

LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF CIVIL WARS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NOVELS DEALING WITH
THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND THE YUGOSLAV
CONFLICT

by

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Declaration of Good Academic Conduct

I, Tiana Vekić, hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 255 pages in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All sentences or passages quoted in this dissertation from other people's work (with or without trivial changes) have been placed within quotation marks, and specifically acknowledged by reference to author, work and page. I understand that plagiarism the unacknowledged use of such passages will be considered grounds for failure in this dissertation and in the degree programme as a whole. I also affirm that, with the exception of the specific acknowledgements, the following dissertation is entirely my own work.

Tiana Vekić

Strasbourg, December 2016

Abstract

A civil war is a violent conflict of dramatic political and social change that becomes a historical, cultural and literary marker. It is a period when laws, history and identities are reformulated through dual processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. This makes evident the symbolic dimension of civil war violence and accentuates the unstable, precarious and malleable nature of identity constructs, ideologies and history. The fact that these rapid transformations implicate massive human suffering is perhaps what is most unsettling about civil war. A civil war is not only a pivotal moment in a nation's history but as well on an individual level for those who live through it and have to adapt to the changing systems of values that redefine life during and after the conflict. This thesis examines how contemporary novels dealing with the Spanish Civil War and the Yugoslav conflict reflect on the human experience during these periods of chaotic and violent social transformations. The study presents a comparative analysis of the following works: Camilo José Cela's *San Camilo, 1936*, Dževad Karahasan's *Sara i Serafina (Sara and Sefarina)*, Mercè Rodoreda's *Quanta, quanta guerra... (War, so much war)*, Velibor Čolić's *Chronique des oubliés (Chronicle of the forgotten)*, Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás (The backroom)*, David Albahari's *Mrak (Darkness)*, and Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina (Soldiers of Salamis)*. Parting from a close study of the texts, the thesis argues that the novels represent the human dimension by focusing on ordinary people's subjective experiences during the conflict while relegating the political and military events surrounding the civil war to the background. Such representations aspire to redeem the complexities and the significance of

individual lives and of a social collective, which the civil war's physical and symbolic violence dehumanizes, silences and obliterates.

Key words: Civil war literature, Spanish Civil War, Yugoslav Conflict

Résumé

Une guerre civile est un conflit violent impliquant un changement socio-politique dramatique qui devient un jalon historique, culturel et littéraire. C'est une période où les processus doubles de la déconstruction et de la reconstruction reformulent les lois, l'histoire et les identités communautaires. Cela met en évidence la dimension symbolique de la violence d'une guerre civile et accentue la nature instable, précaire et malléable des constructions identitaires, idéologiques et historiques. Le fait que ces transformations rapides impliquent une souffrance humaine massive est peut-être l'aspect le plus perturbant d'une guerre civile. Une guerre civile est non seulement un moment charnière dans l'histoire d'une nation, mais aussi pour les individus qui l'ont vécue et qui doivent s'adapter aux nouveaux systèmes de valeurs redéfinissant la vie pendant et après le conflit. Cette thèse analyse la façon dont les romans contemporains sur les guerres civiles de l'Espagne et de l'ex-Yougoslavie représentent l'expérience humaine au cours de ces périodes de transformations sociales chaotiques et violentes. Elle présente une étude comparative des œuvres suivantes: *San Camilo, 1936* de Camilo José Cela, *Sara et Sefarina* de Dževad Karahasan, *Tant et tant de guerre* de Mercè Rodoreda, *Chronique des oubliés* de Velibor Čolić, *La chambre du fond* de Carmen Martín Gaité, *L'obscurité* de David Albahari et *Les Soldats de Salamine* de Javier Cercas. A partir d'une étude attentive des œuvres, cette thèse soutient que les romans représentent la condition humaine en se focalisant sur les expériences subjectives des gens ordinaires pendant les conflits, et en reléguant en arrière-plan les événements politiques et militaires de la guerre civile. Ces représentations aspirent à dévoiler les complexités et la valeur des vies individuelles et de la communauté collective, qui sont

déshumanisées, anéanties, et réduites au silence par la violence physique et symbolique d'une guerre civile.

Mots clés: Littérature de guerre civile, la guerre civile espagnole, la guerre civile dans l'ex Yougoslavie

Table of Contents

Declaration of Good Academic Conduct	i
Abstract	ii
Résumé	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
1 Introduction: War Literature and Focus of Study	1
1.1 Literary Approaches to Representing War: From the Legacy of the Epic to the Major Shifts in the 20 th Century	5
1.2 Focus of Study: Narrative Strategies in Representing Civil Wars	31
2 Phenomenon and Definition of Civil War.....	35
2.1 Principal Actors Involved.....	37
2.2 Armed Conflict: Coordination, Scale and Aims of Civil War Violence.....	43
2.3 Contestation over the Political and Social Order: State Breakdown and the Foundation of a New / Reborn Nation	58
3 Civilians in a Sieged City: Camilo José Cela's <i>Visperas, festividad y octava de San Camilo del año 1936 en Madrid</i> and Dževad Karahasan's <i>Sara i Serafina</i>	72
3.1 Shifting Internal Boundaries	73
3.2 The Naming and Redefining of the Civil War in the Bellicose Framework of the Novels	76
3.3 Focalization on Civilian Experiences and Personal Relationships	86
3.4 Civil War's Degradation of the Private Space, the City and the Nation	98
4 Representations of Mass Destruction and the Creation of a Collective Memory Through the Figure of a Travelling Soldier: Mercè Rodoreda's <i>Quanta, quanta guerra...</i> and Velibor Čolić's <i>Chronique des Oubliés</i>	110
4.1 A Wandering Soldier's Transformative Voyage.....	111
4.2 A Land Marked by Mass Deaths, Destruction and Loss	128
4.3 Construction of a Collective Memory	145

5	A Reflexive Process of Writing About the Past and Recovering Memories of the Civil War: David Albahari's <i>Mrak</i> , Carmen Martín Gaité's <i>El cuarto de atrás</i> and Javier Cercas' <i>Soldados de Salamina</i>	155
5.1	Representations of Personal Memories and the Process of Retrospectively Writing About a Civil War.....	157
5.2	The Second Generation's Inheritance of the Past: Narrative Challenges to Creating a Postmemory.....	194
6	Conclusion: Literary Representations of Civil Wars.....	214
6.1	Conceptual and Operational Definition of Civil War.....	214
6.2	Literary Portrayals of Civil War and Their Focus on Individual Human Experiences.....	218
6.3	Literary Portrayals of Civil War's Reconfigurations of Identities, Community and the Nation.....	228
	Bibliography.....	238
	Appendix: Figures.....	253

List of Figures

Figure 1	Number and duration of civil wars from 1945-2000	253
Figure 2	Number of armed conflicts by type	253
Figure 3	<i>Armonía (Harmony, 1956)</i> by Remedios Varo	254
Figure 4	Detail of Remedios Varo's <i>Armonía (Harmony)</i>	254
Figure 5	Image of Sanchez Mazas' diary in <i>Soldados de Salamina</i>	255

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1 Introduction: War Literature and Focus of Study

There is an endless and uneasy presence of war images and narratives, perpetuated by an ever-continuing prolific production of war representations. We are continuously exposed to them in the media (newspapers, TV, Internet), urban spaces (statues, arcs de triumphs, names of streets), political discourses (speeches, national anthems, commemorative holidays), arts (cinema, literature, theatre, visual arts) and other social and cultural spaces that configure our lives. Societies are explicitly and implicitly founded, shaped, decorated, reaffirmed and critically questioned through war representations. Whether motivated by curiosity, bewilderment, a need to understand, redemption, consolation, commemoration, persuasion of public opinion, rectification of history or other aims, war is a major theme for the arts, history, media and political discourses.

While portrayals of war may be ubiquitous, they do not provide an ultimate understanding of what war is nor a comprehensive insight into a particular conflict. War representations remain selective, aesthetical and ideological. Our understanding is thus limited and continuously shifting as multitudinous representations give different partial perspectives. No representation is a neutral mirror reflection of the conflict but an appropriation and reconstruction of a particular vision of it. This manipulation is an integral part of the way any medium and its forms “work on” the subject to transform it into a representation, even in mediums such as photographs, as Susan Sontag has pointed out: “[p]hotographs tend to transform, whatever their subject; and as an image something may be beautiful – or terrifying, or unbearable, or quite bearable – as it is not in real life” (60). The representation of war implicates an act of objectification since it

turns human life into a codified form, such as an object of art, a relic, a statue, a statistical number, a topic of debate, a headline, an image, and ultimately a symbol. Conversely, and paradoxically, it is also art's capacity to transform reality wherein lies its power to convey war and to re-present it in a significant way. Mario Vargas Llosa's essay "The Power of Lies" ("La verdad de las mentiras") defends that literature speaks truth by lying, by creating a fabular and credible illusion which is based on authentic human experiences. Specifically in relation to war, Dubravka Ugrešić has argued that a representation of tragedy can impact us to such an extent that it becomes "truer" than reality itself:

Those who didn't get a chance to cry over the real victims will weep over re-enacted ones. And these staged ones will be truer than the real. Because the real ones were too real to be true. [...] Tragedy becomes tragic only once it is transposed into a genre. What evokes tears is not the event itself, but the rhythm and rules of the genre, the representation of reality, and not reality alone, and hence the funeral rather than the deceased.¹ (my trans.;² 300-301)

Faced with the uncaniness of the extreme horrors of war that make the shocking reality seem "too real to be true", representations attempt to translate the unbelievable reality into an imaginable one (even if that means imagining what is deemed unimaginable) through varied codes of expression. This is a challenging task that has been approached

¹ "Onaj koji je propustio da zaplače nad stvarnim žrtvama, plakat će nad glumljenima. A te glumljene bit će istinitije od stvarnih. Jer stvarne su bile isuviše stvarne da bi mogle biti istinite. [...] Tragedija postaje tragedijom tek kad je transponirana u žanr. To što izaziva suze nije sam događaj, nego ritam i pravila žanra, reprezentacija zbilje, a ne sama zbilja, sprovod, dakle a ne pokojnik." (Ugrešić 300-301)

² Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. Original quotes are always provided alongside the translations.

through a large variety of forms as well as through revisions and reinventions of the very codes of representation.

The question of war representations takes on a particular dimension in civil wars. A civil war is a violent conflict of dramatic political and social change occurring within the boundaries of a nation and inside a society. A disruption of meaning and history sprout in a civil war from a core process of national reconfiguration. This is a dramatic multifaceted process which implicates rewritings of history, the social and political imagery, cultural heritage and community identity. A civil war is a period when laws, history, individual and collective identities are rewritten through dual and opposing processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. The postwar newly reborn nation creates its revised tales of identity, often recurring to epic models of exemplary heroes, mythical pasts and historical revision. There is thus a drastic reconfiguration of symbols, which ensues a destabilization of the referential capacity of words and a crisis of meaning. This makes evident the symbolic dimension of civil war violence and accentuates the unstable, precarious and malleable nature of identity constructs, ideologies and history. The fact that these rapid socio-political transformations implicate massive human suffering is perhaps what is most unsettling and senseless about civil war.

This study explores how literature represents civil war's transformations of society and individual lives, elaborating in more detail the above mentioned characteristics of civil wars. To focus the scope of the study, novels dealing with two civil wars of 20th century Europe are compared: the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)³

³ The Spanish Civil War began out of a failed military coup and ended with the Nationalist's (Falange political group) defeat of the Second Spanish Republic and the

and the Yugoslav conflict (1991-2001)⁴. While the two wars have their own specific histories (and particular ideological, political and cultural dimensions) their national reconfigurations during and after the conflict implicate similar processes, such as: the imposition of internal boundaries that fracture society into antagonistic parts, the homogenization and purification of an imagined postwar identity, and historical revisions which erase the recent past while searching for founding myths in more distant pasts. These processes are observable in both civil wars and revolve around a violent reconfiguration of a shared communal space.

This study defends, through a comparative analysis of novels dealing with the two civil wars, that literature narratively constructs the meaning and significance of civil war through its impact on people. The novels illustrate how civil war's reconfiguration of a social space implicates a complex dynamic of physical and symbolic violence which puts people's identity, life, sense of home and belonging in crisis. A civil war is not only a pivotal moment in a nation's history but as well on an individual level of those who live through it and have to adapt to changing systems of values that redefine life during and after a civil war. Through different narrative techniques portraying the "little stories" of ordinary people, the novels aim to represent the human condition, along with the complexities and heterogeneity of a collective, which are threatened to be erased by the civil war and postwar periods. In this way, they

subsequent establishment of General Francisco Franco's dictatorship, which lasted until his death in 1975.

⁴ I consider the Yugoslav conflict from 1991-2001 a civil war between different regional and religious identities which resulted in the breakdown of Yugoslavia into multiple independent countries (in order of independence: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo). It involved a series of conflicts between different regions, with the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992-1995 being the bloodiest and involving the highest civilian casualties. There were as well international military interventions, notably NATO's involvement, as is not uncommon in civil war.

defy the bellicose violence obliterating individuals and communities, while attempting simultaneously to preserve, rectify and make homage to what is lost in a civil war.

To begin an analysis of narrative representations of civil war, I will first go over some of the common literary approaches and critical writings on war representations in order to introduce the topic of war literature. War has appeared across all literary genres and through an immense variety of forms and styles. While literary war representations are diverse, and can be contradictory at times, there are common themes and methods of representation that have emerged, evolved, been reinvented, deconstructed or discarded. By looking at some of these common threads across literary works and critical writings on war literature, we can outline some of the major challenges of representing war along with the literary strategies developed to address them, as well as analyze the role that literature plays in framing our understanding of war and its impact in moulding our individual, national and cultural identities.

1.1 Literary Approaches to Representing War: From the Legacy of the Epic to the Major Shifts in the 20th Century

War is an ancient subject of representation. It dates back thousands of years and has been represented through an extensive variety of media and forms, as Kate McLoughlin summarizes:

War representation is 12,000 years old, dating from at least the Mesolithic period (10,000–5,000 bce) in the form of rock-paintings of battle scenes found in the Spanish Levant. The modes by and media in which armed conflict has been recorded over the thousands of years since are multifarious: an inexhaustive list would include all the literary, musical and fine art genres; film,

television, radio and the internet; games of every description, battle re-enactments and anti-war demonstrations; advertisements, photographs and posters; dance and movement; post-cards, coinage and papier-mâché models; mugs, cereal bowls, tea towels, thimbles, bow-ties, pencil sharpeners and key-rings; and, unlikeliest of all, the spun sugar from which the Viennese court confectioner wove a model of the Battle of Esztergom from the Empress Maria Theresia. (7)

Literature in particular has a long and ample tradition of representing war. It appears repeatedly across all literary genres and spans epochs and cultures. Adrienne Hytier's comparative literary study asserts war's continued dominant presence in society and literature across time:

[W]ar has played a major and often dominant role in primitive literatures and it continues to be one of the most important themes. In fact, war is not only a theme, but as well a subject, pretext and backdrop. These varied forms of war can be found in countless works. There is hardly any literary (or artistic) form where it has not appeared. Man organized as society has always created war and has forever talked about it.⁵ (10)

The primary literary model for representing war is the epic tradition. It is the foundation of war literature, and as Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux states: "writings on war are always read in comparison to the epic heritage" ("l'écriture de guerre, se lit toujours en regard de sa paternité épique"; 7). In ancient literature, the epic represents war

⁵ "[La] guerre joue un rôle considérable, souvent même prépondérant, dans les littératures primitives et continue à être un des thèmes les plus importants. En vérité, la guerre n'est pas seulement thème, elle est également sujet, prétexte et toile de fond. Sous ces formes variées, on la retrouve dans un nombre incalculable d'ouvrages. Il n'est guère de forme littéraire (ou artistique) où elle n'apparaisse. L'homme organisé en société a toujours fait la guerre et il en a toujours parlé." (Hytier 10)

through the form of a long narrative poem in hexameter verse conveying historical events in which heroic characteristics and grandiose deeds are exalted while society's upheld values are defended. The courageous hero is an idealized male warrior, that is, a loyal defender of a society fighting in the name of honour and demonstrating an incredible capacity to overcome challenges through physical strength and intelligence. Hegel has observed that the individual hero sets off willingly on the adventures, with honour and respect being the basis of his obedience and servitude (2: 1053-4).

The idealized heroic quality of the warrior is linked to public honour and captured by the Greek concept of *kleos*, defined by Gregory Nagy as immortality of fame for glorious deeds (Johns-Putra 25, 27). Classical epics have nonetheless a complex working of heroism; Adeline Johns-Putra has shown that the heroic warrior code, while being an elementary foundation of epics, is at the same time subject to a critical denouncement for its demands of excess sacrifices and barbarity:

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* simultaneously construct and deconstruct a heroic warrior code. [...] Though questioned at the very moment of its inception, it remains the crux of the epic tradition as it takes shape. In the critical reception of the Homeric epics from the fifth century BC onwards and, more obviously, in the taking up of the epic by Roman poets, the question of exactly what constitutes epic heroism remains central to the form.⁶ (34-35)

⁶ For example, in Homer's *Iliad*, the heroic code which forms an idealized essential formal element, is nonetheless subject to scrutiny through Achilles' disillusion with the heroic code and the denouncement of suffering in the name of glory, as Adeline Johns-Putra remarks: "Strikingly, the heroic code that provides the very basis for action in the *Iliad* has, by the time the poem reaches its end, begun to be questioned and even undermined" (32). Similarly, in Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus' quest to return home implies a critique of the sacrifices required by war, while Lucan's *De bello civili* ("On the Civil War") denounces the obscenities of war by depicting the senselessness of barbaric civil warfare between co-patriots (Johns-Putra 33, 46).

The extraordinary deeds that the classical epic hero accomplishes are related to the central values of a community, thus functioning as an “act of nation-building or as a model of exemplary behaviour” (Johns-Putra 145). While appearing as an individual, the epic hero represents a collective community, as Georg Lukács has noted: “The epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community” (66). Similarly for Hegel, the epic hero is an individual who “brilliantly concentrates in themselves those traits of national character which otherwise are separately dispersed” (2: 1068). In the epic, the community is a total entity whose destiny is framed by violence; conflict appears dually as a danger to and an opportunity to reaffirm its core values and identity.

This coincides with the role that ancient epics play in reinforcing collective memory and forming the cultural history of a tribe or nation (Quinn 140). The mnemonic character of epics has a historical function; the epic, in Ezra Pound’s words, is a poem including history, a tale of the tribe, while the poet, as Adeline John-Putra states “is not a creator of art, but a conveyer of history” (Blanton 4; John-Putra 12, 22). The epic’s deemed historical representation of war is framed around an idealized identity discourse set on the concept of a tribe’s glory. Lauri Honko has argued that epics can be characterized as “tales of identity” conveying symbolic meanings and acting as markers of a collective identity. Accordingly, epics are “seen in relation to something beyond their text, such as people’s perception of group identity, core values of the society in question, modes of heroic conduct and human endeavour, symbolic structures of history and mythology” (Honko 21). While traditionally epic poetry aims to reflect a local identity, the epic model has gained global symbolic value in

representing a national identity (Honko 31). Honko argues that the national epic is a “supreme tale of community identity” constructed through top down political action and handled by a cultural or intellectual élite: “On the whole, the concept of national epic is tricky because more often than not it results from ambitious structuring by a literary élite in accordance with some earlier model, rather than from natural growth [...]. The creation of a national epic is not a poetic but a political act” (31, 29). For Hegel, epics convey an objective and universal view of a national spirit: “the content and form of epic proper is the entire world-outlook and objective manifestation of a national spirit presented in its self-objectifying shape as an actual event” (2: 1044).⁷ It is no surprise that each nation has its own revered epic(s) telling the story of historical battles that form an integral part of the cultural foundation of the national identity.⁸

While epic poetry flourished in ancient literature and is mostly seen as archaic, the shadow of the epic tradition persists across epochs and reaches contemporary representations of war. It is notably echoed in literature that expresses a national

⁷ More precisely, Hegel contests that epics portray the national spirit by evoking the people’s way of life and thinking: “All the truly primitive epics give us the vision of a national spirit in its ethical family life, in states of national war or peace, in its needs, arts, usages, interests, in short a picture of a whole way of thinking and a whole stage of civilization” (2: 1056). The particular national worldview also has a universal dimension; as such, in the epic “the world it describes must not be only that of a *particular* nation; it must be such that what is *universally* human is firmly impressed at the same time on the particular nation described and on its heroes and their deeds” (2: 1057-1058).

⁸ The marked use of the epic as a vehicle for nationalist ideology began with Virgil’s *Aeneid* (29 BC), written in request from the emperor Augustus to celebrate Rome’s newly established nationhood (Johns-Putra 44). *Aeneid* evolved the mythical and historical narrative of ancient Greek epics into a nationalist narrative for imperialist Rome (Johns-Putra 44). For example, the heroic character in *Aeneid* calls for the sacrifice of independent will for the sake of duty and service to national glory (Johns-Putra 43). This embodiment of a nationalistic vocation in the epic form has endured over time, as Adeline Johns-Putra remarks: “The *Aeneid*, then, represents the inauguration of what would become a commonplace in theory (though not necessarily, as we shall see, a mainstay of practice): the use of the epic form to embody nationalist ideology” (44).

vocation (or a parody of it) through the appropriation and revision of a historical war legacy and the propagation of heroism as recognition for defending (and dying for) the glory and honour of one's country and its dominant values. In light of the fact that a civil war brings about a process of redefining the national imagery (through the destruction of the recent national identity and the swift edification of another "true" identity which emerges "triumphant" after the war), the political and cultural elites' post-civil war rhetoric often applies epic dimensions, in line with Honko's analysis of the national epic as a political act, in order to exalt a newfound national spirit. In their redefinitions of the community, they package symbolic values expressing the new collective identity through historical and mythical narratives which simplify the complexities of the social fabric and reproduce the antagonistic divisions created during civil war through exaltations of new national heroes and vilifications (or silencing) of the recently ideated enemy figure(s). The rhetoric of the dictatorship in postwar Spain constructed a national image of a unified, triumphant and re-conquered Spain. David Herzberger has stated that historical writing after the Spanish Civil War was "epic in scope and heroic in value" while José-Carlos Mainer has pointed out how historical revision and dramatization of a heroic past were some of the central characteristics of literature produced by writers who were a part of the Falange ideological and political movement: "history, in this way, was in a permanent trance of renovation, of heroic continuity and of imminent victory" (35; "la historia era, de ese modo, algo en permanente trance de restauración, de continuidad heroica y de inminencia de victoria"; 509). The reformulations of national identities in newly formed states during the Yugoslav conflict also drew on the epic tradition. For example, in his study of theatre, Naum Panovski states how "the National Theatre seasons served the political elites.

During the mid and late-nineties many theatres in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia were performing shows that glorified the national heroic past” (64).

Besides the national ideology, we can identify numerous elements of the ancient epic that resonate in other forms of literary representations of war. They are not simply replicated but reinterpreted in relation to relevant literary/artistic movements and social contexts. Some of the major revised epic elements that I would like to highlight include the concept of heroisms and the historical function of literature.

The hero in war representations is perhaps the most easily identified reworked element of the epic tradition. The concept of heroism is not a stable one; it evolves in relation to dominant social values and is reconfigured by artistic movements. For example, the Medieval Ages introduced Christian morality and allegorical values by which the heroic warrior code became “a parable for the universal conflict between good and evil that, for the Christians, is supposedly constant and ubiquitous until the end of time” (Johns-Putra 49-50). Thus, in the chivalric romance, the *chansons de geste* of the 10th and 12th century, the heroic soldier at battle is an idealized goodhearted Christian knight fighting against pagan wickedness in the name of honour and chastity. The knight’s patriotic loyalty and defense of his king and country’s honour is framed by Christian morality (Johns-Putra 62).

While certain war representations hold onto the classical epic exaltation of an individual war hero who is a renowned and exemplary figure of society (for example, a knight, a general, etc.) motivated by glory (public recognition by the community), later literary representations of war turn towards embodying heroism in the actions of ordinary people. For example, while Leo Tolstoy’s *Война́ и мир* (*War and Peace*) constructs heroic historical figures who stand out for their military leadership (generals

Kutuzov and Napoleon), Russia's victory is presented not as solely being due to the achievements of singled out heroic figures, but also to a significant myriad ensemble of actions carried out by ordinary people (Johns-Putra 145). Here, war is composed of an intricate communal web of private lives:

Yet, this text is more than a narrative about the effects of war on private lives. It delineates the way in which war consists primarily *of* these private lives. Thus, by the time battle-scenes occur, these involve not just faceless soldiers but individuals who are tied to other individuals, lives that are part of a complex of many other lives. The text's descriptions of battles, significantly, are concerned less with military tactics or instances of bravery and more with the responses of ordinary soldiers, with Andrew's delirium on seeing the blue sky as he lies on the ground wounded, with Nicholas's enthusiasm at his first battle, with the humorous exchanges between Pierre and the men manning Raevsky's Redoubt at Borodino. This is Tolstoy's main point about war, that it is really a collection of individual actions by individual men, and not, crucially, the outcome of any amount of military planning. (Johns-Putra 146)

Jacques Rancière argues that Tolstoy's shedding of light onto the masses stages a literary revolution which debunks the vision of war history as a legacy of the actions of great men:

[W]ar, which has always kept the myth of the decisive action of great men going, reveals the exact opposite to the rigorous observer. Great men don't make history. [...] In every one of the battles [in *War and Peace*], forecasts and plans reveal themselves to be obsolete and are defeated by the infinite interweaving of small actions and reactions. In every one of them, it is revealed that those who

forecast and command do nothing but forecast and plan – actions that are ends in themselves and that only produce effects on the ground in tangential ways. It is the masses who actually act, and they do so precisely because they don't let themselves be distracted by the illusory determination of ends and strategies. (73-74)

While Tolstoy alters the epic vision of an individual martial hero in war by bringing into view ordinary people, the function of the characters' heroic actions is similar to that in classical epics: the preservation of a community that is threatened by war. In classical epics, the actions of the hero allude to the strength and collective identity of the people, as Alberto Casadei has remarked: "The epic provides the cohesion and strength of the people through the action of war and the endeavors of the hero who more than anything else symbolizes the virtues of the people. Parting from this common base the connotations of the epic narrative may be very different, depending on the 'spirit of the people' they belong to" ("L'epopea sancisce la coesione e la forza di un popolo a partire da un'azione di guerra e dalle imprese dell'eroe che più di ogni altro ha simboleggiato il valore della sua gente. Su questa base comune le connotazioni della narrazione epica possono essere assai diverse, a seconda dello 'spirito del popolo' cui appartengono"; 10). Thus whatever the form heroism may take, it is often elaborated in literary representations of war as a defense of communal values and ties.

These two aspects of heroism – the role of ordinary people in war and the preservation of communal ties – take on a particular significance in civil wars. Civil war is a conflict that occurs inside society and which disproportionately affects civilians. Its violence constructs internal frontiers which redefine citizens, create an internal enemy

and break communal ties. The battlefield carried out on the population is continued in the postwar period as a symbolic form of violence through the ideologies of the newly formed institutions and laws governing civic life, selective historiography, revised educational programmes, and other regulations of the political, social and cultural spaces. The comparative analysis of literary works carried out in this thesis reveals that one of the central narrative features of the novels is their focus on the experiences of ordinary people. Their portrayals of the senselessness of civil war violence committed against the population challenge the justifications of the violence while their illustrations of human relations in a shared communal space debunk the divisions imposed by civil war. They preserve the significance of the individual and collective identity threatened by civil war violence which effaces ordinary man and the complexity of relations by dehumanizing people and creating homogeneous collective identities.

This brings us to the mnemonic and historical function of war narratives. War literature commonly has a vocation to “record” history, and many works aim in particular to safeguard the history of a community threatened by war’s physical and symbolic destruction of records, society, culture and heritage. The attempt to represent what is at risk of being annihilated by war revolves around a conceptualization (and revision) of an external reality and literature’s capacity of evoking such a reality. Classical epics aim to present a total and authoritative worldview through the evocation of muses,⁹ its broad scope (in content and form), and a fixation on details¹⁰ that give the

⁹ In classical epics the muses are the ultimate eyewitnesses of history that inspire the poet by sharing their knowledge, as Adele Johns-Putra explains: “The muses safeguard knowledge of the ‘history of the world’ which provides material for epic. Through the muses, the poet can access this special knowledge and convey it to his audience. The epics are thus peppered, and crucially begin, with invocations to the muse: ‘Sing,

impression of historical veracity and completeness. Hegel's analysis of the epic describes it as "factual", meaning: "the objective presentation of a self-grounded world, made real in virtue of its own necessity" by a poet who dissimulates his own subjectivity¹¹ in order to present "objective events" and the "people's objective way of looking at things" (2: 1047, 1049, 1050).

This vocation to represent war and record history through literary strategies deemed capable of faithfully reflecting the exterior reality can be found in later representations of war, such as in the literary realism movement of the nineteenth century novels and the boom of the genre of testimonial literature in the 20th century. While the narrative forms varied in their adoption of different style techniques for capturing the exterior reality, they shared a common conviction that the reality of war resides in the experience of everyday ordinary people, which is often overlooked by official History. For example, Jean-Norton Cru's *Témoins (Witnesses)*, an anthology and critical review of testimonials written by First World War soldiers, emphasizes that war historiography must address the actual experiences of the *poilus* (soldiers). According to Cru, a realistic representation of "war as it really is", one which "is

goddess...' (*Iliad* I.1) and 'Tell me, Muse...' (*Odyssey* I.1)" (21). The poet's text acquires in this way an aura of a "truth claim", guaranteed by the divine inspiration of the muses and gods ("pretesa di verità"; Casedei 16).

¹⁰ In *Aesthetics*, Hegel points out the importance of details in an epic's construction: "Epic, on the other hand, *demands the maximum of detail*, which, if only it is clear and intelligible, most readily gives us pleasure, after all, in the matter of those external historical facts" (1: 276; emphasis mine).

¹¹ Regarding the concealment of the poet's subjectivity, Hegel states that:

On account of the objectivity of the whole epic, the poet as *subject* must retire in face of his *object* and lose himself in it. Only the product, not the poet, appears, and yet what is expressed in the poem is *his*; he has framed it in his mind's eye and put his soul, his entire spirit, into it. But the fact that he has done this does not appear directly [...] because the epic presents not the poet's own inner world but the objective events, the subjective side of the production must be put into the background precisely as the poet completely immerses himself in the world which he unfolds before our eyes. (2: 1048, 1049)

poignant, is cruel and is hard to read”, can only be achieved through a sincere¹² first witness account of the war (“la guerre telle qu’elle est”; 22, “elle est poignante, elle est cruelle, elle fait mal a lire”; 141).

The faith in the possibility that literature could be an objective reflection of history and bring to light what really happened during war has been largely debated. The link of the epic to truth began to be fissured during the Renaissance (particularly from the end of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century) by works that used irony and mock (Casadei 18).¹³ The 20th century, in particular, including the modern and postmodern movements, has debunked the notion of an essential and objective historical truth. Nonetheless, while the concepts of reality and literature’s means and capacity of representing an external reality change over time, the question of history in war representations remains an important one. The task of representing a violent historical period has led to an ample reflection on narrative strategies and literature’s limits in representing such a past.

Despite the significance of the epic heritage in war literature, much of the epic form of representing conflict has been rejected or subverted by later representations of war. Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux argues that the epic form is insufficient to express

¹² For Cru, while truth is an impossible ideal, it can be approached through sincerity, which is an achievable ideal expressed through simple narratives lacking worked-on language and having no anterior agenda. In analyzing memoirs of the First World War, he states: “Bernard Descube’s memories, evidently composed from a well kept notebook, are without literary ostentation and without propaganda or theoretical ambitions. It is these types of memoirs that have the greatest possibility of sincerity; and I mean to say sincerity, an achievable ideal, and not truth, an impossible ideal” (“Les souvenirs de Bernard Descubes, rédigés évidemment d’après un carnet bien tenu, sont sans préhension littéraire comme sans ambition de propagande ou de thèse. Ce sont de tels mémoires qui ont les plus grandes chances de sincérité ; je dis bien, sincérité, idéal réalisable, et non vérité, idéal impossible”; 289).

¹³ For example, Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) mocks the epic heroism and historical pretensions of the chivalric romance through the use of irony, insanity and comic romance imaginations.

contemporary war experience: “Tradition provides a model to make literature of war, the epic, which beats to the collective movement towards victory and a better life. However, it is a genre in decline and poorly suited for recent convulsions and cataclysms to come” (“Pour « littériser » la guerre, la tradition fournit un modèle, l’épopée, qui rythme le mouvement collectif vers la victoire et le mieux-être; mais c’est un genre en déclin qui convient mal aux convulsions récentes et cataclysmiques du devenir”; 27).

A change in war representations began to occur in the middle of the 19th century during the Crimean War, the first conflict to have modern media technology and to be photographed, becoming widely read and viewed (Keller ix-xiii). Ulrich Keller has pointed out that:

During the Crimean War years a dense network of novel, technologically defined channels, media and genres of communication (what Jonathan Crary calls the 19th century’s new “techniques of the observer”) emerged which, perhaps for the first time, held out the promise for quite diverse groups across society to engage in intense efforts of constituting their own histories through a processes of competitive, controversial representations. (xviii)

This expansion of the representation of war to alternative viewpoints was also reflected in literature. For example, Tolstoy’s *Севастопольские рассказы* (*Sevastopol sketches*) on the siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War brought to light soldiers’ emotions, portraying in particular the previously un-discussed fear that soldiers feel through a narrative which creates a sense of escalating danger, describes soldiers’ sensorial experiences and the corporeal expressions of their fears, and openly acknowledges the social expectations pushing soldiers to simulate bravery (Plamper 263-264).

The most radical shift in war representations came at the start of the 20th century during the First World War, the bloodiest war Europe had seen until then, which put into crisis modes of representation, questioned the very possibility of talking about war, altered upheld perceptions about war and destabilized basic moral convictions. The industrialization of warfare brought into question not only the meaning of technical military terms, but shook the very core of upheld visions of war, as James Dawes remarks: “For jurists and military officials, the technologization and industrialization of combat brought into question received conceptions of categories such as ‘weapon,’ ‘target,’ ‘protected non-combatants,’ ‘justified reprisal,’ and ‘necessary and unnecessary suffering.’ For the culture as a totality, it brought into question an even more fundamental set of terms” (70).

One of the major crises in literary representations of the First World War was the paradoxical question of how to narrate an incommunicable experience. One of the reactions to the extreme and unimaginable violence of the First World War was stupefaction and silence. In an essay announcing a lamented end of the art of storytelling, the art of sharing experiences, Walter Benjamin famously remarks that soldiers returned mute from war: “With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?” (“Storyteller” 362).

Being at a loss of words to describe the experiences of the First World War can be due, on the one hand, to the unfathomable extremeness of the violence that makes

war incomprehensible,¹⁴ and on the other hand, to the propaganda use of words (such as glory and honour) which empty them of their meaning. For example, in an interview for the New York Times in 1915, Henry James speaks of the rapid deterioration and loss of the weight of words during the war:

In face of such enormous facts of destruction [...] One finds it in the midst of all this as hard to apply one's words as to endure one's thoughts. The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires; they have, like millions of other things, been more overstrained and knocked about and voided of the happy semblance during the last six months than in all the long ages before, and we are now confronted with a depreciation of all our terms, or, otherwise speaking, with a loss of expression through increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk. (pars. 27, 29)

The deterioration of language's capacities to meaningfully communicate marks a rupture in upheld values of the time. At the start of the First World War, as Paul Fussell points out in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, words, meaning and values were still considered stable, clear and reliable: "[T]he Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant" (21). The stark contrast between propaganda use of language and the actual reality of the war made words lose their weight, become impotent, meaningless, and fraudulent. In the novel *A Farewell to Arms* Ernest

¹⁴ The incomprehensibility of war also has a dark irony, as Paul Fussell remarks: "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends" (7).

Hemingway qualifies as “obscene” the profuse use of abstract words which fail to denote the true realities of the war they speak of:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (161)

As suggested in Hemingway’s passage comparing abstract and concrete nouns, the First World War initiated a critical reflection on the referential capacity of language. It made apparent the problematic nature of the referential capacity of abstract words to denote a reality, thus putting into question the referential foundation of realistic literature in the previous century. Later, in 1963, Roland Barthes would name this referential illusion of the realism genre the “*effet de réel*” (“reality effect”) and explain its mechanism as the occultation of the connotative nature of signs (through the expulsion of the signified, i.e. the concept) in order to create an illusion of a direct link,

a denotative relation, between word and object.¹⁵ While a complete break in the belief of the referential capacity of language would be finalized later on in the century, the First World War generation of artists searched for a new way to express the human experience at the start of the 20th century. They voiced a need to purify language of its utilitarian, journalistic and propaganda use in order to break war myths and speak of the human condition.¹⁶ This included a rising criticism of epic language and patriotic

¹⁵ “This is what we might call the *referential illusion*. The truth of this illusion is this: eliminated from the realist speech-act as a signified of denotation, the “real” returns to it as a signified of connotation; for just when these details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do – without saying so – is signify it; Flaubert's barometer. Michelet's little door finally say [*sic*] nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of “the real” (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.” (Barthes, *Rustle* 148)

¹⁶ The conception of the human condition went beyond the contours of the nationalistic imagery. Many writers (although not all) did not limit themselves to lamenting the suffering of the co-patriots at the hands of the enemy, but rather denounced the universal suffering of humanity in times of war. For example, in analyzing Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Lionel Richard remarks how the novel makes use of the plural noun “we” and vagueness of time, space and identity in order to express the universal weight the First World War has on soldiers:

Bäumer expresses himself not in the first person, but insinuating an “us”. The point of view is that of a community of youth, all coming from the people. The use of everyday language, the soldiers' argot, and a sentimentalism at times a little sappy, facilitates the reader's – any reader's, regardless of nationality – identification with their situation. Like the vagueness of time, place and enemy, the method results not necessarily in confronting the enemies between themselves, the Germans and the Allies, but more essentially two much more fundamental adversaries: war and the individual. (97)

Bäumer s'exprime non à la première personne, mais en s'inclinant dans un ‘nous’. Le point de vue est celui d'une collectivité de jeunes gens, tous issus du peuple. L'utilisation d'une langue populaire, de l'argot des soldats, et d'un sentimentalisme parfois un peu à l'eau de rose, facilite l'identification du lecteur à leur situation. De n'importe quel lecteur, sans considération de nationalité. De même que l'imprécision du temps, de lieu, de l'ennemi, le procédé aboutit à confronter non les ennemis entre eux, les Allemands et les Alliés, mais essentiellement deux adversaires beaucoup plus fondamentaux : la guerre et l'individu. (97)

narratives. The new language would as well be wary of loquacious and sentimental exaltations.¹⁷ In literature, poetry and memoirs became the dominant forms of expression, deemed most apt to express the human condition and to bring to light the grim realities of trench warfare left out by official historiography. The modernist and avant garde movements' search for a novel way of expressing the extreme sense of loss, alienation, despair and chaos of their times created a rupture with anterior literary models and disrupted the foundations of language and history, as Yuknavitch has commented: "Wartime writers in particular seemed to let go of the representational authority that characterized realism and concentrate instead on the novel's formal capacities to reflect how war challenges the very foundations of meaning and history" (6-7).

Representations of the horrors and brutality of war were aimed to denounce the shameful suffering and dehumanization of ordinary soldiers and civilians, reveal the lies perpetuated by the media which glorified war, and to break the upheld myths of war, such as the honourable death of dying for one's country and the idealized image of soldiers embodying the example of heroism, courage, and fearlessness. Ultimately, many writers expressed a belief and hope that future wars could be prevented if the true

¹⁷ For example, Jean Norton Cru states in a conference in 1922: "I swore to never betray my comrades by painting their anguish in the brilliant colours of heroic and chivalrous sentiment" ("J'ai juré de ne jamais trahir mes camarades en peignant leur angoisse sous les couleurs brillants du sentiment héroïque et chevaleresque"; S8). Similarly, Walter Benjamin expresses sharp criticism for nationalist writers whose overly loquacious descriptions of war are far removed from actual war experiences:

But these authors are not capable of making anything clear, of calling things by their names. War: "eludes the usual economy exercised by the mind; there is something inhuman, boundless, gigantic in its Reason, something reminiscent of a volcanic process, an elemental eruption, ... a colossal well of life directed by a painfully deep, cogently unified force, led to battlefields already mythic today, used up for tasks far exceeding the range of the current conceivable." Only an awkward lover is so loquacious. And indeed these authors are awkward in their embrace of thought, too. ("Theories" 122)

face of war in all its crudeness was revealed.¹⁸ In this way, the memory of the First World War was supposed to serve not the patriotic myths, as previous wars had, but to be a radical lesson for humanity, captured succinctly by the dictum “the war to end all wars”.

While the belief in art’s power to prevent wars by revealing its true horrific face has largely been lost, the necessity of exposing the emptiness of military and propaganda words along with the search for a language capable of conveying the human condition have persisted over time and are important elements of civil war literature. Naum Panovski, for example, has pointed out how “the fascinating words ‘liberation’ and ‘freedom’ in the small new countries – Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia – that appeared after the death of Yugoslavia received a very special place. They became the most used and abused expressions” (61-61). In contrast to interstate wars which reaffirm a nation’s core values through expressions of “freedom” and patriotism, the abuse of similar terms in civil war takes on the specific nuance of re-conquering a country, of purging a social and cultural space from inside of elements deemed to be undesirable, of amending the collective identity and allowing the “true” national identity to emerge triumphant after the conflict. This process of

¹⁸ For example Jean-Norton Cru argues that a “realistic literature” based on truthful eyewitness accounts could eventually put an end to war by contesting legendary war visions that perpetuate widespread illusions of heroism, fearlessness, and courage. We can see this hope in the following letter he wrote to his family: “I am convinced that there would be no more wars if we accepted to see Bellona as she is, with her grimacing face and in all her ugliness. If I have one desire, it’s that this war will lead to the emergence of realistic combat literature based on the writings of the combatants themselves, the survivors and the dead, whose letters, travel journals, and diaries will be published” (“Je suis convaincu qu’il n’y aurait plus de guerres si l’on voulait voir Bellone telle qu’elle est, avec son visage grimaçant et dans toute sa laideur. Si j’ai un espoir, c’est que cette guerre fera naître une littérature réaliste des combats due à la plume des combattants eux-mêmes, à la plume des survivants et, à celle des morts dont on sortira les lettres, les carnets de route, les notes intimes”; S4).

rewriting the nation in a civil war, along the terms of a “liberation” and associated language, creates myths and empty discourses which leave out individual human experiences as well as the complexities, interrelations and shared experiences of a collective social space. The literary task then of redeeming historical oblivions resulting from civil war involves creating narratives which debunk such myths and portray the complexities of the human condition and collective identity destroyed during a civil war.

Similar dilemmas on representing war brought up during the First World War – such as the problematic of naming horrors that are beyond comprehension, the referential capacity of language, and the need to remember the lives violently lost – reappear and are pushed to their extreme in the Second World War. The world’s deadliest conflict, and one where civilian casualties far surpassed military ones, is symbolized by two extremes of violence and technology: the Holocaust (*Shoah*) and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Casedei 62). The atrocities of the Second World War, “the most appalling cruelty that ideology and technology have been able to commit”, as Alberto Casedei has stated, are incomprehensible and thus unspeakable of (“la crudeltà più immane che l’ideologia e la tecnologia abbiano potuto far commettere”; 62). It was not just a matter of finding the adequate words or forms of expression, the disaster provoked a more profound crisis in meaning and the capacity of language to ethically speak of war without participating (unwillingly) in the violence. The question became how to make sense of the extreme violence pushing language, meaning and history to a state of aporia.

A particular theoretical and formal dilemma that arose regarding representations of the Second World War is the apprehension of the violent nature of words. In the

years leading up to the war, Simon Weil warns in the essay “The Power of Words” about the danger of devoid abstract words: “But when empty words are given capital letters, then, on the slightest pretext, men will begin shedding blood for them and piling up ruin in their name, without effectively grasping anything to which they refer, since what they refer to can never have any reality, for the simple reason that they mean nothing” (translated by Richard Rees; 241).¹⁹

After the Second World War the violent nature of words becomes much more fundamental than Weil’s pacifist warning. Numerous writers expressed the concern that literature’s (and in general art’s) commemoration of victims paradoxically implicates violence. In “Cultural Criticism and Society” Theodor Adorno famously and provocatively states: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”²⁰ (*Prisms* 34).²¹ While Adorno’s phrase is frequently interpreted to mean that the horrors of the Holocaust silenced poetry, the phrase, as Howard Caygill has pointed out, is ambiguous

¹⁹ The original essay appeared in 1937 under the title “Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie” (“Let’s not restart the war of Troy”).

²⁰ The full quote reads:

The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (*Prisms* 34)

²¹ The poet Adonis, when asked in a recent interview with Jonathan Guyer about Adorno’s statement and if poetry can address the violence occurring in the Syrian Civil War, replied:

Auschwitz was a catastrophic disaster, but humanity has gone through many catastrophic disasters. On the contrary, I believe that writing starts with asking questions and uncovering the sources of evil, wherever they come from. Because with Adorno’s words, he prevents us from posing questions and forces us to accept. This is wrong. I do not agree with him. Now the writing starts, after Auschwitz. (par. 29)

and has complex layers of meanings, including that: Auschwitz marks an end to lyrical poetry (which has a specific history); it is no longer possible to write certain types of poetry after Auschwitz (instead of speaking of happiness, poetry must from now on express suffering);²² and that poetry, even when fighting barbarity, is complicit with it

²² Such a change in the subject matter as well as the style of poetry in reaction to war was observed in Pablo Neruda's poetry while he was working at the Chilean consulate in Madrid at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. In reaction to the conflict, his poetry became politically and socially compromised, and presented, as Luis Monguió states in an introduction to *Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda*, "his newly found fellowship with mankind, the very humblest, Neruda's wish to understand and be understood" (Neruda 23-24). He directly addresses this shift in his poetics in the poem "A few things explained" ("Explico algunas cosas"):

You will ask: And where are the lilacs?
And the metaphysics muffled in poppies?
And the rain which so often has battered
its words till they spouted up
gullies and birds?

I'll tell you how matters stand with me.

.
Would you know why his poems
never mention the soil or the leaves,
the gigantic volcanoes of the country that bore him?

Come see the blood in the streets,
come see
the blood in the streets,
come see the blood
in the streets! (Neruda 109, 113; translated by Belitt)

Preguntaréis: Y dónde están las lilas?
Y la metafísica cubierta de amapolas?
Y la lluvia que a menudo golpeaba
sus palabras llenándolas
de agujeros y pájaros?

Os voy a contar todo lo que me pasa.

.
Preguntaréis por qué su poesía
no nos habla del suelo, de las hojas,
de los grandes volcanes de su país natal?

Venid a ver la sangre por las calles,

and confirms it. Adorno returns to reaffirms his previous statement in a later essay (“Commitment”),²³ then goes on to elaborate how representations of atrocities trap art in an aporia and a paradoxical situation. While art is the only place where “suffering can still find its own voice”, and thus is a means of resistance to war’s annihilation and silencing of victims (“[t]he abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting”), at the same time, art paradoxically enacts violence and betrays the victims through its aesthetic stylization (Adorno, “Commitment” 188). Hence, Arnold Schoenberg’s *Survivor of Warsaw*, despite its efforts to commemorate and salvage victims from oblivion, has, as Adorno observes, something “embarrassing” about it in the way that it transforms the suffering of people into objects of art and cultural commodities:

[B]y turning suffering into images, harsh and uncompromising though they are, it wounds the shame we feel in the presence of the victims. For these victims are used to create something, works of art, that are thrown to the consumption of a world which destroyed them. The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylization, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims; yet no art

venid a ver
la sangre por las calles,
venid a ver la sangre
por las calles! (Neruda 108, 112)

²³ “I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature.” (Adorno, “Commitment” 188)

which tried to evade them could confront the claims of justice. Even the sound of despair pays its tribute to a hideous affirmation. (“Commitment” 189)

In making “an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning”, art creates meaning and hence delimits war, whose reality is infinite and incomprehensible. This is also reflected on in Maurice Blanchot’s *L’Écriture du Désastre* (*The Writing of the Disaster*) where he poses the question of how to speak of a disaster that is unlimited. For Blanchot, the Holocaust is an unnamable “absolute event of history”, a paradoxical silent cry which makes ultimate meaning (with a capital “M”) impossible:

The unknown name, beyond nomination:

The holocaust, the absolute event of history, the historical date, that utter burn where all of history was put on fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up (...) How to keep it in thought, how can thought be made the keeper of the holocaust where all was lost, including guardian thought?

In the mortal intensity, the fleeting silence of the countless cry.²⁴ (80)

Writing on the Holocaust would assign meaning and limits to something that is senseless and beyond meaning. In this way, for Blanchot, writing itself embodies violence: “Writing is already (still) violence: it is where there is rupture, breaking, grinding, tearing of the torn in each fragment, acute singularity, sharp point” (“L’écriture est déjà (encore) violence: ce qu’il y a de rupture, brisure, morcellement, le déchirement du déchiré dans chaque fragment, singularité aiguë, pointe acérée”; 78).

Blanchot’s resistance to the violence of meaning formally leads to a fragmentation of

²⁴ “Le nom inconnu, hors nomination:

L’holocauste, événement absolu de l’histoire, historiquement daté, cette toute-brûlure où toute l’histoire s’est embrasée, où le mouvement du Sens s’est abîmé (...) Comment le garder, fût-ce dans la pensée, comment faire de la pensée ce qui garderait l’holocauste où tout s’est perdu, y compris la pensée gardienne?

Dans l’intensité mortelle, le silence fuyant du cri innombrable.” (Blanchot 80)

narrative composition, a decomposition of syntax, a separation of words which, as James Dawes points out assaults meaning and thus the power contained in it: “Blanchot’s text is a collection of fragments, of words fallen together, as poignant as cries of pain (...) It is language made into a puzzle, gesturing towards sense but never enclosing it, assaulting meaning (and thereby power) through paradox and splintering of grammar” (198).

The disruption of meaning provoked by the Second World War shattered and fragmented history and language, rejecting its authoritative objectivism, and determinism. The unraveling of coherent meaning, led to a reflection of the absurdity, estrangement, nonsense and chaos of human life caught in physically, symbolically and ideologically violent movements. In literature, this was expressed in part through the French *nouveau roman* postwar movement. Rejecting the assumptions of traditional realism and authoritative claims of knowledge, the self-reflexive experimental narration proposed that human experience is unknowable. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Le Sursis* (*The Reprieve*, part of *The Roads to Freedom* trilogy), dealing with the mobilization of men in the wake of the Second World War, interweaves multiplications of points of view and isolated perceptions of collective experiences which, as Bernard Fauconnier remarks, show man’s powerlessness in an absurd and grotesque world.²⁵ Similarly, Claude Simon’s *La Bataille de Pharsale* (*The Battle of Pharsalus*)

²⁵ “No center, no meaning, no point of reference, even in the typography: an infernal whirl of isolated acts, of aims which search in vain to make a report of the event or to master it, an accumulation of comical or pathetic situations which render the event unthinkable.” (Fauconnier 143)

“Pas de centre, pas de sens, pas de repères, même dans la typographie: un tournoiement infernal d’actes isolés, de propos qui cherchent vainement à rendre compte de l’événement ou à le maîtriser, une accumulation de situations cocasses ou pathétiques qui rendent l’événement dans son impensé.” (Fauconnier 143)

assemblage of fragments, impersonal visions and repetitions of text extracts creates a heterogeneous mixture where truth and meaning are fragmented and war's violence is hidden and perennial (Casedei 69).

The rupture in meaning and history, initiated during the First World War and brought to its extreme in the Second World War, are evoked in the common characteristic of contemporary representations of war which show the tension between the impossibility of writing on war and the necessity to do so in order to commemorate and salvage what has been lost. This mnemonic dimension, albeit having acquired a paradoxical nuance in the 20th century, is a common element in war literature, appearing as we have seen since the classical epics. It is a search for the preservation of a human condition, a collective experience and a community threatened to be silenced and annihilated by war. The force of war is an act of obliteration and dehumanization. Force, as defined by Simon Weil from an analysis of the *Iliad*, is that which transforms a subject into an object: "To define force – it is that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing*. Exercised to the limit, it turns a man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all" (translated by Mary McCarthy; 184). The difficult position of literature, as we have seen, is how to redeem what was lost, how to render it human and bring it back to life textually so to speak, while utilizing language which in itself operates through a violent act of force. Literature, at its best, occupies the in-between space of the opposing dualities, of the tension between remembering and forgetting, voicing and silencing, reconstructing and annihilating.

1.2 Focus of Study: Narrative Strategies in Representing Civil Wars

The characteristics of literary representations of war thus far outlined take on a particular dimension in civil war literature due to the fact that this type of conflict violently reconfigures individual and collective identities within a society. Civil war brings about a drastic internal contestation over the power to decide who “we” are, how this newly imagined population will be governed, and how its history will be (re)written. These dramatic transformations reveal the unstable and malleable nature of society and put into crisis people’s sense of identity, belonging and home. The senselessness of mass violence and suffering (characteristic of all wars) provokes in civil war a rupture in the meaning of society since the same collective that constructed a shared space of cohabitation is the one who is taking part in its demolition. Hence, the mnemonic dimension of literature aiming to salvage what is lost during civil war tackles the question of lost identity, community and home as a whole society is violently reconfigured during the conflict.

As a theoretical and conceptual base, this study on the narrative strategies in representing civil war, begins in chapter two with an analysis of what civil war is as a concept and a phenomenon by discussing definitions of civil war, historical evolution of warfare, and major empirical and theoretical works on civil war and warfare in political sciences and humanities studies. Drawing on this research, I argue that a civil war is an internal military conflict occurring within the boundaries of a nation between the government in power and opposition group(s), which drastically damages the cohesion of the social and political structure. It involves high intensity and prolonged violence which leads to an impairment of the political order and a collapse of the legal system, plunging the nation into a widespread escalation of violence, corruption and chaos. The

conflict fractures a cohabited social space by enforcing divisions within the population and redefining citizens along imagined simplistic “us” versus “them” categories. The “battlefield” in a civil war largely becomes imposed upon a civilian population while the violence takes on physical and symbolic dimensions aimed at destroying a social, cultural and political space while reconstructing another.

The following chapters expand this conceptualization of civil war by exploring, through a close comparative analysis of novels, how literature has portrayed the significance of civil war from the point of view of human experiences. The study is limited to two civil war – the Spanish Civil War and the Yugoslav conflict – revealing how despite the political and historical differences of the two conflicts (with the former involving a failed coup and the establishment of a dictatorship following the defeat of the Second Spanish Republic while the latter led to the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into multiple democratic nations, which founded politically the new nations along religious and regional identities), similar processes of the civil wars’ exclusionary homogenizations of populations, violent reconfigurations of a cohabited space, and effacement of individual and collective experiences are addressed in the novels. The selected corpus focuses on native authors, many of whom directly experienced the civil war and for whom the conflict impacted their writing.

Chapter three analyzes the portrayals of civilian experiences in sieged cities by comparing Camilo José Cela’s *Visperas, festividad y octava de San Camilo del año 1936 en Madrid* (*The eve, feast, and octave of Saint Camillus of the year 1936 in Madrid*, 1969) and Dževad Karahasan’s *Sara i Serafina* (*Sara and Sefarina*, 1999). It explores how the novels focus on the personal experiences and relationships between city dwellers at the start of a civil war while vaguely presenting the conflict as a chaotic

and incomprehensible looming danger that presses upon the whole population. Their representations of individual experiences expose the senselessness of the ideological justifications of civil war violence and the artificiality of the imposed internal boundaries edifying opposing identity constructs and fracturing a cohabited city space.

Chapter four analyzes representations of civil war in the rural space by comparing Mercè Rodoreda's *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (*War, so much war*, 1980) and Velibor Čolić's *Chronique des oubliés* (*Chronicle of the forgotten*, 1994). Both novels use the figure of the traveling soldier to construct a vision of civil war's mass destruction, showing how it transforms individuals and their homeland. Civil war is portrayed as an accumulation of death and an apocalyptic demise of a land, which causes senseless suffering and robs people of their identity, life, loved ones and home. The soldiers' narratives unite diverse stories of the people they encounter, creating in the end a collective memory of civil war experiences.

Chapter five focuses on the question of historiography and the problematic of writing retrospectively about civil war. It analyzes three novels – Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (*The backroom*, 1978), David Albahari's *Mrak* (*Darkness*, 2008), and Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina* (*Soldiers of Salamis*, 2001) – which critically reflect on the process of recovering memories and creating a representation of civil war experiences through a metafictional narrative strategy. The first two novels portray a narrator/protagonist reflecting on his/her personal memories of the civil war and postwar period while the third one deals with the way a second generation narrator/protagonist (that is, one who does not have direct experience of the civil war) investigates and reconstructs the past.

Chapter six brings together the central points raised throughout the study,

comparing common narrative strategies across the seven novels. I argue that the novels approach the problematic of representing a conflict, which is beyond comprehension and which pushes toward an aporia, by relegating the civil war to the background of the narrative and by maintaining the ambiguities of its violent force. Civil war is expressed through connotations and evocations which speak of the subjective perceptions that individuals have of it. The novels hence do not portray the meaning of civil war by analyzing the conflict in and of itself, but rather by illustrating its effects on ordinary people who become a central part of its “battlefield”. The significance of civil war is configured by a reflection on the multifaceted violence and loss it causes on individual and collective levels through physical and symbolic reconfigurations of identities, communities and society.

2 Phenomenon and Definition of Civil War

While civil wars are not a novel phenomenon (dating back to ancient societies), they have become ever more common in the 20th century.²⁶ During the first half of the 20th century, interstate wars between different nations were the more common type of conflict (Doyle and Sambanis 11). However, after Second World War, civil wars and other forms of internal conflicts (such as revolutions, guerrilla warfare, etc.) have increasingly dominated the global war landscape, with around 85 percent of all wars being internal and an estimated 125-151 civil wars occurring globally from 1944-1999 (Doyle and Sambanis 11, 136; Sambanis, “Review” 218; Fearon 275; Tilly 56). The escalation of civil wars has become an evermore-pressing issue for the 20th and 21st century. They lead to alarming consequences during the conflict itself and also well into the post-war period, causing injury to civilians (death, internal displacement, exile, poverty, loss of basic human rights, etc.), economic devastation of country/ies directly affected as well as neighbouring states,²⁷ major infrastructure damages, deterioration of health levels, increased social tensions, international isolation and numerous other consequences (Doyle and Sambanis 4, 17, 42; Collier and Sambanis 8). Despite its increasing prevalence and significant impact, civil wars are still a relatively new focus

²⁶ Civil wars have been increasing linearly over the 20th century, with a peak frequency occurrence at around 1992-1994 (in 1992 there were an estimated 28 internal military conflicts around the world and 44 in 1994) (Sambanis, “Review” 215; Fearon 275; Tilly 56) (see figures 1 and 2). Presently, they are more common than international conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler 563).

²⁷ Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis identify as a “conflict trap” commonly observed cycles of economic deterioration and recurring violence in regions neighbouring a state in civil war (42).

of study and much advancement is needed across various disciplines (humanities, political sciences, history, etc.) to further our understanding of the phenomenon.²⁸

The term civil war is ambiguous and can vary when and how it is applied to describe a conflict.²⁹ Changes in geopolitics during the 20th and 21st centuries, in the way warfare is waged, as well as advancements in technology and media coverage have altered the face of civil wars. Furthermore, each civil war has particular and complex dynamics specific to the local context of the conflict. While these factors may render the term elusive, we can still outline some common determinants across various studies to approach a conceptual and operational definition of civil war.

Although there is no agreed upon clear definition of civil war, there are common threads across studies, which I will review here in order to explore the concept of civil war. In analyzing these key conceptual features, I hope to reveal at the same time a complex dynamic that challenges the binary logic often used in defining a civil war. It is important to note interplays, paradoxes and gray areas that condition our understanding of civil war.

The Oxford dictionary defines a civil war as “a war between citizens of the same country”, and Merriam-Webster’s similarly as “a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country” (Thompson 241; *Merriam-Webster’s* 210). Both definitions imply the containment of the conflict in one country and an impairment of a

²⁸ There are many challenges to studying civil wars. Apart from the complexities of the topic, much data is missing, censored, deliberately erased, or guarded secret for security or political reasons.

²⁹ As Stathis Kalyvas has noted, the use of the term “civil war” to label a conflict can be subject to “serious semantic contestation” (17). This semantic confusion emerges from euphemisms that downplay the situation (such as “troubles”, “emergency”, “situation”, “violence”) or biased uses of the term that can on the one hand, legitimize the insurgents’ fight by recognizing it as a “civil war” and, on the other hand, deny this legitimacy by labeling it instead as “subversion”, “terrorism”, “delinquent behavior”, etc. (Kalyvas 17).

social structure in which citizens that previously co-existed peacefully fight against one another. These definitions remain nevertheless vague and simplified views of a civil war. Political scientists have worked towards outlining a more detailed theoretical and empirical conceptualization of civil wars. In reviewing some of these studies, as well as others from the humanities disciplines, I will go over what I see as the three main features of a civil war: principal actors involved, armed conflict (coordination, scale and aims of civil war violence) and contestation over the political and social order (state breakdown and foundation of a new/reborn nation).

2.1 Principal Actors Involved

Foremost, a civil war is a conflict that occurs within the boundaries of an internationally recognized state. For example, the first condition that Michael Doyle and Nicolas Sambanis specify in their definition of a civil war is that “the war takes place within the territory of a state that is a member of the international system with a population of 500,000 or greater” (133). It is a domestic crisis that may or may not include foreign intervention. Due to this geographical component, some theorist use the term “internal war” or “internal armed conflict” rather than “civil war”.³⁰ More precisely than “a war between citizens of the same country”, a civil war occurs within

³⁰ The concept of “internal war” was developed in the 1960s and was used to refer to all forms of violence against authority (such as civil wars, coups, assassinations, rebellions, revolutions) (Gersovitz and Kriger 5). The United Nations specify two types of armed conflicts under the Geneva Convention Protocols: “international armed conflicts” and “non-international armed conflicts” which include civil wars (see Sandoz et al.). The *Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook* breaks down the concept of “internal war” to distinguish between an “internal armed conflict” (that “occurs between the government of a state and internal opposition groups without intervention from other states”) and an “internationalized internal armed conflict” (that “occurs between the government of a state and internal opposition groups with intervention form other states”) (Strand et al. 10). A major problem with the term “internal war” is that it tends to agglomerate all forms of violence against an authority (Gersovitz and Kriger 5).

the boundaries of one sovereign state between a government (or a government claimant) and an organized opposition group(s) recruiting locally.³¹ The condition that the government be one of the principal combatants is used to distinguish civil wars from other forms of civil violence (Sambanis, “Review” 238). We can see the specification of actors involved in the following definitions of civil war:

[A civil war involves] combats between governmental and rebel units generating at least a thousand battle deaths, each side sustaining at least 5 percent of the casualties. (Tilly 56)

Civil wars typically do not occur between standing armies, but rather between a government army, or militia, and one or more rebel organizations. (Doyle and Sambanis 3)

Civil war is defined as *armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities*. (Kalyvas 5)

First, a non-international armed conflict is distinct from an international armed conflict because of the legal status of the entities opposing each other: the parties to the conflict are not sovereign States, but the government of a single State in

³¹ While the main participants are local to the nation in conflict, foreign states often play a role in civil wars, even a decisive one in war outcome and duration. Furthermore, there is a tendency for high-capacity democratic regimes to participate in civil war not as officially declared belligerents, but as suppliers of arms, purchasers of contraband, and peacekeepers (Tilly, 66). Nowadays it is often not officially declared who all the extended participates in a civil war are and aggressive action can be camouflaged as aid or a “liberation” movement.

conflict with one or more armed factions within its territory. [...] Within these limits, non-international armed conflict seems to be a situation in which hostilities break out between armed forces or organized armed groups within the territory of a single State. (Sandoz et al. 1319-1320)

The first two definitions have used the term “rebel” implying an opposition that challenges the government’s power, often aiming to overthrow the political system currently in place and seize power or to carve out autonomous territories of their own (i.e. secessionist civil wars). Depending on the context and the way the conflict is presented to influence public opinion and support, the opponents can be labeled as: rebels, terrorists, revolutionary groups, freedom fighters, people’s army, challengers, insurgents etc. Likewise, the way the government is presented can influence our understanding of a conflict and can have implications for policy makers and decisions made by external countries about intervention. For example, the government can be presented as a legitimate ruler of a sovereign state defending its right to legislative power, or as an oppressive regime under which its citizens suffer, thus justifying the need to bring it down even by violent means.

There are two assumptions about the warring parties that are often taken for granted: a clear division between the warring sides and a unified homogeneous character of each group. The division between the warring parties is not clean cut; for example, soldiers may change camps and enemies may even collaborate.³² Within group dynamics are also complex and contradictory sentiments and actions may arise. Fissures

³² One example of collaboration between enemies is the exchange of goods for monetary gain. During the conflict in Bosnia, Serbian military leaders who inherited weaponry from the Yugoslavian national army sold weapons and rented tanks to their Croatian and Muslim-Bosnian military enemies while the Croatian military sold fuel to their opponents (Mueller 58).

and disagreements within a group may even escalate into inter-group hostilities, creating wars within a war. For example, during the Spanish Civil War, divisions on the Republican side turned violent during the May Days of 1937 as fighting ensued in Barcelona between, on the one side, the Communist party, PSUC (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia), Guardia de Asalto (Civil Guards) and, on the other side, the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation), CNT (National Confederation of Labour), and POUM (Worker's Party of Marxist Unification).³³ However, even in inter-group divisions, dividing lines are porous and collaboration appears between fighting sides. For example, in George Orwell's account in *Homage to Catalonia* of the fighting during the May Days, we can note the ambiguous relation he (as part of the POUM) has with a Civil Guard occupying an opposition post:

‘We don't want to shoot you. We're only workers, the same as you are.’

³³ George Orwell's description in *Homage to Catalonia* of the military geography of Barcelona during the May Days fighting evokes the confusion around the divisions that formed within the Republican side:

What the devil was happening, who was fighting whom, and who was winning, was at first very difficult to discover. [...] Looking out from the observatory, I could grasp that the Ramblas, which is one of the principal streets of the town, formed a dividing line. To the right of the Ramblas the working-class quarters were solidly Anarchist; to the left a confused fight was going on among the tortuous by-streets, but on that side the P.S.U.C. and the Civil Guards were more or less in control. Up at our end of the Ramblas, round the Plaza de Catalunya, the position was so complicated that it would have been quite unintelligible if every building had not flown a party flag. The principal landmark here was the Hotel Colón, the headquarters of the P.S.U.C., dominating the Plaza de Catalunya. In a window near the last or but one in the huge 'Hotel Colón' that sprawled across its face they had a machine-gun that could sweep the square with deadly effect. A hundred yards to the right of us, down the Ramblas, the J.S.U., the youth league of the P.S.U.C. (corresponding to the Young Communist League in England), were holding a big department store whose sandbagged side-windows fronted our observatory. They had hauled down their red flag and hoisted the Catalan national flag. On the Telephone Exchange, the starting-point of all the trouble, the Catalan national flag and the Anarchist flag were flying side by side. Some kind of temporary compromise had been arrived at there, the exchange was working uninterruptedly and there was no firing from the building. (96)

He made the anti-Fascist salute, which I returned. I shouted across:

‘Have you got any more beer left?’ (97)

The enemy is not a black and white figure, especially in civil wars where the friend-enemy boundary is enforced in a population that cohabits and shares community spaces. A civil war is often described as being particularly tragic because it involves fighting among brothers³⁴ (evoking an image of the nation as a family), rather than strangers, as is the case in external wars. Some authors have thus described civil wars as having “the character of a family quarrel” (Newman and DeRouen 41). Speaking of the Spanish Civil War, Nicholas Atkin remarks that “communities were pitted against one another” and subsequently “everyone’s loyalties were suspect and frequently called into question” (xvi). The fabric of social cohesion breaks down and people have to step to one side of the dividing line(s), whether they make the choice for themselves or are forced into it through circumstances. The terms “enemy”, “traitor”, “co-patriot” are applied with fresh paint while categories of “us” and “them” are reconfigured. This requires indoctrination and learning of new codes of social relations and behaviours.

Identifying the enemy within the nation – where there are shared cultural, linguistic, historic and/or personal spaces – and working towards its destruction or annihilation is in a way an act of self-mutilation and self-destruction. Civil war is sometimes portrayed as a disease within a body that breaks it down or as an act of self-consumption. For example, Salvador Dalí’s painting *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)*, completed shortly before the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, embodies Spain’s escalation towards civil war violence as a

³⁴ The conceptualization of a civil war as a fratricide could also be seen as an allusion to the biblical story of Abel and Cain, the first sons of Adam and Eve. Slaying his brother, Cain becomes the first murderer of humankind and Abel the first human to die, whose death renders the earth infertile from the blood that sinks into it.

monstrous body that inflicts pain on itself as it mutilates and dismembers itself. Dalí has described the painting as “a vast human body breaking out into monstrous excrescences of arms and legs tearing at one another in a delirium of auto strangulation” (qtd. in *Philadelphia Museum of Art*, “Label” par. 1).

Building on the comparison to a sick body, a civil war is often propagated and defended as a “purifying” act wherein an internally identified anomaly or toxin needs to be eradicated, implying that after its elimination the body will once again be “healthy”, “clean” and “innocent”.³⁵ Michel Foucault sees the propagation of a social “internal war”³⁶ that deals with the population as a political and scientific problem articulated by modern history in biological terms. In the mechanics of biopolitics, an insidious internal presence is identified as a biological threat: “we see the emergence of the idea of an

³⁵ This type of ideological and political vocabulary pervades all aspects of society during a civil war and its postwar period. For example, Dubravka Ugrešić has written on the use of slogans such as “Clean Croatian air” (“Čisti hrvatski zrak”) and “Breathe more easily” (“Lakše se diše”) for the marketing of soda drinks and candies during the political movement towards Croatia’s independence in the 90s and the Yugoslav conflict (59). The “political-ecological” (“političko-ekološke”) phenomenon, as she denominates it, reduces life to a banal “clean-dirty” (“čisto/prljavo”) binary opposition that has become ubiquitous in everyday language and mentality (87, 88):

That little phrase – *clean Croatian air* – has attached itself to the Croatian language like a burr, come to life in newspapers, on television, in politics, in thought, in everyday speech and in everyday life. Nowadays there is hardly any newspaper article or television broadcast without the word *clean*, which implies its opposite – the word *dirty*. And in the newly established system of values, based on the opposition *clean-dirty*, life suddenly seems very simple. (87-88)

Mala fraza – *čisti hrvatski zrak* – zaplela se u hrvatski jezik poput čička, primila u novinama, na televiziji, u politici, u mišljenju, u svakidašnjem govoru i svakidašnjem životu. Danas gotovo nema novinskog članka ili televizijke emisije bez riječi *čisto*, koja podrazumijeva svoj opozicijski par, riječ *prljavo*. A u novouspostavljenom sistemu vrijednosti, temeljenom na opoziciji *čisto/prljavo*, život se najednom pokazuje vrlo jednostavnim. (87-88)

³⁶ While Foucault’s social internal war does not specifically occur during wartime, he argues in “*Society Must Be Defended*” *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* that the power structure founded by war continues on and is reflected in the postwar political order.

internal war that defends society against threats born of and in its own body. The idea of social war makes, if you like, a great retreat from the historical to the biological, from the constituent to the medical” (Foucault 216). As Nick Mansfield has pointed out in his reading of Foucault, the social war becomes a matter of self-cleansing, while struggle and violence are seen as acts of therapy and hygiene (127). In a civil war, the violence of biopolitics that Foucault identifies in modern societies is taken to its extreme. The escalation of political violence into full out civil war involves a significant level of organization, coordination and mobilization of violent means.

2.2 Armed Conflict: Coordination, Scale and Aims of Civil War Violence

In order to distinguish a civil war from other forms of internal violence, the violence that ensues must be militarily organized, high intensity and sustained. These dimensions differentiate a civil war from sporadic acts of civil violence.³⁷ Civil war therefore, is defined as an armed conflict between organized opposition groups and a sovereign authority, wherein the opposition is able to mount an effective military

³⁷ For example, the *Commentary on the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949* address the question of the organization and intensity of violence in their definition of a non-international armed conflict:

4340 It is therefore appropriate to raise the question whether all forms of violent opposition to a government, from simple localized rioting to a general confrontation with all the characteristics of a war, can be considered as non-international armed conflicts.

4341 The expression “armed conflict” gives an important indication in this respect since it introduces a material criterion: the existence of open hostilities between *armed forces which are organized to a greater or lesser degree*. Internal disturbances and tensions, characterized by *isolated or sporadic acts of violence, do not therefore constitute the armed conflict in a legal sense*, even if the government is forced to resort to police forces or even to armed units for the purpose of restoring law and order. (Sandoz et al. 1319-1320; emphasis mine)

resistance, thus prolonging the duration of the conflict between the rebellion and the government efforts to subdue them. Sporadic acts of intense violence can develop into a civil war when there is an escalation of the intensity and duration of violence. For this to occur, both sides of the conflict (i.e. opponents and government) must have a significant level of military and political organization by which they use violent means to achieve military, political, economical and ideological aims. Provided that the opposition group has sufficient military strength and financing, they will be able to mount an effective challenge to the state in power.³⁸ Military organization and funding also play an important role on the government side. Various political science studies have found that stronger governments are more able to deal with and control violent episodes in the early stages, thus avoiding the escalation of the situation into a civil war. Low capacity governments (poorer states with political and economic instability) are less capable of mounting an effective resistance and are thus more vulnerable and prone to civil war outbreak.³⁹

³⁸ Collier and Hoeffler's study "Greed and Grievance in Civil War" identifies several factors that facilitate opportunity for rebellion by supporting opposition groups militarily and financially, thus putting countries in greater risk of civil war. Their list of proxies for opportunity includes extortion of natural resources (oil in particular, but also diamonds, timber, cocaine), donations from diaspora populations, and subventions from hostile governments (565, 568, 569, 575). In addition, other factors they find to increase rebellion opportunity include low secondary school enrolment, mountainous terrain, low population density and low urbanization (569, 579).

³⁹ There is a significant body of political sciences research that indicates an increased likelihood of civil war in politically unstable governments and poorer nations. High capacity regimes, whether democratic or authoritarian, generally leave little space for disloyal opposition to accumulate military power (Tilly 67). Several studies have found the risk of civil war outbreak is greatest in anocracies or not well-established democracies; such regimes are neither democratic enough to resolve political grievances by allowing greater participation, nor autocratic enough to suppress rebellion in its early stages (Doyle and Sambanis 19, 35). In addition, economic studies have identified a robust empirical relationship between poverty, slow economic growth and increased risk of civil war (Collier and Sambanis 3). Nicholas Sambanis has stated that "civil war is a problem of the poor" (Sambanis, "Review" 216). In general, countries with high

On the one hand, civil war violence is organized, premeditated and aimed at particular targets according to outlined military and political strategies. In this sense, we can think of a civil war as a form of coordinated destruction with a specific purpose. On the other hand, there is also a significant element of chaos that renders the violence unpredictable and senseless. Apart from “purposeful” chaos that could be a deliberate part of a military strategy, disorganization and within group disagreements, whether on the opposition or government side, may lead to a chaotic situation in which political and military aims or actions do not follow a clear unified plan.⁴⁰ Fragmentation of a centralized army and irregular warfare (such as paramilitary forces, guerrillas, militias, etc.) may contribute to a chaotic situation and an escalated use of violence. Since the Second World War, irregular military practices have become ever more prevalent and

levels of per capita income are unlikely to have a civil war (Sambanis, “Review” 229). Poverty exacerbates the risk of civil war and also further reduces income in countries that have experienced a civil war (Collier and Sambanis 3).

⁴⁰ For example, disorganization and lack of political and military coherence was a major problem for the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War. Michael Alpert’s study of the armies during the Spanish Civil War in “Soldiers, politics and war” describes the Republican forces as being characterized by “immense enthusiasm, heterogeneity and military inefficiency” (214). Without a centralized military authority in command nor a clear unified front, there was no coherent assemblage of forces:

In the Republican army, in contrast, the urge to militarize, restore the authority of the state and put order into the haphazard militia, meant that brigades, divisions and corps were formed at speed, without the benefit of existing administrative organization or bases. Units might be formed on paper, often without arms and frequently without officers to command them. (Alpert 216)

Furthermore, as Ronald Fraser argues in “The popular experience of war and revolution 1936-9”, the emergence of the war during the revolution brought on by the Second Republic harshened political and military divisions on the Republican zone. First, there were disagreements on whether to prioritize the war effort (as was pushed by the Communist party and the Popular Front) or the revolution itself (as the other parties voiced) (Fraser 226). Secondly, and perhaps more problematically, there was a lack of agreement on what type of revolution should be carried out (Fraser 231).

are often responsible for much of the mass killing and destruction during a civil war (Tilly 58).⁴¹

Further chaos may be added to the situation by opportunism, a frequent occurrence in civil wars where people (soldiers as well as civilians and external actors) attempt to profit from the chaos, violence and disintegration of the social order in order to pursue personal economic gains, desires for revenge, or other sorts of aspirations.⁴² Opportunism can be observed in the emergence of a black market (where essentials for life such as food are resold at exorbitant prices),⁴³ looting, forceful seizure of people's

⁴¹ For example, paramilitary forces and "criminal bands" were used in the Yugoslav conflict to push the war in motion and were responsible for much of the brutal violence inflicted upon civilians (Hajdinjak 50; Collier and Sambanis 212, 217; Fearon and Laitin 871). Faced with an early disintegration of the Yugoslavian army and a significant level of reluctance to fight by official army soldier (as was indicated by high numbers of draft dodgers, deserters and numerous complaints by generals of soldiers unwilling to fight), politicians turned to relying on paramilitary groups to set the war in action (Mueller 47-49; Hajdinjak 49):

Specifically, the politicians urged underworld and hooligan groups to get into the action, and it appears that thousands of prison inmates, promised shortened sentences and enticed by the prospect that they could "take whatever booty you can", were released for the war effort. Thus, to a substantial degree the collapse of the army led to a privatization of the war, and loot comprised the chief form of payment. The releases, together with other criminals and like-minded recruits, generally worked independently, improvising their tactics as they went along. (Mueller 49)

⁴² For example, in the later phases of the civil war in Rwanda in 1994, prevalence of violent acts of opportunism increased as the Rwanda Patriotic Front forces advanced towards victory and the Hutu Power central authorities started losing control of their militia: "Especially in war zones and in later phases of the genocide, central coordination collapsed, and various forms of banditry became increasingly prevalent. Like demobilized mercenaries in other wars, squads of Interahamwe became free-booting predators" (Tilly 141-142).

⁴³ The black market flourishes during a civil war as primary resources become scarce and bread queues elongate. It can develop to such an extent that humanitarian resources, such as those from international aid agencies whose aim is to help civilians, can ironically and tragically be appropriated and sold to civilians at exaggerated prices on the black market (Mansfield 153). Corruption by extortion of humanitarian aid in order to make profits from the black market can even be in complete contradiction to the political and military aspirations of the war effort, while harming along the way the very populations that are supposed to be defended, as we can see in the following example

homes, physical violence committed against persons, etc. Opportunism occurs at the margins of existing political control (which breaks down during a civil war) in unpoliced areas or at points of breakage in systems of surveillance and control (Tilly 142). State failure, frequently associated with a civil war, generates a situation where anarchy emerges endogenously as a result of domestic political competition (Doyle and Sambanis 40). In such a situation, the collapse of law and order permits the normalization of crime, hence acts that were labeled as a crime punishable by law during peacetime (such as stealing, harassing, murdering, etc.) are no longer policed or punished and become permissible, even encouraged at times as part of a “war effort”. The accumulation of opportunistic violence further accentuates the chaos and senselessness of the civil war violence.

The use of violence outside the (fading) norms of order is not only an act of opportunism, but more significantly, it is a basic constituting component of a civil war. The infringing violence that ensues during a civil war is part of a struggle over the monopoly of force. The World Bank definition of civil war centers on an organized large-scale violence over the monopoly of force:

during the conflict in Bosnia:

They [officer Naser Orić and his militia in charge of defending the population in Srebrenica] prospered by exaggerating the population size in order to get excess humanitarian aid, and then hoarding it to drive up prices before selling it on the black market at a killing. [...] Because the refugees were essentially being used as human shields to protect the property and income of Orić and his men, Muslims were not allowed to leave, yet little effort was made to improve the lives of the people, especially the refugees, unless it brought personal profit to the ruling gang. (Mueller 57).

A similar hoarding of resources that inflated the black market while endangering the survival of an already starving civilian population occurred in the Spanish Civil War, as the following example illustrates: “When food was in short supply they hoarded it and created a thriving black market which, apart from disrupting supplies, did much to undermine morale in the republican zone. The communist civil governor of Cuenca admitted later that the smallholders who predominated in his province held on to their grain when the cities were starving” (Bevor 113).

We define a civil war as a politically organized, large-scale, sustained, physically violent conflict that occurs within a country principally among large/numerically important groups of its inhabitants or citizens over the monopoly of physical force within the country. Civil wars usually have incumbent governments that control the state and have a monopoly of force before the civil war and challengers—people who have not effectively challenged the monopoly of others before the outbreak of the civil war but whose challenge initiates the outbreak of the civil war. (Gersovitz and Kriger 3-4)

The monopoly of force that the government holds during peacetime in order to maintain power and order – that is, reserving the right to use violence (for example, through a police force) while illegalizing and punishing others from using violence – breaks down during a civil war as other fronts of violent forces emerge.⁴⁴ This breakdown of the monopoly of violence is a precursor and symptom of a wider breakdown of the law system itself. Following Walter Benjamin’s ideas in his essay “Critique of Violence”, the use of violence outside the law presents a danger to and undermines the legal system since law preserves itself by claiming hold of the monopoly of violence. During a civil war, the escalation of the use of violence outside the law leads to the breakdown of the distinction between legal and illegal use of violence. Due to its pervasiveness and

⁴⁴ The idea of the state’s claim over the monopoly of force goes back to Max Weber’s essay “Politics as a Vocation” where he argues that the modern state is characterized by its *monopoly* over physical violence:

Nowadays, in contrast, we must say that the state is a form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory – and this idea of ‘territory’ is an essential defining feature. For what is specific to the present is that all other organizations or individuals can assert the right to use physical violence only insofar as the *state* permits them to do so. The state is regarded as the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence. (33)

transgression of the legal system, violence in fact becomes normalized. Without the legal binding, the use of violence is then justified by other moral or ideological discourses, such as the use of violence to “defend” a population/territory or for “security reasons”.

This fight over the monopoly of force in a civil war is reciprocal, or coming from multiple opposing warring sides, and is sustained over a period of time (ranging from about two to over twenty years),⁴⁵ in contrast to sporadic acts of large-scale violence against a government authority. The duration of the violent conflict over the monopoly of force is a central feature of a civil war, as is noted for example by Mark Gersovitz and Norma Kriger: “Civil wars must entail large-scale and sustained internal political violence to distinguish them from intense but limited episodes of political violence that contest the monopoly of force, such as political assassinations, mutinies, or coups”(4).⁴⁶ The length of a civil war is often prolonged by external interventions, apparently due to their tendency to support opposition groups through military and/or financial aid (Elbadawi and Sambanis 1, 10).⁴⁷ This sort of assistance builds a counterweight to the government’s initial superior strength, thus levelling the playing

⁴⁵ According to the study of civil war length by James Fearon there is a high variability in the duration of civil wars. More specifically: “a quarter of the 128 civil wars starting since 1945 lasted two years or less, and a quarter of all civil wars have lasted at least 12 years. Thirteen wars in the sample are coded as having lasted at least 20 years” (Fearon 276).

⁴⁶ A military coup can turn into a civil war if it is unsuccessful in overthrowing the government, and likewise if the government is unable to suppress the rebellion in its early stages, thus prolonging the violent conflict. For example, the Spanish Civil War started with an unsuccessful military coup by the Nationals (led by general Francisco Franco) which then turned into a civil war due to the Republican government’s inability to take control of the situation early on as well as Nazi Germany’s swift military support which strengthened the Nationals’ opposition.

⁴⁷ Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis’ study on external intervention and civil war duration report that out of 190 interventions from 1944-1998, only 57 led to an end in fighting (10).

field and limiting the government's ability to repress the rebellion early on (Doyle and Sambanis 44; Elbadawi and Sambanis 1). On the other hand, interventions that have clearly favoured the government appear to shorten conflicts (Collier and Sambanis 7).

In addition to the duration of sustained violence, an extensive prevalence of violence is also a marking feature of a civil war. Its daily presence breeds an acute sense of fear, as was noted for example by Sam Johnson in his study of the Russian Civil War:

Violence became an everyday occurrence. [...] Hostages were routinely round up, imprisoned, and shot. Individuals were attacked and beaten in the street, and sometimes stripped of every belonging and item of clothing. Few would venture outdoors at night. Just as the social system was swept away, so too was the legal and moral order. Fear governed the thoughts of many ordinary Russians, and grew more intense during the period known as the Red Terror. (Atkin 58)

It is difficult to say exactly what level and which type(s) of violence qualify a conflict to be labeled as a civil war. Generally, it is agreed upon that one of the defining characteristics of a civil war is large-scale destruction (Sambanis "What", 820). However, there are conceptual and empirical problems in defining large-scale destruction. Political scientists in general use an absolute threshold of the number of deaths (usually restricted to battle deaths) to define a civil war and measure violence. Specifically, a conflict is labeled as a civil war if there are at least 1,000 battle deaths per year. For example, we can see this in the following definition of a civil war:

Civil war is an armed conflict that pits the government and national army of an internationally recognized state against one or more armed opposition groups able to mount effective resistance against the state; the violence must be

significant, causing more than a thousand deaths in relatively continual fighting that takes place within the country's boundaries; and the rebels must recruit mostly locally, controlling some part of the country's territory. (Doyle and Sambanis 31)

The death threshold is also commonly used to code when a civil war begins (i.e. when the threshold is met or surpassed and is followed by a sustained number of deaths). We can see, for example, the operational definition of the start and duration of a civil war in the list of conditions specified by the above-cited study:

[T]he start year of the war is the first year that the conflict causes at least 500-1,000 deaths. If the conflict has not caused 500 deaths or more in the first year, the war is coded as having started in that year only if cumulative deaths in next three years reach 1000. [And,] throughout its duration, the conflict is characterized by sustained violence at least at the minor or intermediate level. There should be no three-year period during which the conflict causes fewer than 500 deaths. (Doyle and Sambanis 134)

There are many limitations to this definition of violence by a threshold of deaths that restrict our understanding of civil wars. It relies on a narrow concept of violence which is limited to committed acts of physical violence and ignores potential violence (Gersovitz and Kriger 10). A fundamental part of civil war is not only direct experience of violence, but also the continuous intimate presence of a looming threat of potential violence that incites fear and insecurity.

Furthermore, many studies limit the definition of violence to "battle deaths", disregarding that violent episodes are often inflicted upon civilians and that a civil war often does not involve clear set-piece battles between armies (Gersovitz and Kriger 9).

What we normally conceive of as a “battle” (a sustained fight between opposing armed forces) is often falsely applied to describe violent episodes in civil wars, as well as during other types of wars since the 20th century. Up until the 19th century there was in general a clear division between the battlefield where armies fought each other and the separate civilian zone that was rarely directly affected. In the 20th century, however, the distinction between military and civilian areas becomes blurred (Atkin 1). This shift in what constitutes a “battlefield” is largely due to modernization and changes in the way warfare is waged. During the First World War advances in technology, such as aircrafts, brought more war violence to civilian zones. For example, in the essay “War and Warrior”, Walter Benjamin discusses the changing face of war and international law after the invention of airplanes: “Since gas warfare obviously eliminates the distinction between civilian and military personnel, the most important basis of international law is removed” (“Theories” 121). As the 20th century advanced, civilians became more frequently affected by war violence, to the point that they are often directly implicated in “battlefields”. In his study *Civilians in War*, Simon Chesterman cites an alarming increase in civilian casualties throughout the 20th century: “War, of course, has changed. In World War I only 5 percent of all casualties were civilian; in World War II that number was 50 percent; and in conflicts through the 1990s, civilians constituted up to 90 percent or more of those killed, with a high proportion being women and children” (2).

In a civil war in particular, the “battlefield” pervasively invades the civilian zones as both government and opposition armies selectively target civilians (Collier and Sambanis 9; Sambanis and Doyle 3-4). Stathis Kalyvas has argued that one of the factors distinguishing civil wars from interstate wars is its “barbarism” typified by a

“disproportionate victimization of civilians” (11). Furthermore, injury to civilians is not only limited to physical violence (or simple death counts), but involves much more complex dynamics of violence and coercion that damage the physical and psychological well-being of civilians. Nicholas Sambanis suggests expanding the damage toll count to also include displacement of populations during civil wars: “Civilians are targeted in civil war and are disproportionately affected by humanitarian disasters created by combatants to hold civilian populations hostage and gain control of territory. One might also consider counting refugees and internally displaced persons as a measure of the human cost of the war” (“What” 823).

Civilians in fact become part of a military strategy. The violence committed against them is justified in two ways: firstly, the violence is deemed to be unintentional since they were unfortunately present at the “battlefield” (a “being at the wrong place at the wrong time” type of discourse), in which case the term “collateral damage” is applied to absolve responsibility; and secondly, the civilians are identified as direct targets and intentional violence committed against them is justified as a necessary military (and political) act against an identified threat or enemy presence. In both cases, whether the violence is presented as unintentional or intentional, the harm inflicted upon civilians is justified as a military necessity. In his criticism of military strategies targeting civilians during the Yugoslav conflict, Viktor Ivančić writes: “Quality war strategies are such that they imply the necessity of every victim of the opposing side” (“Kvalitetne ratne strategije takve su da podrazumljevaju kako je svaka žrtva s protivničke strane nužna”; 42).

One of the ways this necessity is often formulated is through a defensive-aggressive logic whereby a threat is identified which requires arming and aggressive

actions in order to be prepared to deal with a perceived threat. This defensive-aggressive action is seen as a threat by the opposing group(s), which then turns to its own defensive-aggressive actions, thus leading to a vicious cycle of escalating violence (Doyle and Sambanis 28). Behind the defensive-aggressive action is often an offensive agenda that is pushed forward through security dilemma propaganda that plays on stereotypes and evokes strong emotions, in particular fear.

According to the “military necessity” logic, civilians are no longer innocent bystanders caught in a war zone, but become an active part of the military conflict, and hence subject to its violence. The result is a blurring of the conceptual division between civilian and combatant.⁴⁸ This sort of logic can be taken to its extreme to identify

⁴⁸ Up into the 19th century, only professional soldiers were granted belligerent status, and it was even considered a delinquent act for civilians to participate in hostilities (Chesterman 13). The idea of mobilizing civilians as combatants originally goes back to the *levée en masse* (mass uprising) of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars (1792-1815) where the population was mobilized and volunteers recruited in masses for the army (Chesterman 13). As Carl von Clausewitz has stated in his study of warfare, the mobilization of citizens revolutionized warfare by making it a “business of the people” and providing an immense source of war resources for mobilization: “The people became a participant in war; instead of governments and armies as heretofore, the full weight of the nation was thrown into balance” (238).

At the start of the 20th century during the First World War (the epitome of the slowly developing phenomenon of “total war”), mass mobilization of whole societies became commonplace as civilians were recruited for the army or as labourers in the war industry (for example, in the fabrication of arms). As men were recruited for armies, women’s participation in the labour industry was in large part initiated at the beginning of the 20th century by the high labour needs of the weapons manufacturing industry (Atkin 35). Powerful propaganda campaigns pushing for mobilization of the population have ever since become the norm.

Even though the mass mobilization of populations implicates civilians in the war, the distinction between civilian and combatant, despite propaganda’s tendency to dress civilians as combatants, is still upheld in most common understandings and legal definitions of the terms. The basic legal conceptual separation of the terms civilian/non-combatant and belligerent/combatant was first developed in the Hague Conventions at the start of the 20th century to mitigate war practices in Europe (Chesterman 10). Concerns for protecting civilians during warfare led to further legal development of the term “civilian” after the Second World War when the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians was created in 1949 (Chesterman 10).

defenseless civilians as “threats” and thus justify targeting them. For example, Viktor Ivančić discusses the problematic phrase “classic civilians” used by general Tus to justify a mass attack on civilians in Krajina on the basis that they could not be considered as “classic civilians” since mobilization of their family members to the army implicates them in the war.⁴⁹ Due to the fact that a civil war spreads through the whole of society, civilians, even those opposing the war, cannot play a neutral role and, willing or not, will find themselves classified as belonging to one side or another, hence becoming targets for violence.⁵⁰

The “military necessity” logic is applied not only to cases of violence committed against civilians, but also for attacks on areas of cultural or historical significance identified as “threatening”. In addition to the expansion of the warzone to civilian areas,

⁴⁹ Ivančić criticizes the use of the phrase “classic civilian” in the following statement:

Concerning the executions of unarmed citizens – because ‘this’ and ‘that’, among other things, concerns the murder of about seven hundred civilians, mainly the elderly – general Tus stated the following: “In Krajina there was not a family or a home that did not give at least someone to the army. All were involved. They were so connected that among them there was no ‘classic’ civilian completely uninvolved in war actions. Courts cannot ignore this. (44)

O likvidacijama nenaoružanih stanovnika – jer ‘ono’ i ‘to’ se, između ostaloga, odnosi na ubojstva oko sedam stotina civila, uglavnom staraca – general Tus je izjavio sljedeće: “U Krajini nije bilo obitelji ili kuće koja nije barem nekoga dala u vojsku. Svi su bili uključeni. Toliko su bili povezani da među njima nije bilo ‘klasičnih’ civila posve neuključenih u ratna djelovanja. To sud ne može zanemariti. (44)

⁵⁰ There are many examples of acts of protest by citizens against a civil war and its categorizations of populations into fellow versus enemy. Unfortunately, even these actions are taken up by the war logic; hence, a fellow comrade who is a friend or a sympathizer of the enemy becomes marked as an enemy. For example, during the Rwanda civil war, any Hutu defending or accused of siding with Tutsis was killed, as we can see in the following testimonial report by Mahmood Mamdani:

Kodjo Ankrah of Church World Action recounted to me what happened when soldiers entered a church in Ruhengeri and asked that Hutu step on one side, and Tutsi on another: “People refused; when they said, Tutsis this way, all moved. When they said Hutus that side, all moved.” Eventually, soldiers killed them all, 200 to 300 people in all. Professionals who refused to join in the killing also met the same fate. (Tilly 139)

technological advancements and changes in warfare tactics since the beginning of the 20th century have also led to a proliferation of attacks against historically and culturally significant sites.⁵¹ In other words, all areas of society and civil life become in appearance reduced to targets of a seemingly calculated (and hence “neutral”) military strategy under a vast and invasive battlefield zone. This military strategy camouflages a political violence that labels symbolically significant sites and/or people as threatening. Accordingly, Dubravka Ugrešić has written: “The war topography of terror unfolds on a deeply symbolized foundation. As such many buildings will be destroyed for their symbolic value” (“Ratna topografija terora odvija se na jakoj simbolizacijskoj osnovi. Tako će mnoge građevine biti uništene zbog svoje simbolične vrijednosti”; 85). Writing on the civil war in Yugoslavia she argues that an analysis of a map of military destructions reveals the pattern that many major attacks specifically targeted sites of

⁵¹ In response to the mass destruction of cultural sites during the Second World War and the pressing need to protect cultural property during armed conflict, the “Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict” was written at the Hague in 1954, to which a “Second Protocol” was added in 1999. The Convention defines “cultural property” as follows:

(a) movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above;

(b) buildings whose main and effective purpose is to preserve or exhibit the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a) such as museums, large libraries and depositories of archives, and refuges intended to shelter, in the event of armed conflict, the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a);

(c) centers containing a large amount of cultural property as defined in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b), to be known as ‘centers containing monuments’.
(UNESCO 8-10)

multicultural symbolic value.⁵² She holds that the violent targeting of these symbolically significant sites is an effort to destroy all areas reflecting Yugoslavian principles, and ultimately to erase cultural heritage and collective memory associated with those principles. Similarly, the bombing of the town of Guernica on April 26, 1937 by the National Army (with the military air support of Nazi Germany's Condor Legion) that injured a third of the town's population is an act of violence that has a great symbolic and political significance (Beevor 232-233). Being a symbol of Basque cultural identity and resistance to fascism in the 1930s, the town of Guernica posed a threat to the monolithic ideology of the National military movement (Fusi 200).

The selective targeting in a civil war suggests that the physical violence is a means to obtain an end. While sporadic acts of senseless violence, a type of violence for violence's sake, certainly can occur, the general violent force that occurs during a civil war is an organized and coordinated movement towards identified aims. The most significant aims of the violence are political, ideological, and economical, or in other words, quests for different forms of power. Emotive based primordialist explanations of civil war (such as "ancient hatred" theories), although popular for policy makers and journalists, have been refuted by numerous studies.⁵³ This is not to say that emotions are never a motive behind violent acts, but that they are not the principal motive behind the decision and organization of pushing forward a civil war. Emotive based violence may

⁵² As examples she cites the destruction of towns (Vukovar, Sarajevo, Dubrovnik, Zadar, Šibenik), churches (Šibenik Cathedral), places holding valuable unique documents and literary works (National Library of Sarajevo, Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, Old Library in Dubrovnik), and the bridge of Mostar (Ugrešić 218-219).

⁵³ For example, refer to Collier and Hoeffler "Greed and Grievance in Civil War", Fearon and Laitin "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity", Horowitz "Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict", Mueller "The Banality of *Ethnic War*", Sambanis "Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War" and "A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War".

be more of an effect rather than a cause of civil war, that is, injury experienced during a civil war may incite emotions such as anger and desires for revenge.⁵⁴ Furthermore, examinations of civil wars based on emotive motives present a limited view and are often part of propaganda campaigns.

The militarily organized violence is above all an expression of an escalation of political struggles during which the government is in a state of crisis. In the next section I will focus on some of the political and ideological aspects of a civil war, most notably the rapid political shift that a civil war brings about as one political system is broken down and another is constructed.⁵⁵

2.3 Contestation over the Political and Social Order: State Breakdown and the Foundation of a New / Reborn Nation

A civil war is fought by well-organized groups with political agendas that challenge the sovereign authority (Sambanis, “What” 820). In the 19th century, Carl von Clausewitz had pointed out the political character of war in his famous dictum that war is the continuation of politics by military means. War is a form of politics, an expression of political contestations: “When whole communities go to war—whole peoples, and especially *civilized* peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the occasion is always due to some political object. [...] We see,

⁵⁴ For example, outlining the difficulties in building peace in countries experiencing civil war, Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis mention hatred and fear generated by high levels of death and displacement experienced during the war (43).

⁵⁵ Although it is not a central question for this thesis, economic aims are also significant to understanding civil wars and the dynamics of civil war violence. Although it is a rather recent area of research on civil wars, there is in general agreement that economic motives and opportunities for material benefits are determinant in civil wars (Sambanis, “Review” 224). For example, refer to the study by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler’s “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”.

therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means” (28).

The dynamics between politics and civil war are associated in particular with political instability, institutional transformations and state failure. Politically unstable states and those undergoing institutional transformations are more prone to civil war outbreaks (Sambanis, “What” 261). Political instability may be more of a circumstantial trigger for civil war outbreak while institutional shifts play a causal role (Wimmer and Min 893, 867).

Andreas Wimmer and Brian Min have shown a strong bi-directional association between institutional transformations and war: war can cause institutional shifts and conversely, war can be a consequence of these shifts (876). According to the authors, wars are fought over contested basic structures of government (i.e. legitimate claims to governmental power) (869, 872). By studying territories’ conflict history in relation to their history of institutional change from 1816-2001 they find that the expansion of empires and nation states are major driving forces in war occurrences in the modern world. In particular, while interstate and imperialist wars are associated with the expansion of empires in the 19th century, the occurrence of civil wars increases significantly in the 20th century with the spread of nation-states (869).⁵⁶ Significantly, these patterns imply that a civil war is not necessarily fought over territorial expansion but rather over state building projects, with civil wars emerging from nation building aspirations: “the history of modern warfare appears to be not so much the result of

⁵⁶ Wimmer and Bin reveal increases in civil war occurrences with each wave of nation state formation around the world (871). The exceptions they note are revolutionary wars in Latin America that have been frequent over the 20th century and are not necessarily associated with state formation. (888)

changing power balances between actors or of revolutionary conflicts as primarily a struggle between competing projects of state building” (Wimmer and Min 872).

While civil wars are associated with nation formation (the sub-labeled secessionist civil wars) they are not limited to it but are rather part of a more general radical push for state transformation, whether the objective is the formation of a new secessionist nation or a change of power in state.⁵⁷ This movement for radical political change over a short period of time has an ideological framework.

The violent push for radical political change over a relatively short period of time during a civil war leads to an impairment of the state, a breakdown of the state’s authority, including challenges to state legitimacy and sovereignty as well as a disruption of the state’s monopoly over force and order. For example, Mark Gersovitz and Norma Kriger have stated that “civil war is one form of the impairment of the state” (5). This impairment can be a radical disruption or a complete collapse of the political, and subsequently social order of civil life. For Nicholas Sambanis, a civil war represents “the most poorly understood *system failure* in domestic political processes. It is a disruption of social norms that is unparalleled in domestic politics and has important implications for the stability of regional systems and the maintenance of international security” (Sambanis, “Review” 217; emphasis mine).

The consequence of the destruction of the legitimate state authority during a civil war is the creation of a lawless state that is fragmented by shifting internal borders (due to changing divisions of the territory between the warring parties). This has several

⁵⁷ Commentary documents to the additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions remark the following two political goals behind internal war: “Insurgents fighting against the established order would normally seek to overthrow the government in power or alternatively to bring about a secession so as to set up a new State” (Sandoz et al. 1320).

implications. In the legal and administrative limbo that civil war brings about, all that had been officially and legally recognized (for example, property ownership, citizenship, currency, etc.) could have its meaning and legal standing revoked or rewritten.⁵⁸ That is to say, all the “paper” declarations that were (mis)taken for being true, meaningful, and real, are revealed to be only symbolic constructions and performative utterances subject to the whim of social and political paradigms. Identities as well, are shown to be subject to negation and revision. The destruction of the state authority creates an open space to contest and revise what the nation is and who its citizens are. As such, a civil war marks a pivotal moment in a nation’s history, a dividing line between the before and the after, the past and the future, the old and the new country.

The breakdown of the political system also has consequences on social order and cohesiveness. In nations, the territory is ruled in the name of a nationally defined group of equal citizens (Wimmer and Min 873). During a civil war, the supposed equality of citizens falls apart as populations are divided into opposing groups based on varied categorical definitions that are often oversimplified visions based on ontological, natural or historical dogmas. The political re-administration of populations and the physical violence during civil war bring significant changes in demographics, including large numbers of people being internally displaced or forced to go into exile. Furthermore, the population divisions and exposure to violence cause changes in the dynamics of social relations that have effects long after the conflict itself (Doyle and

⁵⁸ For example, Robert M. Hayden has discussed the question of citizenship that arose in the Yugoslav conflict. As Yugoslavia fell apart, citizenships became meaningless and residents had to deal with denaturalization (loss of their previous Yugoslavian citizenship) and application procedures for new citizenships (naturalization), which were often based on discriminatory and ambiguous laws open to interpretation (13-16).

Sambanis 43-47). For example, Stathis Kalyvas concludes from his fieldwork interviews based study on the Greek civil war that “violence appeared to be less the result of powerful political identities and deep divisions and more their cause” (14-15).

The shifting of populations and their political, ideological and administrative redefinitions reveals the artificial and unstable character of those identities and the systems that configure them. In such a situation, people may lose a sense of who they are. For example, Dubravka Ugrešić cites her mother commenting to her during the Yugoslav conflict: “*I don’t know who I am anymore, or where I’m from, or where I belong, my mother said*” (“*Sada više ne znam tko sam, ni odakle sam, niti čija sam, rekla je moja mama*”; 19). During this conflict, others responded by mocking the political redefinitions of populations and listed themselves in the national census in 1991 as “Eskimos, Bantus, American Indians, Citroens and refrigerators, among other fanciful categories” while 1996 to 2003 data from the Sarajevo’s Centar marriage registry reveals that some people “signaling ironic acceptance of that insider/outsider category, wrote in their ethnic affiliation as Ostali [Other]; while a few people simply wrote ‘a-national’ or ‘čov[j]jek’ (human being)” (Hayden 21; Markowitz 66).

The malleability of the social order, accompanied by large-scale violence, brings about a crisis of meaning. The ease and quickness by which shifts are brought about in the political and social symbolic order through transgression and violent means evokes senselessness. At the same time, the fact that these symbolic shifts during a civil war involve extensive human suffering makes the whole affair absurd. That is to say, a civil war demonstrates the fragility of a political and social order and the ease by which its laws can be transgressed and its meaning contested. At the same time, it absurdly demands sacrifices and suffering from the population during the conflict in order to

erect a revised or new political and social order, which is alas bound to be transient like the old one. Even the newly constructed political and military movements reveal their contradictory and arbitrary nature as the war progresses and soldiers commonly report loosing sight of what they are fighting for.

The loss of meaning extends even to the everyday life, as civilians not only face the dangers of military violence, but also having to struggle to survive and meet basic life necessities (such as shelter, food, water, heating, etc.). Objects are seen for their capacities to fulfill basic necessities; for example, books become useful fire fuel. During the Russian Civil War, civilians dealt with fuel shortages in winter time by burning anything they could to stay warm, including dismantling wooden buildings, removing door and window frames, burning furniture, papers and books (Atkin 58-59).

While senselessness may characterize the everyday experience of civil war, the political mobilization of the war effort is dependant upon the creation of a symbolically articulated new social order which embodies the given reasons and justifications for going to war. In his comparative study of theories of war, Nick Mansfield points out that:

[W]ar is distinguished from mere violence, even collective purposeful violence, by its grounding in varied but specific logics of social meaning. Its function has always been to enact certain understandings of the nature of the society it purports to defend. Leaving aside the obvious point that any contest of arms, no matter how unduplicitous and honest it may be, remains the most vicious way of organizing human relations, it seems naïve to assume that war was ever less than heavily symbolic or ritual. (146)

If we think of a civil war as a moment of passage from one political and social reality to another by the transgression of an established order, then Mansfield's description of war as a "ritual" is very fitting. Similarly, Ugrešić's comparison of civil war to a literary metamorphosis, evokes its transformative power.⁵⁹ Civil war is the crumbling of one political and social system (through an act of auto-destruction as previously discussed) in order to precipitate the rebirth of the nation (or the birth of a new nation through secession). It is a contestation, through violent means, for the right to rewrite the nation. This right is what is "won" at the end of a war. In the essay "War and Warrior" Walter Benjamin discusses the peculiar meaning of "winning" a war:

What does it mean to win or lose a war? How striking the double meaning is in both words! The first, manifest meaning, certainly refers to the outcome of the war, but the second meaning – which creates that peculiar hollow space, the sounding board in these words – refers to the totality of the war and suggest how the war's outcome also alters the enduring significance it holds for us. This meaning says, so to speak, the winner keeps the war in hand, it leaves the hands of the loser; it says, the winner conquers the war for himself, makes it his own property, the loser no longer possesses it and must live without it. [...] To win or lose a war reaches so deeply, if we follow the language, into the fabric of our existence that our whole lives become that much richer or poorer in symbols, images and sources. ("Theories" 123)

The winner that "keeps the war in their hands" reserves the exclusive right to determine the meaning of the war by, on the one hand, political appropriations of its

⁵⁹ "But if we return to the original thesis, that it is possible to read war as a literary text, then one of its predominant stylistic devices is the metamorphosis" ("A ako se vratimo tezi s početka, da je rat moguće čitati kao književni tekst, onda je od dominantnih stilskih postupaka – metamorfoza"; Ugrešić 84).

significance which are diffused through various state institutions (law, education, research and academia, mass media, etc.), and on the other hand, by cultural and artistic representations, whether they be historical, literary, cinematic, etc. To “win” the war means as well to hold commemorative rights, which leads to selective and at times manipulative homages. The political commemorative right means that human suffering from the war will be filtered, simplified, homogenized, and packaged into symbols which will be used to explain and justify the present and future directions of the political and social orders. Ultimately, to win a war is to take over power of state and claim the right to rewrite the legal, political, social and cultural foundations of the “new” nation according to a particular vision of the past, present and future. The physical space as well is reshaped to reflect the new symbolic order (for example, streets and squares may be renamed and commemorative statues put up). The power in state of the new nation reserves additionally the right to redefine the citizen by deciding who can be recognized as a citizen and by identifying which characteristics and behaviours are deemed ideal and which are delinquent. All of the above mentioned forms of rewritings are violent ideological actions.

The redefinition of the nation, the institutions and the civilians begins with an exercise of power through lawmaking. The violence that occurs during a civil war is the origin of law creation, and so to speak, lays the seeds of the postwar nation. In the essay “Critique of Violence”, Benjamin identifies the first function of violence as the lawmaking function: “If, therefore, conclusions can be drawn from military violence, as being primordial and paradigmatic of all violence used for natural ends, there is inherent in all such violence a lawmaking character” (283). The lawmaking function uses

violence as its means, and remains bound to the violence in the moment it becomes law and power:

For the function of violence in lawmaking is twofold, in the sense that lawmaking pursues as its end, with violence as the means, *what* is to be established as law, but at the moment of instatement does not dismiss violence; rather, at this very moment of lawmaking, it specifically establishes as law not an end unalloyed by violence, but one necessarily and intimately bound to it, under the title of power. Lawmaking is power making, and to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence. (“Critique of Violence” 295)

This implies that violence is not only the origin which produces the law and power codes of the new state, but also remains integrated in the exercise of law and power of that state.

The idea of the double function of violence is also analyzed by Michel Foucault in his lecture series “Society Must be Defended”. To begin with, Foucault recognizes that laws’ origins are in war violence:

War obviously presided over the birth of States: right, peace, and laws were born in the blood and mud of battles. This should not be taken to mean the ideal battles and rivalries dreamed up by philosophers or jurists: we are not talking about some theoretical savagery. The law is not born of nature, and it was not born near the fountains that the first shepherds frequented: the law is born of real battles, victories, massacres, and conquests which can be dated and which have their horrific heroes; the law was born in burning towns and ravaged fields. It was born together with the famous innocents who died at break of day. (50)

Similarly to Benjamin's stance, the violence during the origin of law creation remains a part of the law system and is perpetuated in the political and social structure:

Law is not pacification, for beneath the law, war continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power, even in the most regular. War is the motor behind institutions and order. In the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war. To put it another way, we have to interpret the war that is going on beneath peace; peace itself is a coded war. We are therefore at war with one another; a battlefield runs through the whole of society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefield that puts us all on one side or the other. There is no such thing as a neutral subject. We are all inevitably someone's adversary. (Foucault 50-51)

This perseverance of violence and conflict in law leads Foucault to propose that power is the continuation of war, and to thus invert Clausewitz's dictum by defending that "politics is the continuation of war by other means" (15). From this point of view, the violence, divisions of populations and disequilibrium created during war remain in the postwar period and become a defining characteristic of power:

[P]ower relations, as they function in a society like ours, are essentially anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given historical moment that can be historically specified. And while it is true that political power puts an end to war and establishes or attempts to establish the reign of peace in civil society, it certainly does not do so in order to suspend the effects of power or to neutralize the disequilibrium revealed by the last battle of the war. According to this hypothesis, the role of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force, and

to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals. (Foucault 15-16)

As an example, and alluding to Foucault's idea of the continuation of war through political power, Paul Preston has criticized the obstruction to historical research in postwar Spain posed by General Franco's dictatorship (the winner who keeps the war in hand in Benjamin's terms) which suppressed all compromising points of views and inquiries: "The obstruction of scholarship, like many other aspects of the regime's censorship machinery, was a continuation of the war by other means. In victory, the dictatorship sought to impose its own view of the nature of the war as a struggle between the barbaric godless hordes of the proletariat and the guardians of traditional Christian values" (2).

The suppression of opposing points of view that are challenging to the power in place can be one form of the "relationship of force" that Foucault discusses. It establishes by force a monolithic and naïve vision of the nation and its past. Going back to the idea of a civil war as a "purifying" act, the postwar period eliminates all that is "dirty", that is, which compromises the simplified "innocent" façade of the newly born nation. This includes history, records, memories, testimonies, among other things.⁶⁰ At the beginning of the new nation, a false innocence is upheld; the nation is reborn, absolved of its sins, forgotten the compromising past. The foundation of the nation (or its "rebirth"

⁶⁰ For example, Dubravka Ugrešić has noted the "cleaning" impetus to rid the newly formed Croatian nation after the civil war of any conflicting or alternative symbols deemed threatening to its homogeneous character. Hence the efforts of what she denominates as the "Mr. Clean Croatian Air" ("Mr. Čisti Hrvatski Zrak") pervasive ideology is "cleansing the shelves of enemy Cyrillic, and also of Latin-script books imbued with the 'Yugoslav spirit'", has "cleaned up all the old names of streets, schools, institutions, squares" and has been "cleaning the space away of all unlike-thinkers" ("čiste police of neprijateljske ćirilice, ali i od latiničnih tekstova koje prožima 'jugoslavenski duh' [...] počistio je stare nazive ulica, škola, institucija, trgova [...] čisti prostor od – 'neistomišljenika'"; Ugrešić 89, 90).

after a civil war) thus involves selective erasing of the past. In the famous lecture that Ernst Renan gave in 1882 on “What is a Nation”, he points out the importance that forgetting has for nations:

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light the deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. [...] Yet the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things. (11)

In the post war period of a civil war, this selective forgetting is often focused on negating and suppressing the recent past leading up to the war, while going further back in history to search for origins of the “true” identity, thus bringing up mythical imagery while ignoring relevant (but compromising) recent historical events. For example, in post civil war Spain, the conceptualization of a new Spain revitalized images of the Catholic Monarchs of the 15th century and the Spanish Empire as representing the “real” traditional Spanish identity while suppressing the recent history at the beginning of the 20th century (in particular that of the Second Spanish Republic) which involved significant class struggles and political battles for social issues. Similarly, the postwar secessionist states following the Yugoslav conflict searched in history for defining mythical national moments while suppressing or manipulating the more relevant recent history of Yugoslavia.

Ugrešić has labeled this process of suppressing the recent past as a “confiscation of memory” (“konfiskacija pamćenja”) executed by the political and intellectual leaders of the

new nation who behave as “the masters of oblivion” (“gospodari zaborava”): “Warriors, the masters of oblivion, the destroyers of the old state and builders of the new ones, used every possible strategic method to impose a collective amnesia” (“Ratnici, gospodari zaborava, rušitelji stare države i graditelji novih, svim su strateškim sredstvima uspostavljali kolektivni zaborav”; 302, 17). She emphasizes in particular the simultaneous and opposite processes that go on between, on the one hand, destroying and forgetting while, on the other hand, constructing and putting up new commemorative symbols:

Horrorific times are marked by the rhythm of destruction and construction, chaos and order, rapid demolition and simultaneous building. What was there is destroyed (cities, ideological notions, bridges, criteria, libraries, norms, churches, marriages, monuments, lives, graves, friendships, homes, myths), the old truth is destroyed. That which will become the new truth is rapidly being built. [...] What is being built on the ruins is the new truth, the one that will one day be the only one remembered.⁶¹ (100-101)

It is perhaps this rapid process of metamorphosis and destruction-construction during a violent conflict of immense suffering that is most perplexing about civil war and which invites us to go back and reflect on what was lost, what was changed, and what remains still. A civil war is not only a pivotal moment in a nation’s history, identity and ideology, but as well on individual levels of those who live through it and have to adapt to changing systems of values that reorganize and redefine life during and after a civil war. The next chapters will turn to analyzing how literature has approached

⁶¹ “Strašna vremena obilježena su ritmom destrukcije i konstrukcije, kaosa i reda, ubrzanim rušenjem i istodobnom gradnjom. Ruši se ono što je bilo (gradovi, ideološke floskule, mostovi, kriteriji, biblioteke, norme, crkve, brakovi, spomenici, životi, grobovi, prijateljstva, domovi, mitovi), ruši se stara istina. Ubrzano se gradi ono što će biti novom istinom. [...] Ono što se na ruševinama gradi je nova istina, ta koja će jednoga dana biti jedinim pamćenjem.” (Ugrešić 100-101)

representing human experiences during civil war's violent political shifts.

3 Civilians in a Sieged City: Camilo José Cela's *Visperas, festividad y octava de San Camilo del año 1936 en Madrid* and Dževad Karahasan's *Sara i Serafina*

Having defined civil war in the previous chapter as an internal conflict occurring within the boundaries of a nation which impairs the social and political fabric of a cohabiting group of citizens through simultaneous processes of physical and symbolic deconstructions and reconstructions, this chapter will analyze how these processes are depicted in two novels dealing with civilian experiences during the onset of conflict in two cities: Madrid and Sarajevo. The portrayals of civilian experience in the beginning stages of civil war in Camilo José Cela's *Visperas, festividad y octava de San Camilo del año 1936 en Madrid* (*The eve, feast, and octave of Saint Camillus of the year 1936 in Madrid*, 1969; from here on referred to as *San Camilo, 1936*) and in Dževad Karahasan's *Sara i Serafina* (*Sara and Serafina*, 1999) depict the arbitrary and senseless nature of opposing identity constructs, violence and death within a city's community. Beginning with an analysis of the novels' oblique civil war portrayals through redefinitions and figurative language, this chapter examines how these novels debunk ideological justifications of civil war violence and the conflict's construction of boundaries within the population. Such civil war representations are part of the novels' focus on the civilian experiences and their disregard for explaining the political reasons behind the conflict. An analysis of the novels' portrayals of the daily lives of an interrelated community of city dwellers demonstrates how the novels construct the significance of the civil war through the experience of ordinary people, who have to

deal with the conflict's sudden invasion and degradation of their private lives and of their cities.

3.1 Shifting Internal Boundaries

To begin with, I will go back to one of the main characteristics of a civil war outlined in the previous chapter: it is a conflict occurring within the boundaries of a state. A country is defined (in part) geographically, politically and symbolically by the physical contours of its border, which contains within it a society of citizens, that is to say, a community of people recognized as having the right to reside, live, work and participate in social activity. It is a shared space of cohabitation, including shared language(s), education, culture and social values. While never truly being a homogeneous and idyllically democratic⁶² space, since segregations of certain populations (whether on the basis of race, gender, class or other categories) exist and (invisible) interior boundaries shape the interior socio-political dynamics, in general, the population is conceived as and functions as a whole.

The onset of a civil war is marked by sudden and shifting constructions of boundaries that violently reshape a communal coexistence. Boundaries are divisions which can be manifested in physical forms, but which are essentially symbolic constructions that have been imagined and implemented (through laws, institutions, administration, social practices etc.). Their basic function is to divide and differentiate people into groups and categories. As symbolic constructions, they can also appear to be invisible, “given” or widely accepted and re-enacted by a majority. While often appearing to be static, they are in fact dynamic, at times shifting gradually and other

⁶² I use the term democratic here in its wider meaning, not just referring to a political system.

times a part of drastic processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. This malleability and artificial nature of boundaries and categorical divisions of people is made apparent during a civil war. The exterior border of the nation, as well as the interior borders marking cities and other areas, are re-enforced, creating closed, isolated and claustrophobic spaces cut off from the outside world. This not only limits the free movement of people, but also the transport of basic human necessities, communication lines, etc. Furthermore, and significantly in a civil war, inter-communal boundaries are erected by ideological, political and military forces that fragment society through the enforcement of binary oppositions, such as patriot-foreigner, traitor-comrade, friend-enemy, insider-outsider, etc. While the construction of such divisions may have already started taking shape in the years leading up to the civil war in the form of political or social tensions, at the emergence of a civil war they suddenly become strikingly apparent, “real”, and deadly. The abstract and arbitrary nature of these boundaries is highlighted in *San Camilo, 1936* and *Sara i Serafina* by debunking the emerging enemy-friend categorizations and the political-ideological discourses while focusing on the unique characterizations of individuals and the web of personal relations in a community of city dwellers.

San Camilo, 1936 narrates the experience of the civilians in Madrid during the Spanish military's failed *coup d'état* which commenced the three year long Spanish Civil War. The novel is broken down into three parts and an epilogue: the days leading up to the coup (including the assassination of the republican military police Assault Guard officer José del Castillo Sáenz de Tejada on the 12th of July and the subsequent assassination of the Spanish monarchist party politician José Calvo Sotelo on the 13th of July, regarded as triggers of the start of the civil war); the military uprising of the

Spanish Army of Africa and the *coup d'état* on July 18 which commences the civil war; and the days after the *coup d'état* (including the takeover of the Montaña Barracks in Madrid by the military uprising and its soon after re-capturing by the republican government forces). While the historical events mark the structural framework of the novel, the story is composed of a complex narrative web presenting the monologues of a 20 year old student talking to a mirror and glimpses into the daily lives of hundreds of recurring characters living in Madrid at the time (with a particular focus on the middle and higher classes, youth and prostitutes). This central web of characters' stories is overlaid by a backdrop of political and social unrest (including people chanting in the streets for arms, shootings, political meetings and speeches).

Sara i Serafina likewise situates the story in a concrete duration of time (August 1992 to February 1993) during the first year of the siege of Sarajevo at the start of the Yugoslav conflict. The civil war forms an obscure background of a story which focuses on the daily lives of civilians, their friendships, love, hopes, struggles to maintain normalcy and efforts to escape the city. An unnamed protagonist/narrator, referred to by the other character as "professor" (of literature), reflects on his friendship with Sara/Serafina, whose death marks the beginning⁶³ and end of the story. A visit from his friend Dervo Perin (a police officer turned soldier) in February 1993 requesting him to come to his office and speak with Sara, who had been spotted repeatedly walking along

⁶³ "I remembered them [the bronze statues from a conversation about statues and nations] one freezing day, less than ten years later, on February 1993, during a conversation with my good friend Dervo Perin, on a day that I simply cannot forget and which I still wish never happened, because we lost Sara on that day." (*Sara i Serafina* 7)

"Sjetio sam ih se jednog ledenog dana [onih brončanih likova iz razgovora o spomeniku i države], nepunih desetak gonida kasnije, u februaru 1993, za vrijeme jednog razgovora s mojim dobrim prijateljem Dervom Perinom, onog dana koji naprosto ne mogu zaboraviti i za koji još uvijek želim da nije svanuo, jer smo toga dana ostali bez Sare." (*Sara i Serafina* 7)

dangerous streets overlooked by snipers, provokes him to reflect on their friendship and meeting in August 1992. This friendship developed during the professor's attempt to help Sara obtain fake paperwork (baptism certificates and supplementary documents in fake names) for Sara's daughter Antonija and her fiancée Kenan, so that they could escape the city. Despite successful obtainment of the baptism certificates, an unexpected visit from soldiers at the document falsifier's home a day before the arranged escape leaves Kenan without the supplementary documents and forces Antonija to leave alone. Living now alone, Sara desperately searches for a sense of normalcy and social utility, which are fundamental to her existence and motivation to keep on living.

3.2 The Naming and Redefining of the Civil War in the Bellicose Framework of the Novels

In both novels, the civil war frames the story, but is never directly approached nor the main subject matter of the narratives. That is to say, the story is situated during a civil war, and deals with the effects of the conflict on people's lives, but is not about the conflict itself (such as the warring sides, political ideologies, major military actions, etc.). Although *San Camilo, 1936* is the first novel where Cela deals with the topic of the Spanish Civil War, he has frequently stated that it is "a novel immersed *in* the Civil War rather than one written *about* it" and that it was conceived as "a fresco of the anguish and insanity of a group of men who knew nothing about what was happening on 18 July, 1936, when the war officially began" (Charlebois 53). A similar statement could be made for *Sara i Serafina*; it is embedded in the civil war but not directly about it. The Yugoslav conflict appears as a powerful force looming in the background and which presses upon, alters and interrupts the private daily lives of civilians. Despite its

significance, it remains vague, is never extensively described or discussed in detail, and at times is unnamed or renamed by other terms. In both novels, the civil war appears as a vague collective form where the internal boundaries of the warring sides are fuzzy, chaotic and arbitrary.

In *Sara i Serafina* the term civil war⁶⁴ is never used and the general term “war”, deemed inept to fully capture the meaning of the situation, is re-qualified as “the situation” and an “experiment”, while the front is denominated as the “field”:

He then continued ‘analyzing the situation’, as we called then our talks about the war.⁶⁵ (10)

Dervo had just returned from the field, as he called his trips to the front, that is to say to the battles (because in this war, they say, there were no fronts), so he was telling me about what he had seen, experienced, desired and thought about.
[...]

– Someone is carrying out an experiment on us, professor, I assure you – Dervo told me then, exactly in that way, and even now I can hear the words

⁶⁴ Karahasan has also repeatedly defended that the military aggression in Bosnia is not a civil war but a massacre of civilians, as he states in a letter:

I kept repeating, ad nauseum, that the war in Bosnia is not a civil war but a slaughter, because while a war is possible between armies, in Bosnia we have an attack of the “Yugoslav People’s Army” on civilians; I pleaded that the idea [*sic*] there are ‘three sides in the conflict’ is wrong because it overlooks the most numerous ‘fourth side’ – the Bosnian population, which prefers integration, tolerance, and a Bosnian multicultural community. (“Belated” 17)

He goes on to criticize the calculated “false naming of things” by Western politicians, who are very well informed of what is going on: “They deliberately give false names to things in order to distort those very things, to ‘justify’ their own ineptness, forlornness, passiveness, and indecisiveness” (17). It is precisely this politically concealed and silenced “fourth side” which becomes the protagonist in *Sara i Serafina*.

⁶⁵ “Onda nastavi ‘analizirati situaciju’, kako smo tada nazivali razgovore o ratu.” (*Sara i Serafina* 10)

pronounced in his voice in the depths of my ear. – Someone tremendously powerful is carrying out an experiment on our skins and on our fucked lives. This is what it is, my professor, I am definitely certain now that it is this and nothing else.⁶⁶ (7)

Apart from mentioning Dervo's trips to the battlefields, his story about such battle experiences is not revealed. The vague (and seemingly absent) frontlines take out of view the division lines, the delineation of warring sides, and present the situation as an aggressive, senseless and vague wave of violence against the city population from some unknown "tremendously powerful" figure.

The political-ideological justifications for erecting divisions within the population are likewise qualified as senseless and shallow. *Sara i Serafina* does not provide any elaborations on the ideological differences between the warring sides and instead highlights their lack of substance and differentiation. This can be seen, for example, in the discussion of the absurd and simplistic categorizations of a "clear man" ("jasan čovjek"), that is, someone who clearly picks a side and knows where they belong, versus an "unclear man" ("nejasan čovjek"), the ambiguous one who does not want to pick a side (42).⁶⁷ This purely formal and arbitrary creation of dividing lines

⁶⁶ "Dervo se upravo bio vratio s terena, kako je on zvao boravak na fronti to jest u borbama (jer fronte u ovom ratu, kažu, nije bilo), pa mi je pričao o onome što je vidio, doživio, poželio i pomislio. [...]"

– Neko izvodi neki eksperiment na nama, profesore, ja ti to tvrdim – rekao je Dervo tada i upravo tako, u unutrašnjem uhu čujem još sada njegove riječi izgovorene njegovim glasom. – Neko strahovito moćan izvodi neki svoj eksperiment na našim kožama i s našim jebenim životima. To je to, moj profesore, sada sam definitivno siguran da je tako i nikako drugačije." (*Sara i Serafina* 7)

⁶⁷ Fran Markowitz's comparative study of the censuses in Yugoslavia from 1961-1991 and in Bosnia in the following years remarks how during the civil war and postwar periods state bureaucracies impose a triadic population categorization system (Bosniacs, Croats, Serbs) and coerce the population into picking a "clear" side or saying "who they really are", hence concealing and suppressing the existing heterogeneous and hybrid

based on performative language – in the form of a verbal declaration (whether it be honest or not) and (often falsified) identification papers – debunks the ideological and political constructs justifying the creation of warring sides. The sole justification for fighting given in the novel is Dervo's desire to protect his family, irrespective of what socio-political situation or warring side the threat comes from: "I'm defending my home and my family, and I don't care about the rest, about nothing else, not even someone else's views of me. My task is to defend my home from exterior circumstances, and I don't pose the question whether those circumstances are due to Chetniks, low wages, because someone views me as a rat or some other reason" ("Ja branim svoju kuću i familiju, a ostalo me se ne tiče, ništa pa ni to kako me neko vidi. Moj posao je da branim svoju kuću od okolnosti, a nije moje pitanje jesu li te okolnosti četnici, mala plaća, neko ko me promatra kao štakora ili nešto četvrto"; 8-9).

Reconfigurations of the denominations and connotations of the civil war, as well as a subversive treatment of the boundaries between opposing warring sides, can also be observed in *San Camilo, 1936*. In contrast to *Sara i Serafina* which omits direct references to the dynamics of the socio-political situation around the conflict, *San Camilo, 1936* constructs an intricate web of historical references which situate the story in a particular social, political and historical framework. However, while frequent references are made to political parties, different social movements, historical events and ideological chants occurring around the 18th of July, 1936,⁶⁸ they are not elaborated

identities in Bosnia: "Bosnia's culture and multiplicity and blending is inherently dependent on porous inter-group boundaries" (57, 49).

⁶⁸ The historical web created in the novel includes references to: political parties and unions of the time (JSU, Frente Popular, POUM, Falange, Renovación Española, UGT, CNT, FAI, etc.); political and military figures (Manuel Azaña, Diego Martínez Barrio, Manuel Blasco Garzón, José María Gil-Robles y Quiñones, Santiago Casares Quiroga, Indalecio Prieto Tuero, etc., and generals Núñez de Prado, Cabanellas Ferrer, Mola,

upon but appear rather as fleeting and accumulating markers that puncture the story. They are often inserted within the narration of a character's private life and in the form of an enumeration which creates tension by evoking a sense of escalating urgency, as we can see in the following example: "general Mola is rebelling general Quiapo de Llano is rebelling general Franco is rebelling general Cabanellas is dismissed general Batet is imprisoned no one knows where general Villegas is general Miaja is confused and justly so sir Leon sleeps like a log in the bed all to himself" ("el general Mola está sublevado el general Queipo de Llano está sublevado el general Franco está sublevado el general Cabanellas está cesante el general Batet está preso el general Villegas nadie sabe donde está el general Miaja está confuso la cosa no es para menos don León duerme como una piedra con toda la cama para él solo"; 212).

Enumerations and repetitions are also used to deconstruct the significance of words expressing political movements or ideological concepts pushing towards the civil war. *San Camilo, 1936* fractures the narrative with repeated insertions of phrases associated with various political and revolutionary movements occurring around the 18th of July. Words and slogans, when excessively repeated, and especially by a collective

Miaja, Quiapo de Llano, Batet, Villegas, Patxot and the future dictator Francisco Franco Bahamonde who is described as being "the most dangerous one of them all and also very young", among others); newspapers (*El Heraldito, Voz, ABC, El Liberal, El Debate, El Sol, La Traca, El Socialista, Claridad*, etc.); writers, poets and artists (Juan Ramón, María Zambrano, Miguel Hernández, Arturo Serrano Plaja, Maruja Mallo, Idefonso Manolo Gil, Luis Felipe Vivanco and Camilo José Cela himself who "composes poems but until now hasn't succeeded in publishing them"); historical events (the general strike against the military uprising of July 18, 1936, the assassinations of José del Castillo Sáenz de Tejada and José Calvo Sotelo, the uprisings of the military generals and the Moroccan Army Corps, the *coup d'état*, the battles over the Montaña Barracks, the announcement of a state of emergency by the Republican government and the spreading declarations of war across different regions of the country, the push for a social revolution, etc.) ("el más peligroso de todos y además muy joven"; 189, "compone versos pero hasta ahora no ha conseguido publicarlos"; 63).

mass, start to break down and become distorted or devoid of meaning, as we can see here in the treatment of the word “weapons”:

Weapons, weapons, weapons, people are shouting we want weapons, weapons, weapons, every passing moment there are more people shouting weapons, weapons, weapons, the onlookers don't shout weapons, weapons, weapons (some do) but suddenly they imagine themselves with a weapon in hand, weapons, weapons, weapons, we want weapons, weapons, weapons [...] the shouting for weapons, weapons, weapons, is the only sound heard, weapons, weapons, weapons, and against the façades of the buildings (there are many closed windows) resounds a deafening echo which always begins with the second syllable, ...pons, weapons, weapons, weapons..., when there are many shouting weapons, weapons, weapons at the same time, the words, the sole word that is heard sounds different and places the accent on the second syllable, ...weapons, weapons, weapons..., musicians are not capable of achieving these effects.⁶⁹ (170-171)

San Camilo, 1936 employs these narrative methods to highlight the common artificial nature of politicized words and ideological slogans across various sides involved in the conflict. Different slogans and political viewpoints are often intermixed through juxtapositions and enumerations that name various sides without elaborating in depth on

⁶⁹ “Armas, armas, armas, la gente pide armas, armas, armas, cada vez hay más gente que pide armas, armas, armas, los mirones no piden armas, armas, armas (algunos sí) pero de repente se imaginan ya con un arma en la mano, armas, armas, armas, queremos armas, armas, armas [...] los vociferantes que piden armas, armas, armas, es lo único que se escucha, armas, armas, armas, y en las fachadas de los edificios (hay muchos balcones cerrados) retumba un eco sordo que empieza siempre por la segunda sílaba, ...mas, armas, armas, armas..., cuando son muchos los que piden armas, armas, armas al mismo tiempo, las palabras, la única palabra que se escucha suena de diferente manera y con el acento en la segunda a, ... armás, armás, armás..., los músicos no son capaces de conseguir estos efectos.” (*San Camilo, 1936* 170-171)

what they are fighting for, thus stripping the violence of reason and justification.⁷⁰ John Herman Richard Polt's study of *San Camilo, 1936* proposes that the use of repetitions along with the dominant figure of the mirror in the novel relativize the dividing lines between opposing sides: "The repetitive style, of which Cela is so fond, here suggests the mirror-like similarity of the opposing sides, as they are reflected, at least potentially, in the protean narrator" (448). This similarity does not equate the ideologies of the different sides, but stresses the fabricated nature of political constructs. The issue presented is the way that politics construct and deconstruct stories, write and erase them, which albeit their artificial character stir up people's consciences:

[T]he politician is the miller of consciences and behaviours who fabricates with his flour cakes and historical sacramental bread,⁷¹ in politics everything is an eraser, there are many small stains, white, pearl grey, dark grey, black, shiny or

⁷⁰ For example, in the following passage from *San Camilo, 1936* the juxtaposition of proclamations from various political groups interweaved with vulgar and scatological language, characterizes spewed political language as offensive. Assembled together, the clash of the political proclamations and the scatological language forms a heterogeneous self-destructive collective:

Long live the King, Shit calmly shit happily but son of a bitch aim for the bowl, He who reads this is an asshole, the bigger asshole is the one who wrote it, Long live the JSU, the King shits and the pope shits and in this shitty world nobody gets out without shitting, One shits here and one pisses here and who has time sways here, Don't shit on the lid faggot, Long live the Spanish Falange, José Sacristán Gutiérrez took a shit here on February 12, 1936, Long live the Republic! (34)

Viva el rey, Caga tranquilo caga contento pero hijoputa cágate dentro, Cabrón el que lo lea, Más cabrón es el que lo escribió, Vivan las JSU, Caga el rey y caga el papa y en este mundo de mierda sin cagar nadie se escapa, Aquí se caga y aquí se mea y aquí el que tiene tiempo se la menea, No te cagues en la tapa maricón, Viva Falange Española, Aquí cagó José Sacristán Gutiérrez el 12 de febrero de 1936 ¡viva la república! (34)

⁷¹ The word "hostias" here has a double meaning; it can refer to the sacramental bread while in very popular colloquial language it is used as a blasphemy to signify something that is terrible, awful or stupendous. This passage hence creates an irony by playing with the opposition between the word's literal meaning and the colloquial use of its vulgar and anticlerical signification.

matte ones, it's all the same, they form as constellations of stars, Cassiopeia, Centaurus, Coma Berenices[.]⁷² (208)

This deconstruction of common words and phrases associated with the political movements during the civil war is accompanied by a reconfiguration of symbols that connote the civil war. While in *Sara i Serafina* the characters renamed war related terms deemed insufficient to express the situation, *San Camilo 1936*, creates metonymic and metaphorical abstractions. The title of the novel – *The eve, feast, and octave of Saint Camillus of the year 1936 in Madrid* – refers to the start of the Spanish Civil War on July 18 through a metonymic relation with the feast of Saint Camillus de Lellis (the patron saint for the sick and hospitals) occurring on the same day, which alludes to the mass injuries and deaths about to fill the hospitals.⁷³ The escalating political situation and upcoming civil war is often expressed through a series of metaphors that point to an uncontrollable catastrophe of self-destruction and massive deaths. It is alluded to through the image of an immense tangle and a spider's web that traps everyone: “there is no one who's going to be able to unknot this tangle, most likely it will not be untangled and we will all die imprisoned in it as if we were caught in a big spider's web kicking and cursing and blaming others” (“este enredijo no va a haber quien lo desenrede, lo probable es que se quede sin desenredar y muramos todos presos en él como en una gran telaraña pataleando y blasfemando y echándole la culpa a los demás”);

⁷² “[E]l político es el molinero de las conciencias y de las conductas y con su harina fabrica tortas y hostias históricas, en política todo es goma de borrar, todo son muchos pequeños borrones blancos, gris perla, gris marengo, negros, brillantes o mate esto es lo mismo, que forman como constelaciones de estrellitas, Casiopea, el Centauro, la Cabellera de Berenice[.]” (*San Camilo, 1936* 208)

⁷³ The significance of the title is reinforced by the epigraph at the beginning of the novel: “July 18, Saint Camillus de Lellis, patron saint of the hospitals” (“18 de julio, San Camilo de Lelis, celestial patrono de los hospitales”).

244). A major metaphor used frequently in *San Camilo, 1936* is the association of the civil war to the breakout of an uncontrollable fire.⁷⁴

The nation is anxious, the spark can fly any second now, perhaps it's already happened with these stupid deaths [the assassinations of José del Castillo Sáenz de Tejada and José Calvo Sotelo], and the fire, if it manifests itself, will be difficult to contain, very difficult, when a fire isn't put out before it takes on body and force it can't be extinguished except by its own and last levelling ashes.⁷⁵ (97)

Other recurring metaphors are the association of the civil war with an uncontrollable multiplication of crimes resulting in an overwhelming accumulation of spilled blood: "crime is a worm that reproduces by parthenogenesis and from one crime can spring a hundred crimes which in the second batch already become a million crimes, can you imagine a world burned by blood spilled through so many crimes?" ("el crimen es verme que se reproduce por partenogénesis y de un crimen pueden frutar cien crímenes que a la segunda hornada son ya un millón de crímenes, ¿te imaginas al mundo calcinado por la sangre de tanto crimen?"; 337). The civil war is also associated with "a deluge of blood" ("un alud de sangre") caused by an uncontrollable proliferation of

⁷⁴ Another association of the civil war with fire is made through a burning torch: "nobody can save themselves here, well, a few save themselves from this burn or be burned situation, here everyone wants to resolve everything with a burning torch, the Spaniard wants to burn his history so that afterwards when there is nothing left he can hurl himself on the embers screaming" ("aquí no se salva nadie, bueno, se salvan unos pocos de esto de quemar o ser quemado, aquí todo se quiere arreglar con una tea ardiendo, el español quisiera quemar su historia para después cuando ya no quedara nada arrojarse sobre las brasas dando gritos"; *San Camilo, 1936* 248).

⁷⁵ "El país está nervioso, la chispa puede saltar en cualquier instante, a lo mejor ha saltado ya con estas muertes estúpidas [asesinatos de José del Castillo Sáenz de Tejada y José Calvo Sotelo], y el incendio, si llega a declararse, va a ser difícil de contener, muy difícil, cuando los incendios no se sofocan antes de que cobren cuerpo y violencia no se extinguen sino con sus propias y últimas cenizas arrasadas." (*San Camilo, 1936* 97)

blood spilled on a collective scale which implicates everyone, regardless of warring side affiliation, and turns them into a perpetrator and victim at the same time (314):

[T]he blood calls forth more blood the blood is a good fertilizer for blood the blood generates blood fabricates blood breeds blood which then dries over the still tender wound accusing us all even if we close our eyes here there's no point in closing your eyes as happens during lent and this other thing is a carnival of blood in which we all wear a mask with splatters of our own or others' blood, when looked at carefully it's the same, the terrible thing is when the blood spills beyond its course and starts losing colour and speed, I am a killer or the one killed you are a killer or one the killed he is a killer or the one killed, it doesn't matter, what's awful is the plural, we are killers or the ones killed, you all are killers or the ones killed, they are killers or the ones killed[.]⁷⁶ (129-130)

The thus far outlined techniques in creating the bellicose framework of the novels through renaming, enumeration, and figurative language debunk the ideological justifications of civil war violence and relativize the divisions between the opposing warring sides. This subversive treatment of political and military language follows the novels' disregard for setting the story straight (that is, clarifying the historical events behind the conflicts) and their preoccupations with expressing the everyday experience of civilians living during the civil war.

⁷⁶ “[L]a sangre llama a la sangre la sangre es buen abono para la sangre la sangre engendra sangre fabrica sangre cría sangre que después cuando se seca sobre la herida aún tierna a todos nos acusa aunque cerremos los ojos aquí no vale cerrar los ojos eso es en la cuaresma y esto otro es un carnaval de sangre en el que todos llevamos puesta una máscara con salpicaduras de sangre propia o ajena, bien mirado es lo mismo, lo malo es la sangre que se derrama fuera de sus cauces y va perdiendo su color y su velocidad, yo soy un asesino o un asesinado tú eres un asesino o un asesinado él es un asesino o un asesinado, poco importa, lo malo es el plural, nosotros somos unos asesinos o unos asesinados vosotros sois unos asesinos o unos asesinados ellos son unos asesinos o unos asesinados[.]” (*San Camilo*, 1936 129-130)

3.3 Focalization on Civilian Experiences and Personal Relationships

San Camilo, 1936 and *Sara i Serafina*'s representations of civil war focus on the way it is experienced by civilians in their daily lives. Although the narrative techniques employed vary between the two novels, their main aim is similar: the portrayal of civilians' quotidian lives and the interconnections between individuals. The creation of a cohabiting space of interrelations in both novels creates a heterogeneous collectivity that contests the enemy-friend division of warring sides.

In their reflections on literature, both authors have expressed a similar view that one of the key functions of literature is to portray the experiences of people. In his essay "Literature and War", Karahasan writes that a literary work is composed of language and metalinguistic material (which includes emotions, thoughts, events and human characteristics) (1). Literature articulates human behaviour and choices made within an accepted value system; it "provides an instrument for interpretation of human experience in the world, and the reasons for our dwelling in it" (2). In its "authentic" form it portrays "complete human beings dwelling in an integrated world" (4).

Literature, Karahasan goes on, not only articulates human experiences, but also "dictates, or at least determines" human behaviour by shaping cultural value systems that explain the nature of the world (2). This function marks literature with accountability due to its political potential, that is to say the possible "responsibility and culpability that literature may have for some political forms, acts and consequences" (3). Karahasan elaborates how "misuses" of literature can have catastrophic political and social consequences (even having a part of the responsibility, as he says, for the fact that he "come[s] from a destroyed country") (4). One of its misuses, he argues, is the *l'art pour l'art* (art-for-art's sake) which reduces the craft to a self-contained game,

indifferent to what happens outside it in the material world, devoid of ethical questions and thus contributing to “the spreading of general indifference in an indifferent world”

(6). The sole focus on the aesthetic in *l’art pour l’art* contributes to the unsettling characteristic of the contemporary world in which:

People who observe and experience the most horrendous suffering of their neighbours as a mere aesthetic excitement, people who aestheticize death and agree to watch the worst torments in order to feel something – for a moment at least – such people are inscribed in contemporary literature, which is entirely free and pure, written by authors with a surplus of artlessness. (7)

A second misuse of literature that Karahasan identifies is its appropriation for “prophetic ambitions” and political goals that impose values (7). It often takes the form of “heroic literature” which strips characters of their individual values in order to represent some form of collective identity such as a nation or a political party (“People in this literature are Serbs, Croats, Communists, Royalists, or something similar”) (8). Rather than having personal desires, characters in heroic literature behave according to an imagined ideal they represent, thus possessing: “no feelings, no wishes, no thoughts, and no acts beyond belonging to the political community. Destiny lies within that belonging, and anything that a human being can have within, around, above him-or herself, or anywhere else – is within that political community” (10).

In contrast to this dissolution of the individual in the political collective, Karahasan’s works focuses precisely on the “human being who as an individual desires, or wants, believes, dreams or understands” (11).⁷⁷ Following this literary vision,

⁷⁷ A recurring theme in Karahasan’s work is the proposition that literature reflects the complex and enigmatic interior matter of the world and the characters who occupy it. For example, we can see this expressed in a passage from his novel *Izvještaji iz Tamnog*

characters in *Sara i Serafina* are not identified in relation to political groupings; instead they are presented as individual characters portrayed through their thoughts, emotions, and conversations, which form the central matter of the novel. There is even a complete disregard and contempt for political identities at the same time that individual viewpoints and personal bonds between people are praised and become the focal point of the narrative. The main action of the story, the arrangement of the escape for Antonija and Kenan, is stressed as being a “story about love and not politics and violence” and one that concerns the “salvation of a love” (“priča o ljubavi a ne politika i nasilje”; 85, “spašavanju jedne ljubavi”; 74). Kenan’s reasoning for his acceptance to adopt a fake identity in order to secure an escape from Sarajevo with his fiancé and his unwillingness to eventually play out this new identity in her presence shows indifference towards political identities while at the same time placing value on the significance and dynamics of authentic personal relationships:

Vilajeta (Accounts from a Dark Wilayah, 2007) which presents a discussion on literature’s capacity to portray contradictory aspects of the world:

I remind you of your commentary on Hamlet’s statement that art holds a mirror up to nature: art does not need to mimic the appearance of nature, but the way in which it functions; we don’t need to and we shouldn’t in a work bring about a recognizable appearance of a singular phenomenon of one world, however, we have to clearly express the mechanisms according to which that world functions – feels, thinks, acts or doesn’t act, its reasons and aims, its interior attributes; art therefore is a mirror of nature, but of its invisible interiority which discloses itself through the visible form of nature and through which we come to understand or at least to forebode it. (101)

Podsjećam Vas na Vaše vlastito tumačenje Hamletovih riječi o umjetnosti kao ogledalo prirode: ne treba umjetnost oponašati i pojave prirode, nego način na koji priroda djeluje; ne moramo i ne trebamo u jednom djelu dovesti do prepoznatljivog izraza pojedinačne fenomene jednog svijeta, ali moramo jasno izraziti mehanizme po kojima taj svijet funkcionira – osjeća, misli, djeluje ili ne djeluje, njegove razloge i ciljeve, njegove unutrašnje osobine; umjetnost dakle jeste ogledalo prirode, ali one nevidljive, unutrašnje, one prirode koja se objavljuje kroz vidljivu i preko nje se može razumjeti ili bar naslutiti. (101)

Kenan had calmly and obstinately argued that his refusal to use a fake identity in front of Antonija is not due to affectation nor caprice but to an absolutely practical decision whose reasoning lies in the fact that they love each other and plan to get married. “If only you had more technical knowledge, if you were for example experienced in architecture, you would understand what I mean,” he said. “It’s just not clear to me why Dubravko doesn’t understand such a simple thing when he is a prosthetist. He must know that it would create a breach not in my identity – I don’t care about identity in the sense that some understand it to be – but in her image of me, in her experience of me. It would be as if some invisible, or absent person wedged themselves in between us, as if we were living in some sort of perfect triangle. My reflection in the eyes of my fiancée would inevitably and unforgettably be obfuscated by the episode in which I was for her, not just for the rest of the world, somebody else, and this is not a good foundation for a happy marriage.[’]”⁷⁸ (93)

Cela’s vision of literature runs along similar lines to Karahasan’s in the sense that he rejects a political use of literature while focusing on unique individualities of ordinary people. In an interview with Theodore Beardsley, Cela states: “We writers do not create our work for political reasons but for historical ones” (45). Similarly, in the

⁷⁸ “Kenan je mirno i uporno dokazivao da njegovo odbijanje da se pred Antonijom krivo predstavlja nije ni prenemaganje ni kapric nego apsolutno praktična odluka koja svoje razloge ima u činjenici da se njih dvoje vole i namjeravaju se ženiti. ‘Kad biste imali više tehničkih znanja, kad biste se recimo bavili arhitekturom, znali bi šta mislim,’ govorio je. ‘Jedino mi nije jasno kako taj Dubravko ne razumije tako jednostavnu stvar, on je ipak protetičar. On mora znati da bi to napravilo pukotinu ne u mome identitetu – briga mene za identitet kako ga neki razumiju – nego u njezinoj slici o meni, u njezinome doživljaju mene. Kao da bi se neko nevidljiv, recimo odsutan, uglavio među nas, kao da bismo življeli u jednoj vrsti idealnog trokuta. Sliku mene u očima moje žene neizbježno i neizbrisivo bi mutila epizoda u kojoj sam ja i za nju, ne samo za ostatak svijeta, bio neko drugi, a to nije dobra osnova za sretan brak.[’]” (*Sara i Serafina* 93)

prologue to the fourth edition of *La colmena* (*The Hive*, 1951) Cela identifies a historical vocation in his work – “this is a historical book not a novel” (“éste es un libro de historia, no una novela”) –⁷⁹ which counteracts the historical inertia imposed by politics (xlvi): “Politics – it is said – is the art of channelling history into inertia. Literature, most likely is nothing else but the art (and, perhaps not even this) of describing the upwelling of that inertia” (“La política – se dijo – es el arte de encauzar la inercia de la historia. La literatura, probablemente, no es más cosa que el arte (y, a lo mejor, ni aun eso) de reseñar la marejadilla de aquella inercia”; xlvi). Cela’s literature aspires to emulate (or bring to life, so to speak) the reality of a historical period by reflecting the passage and rhythms of everyday life,⁸⁰ he writes in the introductory note to the first edition of *La colmena*:

My novel, *The Hive*, first book to be published in the series *Uncertain Paths*, is nothing else but a pale reflection, a humble shadow of the everyday, rough, intimate and painful reality.⁸¹ [...] My novel doesn’t aspire to be more – nor

⁷⁹ I believe that the negation of the term “novel” here is used to stress the historical or realistic dimension of the work, in contrast to the fictional (implying unreal or made up) characteristic associated with novels. At other times, Cela does in fact refer to his work as a “novel”. He has stated that the definition of the novel is vague, in comparison to other genres such as poetry or the essay; as such, it is a “protean genre into which everything fits” (Cela, “Interview” 44).

⁸⁰ This aspiration to reflect real life has led to various categorizations of *La colmena*, regarding which Cela has made the following remark: “I don’t know if the novel is realistic, or idealistic, or naturalistic, or costumbristic, or whatever else. I’m not too concerned about it. Everyone can put whichever label they prefer” (“La novela no sé si es realista, o idealista, o naturalista, o costumbrista, o lo que sea. Tampoco me preocupa demasiado. Que cada cual le ponga la etiqueta que quiera” (*La colmena* xlii).

⁸¹ This emphasis on the “everyday, rough, intimate and painful reality” is a marking feature of the so-called “tremendismo” (terrible/tremendous-ism) movement that emerged in Spain in the immediate post war period of the 1940s (*La colmena* xli). The term is used in reference to literature dealing with the contemporary harsh and tragic life circumstances that condition individuals, which has an existential inclination, and which reproduces with precision the crude and at times vulgar language observed in popular speech. Jerónimo Mallo associates *tremendismo* with a particular narrative

certainly less – than a piece of life narrated step by step, without reticence, without strange tragedies, without charity, in the manner that life flows, exactly the way that life flows.⁸² (xli)

San Camilo, 1936 applies the literary techniques already established in *The Hive* to portray a “piece of life narrated step by step”, but in a more condensed and accelerated manner achieved by the author’s experimental (non)use of punctuation,

application of realism: “[*tremendismo*] is a result of an application of realism techniques to a novel in order to reflect the anxieties, sufferings, frustrations and anguish of our time. That is to say, to portray the current ‘terrible’ circumstances of life, which are not the same as the ‘terrible’ circumstances of other periods” (“[*tremendismo*] es el resultado de la aplicación de la técnica realista en la novela para reflejar las inquietudes, los sufrimientos, las frustraciones y la angustia de nuestro tiempo. Es decir, lo ‘tremendo’ de la vida actual, que no es lo mismo que lo ‘tremendo’ de otras épocas”; 54).

Although Cela’s first novel *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (*The Family of Pascual Duarte*, 1942) is often said to have initiated the literary movement, Cela denies being the “father” of *tremendismo*, upholding that it has a long tradition in Spanish literature and that it is merely a form of literary realism within a particular historical context:

To classify me as the father of *tremendismo* is to commit a dreadful error in chronology. I am certainly no child, but I am substantially younger than the Archpriest of Talavera, for example, and than most of the Spanish writers of the Middle Ages and the Golden Age. And tell me, didn’t Quevedo, in half or more than half of his works, write precisely in that vein? And jumping distance and years to the Generation of 1898, the same is true of a significant portion of Valle-Inclán’s work. I believe that this is a Spanish quality as old as Spanish literature itself. *Tremendismo* is a word that has become successful, but it is an expression for people like sextons or . . . I don’t even think it makes sense, because *tremendismo* is nothing more than realism insofar as it tries to reflect reality faithfully. If this reality is “tremendous,” well, what can we do about it? We have to come to terms with it exactly as it presents itself to us, exactly as we have found it. (Cela, “Interview” 43)

In addition to its literary tradition, *tremendismo* also applies to art and cinema, for example Francisco Goya’s paintings (such as the “Black paintings”, “The Disasters of War”, “Los caprichos”, “The Third of May 1808”) and to a certain extent Luis Buñuel’s filmography.

⁸² “Mi novela *La colmena*, primer libro de la serie *Caminos inciertos*, no es otra cosa que un pálido reflejo, que una humilde sombra de la cotidiana, áspera, entrañable y dolorosa realidad. [...] Esta novela mía no aspira a ser más – ni menos, ciertamente – que un trozo de vida narrado paso a paso, sin reticencias, sin extrañas tragedias, sin caridad, como la vida discurre, exactamente como la vida discurre.” (*La colmena* xli)

rapidly shifting narrative points of views and pages-long sentences (denominated “river-paragraphs” by Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz) which evoke a sense of chaos occurring at the start of the civil war (“párrafos-río”; “El Estatuto” 579). The novel aspires to reflect the crude reality of Madrid in 1936 through a narrative that emulates the passage of quotidian moments in characters’ lives. While *San Camilo, 1936* received criticism from some critics for “sacrificing global perspectives that clarify what happened historically”, others have praised its treatment of personal experiences (Polt 443). For example, José María Naharro-Calderón has highlighted the importance of *San Camilo, 1936*’s rejection of univocal interpretations of global history through its polyphonic narration of personal stories and its dispersion of points of view (61). As John Herman Richard Polt has argued, *San Camilo, 1936* gives a worm’s-eye-view rather than a historical bird’s-eye-view to convey the unmediated personal experiences of individuals living in Madrid at the outbreak of the civil war: “Cela is not hiding established facts, but showing how the individual who lives immersed in events, experiencing them directly without the benefit (and distortion) of the ordering bird's-eye view of the historian, gets his news in specific ways and often as a jumble of conflicting reports” (448-449). The effect of this worm’s-eye-view is a sense of confusion and difficulty in making sense of the events. This is remarked upon in *San Camilo, 1936* by the narrator who states that “history⁸³ seen up close confuses everyone, the actors and the spectators, and is always very minuscule and shocking, and also very difficult to interpret”, as well as by sir Máximo, one of the characters, who makes the comment: “the thing is that we are too close and lack perspective” (“la historia vista desde cerca confunde a todos, a los actores y a los espectadores, y es siempre muy minúscula y estremecedora, también

⁸³ The word “historia” in Spanish dually refers to history and story.

muy difícil de interpretar”; 85, “lo que pasa es que estamos demasiado cerca y carecemos de perspectiva”; 181).

The literary technique used to create this worm’s-eye-perspective in *San Camilo, 1936* is a narration that attempts to simulate the “form and immediacy of life” (Polt 444). Narrated in present tense and vacillating between the first, second and third person⁸⁴ it presents a kaleidoscopic vision of Madrid in 1936 by following the intimate daily lives of interrelated characters in their homes and collective spaces (mainly cafés, bars, reunions and brothels). A kaleidoscopic vision of a mosaic community of individuals is created through the use of a present tense that layers simultaneous actions happening in the city. We can see this for example in the following passage where simultaneously occurring intimate moments of individuals’ lives, violent incidents and deaths are weaved together through a repetitive use of the prepositions “while” (“mientras”) and “on/in” (“en”):

While Senén takes a stroll and sir Gerardo amuses himself with the girl from Murcia, *while* Miguel Mercader takes an aspirin and his coffee with milk, *while* Paquito and Alfonso, the two guys from Salamanca who are in Madrid for a couple days, masturbate to the memory of the girls with tuberculosis, *while* sir Máximo pisses, takes the sodium bicarbonate and brushes his teeth, *while* Magdalena awaits in the morgue the soon upcoming time to be thrown in the common grave, *while* Beautiful Turquoise Eyes smiles perhaps with a touch of bitterness and continues ruining, rotting and disgracing herself, *while* Toisha sleeps in her transparent nightgown, and you stay awake reflecting on how you

⁸⁴ For a study on the narrative voices in *San Camilo, 1936*, refer to Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz’s article “Estudio de la ‘voz’ en *San Camilo, 1936*” which analyzes the novel’s intricate construction of polyphony.

don't understand anything that's going on, very disparate incidences are occurring in the world (carefully looked at they are not really that disparate), *on* Toledo street a truck crushes a drunkard who was peacefully vomiting and wasn't bothering anyone in the middle of the street, *on* Mesón de Paredes street a servant who was impregnated in her village aborts, *on* the Bilbao plaza a boy suffers from croup, *in* a reserved room on Arlabán street people are ostentatiously partying until suddenly, bam! a man dies from a heart attack, *in* a clinic on Encomienda street two people who had been fighting on the public street are treated, *on* Velázquez street a legislator is kidnapped and will be killed, *on* Tudescos street a whore is stabbed to death[.]⁸⁵ (84-85; emphasis mine)

San Camilo, 1936 places particular emphasis on the intimate portrayal of ordinary people (in contrast to historical figures) and the reproduction of colloquial speech, which Cela is renowned for (for example, Arturo Torres-Ríoaseco has stated that “no [contemporary] author surpasses Cela in the mastery of vernacular language, in the

⁸⁵ “*Mientras* Senén pasea y don Gerardo se refocila con la Murcianita, *mientras* Miguel Mercader toma su aspirina y su café con leche, *mientras* Paquito y Alfonso, los dos chicos de Salamanca que están pasando unos días en Madrid, se masturban acordándose de las tísicas, *mientras* don Máximo mea, toma bicarbonato y se lava los dientes, *mientras* Magdalena en el depósito de cadáveres espera la hora ya próxima de la fosa común, *mientras* Bella Turquesa sonríe quizá con un deje de amargura y sigue desbaratándose, pudriéndose, quemándose, *mientras* Toisha sueña dentro de su camión transparente, y tú que estás desvelado cavilas que no entiendes nada de lo que pasa, en el mundo acontecen sucesos muy dispares (bien mirado tampoco demasiado dispares), *en* la calle de Toledo un camión aplasta a un borracho que estaba vomitando tan tranquilo y sin meterse con nadie en medio de la calzada, *en* la calle de Mesón de Paredes aborta una criada a la que habían preñado en su pueblo, *en* la glorieta de Bilbao agoniza un niño con garrotillo, *en* un reservado de la calle de Arlabán se canta por lo grande hasta que de repente, ¡zas!, un señor se muere de un infarto de miocardio, *en* la casa de socorro de la calle de la Encomienda curan a dos que se pegaron en la vía pública, *en* la calle de Velázquez secuestran a un diputado al que van a asesinar, *en* la calle de Tudescos matan a una puta a navajazos[.]” (*San Camilo, 1936* 84-85; emphasis mine)

torrential capacity of the linguistically grotesque”) (“ningún escritor [contemporáneo] sobrepasa a Cela en la maestría del lenguaje vernacular, en la capacidad torrencial de lo lingüísticamente grotesco”; 168). The novel begins with a monologue a young man has in front of a mirror in which he agonizes over the seemingly insignificant nature of his banal life (and which turns into an obsessive speech that is frequently repeated, with slight alterations, throughout the novel):

One examines one's conscience and nothing is clarified, no, you are not Napoleón Bonaparte, nor are you King Cyril of England [...] you are a nobody, a poor man with his brains full of gregarious thoughts, of redeeming thoughts which don't lead anywhere, to be a hero it is necessary to be more humble and above all to not know it, here everything moves on a minor scale, in your head and outside your head, here everything is domestic and quotidian, heroes are very domestic and quotidian [...] No, it's pointless, you are not Napoleón Bonaparte, nor King Cyril of England, you are catechism flesh, brothel flesh, cannon flesh, you are the unknown soldier, the man for whom the little star does not shine on his forehead, men who are gallows flesh tend to have more composure, history gives much faith, you are in the public – in the catechism, in the brothel, in the front – and although you sometimes believe yourself to be the center of the world, you will never come out of this with your body clean nor above and in front of the other catechumens, the other prostitute frequenters, the other soldiers, nobody will ever notice you, but you shouldn't feel bad about it, every person gets to the point they are able to come to and which others let them

reach and you are allowed to live, does that seem little to you?⁸⁶ (13,15)

San Camilo, 1936, defends that the Spanish Civil War involves a massive collective of ordinary non-historical individuals,⁸⁷ each with their proper feelings and thoughts. The challenge of writing about it is how to reflect the collective mosaic. *San Camilo, 1936* attempts to achieve this difficult task by showing a bottom-up view which incorporates hundreds of ordinary characters and gives glimpses into their unique lives. It also directly voices the idea that everyone is unique and equally important through uncle Jerónimo's speech to his nephew:

[N]obody is important, my nephew, and the dead even less so, if you want I'll say it in another way, everyone is important and of equal importance, [...] the world is full of unknown people but they are all different, I assure you they are all different, each person has their own, sometimes minor, pain and pleasure,

⁸⁶ “Se hace examen de conciencia y nada se aclara, no, tú no eres Napoleón Bonaparte, tampoco eres el rey Cirilo de Inglaterra [...] tú eres un piernas, un pobre hombre con la sesera llena ideas gregarias, de ideas redentoras y que no conducen a lado alguno, para ser héroe hay que ser más humilde y sobre todo no saberlo, aquí todo se mueve a escala menor, en tu cabeza y fuera de tu cabeza, aquí todo es doméstico y cotidiano, los héroes son muy domésticos y cotidianos [...] No, es inútil, tú no eres Napoleón Bonaparte ni el rey Cirilo de Inglaterra, tú eres carne de catequesis, carne de prostíbulo, carne de cañón, tú eres el soldado desconocido, el hombre a quien no le brilla una estrellita en la frente, los hombres que son carne de horca suelen tener más aplomo, la historia da mucha confianza, tú estás entre el público – en la catequesis, en la ramería, en el frente – y aunque a veces te crees el eje del mundo, no saldrás nunca a cuerpo limpio por encima o delante de los otros catecúmenos, de los otros frecuentadores de mujeres públicas, de los otros soldados, nadie se fijará en ti jamás pero no debes lamentarlo, cada cual llega hasta donde puede y los demás le dejan y a ti se te permite vivir, ¿te parece poco?” (*San Camilo, 1936* 13,15)

⁸⁷ For example, in the battle at the Montaña Barracks the people appear as an anonymous non-historical mass of individuals, each with their own story: “in front of the Montaña Barracks were the people, the collective is very imprecise, continually changing, including perhaps more than twenty or thirty thousand men, each carrying their own emotive story on their hearts, but not a single historical name” (“frente al cuartel de la Montaña estaba el pueblo, es muy impreciso esto del pueblo, muy cambiante, quizá más de veinte o de treinta mil hombres, cada uno con su emocionante novelita pegada al corazón, pero ni un solo nombre histórico”; *San Camilo, 1936* 261).

[...] when history is written about these events it will say that Madrid was suddenly populated by a flood of equal and uncountable men and women, it will also be a lie, there are no two equals and yes it is possible to recount them all with patience and a little order, the hard part is knowing where to begin[.]⁸⁸ (364-365)

Uncle Jerónimo's long speech to his nephew, which forms the epilogue of the novel, gives a pedagogical aspect to *San Camilo, 1936*'s favour of the individual over the historical. Similar to *Sara i Serafina*'s emphasis on the importance of love over politics and ideology, uncle Jerónimo urges his nephew to not be swayed by history and ideology, to not become objectified by it, and to instead run away from the political unrest and construct a life filled with love:

[F]orgive me my nephew if I bore you, at your twenty years of age all you need to do is defend your heart from becoming frozen, make an effort to believe in something other than history, that grand lie, believe in the theological virtues and in love, in life and in death, you'll see that I am not asking too much, love is never a torment and in any case is always love, contrary to what people imagine I assure you that love is never tyrannical and that it is always a companion for our uncertain voyage though life, life is a tunnel which we walk along sowing and harvesting love or groping in the dark, there's no other alternative, open wide the doors to your soul and let love inhabit you, invade you like a tide [...]

⁸⁸ “[N]adie es importante, sobrino, y los muertos menos aún, si quieres te lo digo de otra manera, todos los hombres son importantes e iguales en importancia, [...] el mundo está lleno de desconocidos pero son todos diferentes, te aseguro que son todos diferentes, cada uno tiene su dolor y su gozo, a veces minúsculo, [...] cuando se escriba la historia de estos acontecimientos se dirá que Madrid se vio poblado de golpe por una riada de hombres y mujeres iguales e incontables, también será mentira, no hay dos iguales y sí se pueden contar con paciencia y un poco de orden, lo difícil es saber por dónde debe empezarse el melón[.]” (*San Camilo, 1936* 364-365)

don't let anybody freeze the mysterious nooks of the heart, my nephew, rebel against death, against the epidemic of death, don't pay attention to me, I'm not alive to be paid attention to but to serve as an example, and don't pay attention to others either, it's taken you a lot of work to live for twenty years, don't spoil your twenty years for the service of nobody, I assure you that the sacrifice will be futile and even worse stupid, no child, no[.]⁸⁹ (361, 366)

Uncle Jerónimo's speech is a warning against the "messianic lure of history", as John Herman Richard Polt has remarked, which places value on the significance of individual life (452). The task of constructing one's own meaningful life is a challenging one. In the face of civil war's physical and symbolic violence usurping personal identities, the arduous task of maintaining and building one's life becomes an act of heroic resistance. *San Camilo, 1936* and *Sara i Serafina* show how people struggle to preserve their lives as the civil war violence tragically interferes in the personal sphere.

3.4 Civil War's Degradation of the Private Space, the City and the Nation

While the civil war forms the framework and context of the two novels, and the

⁸⁹ “[P]erdóname sobrino si te aburro, a tus veinte años basta con defender al corazón del hielo, esfuérate por creer en algo que no sea la historia, esa gran falacia, cree en las virtudes teologales y en el amor, en la vida y en la muerte, ya ves que no te pido demasiado, el amor no es nunca un tormento y en todo caso siempre es el amor, contra lo que la gente supone yo te aseguro que el amor no es jamás un tirano y sí siempre un compañero para nuestro incierto viaje por la vida, la vida es un túnel por el que caminamos sembrando y cosechando amor o dando y recibiendo palos de ciego, no hay otra alternativa, abre de par en par las puertas de tu alma y deja que el amor te habite, te invada como una marea, [...] no permitas que nadie te hiele los misteriosos recovecos del corazón, sobrino, rebélate contra la muerte, la epidemia de la muerte, a mí no me hagas caso, yo no estoy vivo para que se me haga caso sino para servir de ejemplo, pero tampoco hagas caso a los demás, a ti te ha costado mucho trabajo vivir veinte años, no desbarates tus veinte años en el servicio de nadie, te aseguro que tu sacrificio sería estéril y lo que es aún peor estúpido, no hijo, no[.]” (*San Camilo, 1936* 361, 366)

personal stories of city dwellers and their interrelations the foreground, civil war violence is portrayed through its invasion of the private space and degradation of the city (and nation). *San Camilo, 1936* and *Sara i Serafina* focalize on the individuals and the personal relations between them by dedicating a majority of the narration to dialogues in the direct and indirect speech (with free direct speech occurring most often in the experimental narration of *San Camilo, 1936* and a mix of indirect and direct speech in *Sara i Serafina*). The civil war invades the private space by becoming a topic of discussion and by interrupting conversations with its sounds. In *Sara i Serafina*, the sounds of shootings in the background intrude the conversation between Sara, the professor and his wife in their home: “Brusque sounds of a skirmish erupted, by the sounds I would say from the Vrbanje bridge or from the Jewish cemetery [...] Sara paused again for a moment to pull herself together and take a breath because the skirmish from Vrbanje bridge was intensifying and it became necessary to speak louder than normal. [...] Sara needed to speak louder and louder because the artillery had now joined in” (“Počelo je žestoko puškanje, po zvuku bih rekao od Vrbanje mosta ili od Jevrejskog groblja. [...] Opet je Sara kratko predahnula da se sabere i da uhvati daha jer se pucnjava od Vrbanje mosta pojačavala tako da je trebalo govoriti glasnije nego što je normalno. [...] Sara je morala govoriti sve glasnije jer se javila i artiljerija” (80, 81).

In *San Camilo, 1936* news of assassinations, political crises and the military revolts are heard about on the radio and quickly spread through the city’s population through circulating rumors. In this way, the violent events pushing the country into a civil war become a topic of discussion in which people express their confusion and give their contrasting opinions about what they think is happening or what should be done. While a wide array of different opinions is presented, the civil war appears mainly as an

unclear and unsettling situation brewing in the background; it is something difficult to name (usually referred to vaguely as “this”) as we can see in the following passage from *San Camilo, 1936*:

Agustín Úbeda found Engracia in her home, I was waiting for you, the time has come, the time for what?, the time for the people to get justice, this is going to finish badly Engracia, well don't come if you don't want to, no woman it's not that, it's not that, what is it then?, what do I know!, all I'm telling you is that this is going to finish badly [...] Toisha calls you by telephone in Dámaso's house, I'm afraid, no woman, nothing is going on, you'll see, stay calm, people are getting all riled up but nothing is going on, people are very alarmist and you'll see how in the end everything will be alright[.]⁹⁰ (172-173)

The civil war's invasion of the private sphere takes its maximal force in the sudden transformation of death into a public spectacle. Both novels' treatment of death highlights the appalling and dehumanizing aspect of death witnessed in public, while omitting and making arbitrary the political qualification of such deaths (for example identifications of “enemy” or “compatriot” deaths). In *Sara i Serafina* death is described as having become “impersonal and industrial”, as being “public, on the street” (“bezlično i industrijski”, “javno, na ulici”; 135). The transformation of death into something public and industrialized is an ultimate rupture to a person's intimate space:

She, Sara, has forever known that death is the pinnacle of intimacy, experience

⁹⁰ “Agustín Úbeda encontró a la Engracia en su casa, te estaba esperando, ha sonado la hora, ¿la hora de qué?, la hora de que el pueblo haga justicia, esto va a acabar de mala manera Engracia, bueno no vengas si no quieres, no es eso, mujer, no es eso, ¿qué es entonces?, ¡yo qué sé!, lo que te digo es que esto va a acabar de mala manera. [...] Toisha te llama por teléfono a casa de Dámaso, tengo miedo, no mujer, si no pasa nada, ya verás, estate tranquila, la gente anda revuelta pero no pasa nada, la gente es muy alarmista tú verás como al final no pasa nada[.]” (*San Camilo, 1936* 172-173)

and event which is shared only with those from whom we hide nothing. But nowadays it isn't like this anymore, perhaps because there is no more intimacy, there is no more hiding because there is nothing to be hidden. In a completely transparent world we have also become shamelessly transparent. Our lives are public as well as our organs, our emotions are public as well as our habits, and so our death is also public, shameless, and blatantly exposed to foreign eyes.⁹¹ (135)

Similarly, in *San Camilo, 1936* death becomes blatantly public and dehumanizing as it predominately occurs in the streets in front of passersby. For example, the random and senseless shooting of Victoriano (upon going out in the middle of the night, when his pregnant wife's water breaks, to get her mother and midwife) becomes a tragic and absurd public spectacle:

[H]ang in there a little longer, I'm gonna go get them, you'll see how they'll both be here in a jiffy, but you're going outside in pyjamas? who cares, it's not cold out!, I'll be right back with both of them!, Victoriano flies down the stairs and upon entering the street starts sprinting, on the corner of street Torija they yell at him Halt! Halt!, hey son of a bitch, stop, I'm not kidding!, Halt! this one, this one, get him he's a fascist!, Victoriano is about to say what the fuck, why would I be a fascist, I'm going to get the midwife for my wife!, but he manages only to say what the fuck!, not having time to say anything else because two shots ring, first one and then another, and he falls face down on the floor, they

⁹¹ "Ona je, Sara, oduvijek znala da je smrt vrhunac intimnosti, doživljaj i događaj koji se dijeli samo s onima pred kojima se zaista ništa ne krije. Ali danas toga više nema, valjda zato što nema više intimnosti, nema više sakrivanja jer se nema šta sakriti. U potpuno prozirnem svijetu i mi smo postali besramno prozirni. Javni su nam životi i javni organi, javna su nam osjećanja i javne navike, pa nam je i smrt javna, besramna, prostački izložena stranim pogledima." (*Sara i Serafina* 135)

shoot him again in the back and he dies, most likely the bullet pierced his heart and stopped it upon impact, some people begin crowding around the cadaver, who is it?, a fascist who escaped from the station, no way!, you think fascists escape wearing pyjamas?⁹² (246-247)

The civil war's invasion of the intimate lives of civilians is paralleled by its obscure profusion through the city space. In *Sara i Serafina*, it takes the form of an invisible danger (notably snipers) lurking over the civilians and limiting their freedom to occupy the city space. Walking in the public space means sensing dangerous areas and having to be creative in coming up with complex alternative routes.⁹³ The civil war

⁹² “[T]ú aguanta un poco, voy a buscarlas, ya verás cómo en seguida están aquí las dos, ¿pero vas a ir así?, ¡qué importa, no hace frío!, ¡en seguida estoy aquí con las dos!, Victoriano se echa escaleras abajo y al llegar a la calle sale corriendo, en la esquina de la calle de Torija le dan el alto, ¡alto!, ¡que se pare tu padre, cabrón, yo no estoy para bromas!, ¡alto! ¡a ése, a ése, darle que es un fascista!, Victoriano va a decir ¡qué coño voy a ser fascista, yo voy a buscar una comadrona para mi mujer!, pero no puede decir más que ¡qué coño!, tampoco le dan tiempo para más porque suenan dos disparos, primero uno y después otro, y se cae de bruces contra el suelo, le pegaron un tiro en la espalda y está muerto, lo más probable es que la bala le diera en el corazón y lo dejara seco de repente, algunas personas se arremolinan en torno al cadáver, ¿quién es?, un fascista que se escapaba del cuartel, ¡venga ya!, ¿usted cree que los fascistas se escapan en pijama?” (*San Camilo, 1936* 246-247)

⁹³ We can see this for example in the following passage:

Even though it was fairly peaceful, we didn't go down King Tomislav street. That is to say we didn't take the shortest and most intuitive route, precisely because it was so peaceful, and like this the whole day? (It's been a while since I've noticed that other people's sense of unease on wide and open streets also becomes heightened on peaceful days.) Passing through a maze of narrow streets, of which the local people and authorities in Sarajevo were very fond of, [...] we descended quite quickly to the Park, and from there it was necessary to run in order to slip away from the snipers. (*Sara i Serafina* 45)

Iako je bilo sasvim mirno nismo krenuli niz Ulicu kralja Tomislava. Ili nismo tim, najkraćim i najprirodnijim, putem krenuli upravo zato što je bilo tako mirno, i to cijeli dan? (Već poodavno sam primijetio da se i kod drugih ljudi u mirne dane pojača nelagoda od širokih i otvorenih ulica.) Dosta brzo smo se mrežom uskih uličica, za koje je u Sarajevu bilo ljubavi kod svih graditelja i kod svih vlasti [...] spustili, do Parka, a onda je tu valjalo trčati ne bi li se izmaklo snajperisti. (45)

is also an obscure and looming presence hanging in the air in *San Camilo, 1936*. It is a sensed danger which creates a collective mood of anxiety.⁹⁴ The emerging violence and death spreading through Madrid is obscurely perceived by the unusual infestation of flies⁹⁵ and by a lingering smell of death:

[T]he people drinking coffee on the terraces on Recoletos and Alcalá streets had

⁹⁴ The phrase “anxious” is frequently repeated, for example: “I was very anxious and it all happened so fast, I feel it with my whole heart because these killings of people on the street are really worrisome”, “what’s wrong?, you seem really anxious”, “this is a very anxious country”, “people’s spirits are filled with anxiety and nobody here is going to sleep” (“estaba muy nervioso y fue todo muy rápido, y lo siento con toda mi alma porque esto de matar a la gente por la calle es un verdadera inquietud”; 76, “¿qué te pasa?, te veo como nervioso”; 79, “éste es un país muy nervioso”; 169, “los ánimos están nerviosos y aquí nadie se va a dormir”; 240).

⁹⁵ Flies appear in *San Camilo, 1936* as a symbol for pathetic, slow and painful death. They allude to the characters’ and the nation’s powerlessness and vulnerability to be destroyed by the civil war violence. The novel presents repetitive descriptions of flies (and mosquitos) pitifully drowning in coffees, teas or alcoholic drinks, struggling to survive and not comprehending what is happening to them or why they are dying. For example, in the following passage we can especially note the parallels made between the drowning insects and the upcoming destruction of the Republican government:

[T]he fly is unaware of what is happening to it, it notices that it is dying but it doesn’t know why it is dying if it was feeling healthy and powerful, there will be time to extend the base and to go for a coalition government, in the glass of cognac a depraved mosquito drowns, it’s hot and half of the mosquito’s body is paralyzed, it kicks with much difficulty, kick kick kick kick kick kick, pause kick kick kick kick kick kick hemiplegic pause, kick kick kick kick kick kick, an almost absolute and definitive pause, in these moments we only pursue concord, the drowning flies have doubts about all that they hear, Spain has reached the limit of its political tension and beyond is nothing but blows and blood and messianism, the fly in the coffee and the mosquito in the cognac are discovering that death has no limits[.] (207)

[L]a mosca ignora lo que le está aconteciendo, se nota morir pero no sabe por qué muere si se encontraba sana y poderosa, ya habrá tiempo de ampliar la base y de ir a un gobierno de coalición, en la copa de coñac se ahoga un mosquito vicioso, hace calor y el mosquito tiene medio cuerpo cogido por la parálisis, pateo con mucha dificultad, uno uno uno uno uno uno, pausa uno uno uno uno uno uno pausa hemipléjica, uno uno uno uno uno uno, pausa casi absoluta y definitiva, en estos momentos sólo perseguimos la concordia, las moscas naufragas dudan de todo cuanto escuchan, España ha llegado al límite de su tensión política y más allá no quedan sino los golpes y la sangre y el mesianismo, la mosca del café y el mosquito del coñac están descubriendo que la muerte no tiene tamaño[.] (207)

noticed that the city was starting to be invaded by the stench of death, what smells?, it smells like corpses, don't you notice?, but, how can it smell like corpses?, I don't know!, all I'm saying is that it smells like corpses, damn, it does smell like corpses! [...] the city smells like corpses, it is a very subtle stench and one that almost no one perceives, but it smells like corpses, in the trees along Recoletos street there are no flying nightingales nor owls[.]⁹⁶ (108)

The accumulation of death on the streets and the transformation of the city into an open “battlefield”, implies a wider disintegration of a collective social order and the (upcoming) collapse of the government (and nation). In *San Camilo, 1936* the characters' voice their concerns about the ability of the Republican government to maintain order and handle the growing tensions, including the uprising of the military revolts, the revolutionary workers movements and the demonstrators asking for distributions of arms: “the government can't handle the situation, the Republic is completely lost and the fighting between them all will end up killing it” (“el gobierno no puede con la situación, la república está más que perdida y entre unos y otros acabarán matándola”; 102). The escalating chaos and violence eventually signals a breakdown of authority and law, as is indicated in the following examples:

[N]o one should have stepped out of legality, this could turn into madness that costs many lives [...] no one should step out of legality, this unfortunately doesn't look like a military uprising but a demolition, you'll see soon, now

⁹⁶ “[L]as personas que toman café en las terrazas de Recoletos y de Alcalá hubieran notado que la ciudad comenzaba a ser invadida por el olor a muerto, ¿a qué huele?, a muerto ¿no lo notas?, pero ¿cómo va a oler a muerto?, ¡yo qué sé!, lo que te digo es que huele a muerto ¡vaya si huele a muerto! [...] la ciudad huele a muerto, es un olor muy tenue y que no percibe casi nadie, pero huele a muerto, por entre los árboles de Recoletos no vuelan ni el ruiseñor ni la lechuza[.]” (*San Camilo, 1936* 108)

there's lots of unleashed craziness[.]⁹⁷ (168)

[N]obody respects the law anymore, the law is like a five peseta coin prostitute on Mardi Gras[.]⁹⁸ (172)

The destruction of the institutional and government power is subtler in *Sara i Serafina*. It is indicated above all by an administrative limbo in which official documents, as symbolic constructs and performative utterances, are subject to manipulation and become commodities. As the authority of the politico-legal system breaks down, the distinction between official (“real”) and fake documents becomes absurd since both are meaningless. In *Sara i Serafina*, when the professor asks a priest to issue a fake baptism certificate for Kenan, the priest, while at first being outraged, soon realizes that it is just an administrative document, and hence insignificant: “Soon after he remembered that the baptism certificate is an administrative document which confirms that someone received the sacrament of baptism but is not an integral part of the baptism itself” (“Nakon toga se sjetio da je krštenica administrativni dokument koji potvrđuje da je neko primio sakrament krštenja a ne sastavni dio samog sakramenta”; 88). The senselessness of administrative documents is in particular highlighted by the remark that Kenan makes upon hearing that his friend, who was falsifying documents, including those that were supposed to permit Kenan to escape Sarajevo, had decided to hand over the documents and collaborate with the soldiers who had raided his home and threatened him with a more thorough search:

⁹⁷ “[N]adie debería haberse salido de la legalidad, esto puede ser una locura que cueste mucha sangre [...] nadie debe salir de la legalidad, esto por desgracia no tiene aire de cuartelada sino de liquidación por derribo, ya lo verá usted, ahora hay mucho loco suelto[.]” (168)

⁹⁸ “[L]a ley ya no la respeta nadie, la ley es como una puta de a duro en martes de carnaval[.]” (172)

But what meaning, for God's sake, do fake documents have today and here, in a city where people are killed like origami roses. Is he out of his mind, how could he have been fooled by such transparent blackmail?! No, this kind of crap really only happens to me. Documents from a country which no longer exists – and I can't leave because of these documents, that'll make you go crazy.⁹⁹ (103)

In both novels, the collapse of the politico-institutional order and the spreading of violence through the private and public spheres cumulate towards the death of the city (and nation). In *San Camilo, 1936*, Madrid becomes overtaken by processes of deconstruction which it is unable to escape from: “cities don't escape, they burn, they decompose, they become ruined, but they don't escape, cities can't escape, they would have done it a while ago”, “cities don't escape, they stifle, they devour themselves, they dissolve like a square of sugar in coffee, but they don't escape, they die stranded in their birthplace” (“las ciudades no huyen, se queman, se pudren, se desbaratan, pero no huyen, las ciudades no pueden huir, ya lo hubieran hecho hace tiempo”; 82, “las ciudades no huyen, se ahogan, se devoran a sí mismas, se disuelven como la piedra de azúcar en el café, pero no huyen, mueren varadas en el mismo lugar donde nacieron”; 142).

The image of the stranded city breaking under violence is likewise portrayed in *Sara i Serafina*. During Dervo's trip from the “field” back into the city through a newly constructed tunnel, he is disturbed by the sight of a woman carrying a green desk lamp among the crowd of people leaving the city. Enigmatically, he sees in the image of the

⁹⁹ “Pa kakve veze imaju, pobogu, falsificirani dokumenti danas i ovdje, u gradu u kojem se ljude ubija kao papirnate ruže. Je li on uopće normalan, kako je mogao nasjesti na tako prozirnu ucjenu?! Ne, takva se besmislica zaista može samo meni dogoditi. Dokumenti jedne države koja više ne postoji – i ja radi toga ne mogu vani, pa to je da svisneš!” (*Sara i Serafina* 103)

woman leaving with the green lamp a “sure sign that Sarajevo is dying” and is left with the lingering sensation that the city is less beautiful and that it has lost something fundamental¹⁰⁰ (“pouzdan znak da Sarajevo umire”; 30):

Everything that is important, all the things that were associated with a lot of love, memory and meaning, are being taken out of the city, and into the city are being brought only things which provide for bare survival and which can serve as a social symbol. And in order to bring in this sadness arriving over here it is necessary to descend into the underground, Dervo was raving as if in a trance. “And for this reason, I tell you, professor, this place we live in is not a real world”, Dervo was yelling and hitting the floor with his fist as if to check if it is there. “Sarajevo holds onto the world with its fucking tunnel like a newborn holds onto the mother with the umbilical cord”, he said later, when he had calmed down a little and could again articulate. “But what is this newborn like and what kind of a navel leads through the underground?! We are, man, on a boat in the middle of the open sea,¹⁰¹ but we are not sailing and we can’t sail

¹⁰⁰ “I don’t know, I realize how nonsensical it is, I realize how it speaks negatively of me and it doesn’t please me that it’s like this, but I admit that I can’t stand the unknown woman and I can’t forgive her for leaving the city without its lamp. Something in me even today feels that the city is much less beautiful, that it lost a great deal, when it was left without the little desk lamp with the green protector.” (*Sara i Serafina* 31)

“Ne znam, jasno mi je koliko je to besmisleno, jasno mi je koliko to lošega o meni govori i nije mi drago što je tako, ali priznajem da ne mogu smisliti nepoznatu ženu i ne mogu joj optostiti što ostavi Grad bez lampe. Nešto u meni i dan-danas osjeća da je Grad mnogo manje lijep, da je mnogo izgubio, kad je ostao bez male stolne lampe sa zelenim štitnikom.” (31)

¹⁰¹ A similar metaphor is used by David Filip in a letter to Mirko Kovač where he compares the newly formed nation after Yugoslavia’s breakdown to a ship lost at sea:

Is this which was created after former Yugoslavia really *our fatherland*? What loyalty do we owe it? Here they are disoriented, lost in space and time, the residents of this new state, which is abandoned and ostracized from the world, floating without direction like a lost ship on an endless sea. We are outcasts in

because some idiot dropped the anchor. Or we dropped it ourselves, on purpose, for some reason we had to drop the anchor in the middle of the open sea and in the meantime we've forgotten the reason or lost the possibility of lifting the anchor.”¹⁰² (31-32)

Metaphorical images are used in both novels to illustrate the cities' captivity and vulnerability as they succumb to violent degradation and death. Sarajevo appears to be fragile like a newborn, while the city in *San Camilo, 1936*, is said to dissolve as easily as a cube of sugar in coffee. These connotations of vulnerability and innocence make all the more tragic the violence that pushes the cities to infernal depths; *San Camilo, 1936* describes Spain as sinking into an infernal well of blood and shit,¹⁰³ while Sarajevo is

our own country. Everything seems temporary, even the state in which we now live. (Filip and Kovač 70)

Da li je ovo što je nastalo posle nekadašnje Jugoslavije zaista *naša otadžbina*? Kakvu joj lojalnost dugujemo? Ovde su bez orijentacije, izgubljeni u prostoru i vremenu, stanovnici ove nove, od sveta odbačene i izopštene države koja pluta bespućem kao izgubljeni brod na beskrajnom moru. Mi smo u sopstvenoj domovini izgnanci. Sve deluje privremeno, pa i država u kojoj sada živimo. (Filip and Kovač 70)

¹⁰² “Iz grada se iznosi sve važno, sve ono što je za sebe vezivalo mnogo ljubavi, sjećanja i smisla, a u grad se unosi samo ono što omogućuje puki opstanak i može poslužiti kao društveni znak. A da bi se i to tuge što dopiše ovamo unijelo mora se sići u podzemlje, vikao je Dervo kao u transu, ‘I zato ovo gdje mi boravimo nije stvarni svijet, profesore, kad ti ja kažem’, urlao je Dervo i udario šakom po podu kao da provjerava ima li ga. ‘Sarajevo se svojim jebenim tunelom drži za svijet kao što se novorođenče onim crijevom drži za mater’, govorio je kasnije, kad se malo smirio i uzmogao opet artikulirano govoriti. ‘Ali kakvo je to novorođenče i kakav je to pupak koji vodi kroz podzemlje!? Mi smo, čovječe, na brodu nasred pučine, ali ne plovimo i ne možemo ploviti jer je neka budala bacila sidro. Ili smo ga mi sami, namjerno, bacili, iz nekog razloga smo morali baciti sidro nasred pučine pa u međuvremenu zaboravili razlog ili izgubili mogućnost da sidro dignemo.’” (*Sara i Serafina* 31-32)

¹⁰³ “[T]he country is sinking into a deep well of blood and shit in whose depths lays an infernal wasteland (with its dried blood stains, with its stains of dried shit).” (*San Camilo, 1936* 170)

“[El] país se hunde en un hondo pozo de sangre y mierda en cuyo fondo habita el páramo del infierno (con sus manchas de sangre seca, con sus manchas de mierda

depicted as being transformed into a surreal underworld place where everything that is personally significant (all that is associated with love, memory and meaning) is being taken away. The city (and country) is treated as a collective whole condemned to self-destruction, with no clear reasoning or justification for it. In *Sara i Serafina* the anchor that condemns Sarajevo is dropped for some obscure reason by an unknown “idiot” or a collective “we”. It is also the collective “we” who is accountable for Spain’s destruction in *San Camilo, 1936*; for example, in the epilogue of the novel, uncle Jerónimo warns that “Spain could die in our hands any day now” (“España se nos puede morir entre las manos cualquier día”; 360). Hence, the collective, in both novels, tragically appears as the victim while being at the same time implicated in the violent degradation of the city and nation.

The construction of the collective cohabited city space in which everyone is caught in the self-destructive violence breaks down the internal divisions erected in a civil war. The invasion of the private space and the stripping of all that is personally significant for the sake of constructing internal divisions and ideological constructs that are artificial, arbitrary and empty of significance makes the violence absurd and its consequences tragic. *San Camilo, 1936* and *Sara i Serafina*’s focalization on the personal experiences and the relationships between characters attempts to salvage the intimate human space and personally held values (such as the importance of love that both novels defend).

seca).” (170)

4 Representations of Mass Destruction and the Creation of a Collective Memory Through the Figure of a Travelling Soldier: Mercè Rodoreda's *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and Velibor Čolić's *Chronique des Oubliés*

The previous chapter analyzed narrative strategies in the construction of a collective cohabited city space and the portrayal of the invasion of civil war violence into the private lives of city dwellers. This chapter will turn to the rural space and the construction of a collective experience of war through the figure of a travelling soldier. A subjective experience of civil war violence and an illustration of how the “battlefield” in civil war tragically implicates civilians, continues to be a central narrative focus. A comparative study of Mercè Rodoreda's *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (*War, so much war...*, 1980) and Velibor Čolić's *Chronique des oubliés* (*Chronicle of the forgotten*, 1994) will analyze the use of a soldier's voyage as a means of witnessing the tremendous scale of civil war violence, illustrating common experiences of loss and constructing a collective memory. In their representations of collective civil war experiences, the pervasive violence and accumulation of death and destruction lead toward what appears to be an apocalyptic final. This process of extreme destruction implicates a loss of a previous life, home and county. These arguments are developed in this chapter through analyses of the narratives' focus on the subjective experience, the transformation of a soldier, and their portrayals of the extensiveness of civil war violence. Finally, the chapter examines the novels' resistance to such violence through the construction of a collective memory.

4.1 A Wandering Soldier's Transformative Voyage

The collapse of the government and legal order during a civil war, addressed in the previous chapters, is accompanied by a wider transformation of the social order marked by processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. Through the drastic passage from one social and political order to another, a civil war acquires a ritualistic dimension as a country transgresses from one national identity to another. A dramatic identity passage also occurs on an individual level. A civil war is a major life marker which implicates the loss of a previous life and the need to rebuild a new one. The loss is multifaceted and may be material (home, belongings, savings, career), personal (self-identity, loved ones, family), social (friends, neighbours, social belonging, status), and cultural (cultural practices, language). Both on national and individual levels, a civil war is a point of radical transformation, a marking line which divides life before and after the conflict.

On a national level this transformation through deconstruction and reconstruction opens up a space for the erection of new meaning through rewritings and symbolic reconfigurations. As was discussed in chapter two, the “winner” appropriates the right to give meaning to the civil war, to create morals, history, myths, and commemorations which identify the heroes, the martyrs, and the enemies. This restrictive vision often elicits the creation of alternative representations that attempt to open up a space for recuperating that which is omitted or lost in the process of deconstruction-reconstruction. Often, what is left out is the diversity of individual experiences and the implicated transformations individuals undergo as they lose their previous lives and have to adapt to the newly constructed social and cultural coordinates at the end of the war.

The destruction, loss, and transfiguration of individual lives during a civil war are recurring themes in the works of Mercè Rodoreda and Velibor Čolić, and a part of the writers' personal experiences. In the prologue to *Quanta, quanta guerra...* Rodoreda writes that war consistently appears in her novels due to the impact the Spanish Civil War had on her generation: "There is an intense circulation of blood and death around the people of my generation. Because of this immense flow of tragedy, war appears in my novels, perhaps sometimes involuntarily, to a lesser or greater degree" ("Al voltant de la gent de la meva època hi ha una intensa circulació de sang i de morts. Per culpa d'aquesta gran circulació de tragèdia, en les meves novel·les, potser alguna vegada involuntàriament, poc o molt, la guerra hi surt"; 14). Rodoreda's personal experience of the civil war and exile initially interrupted the writing career she started in the years leading up to the civil war (including published novels and journal articles as well as having been active in literary and intellectual groups in Barcelona).¹⁰⁴ In an interview in 1973 with Montserrat Roig, she explains that exile initially silenced her as a writer due to the economic hardships she endured, the difficulty of having to reconstruct herself as a Catalan writer¹⁰⁵ in a foreign land and the necessity of taking time to digest lived experiences:

¹⁰⁴ The entry of the nationalist troops into Rodoreda's hometown of Barcelona towards the end of the Spanish Civil War pushed her into a long exile during which she passed the majority of her adult life in France and Switzerland until finally returning to settle in Romanyà de la Selva in Catalonia (Arnau, *Mercè* 51).

¹⁰⁵ Writing in Catalan can be seen as a manner of holding onto an identity threatened by the civil war, exile, and Francisco Franco's postwar dictatorship (which banned the Catalan language under a heavy repression of Catalan political power, culture, and identity). As Carme Arnau has written, for Rodoreda the Catalan language is: "A maternal language which seems to be the only possible homeland for Mercè Rodoreda. A homeland lived in exile, faithfully and intensely, because language represented, as well, her identity" ("Una llengua materna que sembla per a Mercè Rodoreda l'única pàtria possible. Una pàtria que visqué a l'exili, fidelment i intensament, perquè la llengua representava, també, la seva identitat"; *Mercè* 113).

After the [Spanish civil] war it took me a long time to start writing again. I had to work so hard to survive. And to write in Catalan while living in a foreign country is like wanting that flowers bloom in the North Pole. I needed a lot of peace and calm. This does not mean that writers then stop speaking about tragic times, but it was as if I was starting all over again with everything. I hadn't digested the dramatic events, and to speak of them right away would have turned them into a personal, subjective chronicle. Once, when I was young, I went to see the director of 'La Rambla' and I told him that I wanted to learn to write through journalism. He looked at me and said: "First live, then write."¹⁰⁶

(Rodoreda, "El aliento" 37)

Rodoreda's personal experience of the civil war and the subsequent hardships endured in exile ultimately shaped her as a writer by providing her with, as she has stated late in her career, a greater sense of humanity: "Exile is being without a country. For a writer, for an artist, the difficult times are very important for self development. They make you more human. Living through misfortune humanizes you. This is important" ("L'exili és estar sense país. Per un escriptor, per un artista, les èpoques difícils són importantíssimes per formar-se. Et fan més humà. Viure malament t'humanitza. Això és important"; Ibarz 87).

¹⁰⁶ "Después de la guerra tardé mucho en volver a escribir. Demasiado trabajo tenía para sobrevivir. Y escribir catalán en el extranjero es lo mismo que querer que florezcan flores en el Polo Norte. Necesitaba mucha paz y tranquilidad. Eso no quiere decir que los escritores dejen luego de hablar de las épocas trágicas, pero era como si empezara de nuevo con todo. No había asimilado los hechos dramáticos, y si se habla de ellos en seguida, se convierten en una crónica personal, subjetiva. Una vez, cuando yo era joven, fui a ver al director de 'La Rambla' y le dije que quería aprender a escribir a través del periodismo. Me miró y me dijo: 'Primero, viva; luego, escriba.'" (Rodoreda, "El aliento" 37)

The Spanish Civil War appears in Rodoreda's works as an oppressive force that pushes characters through psychological hardship which ultimately transforms them. For example, her most famous work, *La plaça del Diamant* (*In the Diamond square*, 1962) deals with the maturation and psychological evolution of a young woman struggling to survive with her two children in Barcelona as she endures extreme poverty and is overwhelmed by the violence of a civil war she doesn't understand. The "psychological-symbolic novel", as Carme Arnau has described Rodoreda's work, focus on the interior and expresses the psychological evolution of characters through poetic and symbolic language ("novel·la psicològico-simbòlica"; *Introducció* 13).¹⁰⁷ Rodoreda crafts a poetic, expressive and evocative narrative from seemingly simple language. In the prologue to *Mirall trencat* (*Broken Mirror*, 1974) she states that: "Writing well means to me saying the essential with the maximum simplicity" ("Per escriure bé entenc dir amb la màxima simplicitat les coses essencials"; 14).

Experience of civil war and exile likewise shaped Čolić as a writer and have become dominant themes in his writing. A soldier in the Bosnian army at the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict, Čolić deserts the army and goes into exile in France. He publishes the majority of his books in French (first through the assistance of Mireille

¹⁰⁷ Carme Arnau, who has extensively studied Rodoreda's work, has identified the poetic dimension in various novels as deriving from the creation of a dense and suggestive atmosphere, aestheticized scenes, a subjective and unique point of view which expresses the character's pain and the use of lyrical monologues (*Introducció* 13, 22). In particular, Arnau has pointed out how Rodoreda's expressive language, inspired by her admiration for the writer Katherine Mansfield, densely portrays profound emotions from seemingly trivial events of the everyday life (*Mercè* 66). Her narrative creates a complex intimate world through intense subjectivity (relying heavily on interior monologues), the use of "written spoken language" ("escriptura parlada") and attention to senses (such as smell) (*Mercè* 103, 97, 110).

Robin who translates his writing, then by writing in French).¹⁰⁸ The adoption of the French language appears as part of a (new) identity reconstructed after the loss of home. During an interview with Vladimir Arsenijević, Čolić's comment about writing in French suggests a link between a (voluntary) loss of language and a (involuntary) loss of home: "I changed my language and language has changed me. Anyway, I am not French. And I got tired of being 'ex' ['ex-Yugoslavian']. I didn't construct nor did I deconstruct that country. I requested, and succeeded that in my passport it be written stateless. A man without home" ("Ja sam promijenio jezik i jezik je promijenio mene. Inače, nisam Francuz. I dosadilo mi je da budem 'ex'. Ja tu zemlju nisam ni sastavljao ni rastavljao. Zatražio sam, i uspjelo mi je, da mi u pasošu napišu apatrid. Čovjek bez domovine"; Čolić, "Netko" par. 20). His loss of home carries a sense of injustice and violence, as is insinuated in his statement about the life that was stolen from him: "I have been robbed of many things. A part of my youth, my friends, my country" ("Moi, on m'a volé plein choses. Une partie de ma jeunesse, mes amis, mon pays"; "L'abécédaire" par. 23). Following the loss of the old life, the newly reconstructed life is associated with a sense of rebirth: "one loses oneself and one finds oneself somewhere else. In this way, it is rebirth" ("on se perd et on se retrouve quelque part ailleurs. Alors c'est la renaissance"; "L'abécédaire" par. 15).

¹⁰⁸ Published translated works include: *Les Bosniaques* (*The Bosnians*, 1993), *Chronique des oubliés* (*Chronicle of the forgotten*, 1994), *La vie fantasmagoriquement brève et étrange d'Amedeo Modigliani* (*Amedeo Modigliani's phantasmagorical, short and strange life*, 1995), *Mother Funker* (2001) and *Perdido* (2004). Works written in French include: *Archanges: roman a capella* (*Archangel: an a capella novel*, 2008), *Jésus et Tito* (*Jesus and Tito*, 2010), *Sarajevo Omnibus* (2012), *Ederlezi: Comédie pessimiste* (*Ederlezi, a pessimist comedy*, 2014), *Manuel d'exil* (*Exile manual*, 2016). In the postwar period he published one novel in Serbo-Croatian *Kod Alberta* (*At Albert's place*, 2006).

In parallel to Rodoreda's statement that the civil war has been a generational marker which is continually present in her work, the civil war predominantly appears in Čolić's novels. In the interview with Vladimir Arsenijević, he argues that the war will continue to be a topic of representation: "I think that representations of the horrors of our war have not been exhausted in literature. Nor in film. While they loaded canons, we were silent. And now these same generals and patriots would like for it to be forgotten" ("Ja mislim da ta strahota od našega rata još nije završila u literaturi. Ni na filmu. Dok su oni radili topovima, mi smo ćutali. A sad bi ti isti generali i rodoljupci da se zaboravi"; Čolić, "Netko" par. 14). This statement implies the role that literature (and art in general) plays in redeeming what was lost during war. Being silenced by civil war, and subsequently forgotten, is a recurring theme in his writing, and of key significance in *Chronique des oubliés*. His treatment of the war largely revolves around the recuperation of memory, the salvation from oblivion, and the redemption of violently silenced voices. The mnemonic and commemorative narratives incorporate testimonial and biographical elements while aspiring to capture ordinary history, with a lowercase 'h' rather than History, for which Čolić has stated to feel "[a]n almost physical necessity to narrate them" ("[u]n besoin presque physique de les raconter"; "L'abécédaire" par. 9).

The historical approach that Čolić and Rodoreda take on in *Chronique des oubliés* and *Quanta, quanta guerra...* is a focalization on history, on the stories of how the vast destruction of civil war affects a collective of ordinary people. A major theme in both novels is the loss of a previous life during civil war, which presents a need to reconstruct a new beginning, and the transformation that this process implicates. Both novels are structured around the travels of a soldier who collects stories of individual

people while witnessing the destructions caused by civil war. *Quanta, quanta guerra...* narrates the coming of age experience of Adrià Guinart, a fatherless adolescent who runs away from home to join the republican army. Soon after enlisting, he flees the army and wanders through the land of Catalonia, in search for food and temporary shelter. Through his vagabond travels he encounters diverse people who share with him their experiences, life's lessons and plights. Signs of the devastations caused by the civil war become more and more present as his voyage progresses. They cumulate in his arrival to a bloody aftermath of a battle at a riverbank and his subsequent discovery in the adjacent forest that his love (a young woman named Eve) had been held captive by an old woman, prostituted and murdered. After taking vengeance by burning the old lady's house (the first act of violence he commits) and with the war having been declared ended, he decides to head back home. He begins his journey home a changed and matured young adult, carrying with him the memory of all that he had seen and of the people he had met.

Chronique des oubliés reunites stories of diverse civilians and soldiers during the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict in northern Bosnia. The stories largely focus on portraying the senselessness of the death and loss suffered by people. They are told and organized by an autobiographical soldier/narrator whose travels with his detachment make him a witness of overwhelming and disturbing violence. With the focus being on presenting and preserving the stories of others, little is revealed about the soldier/narrator. It is not until towards the end of the book, when he prepares to go into exile, that we learn more about him. In the chapter "Inventory of what is left" ("Inventaire de ce qui reste"), it is revealed in the details of the passport that the first person narrator is named Velibor Ante Čolić. The end of his voyage is followed by the

transformed soldier/narrator's introspective contemplation and a series of reflections about the absurdness of the war's destructiveness, political and historical appropriations of peoples' plights which foster oblivion, and his own struggle to come to terms with a loss of identity and home.

Quanta, quanta guerra... and *Chronique des oubliés* present a soldier who witnesses through travelling an accumulation of destruction, loss, and death on a collective level. His voyage and the stories of other people he carries with him are situated in a specific historical time and place. In *Chronique des oubliés*, the soldier travels through villages and towns in northern Bosnia around the Bosnia River and momentarily in eastern Croatia at the Sava River, before leaving for France.¹⁰⁹ The narrative is situated from 1990-1994, with a majority of the stories occurring at the beginning of conflict in Bosnia from May to July 1992. An effort to document, and to create a chronicle as indicated in the title, is in part revealed by the dates and places noted at the ends of each chapter, with varying levels of details provided.¹¹⁰ The aim of the chronicle in *Chronique des oubliés*, however, is more concerned about documenting personal histories rather than the Historical and even ignores the chronological order while thematically organizing the narrative. The historical dimension and resemblance to the journal genre carries a commemorative aim which aspires to inscribe voices and stories at risk of being forgotten.

¹⁰⁹ The towns and villages mentioned in *Chronique des oubliés* include: Derventa, Doboje, Modriča, Pećnik, Modrički Lug, Donji Kladari, Garevac, Odžak, Jakeš, Riječani, Bosanski Brod, Donji Kladari. In France the exiled soldier writes from Paris and Strasbourg.

¹¹⁰ The consistency and details of annotated dates and places varies. Sometimes they are very precise, for example: "Modriča, Bosnia, 12 May, 1992", and "It was at 5am on the 20th of August, 1992, when I went into exile" ("Modriča, Bosnie, le 12 mai 1992"; 62, "C'était à cinq heures du matin, le 20 août 1992, quand je suis parti en exil"; 121). Other times just the month or year and city or country are noted, or both completely omitted.

While the narrative focus is on the personal stories rather than the historical events, the historical contextualization in *Chronique des oubliés* includes direct, albeit brief, reflections on the political context surrounding the civil war and breakdown of Yugoslavia. The historical content does not provide details to clarify events but rather presents a critique of political movements for forcibly dividing people into homogeneous groups¹¹¹ and of the hypocritical nature of political rhetoric.¹¹² The politicization of bodies and the “counting” of people (“Everything collapsed for good once they started to count us”) dehumanizes people and forcefully creates artificial division of “us” versus “them” within a cohabiting group of people (“Bosnians lived in good harmony”) (“Tout s’est écroulé définitivement quand on a commencé à nous compter”; 126, “Les Bosniaques vivaient en bonne entente”; 129). *Chronique des oubliés* expresses a profound disillusionment of the “tragic-comical”¹¹³ months leading up to the war and the creation of a monstrous self-destructive state: “Instead of a modern and democratic state which several generations dreamed about, they served us again, God knows for how many times, a Leviathan State, a monster which devours its

¹¹¹ The critical tone can be noted, for example, in the following statement: “Nationalist parties transformed into nationalist movements. *All the Serbs to the Serbian Democratic Party, all the Muslims to the Party of Democratic Action and all the Croats, of course, to the Croatian Democratic Union*” (“Le parties nationaux se transformèrent en mouvements nationaux. *Tous les Serbes au SDS, tous les Musulmans au SDA et tous les Croates, bien sûr, au HDZ*”; *Chronique des oubliés* 127).

¹¹² For example, the text makes use of quotation marks to question the extent to which the November 1990 general elections were truly “free and democratic” (“libres et démocratiques”; *Chronique des oubliés* 127).

¹¹³ “The months which preceded the war in Bosnia were tragic-comical. Comical because the different leaders and heads of parties continuously assured us that a conflict was practically impossible. Tragic due to the consequences that this had for all of us.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 128)

“Les mois qui précédèrent la guerre en Bosnie furent tragi-comiques. Comiques parce que les différents leaders et chefs de parti ne cessèrent de nous assurer qu’un conflit y était pratiquement impossible. Tragiques en raison des conséquences que cela eut pour nous tous.” (128)

children” (“Au lieu d’un État moderne et démocratique dont plusieurs générations avaient rêvé, on nous resservit, Dieu sait pour la combienième fois, un État Léviathan, un monstre qui dévore ses enfants”; 128). Ultimately, the political force shaping history is largely dismissed in favour of placing value and meaning on the personal: “Uniforms are not important, leaders and politicians even less so. What remains is the country and its people. And memories...” (“Les uniformes n’ont aucune importance, les leaders et les politiciens encore moins. Restent le pays et ses habitants. Et les souvenirs...”; 130)

In contrast to the chronological details and discussion of political context in *Chronique des oubliés, Quanta, quanta guerra...* is more vague about the historical context, providing only some details from which it can be inferred that the story takes place during the Spanish Civil War. The scenery in the novel appears to depict Catalonia; for example, Carmen Arnau has noted its similarity to the Gavarres mountain massif and the landscape of Romanyà de la Selva, where Rodoreda lived while writing the novel (*Mercè* 143). Certain details in the novel point to the Spanish Civil War, for example, the presence of soldiers with red neckerchiefs like those worn by the republican forces. The references to the Spanish Civil War have been pointed out by Janet Pérez who states that there are details – such as references to *milicianos* (militiamen), the red neckerchiefs worn by Adrià’s comrades and the warplanes – which situate the novel within the specific historical context of the Spanish Civil War, as well as by Barbara Luczak who argues that: “Despite the scarcity of circumstantial details, the information provided throughout a reading of the novel is sufficient enough to situate the fictional story in a space and time which are concretely and emblematically a part of the Spanish Civil War, as well as the prewar period – in this case, quite indeterminably – in Barcelona” (431; “A pesar de la escasez de los datos

circunstanciales, la información proporcionada a lo largo del proceso de lectura es suficiente para situar la realidad ficcional en un espacio y un tiempo concretos y emblemáticos para la guerra civil española y un período – en este caso, bastante indeterminado – de preguerra, en Barcelona; “Nota” 45).¹¹⁴ In addition, Imma Contrí i Cirerol and Carles Cortés i Orts suggest in their analysis of the novel that the riverbank filled with dead bodies, which Adrià comes across at the end of his voyage, refers to the aftermath of the battle of Ebre remembered for its immense casualties (67).

In *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, and in the corpus of her work in general, Rodoreda deliberately dismisses elaborations of historical events or facts and expresses disinterest for the chronicle genre. She chooses instead other narrative forms (such as the psychological novel) and focuses more on the interior evolution of characters living through a particular historical period. In the prologue to *Mirall trencat (Broken Mirror)* she writes:

[M]y historical time interests me in a very relative manner. I’ve lived through it too much. In *The Diamond square* I speak of it without having set out to do so on purpose. A novel is, also, a magical incident. It reflects what the author carries inside without them even realizing that they’re so heavily loaded with ballast. If I had wanted to deliberately talk about my historical time I would have

¹¹⁴ Pérez and Luczak have also criticized other critics’ analyses of *Quanta, quanta guerra...* for focusing only on universal, symbolic, mythical, and abstract interpretations, which present the bellicose setting as an “interior war”, a fight between Good and Evil, a “war” between the individual and the world” or as “merely some spiritual journey or quest for knowledge”, while ignoring the references to the Spanish Civil War in the novel and Rodoreda’s prologue (“guerra interior”; Luczak, “Nota” 48, Luczak, “Nota” 49, “la ‘guerra’ entre el yo y el mundo”; Luczak, “Nota” 51; Pérez 436). Pérez has argued that such universal interpretations revolving around a paradigmatic concept of war neglect the fratricidal element stressed in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and dilute the force of the novel conveyed by its portrayal of a war that is a highly significant and tragic marker in Spanish history (51).

written a chronicle. There are some excellent ones. But I was not born to limit myself to talking about concrete facts.¹¹⁵ (18)

Rather than “deliberately” discussing the historical time, as is the case with Čolić, Rodoreda focuses on indirectly portraying the civil war through allusion, applying what Luczak Barbara sees as the “art of ellipsis” and “the poetics of suppression and suggestion” (“arte de elipsis”, “poética de supresión y sugestión”; “Nota” 42). Rodoreda’s style largely centers on evoking rather than explicitly saying.¹¹⁶ For example, the brutality of the battle scenes and violent acts committed in rural areas against civilians is not described in action, but rather evoked through the presence of dead bodies and scenes of destruction that Adrià comes across. In this way, *Quanta, quanta guerra...* appears to be, as Rodoreda describes it in the prologue: “a novel with

¹¹⁵ “[E]l meu temps històric m’interessa d’una manera relativa. L’he viscut massa. En “La plaça del Diamant” el dono sense haver-me proposat de donar-lo. Una novel·la és, també, un acte màgic. Reflecteix el que l’autor porta a dintre sense que gairebé sàpiga que va carregat amb tant de llast. Si hagués volgut parlar deliberadament del meu temps històric hauria escrit una crònica. N’hi ha de molt bones. Però no he nascut per limitar-me a parlar de fets concrets.” (*Mirall trencat* 18)

¹¹⁶ Discussing her writing style in the prologue to *Mirall trencat* (*Broken Mirror*) Rodoreda states:

“I cannot say without it sounding fake that “Colometa was despaired because she lost hours of sleep cleaning after the pigeons.” Neither can I make her say directly: “I was despaired because I had to lose hours of sleep cleaning after the pigeons.” I have to find a deeper, more expressive form; I cannot say to the reader that Colometa is despaired, I have to make them feel it. And for the reader to see Colometa’s despair I am obliged to write: “And it was that day when I told myself that that was the end of it. Pigeons, vetches, troughs, food containers, incubators, dovecote and the worker’s ladder, it can all go to hell!” (19)

Jo no puc dir sense que soni fals: “La Colometa estava desesperada perquè no donava l’abast a netejar coloms”. Tampoc no li puc fer dir directament “jo estava desesperada perquè no donava l’abast a netejar coloms”. He de trobar una fórmula més rica, més expressiva, més detallada; no he de dir al lector que la Colometa està desesperada sinó que li he de fer sentir que ho està. I perquè el lector vegi la desesperació de la Colometa em veig obligada a escriure: “I va ser aquell dia que vaig dir-me que s’havia acabat. Coloms, veces, abeuradors, menjadores, covadors, colomar i escala de paleta, ¡tot a passeig!” (19)

little war but with a continuous backdrop of war” (“una novel·la amb poca guerra però un fons continuat de guerra”; 14). While the battlefield and violent acts are not shown during their occurrence (in part because Adrià runs away from the army), the civil war is present as a constant backdrop, a sensed atmosphere, shaping Adrià’s voyage, the lives of the people he comes across and even the nature of the landscape he travels across. Although the civil war is pushed to the background, evocative images of it predominate and show the immense disaster it inflicts. Its ungraspable magnitude is implied in the title of the novel – *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (*War, so much war...*) – through the repetition of “quanta, quanta” (“so much, so much”) and the use of an ellipsis. Barbara Luczak has also pointed out the “obsessive insistence” of war in the novel: “[*Quanta, quanta guerra...*] presents the war with obsessive insistence. Images of the bellicose conflict are omnipresent in the novel: the land Adrià traverses is covered with live, injured or dead soldiers, planes that have exploded in the air, civilians shot in the doorframes of their houses, ruined or bombarded villages, children starving to death, etc.”¹¹⁷ (“Nota” 48-49).

While *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* differ in how they situate the story historically (with the former evading direct references and the latter providing explicit historical commentaries and detailed documentation of time and place), in both novels the historical is relegated while emphasis is placed on subjective experiences of the civil war. Neither aim to clarify the sequence of political and military events that shaped the civil war, but rather to portray through subjective narrative (using

¹¹⁷ “[*Quanta, quanta guerra...*] presenta la guerra con una insistencia obsesiva. Las imágenes del conflicto bélico están omnipresentes en la novela: el país recorrido por Adrià está sembrado de soldados vivos, heridos o muertos, aviones que explotan en el aire, civiles fusilados en los quicios de sus casas, pueblos arruinados o bombardeados, niños muriéndose de hambre, etc.” (Luczak, “Nota” 48-49)

the first person as well as colloquial and oral language) the significance of the conflict through its dreadful effects on individual lives, communities, villages and rural land. They portray civil war as a vast accumulation of death, destruction, and loss which transforms people and the place they call home. The soldiers' voyages appear as a passage and a transgression through an aberrant space that is in the process of being destroyed, apparently absurdly for the sake of being reconstructed after its demise.

Critics have interpreted Adrià's voyage in *Quanta quanta guerra...* as a myth of initiation, an initiation voyage, a rite of initiation, a coming of age story (Bildungsroman), a solar myth, and a quest romance (Cortés i Orts 4; Contrí i Cirerol and Cortés i Orts 6, 104, 98; Luczak, "Nota" 43, 48; Sosa-Velasco 48, 58; Pérez 432, 432). The common thread between the varying interpretations is that Adrià overcomes physical and psychological challenges (such as hunger, physical aggressions, witnessing large scale death, finding out his first love suffered and was killed by cruel gratuitous violence, etc.) through which he learns, evolves, and matures. The novel, as Rodoreda explains in the prologue, aims to present an innocent and naïve boy taken aback by what he witnesses: "It has to be about a boy who is still wet behind the ears, who, like the poets, is astonished by everything he sees" ("Hauria de ser un noi encara amb la llet als llavis, que com els poetes, tot el que veïés el deixés sorprès"; 14). Adrià's face is often described as innocent and frightened; for example, the man in the castle spares him his life because Adrià has "the face of a frightened animal" ("cara de bèstia sorpresa"; 98). Upon joining the army at fifteen years old, he is urged to leave because of his young age: "And he told me: why did you come here, so young? Get outta here, if you can" ("I va dir-me ¿què has vingut a fer aquí, tan jove? Guilla, si pots"; 41). Janet Pérez has suggested that Adrià's young age and innocence may "symbolize the youths whose

youth forever ended with the war” (437). The division that Adrià briefly joins is also largely composed of young soldiers; Adrià remarks that: “We were about a hundred men, all young, all tired, all fed up” (“Érem un centenar d’homes, tots joves, tots cansats, tots avorrits”; 67).

Although Adrià resists taking part in military activity (for example, by refusing to learn how to shoot)¹¹⁸ and runs away from the army, he cannot escape the civil war as he encounters the ravages of violence everywhere along his travels. His experience travelling through a land overcome by civil war fundamentally changes him and takes away his innocence. Towards the end of his voyage, while passing through a forest, he expresses the fear of not being able to go back to his old carefree self: “It was another type of fear: I was afraid of myself. Afraid of not going back to be myself ever again because of that immense fear that oppressed me” (“La por ja era d’una altra mena: tenia por de mi. Por de no tornar mai més a ser jo per culpa d’aquella por tan grossa que m’estrenyia i m’estrenyia”; 208). Looking into a pool of water he has a difficult time recognizing his changed face and is startled by all that his eyes behold: “In it appeared a reflection of my shaved head. My face without hair falling over the forehead did not seem to be my face. I stayed a long while captivated by my eyes, not because they were my eyes, but because of all that they held inside, because of all the things they had seen.

¹¹⁸ “I learned to load and fire a gun. To shoot. How old are you? Fifteen. You look older. Come on, let’s see if you learn to shoot with a good aim. I didn’t want to learn. I aimed higher or lower, more towards the right or more towards the left of the carton man in which we had to make a bull’s eye. I didn’t want them to teach me to kill anybody.” (*Quanta, quanta guerra...* 67-68)

“Vaig aprendre a carregar i a descarregar el fusell. A tirar. ¿Quants anys tens? Quinze. Sembla que en tinguis més. Apa, a veure si aprens a tenir bona punteria. No volia tenir-ne. Apuntava més avall o més amunt, o més cap a la dreta o més cap a l’esquerra, de l’home de cartó que havíem d’encertar. No volia que m’ensenyessin a matar ningú.” (67-68)

My heart skipped a beat” (“A dintre hi havia el meu cap amb els cabells arranats. La meva cara sense cabells damunt del front no semblava la meva cara. Em vaig encantar una estona llarga amb els meus ulls, no pas perquè fossin uns ulls i meus, sinó per tot el que hi havia a dintre, per tot el que havia vist. El cor em va fer un salt”; 210). Once the war ends and he prepares to go back in search for a lost home, having no possessions and heavy with the burden of what he has witnessed, Adrià acknowledges being a changed person: “I will return different. I have seen death up close. And the devil. A great sadness, like a strong hand, squeezes my heart. Where was my home? Did I still have a home?” (“Tornaria diferent. Havia vist la mort de la vora. I el mal. Una gran tristesa com una mà molt dura m’estrenyia el cor. ¿On era a casa? ¿Encara tenia casa?”; 246).

The soldier’s voyage in *Chronique des oubliés* can also be interpreted as an initiation voyage. Although he is not an adolescent like Adrià maturing into adulthood, he observes violent loss of innocence around him and is transformed by his experience. Learning to wage war, often unwillingly like Adrià,¹¹⁹ initiates soldiers into a bellicose

¹¹⁹ This unwillingness to fight can be observed in the protagonist’s evasion of battle by choosing to lay hidden in the grass one night, as well as in the scene of a soldier being taught how to fire:

You will take the whole cartridge clip and you will put it in your firearm (it’s very simple: just a click). Then, you will position the lever on automatic fire. You will place the cross on your shoulder and you will press gently on the trigger, using the index finger of the right hand. You will fire. [...] Afterwards, you will feel a terrible thirst and you will be nauseous, because you are not really a soldier and the smell of the powder bothers you. (*Chronique des oubliés* 111-112)

Tu prendras un chargeur entier et l’introduiras dans ton fusil (c’est tout simple: juste un dé clic). Ensuite, tu positionneras la manette sur le tir automatique. Tu placeras la crosse sur ton épaule et appuieras doucement, de l’index de la main droite, sur la gâchette. Tu tireras. [...] Après, tu ressentiras une soif atroce et tu auras la nausée, car tu n’es pas vraiment un soldat et l’odeur de la poudre t’indispose. (111-112)

existence that strips them of their innocence. Loss of youth is highlighted by specifying the age of the young soldiers and adolescents that are killed; for example: Franjo K. the “young twenty two year old man”, D.A. the “young seventeen year old adolescent” and Izudin H. who is “twenty two years old” (“jeune homme de vingt-deux ans” ; 27, “jeune adolescent de dix-sept ans”; 48, “âgé de vingt-deux ans”; 109). A total loss of innocence is evoked in the face of a toddler:

But the eyes of little three year old Matea C, three years old, the round immense eyes, were hazy. Something about her chubby cheeks, still a baby face, resembled the first dew of spring, the solitude of stars, a stream of light, all that which is beautiful and futile.

We had the impression that the tears she shed had aged the world, made it lose its purity, its innocence.¹²⁰ (117)

Witnessing the loss of innocence and senseless death disturbs and alters the protagonist. He is nauseated,¹²¹ hopeless and fearful. Fear appears as an instinctual and innocent response through its comparison to the fear of a “small” animal: “We are small

¹²⁰ “Mais les yeux de la petite Matea C., âgée de trois ans, des yeux ronds, immenses, s’étaient voilés. Sur son visage joufflu, une bouille de bébé encore, quelque chose qui ressemblait à la première rosée du printemps, à la solitude des astres, à une cascade de lumière, à tout ce qui est beau et vain.

On avait l’impression que les larmes qu’elle avait versées avaient fait vieillir le monde, que celui-ci avait perdu sa pureté, son innocence.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 117)

¹²¹ For example, he feels nauseous upon finding a dead soldier who has the hands of a farmer:

It is summer.

Flies escape from his open mouth and fly onto my hand.

I rush outside and, in the courtyard, vomit for a long, long while, soiling my military boots. (*Chronique des oubliés* 42)

C’est l’été.

Des mouches s’échappent de sa bouche ouverte et viennent se poser sur ma main.

Je me précipite dehors et, dans la cour, vomis longtemps, longtemps, souillant mes bottes militaires. (42)

animals encircled and afraid. [...] We are there, crouching, squeezed against each other like a flock of sheep” (“Nous sommes de petits animaux encerclés et apeurés. [...] Nous sommes là, accroupis, serrés les uns contre les autres tels les moutons d’un troupeau”; 100). The transformative effect of the soldier’s voyage is most clearly remarked when he escapes the war leaving for exile. At the end of his war journey he leaves, like Adrià, carrying a load of memories, little possessions and a loss of home. He lists an “inventory” of the meagre possessions he is left with, some of which are useless, such as “a used black agenda containing phone numbers no longer in service” and “a green tracksuit, not in my size” (“un agenda noir, écorné, contenant des numéros de téléphone qui n’ont plus cours”; 120, “un jogging vert, pas à ma taille”; 121). The transformation after the experience of civil war is expressed most explicitly in a letter he writes from exile to a friend in Belgrade: “If you open the door, yes, if you really open the door and let me enter, you will see that I still have the same eyes and the same face as you, that we resemble each other like twin brothers, except that my face is deformed by something ugly and misleading” (“Si tu ouvres la porte, oui, si tu l’ouvres vraiment et me laisses entrer, tu verras que j’ai toujours les mêmes yeux et le même visage que toi, que nous nous ressemblons comme des frères jumeaux, sauf que le mien est déformé par quelque chose de laid, de mensonger”; 134).

4.2 A Land Marked by Mass Deaths, Destruction and Loss

The voyages in both novels thus constitute a passage through a violent space which transforms the protagonist/narrator who has lost his possessions, home, love and old self. The protagonists are not the only ones transformed by the violence. The extensiveness of the destruction, affecting diverse people, the community, and the

landscape makes the civil war appear as an apocalypse which breaks down the whole country. *Chronique des oubliés* makes a direct reference to the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in the description of the terrified facial expression of a dying soldier:

In the moment of his death, Faruk D.'s face took on an everlasting stunned and fearful expression of someone who is departing. His contorted face, a mask cast in the wax of the past, was in fact that of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. It seemed to announce the imminence of glacial and infinite terror which –we supposed, since that was all we could do– would grasp us at the moment when we leave this world.¹²² (20)

Jennifer Duprey's analysis of violence in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* argues that it acquires an apocalyptic dimension through the presence of mass graves, the constant flow of dead bodies in rivers and, most significantly, the torture, rape and murder of Eva who represents life in the novel and alludes to the biblical mother of all men (85-86). The pervasiveness of death in the two novels also evokes a passage through an underworld. Carles Cortés i Orts has described Adrià's travels in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* as "a voyage into the world of the dead" while Jennifer Duprey has argued that "[t]he war landscape becomes a metaphor for hell. The images of its violence evoke a sort of underworld" ("un voyage au règne des morts"; 4, "[é]l ámbito de la guerra deviene una metáfora del infierno. Las imágenes de esta violencia evocan una suerte de submundo"; 85). There are certain literal and figurative images of Adrià falling (such as

¹²² "Au moment de sa mort, le visage de Faruk D. prit à jamais une expression étonnée, pétrifiée, celle de celui qui s'en va. Sa face convulsée, masque coulé dans la cire du passé, était en fait celle d'un des quatre cavaliers de l'Apocalypse. Elle semblait annoncer l'imminence d'un effroi glacial et infini, effroi qui – nous le supposons, car c'est tout ce que nous pouvons faire – nous saisit à l'instant où nous quittons ce monde." (*Chronique des oubliés* 20)

his fall into the sewer and his dream of falling into the strange pond¹²³ where he finds a skeleton) which, as Janet Pérez has noted, allude to the protagonist's journey through an underworld.

The bellicose land through which the soldiers in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* travel through is marked by an omnipresence of death and destruction. Images of dead or dying soldiers, civilians, and children, destroyed houses and burned villages are ubiquitous. Death is a leitmotif whose significance in both novels is far reaching; it afflicts individual lives (in the literal and figurative sense), communities, nature, towns and country. It appears as a crude, senseless and dehumanizing demolition of all that is associated with humanity and community.

In *Quanta, quanta guerra...* the first person that Adrià encounters on his journey upon running away from the army is a soldier attempting to commit suicide by hanging himself because he feels to have already perished figuratively in the war: “And the war has killed me. I’m emptied of everything, surrounded by the dead and blood...I died a while ago. Why should I want to breathe and have a body that I don’t love and which doesn’t stop crying out for sleep, hunger and sadness? I mean to say that it asks for joy, even if it’s just a little bit of joy, but it only finds sadness...” (“I la guerra m’ha matat. Buit de tot, voltat de morts i de sang... ja fa temps que vaig morir ¿per què he de voler respirar i tenir un cos que no estimo i que demana sense parar son, gana i tristesa? vull dir que demana alegria, encara que només sigui una mica d’alegria i només troba

¹²³ The strange pond is said to have formed at a mountain where workers building a tunnel mysteriously started getting sick and dying. The fisherman who shows the site to Adrià explains to him that: “The water is unusual, green and thick: ill. Nobody dares to enter it and swim until the hole. If you throw in a piece of wood or whichever branch, it doesn’t float, it sinks spiraling in a whirlwind” (“És una aigua estranya, verda i espessa: malalta. Ningú no ha gosat ficar-s’hi i nedar fins al forat. Si s’hi tira una fusta o una branca qualsevol, no suren, s’enfonsen fent un remolí”; 216).

tristes...”; 46). The soldier’s words above foreshadow Adrià’s voyage. He as well will come across countless corpses, undergo hunger,¹²⁴ and succumb to hopeless sadness; at one moment he says: “And I dozed off without having completely come to terms with the thought that all the goodness in this world has abandoned me” (“I em vaig abaltir sense acabar d’entendre que tot el bé d’aquest món m’hagués abandonat”; 61).

Similarly to Adrià, the protagonist in *Chronique des oubliés* witnesses countless deaths, remarking their overwhelming sadness and dehumanization. He observes the objectification of people in the faces of dead soldiers: “There was nothing sacred or glorious about his lifeless face. Nothing but bitterness and sadness, as if Faruk D. was just a forgotten and long ago discarded object” (“Il n’y avait rien de sacré ni de glorieux sur ce visage sans vie. Rien que de l’amertume et de la tristesse, comme si Faruk D. n’était qu’un objet oublié, mis au rebut depuis longtemps”; 20). Death appears in its

¹²⁴ Extreme hunger is one of the many facets of violence that humiliates and degrades people during wartime. In *Quanta, quanta guerra...* there are countless scenes of Adrià desperately searching for food, sometimes stealing it and other times being fed by people he stays with in exchange for work. The extreme extent of his hunger is illustrated through his reaction to food, as can be noted in the following example: “The smell of the bread with tomato smeared on it, of the ham, was maddening. I let the sandwich fall, fell to my knees, lowered my nose to the ground and sunk my teeth into it” (“Del pa sucats amb tomàquet, del pernil, sortia una olor que m’embogia. Vaig deixar caure l’entrepà, em vaig ajupir de nassos a terra i vaig clavar-hi les dents”; 108). In *Chronique des oubliés* this extreme hunger is expressed in the portrait of a man so starved that he appeared as “the man who was a shadow of himself”, and in the description of people sitting in a circle, as if in “an ancient ritual”, and eating grass (“l’homme ombre de lui-même”; 108, “un rituel ancien”; 41):

People are eating grass.

At the periphery of the small city of Modriča, a group of civilians has dandelions for breakfast, after carefully separating the leaves from the yellow flowers, which are bitter.

They chew, dazed, their eyes glazed. (40)

Les gens mangent de l’herbe.

À la périphérie de la petite ville de Modriča, un groupe de civils déjeune de pissenlits, après avoir bien séparé les feuilles des fleurs jaunes, qui sont amères.

Ils mastiquent, hébétés, le regard éteint. (40)

physical, literal form, as well as figuratively. Like in *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, death is figuratively linked to a loss of joy:

Ibrahim, the old Rom who had been nicknamed ‘Pepper’, is dead from sadness.

The doctors who noted his death in the refugee camp in Croatia claimed that he died from drinking too much, but that’s not true...

They took everything from Ibrahim, his journey, his freedom, his joy, his songs, and that is why he has died from sadness.

In a refugee camp. All alone.

While he was being buried, there was no one to play him ‘Romalen’ on violin. No one.¹²⁵ (36)

The most disturbing deaths portrayed in the two novels are those of infants. Such catastrophe symbolizes an ultimate loss of innocence and implies an apocalyptic end through the death of the lives of the youngest generation. Both novels express the tragedy and incomprehensibility of an infant’s death through the image of a parent desperately holding onto a dead child as if it were still alive. Toward the end of Adrià’s voyage, he comes across a woman (who appears to be the only person alive in the deserted riverbank filled with dead soldier) holding a dead baby in her arms: “She carried an infant in her arms; immediately I noticed that it was dead because of the wax colour of the legs and the hanging hand. She spoke to it as if it were alive, my love, my

¹²⁵ “Ibrahim, le vieux Tzigane que l’on surnommait ‘Poivre’, est mort de tristesse.

Les médecins qui ont constaté son décès dans un camp de réfugiés en Croatie ont prétendu qu’il était mort d’avoir trop bu, mais ce n’est pas vrai...

On avait tout pris à Ibrahim, sa route, sa liberté, sa joie, ses chansons, et c’est pour cela qu’il est mort de tristesse.

Dans un camp de réfugiés. Tout seul.

Lorsqu’on l’enterra, il n’y avait personne pour lui jouer ‘Romalen’ au violon. Personne.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 36)

baby...” (“Duia una criatura morta a coll; ho vaig veure de seguida, que era morta, pel color de cera de les cames i d’una mà que li penjava. Ella li va enraonar com si fos viva, amor meu, fill meu...”; 231). In *Chronique des oubliés* the denial of a child’s death is portrayed through a father who crafts a doll for his dead daughter:

He watches. It’s been three days since he hasn’t taken his eyes off his little Alma. And since he’s been waiting. He waits to see her smile, to make a gest, to say a word, anything.

And nothing.

Alma sleeps. Alma doesn’t want to play with her doll.

Alma has gone elsewhere.

But her father still waits while smoking. He wants to believe.

To believe that his child is going to wake up and ask him for a glass of water.¹²⁶ (31-32)

Along with depicting the tragedy of individual deaths, *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* portray the extensiveness of collective death, which dehumanises people by reducing them to an objectified and abased mass anonymity. In *Chronique des oubliés* collective death is succinctly denoted through the mathematical symbol for infinity, which appears drawn on a wooden plaque over a recent mass grave. The mathematical symbol on the headstone of the grave rather than the names of the deceased also expresses the anonymity and dehumanization of the dead. Collective

¹²⁶ “Il regarde. Cela fait trois jours qu’il ne quitte pas des yeux sa petite Alma. Et qu’il attend. Il attend de la voir sourire, faire un geste, dire un mot, peu importe.

Et rien.

Alma dort. Alma ne veut pas jouer avec sa poupée.

Alma est partie ailleurs.

Mais son père attend toujours en fumant. Il veut croire.

Croire que son enfant va se réveiller et lui demander un verre d’eau.”

(*Chronique des oubliés* 31-32)

death appears as part of an absurd perpetuated cycle of self-destruction, due to which the soldier concludes that perhaps the infinity symbol is “the most fitting term that we could inscribe on our new tombs” (“le terme le plus approprié que nous puissions inscrire sur nos nouvelles tombes”; 131). The self-destructive action of collective violence in the civil war pushing the whole population to its end is also expressed in another novel by Čolić, *Les Bosniaques: hommes, villes, barbelés* (*The Bosnians: men, cities, barbed wires*, 1993), where he speaks about the dead becoming more numerous than the living and how “we will tally each other in order to find out *which one of us will be the last one and blow out the candle*” (“nous nous dénombrerons afin de savoir *lequel d’entre nous sera le dernier et éteindra le cierge*”; 135).

In *Quanta, quanta guerra...* the recurring images of mass death are described more explicitly. Anonymity, irreverence, and injustice for the dead is expressed through detailed descriptions of piled body parts and abandoned corpses. Along his journey, Adrià finds corpses left laying with circles of birds flying above them and bodies that had been thrown into rivers rather than buried. Facing such terrible displays of degradation, Adrià shows regard and compassion for the dead by frequently taking on the difficult role of a gravedigger. For example, after discovering a pit of dead corpses in an abandoned town he works tirelessly to bury them: “I spent two days and two nights without eating or drinking, throwing shovelfuls of earth over the dead. Until I buried them” (“Vaig passar dos dies amb les seves nits sense menjar ni beure i tirant palades de terra damunt dels morts. Fins que vaig cobrir-los”; 204).

The pervasiveness of civil war violence also impacts nature, degrading and transforming it. Rivers in *Chronique des oubliés*, like in *Quanta, quanta guerra...*,

transport the dead and are used to dispose of bodies.¹²⁷ Nature, as a recipient of mass death, becomes transformed by it. One recurring image is of nature being stained by the colour red. In *Chronique des oubliés*, the blood of a soldier who had laid down on a mine is described as spreading over a field of white Queen Anne's Lace flowers. In *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, the soil and rivers become so filled with corpses that they turn red. For example, the chapter where Adrià finds a pit of mass corpses is titled "Red earth" ("La terra vermella"), and he comes across, at another part of his journey, a red river which a soldier warns him not to look at: "Don't look. Underneath what remains of the bridge, the water is red. We are surrounded by dead soldiers. Talk as much as you want, but don't look. Say something...quick. Don't look towards the bridge" ("No

¹²⁷ For example, in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* when Adrià meets and falls in love with Eva at a riverbank, his discovery of dead bodies approaching them in the river signifies an invasion of death and a contamination of an Eden-like scenery: "Get out! Three shadows floated down the river. They are dead soldiers. They toss them from the heights of the Merlot to not have to put in the work of burying them. I push them with the pitchfork so that they don't get blocked and rot between the reeds and canes which are my palace" ("Sortim! Riu avall baixaven tres ombres. Són soldats morts. Per estalviar-se la feina d'enterrar-los els llencen daltabaix del cingle del Merlot. Els empenyo amb la força perquè no s'encallin i no es podreixin entre els joncs i les canyes que són el meu palau"; 55).

The description of the appearance of dead soldiers in the river reveals their unsettling loss of entity. In the previous passage, the soldiers are described as "shadows", thus evoking how they have lost their physical substance and become an incorporeal reflection. Similarly, in *Chronique des oubliés*, floating soldiers' corpses in a river are compared to an empty nutshell:

The carbonized corpses of four Serbian soldiers were aligned, wrapped in garbage bags, close by their completely destroyed tank. [...]

The river, swelled by spring rain, carried its dirty water. This singular raft and its crew will soon appear as nothing but a simple walnut shell.

That sails, light and empty. (25-26)

Les cadavres carbonisés de quatre soldats serbes étaient alignés, enveloppés dans des sacs de poubelle, près de leur véhicule blindé, entièrement détruit. [...]

La rivière, gonflée par les pluies printanières charriait ses eaux sales. Cette singulière embarcation et son équipage ne ressemblèrent plus bientôt qu'à une simple coque de noix.

Qui voguait, légère et vide. (25-26)

miris. Sota el que queda del pont, l'aigua és vermella. Estem voltats de soldats morts. Enraona tant com vulguis, però no miris. Digues alguna cosa... corre. No miris cap al pont"; 51). A particular effect of mass death is that it appears to render the land infertile in *Quanta, quanta guerra...*: "Years and years ... years will pass before something could be planted at the river's bank because, if they started to dig, they would find bones instead of soil. It's all that remains: bones. Bones of the dead without names" ("Anys i anys...passaran anys abans no es pugui plantar res a les vores del riu perquè, si es posen a cavar, en comptes de terra trobaran ossos. Tot el que queda: els ossos. Ossos de morts sense nom"; 232). This allusion to the story of Abel and Cain (in which the land tainted by Abel's blood no longer yields crops to Cain for having murdered his brother) is part of a symbolic web of biblical references in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* that evoke sin and the story of the first fratricide.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ *Quanta, quanta guerra...* incorporates biblical references to elaborate the theme of sin, loss of innocence and paradise, as well as to problematize a binary opposition of good and evil. Sin is evoked by the symbolic presence of a snake which crosses Adrià's path upon arriving at a pit of corpses and again after his departure from it. The association of civil war violence with sin is also made by the repeated imagery of lost paradise and innocence, a recurring motif in Rodoreda's prose and one that is often linked to gardens and nature. For example, the woman Adrià encounters by the riverbank filled with corpses speaks to him, in the past tense, of how her home was a paradise before the civil war: "My house was up there. Now just four walls remain. We had a vegetable garden that was a paradise... imagine, with so much water nearby to irrigate" ("Jo tenia la casa allà dalt. Només en queden les quatre parets. Teníem un hort que era una glòria... imagina, amb tanta aigua per regar-lo a la vora"; 231). The loss of paradise and innocence is also symbolized by Eva's (Eve's) tragic death, through which Adrià loses a platonic love and his innocence when he sets fire to the old woman's house who had held Eva captive. Among these biblical allusions, *Quanta, quanta guerra...* also makes repeated references to the figure of Cain. Inspired in part by Charles Baudelaire's poem "Caïn et Abel" ("Cain and Abel"), as Rodoreda indicates in the prologue, *Quanta, quanta guerra...* presents a more complex reflection on the figure of Cain which breaks the usual simplistic moral argument. For example, the fisherman's explanation about who Cain is adds that he is also characterized by his determination and desire to know:

What does it mean to be Cain? It can be said that until that moment he had been talking without looking at me and the question compelled him to turn his head.

The morbid disfiguration of nature along with the difficult confrontation with incommensurable mass deaths are part of *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés*'s treatment of the loss of home and community brought on by civil war. Home and community appear as interrelated concepts signifying a space of belonging, joy, love and friendship. The physical destruction of homes in civil war is swift, shockingly easy and senseless. *Chronique des oubliés* emphasizes in the chapter "La Maison" ("The House") the injustice of military violence against civilians through the contrast between the power of a tank and the defencelessness and vulnerability of a house: "The tank passed over the house as easily as if it were a theatre set" ("Le tank passa à travers la maison aussi facilement que s'il se fut d'un décor de théâtre"; 62). The rapid physical destruction of the house carries with it a profound symbolic violence committed onto a very personal and emotive significance of home, defined by experiences and memories. The tank not only physically runs over the house, but also metaphorically over the memories, identity and life associated with it: "Then they climbed back into the tank and ploughed once more the tracks through the garden of my childhood" ("Puis ils

What do you mean? Just that: who is Cain? You want me to believe that you don't know? I know that God punished him and afterwards protected him. My mother, when I was misbehaving and angered her, would tell me that I was a Cain. And I have this mark on my forehead... What questions you ask. Everyone knows that Cain killed... but there are some who consider him to be the one who desires to know, the one who never stops, the one whom nothing can stop, the one who wants to know everything. What questions, he ended shaking his head. (228)

¿Què vol dir ser un Caín? Fins aleshores es pot dir que havia enraonat sense mirar-me i la pregunta li va fer girar el cap. ¿Què vols dir? Només això: ¿Què és un Caín? ¿Em vols fer creure que no ho saps? Sé que Déu va castigar-lo i que després va protegir-lo. Quan feia enrabiar la meva mare em deia que jo era un Caín. I aquest senyal que tinc al front... Quines preguntes de fer. Tothom sap de memòria que Caín va matar... però hi ha qui el considera aquell que vol saber, que no s'atura mai, que no l'atura res, que ho vol conèixer tot. Quines preguntes, va acabar movent tot el cap. (228)

remontèrent dans le tank et labourèrent encore une fois de ses chenilles le jardin de mon enfance”; 62). Toward the end of *Chronique des oubliés*, the loss of home due to civil war takes on a more extended signification in referring to a loss of country, community and belonging during exile: “In silence, we cross the border and the bridge, becoming people who no longer have a country. Refugees. Vagabonds. The homeless. Men on a quest. / For a family, for a life abruptly interrupted, for a lost love...” (“En silence, nous traversons la frontière et le pont, devenant des êtres qui n’ont plus de pays. Des réfugiés. Des vagabonds. Des SDF. Des hommes en quête. / D’une famille, d’une vie brusquement interrompue, d’un amour perdu...”; 135). This loss is stressed in the rest of the chapter through a repetition of paragraphs beginning with “I look for you” (“Je te cherche”). The search culminates in the last words of the novel which appear to acknowledge the futility of the search for a country that was loved (in the past tense, insinuating that this country no longer exists) and express a desire to move on:

And I look for you.

And I am no longer sure of anything.

Am I really searching for you?

The country that I loved.¹²⁹ (141)

The dual physical and symbolic destruction of house and home also occurs in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* It is illustrated, for example, when Adrià comes across a recently bombed house, whose owner, the bricklayer tells him:

When the bomb fell I was in the vineyard. But, why? Why did they have to drop a bomb here, just one and here, if this is a wretched village, without young

¹²⁹ “Et je te cherche.
Et je ne suis plus sûr de rien.
Est-ce que je te cherche vraiment?
Pays que j’ai aimé.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 141)

people and nothing? His voice stifled: and nothing... Just a desire to spread misfortune to people's lives. A woman like her... to die under the rubble of her own home, alone in the house, without ever having done any harm to anyone...¹³⁰ [...] Us two built this house with our own sweat. We were always desperately saving to be able to buy a sack of cement, then two sacks of sand, then a bunch of bricks. Everything seemed worthy of a celebration to us! And the plasterer, poor Estanislau, came and didn't want to charge for the material or his labour. And the electrician, Jeremies, came and didn't want to charge his daily wage. And Manuel, the carpenter, came and gave me the scaffolding. And Belloc, the painter, came and gave me the paint. And we all, electrician, carpenter, plasterer, painter and I, painted the house with the blue blinds. Eulàlia prepared the food for everyone. A paradise. You can't understand what it means to build a house from the foundation to the rooftop. To see how it rises.¹³¹ (190)

¹³⁰ The phrase “without ever having done any harm to anyone” (“sense haver fet mal a ningú”) points to the injustice of the death, the fact that good people, who never harmed anyone, and who deserve better, are killed and made to suffer senselessly in civil war. A variation of this phrase also appears in *La plaça del Diamant* (*In the Diamond square*) when the misfortune Natalia lives through during the civil war pushes her to contemplate suicide: “And that way we'll put an end to it all and everyone will be happy, since we haven't done any harm to anyone and no one loved us” (“I així hauríem acabat i tothom estaria content, que no fèiem cap mal a ningú i ningú no ens estimava”; 162).

¹³¹ “Quan va caure la bomba jo era a la vinya. Però ¿per què? ¿Per què havien de tirar una bomba aquí, només una, si això és un poble de mala mort, sense joves ni res? La veu se li va escanyar: ni res... Només ganes de desgraciar la vida de la gent. Una dona com ella... haver de morir sota la runa de la seva casa, sola a dintre de la casa, sense haver fet mal a ningú... [...] Aquesta casa havia estat feta amb la suor de tots dos. Sempre estalviant com uns desesperats per poder comprar ara un sac de ciment, ara un parell de sacs de sorra, ara una partida de maons. Tot ens era festa! I va venir el guixaire, el pobre Estanislau, i no em va voler cobrar ni el material ni la feina. I va venir el lampista, en Jeremies, i no em va voler cobrar els jornals. I va venir en Manel, el fuster, i em va regalar els bastiments. I va venir en Belloc, el pintor, i em va regalar el vernís. I tots, lampista, fuster, guixaire, pintor i jo, ens vam posar a pintar-la: amb les persianes blaves. L'Eulàlia feia el dinar per tots. Una glòria. Perquè tu no pots saber què

The tragedy and injustice of violent targeting of civilian areas of no military interest is highlighted through several narrative techniques in this passage.¹³² Repetitions of certain words (“why”, “one bomb”, “here”) emphasize the bricklayer’s difficulty in coming to terms with the senselessness of the violent act while the use of ellipses to pause and make the ends of sentences fall silent (“and nothing...”, “A woman like her...”, “without ever having done any harm to anyone...”) stresses the emotional weight behind the loss of words. The injustice of the act is further highlighted by the sharp contrast between the swiftness and ease by which the bomb destroys the house and all the effort, time, and perseverance required to build it “from the foundation to the rooftop”. The house signifies a lost paradise, a space of love, family, joy and friendship. Jennifer Duprey’s analysis argues that the bombing of the bricklayer’s house implicates a symbolic and poetic metaphor which recalls a loss of life and dwelling (84-84).

The bricklayer’s story emphasizes how the house was a place built jointly by a couple and through the generosity and kindness of others who one after the other came to help. The detailed description of the construction of the house speaks symbolically of a communal effort to construct a home. Placed in the overall context of the general themes of the novel, the passage could be interpreted not only to refer to the individual house, but to allude as well to the civil war’s more general destruction of a collectively constructed symbolic signification of home associated with social, cultural and political spheres.

The destruction (and tragically implicated process of self-destruction) which

és fer una casa amb fonaments fins al teulat. Veure com puja.” (*Quanta, quanta guerra...* 190)

¹³² Jennifer Duprey has argued that this scene alludes to the nationalist army’s bombarding of civilian areas to terrorize populations, such as the town of Guernica which has a symbolic value of Basque identity (83).

breaks down a communally constructed place identified as home (whether it be a house, town, or nation) is a marking feature of civil war violence. Sosa-Velasco argues that *Quanta, quanta guerra...* shows how violence is institutionalized and perpetuated between the republican and nationalist sides, as well as within the Catalan population, by presenting conflict in the nucleus of the family (for example in the chapter about the “moon man”/ “l’home-lluna” who is maltreated by his greedy brothers) (52). The civil war in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* presents a dynamic of violence which is more complex than simple us-them and hero-enemy divisions. The chaos of the civil war, and the collapse of a legal and political order, facilitate a proliferation of opportunistic violence within communities. Janet Pérez has pointed out numerous examples of violence in the novel that challenge the alleged ideological or political justifications behind the civil war:

Several tales of crimes committed in the name of war reveal to, the wandering anti-hero other aspects of human passion and motivations: episodes in the castle introduce robbery, pillage, unlawful imprisonment, personal vengeance and enrichment, opportunistically carried out under political pretexts, while in the village of the three acacias (Chapter 26), the murder of the usurer springs from long-smouldering resentment; it has no military or strategic significance. (435)

The overall result of the prolific violence is senseless large-scale communal self-destruction through which everyone loses. The enemy is not an external and separated category but an internal self-perpetuating reflection created out of an absurd circular logic according to which you are my enemy because I am your enemy. This is most evident in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* in the following conversation by workers upon returning to their village after fighting in the war: “This war is a huge tragedy. Can you

explain to me why we are fighting? The bricklayer said to fight the enemy, but the carpenter said that for the enemy we are also the enemy. The electrician said: even if we win the war it would be as if we lost it, a war is set up so that everyone loses” (“Aquesta guerra és la gran desgracia, ¿em vols explicar per què la fem? El paleta va dir que era per anar contra l’enemic, però el fuster va dir que per a l’enemic nosaltres també érem l’enemic. El lampista va dir: encara que la guanyem serà com si l’haguéssim perduda, una guerra serveix perquè la perdi tothom”; 192). The weight of the collective violence which makes everyone lose is also reflected at the end of *Quanta, quanta guerra...* in Adrià’s vision of angels coming down to bring peace to the dead. In this vision he hears a blessing given to all: “I will bless the killers and the killed, the decomposing flesh, the bones that are separating, the veins that have soaked the land with blood. I will bless these battalions of approaching souls, drawn by my compassion and in search of my forgiveness” (“beneiré els assassins i els assassinats, les carns que es desfan, els ossos que es separen, les venes que han xopat la terra de sang. Beneiré aquests batallons d’ànimes que s’acosten, atretes per la meva pietat en busca del meu perdó”; 245). Barbara Luczak interprets this scene as a hope for a reconciliation between warring brothers (“Nota” 51).

The senselessness of self-destructive violence is also highlighted in *Chronique des oubliés*. The war is described as being self-inflicted: “It is a war that is carried out against oneself” (“Il s’agit d’une guerre que l’on mène contre soi-même”; 130). Several passages point out the senselessness of the destruction of a previously collectively constructed society. The difficulty in justifying the military violence can be seen in the passage where a troop heading to battle passes by an old man who poses an unsettling question: “And what has become of the ‘Fraternity’ and of the ‘Union’, retorted the old

man, with a low voice that seemed to come from beyond the grave, what has become of Tito's celebrated 'Union and Fraternity'? Where are they, why have they disappeared, eh?" ("Et qu'en est-il de la 'Fraternité' et de l'Unité", rétorque le vieillard, d'un voix basse qui semble venir d'outre-tombe, qu'en est-il de la célèbre 'Unité et Fraternité' de Tito? Où sont-elles, pourquoi ont-elles disparu, hein?"; 56). The soldier's inability to provide an answer, highlighted through a prolonged silence ("I don't respond. I stay quiet for a long time, a very long time"), and his final remark upon leaving for battle ("Let's go, I say at last to my soldiers. Let's go... – May the Good Lord help us... Us, and them as well..."), attest to the senselessness of the fighting and the enmity ("Je ne réponds pas. Je me tais, longtemps, très longtemps", "On y va, dis-je enfin à mes soldats. On y va.... – Que le bon Dieu nous vienne en aide...À nous, et à eux aussi..."; 56). The absurdity of fighting for the construction of a country (Yugoslavia) only to later violently deconstruct it is summarized in the following statement: "We have died and lived together for wanting to live separated" ("Nous sommes morts et avons vécu ensemble pour avoir voulu vivre séparés"; 131). This senselessness is further illustrated by examples of affinity and friendship between individuals divided into opposing sides, which destabilizes the enemy category used to justify warring against each other. The artificiality of the dividing line between warring sides is made apparent in the story of the prisoner nicknamed "Knorr" who is captured wandering lost in the woods, becomes a cook during his imprisonment, and is then traded to go back to the warring side he came from:

"Knorr" left us at the beginning of the month of July 1992, on the occasion of a rare exchange of prisoners called "all for all".

“Fucking war and politics, he told us upon taking off. I’m never again going to combat.”

The good soldier “Knorr”, our new friend.

Then he put his head once again through the collar of his worn-out uniform and, slightly more stooped than usual, made a step to place himself on the other side.¹³³ (64-65)

The act of having to cross to the other side of a violent frontier, which converts a friend into an enemy, is portrayed as a tragic transfiguration whose reasoning remains obscure, as can be noted in the following example: “But there are questions that we ask ourselves and which are left without answers. What is the idea, the obscure force, the political leader which has transformed yesterday’s neighbour and friend into the enemy?” (“Mais il est des questions que nous nous posons et qui restent sans réponse. Quelle est l’idée, la force obscure, quel est le chef politique qui ont transformé le voisin et l’ami d’hier en ennemi?”; 16).

The destabilization of the enemy category along with the portrayals of collective suffering and loss in *Chronique des oubliés* and *Quanta, quanta guerra...* are part of a denouncement of the civil war violence pushing toward a total destruction of a social cohabited space. The novels’ representations of the accumulation of death and destruction (of individual lives, community and landscape) denounce the vast loss caused by the violence while counteracting the complete fulfillment of that loss through

¹³³ «« Knorr » nous quitta au débout du mois de juin 1992, à l’occasion d’un des rares échanges de prisonniers qu’on appelait « tous pour tous ».

« Putain de guerre et de politique, nous dit-il en prenant congé. Je n’irais plus jamais combattre. »

Le bon soldat « Knorr », notre nouveau copain.

Puis il rentra le cou dans le col de son uniforme élimé et, un peu plus voûté encore que d’habitude, fit un pas pour se placer de l’autre côté.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 64-65)

writing. Their representations attempt to salvage that which is in the process of being destroyed from complete obliteration through writing and the construction of a collective memory.

4.3 Construction of a Collective Memory

Quanta, quanta guerra... and *Chronique des oubliés*'s representations of civil war violence portray, as was analysed thus far in the chapter, accelerated destruction of individual and collective lives which leads to a loss of life, former identity, home and loved ones. The narrative treatment of these losses through a focus on the personal stories of diverse individuals appears as a means of creating a collective memory. They show on the one hand the uniqueness of each individual and their particular experience of the civil war, while on the other hand creating a sense of solidarity and unifying the stories by revealing the similarities of the loss and suffering affecting the collective. The mnemonic characteristic of the narratives appears as a resistance against the civil war's violence which destroys both on physical and symbolic levels through dehumanization and instrumentalization of people's lives and deaths.

Quanta, quanta guerra... and *Chronique des oubliés* use the figure of the traveling soldier as a protagonist and narrator who becomes through his experiences a witness and storyteller. As narrator and storyteller, the soldier collects and organizes stories about the people he encounters (or hears about), presenting in his text what he sees and hears. In this way, he becomes a voice for others and a witness of death and destruction caused by civil war. In both novels, the soldier/narrator often fades into the background while he observes, listens to and presents the stories of the secondary characters. As Janet Pérez has stated, Adrià is a spectator rather than a participant of

war, he is a “front-line observer” (428). Similarly, *Chronique des oubliés* does not reveal scenes of the soldier fighting in the war and focuses instead on what the soldier/narrator observes. *Chronique des oubliés* begins with an assertion that “the writer is a sort of witness” who needs to bring humanity into view in the midst of all the horror and dehumanization brought on by war (“l’écrivain est une sorte de témoin”; 11). The narrator of *Chronique des oubliés* strives to achieve an empathetic gaze in the representation of others’ pain, as is implied in the following statement: “For a man, is there a more honorable and dignified attitude than stopping for an instant to consider the misfortune of others?” (“Pour un homme, y a-t-il une attitude plus honnête et digne que celle qui consiste à s’arrêter un instant pour réfléchir au malheur des autres?”; 17). *Chronique des oubliés* identifies literature as a means for achieving such a humane reflection and counteracting war. It begins with a chapter titled “To believe in literature” (“Croire en la littérature”) which defends the need “[t]o believe that writing can set in motion again all the mechanisms that were ‘disposed of’ while taking up arms. / That it can bring the incomprehensible and unexplainable horror to a *human scale*” (“Croire que l’écriture peut remettre en branle de mécanismes qu’on a mis « au rebut » lors du recours aux armes. / Qu’elle peut ramener l’horreur, incompréhensible et inexplicable, à la *mesure humaine*”; 12).

The focalization on the experience of others, and the creation of a collective memory, is reflected in the structure of the novels. *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* are constructed as a collection of stories in which chapters appear as coherent short stories (usually each chapter is dedicated to one story, although in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* some stories span multiple chapters). A majority of the chapters center around telling the tale of a particular person, and at times of a group of

people, with the rest being reserved to the soldier's personal experience and reflections. The titles of the chapters make reference to the encountered person(s)¹³⁴ or a marking aspect of an experience. The novels do not go into depth to develop each character's story, but rather create portraits which present glimpses into the lives of diverse people during a civil war. The episodic structure¹³⁵ of the novels gives form to a collective mosaic of personal experiences in which the reoccurrences of loss, brutality, destruction and death create a sense of collective suffering.

At the end of his voyage, the travelling soldier becomes a bearer of a collective memory. Alfredo Sosa-Velasco sees in *Quanta, quanta guerra...*'s fragmentary structure the creation of a collective memory in which Adrià unifies an ensemble of voices, integrating them into the text to such an extent that it becomes difficult at times

¹³⁴ The reference to the encountered persons in the chapters' titles in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* include: "The hanged man", "The girl at the river", "The miller", "The girl with the multi-coloured dress", "Eve", "The prisoner", "Three girls and an orange", "The man with the sandwich", "The girl at the beach", "The woman from the Canaries", "The man with the cat", "The hermit", "The man who walked backwards towards the sun and the moon", "A victim", "The bricklayer" and "The fisherman" ("El penjat", "La noia del riu", "La molinera", "La nena del vestit de dos colors", "Eva", "El pres", "Tres noies i una taronja", "L'home de l'entrepà", "La noia de la platja", "La dona del canari", "L'home del gat", "L'ermità", "L'home que caminava d'esquena al sol i a la lluna", "Una víctima", "El paleta", "El pescador").

In *Chronique des oubliés* the chapter titles referring to characters include: "The face of the one leaving", "Story about children I", "Story about drunks", "Story about the Roma I", "Story about a 'white eagle'", "Story about the Roma II", "Story about Juro, the Ustasha nicknamed 'Tito'", "Story about the prisoner nicknamed 'Knorr'", "Story about children II", "Story about the Roma III", "Gara", "A shadow of himself", "A text about a man who was forgotten" and "The freshwater fisherman" ("Le visage de celui qui s'en va", "Histoire d'enfants I", "Histoire d'ivrognes", "Histoire tzigane I", "Histoire d'un 'aigle blanc'", "Histoire tzigane II", "Histoire du Juro l'oustacha, surnommé 'Tito'", "Histoire du prisonnier surnommé 'Knorr'", "Histoire d'enfants II", "Histoire tzigane III", "Gara", "L'ombre de lui-même", "Écrit sur un homme qu'on a oublié", "Pêcheur d'eau douce").

¹³⁵ For example, Barbara Luczak's analysis of *Quanta, quanta guerra...* points out that the novel's episodic structure is based on sequential episodes united by the protagonist ("Nota" 43). According to Luczak, this framework, along with certain recurring motifs and themes (such as solitude, hunger, beatings, cruelty and the pitilessness of the world), evoke the picaresque novel ("Nota" 43).

to distinguish the speakers (49). The frequent use of free direct speech gives agency to the characters' voices and a sense of authenticity to the memories that Adrià's narrative holds together. In many of the stories, the voices that Adrià's master narrative weaves together are those of other storytellers who add different perspectives. Jennifer Duprey has pointed out how Adrià encounters a variety of storytellers, including traditional storyteller figures such as shepherds and fishermen, who speak of life before and during the civil war, of local traditions and of far away lands (80, 89). Listening to and memorizing the stories, Adrià then converts them into something durable through the act of retelling (Duprey 80). At the end of the war, upon embarking on his journey home, Adrià declares: "I will return carrying a mountain of memories of all the people that I have met, who were born and lived so that I could meet them, and who will surround me throughout my journey... so many tender eyes, so many sad eyes, so many surprised eyes, so many despaired eyes..." ("Hi tornaria carregat amb muntanyes de records de tota la gent que havia conegut, que havia nascut i que havia viscut perquè jo la pogués conèixer, i que em voltaria tot al llarg del camí... tants ulls dolços, tants ulls tristos, tants ulls sorpresos, tants ulls desesperats..."; 246).

The collective memory constructed by Adrià shows not only how the civil war devastated so many lives, but reveals as well a diversity of people who present unique points of view. For example, Janet Pérez has argued that Adrià's encounters with different people illustrate possible life-styles and philosophies:

Many of Adrià's encounters, in the nature of exemplary tales, illustrate possible life-styles and philosophies. The man with the skull belt-buckle teaches him the importance of little things, "a sweet fruit at sunset". The scapular vendor exemplifies an itinerant life; a peddler who believes in reincarnation, he not only

wanders from place to place but perhaps from existence to existence. The prisoner in the castle dungeon expounds a quietist, contemplative philosophy, a rather ecstatic contemplation of time's passing. The "laziest man" exemplifies parasitic existence much like that of the hereditary nobility (and similarly, he expects others to serve him). The obese *hombre-luna* symbolizes the temptations and perils of unlimited self-indulgence, the self-defeating and unsatisfactory results of uncontrolled hedonism. (Pérez 434-435)

This plurality of unique individual stories creates a bottom-up vision of a collective experience of civil war. Jennifer Duprey sees in the plurality of diverse stories that Adrià listens to and commemorates an opposition to the monumental national myth of a monolithic unified Spain created by the Francoist dictatorship in the postwar period (79). We can hence interpret the mnemonic dimension of *Quanta, quanta guerra...* as a call for the need to recover that which was symbolically destroyed through oblivion in the restrictive postwar vision.

Chronique des oubliés similarly builds a bottom-up collective memory through a fragmentary structure and by incorporating diverse stories of individual experience of the civil war. The main theme of the novel is centered around commemorating those whose voices are stifled by the war and history. This is announced in the title "Chronicle of the forgotten" and the dedication at the beginning of the novel:

The *Chronicle of the forgotten* is a book that speaks about death, shame, war and silence.

I dedicate it to all those who didn't have anyone to bury them, to mourn them, to mention them in their nightly prayers.

I dedicate it to all those who have fallen into oblivion....¹³⁶

The narrator takes on the role of speaking for those who do not have a voice and who have “fallen into oblivion” through testimonial descriptions and the use of direct speech. The narrator’s appropriation of other voices contrasts the dominant narrative technique in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* where the voices of other characters appear to have agency by puncturing Adria’s narrative in the form of free direct discourse.

The need to commemorate those who have been pushed into oblivion appears as a form of resistance against the silence caused by civil war violence. One of the ways *Chronique des oubliés* develops the theme of oblivion in relation to civil war violence is through a repeated association between death and silence. The two motifs consistently appear together throughout the narrative: “an unreal silence” settles after a battle; the atmosphere is described as being “silent and pale like a lily” in a house where a woman is about to die during childbirth; “a religious silence” is sensed when a troop enters a house and finds a dead soldier as well as among a group of fleeing refugees watching airplanes drop bombs over a bridge they need to cross; moments before a shell unexpectedly falls from the sky killing Jakov the “silence had something solemn, rich and peaceful to it”; as the troop passes through the town of Pećnik a “solemn silence reigns”; and, attention is drawn to the silence after Franjo K.’s death “[a]fter this death, after this bloodshed, a terrible, uncanny silence sets in. As it always does” (“un silence irréal”; 112, “silencieux et blême comme une fleur de lis”; 96, “un silence religieux”; 42, 91, “Le silence avait quelque chose de solennel, de riche et de paisible”; 103, “Il

¹³⁶ “La *Chronique des oubliés* est un livre “qui parle de la mort, de la honte, de la guerre, du silence.

Je le dédie à tous ceux qui n’ont eu personne pour les enterrer, les pleurer, les mentionner dans leurs prières du soir.

Je le dédie à tous ceux qui sont tombés dans l’oubli...” (*Chronique des oubliés*).

règne un silence solennel”; 55, “Après cette mort, après ce sang, s’instaura un silence terrible, surnaturel. Comme c’est toujours le cas”; 28). While signifying death and forgetting, silence is paradoxically at the same time qualified as being expressive, as capable of evoking the lives that have been lost. It is a reminder of a loss, a marker of an absence. In this way, the silence of those who live through civil war is said to be more revealing than the “volumes that speaks of ‘us’ and ‘those people’, of ‘just war’ or ‘unjust war’, and so on and so forth...” (“volumes qui parlent de « nous » et de « ces gens-là », de « guerre juste » ou de « guerre injuste », et ainsi de suite...”; 130).

Chronique des oubliés’s emphasis on the need to rectify oblivion brought on by civil war, presents a deep concern about the way that history is written and a fear that the stories of ordinary people will be forcibly erased. Facing imminent oblivion, *Chronique des oubliés* proposes that literature has the power, and responsibility, to oppose the violence of war perpetuated on a symbolic level through dogmatic writings by the victors:

Wanting to believe in literature after war, or while it carries on, is a form of *resistance*. [...] Otherwise, innocent victims, in this case a whole population along with its culture and civilization, will be forever at the mercy of the victors, the aggressors in the present instance. It is well known that the victors are the ones who write history.¹³⁷ *To not write against the war striking Bosnia is*

¹³⁷ This idea of history being written by the victors is reinforced through a quote by Danilo Kiš inserted at the start of a chapter about collective death: “*History is written by the victors. The people weave legends. The writers imagine. Only death is undeniable*” (“*L’histoire est écrite par les vainqueurs. Le peuple tisse les légendes. Les écrivains imaginent. Seul la mort est indéniable*”; 124).

*equivalent to forgetting a whole population. And forgetting, is death, stripped of hope.*¹³⁸ (12-13)

In addition to the concern about oblivion, *Chronique des oubliés* criticizes the manipulation and ideological rewritings of history, including reductionist misrepresentations of the conflict, stating for example that: “To reduce the conflict in Bosnia to ‘tribal’ acts of revenge between three barbaric populations is as well *shameful*” (“Réduire le conflit en Bosnie à des règlements de comptes ‘tribaux’ entre trois peuples sauvages: c’est également une *honte*”; 130). The reflection on historical writing highlights in particular its malleability by pointing out, for example, how historical (re)writings choose whom to qualify as “hero” or “traitor” while furthermore making it possible to rename past “heroes” as “traitors” and vice versa (*Chronique des oubliés* 131). Within such reconstructions, the political, ideological and military concepts of “liberated” and “freedom” acquire in *Chronique des oubliés* a bitter ironic tone, as we can see in the following examples:

“Sacrificing one’s life for the country and freedom” has nothing glorious
or epic about it.^{139, 140} (130)

¹³⁸ “Vouloir croire en la littérature après une guerre, ou pendant qu’elle dure encore, est une forme de *résistance*. [...] Sinon, les victimes innocents, en l’occurrence un peuple tout entier avec sa culture et sa civilisation, seront à jamais à la merci du vainqueur, dans le cas présent l’agresseur. Car il est bien connu que ce sont les vainqueurs qui écrivent l’histoire. *Ne pas écrire contre la guerre qui sévit en Bosnie équivaut à oublier tout un peuple*. Et l’oubli, c’est la mort, dénouée d’espoir.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 12-13)

¹³⁹ “« Donner sa vie pour la patrie et la liberté » n’a rien de glorieux ni d’épique.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 130)

¹⁴⁰ This phrase is repeated in Čolić’s novel *Les Bosniaques: hommes, villes, barbelés* (*The Bosnians: men, cities, barbed wires*), where the text stresses, in capital letters that: “THERE IS NOTHING GLORIOUS ABOUT THE DEATH OF A YOUNG GUY ON THE FRONT, ON ONE SIDE OF IT LIKE ON THE OTHER” (“IL N’Y A RIEN DE GLORIEUX DANS LA MORT D’UN JEUNE GARS AU FRONT, D’UN BORD COMME DE L’AUTRE”); 135).

After the second “liberation” of Modriča, which was also going to be proven temporary, we, the Bosnian troops, entered a completely destroyed city, “liberated” from top to bottom.¹⁴¹

Confronting oblivion and instrumentalization of people’s lives during civil war, *Chronique des oubliés* opposes literature to politics, assigning to it the responsibility of being the moral voice:

Because a book, a good book, this indestructible ‘architecture of the spirit’, lasts much longer than all the absurdities, political or otherwise. It is not in vain that our grand author Meša Selimović has said:

“Write, so that God remembers.

Because it is as if that which is not recorded never happened.”¹⁴² (17)

Quanta, quanta guerra... and *Chronique des oubliés*’s commemorations to the way individuals face multiple facets of loss and death can be seen as an aspiration to create, so to speak, an “architecture of the spirit”. Their collective memories point to the need of speaking about human qualities in the context of mass destruction that violently dehumanizes and pushes toward an apocalyptic end. In this there is an effort to reclaim dignity, to show life, empathy and companionship. Ultimately, there is hope that despite all the death witnessed, life will spring through and regenerate. Both novels speak

¹⁴¹ “Après la seconde « libération » de Modriča, qui allait elle aussi s’avérer provisoire, nous entrâmes, nous, les troupes bosniaques, dans une ville complètement détruite, « libérée » de fond en comble.” (*Chronique des oubliés* 124)

¹⁴² “Car un livre, un bon livre, cette indestructible « architecture de l’esprit », dure bien plus longtemps que toutes les absurdités, politiques ou autres.” Ce n’est pas en vain que notre grand auteur Meša Selimović a dit:

« Écris, afin que Dieu se souvienne.

Car c’est comme si ce qui n’a pas été consigné n’était pas advenu. » (*Chronique des oubliés* 17)

symbolically of the dead being buried in gardens. In *Chronique des oubliés* a man is buried under the shade of a lilac while in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* Eva – who had spoken to Adrià about the need to bury the dead very close to the roots so that they could metamorphose into trees – is as well buried by an old tree filled with birds. After all that the soldier in *Chronique des oubliés* witnesses, he still defends that: “Life continues. The facets of this world are multiple” (“La vie continue. Multiples sont les facettes de ce monde”; 125). The regeneration of life after civil war necessitates the reconstitution of collective companionship. Čolić ends the novel *Les Bosniaques* (*The Bosnians*) with the message that: “the last hope, the last chance consists in reaching out a hand in response to a held out hand, in returning a smile for a smile. It is only then that we could be certain, absolutely sure, to be standing alive again” (“le dernier espoir, la dernière chance consistera à tendre la main en réponse à la main tendue, à rendre sourire pour sourire. Ce n’est qu’alors que nous pourrons être certains, absolument sûrs, de vivre à nouveau debout”; 135-136). The importance of reaffirming companionship is demonstrated in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* when the soldiers/workers coming back from the war help rebuild together, along with Adrià’s help, the bricklayer’s destroyed house. In spite of the tremendous destruction caused by civil war, human compassion can still be found and nurtured, as is pointed out in the hermit’s words to Adrià: “They say there is war, that brothers are killing brothers, but here the God of the grass and of the tree, of the sky and of the clouds, of the water and of the rock, blesses without end the men of tender hearts” (“Diuen que hi ha guerra, que els germans maten els germans, però aquí el Déu de l’herba i de l’arbre, del cel i de la boira, de l’aigua i de la roca, no para de beneir els homes de cor tendre”; 169).

5 A Reflexive Process of Writing About the Past and Recovering Memories of the Civil War: David Albahari's *Mrak*, Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* and Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina*

Physical losses experienced during a civil war, such as those discussed in the last chapter (notably of home, identity, and loved ones), are accompanied by violence which is perpetuated on a symbolic level through the manner in which civil war is represented and commemorated. As was examined in chapter two, the rapid shift from one social order to another during civil war is accompanied by a process of rewriting which, selectively effaces the recent past while constructing a revised vision of a newly reconstructed nation. The rewriting of the nation, by which “the winner keeps the war in their hand” as was already mentioned, brings up the question of memory and history implicated in the way representations of the conflict create interpretations of the past and assign it a certain restricted meaning (Benjamin, “Theories” 123). This vision is often a monolithic one, set upon justifying the newly established power which implements postwar values that lead the nation toward a certain imagined future. The selective erasing implicated in this process invites reflection on that which is sifted out of dominant narratives and on the limits of the possibilities of representing the past.

The construction of memory, notably as a resistance to loss brought on by civil war violence, brings up the question of which memories are being recovered through literature, and how memory is narratively constructed. In the previous chapter, recompilation of short stories and voices of multiple characters united by a

narrator/protagonist was identified as the major narrative strategy adopted to constructing a collective memory. The testimonial memory appeared to be constructed during the soldier's experience of the civil war. This chapter will explore more in-depth mnemonic narrative strategies, examining how memories of experiences during civil war are created retrospectively by a narrator/protagonist looking back on the past. A central aspect to the narrative strategy of writing about the past is not only the memory itself, but the narrator's conscious examination of the process involved in creating the representation. Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (*The Backroom*, 1978), David Albahari's *Mrak* (*Darkness*, 2008) and Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina* (*Soldiers of Salamis*, 2001) are metafictional novels whose representations of the civil war and postwar period reflect on the process of writing about the past. They present an autobiographical narrator/protagonist searching to recover memories of personal experiences during a civil war while actively analyzing how the developing narrative captures this past. The first part of the chapter will be dedicated to a study of Albahari and Martín Gaité's novels, whose self-reflexive narratives present an intimate personal vision of the civil war and postwar experience while questioning the validity of historical writing. The second part of the chapter will examine metafictional narrative strategies in civil war representations by a second generation narrator (who inherits the history of the civil war but does not have direct experience living during that time) through an analysis of Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina*. While Cercas' novel brings up similar narrative aims as Albahari and Martín Gaité's – namely the search for an intimate vision of the past through a self-reflexive text that reveals the limits of historical writing – the construction of a postmemory implicates particular representational challenges.

5.1 Representations of Personal Memories and the Process of Retrospectively Writing About a Civil War

El cuarto de atrás and *Mrak* show a preoccupation for recovering personal memories and reaffirming the subjective agency of an individual within the context of civil war and postwar violence which erases the individual subject under homogeneous packaging that justifies the war and the newly (re)constructed national identity. The novels are self-reflective; they show the narrative construction of the past in its process of development and reveal the narrators' own struggles with shaping memories. Both novels present a writer, the narrator/protagonist, who reflects on and writes about their personal experiences during and after the civil war in their countries. *El cuarto de atrás* is about a female writer named C, who is surprisingly awakened one night around midnight by a mysterious visitor who arrives for an interview. The conversation between the writer and the visitor, revolving around the author's desire to write a unique book of memories, incites a discussion about narrative strategies for writing about the past and provokes the author to embark on a spontaneous reflection of her personal memories (focusing on her childhood during the Spanish Civil War and the postwar period). The writer speaks about her memories of both real events as well as her imagined childhood fantasies, through which she had vicariously lived the longed-for adventures of freedom and self-fulfillment she wasn't granted under general Franco's dictatorship in an impoverished postwar Spain. The long conversation lasting the whole night permits C to uncover forgotten memories as well as to find her own narrative voice and develop a manner of reconstructing the past. Falling asleep as the visitor is preparing to leave, C is awakened the next day and discovers a recently written block of

pages carrying the title “El cuarto de atrás” and whose contents reflect the conversation of the night before.

Mrak similarly has a *mise en abyme* narrative structure through which a work-in-progress memoir is developed within the frame story of a writer reminiscing and writing about the past. An unnamed narrator/protagonist in exile writes from a hotel room in Canada about his personal experiences living as a translator/writer in Zemun (a suburban neighbourhood of Belgrade) in the years leading up to and during the start of the civil war in Yugoslavia. During his stay at the hotel, he is disrupted by a surprise encounter with a past acquaintance from Belgrade (Svetlana) who along with her German partner appear to be after the secret files the protagonist is guarding. The files, given to him by an agent of state security (Davor Miloš) following the protagonist’s attendance at a cultural event at the American embassy in Belgrade in 1985, appear to contain profiles of the attendees and controversial information regarding ideological and political movements leading up to the war, although their exact contents are never revealed. Contained within the narration of the writer’s residency at the hotel – which is marked by a sense of loss, estrangement, and paranoia –, is the material of the book that he is in the process of writing. The book is an autobiographical work, dealing with memories of his personal relationships and events at the outbreak of the conflict which leads to the breakdown of Yugoslavia. In it he reveals the routines of his daily life, including his work as a translator and his ambiguous position in the local writing community. His re-acquaintance at a gallery with former schoolmate and now artist Slavko, gives rise to a series of discussions about art’s capacity to reflect life (which are largely fueled by Slavko’s obsession with form), and to the development of a love affair with Slavko’s partner Metka while the former is away for work and later enlisted in the

army. His personal life is disturbed by the political and military events gaining momentum and he eventually decides to go into exile, traveling through different cities in Europe (Vienna, Amsterdam, London) before finally choosing to move to Canada and put a greater distance between himself and the violent situation in his former country.

Both novels are narrated in the first person by an autobiographical narrator/protagonist retrospectively reflecting on the past as they write about it. While the novels are not autobiographies per se, there are recurring resemblances between the author and narrator/protagonist. Autobiographical elements, frequent in Albahari's work,¹⁴³ draw several parallels between the author and narrator/protagonist in *Mrak*; like the author, he is a translator and writer working in Zemun in the late 1980s and early 1990s who goes into exile in Canada during the civil war in Yugoslavia. In *El cuarto de atrás*, the narrator/protagonist is called by the first initial C (alluding to Carmen), has the same birthday ("I was born during Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, on the 8th of December in 1925"), and like the author grows up in Salamanca ("yo nací en plena Dictadura de Primo de Rivera, el 8 de diciembre de 1925"; 113). The narrator/protagonist also makes numerous intertextual references to her (and the author's) works (such as *The Spa*, *Love in Postwar Spain*, *Behind the Curtains*, and *Slow Rhythm*),¹⁴⁴ reflecting critically on her published novels and those she is still in the process of writing:

¹⁴³ Albahari has stated in various interviews that a majority of his work is partly autobiographical: "Not only the books I wrote after my arrival to Canada but also a great part of other things that I've written are based on my experience.", "It [*Bait*] is also partly an autobiography, as is everything I write" ("Interview" 178; "Ending" 15).

¹⁴⁴ *El balneario* (1957), *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (1981), *Entre visillos* (1957), *Ritmo lento* (1963).

–It’s precisely that year [1953] –I resumed– when I started to write my first novel, the one that I was telling you about before which is quite mysterious [...]

–Which novel? –he says. The one that takes place in the spa?

It seemed to me that there was a certain note of deception in his voice.

–Yes, that one. You don’t think it is mysterious?

–It could have been a good mystery novel, yes –he says slowly–, it started off promising a lot, but then you got afraid, and you still haven’t gotten rid of this fear, what happened?¹⁴⁵ (44-45)

The autobiographical dimension and the narration in the first person are part of the novels’ defense of the subjective individual, an affirmation of the validity and significance of their experience and voice in the face of a historical movement that effaces them. It is in its impact on the subjective individual that the civil war (and postwar period in *El cuarto de atrás*) is presented and history’s capacity of speaking about the past analyzed. Both novels call into question the validity of the construction of dominant official narratives during the civil war and postwar periods (the aggressive political and historical discourses in the case of *Mrak* while in *El cuarto de atrás* the solidification of an unquestionable homogeneous and traditional Spanish identity) which exploit the civil war for political ends while silencing and eradicating the complexities of individual experiences.

¹⁴⁵ “–Precisamente ese año [el año cincuenta y tres] –reanudo –es cuando empecé a escribir mi primera novela, esa que le decía antes que es bastante misteriosa [...]
–¿Qué novela? –dice. ¿Aquella que ocurría en un balneario?
Me parece haber percibido cierta decepción en su voz.
–Sí, ésa. ¿No le parece que tiene misterio?
–Hubiera podido ser una buena novela de misterio, sí –dice lentamente–, empezaba prometiendo mucho, pero luego tuvo usted miedo, un miedo que ya no ha perdido nunca, ¿qué le pasó?” (*El cuarto de atrás* 44-45)

El cuarto de atrás, as well as other works by Carmen Martín Gaité, presents a critique of the propagated dogma of a united, traditional and orthodox Spain implemented during Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1936-1975) after the Spanish Civil War. David Herzberger has argued that the creation of a mythical (if we apply Roland Barthe's conception of myth as a static and historically empty discourse simulating something supposedly "natural")¹⁴⁶ collective Spanish identity during the postwar period constructed a univocal image whose totalitarian function was to coerce and silence (35). Historiography in the first two and a half decades in postwar Spain fabricated a mythic discourse which exalted a static, self-verifying narrative structure that was "epic in scope and heroic in value" (Herzberger 35). It presented the victory of the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War as a Christian crusade which saved Spain from the Republican government's deemed perversion of "true" Spanish values,¹⁴⁷ as can be noted in Franco's following declaration cited and translated by Herzberger: "Our victory was the triumph of Spain against the anti-Spain, the heroic reconquest of the Fatherland that was moving headlong down the path of destruction. Therefore, our victory was and is for all men and for all classes of Spain" ("Nuestra victoria fue el triunfo de España contra la anti-España, la heroica reconquista de una Patria que se precipitaba por la pendiente rápida de su destrucción. Por ello, nuestra victoria fue y es para todos los hombres y las clases de España"; 35). The consequence of the coercive diffusion of such a historical narrative and collective identity is the debilitation of the capacity of people to form their own interpretations; Patricia Grace King has pointed

¹⁴⁶ Refer to Roland Barthe's *Mythologies*.

¹⁴⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the obstruction of historiography in the postwar period and the presentation of the civil war as a religious crusade refer to Paul Preston's "War of words: the Spanish Civil War and the historians" in *Revolution and War in Spain 1931-1939*.

out that “many Spaniards who had come of age during the postwar period were no longer able to trust their ability to interpret history for themselves” (33). In *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (*Love in postwar Spain*), Martín Gaité points out how the triumphal postwar discourse suppressed reflection on the civil war, whose impact was still deeply felt by many, and coerced the population to strive toward an idealized image of a silent, obeying and humble mass:

Prohibited to look back. The war had ended. They censored any commentary that brought to light its trace, which in itself was very apparent, in so many marred families, so many wretched suburbs, devastated towns, prisoners crammed in jails, exile, reprisals and a badly damaged economy. A messianic and triumphal rhetoric, insistent on minimizing the consequences of that catastrophe, rang in hymns to the future. The good ones had won. The country had been redeemed. Now, we all had to collaborate with pride in the task of morally and materially reconstructing it, if we wanted to merit being called Spaniards. And for this task to be effective, the most important thing were savings, of money as well as energy: conserve everything, don't squander, don't show off, don't waste your breath on futile protests or critiques, be reserved, swallow.¹⁴⁸ (13)

¹⁴⁸ “Prohibido mirar hacia atrás. La guerra había terminado. Se censuraba cualquier comentario que pusiera de manifiesto su huella, de por sí bien evidente, en tantas familias mutiladas, tantos suburbios miserables, pueblos arrasados, prisioneros abarrotando las cárceles, exilio, represalias y economía maltrecha. Una retórica mesiánica y triunfal, empeñada en minimizar la secuelas de aquella catástrofe, entonaba himnos al porvenir. Habían vencido los buenos. Había quedado redimido el país. Ahora, en la tarea de reconstruirlo moral y materialmente, teníamos que colaborar con orgullo todos los que quisiéramos merecer el nombre de españoles. Y para que esta tarea fuera eficaz, lo más importante era el ahorro, tanto de dinero como de energías: guardarlo todo, no desperdiciar, no exhibir, no gastar saliva en protesta ni críticas baldías, reservarse, tragar.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 13)

A particular method of silencing discussion on the civil war was to erase the history of the recent past (the political and social changes as well as cultural and artistic movements) while mythically exalting the glory of Spain's distant past. Martín Gaité makes the critique that:

One of the most unwavering orders of Franco's Spain was to cover up the recent past and exalt the distant past. There was no high school student, no matter how limited his dedication, who did not recognize the image and expressions of don Pelayo, Isabella the Catholic or Felipe II, but had no clue about Jovellanos, Campomanes and the generation of 1898, unless they were from a family of certain cultural upbringing.¹⁴⁹ (*Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* 23)

El cuarto de atrás portrays the oppressive force of the coercive discourse of a unified and traditional postwar Spain by openly discussing its impact as well as by demonstrating its effect through the protagonist's struggle with recovering personal memories of the past and finding her own voice. The protagonist describes Franco's dictatorship as "a homogeneous blockage" ("un bloque homogéneo") which paralyzes time to such an extent that it is difficult for C to discern the time of the civil war from the postwar period: "I could only realize what I have already told you, that I am not able to distinguish the passage of time during this period, nor to differentiate the war from the postwar period" ("sólo podía darme cuenta de eso que le he dicho antes, de que no soy capaz de discernir el paso del tiempo a lo largo de ese período, ni diferenciar la

¹⁴⁹ "Enterrar el pasado reciente y exaltar el pasado remoto fue una de las más inquebrantables consignas de la España de Franco. No había estudiante de bachillerato, por escasa que fuera su aplicación, que no conociera las efigies y gestas de don Pelayo, Isabel la Católica o Felipe II, pero de Jovellanos, Campomanes y la generación del 98 podía no tener ni idea, a no ser que perteneciera a una familia de cierta cultura." (*Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* 23)

guerra de la posguerra”; 116).¹⁵⁰ During this paralysis of time, the ubiquitous political ideology silences individual voices and unifies them into a collective mimetic voice:

Franco is the first ruler whom I felt as such in my life, because since the beginning it was obvious that he was the only-begotten one, indisputable and omnipresent, that he had managed to infiltrate all homes, schools, cinemas and cafés, to level out what is surprising and varies, to awaken a religious and uniform fear, to hush all conversations and laughter so that not a single one is heard more than another.¹⁵¹ (115)

The demanded conformity to the implemented postwar vision of Spain silenced discussion about the recent civil war: “Nobody wanted to talk about the cataclysm that had just torn up the country, but the bandaged wounds continued to throb, although no moans nor shots were heard: it was an artificial silence, an emptiness to urgently fill with anything” (“Nadie quería hablar del cataclismo que acababa de desgarrar al país, pero las heridas vendadas seguían latiendo, aunque no se oyeran gemidos ni disparos: era un silencio artificial, un hueco a llenar urgentemente de lo que fuera”; 133). The artificial silence is further pushed along by the propaganda and mythical narratives that glorify a traditional Spanish identity, selectively drawing on past history, particularly that of the Spanish Empire. In reaction to this, C develops a deep suspicion of historical narratives, of their truthfulness, partial portrayals, and bellicose propaganda:

¹⁵⁰ This interconnectedness between the civil war and postwar period reflects Michel Foucault’s idea, already discussed in chapter two, that power established during the postwar period is a continuation of war by other means.

¹⁵¹ “Franco es el primer gobernante que yo he sentido en mi vida como tal, porque desde el principio se notó que era unigénito, indiscutible y omnipresente, que había conseguido infiltrarse en todas las casas, escuelas, cines y cafés, allanar la sorpresa y la variedad, despertar un temor religioso y uniforme, amortiguar las conversaciones y las risas para que ninguna se oyera más alta que otra.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 115)

[A]t that time I loathed history and on top of that I didn't believe in it, I didn't believe in nothing that was written in history books or the newspapers, because of the people who believed in it; I was fed up with hearing the word shot, the word victim, the word tyrant, the word soldiers, the word fatherland, the word history.¹⁵² (50)

[I]n my childhood I looked at the saints in the history book, and neither the glorious events nor the exemplary behaviours seemed trustworthy to me, I was unsettled by the kings who promoted wars, the conquistadores and the heroes, I was suspicious of their arrogant gesture when they stepped onto foreign land.¹⁵³ (85)

Her resentment and disbelief in history is directed to its dogmatic function, which imposes “exemplary behaviours” that she does not admire or identify with, and its war agenda, through which the tiresome repetition of certain words (such as “shot”, “victim”, “tyrant”, “soldiers”, “fatherland”, “history”) is a tool of propaganda that creates a superficial consensus in the population (“the people who believed in it”) with no capacity to transmit a deeper understanding.

Franco's death in 1975 is a moment which “breaks the spell” (as Dunia Gras has described it in her analysis of *El cuarto de atrás*) of the monolithic postwar historiography; it is a turning point when C feels that “time was unfreezing”, that a

¹⁵² “[Y]o entonces aborrecía la historia y además no me la creía, nada de lo que venía en los libros de historia ni en los periódicos me lo creía, la culpa la tenían los que se lo creían, estaba harta de oír la palabra fusilado, la palabra víctima, la palabra tirano, la palabra militares, la palabra patria, la palabra historia.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 50)

¹⁵³ “[M]iraba en mi infancia los santos del libro de historia, ni los acontecimientos gloriosos ni los comportamientos ejemplares me parecían de fiar, me desconcertaban los reyes que promovían guerras, los conquistadores y los héroes, recelaba de su gesto altivo cuando ponían el pie en tierra extraña.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 85)

space was opening up for subjective reinterpretations of the past and the search for repressed memories (“se ha deshecho el maleficio”; Gras par. 23; “el tiempo se desbloqueaba”; *El cuarto de atrás* 119). It is while watching Franco’s funeral broadcast on television news that C feels the desire to go back to her origins, and gets the idea to write a memoir through which she could voice her own impressions of the past. She rejects historiography and its key narrative elements (such as its dependency on deemed facts, dates and chronological events, or as C calls them “the small white stones”, choosing instead to delve into her subjective interior and follow “the little crumbs” of forgotten paths: “At first, I spent several months going to the archives looking up newspaper articles, then I realized that this wasn’t it, that what I wanted to recover was more elusive, it was the little crumbs, and not the small white stones” (“Al principio, me pasé varios meses yendo a la hemeroteca a consultar periódicos, luego comprendí que no era eso, que lo que yo quería rescatar era algo más inaprensible, eran las miguitas, no las piedrecitas blancas”; 120). In this past reached by trails of little crumbs, time is not quantified by dates, but rather qualified by allusions to intimate experiences, for example “the time of lemon ice-cream” and “the pachisi years” (“la época de los helados de limón”; 111; “los años del parchís”; 94). The search for a personal vision, propelled along by the long conversation C has with the mysterious visitor (a nameless man with dark features and dressed in black) is the motor of the narrative, and results in the appearance of the manuscript titled “El cuarto de atrás” at the end of the novel.

While *El cuarto de atrás* critiques the suppression of the individual in a coercive and homogeneous discourse of a postwar dictatorship, *Mrak* focuses on its effacement by a political and cultural elite that stifles voices and rewrites history. Although the politico-social contexts of the two civil wars and postwar periods are different (and

beyond the scope of this thesis), the two novels share a critical reflection of how dominant official narratives during and after a civil war erase recent history, and the individuals inhabiting it, while creating myth based narratives which legitimize the civil war and the newly reconstructed national identities in the postwar period.¹⁵⁴ As in Spain, the civil war and breakdown of Yugoslavia brought on historical revision. Tatjana Aleksić has pointed out that:

It is not an exaggeration to say that ‘the past’ was the common denominator around which the ex-Yugoslav crisis and the subsequent civil wars revolved. The various revisions offered by nationalist-chauvinist forces of Yugoslav constitutive nations were a bone of contention to the people amidst a disastrous economic situation and a power struggle among different nationalist lobbies in the common federation. In the massive abuse of historic discourse, launched from positions of power but soon sweeping the country as an epidemic, the past of each nation was being reinvented and re-imagined in an endless game of placing their roots as far back into antiquity as the popular imagination allowed.

(66)

History appears as a dominant theme of exploration in Albahari’s works after the civil war. In an interview with Tamara Gosta and Tom Toremans, Albahari has stated that: “I consider my novels as descriptions of my own conflict with history. Only when I left Serbia and went to Canada did I decide to write about history. Actually, it was not me who decided this; history decided to use me as one of its voices” (Albahari,

¹⁵⁴ For a more comprehensive study on how the effacement of social memories and the creation of myths during the breakdown of Yugoslavia played a critical role in the legitimization of the civil war and the construction of new national identities see Marko Hajdinjak’s *Yugoslavia-Dismantled and Plundered: The Tragic Senselessness of the War in Yugoslavia and the Myths that Concealed it*.

“Ending” 15). As numerous critics have noted, the civil war forms a visible dividing line in the author’s corpus; his work prior to the 1990s was centered on postmodern experimentations of language, presented through a fragmentary auto-centered narrative, while his work after the war introduced an elaboration on the experience of history, its opposition to the individual and its interplay with identity (Mraović-O’Hare 39; Ribnikar 51; Gordić Petković, “History” 96; Gordić Petković, “Popular” 96). While Albahari’s work can be divided into two phases, this is not to say that there is no continuity between them. Many of the writer’s post 1990s novels continue with his past literary interests, such as his focus on private experiences, transfigurations of identity, metafictional reflection, exploration of language and its (in)ability to communicate. Vladislava Gordić Petković has argued that while the civil war affected his style by making his narrative more traditional and less fragmentary, still “it remains quite a paradox that Albahari actually did include realistic and historical elements into the realm of his literature, without abandoning the minimalism and self-consciousness of his literary style” (“History” 96). She highlights in Albahari’s second phase a quest of language and identity within the context of “historical overdosing”¹⁵⁵ and a “historical tapestry which is difficult to comprehend” (“History” 94, 97; “Popular” 96).

History is presented in Albahari’s novels as a force that transforms and obliterates. Albahari has stated that history works “by destroying and changing everything” (“Ending” 16). In *Mrak*, the threat of historical revision posed by the onset of civil war pushes the narrator/protagonist to take on the difficult role of a guardian of history. Davor Miloš, who entrusts the protagonist with secret documents, says to him prophetically: “In the upcoming time, history will be erased as if it was written with a

¹⁵⁵ This is a reference to Douglas Coupland’s term which defines a period of time when an overwhelming amount of dramatic events occur.

graphic pencil. It is up to you to decide if you want to be the guardian of history. It is not a question of duty and I would be lying if I was to say that I envy you, so I'll understand if you decline" ("U vremenu koje dolazi, istorija će se brisati kao da je pisana grafitnom olovkom. Na vama je da odlučite da li želite da budete čuvar istorije. Nije to pitanja dužnost i lagao bih kad bih rekao da vam zavidim, stoga ću razumeti ako me odbijete"; 94). The process of erasing and falsification brought on by civil war ("In a time when lies and forgery imposed themselves as the only criterion of reality") provokes the protagonist to question what historical truth is and the (limited) extent of his power to unmask dishonest public discourses ("U vremenu u kojem su se laži i falsifikat nametali kao jedino merilo stvarnosti"; 111). He is in particular unsettled by his realization that history is not an enactment of a greater destiny which takes into consideration ordinary man, but a course of events decided upon by a privileged (egotistical) few who hold such a power:

I mean to say that up until tonight I believed that there was a possibility that the documents in my possession are false, that history is a force which occurs beyond us, something akin to the shift between day and night or the transformation from one yearly season to another, and not the result of a deal, or the outcome of a meeting attended by frowning (or joyful) members of a secret brotherhood. Where is God in this? Where is the gentleness and goodness of the world? Where is the ordinary man? In one stroke (if a fellatio could be called as such) all of that had been erased.¹⁵⁶ (103)

¹⁵⁶ "Hoću da kažem da sam sve do večeras verovao da postoji mogućnost da su dokumenti u mom posedu lažni, da je istorija sila koja se događa izvan nas, nešto kao smena dana i noći ili preobražaj jednog godišnjeg doba u drugo, a ne rezultat dogovora, posledica sastanka kojem su prisustovali namrgođeni (ili razdragani) članovi tajnog

Mrak, and other novels by Albahari, show a deep concern with the obliteration of the ordinary man's personal experience under the pressures of history (controlled by an elite). Analyzing Albahari's novel *Mamac* (*Bait*, 1996), Tatjana Aleksić notes the narrator's necessity to "recreate as much as possible of the history that belongs to him personally, to make it recognizable to and acknowledged by the present, and to be able to safely deposit it" (57). By measuring history through personal losses rather than recorded events that shaped it, the narrative makes a claim for the individual right to remember (Aleksić 61). Vladislava Gordić Petković has also pointed out how Albahari presents history through subjective intimate impressions, including personal memories and life experiences ("History" 95). In *Mrak*, historical events are presented from the viewpoint of a limited subjective experience of them. The focus of the narration is on the protagonist's recovery of his personal memories through the process of writing, rather than the historical events themselves, which remain vague and incomprehensible. Hence, the build up towards the start of civil war, and the politics revolving around it, is described as a "situation in our country" ("situacija u našoj zemlji") which is far from clear and which arouses strong feelings of uneasiness, anxiety and fear (66):

In June, after the announcement of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, I wrote in my journal that everything was, finally, clear. Nothing was clear; nothing happened. Not then nor after the attack on the police station in Glina. The first of July the chief of police in Osijek was killed, and while I bit my nails

bratstva. Gde je tu Bog? Gde su nežnost i dobrota sveta? Gde je običan čovek? Jednim potezom (ako se felacio može tako nazvati) sve je to bilo izbrisano." (*Mrak* 103)

on the sidewalk in front of the house where I lived, I was reassuring myself that Davor Miloš had nonetheless forgotten me.¹⁵⁷ (105)

Unable to understand, or to pinpoint what precisely this “situation” entails, the protagonist is left with a series of impressions of his subjective experience of it, which center around the sensation that everything is falling apart: “Everything around us was indeed falling apart” (“Sve se oko nas doista raspadalo”; 38). The search for a way to express the subjective experience during the start of civil war gives rise to a set of metaphorical comparisons and to an enumeration of different words grasping to evoke the significance of the “situation”:

That year [1990], then had stretched itself out like a harmonica, while the next year I do not know what to compare to. Everything in it sped up, stirred up, vexedly, thus there are countless possible comparisons. A vortex, for example, and everything associated with it, a whirlwind or a maelstrom. Then a dance; a dance of death, of course. A black hole, likewise, with all that vacuuming and vanishment. And, a shattered pomegranate. An abyss, a sinkhole, a precipice, a ditch, a gulf. Different words, each in its own way saying the same: we were precipitating into war, we were disappearing, we were becoming nonexistent people. I could say it this way as well: night only brought an announcement of the terrible inevitability of day, anxiety about that which could still occur during daytime; the day itself was an attenuated hope, a spasmodic attempt to keep the

¹⁵⁷ “U junu, posle proglašenja nezavisnosti Slovenije i Hrvatske, upisao sam u dnevnik da je sve, napokon, jasno. Ništa nije bilo jasno; ništa se nije desilo. Ni tada ni posle napada na stanicu milicije u Glini. Prvog jula ubijen je načelnik milicije u Osijeku, i dok sam grizao nokte na trotoaru ispred kuće u kojoj sam živeo, uveravao sam sebe da me je Davor Miloš ipak zaboravio.” (*Mrak* 105)

body and soul together, a miserable substitution for the reality which was leaking like sand through a fist.¹⁵⁸ (82-83)

The images evoke a sudden catastrophic disappearance of individuals struggling to keep their lives intact and, more generally, the dissolution of a reality, the world as they had known it breaking up (“like a shattered pomegranate”) and slipping away (“like sand through a fist”). Related to this series of images portraying civil war is the image of darkness, after which the novel is titled and which is associated with death,¹⁵⁹ a loss of a

¹⁵⁸ “Ta se godina [1990], dakle rastezala kao harmonika, a narednu ne znam sa čime da poredim. Sve se u njoj ubrzalo, uskovitalo, uzvitlalo, tako da su moguća bezbrojna poređenja. Vrtlog, na primer, i sve što uz to ide, kovitlac ili vir. Onda, kolo; kolo smrti, naravno. Crna rupa, takođe, sa svim onim usisavanjem i nestajanjem. Pa, raspukli nar. Ponor, vrtača, provalija, jarak, bezdan. Različite reči, a svaka na svoj način govori isto: strmoglavljivali smo se u rat, nestajali smo, postajali smo nepostojeći ljudi. Mogao bih to i ovako da kažem: noć je jedino donosila najavu strahovite neminovnosti dana, strepnju od onoga što se u tom danu tek moglo da dogodi; sâm dan bio je istanjena nada, grčeviti pokušaj da telo i duh ostanu na okupu, bedna zamena za stvarnost koja je curila kao pesak iz šake.” (*Mrak* 82-83)

¹⁵⁹ The association of darkness with blood, death and murder first appears in the novel through Slavko’s story about his attendance at an art exhibition titled “Mrak” (“Darkness”) during his trip to Amsterdam, which foreshadows his subsequent untold experience fighting in the war, gruesome murder of Metka and suicide. In the exhibition, after first passing through a well lit room, Slavko enters a completely dark room where he feels objects he comes across, staying in it for an indeterminate amount of time “because time loses meaning in darkness” (“jer je u mraku vreme gubilo smislo”; 77). Upon entering a third room with lighting, Slavko is shaken to discover his hands tainted with blood:

While squatting in the dark, Slavko was convinced that he had touched biscuits, a deflated floating tube and a moist sponge. When he entered the last room, he saw that his hands were covered in blood. First he stared at them for a long time, then he tried to wipe it off. He wasn’t able to. He shoved his hands in his pockets, and left that way (like an adolescent who wants to scratch his balls, Slavko said). He walked down the streets and felt how warmth was spreading from his pockets. If he wanted to, he could have flown, he could have done anything, even though nothing came to his mind, but he knew that nothing, *nothing*, would ever be like before again. (78)

Slavko je, dok je čučao u mraku, bio uveren da je napipao dvopek, izduvani šlauf i vlažnu spužvu. Kada se našao u poslednjoj prostoriji, video je da su mu ruke pokrivene krvlju. Prvo je dugo piljio u njih, onda je pokušao da ih obriše. Nije uspeo. Gurnuo je ruke u džepove, i tako izašao (kao pubertetlija koji hoće

sense of time, emptiness and an end: “Instead of the word ‘evening’ read ‘darkness is coming’. [...] One doesn’t live expecting morning and the uncertainty of day, but in the repetition of the emptiness of night. In darkness” (“Umesto reči ‘veče’, čitaj ‘dolazi mrak’. [...] Ne živi se u očekivanju jutra i neizvesnosti dana, nego u ponavljanju ispraznosti noći. U mraku”; 170).

The disappearance of a certain upheld reality is set in motion by the loss of a history, a country, and an identity. The protagonist comes to realize (when he comes home one day to discover his apartment had been broken into, his personal space invaded and dishevelled) that the life he had until then known is forever lost, despite his best efforts to maintain normalcy and ignore the political events going on:

That night, in that disorderly apartment, I suddenly realized that, even if I bring everything back to the way it was organized, it will no longer be my apartment, *that* apartment, in the same way that this misfortuned country was no longer *that* country, my country, nor would it be so even if in that moment everything stopped and peace reigned. [...] The former simple life – waking up, running by the river, translating, moderate meals, listening to records – now seemed

da češka jaja, rekao je Slovako). Hodao je ulicama i osećao kako se iz džepova širi toplina. Da je hteo, mogao je da poleti, mogao je da uradi bilo šta, iako mu ništa nije padalo na pamet, ali znao je da više ništa, *ništa*, neće biti kao pre. (78)

This imagery is reiterated and the art-life dynamic inverted later in the novel when the protagonist remembers the exhibition and compares it, with a touch of irony, to the dramatic civil war violence: “although, I wouldn’t actually be surprised if right now the walls [of the museum] were of soft pastel colors and if on them hung portraits of the destruction of Vukovar and Dubrovnik. It is the same type of artwork, the same darkness, the same blood, just the space, over there in our homeland, was a little bigger” (“premda me, u stvari, ne bi iznenadilo da [muzej] sada ima zidove mekih pastelnih boja i da na njima vise slike razaranja Vukovara i Dubrovnika. Ista je to vrsta umetničkog dela, isti je to mrak, ista krv, samo je prostor, tamo kod nas, bio malo veći”; 149).

hopelessly out of reach, like a dream which vanishes ever more so as the morning advances.¹⁶⁰ (123-124)

The loss of a way of life and the radical transformation of lives brought on by civil war, as well as the postwar period, is a marking feature in *El cuarto de atrás*. The civil war is presented from the point of view of a child who doesn't understand what is going on and who observes the behaviour of others, the changes expected in her conduct and the transformations of everyday life. Being a child during the civil war, C interprets the political shifts of the time and the survival tactics during war as a game.¹⁶¹

At that time I wasn't [afraid] either, because I didn't understand anything, everything that was going on seemed so unreal to me. Going to the bomb shelter? Well, it was another game, one invented by the adults, but the rules were simple: as soon as you hear the siren, you run. Why? Nobody knew, or asked themselves, it didn't matter, everybody complied without questions to the established rules of the game.¹⁶² (55)

While young C shows bravery, the game is quickly revealed to be a dangerous one since those that don't abide by its rules lose their lives. C nonetheless maintains her

¹⁶⁰ “Te noći, u tom razvašarenom stanu, odjednom sam uvideo da, čak i ako dovedem sve stvari u pređašnji red, to više neće biti moj stan, *onaj* stan, kao što ta nesrećna zemlja više nije bila *ona* zemlja, moja zemlja, niti bi to bila čak i kada bi tog časa sve prestalo i u njoj zavladao mir. [...] Nekadašnja jednostavnost života – ustajanje, trčanje pored reke, prevođenje, umereni obroci, slušanje ploča– sada je delovala beznadežno nedostižno, poput sna koji sve više nestaje kako jutro odmiče.” (*Mrak* 123-124)

¹⁶¹ Young C sees politics as a game played by adults – “politics were a game of chance combinations, like solitaire, or an innocuous riddle” – which becomes in the postwar period something dangerous and oppressive (“la política era un juego de combinaciones azarosas, como los solitarios, un acertijo inocuo”; 114).

¹⁶² “Yo entonces tampoco [tenía miedo], porque no entendía nada, todo lo que estaba ocurriendo me parecía tan irreal. ¿Ir al refugio?, pues bueno, era un juego más, un juego inventado por los mayores, pero de reglas fáciles: en cuanto se oyera la sirena, echar a correr. ¿Por qué?, eso no se sabía, ni se preguntaba, daba igual, todo el mundo obedecía sin más a lo establecido por el juego.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 55)

fearlessness, although she conforms to the rules, expressing her rebellious spirit only through imagination. Remembering her childhood during the civil war, C remarks how the sensations of fear and cold dominated adult discussions – which she cites by grouping their voices together under the collective “everybody” (“todos”) –, leading to limitations on freedom of speech and movement:

I never felt fear nor cold, which are for me the two most emblematic sensations of those years: fear and cold sticking to the body – « don’t talk about this », « be careful with that », « don’t go out now », « pull your scarf up higher », « don’t tell that they killed uncle Joaquín », « three degrees below zero » –, everybody was fearful, everybody talked about the cold; they were particularly merciless and long winters, those of the war, snow, ice and frost.¹⁶³ (53)

Despite her efforts to not be affected by the oppressive atmosphere, the civil war and postwar period disrupt C’s life, particularly degrading her sense of freedom to express herself, follow her desires, and live according to her authentic self. During the civil war this is best illustrated by the transformation of the backroom. This room in her childhood home in Salamanca was an idyllic space where she played and learned to read. Metaphorically it signified a space of freedom since it was the children’s room unconstrained by any rules that could restrict play, exploration and self development:

¹⁶³ “[N]unca tenía miedo ni tenía frío, que son para mí las dos sensaciones más envolventes de aquellos años: el miedo y el frío pegándose al cuerpo – « no habléis de esto », « tened cuidado con aquello », « no salgáis ahora », « súbete más la bufanda », « no contéis que han matado al tío Joaquín », « tres grados bajo cero » –, todos tenían miedo, todos hablaban del frío; fueron unos inviernos particularmente inclementes y largos aquellos de la guerra, nieve, hielo, escarcha.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 53)

It was very big and in it *reigned disorder and freedom*,¹⁶⁴ it was permitted to sing at the top of your lungs, to rearrange the furniture, to jump on top of a rickety sofa that had broken springs and which we called the poor sofa, to lay down on the rug, to stain it with ink, it was a kingdom *where nothing was prohibited*. Until the war, we studied and played there completely at our own will, there was plenty of play. And nobody had questioned that playfulness, nor

¹⁶⁴ Disorder is closely associated with freedom and rebellion in *El cuarto de atrás*, and Martín Gaité's works in general. For example, Carmiña Palerm's analysis of political allegories in *El cuarto de atrás* argues that the dichotomy order-disorder, a central theme in the novel, alludes to the totalitarian order of Franco's regime while the positive valuation of disorder points to the protagonist's desire for an anarchic utopia (124-128). In *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española (Love in Postwar Spain)* Martín Gaité analyzes how the postwar ideology that exalted the values of order and organization, in opposition to a feared anarchy, was above all imposed upon the domestic space and female roles:

However they knew since being young girls that there were no evils more threatening to the good health of a society than those which built up in a disorganised household. And to organize it was the indisputable responsibility of women. By means of this prerogative, they received the keys to their realm. But the most intriguing thing [...] was that this female competency or incompetency had to be demonstrated not only through the ability to manage exterior disorder but also the interior one, that is, to tame her own moods and dissatisfactions. (118)

En cambio sabían desde niñas que no había males más temibles para la buena salud de la sociedad que los que se incuban en un hogar desorganizado. Y organizarlo era competencia indiscutible de la mujer. Mediante esta prerrogativa, recibía ella las llaves de su reino. Pero lo más curioso [...] es que aquella competencia o incompetencia femenina había que demostrarla no sólo a través de las capacidades para gobernar el desorden exterior sino también el interior, o sea la doma de los propios humores y descontentos. (118)

In response to this dogma, Martín Gaité's female heroines often express their desire for freedom by valuing disorder and showing disdain for obligatory routines; for example C comments that: "I dreamed of living in a loft where clothes were never hanged and books were all over the floor, where nobody chased after flakes of dust that floated in the beams of light, where one only ate when hunger was felt, without any further ceremony" ("Yo soñaba con vivir en una buhardilla donde siempre estuvieran los trajes sin colgar y los libros por el suelo, donde nadie persiguiera a los copos de polvo que viajaban en los rayos de luz, donde sólo se comiera cuando apretara el hambre, sin más ceremonias"; 78).

was it subject to some determined rules of use: the backroom was *ours* and it came to an end.¹⁶⁵ (161-162; emphasis mine)

During the civil war, the backroom is “invaded” with foreign objects as it becomes transformed into a pantry with a strictly imposed order. For the children, the appropriation of the backroom signifies a loss of freedom and innocence to a new bellicose world defined by the necessities of basic survival and growing tensions:¹⁶⁶

– And things changed during the war?

Yes. There is like a dividing line, which started to be marked in the year 1936, between childhood and growing up. The depreciation of the backroom and its progressive transformation into a pantry was one of the first changes that occurred in this latter part of that dividing line.

– It was turned into a pantry?

– Yes, but not right away. First of all, it should be mentioned that there was a large brown cupboard in the backroom; we kept diverse objects there, among which could appear, at times, a plug or a spoon, which they would come

¹⁶⁵ “Era muy grande y en él *reinaba el desorden y la libertad*, se permitía cantar a voz en cuello, cambiar de sitio los muebles, saltar encima de un sofá desvencijado y con los muelles rotos al que llamábamos el pobre sofá, tumbarse en la alfombra, mancharla de tinta, era un reino *donde nada estaba prohibido*. Hasta la guerra, habíamos estudiado y jugado allí totalmente a nuestras anchas, había holgura de sobra. Pero aquella holgura no nos la había discutido nadie, ni estaba sometida a unas leyes determinadas de aprovechamiento: el cuarto de atrás *era nuestro* y se acabó.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 161-162; emphasis mine)

¹⁶⁶ The sudden reduction of quality of life to basic survival is also noted in C’s memory of the dominance of certain vocabulary during the civil war: “to amortize, to confiscate, to ration, to hoard, to camouflage and other similar verbs which, overnight, were on everyone’s lips and it was impossible to ignore them. I also repeated them, although I didn’t fully understand their meaning, I understood the essential, that they were about necessity and contrary to pleasure” (“amortizar, requisar, racionar, acaparar, camuflar y otros verbos semejantes que, de noche a la mañana, andaban en boca de todo el mundo y era imposible ignorarlos, yo también los decía, aunque no entendiera del todo su significado; entendía lo fundamental, que tenían que ver con la necesidad y se oponían al placer”; 159).

searching for from the other rooms of the house, but this was exceptional and didn't contradict our possession of the piece of furniture, it was entirely ours, it was our dresser for miscellaneous things and toys [...] And, nonetheless, its function as a dresser constituted the first invoked excuse for the invasion. When they started hoarding items of basic necessity, my mother cleared two shelves and started putting on them packages of rice, soap and chocolate, which didn't fit in the kitchen. And then the conflicts started, first about the organization of various items which were left with no safe guarding place, and then about the coercion of freedom, because in the most inopportune moment, somebody could come in the house, such as Pedro at his shameless discretion, and on top of it all protest if the path to the cupboard was not clean and cleared enough.¹⁶⁷ (162)

The backroom comes to represent for C the long lost childhood that was altered by the civil war, and whose memories were then suppressed during the postwar period. In addition to being a real physical space that once existed, the backroom also signifies

¹⁶⁷ “– ¿Y con la guerra cambiaron las cosas?

– Sí, hay como una línea divisora, que empezó a marcarse en el año treinta y seis, entre la infancia y el crecimiento. La amortización del cuarto de atrás y su progresiva transformación en despensa fue uno de los primeros cambios que se produjeron en la parte de acá de aquella raya.

– ¿Se convirtió en despensa?

– Sí, pero no de repente. Antes de nada, hay que decir que en el cuarto de atrás, había un aparador grande de castaño; guardábamos allí objetos heterogéneos, entre los que podía aparecer, a veces, un enchufe o una cuchara, que venían a buscar desde las otras dependencias de la casa, pero esa excepción no contradecía nuestra posesión del mueble, disponíamos enteramente de él, era armario de trastos y juguetes [...] Y, sin embargo, su esencia de aparador constituyó el primer pretexto invocado para la invasión. Cuando empezaron los acaparamientos de artículos de primera necesidad, mi madre desalojó dos estantes y empezó a meter en ellos paquetes de arroz, jabón y chocolate, que no le cabían en la cocina. Y empezaron los conflictos, primero de ordenación para las cosas diversas que se habían quedado sin guarida, y luego de coacción de libertad, porque en el momento más inoportuno, podía entrar alguien, como Pedro por su casa, y encima protestar si el camino hacia el aparador no estaba lo bastante limpio y expedito.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 162)

an interior abstract space, the hidden “backroom” of the mind, where repressed memories are put away behind a figurative “curtain”:

I imagine it also as a garret, a sort of secret enclosure full of blurry things, separated from the cleanest and most organized entrance halls of the mind by a curtain which is only sometimes drawn back; the memories which can surprise us live huddled in the backroom, they always come from there, and only when they wish to, it's useless to pester them.¹⁶⁸ (80-81)

It is these hidden and blurry memories, having an apparent life and possessing a will of their own, that interest C the most. Her memoir, and the novel itself titled *The backroom*, is precisely about recovering the intimate memories stored in this enigmatic and polysemic space. The challenge then becomes how to make these memories re-emerge and how to represent them in the form of a narrative.

Through a *mise en abyme* structure, *El cuarto de atrás* and *Mrak* show the full process, from beginning to end, of the construction of a novel about non-avowed personal experiences during a civil war and postwar period. They reveal the protagonists' idea and initial steps taken in commencing to write, the difficulties they face writing, and their manner in overcoming them. The protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás* discusses her desire to write a memoir, which by the end of the novel appears completed in the form of a block of papers,¹⁶⁹ while *Mrak* begins with the narrator

¹⁶⁸ “[M]e lo imagino también como un desván, una especie de recinto secreto lleno de trastos borrosos, separado de las antecámaras más limpias y ordenadas de la mente por una cortina que sólo se descorre de vez en cuando; los recuerdos que pueden darnos alguna sorpresa viven agazapados en el cuarto de atrás, siempre salen de allí, y sólo cuando quieren, no sirve hostigarlos.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 80-81)

¹⁶⁹ C's discovery of the block of papers titled “El cuarto de atrás” at the end gives the novel a *mise en abyme* and circular structure since the block of papers contains exactly the same number of pages and begins with the same lines as the novel:

stating that he has just started writing a book in his hotel room (“I bought the pencil and paper yesterday”) and ends with its completion (“It is time for me to bring this book to an end”) (“Olovku i papir kupio sam juče”; 9, “Vreme je da privedem knjigu kraju”; 166).

Having decided to write about their personal past, the protagonists face numerous challenges with communicating their experiences. They are critical of their own writing skills and unsure about their ability to adequately portray the past through narrative. In *El cuarto de atrás*, C’s idea about writing a memoir is initially blocked by the thoughts she has about the significance of her own subjective interpretation of a past that has already been extensively written about:¹⁷⁰ “I froze, all of the other people’s

In the place where I kept Todorov’s book is now a block of one hundred and eighty two numbered papers. On the first page, there is written “The backroom” in majuscule letters and in black marker. I pick it up and start reading:

“...And nonetheless, I would have sworn that the posture was the same, I think that I have always slept this way, with the right arm under the pillow and the body slightly leaning on that flank, the legs searching for the juncture where the sheets are tucked...” (181)

El sitio donde tenía el libro de Todorov está ocupado ahora por un bloque de folios numerados, ciento ochenta y dos. En el primero, en mayúsculas y con rotulador negro, está escrito « El cuarto de atrás ». Lo levanto y empiezo a leer:

«...Y sin embargo, yo juraría que la postura era la misma, creo que siempre he dormido así, con el brazo derecho debajo de la almohada y el cuerpo levemente apoyado contra ese flanco, las piernas buscando la juntura por donde se remete la sábana...» (181)

¹⁷⁰ The author’s need to defend her own interpretation of the past appears as well in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (*Love in Postwar Spain*). The reason Martín Gaité gives to defend writing on a topic that has already extensively been covered is that there is always another way of viewing, of writing about the past, which can deepen our understanding of it:

Existing, as there already exist, so many sociological and economical studies, literary chronicles, analyses, memoirs and novels on the topic of the immediate postwar period, the reader might ask themselves what motivates me, at this point in the decade of the 80s, to delve into such a heavily covered subject on which everything appears to be said. And however, nobody who undertakes a project, in spite of such reflections, can stop thinking that what he is going to say has not

memoirs made me freeze. Since Franco's death, it has been observed how memoirs are proliferating, it's already become annoying, and deep down, this is what has been discouraging me, thinking that if I'm bored by other people's memoirs, why wouldn't mine bore them" ("Se me enfrió, me lo enfriaron las memorias ajenas. Desde la muerte de Franco habrá notado cómo proliferan los libros de memorias, ya es una peste, en el fondo, eso es lo que me ha venido desanimando, pensar que, si a mí me aburren las memorias de los demás, porqué no le van a aburrir a los demás las mías"; 111).

In addition to doubting the impact of her individual voice, she shows insecurity about the quality of her writing and the clarity of her storytelling, frequently interrupting her narration with critical thoughts, such as: "But I am telling you the story terribly, the novel was after Bergai, I'm getting lost..." ("Pero se lo estoy contando muy mal, la novela fue posterior a Bergai, me pierdo..."; 158). She shows a high level of aspiration for telling the story well: "I interrupt myself, I've come to the most important point, I have to tell this part well" ("Me interrumpo, he tocado el punto más importante, esto sí tendría que contarle bien"; 160).

The protagonist in *Mrak* similarly shows self-doubts and uncertainty about writing a novel. *Mrak* begins and ends with the protagonist's confession that he had never before thought he would actually write a book:

already been said, *simply because nobody has said it that way, from that point of view*. (*Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* 15; emphasis mine)

Existiendo, como ya existen ahora, tantos estudios sociológicos y económicos, crónicas literarias, análisis, libros de memorias y novelas sobre el tema de la inmediata postguerra, se preguntará el lector que qué me mueve a mí, a estas alturas de la década de los ochenta, a hurgar en un asunto tan manoseado y sobre el que todo parece estar dicho. Y sin embargo, nadie que emprende un trabajo, a despacho de tales reflexiones, puede dejar de pensar que lo que él va a decir no está dicho todavía, *simplemente porque nadie lo ha dicho de esa manera, desde ese punto de vista*. (*Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* 15; emphasis mine)

I never thought that I would write a book. Even now I am not sure that I am actually writing one, not only because I have no idea about how books are written, but also because in no moment can I fully devote my attention to the words that I am shaping with a pen on a fresh piece of paper.¹⁷¹ (9)

I then thought about the book. Never before did it occur to me to attempt such a challenge. I was a translator and an unreliable interpreter of others' texts, but if somebody had told me that I would write a book, I would have laughed in their face.¹⁷² (169)

Like C, he also openly reveals to the reader criticisms about his writing,¹⁷³ finally coming to terms with it by accepting that he has done his best and by maintaining hope in the possibility of storytelling:

All in all, it's one exemplary story which, like the majority of the stories in this book, I've badly told. No, it's not good to speak this way, with such a weight of

¹⁷¹ "Nikad nisam pomišljao da ću napisati knjigu. Ne znam ni sada da li je doista pišem, ne samo zbog toga što nemam nikakvu predstavu o tome kako se knjige pišu, već i zbog toga što nijednog trenutka ne mogu u potpunosti da se posvetim rečima koje uobličavam hemijskom olovkom na svežnju listova papira." (*Mrak* 9)

¹⁷² "Tada sam pomislio na knjigu. Nikada mi pre toga nije padalo na pamet da se upustim u takav pokušaj. Bio sam prevodilac i nepouzdan tumač tuđih tekstova, ali da mi je neko rekao da ću napisati knjigu, nasmejao bih mu se u lice." (*Mrak* 169)

¹⁷³ The self-conscious narrator who has difficulties constructing a story recurs in Albahari's works. For example, he has stated that:

My narrators are just not certain at all what it is they want to say. They have a story, but the story is two steps away from them, and then when they reach the story, it again eludes them and moves two steps ahead, or it moves behind them. And then they have to go back and repeat everything and try again. The story keeps moving forward and backward. ("Ending" 15)

However, despite the narrator's struggles with writing and communicating, a strong necessity to share his story pushes him to formulate one. For example, Tatjana Aleksić's analysis of the tension between silence and speaking in Albahari's novel *Mamac (Bait)* points out how the narrator "feels an inexplicable urge to write although, as he keeps reiterating, he is not a writer and cannot write" (61).

negative meaning and a loss of faith in oneself, because this record could, after all, reach the hands of a young and inexperienced person, more vulnerable to influence than they would like to be. Therefore, that exemplary story, like the majority of the stories in this book, I've told to the best of my ability. It's better this way, much better, because I am leaving room for hope that stories, even this one, can nonetheless be told.¹⁷⁴ (167-168)

The difficulty the narrators/protagonists have in constructing their portrayals of the past implicates their search for the right words, which ultimately are limited in their ability to express a no longer existing reality.¹⁷⁵ Words appear vague and approximate, never capable of fully embodying the past reality and slipping away from the writer's grasp. C speaks about how the words dance away from sight ("the words dance and move away from me, it's like obsessing over reading small letters without glasses"), becoming particularly hard to pinpoint at night ("I have said « desire and fear » to say something, feeling about blindly, and when you shoot like this, you never hit bulls eye; words are for daylight, at night they flee, although the passion for the pursuit is more feverish and compulsive in the dark, but also, because of this, more futile") ("las palabras bailan y se me alejan, es como empeñarse en leer sin gafas la letra menuda"; 12-13, "He dicho « anhelo y temor » por decir algo, tanteando a ciegas, y cuando se

¹⁷⁴ "Sve u svemu, jedna poučna priča koju sam, poput većine priča u ovoj knjizi, loše ispričao. Ne, nije dobro tako da govorim, sa tolikom merom negativnog značenja i gubitka vere u sebe, jer ovaj zapis, na kraju krajeva, može da dospe u ruke mlade i neveste osobe, podložne uticajima više nego što bi sama htela. Dakle, tu poučnu priču, poput većine priča u ovoj knjizi, ispričao sam najbolje što sam umeo. Tako je bolje, mnogo bolje, jer ostavljam prostor za nadu da se priče, pa i ova, ipak mogu ispričati." (*Mrak* 167-168)

¹⁷⁵ The distance between the past and the present time of writing in *El cuarto de atrás* includes multiple decades between C's present and the civil war and immediate postwar period. In *Mrak* the temporal distance is less pronounced (about a decade) although there is a significant geographical distance as the protagonist writes from Canada about his previous life in Serbia.

dispara así, nunca se da en el blanco; las palabras son para la luz, de noche se fugan, aunque el ardor de la persecución sea más febril y compulsivo a oscuras, pero también, por eso, más baldío”; 12). The protagonist in *Mrak* loses the sight, sound and weight of words as they disappear into silence and emptiness:

I’ve learned something else: that a vision is essential for writing, and this, quite surely, I did not have. I was sitting in front of a cloudy haze, that was all there was, and I could only observe how it vanishes, how the letters disappear and leave me empty, in silence, in nothingness. There is no vision which can fight the sad inheritance of the “swift forgetting and selective remembering” (as I read in one study on the post-totalitarian period in former Eastern Europe), or respectively, as my father once said, I’ve come upon the truth but I haven’t become any smarter.¹⁷⁶ (160-161)

The protagonists of the two novels face these writing challenges by openly acknowledging the impreciseness of language and by accepting that only approximate representations can be made of a world characterized by multiplicity and transformation. In *Mrak*, the civil war reveals to the protagonist the unstable nature of a reality easily susceptible to drastic change. He himself is transfigured by the violently shifting surroundings and acquires another identity in exile.¹⁷⁷ This instability of the

¹⁷⁶ “Naučio sam još nešto: da je za pisanje neophodna vizija, a to, sasvim sigurno, nisam imao. Sedeo sam pred oblačkom pare, to je bilo sve, i mogao sam jedino da posmatram kako on iščezava, kako slova nestaju i ostavljaju me u praznini, u tišini, u ničemu. Nema te vizije koja može da se bori sa tužnim nasleđem « brzog zaborava i selektivnog pamćenja » (kako sam pročitao u jednoj studiji o posttotalitarnom periodu u nekadašnjoj Istočnoj Evropi), odnosno, kako je jednom rekao moj otac, došao sam do istine ali nisam postao nimalo pametniji.” (*Mrak* 160-161)

¹⁷⁷ The protagonist reveals, on the one hand, an appreciation for the second life, and the possibility of multiple existences, while on the other hand, mourns for the symbolical death of his original (prewar) life which appears to be the one real existence:

surrounding world is incorporated into the protagonist's writing and vision of literature. When the protagonist's friend Slavko insistently seeks his help through repeated conversations about Slavko's obsessive search for a way to make art directly access reality without altering it, the protagonist expresses doubt rather than providing solutions, questioning not only the possibility of authenticity of a given representation, but also, the assumed singularity of reality, saying for example: "My assertion that we first have to define reality, so that we could then find a way how to express it artistically, didn't help" ("Nije pomogla ni moja tvrdnja da prvo moramo da definišemo stvarnost, da bismo kasnije mogli da pronađemo način kako da je umetnički izrazimo"; 45). For the protagonist, the "real truth" ("*prava istina*") that Slavko is pursuing is futile since reality is not uniform; it changes, for example, according to point of view (64): "I have in mind the fact that the past is constantly changing, that it is continuously showing its different faces, and that each step we take to distance ourselves from it makes us see it from a new angle, like never before" ("Imam na umu i činjenicu da se prošlost neprekidno menja, da stalno pokazuje svoja različita lica, te da svaki korak

I am very worried about my life, but not in that way in which worry implies fear about the end of life, hence, death. My life, the one which I believed to be my true life, ended long ago. This doesn't mean, of course, that I wish for death. The end of one life means the beginning of another, and each life is precious, the second one perhaps a little less than the first, the third – if something like this is possible – even less than the second, but the sense of endearment remains, not as a convulsive adherence to the edge of a precipice under which gapes an abyss, but as a state of awe before a world in which it is possible to really exist only once. (11-12)

Ja dosta strepim za svoj život, ali ne na onaj način koji pod strepnjom podrazumeva strah od okončanaj života, dakle, smrt. Moj život, onaj koji sam smatrao svojim pravim životom, odavno je okončan. To ne znači, dakako, da žudim za smrću. Okončati jedan život znači započeti drugi, a svaki život je dragocen, drugi možda malo manje od prvog, treći – ako je tako nešto moguće – još manje od drugog, ali osećaj dragocenosti ostaje, ne kao grčevito prijanjanje uz rub litice ispod koje zjapi ponor, već kao stanje zadivljenosti pred svetom u kojem se samo jednom može doista postojati. (11-12)

kojim se od nje udaljavamo čini da je vidimo iz novog ugla, kao nikada ranije”; 53). Given the instability of the past, writing for the protagonist is only a partial approximation: “Writing is anyways just an attempt to shape the most probable construction of the world among all the possibilities” (“Pisanje je ionako samo pokušaj da se od svih mogućih uobliča najverovatnija konstrukcija sveta”; 121).¹⁷⁸

El cuarto de atrás likewise regards the past as being multifaceted and ambiguous. The protagonist points out the underlying ambiguity, plurality of points of view and transformative characteristic of reality by incorporating into a historical narration the fantastical genre, which embraces uncertainty and destabilizes accepted rules shaping reality. The protagonist’s admiration for certain classical works (such as Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*),¹⁷⁹ along with the mysterious visitor’s

¹⁷⁸ This ties in with Albahari’s literary interest in the limits of language, in what he says is “my obsession about the impossibility of language to convey what we really want to say” (“Ending” 15). He maintains a disbelief in the perception that the exterior reality is definite and questions language’s capacity to fully express the complexities of the world:

The world should be definite, because [we think that] language is definite too, but the world, in fact, is not definite and it spreads outside of our language as well. We see that language can’t follow [the world]; that feeling of frustration brings in certain nervousness in what my protagonists write. Language betrays us all the time, because it must stay practical and limited, and we would like to have more precise words, for example, for different feelings, psychedelic experiences, dreams, epiphanies (Satori). (“Interview” 179)

¹⁷⁹ *El cuarto de atrás* makes numerous references to fantastical works. The novel begins with a dedication to Lewis Carroll: “For Lewis Carroll, who still comforts us with all his good sense and embraces us in his upside down world” (“Para Lewis Carroll, que todavía nos consuela de tanta cordura y nos acoge en su mundo al revés”). This praise of *Alice in Wonderland*’s inverted reality is accompanied by expressions of admiration for Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. C openly states how this book has influenced her:

Here is the book that put me out of my depth: Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, wow, for a long time, who knows for how long, I was looking for it before; it talks about split personalities, about the rupture of the limits of time and space, about ambiguity and uncertainty; it’s one

encouragements,¹⁸⁰ inspire her to explore unique narrative strategies which do not constrain the portrayal of her personal memories by rules of genre and chronology:

Don't write it in the form of a memoir.

– Yes, that is the question, I am waiting to see if I can come up with another interesting way of weaving together my memories.

– Or to untie them.¹⁸¹ (111)

The protagonist learns to accept narrative disorder and adopts non-linear free-association narration: “Maybe everything consists in losing the thread, which reappears when it wants to, I’ve always been quite afraid of losing my train of thought”, “I started speaking without rhyme or reason” (“Quizá todo consista en perder el hilo y que reaparezca cuando le dé la gana, yo siempre he tenido demasiado miedo a perder el

of those books that sharpens your wits and triggers you to take notes, when I finished it, I wrote in a notebook “I swear I will write a fantasy novel”. (19)

Ahí está el libro que me hizo perder pie: *Introducción a la literatura fantástica* de Todorov, vaya, a buenas horas, lo estuve buscando antes no sé cuánto rato, hablaba de los desdoblamiento de personalidad, de la ruptura de límites entre tiempo y espacio, de la ambigüedad y la incertidumbre; es de esos libros que te espabilan y te disparan a tomar notas, cuando lo acabé, escribí en un cuaderno: « Palabra que voy a escribir una novela fantástica ». (19)

In addition to referencing the book, the narrator applies the major principle outlined in Todorov’s work that the fantastic genre draws on the uncertainty produced by the ambiguity between the natural and supernatural, such that the fantastical text “must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described” (Todorov 33). *El cuarto de atrás* achieves this fantastic effect through its oneiric-historic ambiguity, including the mixing of concrete historical events with C’s memories of childhood fantasies and dreams.

¹⁸⁰ Throughout the novel the visitor’s provocative questions push C to share her memories, to let go of a presupposed established order and to follow instead the chaos of dreams and fantasy. He encourages her to be less fearful of that which is mysterious and unknown while having more faith in irrationality, chance, and her own curiosity.

¹⁸¹ “–No lo escriba en plan de libro de memorias.

–Ya, ahí está la cuestión, estoy esperando a ver si me ocurre una forma divertida de enhebrar los recuerdos.

–O de desenhebrarlos.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 111)

hilo”; 32, “Me pongo a hablar sin orden ni concierto”; 158). Following the spontaneity of conversation with her visitor, who appears to be an ideal interlocutor,¹⁸² C freely explores memories of the past as they come to her (“I explain things as they occur to me”), disregarding rules of space and time as she moves abruptly between memories of various places (Salamanca, Madrid, Burgos, Amarante, beaches of Galicia, etc.), jumping forwards and backwards in time, and often discovering what she was not specifically searching for: “Every time that I open a box the same thing happens to me, something different appears than what I was looking for, and that which I had been searching for days ago” (“explico las cosas según me van saliendo”; 136, “Siempre que abro un cajón me pasa lo mismo, aparece algo distinto de lo que buscaba, y que estuve buscando días atrás”; 103). Her chaotic and fragmentary narration of the past mixes her subjective visions of historical events (the civil war and immediate postwar period),

¹⁸² The mysterious visitor plays a pivotal role in creating a space where C feels liberated to openly discuss and take her time exploring the past: “We have much night-time ahead of us, an open space, full of possibilities” (“Tenemos mucha noche por delante, un espacio abierto, plagado de posibilidades”; 93). He could be interpreted as the ideal interlocutor, which is a central figure in Martín Gaité’s conception of literature. In her essay “La búsqueda de interlocutor” (“The search for an interlocutor”), Martín Gaité argues that it is necessary to have (or to invent) an ideal interlocutor, a “utopic listener”, in order to write (“oyente utópico”; 29).

Critics have interpreted the figure of the mysterious visitor in *El cuarto de atrás* in various ways, as has outlined Susan Lucas Dobrian (for whom he represents a mirror-like essence upon which the protagonist can project her subconscious desires):

It has been suggested that he represents a projection of the protagonist’s subconscious (Bellver); her masculine alter ego (Montamoro); Jung’s animus (Palley); the collaborative listener/reader (Glenn, Ordóñez); the ideal literary critic (Brown, Durán); a literary muse (L.G. Levine); the ideal interlocutor (Durán, Brown, L.G. Levine); the devil (Palley, El Saffar, Rodríguez); and Todorov, the renown theorist of the fantastical (Spires). (162)

Se ha sugerido que representa una proyección inconsciente de la protagonista (Bellver); su alter ego masculino (Montamoro); el animus jungiano (Palley); el lector colaborativo (Glenn, Ordóñez); el crítico literario ideal (Brown, Durán); una musa literaria (L.G. Levine); un interlocutor ideal (Durán, Brown, L.G. Levine); el diablo (Palley, El Saffar, Rodríguez); y Todorov, el gran teórico fantástico (Spires). (162)

reminiscences of her childhood and adolescent years, recollections of popular culture,¹⁸³ as well as her dreams and memories of childhood imaginary worlds, such as the fantastical desert island Bergai. This imaginary island was a secret place of refuge she and a childhood friend invented to escape to in periods of scarcity and family tensions during the civil war:

The following day, we began to take notes on Bergai, each in our own diary, with drawings and maps; we kept these notebooks well hidden, only showing them to each other. And the island of Bergai began taking form like a marginal world, existing much more than the things we saw for real, it had the power and consistency of dreams. I would no longer get upset about the toys that had been broken, and when they denied me some permission or reprimanded me for something, I would always go to Bergai, I even tolerated the odour of vinegar that impregnated the backroom without it bothering me. Everything could be transformed into something else, depending on the imagination. My friend had

¹⁸³ *El cuarto de atrás* creates an elaborate intertextual tapestry, notably of popular references, which situate the story in a particular time period and cultural context, such as: romance novels, periodicals (*Crónica, Lecturas, Y, Triunfo, Luna de miel en el Cairo*), cinema (the film *Rebeca*, and various actors such as Diana Durbin, Buster Keaton, Greta Garbo, Loreto Prado, Antonio Vico, Irene López Heredia), radio stations (E.A.J. 56 Radio Salamanca), popular songs (boleros, a Portuguese Fado, Conchita Piquer's song "Tatuaje", the military song "I had a comrade"), and numerous literary references (Franz Kafka's *The metamorphosis*, Miguel Cervantes's *The Little Gypsy Girl*, Antonio Machado's *To Xavier Valcarce*, Rubén Darío's *Sonatina*, Erasmus of Rotterdam's *The Praise of Folly*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and to the author's own works, such as *The Spa, Love in Postwar Spain, Behind the Curtains*, and *Slow Rhythm*). Several in depth analyses of intertextuality and metafiction in *El cuarto de atrás* have been written, for example: "Memory, metafiction and mass culture: the popular text in *El cuarto de atrás*" by Stephanie Sieburth, and "Comunicación e intertextualidad en *El cuarto de atrás* de Martín Gaité (2ª parte): de lo (neo)fantástico al caos" by Antonio Pineda Cachero.

taught me this, had made me discover the pleasure of solitary evasion, the capacity to invent which made us feel safe from death.¹⁸⁴ (168)

Intermixing the fantastic with the historical, *El cuatro de atrás* opens up the past to the possibility of alternative interpretations while acknowledging indeterminacy and uncertainty. The parallel fantastic vision of the past is subversively governed by chance and disorder: “Well – he says –, strange things happen every moment. The error is that we insist on applying to them the universal law of gravity, or the law of time, or whichever other law we habitually turn to without a thought; it is hard for us to admit that they have laws of their own” (“Bueno –dice–, cosas raras pasan a cada momento. El error está en que nos empeñamos en aplicarles la ley de la gravitación universal, o la ley del reloj, o cualquier otra ley de las que acatamos habitualmente sin discusión; se nos hace duro admitir que tengan ellas su propia ley”; 90).¹⁸⁵ Although they are governed by

¹⁸⁴ “Al día siguiente, inauguramos las anotaciones de Bergai, cada una en nuestro diario, con dibujos y planos; esos cuadernos los teníamos muy escondidos, sólo nos los enseñábamos una a otra. Y la isla de Bergai se fue perfilando como una tierra marginal, existía mucho más que las cosas que veíamos de verdad, tenía la fuerza y la consistencia de los sueños. Ya no volví a disgustarme por los juguetes que se me rompían y siempre que me negaban algún permiso o me reprendían por algo, me iba a Bergai, incluso soportaba sin molestia el olor a vinagre que iba tomando el cuarto de atrás, todo podía convertirse en otra cosa, dependía de la imaginación. Mi amiga me lo había enseñado, me había descubierto el placer de la evasión solitaria, esa capacidad de invención que nos hace sentirnos a salvo de la muerte.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 168)

¹⁸⁵ The cover photo of the Destino edition of the novel which carries the painting “Armonía” (“Harmony”, 1956) by Remedios Varo evokes the importance of chance (see figures 3 and 4). The painting shows the search for a thread that unites all components, which, with the help of chance, leads to the discovery of a harmonious music, as can be noted in the artist’s commentary about the painting:

The character is trying to find the invisible thread which unites all the things [...] when he manages to put the diverse objects in their place, and blows on the key which sustains the stave, a music should come out which is not only harmonious but as well objective [...] the figure coming out of the wall and collaborating with him represents chance (which so often intervenes in all discoveries), but an objective chance. When I use the word objective I understand it to mean something outside our word, in other words, beyond it,

other (and opposing) rules, C puts the historically real and the fantastic on the same level of the verosimil, replacing the question of what is objectively real with what is more believable. In this way, for C the fictional characters (and the invented island of Bergai) are more credible than those from pedagogical historical books: “You know what I am saying? That yes, I believe in the devil and in giant saint Christopher and in blessed saint Barbara, in all the mysterious beings. In Isabella the Catholic, no” (“¿Sabe lo que le digo? Que sí creo en el diablo y en san Cristóbal gigante y en santa Bárbara bendita, en todos los seres misteriosos, vamos. En Isabel la Católica, no”; 92).

While the fictional world appears to have the power to tap into an authentic subjective experience, the historical revision of the monolithic discourse propagated in the postwar period is deemed unreliable due to its creation of idealized identity models that are devoid of real human experiences. For example, C avidly rejects the female representations propagated by “the monotony of that dull and optimistic propaganda of the 1940s”, which fought to rewrite the female image and to subvert the rights implemented by the Second Spanish Republic prior to the civil war: “The postwar rhetoric was employed to discredit the signs of feminism which made advances during the Republican years, and it re-placed the emphasis on the self-sacrificing heroism of mothers and wives, on the importance of their silent and gloomy work as pillars of the

and which is connected to the world of causations and not the phenomena of our world. (*Remedios* 54)

El personaje está tratando de encontrar el hilo invisible que une todas las cosas [...] cuando consigue colocar en su sitio los diversos objetos, soplando por la clave que sostiene el pentagrama, debe salir una música no sólo armoniosa sino también objetiva [...] la figura que se desprende de la pared y colabora con él, representa el azar (que tantas veces interviene en todos los descubrimientos), pero el azar objetivo. Cuando utilizo la palabra objetivo entiendo por ello que es algo fuera de nuestro mundo, o mejor dicho, más allá de él, y que se encuentra conectado con el mundo de las causas y no de los fenómenos que es el nuestro. (*Remedios* 54)

Christian household” (“el machaconeo de aquella propaganda ñoña y optimista de los años cuarenta”; 85, “La retórica de la posguerra se aplicaba a desprestigiar los conatos de feminismo que tomaron auge en los años de la República y volvía a poner el acento en el heroísmo abnegado de madres y esposas, en la importancia de su silenciosa y oscura labor como pilares del hogar cristiano”; 82). She is especially critical of the usurpation of the image of Isabella the Catholic by the Sección Femenina (Women’s Section; the women’s political branch of the Falange movement which came into power in Spain after the civil war) to create a historical symbol of a Spanish heroine. Their transformation of Isabella the Catholic into a mythical model for good housewives neglected historical complexity.¹⁸⁶ For example, we can note the use of irony in *El cuarto de atrás* to critique the manipulation of the famous motto “As much as he reigns, she reigns, Isabella like Fernando” (“Tanto monta, monta tanto, Isabel como Fernando”):¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Patricia Grace King’s article “‘There’s always a dreamed text’: Defying mythologized history in Carmen Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás*” provides a more detailed analysis of the process of mythification of the figure of Isabella the Catholic by the Sección Femenina (Women’s Section) (in particular refer to pages 37- 44).

¹⁸⁷ Other stylistic strategies that C uses to mock the mythification of Isabella the Catholic’s image include sarcasm, the use of rhyme and circumlocution, as can be observed in the following example:

[T]he magazine *Y*, edited by the Women’s Section; the *Y* of the title came topped with an allusive crown for a certain glorious queen, whose name started with that initial, guess the answer to the riddle: she doesn’t get tired, she is always galloping, from Pisuerga to Arlanza, with her horse and her spear. It was not necessary to be particularly bright to solve the riddle, we knew her all too well, she had been mentioned too often: it was Isabella the Catholic. (83-84)

[L]a revista *Y*, editada por la Sección Femenina; la *Y* del título venía rematada por una corona alusiva a cierta reina gloriosa, cuyo nombre empezaba por aquella inicial, adivina *adivinanza*, la fatiga no la *alcanza*, siempre en *danza*, desde el Pisuerga al *Arlanza*, con su caballo y su *lanza*, no hacía falta tener una particular inteligencia en cuestión de acertijos, la teníamos demasiado conocida, demasiado mentada: era Isabel la Católica. (83-84; emphasis mine to highlight rhyme)

Proud of her legacy, we would fulfil our mission as Spanish women, we would learn to make the sign of the cross over our children's foreheads, to air out a room, to make the most of paper cut-outs and of meat, to remove stains, to knit scarves and wash curtains, to smile at our husband when he arrives displeased, to say to him that as much as he reigns, she reigns, Isabella like Fernando, that the domestic economy helps save the national economy[.]¹⁸⁸ (84)

The alternative viewpoints of the past in *El cuarto de atrás* and *Mrak* destabilize uniform and authoritative historical writings while revealing the enigmatic and imprecise nature of the past. The partial and subjective visions bring up the point that it is only possible to remember the civil war up to a certain point. This incompleteness becomes even more marked as time passes and the civil war slips away into a more remote, inaccessible space. The challenges of accessing the past become more pronounced for the second generation who has not directly lived during that time period. Rather than a life experience, the civil war for them is a legacy, an inheritance, a memory that is passed down generations, studied or investigated. Marianne Hirsch defines the second generation's memory of a traumatic historical event as a postmemory:¹⁸⁹ a subjective guardianship of the past and an inter and trans generational transmission which "strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and

¹⁸⁸ "Orgullosas de su legado, cumpliríamos nuestra misión de españolas, aprenderíamos a hacer la señal de la cruz sobre la frente de nuestros hijos, a ventilar un cuarto, a aprovechar los recortes de cartulina y de carne, a quitar manchas, tejer bufandas y lavar visillos, a sonreír al esposo cuando llega disgustado, a decirle que tanto monta monta tanto Isabel como Fernando, que la economía doméstica ayuda a salvar la economía nacional [.]" (*El cuarto de atrás* 84)

¹⁸⁹ Defending the suitability of the term "postmemory", Hirsch also outlines and discusses other terms which have been applied, such as: "absent memory", "inherited memory", "belated memory", "prosthetic memory", "mémoire trouée" ["holed memory"], "mémoire des cendres" ["memory of ashes"], "vicarious witnessing", and "received history" (105).

archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (111).

The next section will analyze second generation narrative strategies in writing about a civil war and the elaboration of a postmemory in Javier Cercas’ *Soldados de Salamina* (*Soldiers of Salamis*, 2001). This text will solely be analyzed without a comparison to a novel on the Yugoslav conflict since this civil war is relatively recent, with a majority of the populations in the different nations formed after the breakdown of Yugoslavia still possessing direct experience of it. Nonetheless, while the memories and discussion of the past by the first generation is still largely dominant, a beginning formation of a second generation could be identified in the current youth born after the conflict.

5.2 The Second Generation’s Inheritance of the Past: Narrative Challenges to Creating a Postmemory

Despite having occurred around three quarters of a century ago, the Spanish Civil War is still a major topic of representation. In particular, there was a marked emergence of high interest in recovering memories of the civil war at the start of the 21st century. Isabel Cuñado has written about the lucrative boom of publications of diverse genres on the civil war while the journalist Javier Valenzuela highlighted the phenomenon of a “waking up after the amnesia” (“despertar tras la amnesia”) in the literary panorama (Cuñado 1). This phenomenon coincides with shifts in political attitudes toward the civil war, namely the end of the “Pacto del Olvido” (a bipartisan “Pact of Forgetting” established during the transition years from the postwar dictatorship to a democracy by which a blind eye was turned toward the civil war and

the dictatorship) along with the creation of political movements dedicated to recovering the past. Some of these movements include, for example: the “Ley de la Memoria Histórica” (the “Historical Memory Law”) passed in 2007 which pledges to officially recognize the victims of the civil war and of persecutions during general Franco’s dictatorship;¹⁹⁰ the work of the *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (*Association for the Recovery of the Historical Memory*) whose aim since 2000 has been to break the silence around the executions that occurred during and after the civil war through exhumations of mass graves and the development of national archives of disappeared victims; and, the United Nations Working Group of Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances’ inclusion of Spain in 2002 in its list of countries that need to investigate the “disappearances” of people in its past.¹⁹¹

The invigorated literary interest in the Spanish Civil War brings up particular representational questions. While the temporal space between the present and the past

¹⁹⁰ Specifically, the main objective of the law is:

[T]o recognize and extend the rights of those who suffered persecution or violence, for political, ideological or religious reasons, during the Civil War and the Dictatorship, to promote their moral reparation and the recovery of their personal and familial memory, to adopt complementary steps dedicated to eliminating elements which cause division between citizens, all of which has the purpose of fostering cohesion and solidarity between diverse Spanish generations around constitutional principles, values and freedoms. (Jefatura del Estado 3)

[R]econocer y ampliar derechos a favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia, por razones políticas, ideológicas, o de creencia religiosa, durante la Guerra Civil y la Dictadura, promover su reparación moral y la recuperación de su memoria personal y familiar, y adoptar medidas complementarias destinadas a suprimir elementos de división entre los ciudadanos, todo ello con el fin de fomentar la cohesión y solidaridad entre las diversas generaciones de españoles en torno a los principios, valores y libertades constitucionales. (Jefatura del Estado 3)

¹⁹¹ For a more detailed analysis of Spain’s “Pact of Forgetting” and the campaign to recover the past refer to Madeleine Davis’s “Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the ‘Pacto del Olvido’”.

continues to grow, the question arises of how to access a past that the majority of the people in contemporary Spain do not have direct experience of; that is to say, how to represent, from the point of view of the present, another time that one does not have direct experience of and can only approach through secondary sources. Rather than remembering the Spanish Civil War through an intimate experience and an understanding of it by someone who had lived through the time (as was the case for the first generation, and the authors studied thus far in the thesis), the task becomes now of archiving and constructing a collective memory, of founding a historical memory, consecrated in what Pierre Nora denominates *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory). In his theory on memory and history Nora distinguishes between “real environments of memory” (*milieux de mémoire*) – which is a spontaneous, direct, lived and personal memory, such as a genealogical memory of a family –, and “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*) – which is a collective and indirect memory materialized through representations that involve the selective reconstruction, analysis and critique of the past (7).

We can see the process of the construction of a *lieux de mémoire*, and a postmemory of the Spanish Civil War in *Soldados de Salamina* by Javier Cercas.¹⁹² A journalist/writer (of the same name as the author) becomes intrigued when hearing about the escape of Rafael Sánchez Mazas (one of the ideological founders of the Falange movement)¹⁹³ from a mass shooting of prisoners by the sanctuary of Santa

¹⁹² The novel has also been adapted to a film by the same title in 2003 by the director David Trueba.

¹⁹³ Rafael Sánchez Mazas is a writer who was politically involved with the Falange movement and who significantly contributed to the development of its ideology since the party's early years prior to the civil war (Morente 113). He was appointed cabinet minister after the Spanish Civil War and became a leading figure among the ideological elites of the postwar Francoist dictatorship (Gómez López-Quiñones 116). He played a

María de Collell towards the end of the Spanish Civil War. He investigates the curious event and feverously gathers all the pieces of information that he can find in order to write a “relato real” (“real story”) which he titles “Soldados de Salamina” (“Soldiers of Salamis”). The “real story” becomes a representation of a collective memory (reuniting individual memories and events) and a historical memory (a commemorative archive). *Soldados de Salamina* outlines the different steps of the narrator/protagonist’s creation and interpretation of the “real story” in its three part structure: the first part, titled “Los amigos del bosque” (“The forest friends”) is the investigation and documentation phase; the second part, titled “Soldados de Salamina” (“Soldiers of Salamis”), is the organization and compilation of historical facts and individual memories into a plausible narrative (with the “real story” itself embedded in the text); and the third part, “Cita en Stockton” (“Meeting in Stockton”), is the interpretation of the meaning of the “real story.” Thus, similarly to *Mrak* and *El cuarto de atrás*, *Soldados de Salamina* has a *mise en abyme* and metafictional structure by which an autobiographical narrator/protagonist reveals through a first person narrative the process (from beginning to end) of retrospectively writing about the civil war while critically reflecting on the mnemonic narration.

The illustration of the process of creating and interpreting the “real story” implicates a metafictional reflection in the narrative construction of a postmemory. We

key role in creating the emblematic symbols and discourses of the Falange movement; most significantly, he invented the “¡Arriba España!” (“Onwards Spain!”) slogan and salute, ideated the adoption of the yoke and arrows symbol from the Catholic Monarchs for the coat of arms, and collaborated in the creation of the Falange anthem “Cara al sol” (“Facing the Sun”) (Gómez López-Quñones 116). In a study on Sánchez Mazas’ articles, Francisco Morente highlights the frequent representation of the Falange as a revolutionary movement which connects tradition and modernity, defends a united national identity (which implies cultural and political unison) and redeems authentic Christian values (122-124, 127-128).

could define *Soldados de Salamina* as a historical metafiction, following Linda Hutcheon's concept, which refers to auto-reflexive texts that comment on the narrative techniques of representing the past, such as the incorporation of historical documents in fiction (Hutcheon 92-3, 97). A central theme of the metafictional dimension in *Soldados de Salamina* is the appropriation of historical events by a narrative that weaves them into a credible story. The implicit author develops a hybrid genre through the "real story" which unifies in an ambiguous way (through simultaneous juxtaposition and fluid interrelation) the terms "real" (extratextual events) and "story" (narration, fiction). The union of the two terms describes a narration of real events through the recompilation and organization of archives and individual memories of historical moments into a coherent and credible story. The implicit author of the "real story" defines it as follows: "the book that I was going to write would not be a novel, but a real story, a story sewn from reality, amassing real events and people, a story that would be centered around the shooting of Sánchez Mazas and the circumstances that preceded and followed it" ("el libro que iba a escribir no sería una novela, sino sólo un relato real, un relato cosido a la realidad, amasado con hechos y personajes reales, un relato que estaría centrado en el fusilamiento de Sánchez Mazas y en las circunstancias que lo precedieron y lo siguieron"; 52). A narrative representation of the civil war becomes in *Soldados de Salamina* a recollection and appropriation, the "sewing" and "amassing", of disparate events into a story which gives them meaning.

Soldados de Salamina brings about an unsettling confrontation between fiction and history, affirming while also paradoxically negating the opposition of a series of dichotomies, such as: novel-journalistic article, writer-journalist, lie-truth, and invention/imagination-documentation. The novel in its totality plays with the ambiguity

of being at the same time fiction and history; for example, it includes historical events and people, is autobiographical (the empirical author includes autobiographical information and the narrator/protagonist is called Javier Cercas), and it arises from a research study (as is stated in the “Author’s Note” at the beginning of *Soldados de Salamina*).¹⁹⁴ This ambiguous duality is reflected in the inserted text written by the narrator/protagonist Cercas, implicit author of the “real story” titled the same as the novel. Although the implicit author insists on arguing that his “real story” is true and not fictional,¹⁹⁵ fiction not only seeps into the process of creating the “real story”, but furthermore, ends up being fundamentally necessary to give meaning to the story on the civil war.

Closely examining the process of the construction of the “real story”, we can note how the ambiguity of the opposition between the fictional and the historical is central to the narrator’s representation of the civil war. *Soldados de Salamina* begins with the narrator/protagonist introducing a curious event he hears about, which sparks

¹⁹⁴ This book is a result of numerous readings and long conversations. Many of the people I am indebted to appear in the text with their real names; of those who do not, I want to mention Josep Clara, Jordi Garcia, Eliane and Jeanmarie Lavaud, José-Carlos Mainer, Josep María Nadal and Carlos Trías, and especially Mónica Carbajosa, whose doctoral thesis, titled *The prose of the generation of 1927: Rafael Sánchez Mazas*, was extremely useful. Thank you to all of them.

Este libro es fruto de numerosas lecturas y de largas conversaciones. Muchas de las personas con las que estoy en deuda aparecen en el texto con sus nombres y apellidos; de entre las que no lo hacen, quiero mencionar a Josep Clara, Jordi Garcia, Eliane y Jeanmarie Lavaud, José-Carlos Mainer, Josep María Nadal y Carlos Trías, pero especialmente a Mónica Carbajosa, cuya tesis doctoral, titulada *La prosa del 27: Rafael Sánchez Mazas*, me ha sido de gran utilidad. A todos ellos gracias.

¹⁹⁵ For example, the implicit author defends that, contrary to a fictional novel, his story will be “true” (“It will be like a novel – I summed up –. Except that, instead of everything being a lie, it is all true”) and “real” (“And it is not a novel. It is a story with real events and people. A real story”) (“Será como una novela – resumé –. Sólo que, en vez de ser todo mentira, todo es verdad”; 68, “Y no es una novela. Es una historia con hechos y personajes reales. Un relato real”; 166).

his interest and motivates him to write a “real story”: “It was the summer of 1994, now more than six years ago, when I heard for the first time about the shooting of Rafael Sánchez Mazas” (“Fue en el verano de 1994, hace ahora más de seis años, cuando oí hablar por primera vez del fusilamiento de Rafael Sánchez Mazas”; 17).¹⁹⁶ A date specifies the present moment (“summer of 1994”) from which he looks back onto the historical event, and a period of six years marks the length of time he dedicates to investigating and creating a representation (the “real story”) of it. Initially, the memory is transmitted to him by a family link; Cercas finds out about the story unexpectedly, at the end of an unconventional interview with Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio¹⁹⁷ who tells him the story about his father, Sánchez Mazas, facing a firing squad. In addition to providing concrete historical information – such as where the shooting happened (“in the Collell sanctuary [...] which is right by Banyoles”) and when (“It was at the end of the war”) –, Ferlosio reconstructs the personal and intimate experience of his father’s escape, supporting his story with direct citations and descriptive details of what his father heard and did: “At some moment my father heard branches moving behind him, he turned around and saw a soldier staring at him. Then he heard a shout: ‘Is he over there?’ My father told how the soldier stayed put staring at him for a couple seconds and then, without taking his eyes off him, yelled back ‘There’s nobody over here’,

¹⁹⁶ Later, the narrator gives more precise details about the first time he heard the story: “That was how in July 1994 I interviewed Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio [...] Ferlosio told the story of his father facing the firing squad, a story that has kept me in suspense the last few years” (“Fue así como en julio de 1994 entrevisté a Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio [...] Ferlosio contó la historia del fusilamiento de su padre, la historia que me ha tenido en vilo durante los últimos años”; 18-19).

¹⁹⁷ The writer Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio is part of the Generation of the 1950s literary movement (denominated the children of the Spanish Civil War). He is recognized for his innovative narrative and best known for his neorealist novel *El Jarama* (*The River*, 1955), which introduced a novel radical portrayal of popular classes and their language in its narrative intermixing a story about young workers relaxing at the Jarama River and lingering civil war vestiges (Mainer 174).

turned around and left” (“en el santuario del Collell [...] que está junto a Banyoles”, “Fue al final de la guerra”; 19, “En algún momento mi padre oyó un ruido de ramas a su espalda, se dio la vuelta y vio a un miliciano que le miraba. Entonces se oyó un grito: « ¿Está por ahí? ». Mi padre contaba que el miliciano se quedó mirándole unos segundos y que luego, sin dejar de mirarle, gritó: « ¡Por aquí no hay nadie! », dio media vuelta y se fue”; 20).

As in the story of the event told by Ferlosio, the following versions that Cercas finds of Sánchez Mazas’ escape also include fictional elements in the historical narration. For example, the version told by the writer Andrés Trapiello is deemed to be a “lie” because it is “a very fictional story” (“una historia muy novelesca”; 35). Nonetheless, the narrator/protagonist believes that Trapiello’s story is credible because the narration of the mass shooting coincides “almost perfectly in the same terms” with Ferlosio’s version, except for one “fictional” detail that Trapiello adds to embellish his story: how the soldier shrugs his shoulders when seeing Sánchez Mazas (“casi exactamente en los mismos términos”; 38).¹⁹⁸ However, even the “original” version – a recording guarded in the film archives of Cataluña in which Sánchez Mazas tells his personal experience of the event –, has signs of theatricality in Sánchez Mazas’ manner of “reciting” the story:

Sánchez Mazas also told his story of the mass shooting in front of a camera, without a doubt around the same date in February of 1939 when he spoke of it in

¹⁹⁸ “It’s funny – Trapiello reflected – Now that you mention it, it’s true. I don’t know where I got the shrugging of the shoulders from, it must have struck me as being more dramatic, or more like Pío Baroja’s prose.” (*Soldados de Salamina* 40)

“Tiene gracia – reflexionó Trapiello –. Ahora que lo dice, es verdad. No sé de dónde saqué lo del escogimiento de hombros, debió de parecerme más novelesco, o más barojiano.” (*Soldados de Salamina* 40)

Ridruejo's office in Barcelona to his Falangist colleagues [...] but his words are so precise and the pauses between them so measured that he as well gives at times the impression that instead of telling his story, he is reciting it, like an actor performing his role on a stage.¹⁹⁹ (42)

In addition to the presence of fictive elements in the narrative style of the different versions of the story, the event itself of the escape from the mass shooting is stupendous. The fact that Sánchez Mazas was able to escape and survive seems “incredible”, as the narrator/protagonist remarks to the historian Miguel Aguirre: “doesn't it seem incredible to you that a man who was not young, because he was forty-five years old, and who was on top of that near-sighted [...] that a guy like him managed to escape from such a situation?” (“¿no te sigue pareciendo increíble que un hombre que ya no era joven, porque tenía cuarenta y cinco años, y que además era miope [...] que un tipo como él consiguiera escapar de una situación así?”; 35). The fictive dimension of the multiple versions of the story not only brings up doubts about the truth behind the different stories of Sánchez Mazas' escape, but furthermore provokes the question if the event itself ever even happened:²⁰⁰

[M]ore perplexed than disappointed, I said to myself that perhaps, as some had suspected since the beginning, Sánchez Mazas had not even been at the Collell,

¹⁹⁹ “Sánchez Mazas también contó ante una cámara la historia de su fusilamiento, sin duda por las mismas fechas de febrero del 39 en que se lo contó, en el despacho de Ridruejo en Barcelona, a sus camaradas falangistas [...] pero sus palabras son tan precisas y los silencios que las pautan tan medidas que él también da a ratos la impresión de que, en vez de contar la historia, la está recitando, como un actor que interpreta su papel en un escenario.” (*Soldados de Salamina* 42)

²⁰⁰ The truthfulness of Sánchez Mazas' story has also been critiqued by Gregorio Morán who in his book *Los españoles que dejaron de serlo* (*The Spaniards who stopped being Spaniards*, 2003) makes the accusation that the legendary escape was “fabricated thanks to his imagination and the help of some friends who were as imaginative and cynical as him” (“fabricada gracias a su imaginación y a la ayuda de algunos amigos tan imaginativos y cínicos como él”; qtd. in Melero Rivas par. 5).

and that maybe the whole story of the mass shooting and the circumstances around it were nothing more than an immense swindle meticulously plotted by Sánchez Mazas' imagination –with the voluntary or involuntary collaboration of relatives, friends, acquaintances and strangers – in order to cleanse his reputation as a coward, to hide some dishonourable episode in his strange wartime adventure, and above all, so that some credulous investigative journalist thirsty for novelties would reconstruct it sixty years later, redeeming him forever before history.²⁰¹ (65)

To resolve these doubts, Cercas intends to check the truth behind Sánchez Mazas' story, searching for, on the one hand, a concordance between the different versions, and on the other hand, archives that fulfill his need to “verify through documentation” “cerciorarse documentalmente”; 63). During his research, while he is “taken over by an investigative impetus”, Cercas reads various writers (Andrés Trapiello and Sánchez Mazas' works), testimonials and memoirs (*Nuestra Guerra / Our War* by Enrique Lister and *Yo fui asesinado por los rojos / I was murdered by the reds* by Jesús Pascual Aguilar, another survivor of the mass shooting at Collell), finds manuscripts and press articles about Sánchez Mazas, discovers a portrait of Sánchez Mazas made by his friend Eugenio Montes, deciphers a diary that he kept while he was escaping in the forest, visits the sanctuary at Collell, and ends up rigorously searching

²⁰¹ “[M]ás perplejo que decepcionado, me dije que quizá, como algunos habían sospechado desde el principio, Sánchez Mazas ni siquiera había estado en el Collell, y que acaso toda la historia del fusilamiento y de las circunstancias que lo rodearon no era más que una inmensa superchería minuciosamente urdida por la imaginación de Sánchez Mazas – con la colaboración voluntaria e involuntaria de parientes, amigos, conocidos y desconocidos – para limpiar su fama de cobarde, para ocultar algún episodio deshonroso de su extraña peripecia de guerra, y sobre todo, para que algún investigador crédulo y sediento de novelerías la reconstruyese sesenta años después, redimiéndole para siempre ante la historia.” (*Soldados de Salamina* 65)

for whatever piece of information he can find about Sánchez Mazas: “I had gone through all the libraries, newspaper and periodical archives. Multiple times I travelled to Madrid, and constantly to Barcelona, to speak with experts, with professors, with friends and acquaintances (or with friends of friends and acquaintances of acquaintances) of Sánchez Mazas” (“contagiado por el ímpetu detectivesco”; 172, “[r]ecorrí bibliotecas, hemerotecas, archivos. Varias veces viajé a Madrid, y constantemente a Barcelona, para hablar con eruditos, con profesores, con amigos y conocidos (o con amigos de amigos y conocidos de conocidos) de Sánchez Mazas”; 70).

From this extensive investigation arises concrete information (dates, places, etc.)²⁰² which supposedly confirms the “truth” of the story and which becomes the historical base of the recreated memory portrayed in the “real story”. However, there is a (subjective) manipulation in Cercas’ scrutiny of the information. The investigation and reception of the documents implicates an active role by the narrator/protagonist who analyzes and interprets the meaning of the documents, compares them and constructs a coherent story from them. This active reception can be noted in particular in his reading of Sánchez Mazas’ diary. Cercas deciphers Sánchez Mazas’ scribbled writing, and then interprets (“deduces”) the meaning of the notes, comparing them to the rest of the information he has collected about the event: “I re-read it several times, trying to give those dispersed notes a coherent meaning, and link them to the facts I knew. [...] From the text of the diary I deduced that [...] I also deduced that” (“Lo releí varias veces, tratando de dotar de un sentido coherente a aquellas anotaciones dispersas, y de ensamblarse con los hechos que yo conocía. [...] Del texto del diario deduje que

²⁰² For example, we can see in the following sentence the precision of dates provided: “I drew him on February 14, 1939, just two weeks after the events in Collell” (“[L]o retrató el 14 de febrero de 1939, justo dos semanas después de los hechos del Collell”; 41).

[...] deduje también que”; 60, 61). An image of a page from the diary appears as a “document” or a *realia* inserted into the text of the novel (see figure 5). This paratextual element is supposed to support the referential association of the story with a historical reality. However, the implicit narrator modifies this “real object”, imposing on it a particular meaning that he assigns to it through his interpretation.

In the moment of writing the “real story”, Cercas selects the information that he wants to include, actively constructing a postmemory with a particular meaning. Furthermore, the narrator becomes the witness who compiles all the individual memories (that others tell him) and integrates them into a collective memory. The incorporation of historical documents and individual memories into one singular story (the “real story”) implicates the use of fictional narrative strategies in order to give coherence and construct a plausible representation of an unknown distant past. For example, Cercas explicitly states in the “real story”:

After that Sánchez Mazas’ trail vanishes. One can attempt to reconstruct his adventure during the months before the conflict and during the three years it lasted only through partial testimonials – fleeting allusions in memoirs and documents of the times, oral accounts of those who shared with him parts of his adventures, memories of relatives and friends to whom he’d recounted his memories – and also through the veil of a legend shimmering with errors, contradictions and ambiguities which Sánchez Mazas’ selective loquacity about this turbulent period of his life definitely nourished. So then, what follows in my

writing is not what actually happened, but rather that which seems to be plausible; I am not offering proven facts, but reasonable conjectures.²⁰³ (89)

In this way, there is a hybridity between the historical and the fictional in the narrative construction of the “real story”. On the one hand, there is an abundance of concrete historical information as well as expressions which give an objective nuance to the narration, for example: “It is the 29th of November 1937; the versions of what occurred next differ. There are those who maintain that [...] Another version maintains that [...] There are even those who claim that actually [...] These last two hypothesis are erroneous; almost certainly, the first two are not” (“Estamos a 29 de noviembre de 1937; las versiones de lo que a continuación ocurre difieren. Hay quien sostiene que [...] Otra versión sostiene que [...] Incluso hay quien afirma que en realidad [...] Estas dos últimas hipótesis son erróneas; casi con total certeza, las dos primeras no”; 94-5). On the other hand, the narration is embellished with superfluous details that create an atmosphere and highlight the sensorial experience, as can be noted in the description of the jail cell:

Sánchez Mazas and Pascual are stretched out on the floor, their backs leaning against the cold wall, with their legs covered by an insufficient blanket; neither of them will ever remember exactly what they talked about during that short

²⁰³ “A partir de este momento el rastro de Sánchez Mazas se esfuma. Su peripecia durante los meses previos a la contienda y durante los tres años que duró ésta sólo puede intentar reconstruirse a través de testimonios parciales – fugitivas alusiones en memorias y documentos de la época, relatos orales de quienes compartieron con él retazos de sus aventuras, recuerdos de familiares y amigos a quienes refirió sus recuerdos –y también a través del velo de una leyenda constelada de equívocos, contradicciones y ambigüedades que la selectiva locuacidad de Sánchez Mazas acerca de ese periodo turbulento de su vida contribuyó de forma determinante a alimentar. Así pues, lo que a continuación consigno no es lo que realmente sucedió, sino lo que parece verosímil que sucediera; no ofrezco hechos probados, sino conjeturas razonables.” (*Soldados de Salamina* 89)

night, but they will recall the long silences punctuating their secret discussion, the whispers of their comrades and the sound of their sleepless coughing, the rain falling indifferent, assiduous, black and freezing on the paring stones in the courtyard and the cypresses in the garden. The rain keeps falling until the dawn of January 30 slowly changes the darkness of the window to a sickly or ghostly whitish color which strains the atmosphere of the cell like a premonition at the moment when the jailers order them out.²⁰⁴ (100)

Such superfluous details, according to Roland Barthes' theory of the reality effect, create a referential illusion (a supposedly direct link between the signifier and the referent), when in actuality their function is purely esthetical (like in the case of an *ekphrasis*).²⁰⁵ Hence, although the futile details of the "real story" seem to construct "truth" through a referential precision, they are actually narrative elements creating a believable representation. In relation to Nora's theory, we can see here that when individual memories no longer exist ("*milieux de mémoire*") the past is reconstructed through a historical memory ("*lieux de mémoire*") which in itself is a representation whose existence resides purely in its own codes of representation without having a direct referential connection to the extratextual reality: "Contrary to historical objects, however, *lieux de mémoire* have no referential in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs" (Nora 23).

²⁰⁴ "Sánchez Mazas y Pascual están tumbados en el suelo, con la espalda apoyada contra el frío de la pared, con las piernas cubiertas por una manta insuficiente; ninguno de los dos recordará nunca con precisión de qué hablaron durante esa noche brevísima, pero sí los largos silencios que puntuaron su conciliábulo, los susurros de los compañeros y el rumor de sus toses desveladas y de la lluvia cayendo indiferente, asidua, negra y helada sobre las losas del patio y los cipreses del jardín como sigue cayendo mientras el amanecer del 30 de enero cambia lentamente la oscuridad de los ventanales por el color blancuzco de enfermo o de aparecido que tiñe como una premonición la atmósfera de la celda en el momento en que un carcelero les ordena salir." (*Soldados de Salamina* 100)

²⁰⁵ Refer to Barthes' essay "The Reality Effect" in *The Rustle of Language*.

In addition to creating an illusory reality effect, these self-referential esthetic embellishments have another function in *Soldados de Salamina*: to create a subjective dimension. This occurs in particular in the introspective elaboration included in the “real story” by which the implicit author makes note of what Sánchez Mazas is thinking when he faces death and struggles to survive the mass shooting:

In an instant which feels eternal, Sánchez Mazas thinks he is going to die. He thinks that the bullets which are going to kill him will come from behind his back, which is where the commanding voice came from, and that before he dies from the bullets that will have hit him, they would have to pass through the four men lined up behind him. He thinks that he will not die, that he will escape. He thinks that he cannot escape to the back because the shots will come from there; nor to his left, because he'd run back out onto the road and the soldiers; nor ahead, because he'd have to jump over a wall of eight terrified men. But (he thinks) he can escape toward the right, where no more than six or seven meters ahead a dense pickets of pines and undergrowth holds the promise of a hiding place. “To the right” he thinks. And thinks: “Now or never.”²⁰⁶ (101-102)

Through these details, Cercas attempts to recreate and image the lived civil war experience. His empirical search to corroborate what really happened turns into a

²⁰⁶ “Transcurre entonces un instante eterno, durante el cual Sánchez Mazas piensa que va a morir. Piensa que las balas que van a matarlo vendrán de su espalda, que es de donde ha brotado la voz de mando, y que, antes de que muera porque las balas lo alcancen, éstas tendrán que alcanzar a los cuatro hombres que forman tras él. Piensa que no va a morir, que va a escapar. Piensa que no puede escapar hacia su espalda, porque los disparos vendrán de allí; ni hacia su izquierda, porque correría de vuelta a la carretera y los soldados; ni hacia delante, porque tendría que salvar una muralla de ocho hombres despavoridos. Pero (piensa) sí puede escapar hacia la derecha, donde a no más de seis o siete metros un espeso breñal de pinos y maleza promete una posibilidad de esconderse. « Hacia la derecha », piensa. Y piensa: « Ahora o nunca ».” (*Soldados de Salamina* 101-102).

frustrated pursuit of the authentic subjective experience. What Cercas ultimately searches for is the personal experience hidden in the past, the intimate thoughts and feelings of people going through an extreme event. For example he says: “I spent a lot of time asking myself what really happened during those days when Sánchez Mazas was wandering aimlessly in no man’s land. What did he think about, what did he feel, what did he tell the Ferrés, the Figueras, Angelats? What did they remember about what he told them? And what had they thought and felt?” (“llevaba mucho tiempo preguntándomelo – qué ocurrió en realidad durante aquellos días en que Sánchez Mazas anduvo vagando sin rumbo por tierra de nadie. Qué pensó, qué sintió, qué le contó a los Ferré, a los Figueras, a Angelats. Qué recordaban éstos que les había contado. Y qué habían pensado y sentido ellos”; 62).

The question of “what really happened during those days” is not about an objective account of the sequence of events, but the diverse subjective reactions. Cercas desires to go back directly to the past, to gain access to the psychological dimension in its immediacy, to unveil what he regards as an “essential secret” in order to understand the significance of life and death during a civil war.²⁰⁷ However, this experience no

²⁰⁷ The essential secret revolves around the emotions and thoughts one has when contemplating death during a civil war, as is indicated in the narrator/protagonist’s following words:

We will never know who was the soldier who saved Sánchez Mazas’ life, nor what thoughts ran through his mind when he looked him in the eyes; we will never know what José and Manuel Machado said to each other at the graves of their brother Antonio and their mother. I don’t know why, but sometimes I say to myself that if we were to succeed in uncovering one of these two parallel secrets, maybe we would also touch upon a much more essential secret. (*Soldados de Salamina* 26)

Nunca sabremos quién fue aquel miliciano que salvó la vida de Sánchez Mazas, ni qué es lo que pasó por su mente cuando le miró a los ojos; nunca sabremos qué se dijeron José y Manuel Machado ante las tumbas de su hermano Antonio y de su madre. No sé por qué, pero a veces me digo que, si consiguiéramos

longer exists in its original form, and the only thing that remains is a web of secondary memories (copies of copies) of the original experience: “thus what they perhaps told me had happened was not what actually happened, nor what they remembered had happened, but only what they remembered to have said at another time about what happened” (“de manera que lo que acaso me contarían que ocurrió no sería lo que de verdad ocurrió y ni siguiera lo que recordaban que ocurrió, sino sólo lo que recordaran haber contado otras veces”; 62).

Among this web of secondary memories, and the protagonist’s metafictional elaboration of plausible reconstructions of civil war experiences, at the end of his investigation Cercas meets Miralles whose revelation gives a human dimension to the significance of the loss caused by the civil war. It is not only the subjective experiences and events that are buried in the civil war past, but the lives themselves of the young people who have been wiped out of history over time. Miralles, a former soldier in the Republican army, and possibly the mysterious soldier who spared Sánchez Mazas’ life, poignantly reveals through his personal experience a tragic significance of the civil war (touching perhaps the essential secret that Cercas’ is after):

But I will tell you something that you don’t know, something about the war. – He took a sip of his nescafé; so did I: Miralles’ hand trembled from going overboard with the cognac –. When I left for the front in 1936, with me came other young guys. They were from Terrassa, like me, very young, almost children, just like me. I knew some of them from having seen them or spoken to them at some point, but most of them I didn’t know. There were the García Segués brothers (Joan and Lela), Miguel Cardos, Gabi Baldrich, Pipo Canal,

desvelar uno de esos dos secretos paralelos, quizá rozaríamos también un secreto mucho más esencial. (*Soldados de Salamina* 26)

Gordo Odena, Santi Brugada, Jordi Gudayol. [...] You know what? Since the war ended, not a single day has gone by that I don't think of them. They were so young... They all died. All of them dead. Dead. Dead. All of them. None of them tasted the good things in life; none of them ever had a woman all to himself, none of them knew the wonder of having a child and of their child, when three of four years old, climbing into his bed, between his wife and him, one Sunday morning, in a very sunny room [...] Nobody remembers them, you know? Nobody. Nobody even remembers why they died, why they didn't have a wife and children and a sunny room; nobody, and, least of all, those for whom they fought. There isn't and there is never going to be any lousy street in any lousy town in any fucking country which will ever be named after any of them. You understand? You understand, don't you? Oh, but I remember, oh how I remember, I remember them all, Lela and Joan and Gabi and Odena and Pipo and Brugada and Gudayol, I don't know why I do, but I do it, a single day doesn't go by that I don't think of them.²⁰⁸ (199-201)

²⁰⁸ “Pero le voy a contar una cosa que usted no sabe, una cosa de la guerra. –Dio un sorbo de nescafé; yo di otro: a Miralles se le había ido la mano con el coñac–. Cuando salí hacia el frente en el 36 iban conmigo otros muchachos. Eran de Terrassa, como yo; muy jóvenes, casi unos niños, igual que yo; a alguno lo conocía de vista o de hablar alguna vez con él: a la mayoría no. Eran los germanos García Segués (Joan y Lela), Miguel Cardos, Gabi Baldrich, Pipo Canal, el Gordo Odena, Santi Brugada, Jordi Gudayol. [...] ¿Sabe? Desde que terminó la guerra no ha pasado un solo día sin que piense en ellos. Eran tan jóvenes... Murieron todos. Todos muertos. Muertos. Muertos. Todos. Ninguno probó las cosas buenas de la vida: ninguno tuvo una mujer para él solo, ninguno conoció la maravilla de tener un hijo y de que su hijo, con tres o cuatro años, se metiera en su cama, entre su mujer y él, un domingo por la mañana, en una habitación con mucha sol. [...] Nadie se acuerda de ellos, ¿sabe? Nadie. Nadie se acuerda siquiera de por qué murieron, de por qué no tuvieron mujer e hijos y una habitación con sol; nadie, y menos que nadie, la gente por la que pelearon. No hay ni va a haber nunca ninguna calle miserable de ningún pueblo miserable de ninguna mierda de país que vaya a llevar nunca el nombre de ninguno de ellos. ¿Lo entiende? Lo entiende, ¿verdad? Ah, pero yo me acuerdo, vaya si me acuerdo, me acuerdo de todos, de Lela y de Joan y de

The death of so many, stressed through Miralles' repetition ("They all died. All of them dead. Dead. Dead. All of them"), is dually tragic; their young lives were cut short, robbing them of life experiences ("None of them tasted the good things in life"), and on top of it, the sacrifice was unjustly futile ("Nobody even remembers why they died"). Remembered only as an agglomerated mass of anonymous soldiers, there are no *lieux de mémoire* consecrated to them ("There isn't and there is never going to be any lousy street in any lousy town in any fucking country which will ever be named after any of them"). A memory of them (a *milieux de mémoire*) is (temporarily) guarded by Miralles who continues to think about them and to bring up their names.²⁰⁹ Miralles' obstinate remembrances, which he will take with him to his own grave, put the empirical search for the exact story about Sánchez Mazas' escape to the secondary plane and re-places emphasis on the tragic loss of the nameless many whose deaths have been forgotten by society. As Enrique Valdés has pointed out in his analysis of *Soldados de Salamina*, Sánchez Mazas is not the hero of the "real story", but the empathetic unknown soldier who is part of the novel's homage to the lost lives of the anonymous soldiers.

Gabi y de Odena y de Pipo y Brugada y de Gudayol, no sé por qué lo hago pero lo hago, no pasa u solo día sin que piense en ellos." (*Soldados de Salamina* 199-201)

²⁰⁹ The last vestige of the dead soldiers temporarily lives on with Miralles:

"[H]e remembers because, although it's been sixty years since they died, they are still not dead, precisely because he remembers them. Or perhaps it's not him remembering them, but them clinging onto him, in order not to die entirely." "But when Miralles dies", I thought, "his friends will die for good, because there will no longer be anyone to remember them so that they don't die." (*Soldados de Salamina* 201)

"[S]e acuerda porque, aunque hace sesenta años que fallecieron, todavía no están muertos, precisamente porque él se acuerda de ellos. O quizá no es él quien se acuerda de ellos, sino ellos los que se aferran a él, para no estar del todo muertos." "Pero cuando Miralles muera", pensé, "sus amigos también morirán del todo, porque no habrá nadie que se acuerde de ellos para que no mueran." (*Soldados de Salamina* 201)

The role of literature presented in *Soldados de Salamina*, as well as in *Mrak* and *El cuarto de atrás*, is the revival of intimate human experiences, desires, and lives lost (physically and symbolically) during a civil war, as is stated for example in *El cuarto de atrás*:

If nothing is lost, literature would not have a reason to exist. Don't you think?

– Of course, the important thing is knowing how to tell the story of what has been lost, Bergai, the letters...., in this way they live again.”²¹⁰ (168)

The narrators/protagonists of the three novels look back in time searching for a way to portray the losses endured during a civil war and to recreate the intimate experiences of people who have been wiped out of history over time. Their metafictional reflections reveal the process and challenge of representing a past that is abstruse, layered and changing. Due to the uncertainty and instability of the past, the narrators/protagonists do not present definite explanations of events, but hypotheses, impressions and interpretations. To the historical they apply the fictional in order to speak of the significance of the loss caused by civil war and perpetuated in the postwar period.

²¹⁰ “[S]i no se perdiera nada, la literatura no tendría razón de ser. ¿No cree?
– Claro, lo importante es saber contar la historia de lo que se ha perdido, de Bergai, de las cartas...., así vuelven a vivir.” (*El cuarto de atrás* 168)

6 Conclusion: Literary Representations of Civil Wars

The close analyses of narrative strategies across various novels reveals what aspects literature focuses on and how it constructs representations of civil war. Parting from an overview of a conceptual and operational definition of civil war, this chapter will elaborate on how literature signifies civil war through its impact on people by comparing the novels studied thus far. This is broken down into two categories of analysis: one is dedicated to how civil war affects individual lives while the other looks at it on the collective level. First, the novels represent the civil war through individuals' experiences of it, meaning that the stories revolve around the intimate lives of ordinary people while the civil war is relegated to the background of the story and described by the connotations it carries for the people living through it. Second, the novels' representations of the relations between people and the complexities of their identities reveal the artificiality of civil war's division of society into antagonistic opposing sides and the shortcomings of its historical formulation of a reductionist homogeneous society. Overall, the novels show how a civil war's rapid destruction of one social reality and reconstruction of another implicates a violent reconfiguration of individual lives and collective identities. Their representations aspire to redeem what civil war obliterates: the value of individual lives, the complexities and commonalities of the collective, the silences and ambiguities in historical narratives.

6.1 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Civil War

Civil war is a violent military conflict within the boundaries of a state over the political and social order. It is a sustained, coordinated and prolonged military

aggression between the government in place and political opposition(s) challenging its power, sovereignty, and legitimacy. The conflict brings about severe state impairment or its complete breakdown. The loss of the government's monopoly over force and the disintegration of the political order leads to a collapse of law, order and social institutions, breeding extreme chaos. The breakdown of the distinction between legal and illegal use of violence, since what was illegal during peacetime becomes permitted in wartime, normalizes crime and violence.

The violence that spreads during a civil war is often described in statistical terms based on a counting of lives lost and monuments destroyed. Political studies label an armed conflict as a civil war when a threshold of 1,000 battle deaths per year is reached, while media coverage often also centers around reporting the number of casualties. Although figures are necessary for an operational definition of civil war, descriptions of tragedy via enumeration do little to illustrate the significance of violence, besides evoking a momentary reaction of shock, if that at all.²¹¹ Furthermore, this sole focus on quantifying the immediate visible casualties of civil war misses the more subtle,

²¹¹ Filip David, for example, has highlighted the inessentiality of focusing debates around competing estimates of the number of war victims:

Everything appears massive – mass executions, mass expulsions of populations, demolishments of entire cities, destructions of many settlements. Discussions among experts are about whether there are in one mass grave two thousand, or “only” five hundred people. I must say that I don't see any big difference. In the same way that it has always seemed to me pointless (from a moral point of view) to discuss if fifty thousand or five hundred thousand people perished in the Jasenovac concentration camp. Criminals are not measured by the number of crimes committed! (David and Kovač 311)

Sve se čini masovno – masovne egzekucije, masovna proterivanja stanovništva, rušenje čitavih gradova, uništenje mnogih naseobina. Rasprave se među stručnjacima vode – da li je u nekoj masovnoj grobnici dve hiljade, ili “samo” pet stotina ljudi. Moram reći da ne vidim neke velike razlike. Kao što mi je uvek bila bespredmetna rasprava (što se moralne tačke gledišta tiče) da li je u Jasenovcu stradalo pedeset hiljada ili pet stotina hiljada ljudi. Zločinci se ne mere brojem učinjenih zlodela! (David and Kovač 311)

extensive, and long term effects that multidimensional civil war violence has on populations and countries. Besides the most obvious form of military violence which destroys infrastructure, maims and kills people, violence also takes form in the collapse of social institutions, long-term economic devastation, discriminatory policies, disruption of social cohesion and divisions of populations along oversimplified categories. The violence carries a symbolic dimension by which it forcibly redefines citizens and the nation. This is most clearly seen in postwar dogmas which legitimize and institutionalize the ideologies pushed forward during the civil war while erasing all alterity and social complexities.

In addition to being a conflict over governmental power (including political, economic and social power), civil war is a contestation over the identity of the nation, including the redefinition, organization and regulation of the population. Serving as a foundation for nation building, and associated with the spreading of nation states in the 20th century, civil war is a violent conflict over the right to reformulate a national community, implicating not only the power to rule a population, but to decide as well what this population will be like, what values citizens should embody, which image they should identify with and how their history will be written. The newly (re)born post civil war nation presents a reductive and homogeneous image of the community which selectively filters out contradictions and diversity. This national narrative brushes over the complexity of society and the experiences endured during the civil war.

Hence, a civil war is a moment of crisis where the political structure and identity of a nation is contested through large scale organized violence. Political and social transformation is brought on by dual processes of deconstruction and reconstruction, by the collapse of one national system and the construction of another, by the death of one

nation and the (re)birth of another. This rapid and violent reconfiguration of the nation is a transgression of an established order which reveals its non-essential, malleable and vulnerable nature since the struggle for power entails a fight for the right to reorganize the government structure and to redefine society by rewriting laws, history and the national identity. In this way, a civil war is a pivotal moment in a nation's history, and notably in individuals' lives, which marks a stark dividing line between life before and after the civil war.

The consequences this violent transformation of the political and social order has for people is a central focus of literature. The novels studied in this thesis (Camilo José Cela's *San Camilo, 1936*, Dževad Karahasan's *Sara i Serafina*, Mercè Rodoreda's *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, Velibor Čolić's *Chronique des oubliés*, Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*, David Albahari's *Mrak*, Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina*) do not explain the civil war by clarifying what happened, such as through a historical or political point of view. They are not concerned with the sequence of events that shaped the civil war, but seek rather to speak of the significance that the civil war has on people by imagining how it disrupts their lives and the society they are a part of. Individuals living through a civil war have to face the challenge of surviving (staying alive and meeting basic life necessities), guarding their sense of self and maintaining the belief in the dignity and meaningfulness of their lives, dealing with the fracturing of a society they were a part of, coping with a loss of home (the physical and symbolic place they identify as home), rebuilding their lives and adapting to the newly erected postwar political and social order of a re-born impoverished, battered, antagonistic country.

6.2 Literary Portrayals of Civil War and Their Focus on Individual Human Experiences

Literature attempts to understand civil war from a human perspective by looking at how it impacts people. The meaning of the civil war is narratively constructed through imagined stories showing human experiences endured during the violent transformation of a society. The novels studied in this thesis are not about a civil war in and of itself strictly as a politico-military phenomenon, but portray it through stories of people's experiences during a civil war and the postwar period. They are not concerned with documenting what happened, even in *Soldados de Salamina* where a journalist/writer's obsessive research and historical reconstruction of an event during the civil war ultimately becomes a longing to recover a subjective experiences lost in the past. Instead, they construct a plausible representation that imagines the subjective experience of living through a civil war.

The novels do not elaborate or attempt to explain the political and military events shaping the civil war. Concrete references, used to varying degrees of frequency among the novels (such as dates, places, historical figures, references to political and military events, etc.), do not fully explain to the reader exactly what happened during the civil war. They serve instead to situate the story in the context of the civil war, to reveal how the events are confusing for those living through them, or to highlight the senselessness of the bellicose events. A majority of the novels (*Sara i Serafina*, *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, *Chronique des oubliés*, *Mrak*, *El cuarto de atrás*) provide scarce direct references to the civil war and its historical context. They include them to situate the story in that particular context and at times to critique the bellicose movement. The other novels include more frequent references, but they nonetheless do little to clarify

the events around the civil war. In *San Camilo, 1936*, historical, political and military events at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in Madrid mark the structural framework of the story, providing a narrative backdrop of chaotic political and social unrest. Their enumerations throughout the text cause confusion, evoke an unsettling sense of urgency, express the threat of an uncontrollable escalation of violence, render military terms and slogans non-sensible through excessive repetition, and abruptly invade the lives of individuals who become perturbed by the turmoil. *Soldados de Salamina* shows the most extensive reliance on and effort to incorporate concrete historical references; however, this documentary aspiration is a frustrated one as the concrete historical details in the end only offer an illusion of truth without touching upon the true essence of the civil war experience the narrator wishes to reconstruct.

The civil war is consistently portrayed as a violent and vague force in the background, which disrupts and transforms the lives of people (presented at the forefront of the narratives). The sustained and large scale violence of a civil war appears as a continuous backdrop of violence, as a persistent and unforeseeable threat of death. It is represented in the majority of the novels (*San Camilo, 1936*, *Sara i Serafina*, *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, *Chronique des oubliés*, *El cuarto de atrás*, *Mrak*) as a sensed danger pressing upon the population and inducing a collective sense of fear and anxiety. Civil war is largely conveyed as an implicit expression of ubiquitous violence intimately felt by the characters. One common narrative approach used to achieve this effect is to indirectly portray the violence through evocation and allusions. Notably in *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, and also in *Chronique des oubliés*, the violent acts committed against civilians and soldiers during a civil war are evoked through all the signs of destruction and death that the protagonists come across along their journeys (such as the

presence of dead bodies, destroyed or pillaged houses, abandoned towns, uncanny silences, etc.). In *Sara i Serafina* the violence is an invisible threat looming over the city that the civilians gauge (by signs such as silence, time of day, openness of streets, etc.) as they struggle to survive and maintain some level of normalcy in their daily lives. The allusions to the civil war violence are more abstract in *San Camilo, 1936*; for example, the bloodshed is perceived by city dwellers as an uncanny smell of death lingering in the air and as an unusual infestation of flies.

This vague and evocative manner of portraying civil war is part of the novels' elaboration of it through connotations that shape a subjective perception of its chaos, senselessness and tragedy. In the analyzed novels, civil war evades definition and appears difficult to grasp. Various narrative techniques are used to depict its elusiveness. Metanarrative reflections in *El cuarto de atrás*, *Mrak* and *Soldados de Salamina* show how the narrators/protagonists struggle to find the right words which signify the civil war experience and the difficulties they come across in their process of constructing a narrative that faithfully captures the meaning of that experience. In many of the works, civil war remains unnamed or is redefined through figurative language. In *Mrak* and *Sara i Serafina* it is abstractly referred to as a "situation".²¹² Metaphors are frequently used to portray the civil war as an uncontrollable, escalating and all-encompassing violence that implicates everyone. The scale and extent of its damage is incommensurable. *San Camilo, 1936* elaborates numerous metonymic and metaphorical abstractions to express the amplifying political tension and military violence (such as the metonymic association with the feast of San Camillus de Lellis, the metaphorical

²¹² "situation in our country" ("situacija u našoj zemlji"; Albahari 66); "He then continued 'analyzing the situation', as we called then our talks about the war" ("Onda nastavi 'analizirati situaciju', kako smo tada nazivali razgovore o ratu"; Karahasan 10).

images of an uncontrollable fire and a deluge of blood, descriptions of the chaotic violence as a multiplication of crimes, among others). This metaphorical imagery of civil war as an uncontrollable and morbid force is also present in *Mrak* which compares it to a vortex, a dance of death, a black hole, an abyss and darkness. The escalation of violence reaches its extreme in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* where a series of allusions, images and biblical references depict civil war as an apocalypse.

The use of figurative language and the elaboration of fictive elements in historical narratives construct the meaning of civil war by connoting, giving suggestive impressions, and imagining what civil war signifies to the people living through it. Civil war is hence understood in relation to how it is subjectively perceived and in its effect on people and the place they identify as home. The novels' portrayals of civil war as an obscure and ubiquitous force invading and transforming individuals' private lives, the cities, the landscape (and implicitly the whole nation) illustrate how the "battlefield" in civil war is not a clear set-piece military confrontation between armies, but a more extensive aggression perfused through the whole society and which disproportionately targets civilian areas. The novels' emphases on the ways that civilian populations become the center of "battlefields" exposes how the so called military and politically correct term "collateral damage" is in reality intended violence and an integral part of a civil war.

One of the main characteristics of the "battlefield" depicted in the novels is its aggressive intrusion and degradation of peoples' lives and the places where they live. The civil war invades the private space of characters by becoming ever more present in conversations as a noise or a topic of discussion (*Sara i Serafina, San Camilo, 1936, El*

cuarto de atrás, Mrak), by deranging the objects and order in characters' rooms (*El cuarto de atrás, Mrak*) and by demolishing people's homes (*Quanta, quanta guerra...*, *Chronique des oubliés*). It significantly degrades the places where people live; the accumulation of death on the streets and in the rural areas transforms the cities, towns and nature into sterile, pestilent and inhabitable landscapes. In *Sara i Serafina* and *San Camilo, 1936* this is portrayed by the spreading of death and crime in the cities of Sarajevo and Madrid as the authority of the political and legal system collapses while in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* it is depicted through the macabre transformation of the rural areas into an infernal and apocalyptic space. In all cases, the urban and rural places appear vulnerable, defenseless and trapped under the bellicose force. There is a tragic sense of powerlessness and fragility in this as peoples' lives and the places where they have been constructing them are so easily shattered by the violence.

Most strikingly, the expansion of the "battlefield" dehumanizes and objectifies. The demolition of homes, towns and cities does not only destroy the physical space but as well the emotive and mnemonic symbolic space which associates the physical space with a sense of home, identity, belonging, joy, love, family, friendship and the things that one holds dear. This is most evidently illustrated in *Quanta, quanta guerra* and *Chronique des oubliés'* contemplations of destroyed houses as simultaneously signifying the loss of house and home. More broadly, the process of dehumanization can also be identified in the reduction of life to a bare struggle of survival. This is frequently elaborated in the novels, as is the case in: *Sara i Serafina's* portrayals of citizens' difficult daily lives under the siege of Sarajevo (and expressed explicitly in

Dervo's remark that Sarajevo is being deprived of its beauty and human qualities);²¹³ *El cuarto de atrás*' depiction of the civil war's impoverishment of peoples' lives along with the sudden emergence of obsessions over basic necessities (symbolized in particular in the transformation of the backroom); *Quanta, quanta guerra...*'s descriptions of Adrià's struggles to survive, his travels through decaying towns and encounters with people whose lives have been reduced to misery, extreme poverty, and hoarding of food; *Chronique des oubliés*' portrayals of starved people; and more obliquely in the transformation of the protagonist/narrator's daily life in *Mrak*. Dehumanization is brought to its extreme in the loss of reverence for death and the associated objectification of human lives. Civil war transforms death into something banal and senseless as military, political and patriotic appropriations empty the body of any human meaning and personal signification. People's bodies are quantified and become labeled as "enemy", "comrade", "victim", "hero", or as just a nameless corpse. The novels critique various processes by which civil war debases the value of human lives through death. They show how death becomes a common public spectacle (*Sara i Serafina* and *San Camilo, 1936*) and the way that collective death reduces the significance of people's lives to an anonymous agglomerated mass (*Quanta, quanta guerra...*, *Chronique des oubliés*, *Soldados de Salamina*).²¹⁴

²¹³ "Everything that is important, all the things that were associated with a lot of love, memory and meaning, are being taken out of the city, and into the city are being brought only things which provide for bare survival and which can serve as a social symbol." (*Sara i Serafina* 31)

"Iz grada se iznosi sve važno, sve ono što je za sebe vezivalo mnogo ljubavi, sjećanja i smisla, a u grad se unosi samo ono što omugućuje puki opstanak i može poslužiti kao društveni znak." (*Sara i Serafina* 31)

²¹⁴ For example, the horror, tragedy and absurdness of anonymous collective death is portrayed in *Quanta, quanta, guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* through the abandoned corpses and mass graves that the travelling soldiers come across. In

Opposing this dehumanization of people in civil war, literature faces the problematic of how to represent human suffering without objectifying it. The novels analyzed in this thesis tend to approach this by affirming the subjective voice, by focusing on the intimate human lives rather than the civil war itself and by placing particular emphasis on the value and dignity of individuals. A central common narrative strategy is that all the novels are narrated in the first person (with a slight exception in *San Camilo, 1936* which in addition to the first person also often uses the second and third person) and incorporate colloquial language. The novels give agency to the individual while prioritizing their subjective experience. This choice sacrifices a global explanation of the civil war in favor of a partial close up of it. It is a worm's-eye-perspective (as John Herman Richard Polt has described the point of view in *San Camilo, 1936*) which narrates the intimate lives of people, often left out by historical writing and war commemorations. The novels' historical perspectives are related to Miguel de Unamuno's concept of "inter-history" ("intra-historia"), which refers to the silent, eternal and living history of humanity laying hidden beneath the façade of artificial history "crystalized" in books and monuments:

The waves of history, with their murmur and foam shimmering in the sun, roll over a constant deep ocean, immensely deeper than the top layer which ripples over the silent ocean whose ultimate depths sunlight never reaches. Everything written daily in the newspapers, the whole history of the "present historical moment", is nothing else than the surface of the ocean, a surface which freezes and crystalizes in books and records. Once crystalized in this way, it becomes a

Soldados de Salamina this is expressed through Miralles' words about the terrible insignificance of the deaths of his young comrades. The figure of the nameless empathetic soldier who spares Sánchez Maza's life can be interpreted as a symbol for the anonymous soldiers forgotten by history.

hard layer no older in relation to the inter-historic life than is this meagre crust on which we live in comparison to the burning core the earth carries inside. The newspapers don't say anything about the silent lives of the millions of men without history who at all hours of the day and in all the countries of the world wake up at the break of dawn and go to the fields to resume a daily and eternal, dark and silent labour. Their labour, like that of the madreporal corals in the depths of the ocean, lays down the base upon which islets of history are erected. Sound, it is said, is supported by and lives on top of revered silence; those who create uproar in history rise over an immense and silent humanity. This inter-historic life, silent and constant like the ocean's depths, is the substance of progress, the true tradition, the eternal tradition, and not the mendacious tradition which is usually sought in the past buried in books and papers and monuments and stone. (80-81).²¹⁵

Representations of the inter-historic life during civil war consist on the one hand in the novels' omissions and rejections of global historical explanations (Unamuno's

²¹⁵ “Las olas de la historia, con su rumor y su espuma que reverbera al sol, ruedan sobre un mar continuo, hondo, inmensamente más hondo que la capa que ondula sobre un mar silencioso y a cuyo último fondo nunca llega el sol. Todo lo que cuentan a diario los periódicos, la historia toda del «presente momento histórico», no es sino la superficie del mar, una superficie que se hiela y cristaliza en los libros y registros, y una vez cristalizada así, una capa dura, no mayor con respecto a la vida intrahistórica que esta pobre corteza en que vivimos con relación al inmenso foco ardiente que lleva dentro. Los periódicos nada dicen de la vida silenciosa de los millones de hombres sin historia que a todas horas del día y en todos los países del globo se levantan a una orden del sol y van a sus campos a proseguir la oscura y silenciosa labor cotidiana y eterna, esa labor que como la de las madreporas suboceánicas echa las bases sobre que se alzan los islotes de la historia. Sobre el silencio augusto, decía, se apoya y vive el sonido; sobre la inmensa humanidad silenciosa se levantan los que meten bulla en la historia. Esa vida intrahistórica, silenciosa y continua como el fondo mismo del mar, es la sustancia del progreso, la verdadera tradición, la tradición eterna, no la tradición mentira que se suele ir a buscar al pasado enterrado en libros y papeles y monumentos y piedras.” (Unamuno 80-81).

crystalized ocean surface). This can be noted in explicit discussions about the mistrustfulness of history (for example in *San Camilo, 1936, Chronique des oubiés, El cuarto de atrás, Mrak, Soldados de Salamina*), and also inferred by the constant relegation of the civil war and the political events around it to the background of the story. On the other hand, the authors and novels studied directly address the necessity of telling inter-histories. Hence, Čolić states to feel an impulse to narrate ordinary history with a lowercase 'h', the narrator/protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás* wishes to follow the "the little crumbs" ("las miguitas") of history rather than "the small white stones" ("las piedrecitas blancas"), while the narrator/protagonist in *Mrak* poses the question "Where is the ordinary man" ("Gde je običan čovek?") in the grand scheme of history (Čolić, "L'abécédaire" par. 9; Martín Gaité 120; Albahari 103).

Most notably, the novels' content and narrative styles consistently revolve around the little stories of ordinary people, their daily experiences and subjective preoccupations. *Sara i Serafina* follows the lives of individuals (who are part of the Bosnian population and the overlooked "fourth side" of the conflict as Karahasan has stated) ("Belated" 17). It exemplifies the author's vision of literature as a representation of unique human beings possessing their own feelings and thoughts. The psychological dimension also primes in *Quanta, quanta, guerra...* which portrays the complex interior subjectivity of people through a highly symbolic, evocative and poetic narrative. *El cuarto de atrás* retrospectively recovers the subjective memories of the protagonist, suppressed in the postwar dictatorship, by intermixing the fantastic with the historical. The narrative's hybridity of genres and spontaneous non-linear reflections of the past facilitate the revelation of the protagonist's interior world, including her secret dreams and fantasies. Through their focus on the intimate lives of people and their subjectivity,

the novels illustrate how civil war's violence and oppressive force pushes people through psychological hardship which ultimately transforms them. This is present in varying ways in all of the novels, although it is most strikingly illustrated in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* through Adrià's evolution and loss of innocence.

The novels' focus on individual experiences also highlights the value of the person and criticizes the harrowing way that civil war objectifies and nullifies their lives. *San Camilo, 1936* elaborates the individualities of ordinary people in a kaleidoscopic multitude of diverse characters through Cela's experimental polyphonic narrative technique which conceives a novel as "a piece of life narrated step by step, without reticence, without strange tragedies, without charity, in the manner that life flows, exactly the way that life flows" ("un trozo de vida narrado paso a paso, sin reticencias, sin extrañas tragedias, sin caridad, como la vida discurre, exactamente como la vida discurre"; *La colmena* xli). What the novel demonstrates implicitly through its narrative style is explicitly reiterated in an epilogue where uncle Jerónimo gives a long, didactic and pleading speech to his young nephew about the vital necessity of opposing the civil war's violent appropriation of people's lives by defending the dignity of individuals and their right to forge their own lives. The tragic realization of uncle Jerónimo's premonitory warning, given at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, is echoed in the other novels. Specifically, they underline how the civil war abruptly destroys the lives people worked hard to construct and the future they were moving towards. In addition to the visible violence of civil war which kills and maims people, the population is also subject to an extensive and invisible symbolic violence by which they lose their old pre-war lives, and along with it experience a rupture in who they are and where they belong. This is an integral part of Sara's story in *Sara i Serafina* where

the loss of the meaning of her life and social utility pushes her to ideation of suicide. In *Mrak* and *Chronique des oubliés* the protagonist/narrator deals with the loss of his previous life and identity by choosing to go into exile and to start a new life, while C in *El cuarto de atrás* counteracts the civil war and postwar dictatorships' effacement of her identity by recovering safeguarded memories and recreating her sense of self. The possibility of defying the civil war violence by salvaging or reconstructing a new life appears abated in *Soldados de Salamina*. The narrator/protagonist's investigative efforts to recover civil war ghosts from the past culminates in Miralles' commentary about the futile deaths of his young friends and former comrades, who were tragically robbed of life experiences and now remain buried in a forgotten history.

What makes this violence senseless and absurd is how easily and quickly it destroys in vain a life in which so much effort, hope and love was invested. This loss on an individual level is paralleled on the collective. That is to say, a society which was built through a collective effort, made up and sustained by a complex web of relations between citizens cohabiting a shared cultural and social space they identified as home, is suddenly fractured from within, degraded and threatened by annihilation.

6.3 Literary Portrayals of Civil War's Reconfigurations of Identities, Community and the Nation

A marking feature of civil war, and one which differentiates it from other forms of conflicts, is that it occurs within the boundaries of a nation. It is an act of self-destruction with the objective to eradicate the current national organization and identity in order to rebuild another one. The physical military violence is associated with political, social and cultural symbolic forms of violence which aim to reformulate the

community (to redefine who “we” are) during the conflict and well into the postwar period. This implicates a dual process of destroying one collective identity (along with the institutions legitimizing, regulating and developing it) while rebuilding another one.

The novels studied in this thesis highlight through their portrayals of ordinary people’s experiences of civil war how the destruction and shift from one social system to another is artificial, absurd and violent. They illustrate how people suddenly have to adapt to newly imposed divisions in society which redefine who they are, which side they belong on, and transform their neighbour into enemy. The violence leads to a loss of community, home and belonging as the physical, social and cultural space people inhabited, established a social network in and constructed their lives around suddenly collapses. The reformulation of society during civil war erases the complexity and hybridity of communities into simplified categories that legitimize the antagonistic civil war dynamics.

The violent emergence of internal boundaries that fracture a cohabited space at the start of a civil war is elaborated in *Sara i Serafina* and *San Camilo, 1936* in a manner which underlines their arbitrariness and senselessness, hence ridding the violence of its justification. In particular, they reveal how the newly erected internal boundaries and ideological movements are fabricated, shallow and simplistic. Politicized and military words pushing the advancement towards civil war become reduced to noise devoid of meaning in *San Camilo, 1936* through repetitions and juxtapositions. In *Sara i Serafina* it is the written word, the official and fake documents, which loses its legitimacy as documents are shown to be arbitrary, malleable and based on performative language. *Chronique des oubliés* also highlights the hypocrisy and fallacy of bellicose slogans (such as the terms “freedom”, “liberated”, etc.) and the

political movements forcibly dividing people into simplified homogeneous categories through the use of quotation marks, irony, remarks about the absurdity of the frontiers, and by showing affinity between soldiers of opposite sides. In these novels there is no essential political identity attached to the characters, nor a clear justification for which side of the conflict they belong on, as their place appears to be caught in the tension of the divisions being erected.

These newly marked boundaries redefine people according to simplistic categories that exclude any complexity and hybridity. Hence, the professor in *Sara i Serafina* learns how the politics around the authorization of the passage of people across the Bosnian border are fundamentally based on reaffirming a division of people into homogeneous groups; while each side “naturally” prefers their own kind, accepting at times the passage of those belonging to the other side, they coincide in considering the biggest enemy to be the person who challenges these antagonistic politics of social division. The one who does not wish to pick a side, or the one who belongs to multiple sides is labeled as being an “unclear man” (“nejasan čovjek”), in contrast to those who concede to the new rules of the bellicose society and are seen as being a “clear man”, as “clean and trustworthy people who know where their place is and with whom they belong” (“jasan čovjek”, “čisti i odani ljudi koji znaju gdje im je mjesto i kome pripadaju”; *Sara i Serafina* 42).

Counteracting the internal boundaries set up to divide the population into simplistic opposing sides of “us” versus “them”, the novels debunk the artificiality of the constructed enemy category and focus on the connections between people. The enemy is revealed to not be a separate, external “other” which must at all costs be eradicated, but a part of a common whole, a mirror reflection based on a circular self-

defining logic. In *Quanta, quanta, guerra...* the carpenter states that “for the enemy we are also the enemy” (“per a l’enemic nosaltres també érem l’enemic”; 192). The dynamic of the interrelated enemy structure in civil war is further nuanced by the fact that the enemy was not so long ago a co-citizen. The protagonist/narrator in *Chronique des oubliés* brings this point up frankly by asking the question: “What is the idea, the obscure force, the political leader which has transformed yesterday’s neighbour and friend into the enemy?” (“Quelle est l’idée, la force obscure, quel est le chef politique qui ont transformé le voisin et l’ami d’hier en ennemi?”; 16). The novels further challenge the clean-cut enemy category by showing examples of compassion between soldiers of opposing sides (as is the case in *Chronique des oubliés*, and in *Soldados de Salamina*’s intriguing incident of the Republican soldier who spares the life of Sánchez Mazas, one of the key ideological and political leaders of the enemy side). They also indirectly unravel the enemy category by highlighting how the civil war is a tragedy for the whole collective. The novels consistently speak of how the civil war is a terrible tragedy of mutual suffering and loss. Returning from war, the electrician in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* says: “even if we win the war it would be as if we lost it, a war is set up so that everyone loses” (“encara que la guanyem serà com si l’haguéssim perduda, una guerra serveix perquè la perdi tothom”; 192). Similarly, uncle Jerónimo’s warning in *San Camilo, 1936* that “Spain could die in our hands any day now” highlights the collective tragedy and responsibility, while *Sara i Serafina* expresses this idea through the metaphorical image of the population being stranded on a boat in the open sea (“España se nos puede morir entre las manos cualquier día”; 360). In this way, civil war appears as absurd large-scale self-destruction of a society which implicates everyone.

Contrasting the simplified division of society into opposing homogeneous groups during a civil war, the novels develop a web of relations between characters. They show the interconnectedness between people in a cohabited space of shared experiences, both in the urban and rural spaces. The stories do not dwell on the political, largely ignoring which side the characters belong to, and focus rather on the personal bonds between people. *Sara i Serafina* shows indifference to politicized religious identities, which appear as artificially instrumentalized by the war, while placing value on the personal relationships that are threatened by the civil war and which people struggle to protect. The story hence revolves around the development of the friendship between the professor and Sara and the collective efforts made to save Antonija and Kenan's love. Similarly, a love story between the narrator/protagonist and Metka in *Mrak*, between Adrià and Eva in *Quanta, quanta, guerra...*, and friendship in *Soldados de Salamina* between the "Forest Friends" who help Sánchez Mazas survive as well as Miralles' esteem for his lost friends are key parts of the civil war representations.

In addition to highlighting specific relationships, the novels also develop a collective community. *San Camilo, 1936* creates an intricate web of interrelated characters, showing through simultaneous actions and juxtapositions the similarities uniting people, most notably the sense of chaos, anxiety and the terrible threat of death that everyone is confronted with at the outbreak of civil war. A collective of shared experiences is constructed in *Quanta, quanta guerra...* and *Chronique des oubliés* through the figure of a travelling soldier who witnesses along his journey how people are tragically subject to the devastations of civil war. The destabilization of the enemy category and the focus on an interconnected collective defy civil war's breakdown of community while reconfiguring heroism as a defense of human relations and as an

expression of compassion rather than as a patriotic sacrifice. Despite the grievances people are unjustly caused to suffer, and having to deal with their lives being reduced to basic survival, hope is maintained through companionship and helping each other out.

The mutual suffering and the relations that challenge the erected internal boundaries are effaced during the civil war and post war period. The process of homogenization and simplification of the population into antagonistic categories created during the civil war is solidified in the post war period which creates mythical visions of the newly redefined national identity. Specifically, the postwar nations legitimize themselves by selectively erasing and reconstructing the past in such a way that justifies the values they stand for as being morally and historically valid. This new nation that “keeps the war in hand” (as Walter Benjamin has stated) and that continues the war by other means (as Michel Foucault has argued), erases the undesired parts of the society identified as pertaining to an enemy defeated during the war (Benjamin, “Theories” 123; Foucault 15). This exclusion, sometimes formulated in terms of a “purification”, touches upon the political and cultural spheres, pushing out all alterity that doesn’t harmonize with the artificially consentaneous national script. In Spain this meant obliterating the history and policies of the defeated Second Republic and creating a unified, traditional and orthodox Spanish identity which suppressed alternative and regional identities.²¹⁶ In the post-Yugoslav countries, there was a general political

²¹⁶ José-Carlos Mainer has pointed out in his book *Falange y Literatura (Falange and Literature)* that the dictatorship in postwar Spain pushed regional cultures into clandestine existence. For example, the Basque cultural institutions and associations were shut down while the occupation of Catalonia gave rise to a persecution of various forms of tangible and intangible cultural expressions, including notably a severe suppression of the Catalan language under the slogan “Speak the language of the Empire” (“Habla la lengua del Imperio”; Mainer 128-129). Referring to the dictatorship’s attack on the Catalan identity Rafael Tasis wrote in 1939 that “for the Spaniards, the collapse of the Republic and even submission to authoritarian foreign

denouncement of Yugoslavia and Titoism, which came accompanied by the political powers' and media's harsh critiques of emerging "Yugo-nostalgia" sentiments in the populations. Each newly formed nation established itself in opposition to the others, formulating their identity by differentiating themselves in terms of history, culture, language and religion.²¹⁷ The common denominator between the postwar political and

policy, doesn't represent the death of their spirit or of their language. They have lost their freedom, but they have not lost anything more. While we, the Catalans have lost it all" ("per als espanyols, l'enfonsament de la República i àdhuc la submissió a una política estrangera autoritària, no representa la mort de llur esperit ni de llur idioma. Han perdut la llibertat, però no han perdut res més. Mentre que nosaltres, els catalans, ho hem perdut tot"; qtd. in Luczak, *Espacio* 79).

²¹⁷ A necessity of having one's own language as a pillar of a national identity gave rise to political re-nomenclatures of the Serbo-Croatian language, which in the postwar period became renamed as Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian by the respective nations. In addition to being controversial (and causing confusion), the stance that the three languages are different, forcibly rewrites identities. The political redefinitions of language also led to problematic re-qualifications of writers' identities, putting authors who did not clearly belong to one side in delicate situations. For example, Tomislav Z. Longinović has pointed out how the complexity of Ivo Andrić's identity and his defense of the commonality of the Southern Slavs was seen as problematic and subject to abuse by postwar ideologies:

Andrić was born to a Serbian family that had been converted to Roman Catholicism and grew up speaking the *ijekavski* variant of Serbo-Croatian. His first poems were written in the same variant, but when he moved to Belgrade in the 1920s, he started writing his prose in the *ekavski* variant used in Serbia proper. In addition to this vacillation between his Serbian national identity and Croatian religious affiliation, he devoted most of his writings to the lives of Bosnian Muslims [...] To choose one identity over the other presupposed a loss of the other one. The love of one community requires the hate of the other one—a choice a humanist like Andrić could not make. This is also one of the reasons he found the answers to the dilemma of identity in Mlada Bosna, which fought for the unification of all the Southern Slavs, regardless of their national origin or religious affiliation. [...] Those who are not quick to choose their national identity, or those who are perceived as Yugoslavs and therefore as anational, are victims of abuse from all sides. Due to the fact that he belonged to the latter group, Ivo Andrić has posthumously suffered more than any other writer in the former Yugoslavia: his monument in Višegrad has been dynamited by Muslim extremists, his works have been banned from Croatian school programs, and his foundation in Belgrade has been robbed of its assets by Serbian politicians. Locked within the xenophobic universe of their emergent cultures and busy with the invention and reinvention of cultural "others", the guardians of nationalist culture are quick to forget and silence those who remind them of their common

ideological scenes after the two civil wars is the impetus to quickly establish a seemingly firm new national, political, and cultural identity which is homogeneous, simplistic and based on an exclusion of identities which used to be a part of it before the war.

The problematic of the fabrication of national identities and historical revision is elaborated in *Mrak* and *El cuarto de atrás*. Dealing most directly with postwar life, *El cuarto de atrás* describes Franco's dictatorship as "a homogeneous block" ("un bloque homogéneo") that silences the recent history of the Second Spanish Republic and of the social complexities while creating national myths of a glorious traditional Spain (116). The protagonist expresses her rejection of the historical myths, bellicose propaganda and national ideals (in particular those of the female role) in the secure space of an intimate conversation that allows her to freely share her sincere thoughts about the past and her own introspection. A dismissal of historical fabrications in *Mrak* is also played out in the internal subjectivity of a writer who is disturbed and disillusioned by the emptiness of public discourses and the falsification of history brought on by civil war. History is seen as a force that transforms and obliterates, in particular the experiences of ordinary man. This is also illustrated in *Soldados de Salamina* through the frustrated historical investigation of the journalist/writer set on creating a "real story" ("relato real") about Sánchez Mazas' escape at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Following his extensive research, he comes to realize that the historical documents cannot embody the authentic past and that the real subjective experience is out of reach.

What is ultimately revealed is the presence of conflict on a symbolic and representational level, and literature's attempt to amend this by articulating the loss

Slavic origin and the fratricidal nature of the war they are waging. (136-137)

brought on by civil war in a way that restores a meaningful human dimension. The postwar homogeneous triumphant discourses do violence onto the people who have lived through a past that is much more complex than the reductionist and mythical symbols fabricated to justify the civil war and which perpetuate the animosity forged during the conflict. The human dimension is lost among the effacements of the history of ordinary people (inter-history) and the construction of empty memories through commemorations of national heroes and anonymous victims. The literary works that have been analyzed in this thesis expand and open up from the standpoint of a human perspective the history as well as the meaning of civil war (while never tying it down to one definition). In his essay “The Power of Lies” Mario Vargas Llosa argues that:

The reconstruction of the past through literature is almost always misleading in terms of historical objectivity. Literary truth is one thing, historical truth another. But, although it may be full of fabrication—or for that very reason—literature presents us with a side of history which cannot be found in history books. For literature does not lie gratuitously. Its deceptions, devices, and hyperbole all serve to express those deep-seated and disturbing truths which only come to light in this oblique way. (28)

The “deep-seated and disturbing truths” touched upon in the analyzed novels are the illustrations of how civil war implicates a complex long lasting dynamic of violence and coercion which is not just an overt visible expression of military violence, but as well its symbolic form that obliterates individuals and communities. Civil war’s destruction of one social system and its reconstruction of another cause tangible and intangible losses which put into crisis individuals’ sense of identity, home, belonging and life. The novels’ portrayals of peoples’ subjective experiences defy civil war’s debasement of the

human and communal spirit by accentuating the dignity and value of human lives and people's sense of compassion, camaraderie, friendship and love.

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Appendix: Figures

Figure 1. Number and duration of civil wars from 1945-2000 (Fearon 276).

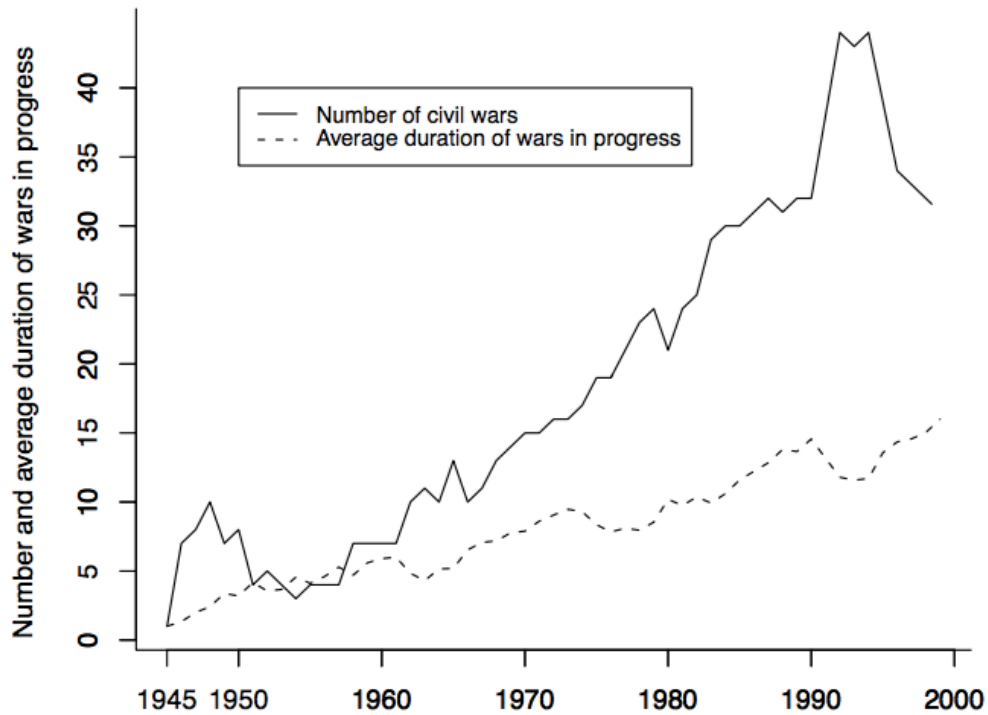


Figure 2. Number of armed conflicts by type (Themnér and Wallenstein 568).

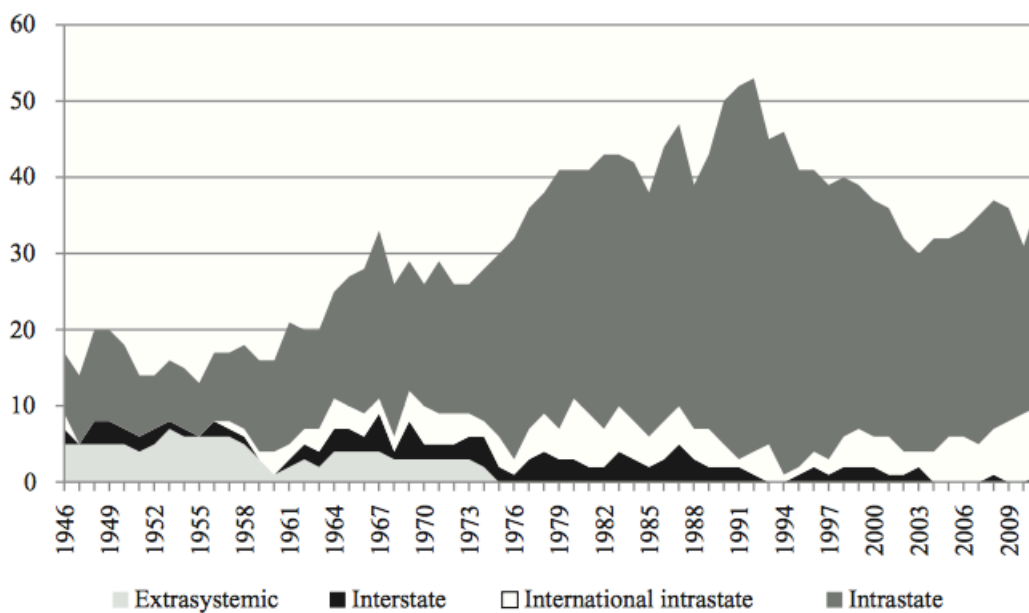


Figure 3. *Armonía* (*Harmony*, 1956) by Remedios Varo. Oil on Masonite, 74 x 93, private collection. Image from *Viajes inesperados: El arte y la vida de Remedios Varo* by Janet A. Kaplan (190).



Figure 4. Detail of Remedios Varo's *Armonía* (*Harmony*). Image from "Arte e chimica: Remedios Varo 2, le opere" by Margherita Spanedda.



Figure 5. Image of Sanchez Mazas' diary in *Soldados de Salamina* (Cercas 59).

