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Basque Studies and the Basque Academic Diaspora

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Editor's note: This is a version of a paper given at the "Joan-Etorri" Basque Studies Symposium at Boise State University, July 29, 2015.

Let me begin with a personal reflection. In July 2011, I decided to visit the United States with my family. Among other reasons, I wanted my son to see the place where he was born, the Stanford hospital. It had been over 30 years since I first came to this country. In January 1984 I came to California, to Menlo Park. I had left behind a Basque Country immersed in a pretty serious economic crisis. The price of oil had multiplied by 2.7 between 1978 and 1981, which joined the crisis underway in the Basque steel and naval sector. During the 80's we were facing the first major transformation of Basque industry and the list of people affected by loss of jobs was endless. Just like today, the Basque Country needed technology, internationalization, and knowledge. That was the time when I arrived to the heart of the Silicon Valley, the crater of a volcano of technology that was in full eruption. I worked two years for the Stanford Research Institute. I will never forget that time of my life.

I came with a scholarship to complete my university education. Vastly different conditions from the ones that Basques faced one hundred years earlier. True, my experience was a century later from those who first came to this place around 1887. So even though I came under very different conditions, I soon found that despite everything, there were certain similarities.

Sure there is quite a difference between coming to take care of sheep like the late Felix Bilbao (see Figure 1), a Californian from the Basque town of Zamudio did, and coming as an engineer to a research center. I want to remember him in a special way because during my first stay in the United States he treated me like a father would. In quoting him, I want to express recognition of all our



Figure 1: Gloria Totoricagüena speaks with Felix Bilbao in the presence of the provost of the University of Stanford, John Etchemendy.

ancestors who came from the Basque Country to build a new future. Their path was not easy. “Joan-Etorri, Going forth and Going back”.

But the feeling of loneliness that I felt when I was suddenly in a new country, is the same that all those have felt who migrate from their countries and come to an unknown location. That feeling of solitude, in the case of the United States, was a mesmerizing one when

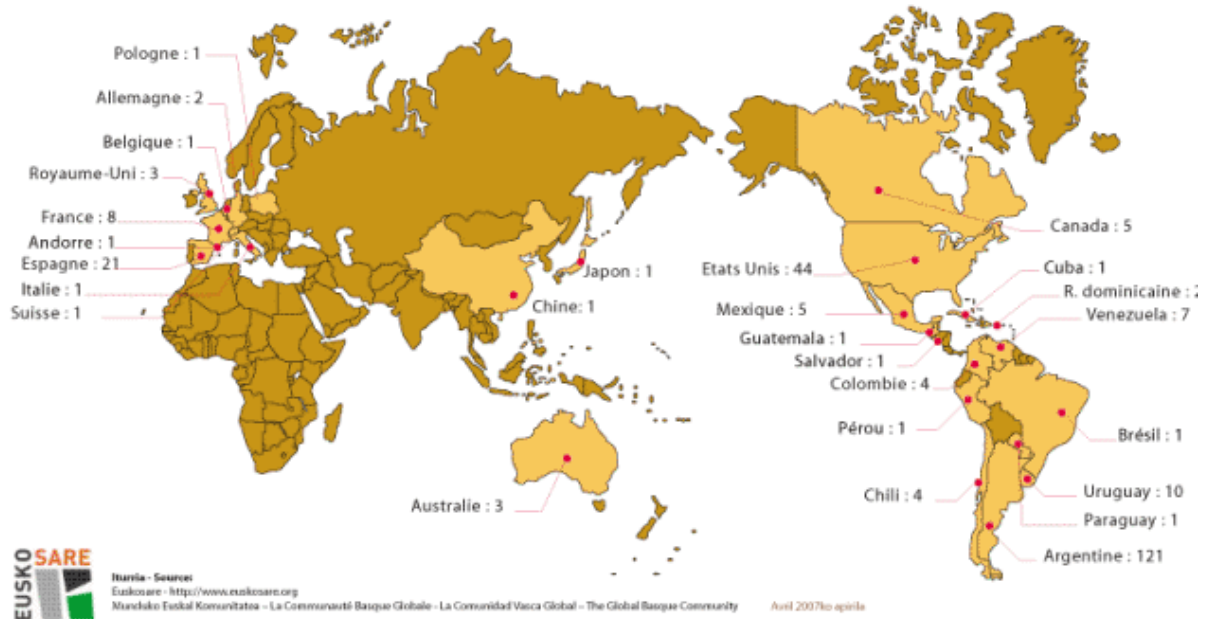
I looked out on that six-lane freeway, having come from a country with much more narrow highways. That image struck me the most as we arrived to a motel room where I would begin counting my scholarship money to see if it would see me to the end of month.

Carrying that feeling of loneliness and economic restriction, the first weekend I found my way to the Basque Cultural Center in South San Francisco (see Figure 2). You cannot imagine what a feeling I had entering the Basque Cultural Center, laying eyes on the fronton, hearing Basque spoken, seeing people playing the card game of *mus*, and in less than half an hour, finding a place to live, thanks to a woman of Navarre who had a lovely house in Menlo Park. My loneliness and financial concerns were resolved. I felt the support from the Basque diaspora, I was clothed and protected. Thanks to that personal experience I realized the extraordinary role played by the Basque centers throughout the world.



Figure 2: Doormat at the entrance of the Basque Cultural Center in South San Francisco.

I take this opportunity to remember the significance of Basque Centers, given in an interview with the magazine *Argia* by Dr. Gloria Totoricagüena. Here is what she said: “I’ll continue my speech by talking about Basque Centers. I would say that Basque Centers are institutions with an educational environment. In reality they are not schools, nor do they have a formal structure. There is no curriculum for teaching, or teachers or text books in them...but the Basque Center is a more important way of showing people how to be Basque than learning it from books. Much more alive. Basque Centers don’t do intellectual work. It’s more about emotion. In them you can come to understand your families and your ancestors’ pathway. In that respect I can say that Basque Centers are educators.”



Source: EuskoSare. Basque clubs around the world (c. 2007)

Taking advantage of a trip in July of 2011, I visited Boise during the celebration of the feast of San Ignatius (see Figure 3). Fortunately I had the chance to visit Morris Hill Cemetery in Boise with Dr. Gloria Totoricagüena. Joan-Etorri, Going forth and Going back, is the theme of this seminar and, you know, what better place to learn about the meaning of those two words than at a cemetery (see Figure 4).



Figure 3: Corpus Christi Dances of Oñati performed in Boise on the occasion of the annual Saint Ignatius festivities.



Figure 4: Gravestones of Basques at Morris Hill Cemetery of Boise

Many came and thrived, others returned; some were successful, others not so much so, but also many of them ended up in unknown graves, when there wasn't enough money to record their names on tombstones. "Joan-Etorri, Going forth and Going back". The American dream was not always fulfilled for our ancestors. As Gloria was explaining to us I remember the feeling I experienced at that moment perfectly, that feeling of being completely overwhelmed. A mixture of nostalgia, sadness, excitement, and solidarity with our ancestors left me virtually speechless. "Joan-Etorri, Going forth and Going back".

Years later, visiting Stanford University and its hospital, recalling my past in this country, I was very aware that, in a way, I am also a product of the Basque Diaspora. Amerikauak. I, too, although to a much smaller extent, and under conditions, maybe not better but different, was Amerikanua. My son is Amerikanua. And by the way, it's been 40 years since the first publishing of the book written by William Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikauak: Basques in the New World* (see Figure 5), a book that is now a reference for all of us and that deserves the recognition that this conference is going to give it.

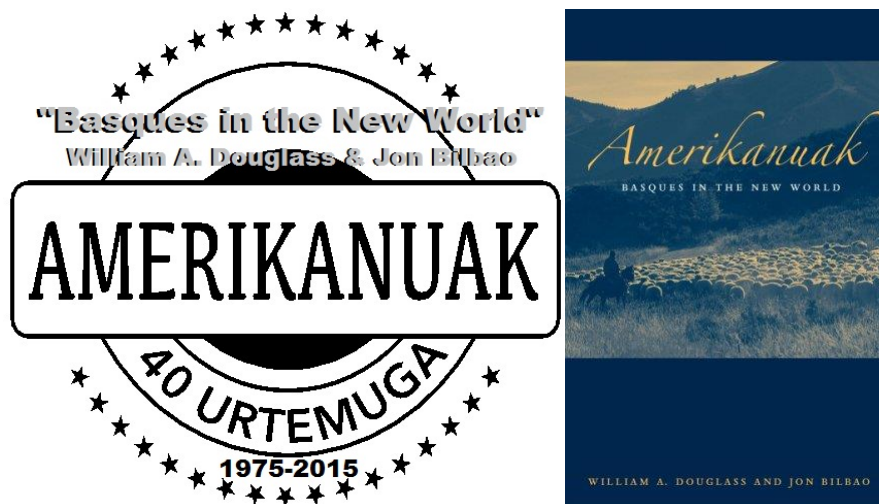


Figure 5: Cover of the book *Amerikauak* by William Douglass and Jon Bilbao

In its introduction it reads, "The New World is a mosaic of ethnic groups. No period of its history, no sector of its society, and none of its regions may be understood fully if immigrant traditions and ethnic heritages are ignored. Consequently, the literature (both scientific and literary) dealing with the American immigrant and ethnic groups is staggering. But sheer quantity does not guarantee either quality or breadth in coverage. Certain ethnic groups and certain periods in the history of particular groups have received comprehensive treatment while others have remained at the margins of awareness and concern. Such is the case with the Basques, one of the least-studied elements in the pluralistic social fabric of the Americas despite the fact that they were

among the first Europeans to immigrate to the New World, as well as one of its most widely distributed immigrant groups." Rereading certain passages of the book I remember that the University of the Basque Country released the Spanish version of the book by Douglass and Bilbao through its publishing service. Being able to highlight this fact, is a source of joy for me as rector of the University of the Basque Country, although I have the feeling that we could have done more.

This leads me to reflect on what we have done, as the University of the Basque Country, to contribute to the development of relations with the Basque Diaspora and, above all, from the University perspective, to study it, and especially the academic Diaspora. When we talk about the Basque academic diaspora, names of people immediately come to mind who, many years ago, prompted the University both in the Basque Country during the Spanish Civil War, as in later years from universities in different countries. Angel Apraiz or Lehendakari José Antonio Agirre are clear examples.

Angel Apraiz was probably the main driver of the creation of the Basque University during the Spanish Civil War (see Figure 6). His knowledge of European and North American universities that he had visited in 1914 allowed him to propose a modern University model, rooted in the Basque culture and open to the world. Doctor Apraiz was a Professor at the University of Salamanca and this is what he expressed in a speech on the Basque University in 1918:



Figure 6: Portrait of Angel Apraiz

"Therefore, now that I am about to talk about this very pleasant subject for me as is the Basque University during this perhaps very solemn and critical occasion, I hope that you will realize that these mentioned cultural aspects are the perspective that our eyes need to behold, that it is not right to consider the issue with a narrow view of one who only wants to obtain for his country centralized, uniform, establishments with bureaucratic frigidness which is difficult to overcome and that the establishment of such centers in our land, which we love so much, must be to provide them with a life, according to the one developed around it with multiple manifestations, and in each of these manifestations its roots be grown so that the University becomes not an end but a means, a means for culture, and culture as well becomes a means, as the inscription says in the main building of the University of Columbia in New York, for public prosperity and for the glory of God."

As we know, it was under the term of Lehendakari Agirre that the Basque University was inaugurated in 1936 (see Figure 7). A University which was silenced by the force of arms. The creation of the Basque University of '36 is, without a doubt, one of the great contributions made by



Figure 7: Lehendakari Agirre

Lehendakari [President] J.A. Agirre, but it is not the point that I'd like to focus on at this symposium today.

Although he is less known for this activity, Lehendakari Agirre was a full-time professor at Columbia University, where he taught Advanced Research in Modern History of Western Continental Europe, and Advanced Research in Latin American History. It was, therefore, one of the first components of this academic Basque diaspora that we want to recognize and strengthen looking to the future.

As Dr. Gloria Totorikaguena reminds us: "Aguirre's course lectures highlighted concepts of democracy, such as freedom, justice, civil rights, peace, representativeness, and tolerance. He focused especially on Christian democracy and promoted a new European political system based on peoples and common European values, a precursor of the European Common Market and of today's European Union."

In March 1943, the Council of Europe in America was inaugurated in New York with Aguirre as a member. Aguirre had worked as a lawyer in labor law and had influenced many changes for a safer workplace and fixed-hour workdays in the Basque Country. He promoted a social Christian democratic society as he perceived the Basque society to be. In addition to his myriad of duties and responsibilities as President of the Basque Government and as full-time professor at Columbia, Aguirre published numerous writings in the United States and in the international press."

Today our relationship with Columbia University is alive and well, thanks to the joint research work done with the Lehendakari Agirre Center, located at the University of the Basque Country, which is

also directed by another former Lehendakari, Juan Jose Ibarretxe, a professor at our university.



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Political Studies

Recalling these facts, I am aware of the many people who have belonged and belong now to this Basque academic diaspora. Some of these people are well-known and their contributions are part of our intellectual heritage. However, the vast majority of these people perform their



work teaching and doing research at universities throughout the world without having been able to network, help each other out, complement each other's work or take advantage of a common and shared potential.

We should establish a space for this relationship which could serve as a meeting place for dialogue, for sharing and contrasting ideas and for generating and transmitting knowledge. A space allowing the Basque Country to continue growing in knowledge with input from anywhere in the world.



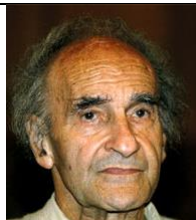


We must take steps and in this sense, today I want to acknowledge here, that the University of the Basque Country should have been much more active in the promotion and development of the academic community of the Basque diaspora. It was our responsibility and our duty. Therefore, I want to announce our determination to establish a specific program for the historical study of the academic community of the Basque diaspora, as well as for the design and development of the necessary tools to establish and promote it. In particular, these are the actions we propose in the short term:

- Establishment of a specific Symposium on the academic community of the Basque diaspora
- Creation of an Association of Basque scholars in the world in close collaboration with Basque Etxepare Institute
- Promotion of Master's projects, and Doctoral theses on the Basque academic diaspora.
- Promotion of mobility exchange programs for students and academic staff in collaboration with universities like this one, Boise State University.

This academic community of the Basque diaspora can be a tool for promoting, strengthening and working together with universities interested in academic programs on Basque studies. This is, without a doubt, another of the obligations of the University of the Basque Country.

In this section, I also want to show our commitment to continue working with universities offering Basque studies and also with the different chairs which, thanks to the work and support of the Etxepare Basque Institute, have been created in different universities. I think that enhancing research, scientific publications, joint postgraduate programs and especially theses in supervision of Basque Studies is, in addition to our duty, one of the most important contributions that we must make as a public Basque University.

As you all know the Etxepare Basque Institute created five different chairs during the last years all over the world. These chairs play a key role in the development of Basque Studies around the world:

	<p>BERNARDO ATXAGA CHAIR AT THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (CUNY). The main objective of this chair is to promote research into and the study of the Basque language and literature. Bernardo Atxaga himself inaugurated it in 2011, at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The Bernardo Atxaga Chair offers a doctoral academic program in Basque culture and annually brings visiting professors to New York.</p>
	<p>KOLDO MITXELENA CHAIR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO. The goal of this chair, founded in 2012, is to extend Basque Studies in North America. It is part of the Division of Humanities at the University of Chicago and every year it hosts, for four months, a renowned Basque professor who imparts seminars and lectures about Basque humanistic studies.</p>
	<p>EDUARDO CHILLIDA CHAIR AT THE JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE UNIVERSITY IN FRANKFURT. It was established in 2013 and its goal is to promote specialised study and research. It began with classes on the great Basque artist Eduardo Chillida. The chair is located in the History of Art Institute at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt and classes form part of Curatorial Studies, administered by the same Institute; furthermore, the Frankfurt Library of Art houses the entire bibliography on the artist in his own section, thereby becoming a point of reference for scholars of his work.</p>
	<p>MANUEL IRUJO CHAIR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL. The Manuel Irujo Fellowship Chair, part of the Department of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies at the University of Liverpool. The visiting professor will teach a four-month course on the History and Politics of the Basque Country in general, and on Basque exile in particular, thereby promoting study and research of this topic.</p>
	<p>JON BILBAO CHAIR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA-RENO. The main purpose of this Chair is to promote international research and knowledge about the Basque diaspora and Basque culture, and to collaborate around that objective. The Chair has created a research grant for a visiting professor, called Jon Bilbao Visiting Research Fellow, which is renewable annually or biannually. The fellow will be based in the CBS of the University of Nevada, Reno, the lead agency in teaching and researching about the Basque diaspora in the United States of America. The chair was created in 2014.</p>

I am not the person in charge of the Etxepare Basque Institute but it is a great pleasure and honor for me to announce that a new chair will be created thanks to the agreement that they will soon sign with Boise State University. The chair will be named “Eloise Garmendia Bieter” and this will be one of the best ways to give tribute to the key role that women played in the development

and settlement of the Basque Diaspora. Women who in silence and without any public role carried out their consistent and hard work, never getting a break, making our cultural heritage and identity transmission possible.



I would like to take this opportunity to remember a person who was instrumental in the development of Basque studies programs, Pete Cenarrusa (see Figure 8). Two years ago he left us, but his legacy remains with us. We give thanks to Pete Cenarrusa for his example and support through the foundation that bears his name and whose objectives I am about to read, and which the University of the Basque Country fully shares:

The Cenarrusa Foundation for Basque Culture was founded in 2003 as the Cenarrusa Center for Basque Studies. Our goal was to preserve, educate and connect the Basque community and the world through research, projects and educational opportunities by establishing a Basque Studies program at Boise State University.



Figure 8: Aurreku of honor offered by Iñaki Goirizelaia to Pete Cenarrusa.

On the other hand, being in the United States in the context of this Symposium and Jaialdi 2015, I must mention the fundamental role of Basque Centers, and especially their relationship with the North American Basque Organizations, Inc. (NABO). I understand this to be another key for improving the contribution that the University of the Basque Country can make to the development of these studies and to encourage mobility. Indeed, “Joan-Etorri, Going forth and Going back”.



As I mentioned before, promoting the mobility of our young people is also an objective that we want to see grow from the University of the Basque Country, collaborating with NABO and North American universities, mainly those that promote Basque studies. We would like to initiate specific programs, particularly targeting the Basque diaspora, although not exclusively, to encourage mobility. This way we encourage the sons and daughters of the Basque community to get to know Basque culture and its language first hand. We propose the establishment of schools and summer courses, organized jointly with universities and NABO, where students interested in Basque studies can make stays programmed with academic and recreational activities. Under the name “Basque Yourself Summer School Program” we would offer training in the following topics:

The Current Basque Country, a political, social, cultural and business perspective

Peace and coexistence

Introductory Basque language course

Linguistic policy

The Basque Country: science and culture

- The Basque educational system
- Basque network of science, technology and innovation
- Basque culture: spontaneous sung poetry, dance, music, film, literature
- Basque heritage



- Basque sports
- Basque cuisine

Amerikanuak, Joan-Etorri. History of the Basque diaspora.

- Where is the Basque Country headed?
- What is the future of the Basque Country in Europe?

This academic program would be accompanied by a proposal including recreational activities to experience first-hand the material presented in traditional classes. These experiences would include field trips to government institutions, business visits, and attending performances of Basque spontaneous sung poetry, dance and music as well as fronton events or attending the festivals of the various towns. Encouraging mobility, making the University of the Basque Country accessible to the diaspora, helping to learn more about our country, our culture and language are the objectives we pursue with this specific program of courses and this summer school.

Our symbol, created by the artist Eduardo Chillida, represents the tree of knowledge (see Figure 9). It has its roots in the Basque Country, but its branches extend to the world, giving shelter to whoever wishes it. Without a doubt, we want to make a special effort for those citizens of the Basque diaspora.



Universidad del País Vasco
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea
The University of the Basque Country *Figure 9.*

In this context, it is worth remembering similar successful initiatives already undertaken in the past, like the program that began in 1974, making it possible for many young people of this State to undertake stays in Oñati, significantly improving their knowledge of the Basque language and culture. An excellent example of the results of such initiatives is the Mayor of this city. When he was 14 years old, Dave Bieter participated in the Oñati program to improve his Basque and delve into the Basque culture. No doubt they were difficult times, with Franco still alive: we had no Basque University, Basque culture was persecuted, but you know, Dave Bieter was able to take advantage of



Figure 10: Dave Bieter and Iñaki Goirizelaia during Jaialdi 2000

the opportunity, and he subsequently repeated his stay twice. Today he is the only Basque-speaking Mayor outside the Basque Country, (see Figure 10). Again “Joan-Etorri, Going forth and Going back”.

It would be wonderful if the Basque diaspora considered the University of the Basque Country as another of its universities. That’s why

initiatives like the ones we propose today are definitely a necessary step.

The University of the Basque Country wants to be present in the Basque diaspora. We want to increase our cooperation with American universities which, like Boise State University, are committed to Basque Studies. We want to be the European benchmark university for the young people of the Basque diaspora. We sincerely hope that the ideas we have presented today can serve to achieve this goal.

