned peace as something collectively imagined – not just agreed upon at a table.

This vision manifested in practice. Ahotsak convened cross-party dialogues, issued public manifestos, and organized collective gatherings that centred women's voices in a profoundly masculinized political environment. Its strength was not only rhetorical but relational: it helped build trust across ideological divides, demonstrating that shared feminist ethics could produce common ground even when political consensus was elusive. It was, in many ways, a prototype of "prefigurative politics," enacting the values of the future peace it hoped to bring into being.

Another key actor in this constellation was Gernika Gogoratz, a peace research and memory center that emphasized the integration of historical memory, dialogue, and feminist analysis. This institution played a quiet yet powerful role in shaping a civic culture of peace by hosting intergenerational memory workshops, publishing pedagogical resources, and collaborating with other platforms to develop a non-state-centric vision of transitional justice (Gernika Gogoratz, 2015). The center deliberately foregrounded the gendered dimensions of violence and memory, underscoring the ways in which women's experiences had been doubly marginalized – first through conflict, then through silence.

Beyond these structured initiatives, countless informal networks of women took part in public actions demanding disarmament and coexistence. From local demonstrations to symbolic performances like human chains and candlelight vigils, these acts were often small in scale but large in meaning. They created visible expressions of civic will that subtly pressured both ETA and the Spanish state to respond. As Rodríguez Lara (2017) notes, these actions redefined peace not as a legal or strategic achievement, but as a socially rooted, ethically lived process. These women were not merely protesting – they were rearticulating the very terms of political legitimacy and collective responsibility.

Despite the significance of these contributions, official accounts rarely granted them centrality. As Rodríguez and Etxebarrieta (2016) argue, feminist peace efforts were often relegated to the category of "supportive" or "complementary" rather than recognized as constitutive. This marginalization reflects a broader structural dynamic: informal, affective, or community-based work – particularly when led by women – is frequently seen as apolitical or secondary to the "real" business of peace. Such a view overlooks the fact that these efforts built the relational scaffolding upon which more formal transitions were eventually constructed.

Indeed, as Galardi (2025) underscores, women's activism played a foundational role in forging the civic consensus necessary for peace. This activism extended beyond visible acts into the slow, patient labour of listening, educating, bridging, and tending. It challenged binary narratives of victim and perpetrator, state and insurgent, by insisting on a more complex, pluralistic account of the past – one that made room for contradiction, grief, and repair.

In sum, initiatives like Ahotsak and Gernika Gogoratuz, alongside countless unnamed actions by ordinary women, helped to expand the political imagination of what peace could look like in the Basque Country. Their contributions were not only ethically significant but also politically generative. They redefined peace as more than the absence of war: as a practice of coexistence, memory, and relational justice. The next section will explore the discursive strategies and affective languages through which these visions were articulated and circulated, particularly by feminist actors navigating both institutional and informal spheres.

5.3 Initiatives from Below: Feminised Peace Practices

Although the Basque peace process is frequently portrayed through the lens of institutional leadership and elite negotiations, much of the actual groundwork for reconciliation and transformation was laid by women in civil society. Often overlooked in dominant narratives, these women sustained and rebuilt the fractured social fabric from below, weaving together care, dialogue, and political imagination. Their contributions did not merely supplement the peace process; they redefined it.

Hamilton (2007) points out that Ahotsak's challenge to traditional peacebuilding was twofold: it contested the exclusion of women from formal dialogue and disrupted the masculinist codes that define political legitimacy. By centering feminist ethics, Ahotsak offered an alternative template for political practice – one grounded not in conquest or negotiation, but in dialogue as a transformative act. Their declarations, gatherings, and public statements became acts of political pedagogy, reminding society that peace is as much about how we talk and listen as about what we decide.

But Ahotsak was only one node in a broader web of feminised peace practices. Local organisations like Lokarri provided infrastructure for community dialogue and emotional repair, often organising forums and support networks for families of prisoners and victims across the political divide (Lokarri, 2011–2014). These efforts were typically informal, often taking place in homes, community centres, and small-town gatherings. Galardi's (2025) research captures how women, in particular, carried the emotional weight of these engagements: listening to pain, sustaining fragile conversations, and performing the unrecognised labour of reconciliation.

Feminist theorists such as Cockburn (2007) and Tronto (1993) have long argued that peace is not merely the cessation of violence but the presence of relational care and ethical interdependence. In the Basque context, such feminist labour formed the scaffolding of what we might call “feminised infrastructures of peace” – networks held together by trust, memory, and persistent engagement with the messiness of cohabitation after violence. These infrastructures did not rely on formal legitimacy; they derived authority from their capacity to hold difference without erasure.

Importantly, many women within the *abertzale*⁶ left embraced a new form of political agency that diverged sharply from the traditional, hierarchical, and often militarised masculinities of their milieu. Their activism was shaped by horizontal organising, ethical responsiveness, and care-based leadership (Rodríguez & Etxebarrieta, 2016). Cohn (2013) observes that feminist peacebuilders often work through modalities of attention and mutuality, qualities that are rarely valued in post-conflict politics but are crucial to its sustainability. In practice, these women cultivated a different kind of authority – one that did not dominate but instead convened, mediated, and held space.

Yet this form of leadership was not uncontested. Critics from within and outside the movement have argued that affective labour and informal organising lack the institutional leverage needed to enact systemic change (Ní Aoláin et al., 2011). While there is merit in acknowledging the limits of decentralised activism, such critiques often miss the point. As Shepherd (2017) contends, feminist peacebuilding intentionally displaces the centre, moving political agency into the realm of lived experience, embodied ethics, and the ordinary. It resists becoming part of the very structures it seeks to transform.

The epistemic challenge posed by these women was equally significant. In a state-driven narrative that centres terrorism and obscures state violence, feminist actors asserted a more complex historical memory. Through oral histories, localised rituals, and collective storytelling, they introduced what Fraser (2000) calls “transformative recognition” – a politics that does not simply ask to be included in existing frameworks but redefines the frameworks themselves. Hamilton (2007) and Galardi (2025) show how these memory practices resisted homogenization and called attention to plural forms of suffering.

Thus, the peace imagined and enacted by Basque women in civil society was not a supplement to the “official” process; it was, in many ways, its ethical and emotional core. It moved peace from institutions to relationships, from treaties to memories, from policy to practice. The next section turns to how these practices coalesced into discourses, affects, and leadership strategies that continue to shape what peace can mean today, not only in the Basque Country but in any society emerging from conflict.

⁶ *Abertzale* is a Basque term meaning “patriot” and is commonly used to describe political movements that support Basque national sovereignty. Within the Basque political landscape, the *left-wing abertzale* tradition refers to those who combine the demand for national self-determination with a commitment to social justice, anti-capitalism, and grassroots organising.

5.4 Discourses, Affects, and Leadership: Feminising the Notion of Peace

This subchapter focuses on how women in the Basque peace process contributed not only through activism but by reshaping the very language and ethics of peacebuilding. It explores how care, emotion, and relational responsibility became central to their leadership, challenging traditional, hierarchical forms of political engagement. Drawing on feminist scholarship, the section examines how these actors redefined political legitimacy, proposing alternative ways of imagining peace, ones rooted in listening, empathy, and collective recognition. These practices did not seek to complement official peace processes, but to transform their logic entirely.

The contributions of women to peacebuilding in the Basque Country were not merely logistical or organisational. They helped reshape the very discourse around what peace is, how it feels, and who is authorised to speak in its name. Central to this redefinition was a feminist reconceptualization of political agency – one that prioritised care, affect, and ethical responsibility over domination, assertion, or institutional status. These women did not just enter political spaces; they transformed them.

Feminist theorists like Cohn (2004, 2013) and Cockburn (2007) have long argued that peace cannot be built without acknowledging the emotional, embodied dimensions of conflict. Political life is not confined to parliamentary debates or declarations of ceasefire. It happens in the moments of shared grief, in the silences after violence, in the gentle, repeated acts of care that rebuild what was broken. In the Basque case, women wove these insights into their activism. They created spaces not only to speak but to feel – where listening became a radical act and empathy a political tool.

These were not mere symbolic gestures. As Cohn (2004) puts it, "ethical listening" requires a suspension of one's own agenda, a willingness to be transformed by the pain of others. In feminist-led peacebuilding, this meant designing gatherings, workshops, and rituals that held space for contradiction, vulnerability, and memory. These spaces did not aim to achieve consensus, but to nurture mutual recognition – a slow, recursive practice of seeing and being seen without erasure.

Leadership in these contexts looked very different from conventional models. Instead of hierarchy, visibility, or charisma, feminist leaders in Basque civil society operated through what Rodríguez and Etxebarrieta (2016) call "relational accountability": a form of authority grounded in trust, consistency, and attentiveness to others. This kind of leadership emerged quietly, often in the margins, and refused

the vertical logics of both state and insurgent formations. It modelled a politics that is less about control than about coherence – about living out the values one hopes to institutionalise.

Such leadership was particularly visible in initiatives that blended memory work with activist praxis. Feminist storytelling circles, community rituals, and intergenerational dialogues offered more than testimony; they crafted new political grammars. Women from disparate ideological backgrounds met not as representatives of parties, but as witnesses to suffering and as co-authors of a different narrative. These gatherings enacted what Tronto (1993) would later define as a “caring democracy” – a form of political life rooted in the obligations we owe one another, not just in shared ideology or legal status.

Equally important was the refusal to be reduced to symbols. Too often, in institutional peacebuilding efforts, women are cast as icons of reconciliation: soft, moral, redemptive. But such portrayals flatten real political work into an archetype. Basque feminist actors challenged this tendency. Rather than allowing themselves to be invoked, they insisted on speaking. As Shepherd (2017) critiques in her work on global peace frameworks, symbolic inclusion often masks substantive exclusion. The women of the Basque civil sphere anticipated this dynamic and preemptively created autonomous spaces where their agency could be exercised, not merely cited.

These interventions were not limited to activism or advocacy. They carried with them an epistemic challenge. What counts as political action? Must it be loud? Must it involve confrontation? Feminist actors argued otherwise. They elevated silence as a mode of presence, patience as a form of resistance, and care as a practice of sovereignty. In doing so, they disrupted the masculinist assumptions that undergird most peace negotiations. As Fraser (2000) and Butler (2004) argue, recognition is not just about being seen. It is about having the power to name the terms of visibility itself.

In this light, the feminist contribution to Basque peacebuilding was not additive but constitutive. It did not seek merely to include women within existing frameworks; it proposed new frameworks entirely. Peace, in this vision, is not a policy outcome. It is an ethos, a horizon, a lived structure of interdependence. It is not imposed or negotiated once and for all. It is enacted, sustained, and renewed through affective labour, mutual recognition, and shared responsibility.

These transformations in discourse, leadership, and political emotion were not just theoretical. They produced the cultural and ethical conditions necessary for rethinking justice, memory, and reparation. The next chapter will follow this thread by turning to the ways in which women—as victims, survivors,

and agents of memory—have contested dominant historical narratives and insisted on the plural truths that must coexist if peace is to endure.

Through the testimonies and practices of women in civil society, this chapter has shown how peace in the Basque Country was largely sustained by feminist initiatives that shifted the focus of the process from institutions to social relations. These women not only kept the community fabric alive in times of violence but also reconfigured the languages and modes of doing politics, emphasising care, listening, and interdependence. Platforms like Ahotsak and local collectives built an everyday and affective peace that not only accompanied the political process but also fundamentally transformed it. Their contribution, however, remains unrecognised as structural. The challenge remains to revalue this type of agency as central, rather than secondary.

6. WOMEN VICTIMS AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

This chapter shifts focus from activism in civil society to the realm of memory and reparation, exploring how women, particularly those affected by violence, have acted as agents of memory, demanding recognition, justice, and truth in the aftermath of the Basque conflict. It highlights how institutional narratives have often marginalised or instrumentalised their pain, and how women have resisted this erasure by constructing alternative spaces for remembering, grieving, and narrating plural histories. Memory, in this context, is not merely retrospective but a deeply political and forward-looking act.

6.1 Memory, Silence, and Conflict

The aftermath of the Basque armed conflict has not brought closure. It has brought a new kind of struggle – one waged not with arms but with memory. Whose story counts? Who gets to speak about pain, justice, and reconciliation? And who, still today, remains silenced? These questions haunt the public and private landscapes of the Basque Country, especially for women.

In the dominant State narrative, the end of ETA marked the successful resolution of a long-standing problem of “terrorism”. Political declarations, solemn commemorations, and legal mechanisms quickly filled the vacuum left by armed activity. But this story is partial. It flattens complexity. It centres the voices of institutional actors – usually always men – and leaves in the margins those whose suffering does not fit the mould of official victimhood. As Butler (2004) reminds us, mourning is unequal; some lives are grievable, others are not. This holds in post-ETA Spain, where recognition has become a battleground of power.

Women were present in every layer of the conflict. As militants, yes, but also as caregivers, mothers of prisoners, sisters of victims, companions of activists, and as ordinary citizens trying to live amidst tension. Their pain and resistance were omnipresent, but they were rarely given institutional acknowledgement. Even in more sympathetic Basque memory spaces, women have often been confined to supportive or symbolic roles, with little space to narrate their own contradictions, ambivalences, and political agency. What they endured and what they held together – emotionally, socially, politically – remains under-acknowledged.

This chapter analyses how women's experiences of the conflict have been (or have not been) integrated into the broader landscape of memory and justice. Drawing on feminist political theory (Fraser, 2000; Tronto, 1993), anthropology (Esteban, 2011), and Basque feminist scholarship (Galardi, 2025; Goikoetxea, 2022), we explore memory as an affective, contested, and embodied field. Rather than treating it as a neutral archive of facts, we approach it as a living process shaped by power, gender, and the politics of recognition.

Crucially, we centre what has often been left outside institutional frameworks: women who suffered not only as direct targets of violence, but also as secondary victims, as hidden witnesses, as mediators and emotional containers for the traumas of others. Many were the ones who waited in prison queues, who absorbed the grief of communities, who stayed silent to protect family members, who stitched memory into the fabric of daily life. These are not just anecdotes – they are political forms of survival, resistance, and justice.

And yet, the official record does not name them. The state's own legal frameworks prioritise those harmed by ETA, while systematically excluding victims of state violence – torture, extrajudicial repression, and ideological persecution. Within this framework, those aligned with or even adjacent to the abertzale left are cast as morally suspect. And women, when recognised at all, are often remembered in ways that reproduce patriarchal tropes: the grieving widow, the suffering mother, the passive bystander. Rarely is the woman victim seen as a political subject in her own right.

This exclusion is not merely symbolic. As Fraser (2000) and Goikoetxea (2022) argue, it has material effects – on reparations, on public discourse, on the possibility of building a shared historical narrative. Recognition is not just about being seen; it is about being considered a full participant in political and ethical life. And so, when women's experiences are excluded from public memory, their political agency is denied.

However, memory does not only flow from the state downward. In kitchens, town squares, healing circles, and feminist collectives, women across the Basque Country have been producing their own forms of remembrance – fragile, plural, and often resistant. They do not seek to replace one official story with another. They seek to make space for contradiction, for mourning that does not fit state categories, and for memory that includes silence, ambiguity, and the refusal to forget those the state has erased.

In the following sections, we will explore how these women, as victims, witnesses, and creators of memory, have worked to reshape the ethical and political landscape of the post-conflict Basque Country. We will examine the gendered asymmetries of recognition, the embodied legacies of trauma, and the feminist redefinition of justice and remembrance from below.

Memory is not a backdrop to peace here. It is the terrain on which peace—sustainable peace, grounded in dignity and mutual recognition—must be fought for.

6.2 Who Counts as a Victim? Gendered Asymmetries of Recognition

Not all victims are treated equally. This has been one of the most painful and persistent truths in the post-conflict Basque Country. While the Spanish state has built an elaborate system of recognition and reparations for victims of ETA's violence, it has systematically ignored or minimised the harm inflicted by its own institutions. Victims of torture, political persecution, illegal detentions, and the dirty war carried out by GAL have struggled for decades to even be heard, let alone recognised. And within this hierarchy of victimhood, women occupy an even more precarious place.

Official recognition mechanisms – such as Spain's Victims of Terrorism Law (Ley 29/2011) – have largely been shaped around a certain model of suffering: politically “innocent,” non-violent, and ideologically aligned with state legitimacy. Women whose pain fits this mould, such as widows of ETA victims, have received public honours, media attention, and financial reparations. But what about women who lost partners to state violence? Who themselves were tortured, exiled, or imprisoned? Who maintained political affiliations with the *abertzale* left? These lives are either excluded outright or placed under suspicion.

As Jule Goikoetxea (2022) argues, this is not a bureaucratic oversight – it is an epistemological project. The state constructs its own legitimacy by deciding which harms are real, which subjects are credible, and which memories deserve preservation. The result is what Nancy Fraser (2000) calls “misrecognition”: not merely the absence of visibility, but the active denial of political status and dignity. In this sense, memory becomes a form of governance – one that polices who may grieve, who may speak, and who may demand justice.

For women, this logic is doubly exclusionary. They are often not recognised as primary victims in their own right. Instead, their suffering is framed in relation to others: as mothers of prisoners, as wives of the disappeared, as daughters of the dead. Rarely are they seen as political agents who experienced harm not just through proximity, but directly, through surveillance, harassment, and trauma. Their grief is often feminised into silence or flattened into passivity. And their resistance, when it exists, is often read as deviant or dangerous.

A striking example of this is the case of Iratxe Sorozábal, a former ETA member who was tortured by Spanish police in 2001. Her claims were ignored for years. Only in 2023 did the Audiencia Nacional acknowledge the torture – and even then, it came not with reparation, but as a footnote. Her experience straddles the uncomfortable space between victim and perpetrator, challenging simplistic binaries. And because of that, she was excluded. Not because her pain was less real, but because it did not serve the narrative the state wished to tell.

This selective recognition creates a moral geography: some bodies are worthy of mourning, others are ungrievable (Butler, 2004). Some lives are folded into national healing, others are expelled from it. It is true that many male victims linked to the Basque left have also been denied recognition, facing silence or suspicion rather than reparation. However, when the majority of these erased lives are women—especially those who occupied caregiving, support, or mediating roles—it becomes clear that this is not only a political omission, but a gendered one. Their exclusion operates at multiple levels: not only are they denied justice, but their suffering is often interpreted through patriarchal tropes that strip them of political agency. Unlike their male counterparts, they are less likely to be seen as ideological subjects and more likely to be remembered only as emotional or moral figures.

Even within Basque institutions, this logic has been reproduced to some extent. While the regional government has made some efforts to include victims of state violence, these have often lacked political clarity or depth. And among the broader public, there remains discomfort in acknowledging the full scope of harm. Women who challenge the state’s monopoly on memory are often accused of being partisan, of politicizing pain, of refusing to “move on.”

But as feminist scholars like Mainer Galardi (2025) and Zuriñe Etxebarrieta argue, moving on is not possible when wounds are still open. And justice cannot begin until all victims – regardless of political alignment – are recognized not as collateral damage but as political subjects in their own right.

So the question is not just “who was harmed?” It is “whose harm counts?” And for many women in the Basque Country, the answer remains: not ours. Not yet.

The next section turns to how that exclusion has been lived and resisted – not in courtrooms or press conferences, but in the most intimate spaces of the body and the everyday.

6.3 Hidden Lives, Embodied Trauma: Feminist Perspectives on Suffering and Silence

Not all wounds bleed. Some settle quietly into the body. Into breath, into bones, into the way someone flinches at a sound or checks the door twice before going to bed. For many women in the Basque Country, the conflict was not something they participated in directly, but something that entered their lives in quieter, more insidious ways – through fear, through silence, through the slow erosion of the everyday.

Anthropologist Mari Luz Esteban (2011) describes how political violence leaves traces not only on public discourse but in the body itself. The female body, she argues, becomes an archive: not only of trauma but of care, resistance, and moral responsibility. During the years of active conflict, women became emotional and logistical centres of their families and communities. They accompanied imprisoned relatives, visited loved ones in far-off jails, navigated the stigma of political association, and held together families fragmented by ideology or violence. They became, in effect, the invisible infrastructure of endurance.

But this labour was rarely recognised. It was framed as maternal, not political; as emotional, not strategic. It did not count. Not in courts. Not in official memory. Not even, sometimes, in their own communities.

And yet, the emotional burden carried by these women was immense. To support a partner tortured by the state while shielding children from the weight of that fear. To mourn a brother killed in an attack without being allowed to speak about it openly. To know things and keep quiet. Silence, in this context, was not compliance. It was protection. And it was political.

As Esteban (2011) reminds us, trauma is not always shouted. Sometimes, it is metabolised through clenched jaws, sleepless nights, chronic pain, or the refusal to tell a story that has no safe audience. The absence of words is not an absence of experience. In fact, it often marks a deeper, more embodied form

of memory. These women carried not just their own grief, but the grief of their entire networks. They absorbed the tension in their families. They kept the peace when political arguments broke out. They negotiated fear, loss, and loyalty – all while cooking, caregiving, and surviving.

This kind of labour doesn't fit neatly into transitional justice frameworks. There's no checkbox for "emotional containment" or "political silence." But its impact is real. It shaped the ways communities functioned during the conflict and long after. And it remains largely invisible in historical accounts.

Still, some women have begun to give shape to this hidden history. In recent years, feminist collectives like Oroituz, Egiari Zor, and others have held workshops where women share their experiences of the conflict, not in legal language, but in their own words. In kitchens, in town squares, in libraries. These are not grand gestures. They are intimate, partial, and sometimes hesitant. But they are powerful acts of reclamation.

Through these spaces, silence begins to speak. Not to confess, not to justify – but to be heard. As Galardi (2025) points out, these testimonies don't aim to "correct" the record. They aim to expand it. To make room for experiences that don't fit the victim/perpetrator binary. That resists closure. They live in tension.

It's also worth noting that many women refused to take on this emotional burden silently. Some resisted – subtly, publicly, or somewhere in between. They questioned party hierarchies, refused to play the expected role, left organizations that denied their pain. Some, like the women of Ahotsak, publicly positioned themselves as mediators and peacebuilders precisely because they were tired of being erased.

Still, others chose not to speak. And that choice must also be respected. Not all stories want to be told. Not all wounds benefit from exposure. The demand for testimony can easily become a new form of coercion – especially when coming from the very institutions that once ignored or criminalized these women.

The next section will explore how some of these embodied experiences of memory have become collective, feminist interventions – challenging not only what is remembered, but how, by whom, and for what purpose.

6.4 Feminist Memory Work: Against the State's Narrative

In post-conflict societies, memory becomes a political field – a contested space where dominant actors attempt to define the boundaries of legitimacy, suffering, and historical truth. In the Basque Country, institutional memory policies have largely been driven by the Spanish state's agenda of antiterrorism, centring narratives of victimhood related to ETA and marginalising other forms of violence, particularly those exercised by the state itself. Within this framework, feminist actors have pushed back, constructing alternative forms of remembrance that challenge hegemonic interpretations and highlight the gendered dynamics of harm and silence.

Rather than advocating for the mere inclusion of women in existing memorial structures, Basque feminist memory initiatives have aimed to question the epistemological and ethical premises of those structures themselves. Scholars like Jule Goikoetxea (2022) and Marta Luxán (2017) argue that state-driven memory politics in Spain are built on exclusionary logics: those aligned with the abertzale left are generally deemed unworthy of recognition, and women are often reduced to symbolic or secondary roles within these narratives. Feminist memory work, by contrast, foregrounds pluralism, intersectionality, and ethical responsibility, proposing new ways of understanding the past through situated knowledge and affective practices.

This includes the stories of women who lived through state repression, police violence, or internal censorship within the nationalist left. It includes those whose suffering did not take place in a public square but in their homes, or during prison visits, or in the aftermath of family breakdowns caused by political division. Importantly, it also includes women who participated politically – as militants, activists, and mediators – but whose agency has been neglected in both state narratives and sometimes within their own political movements.

A critical part of feminist memory work is the rejection of the victim-perpetrator binary that dominates transitional justice discourse. As Butler (2004) and Fraser (2000) have argued, such binaries erase the complexity of lived experience and foreclose the possibility of nuanced understanding. In feminist approaches to memory, the goal is not to purify or idealise history, but to recognise the interwoven realities of care, complicity, survival, and resistance.

This also requires attention to methodology. Luxán (2017) emphasises the need for feminist research to interrogate its own assumptions: Who is speaking? Under what conditions? For whom? In this light,

memory becomes not only a content to be transmitted but a practice to be enacted – one that demands reflexivity, humility, and collective accountability.

Feminist memory work has also engaged critically with the institutionalisation of remembrance. Commemorative acts, museums, and official reports often prioritise visual spectacle and depoliticised mourning. Against this, feminist actors have created rituals and spaces that prioritise dialogue, ambiguity, and critical pedagogy. This includes the use of non-linear narratives, open-ended testimonies, and artistic interventions that invite reinterpretation rather than closure.

Crucially, these practices also recognise the role of emotion, not as irrational or private, but as a legitimate site of political knowledge. Memory is not only about facts; it is about meaning, affect, and relation. By centring the emotions associated with grief, rage, fear, and solidarity, feminist memory initiatives expand the register of political speech and challenge the masculinist rationalism of state discourse.

This counter-memory is not without risks. Those who participate in these initiatives often face social backlash, accusations of relativism, or political instrumentalisation. Yet they persist, not because they claim ownership over history, but because they refuse its erasure. In doing so, they create the conditions for a more inclusive and just remembrance – one that acknowledges the full range of experiences produced by the conflict and opens space for collective healing without simplistic reconciliation.

This chapter has analysed how women affected by violence have been key in constructing alternative memories to the official state narrative. Through mourning, denunciation, or silence, many have claimed their right to be recognised as subjects of memory and not merely as archetypal victims. In contexts where the state has imposed restrictive frameworks of recognition, women have promoted practices that articulate the personal with the political and challenge the boundaries between the public and the intimate. Their memorial work does not seek to close the conflict, but rather to open it to new forms of justice and narrative plurality. Memory, here, is resistance to institutional oblivion and a commitment to a peace that does not erase uncomfortable voices.

7. CONCLUSION

From a critical-feminist perspective, this thesis has examined the closure of ETA's armed cycle and the governance of the post-conflict Basque Country. It set out to ask how gender, as a structuring axis of power, shapes the conditions under which violence ends, memory is institutionalised, and peace is imagined. Specifically, it responds to the research question: *To what extent have women been considered and significantly included in the Basque Country peace process, and what has been the real impact of their participation on the political and social stabilisation and resolution of the Basque conflict?* To do so, it engaged with debates on women, peace and security (WPS), theories of care, and feminist critiques of transitional justice. The analysis shows that while ETA's unilateral dissolution in 2018 achieved a definitive end to armed violence, it did not address the conflict's structural roots or dismantle the gender hierarchies present in both state and insurgent practices. The following pages answer the research question and summarise this study's main findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications.

The first key finding relates to the unilateral and incomplete nature of the ending. ETA's decision to disarm and dissolve was mainly the result of a sustained, robust legal-policing strategy by the Spanish state, with a change of political conception of army groups around the world, and a change of political strategy to achieve independence using other ways without violence. What was missing was a comprehensive political negotiation that could recognise the historical and territorial dimensions of the conflict. As a result, the official narrative reduces the past to a 'terrorism' episode, closing off debates around self-determination and social or economic grievances. Transitional justice, where it occurred, was partial and state-centred: amnesties for abuses committed during counter-terrorist operations were never discussed, truth-seeking was fragmented, and commemorative policies prioritised a security-based approach over a transformative one (Agirre, 2021; Arostegi, 2014).

Civil society, especially feminist collectives and human rights platforms played an irreplaceable role in broadening the post-conflict agenda. Compiling oral archives of all victims and creating collective mourning rituals, these groups redefined peace as a relational practice built from the ground up. Their actions set an ethical standard based on daily commitment, embodied reparations, and the politics of care (Tronto, 2013). As a result, legitimacy shifted – at least in part – from state institutions to community spaces, underlining that sustainable peace requires strong social infrastructure rather than just elite agreements.

At the international level, the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) marked a significant milestone for feminist and gender equality agendas worldwide. However, its implementation has faced ongoing challenges: weak enforcement mechanisms, limited dedicated funding, and little appetite for structural change. In many contexts, gender mainstreaming has often devolved into a box-ticking exercise that symbolically includes women without transforming underlying patriarchal power structures (Shepherd, 2011). This gap reflects broader critiques of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and underscores the need to move beyond superficial approaches toward genuinely transformative gender politics.

These international dynamics are echoed, albeit in distinct ways, within the Basque context. For instance, women's militancy in ETA represents agency in contradiction. While some women challenged essentialist ideas that equate femininity with pacifism, their involvement rarely translated into organisational cultures that genuinely valued gender equality. Leadership, decision-making, and armed actions continued to be dominated by men, while women were relegated to roles in logistics, cultural outreach, and support. In both the collective imagination and the conceptualisation of the conflict, men are consistently positioned at the forefront – as leaders, combatants, and political actors – while only a handful of women are acknowledged, often as exceptions. The considerable work carried out by women behind the scenes – their contributions to strategy, support networks, and internal critiques – has yet to be properly recognised. Many women faced sexualization and subordination, even as they resisted these dynamics and contributed decisively to the movement's evolution. Nevertheless, official histories persist in rendering women's efforts invisible, further reinforcing the idea that militancy and political agency are inherently masculine (Etxeberria, 2019).

Public rituals of peace repeated this exclusion. Press conferences, declarations, and state commemorations were dominated by men: government officials, party leaders, and former militants. Women mostly appeared as moral figures – victims to be honored – rather than as active subjects shaping the post-conflict process. This dynamic shows that numerical inclusion alone is not enough; real influence requires a redistribution of both discursive and material power (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

Recognition regimes built by the Spanish state reinforce hierarchies of victimhood. Those harmed by ETA receive extensive legal and symbolic recognition, while survivors of torture, GAL death squads, and politically motivated policing are sidelined. Feminist memory projects challenge this imbalance by

demanding what Fraser (2008) calls transformative recognition – a shift in the very framework that decides which harms matter and who gets to speak about them.

Through a feminist peace theory lens, the transition from negative to positive peace requires more than just silencing guns; it calls for demilitarising institutions, deepening democracy, and putting care at the centre. Basque women have been architects of invisible infrastructures of peace: neighbourhood mediation networks, support circles for families of former prisoners, and community-based, gender-sensitive policing observatories. These practices understand peace as an ethic of coexistence, not just a legal outcome (Held 2006).

On a theoretical level, integrating the ethics of care (Held 2006), maternal thinking (Ruddick, 1989), and analyses of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995) allows for a rethinking of security, moving away from state-centred logic and toward interdependence and relational justice. In doing so, this thesis broadens mainstream peace and conflict studies, which too often treat gender as just a variable instead of as a constitutive dimension of both violence and peace.

Several practical and scholarly implications follow from these findings. First, institutionalising participation means adopting binding quotas, dedicated budgets, and accountability measures to guarantee women's influence across all post-conflict phases. Second, plural memory policies should include oral testimonies, grassroots archives, and gender-sensitive teaching in official curricula. Third, transformative justice must combine material and symbolic reparations while recognising gender-differentiated harm. Fourth, security sector reform should weave care ethics into policing and legislation, moving away from purely punitive reflexes. Finally, future research should map the formal and informal ways women exert influence and trace how memory, territory, and gender intersect in the prospects of lasting peace.

This study does have limitations. Its sources rely heavily on Basque academic literature and qualitative accounts, offering little quantitative data on women's representation in formal spaces. Additionally, the voices of ethnic minorities in Euskal Herria remain underexplored. Future research should use mixed methods and intersectional perspectives that bring class, race, and sexuality to the fore.

In short, declaring peace is not the same as building it. As long as security-focused narratives and partial memories persist, reconciliation remains shaky. Feminist contributions lie in disarming dominant discourses, illuminating marginalised subjectivities, and proposing a public ethic based on care and

interdependence. Recognising women's agency – as militants, victims, mediators, and caregivers – is not an add-on, but a precondition for inclusive democracy and a durable peace grounded in social justice. The Basque experience stands out as a key laboratory for reimagining contemporary peace processes and offers comparative lessons for other settings marked by political violence.

It becomes clear that addressing the legacies of armed conflict requires more than institutional reforms or symbolic gestures. If we are to move toward transformative peace, we must begin to develop intersectional policies and analyses that truly engage with the complexity of lived experiences. Gender alone is not enough. It is essential to consider how origin, class, age, racialization, and sexuality intersect to produce different forms of harm, exclusion, and recognition.

There is also an urgent need to invest in what is often dismissed as secondary or non-essential. Community forums, care networks, collective workshops, and spaces of listening and healing are not just complementary tools but the very foundation of meaningful peacebuilding. Real reconstruction does not happen through elite agreements alone. It happens in neighbourhoods, in everyday relationships, and in the spaces where people come together to rebuild trust. Participation should not remain at the level of institutional performance. It must be implemented in practice, with funding, with time, and with a genuine commitment to sharing power. Granting agency to all those involved in the conflict is not a symbolic gesture; it is a necessary step toward legitimacy and sustainable peace.

Recognition also needs to be rebalanced. Women, who have historically carried out much of the invisible labour of resistance, care, and mediation, must be acknowledged in full. They cannot continue to be seen only as moral figures or victims. Their political agency, their organisational efforts, and their contributions to peace must be valued equally to those of men. This is not just about fairness. It is about rebuilding a society in which no one is left behind and in which justice becomes a lived reality, not just a legal goal.

Peace is not something that can be declared and considered done. It must be built, again and again, through relationships, through care, and through recognition. Without these elements, conflict remains unresolved beneath the surface, and its reproduction becomes inevitable.

This research also points toward several important avenues for future work. One of them involves exploring how the legacy of the conflict is experienced by younger generations who did not live through armed violence but still carry its effects in memory, family dynamics, and public discourse.

Understanding how these inherited wounds are processed, silenced, or reactivated is key to grasping the long-term impact of political violence.

A doctoral study using feminist methodology could take this further. By engaging directly with groups of people, through interviews, collective workshops, and participatory practices, it would be possible to generate deeper, situated knowledge about how different individuals and communities continue to live with the aftermath of conflict. This kind of research would not only expand academic understanding but also contribute directly to social repair.

It is also necessary to explore the informal ways in which women have shaped peace. Much of their influence often goes unnoticed but is crucial to sustaining nonviolence. These contributions deserve closer study, not as exceptions but as central elements of post-conflict transformation.

Lastly, future research must embrace intersectional and mixed methods that bring together statistics, narratives, and diverse voices. This includes not only women but also migrants, racialized individuals, queer communities, and all those whose experiences are often marginalized in dominant narratives. Only by listening to these perspectives can we begin to imagine new ways of living together after violence.

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