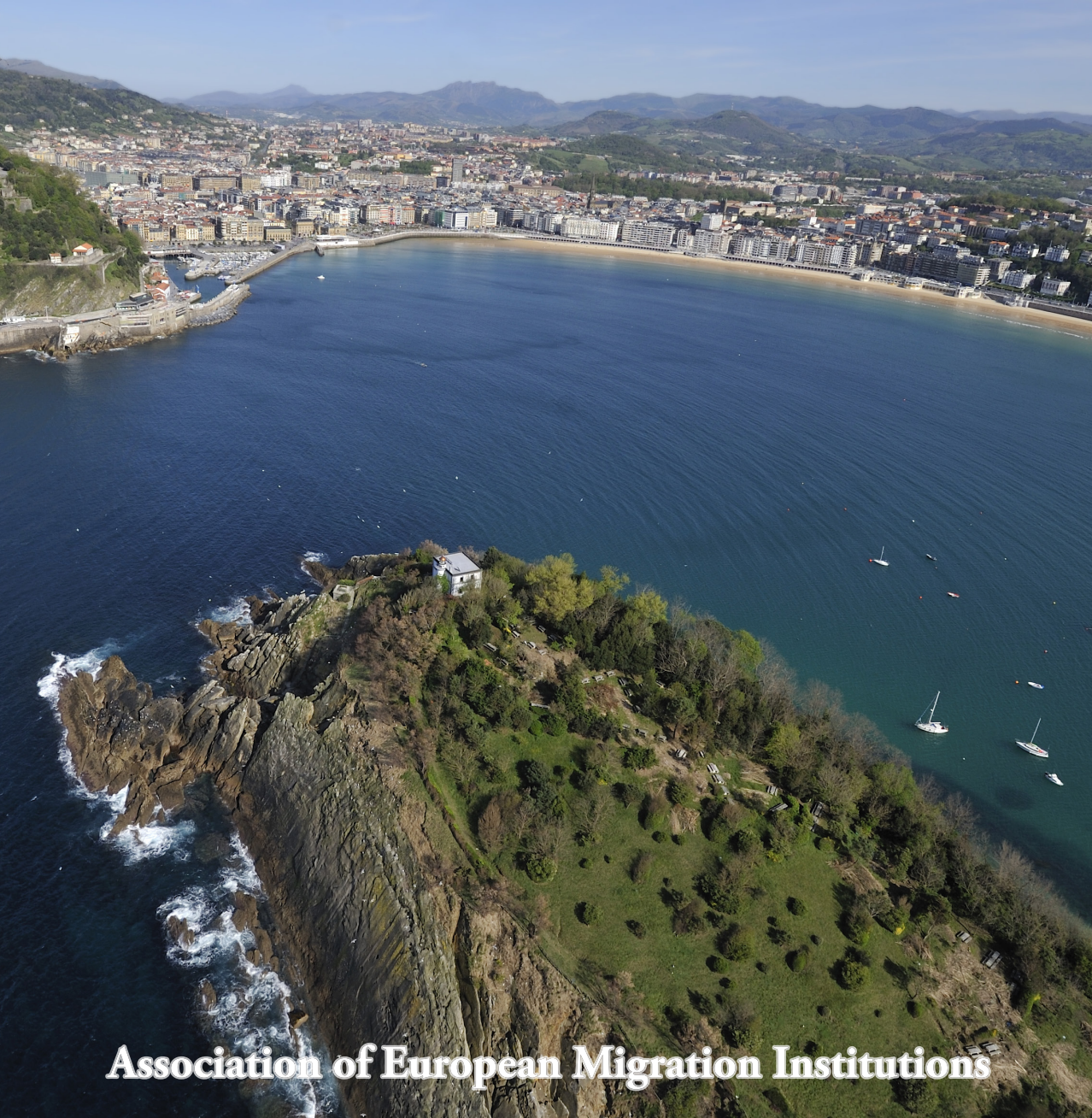


# AEMI

JOURNAL



Volume 19–20 • 2021–2022



**Association of European Migration Institutions**

*Cover picture:*

*Panorama of Donostia-San Sebastián, location of the 31st AEMI Conference on relations between diasporas and their new home countries.*

*Photo: Mikel Arrazola*

# AEMI

J O U R N A L



Volume 19–20 • 2021–2022

*Selected papers*

*from the 31st AEMI Conference in Donostia-San Sebastián,  
Basque Country, 2021*

Relations between Diasporas and  
Their Home Countries:  
New Migrations, Return Movements and  
Historical Context

*Editors*

Maja Gostič, Špela Kastelic,  
Klara Kožar Rosulnik, Kristina Toplak

Association of European Migration Institutions  
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Ljubljana 2022

# AEMI Journal

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## From the Editors

It is a great privilege to introduce this new double issue of the *AEMI Journal* 2021-2022, Volume 19/20. The current issue is indeed a special one, taking into account that the 30th conference, *Return Migration* in Omagh, Northern Ireland had to be cancelled due to the pandemic in 2020. The following year's 31st AEMI conference, *Relations between diasporas and their home countries: New migrations, return movements and historical context*, took place in a hybrid format with online participation as well as meeting in person in Donostia-San Sebastián, Basque Country at the end of 2021. This issue includes five articles from the conference and program. In addition to the articles from the conference in the Basque Country, we have added another article by the young researcher Ana Goenaga Odriozola, which deals with the theme of Panel 6: "*Basque Diaspora: Communities and Identities*", but was not part of the conference.

Furthermore, we would like to address some of the changes that are coming with this issue as our current editorial board is passing on the editorship. Let us briefly explain the chain of events that has led to this moment. Mr. Hans Storhaug, the first and only editor of the *AEMI Journal* for 15 years, proposed in late January 2018 that the Slovenian Migration Institute should take over the editorship of the Journal, as it has many decades of experience in editing and publishing its own academic journal, *Two Homelands*. The new AEMI Board agreed, and three editors were named along with a mentor to supervise their work. The new editors – Dr. Klara Kožar Rosulnik, Špela Kastelic, MA, and Maja Gostič, MA – were working closely together with their supervisor Dr. Janja Žitnik Serafin until Dr. Kristina Toplak took over her responsibilities and duties as the journal's new Editor-in-Chief.

As Mr. Hans Storhaug pointed out repeatedly over the years of his editing of the Journal, there has been a great need for instructions for authors that would help them prepare their articles. With this in mind, we published "Instructions for Authors" and set some additional criteria (e.g. the maximum length of the text, adequate level of English) for the selection of articles for publication. Gradually, we adopted a uniform citation style and general guidelines that have been followed consistently throughout the last two double issues of the Journal.

All in all, it has been a great challenge as well as a privilege to take on the editorship of the *AEMI Journal*. This issue would not be possible without the support of the AEMI Board, and special thanks also go to Mr. Hans Storhaug for all the hard work he has done with the Journal throughout these past 15 years. In the past five years of editing the Journal we have gathered valuable experience, met various AEMI members and gained insight into topics that were previously less familiar to us. Thus, we say goodbye to our role in the Journal with gratitude and pass on the editorship with great pride.

Finally, we would like to draw your attention to the upcoming 32nd AEMI conference *Refuge and Hosting – Paths towards Inclusion* in Fafe, Portugal. All papers to be presented are welcome to be submitted for publication. We wish you all the best and hope to see you at (at least one of) the upcoming conferences throughout the coming years.

Sincerely,

Maja Gostič  
Klara Kožar Rosulnik  
Špela Kastelic  
Kristina Toplak





## 31<sup>st</sup> AEMI CONFERENCE

### *RELATIONS BETWEEN DIASPORAS AND THEIR HOME COUNTRIES:*

*New migrations, return movements and historical context*

Palacio Miramar Jauregia, Donostia-San Sebastián  
Sep. 30 – Oct. 1, 2021

### PROGRAM

#### Thursday, September 30

9:00 Opening  
Cathrine Kyo Hermansen, AEMI Chairperson  
Marian Elorza, General Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Basque Government)

9:20 Kingsley Aikins, The Networking Institute, Ireland  
*Connecting diasporas*

10:00 Panel 1: Migration flows, connections of diaspora and home  
Chaired by Dietmar Osses, AEMI Secretary

Dorota Praszalowicz, Institute of American Studies, Jagiellonian University,  
Cracow, Poland

*Pacific Northwest and the European immigration flows: Toward the comparative  
history of ethnic groups: Poles, Croatians and Jews*

Magdalena Paluszkiwicz-Misiaczek, Institute of American Studies, Jagiellonian  
University, Cracow, Poland

*Polish veterans of WWII in Canada and their peculiar relations with communist  
Poland*

Montserrat Golías, Laura Oso, University of A Coruña, Spain  
*New and old chains. Analysis of migratory flows between Spain and Argentina*

Marina Hansen, University of the Basque Country  
*Italian immigration and state education in Argentina (1870-1930). A multilingual Buenos Aires*

11:30 Coffee-break

12:00 Panel 2: Workshop

Chaired by Belén Fernández Suárez, Antía Pérez-Caramés, University of A Coruña, Spain: *The Spanish diaspora in Europe: emigration and return of a disenchanted generation*

Antía Pérez Caramés (University of A Coruña, Spain), Belén Fernández Suárez (University of A Coruña, Spain), Alberto Capote Lama (University of Granada, Spain) *The new wave of Spanish emigration to France. A comparative analysis of the strategies and trajectories of intra-European migrants*

Jordi Giner Monfort (University of Valencia, Spain), Belén Fernández Suárez (University of A Coruña, Spain), Sandra López Pereiro (University of A Coruña, Spain), Rubén Pérez Roel (University of A Coruña, Spain)  
*The return of new Spanish emigration after the 2008 crisis: motivations for putting an end to the European dream*

Antonio Alejo (University of A Coruña, Spain), Luca Chao Pérez (University of A Coruña, Spain), María José Fernández Vicente (Université de Bretagne Occidentale, France), Anna Giulia Ingellis (University of Valencia, Spain) and Ana Irene Rovetta Cortés (CONICET-University of Jujuy, Argentina)  
*Integration and return policies for the Spanish diaspora: An exploratory overview*

13:30 Lunch

14:30 Panel 3: Return migration and identity

Chaired by Emma Barnhøj, The Danish Immigration Museum

Uxío-Breogán Diéguez, Montserrat Golías, University of A Coruña, Spain  
*The construction of Galicia through emigration: the configuration of a dual and transnational community*

Heidi Rodrigues Martins, Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, Luxembourg  
*The Quartier Italien, grounded through return and other mobilities*

Dietmar Osses, Industriemuseum Zeche Hannover in Bochum, Germany  
*Polish, German, European? Experiences of second generation re-migrants in Germany*

Anders Osvald Thorkilsen, The Danish Immigration Museum, Denmark  
*Dead and buried in the diaspora*

16:00 Coffee-break

16:30 Panel 4: Home and Diaspora

Chaired by Bram Belaart, Red Star Line Museum, Antwerp

Iker Arranz, California State University, Bakersfield, USA  
*The vanishing of home. Reflections on the diaspora relations with borders and identity*

Argitxu Camus, Iker Research Center, Bayonne  
*Letters sent by a Basque immigrant woman in the US to her hometown (1921-1967)*

Susana Sabín-Fernández, United Kingdom  
*Volver*

Joseba Etxarri  
*Euskalkultura*

Tana Garrido, Basque Country  
*La tierra llama, a documentary about women in Cuba*

## Friday, October 1

09:00 Panel 5: Migration and Diaspora in the 21st Century: Pandemic as challenge  
Chaired by Anders Osvald Thorkilsen, The Danish Immigration Museum

Gorka Alvarez Aramburu, Director for the Basque Community Abroad,  
Basque Government

*Public administrations in the face of the new migration of the 21st century*

Igor Calzada, University of Cardiff, University of Oxford, United Kingdom.  
*Hyperconnected Diasporas Amidst Pandemic Citizenship: The End of the Global Citizen?*

10:30 Coffe-break

11:00 Panel 6: Basque Diaspora: Communities and identities  
Chaired by Emilia García, Consello da Cultura Galega, AEMI Board

Oscar Alvarez, University of the Basque Country

*Diaspora and Basque national symbolism in the making*

Maialen Goizelaila, University of the Basque Country

*One diaspora, different communities*

Imanol Galdos, Donostia-Kultura, Basque Country

*Why are they leaving and not returning? Disconnection with the homeland. Is there a risk of Argentineation of the Basque society?*

Iván Jiménez, Bizkaia Talent, Basque Country

*Professional emigrants: Be Basque as an Integrative Strategy to deal with the challenges of the internationalization and lack of talent*

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Panel 7: Workshop  
Chaired by Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik, Slovenian Migration Institute:  
*State- diaspora relations in the context of shifting borders and changing political regimes: identities and transfers of knowledge*

Miha Zobec

*Diasporas and their many “homelands”: the emigrants of Julian March and Prekmurje and the interwar Yugoslavia*

Aleksej Kalc

*Triestines in Australia: From identifying locally to welcoming the Italian “giuliani nel mondo”*

Klara Kožar Rosulnik

*Challenges and opportunities for knowledge transfer from Slovene diaspora*

15:00 Coffee-break

15:30 Panel 8: Workshop

Chaired by Benan Oregi, Officer for the Basque Community Abroad, Basque Government

Peter Loge, George Washington University; Ander Caballero, International consultant, USA

*The rhetorics of diaspora engagement*

Ziortza Gandarias, John Bieter, Nere Lete, John M. Ysursa, Meggan Laxalt, Boise State University, USA Boise, Idaho: *Connecting Academic Boise and other diaspora communities, and the Basque Country*



# When connecting with the home country was slower: Letters sent by a Basque immigrant woman in the US to “home” (1921-1967)

*Argitxu Camus Etxecopar<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Very few projects have used letters as evidence in academic research on the migratory experience of Basques, hence the need to show that private correspondence is a useful primary source when it comes to research. For instance, the letters that survived give valuable insight into the relationship maintained between the immigrant and the family back home. Through one specific family archive, we will look at what we can learn about the specific experience of the writer of the letters in the host country, the relationship across time and space involved in the process of migration, as well as the relationship with “home”.

## **Introduction**

Private correspondence represents a useful primary source when it comes to research. They are private documents that report on individual testimonies, written at a specific time, with a specific purpose and addressed

to specific people. But once in the hands of researchers, letters take on another status and become first-hand sources with which to interpret history. Indeed, this type of resource gives a different angle to history as it gives voice to “ordinary” people, the people whose voices rarely appear in conventional sources (Martínez Martín 2008: 135-150).

Correspondence is thus very relevant for the study of migration in general, including Basque emigration in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Not only do letters contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon, but they also permit us to have a fresh look into the topic. In fact, the information found in these letters completes, refines, and sometimes contrasts with the information found in other types of sources. Through the study of such correspondence and therefore through the individual and family histories they reflect, the human is put at the centre of the subject. These

“ordinary letters” are good reminders that those men and women who sent them made history.<sup>2</sup>

Even after getting settled in the host country, many immigrants continued to have strong ties with their hometowns. Letters passed back and forth between those that left and those that stayed in the home country. The letters that survived give valuable insight into a myriad of topics, including the relationship maintained between the immigrant and the family back home.

Thus, through one specific family archive -the “Mochoua Archive”- we will look at what we can learn about the specific experience of the writer of the letters in the host country, the relationship across time and space involved in the process of migration, as well as the relationship with “home”.

### **Presentation of the corpus under study**

The corpus is named the “Mochoua archive” after the house where the letters it contains were kept for many years, until the passing of the last occupant of the house and the “rediscovery” of these precious documents by the family 10 years ago.<sup>3</sup> Michel Papy summarizes the context very well as follows: *“la conservation des missives est le fait de maisons particulièrement stables et conscientes que les histoires familiales ont contribué à faire l’Histoire”* [the preservation of letters is the work of particularly stable houses that are aware that family histories have contributed to making history].

A total of 40 letters are found in the corpus, written between 1892 and 1967 and sent by four different writers. This article will focus on 30 of them, all written

by Graxi Hourçourigaray between 1921 and 1967. Most of the letters are written in Basque, with a few of them written in French.

Graxi Hourçourigaray emigrated to the American West in 1904 from the village of Barkoxe-Barcus, in the province of Zuberoa in the French Basque Country. She was born in the “Mochoua” house. Graxi Hourçourigaray sent the letters from three different places where she lived over the years: San Diego, California, and Flanigan and Reno, both in Nevada. Some of the letters were sent from San Francisco and Los Angeles while she visited family friends. The letters were sent to the people who lived where she had been born, in the “Mochoua” house in Barkoxe, Zuberoa: her parents and her brothers and sisters while they still lived in the house, and later her brother and sister-in-law and nieces who took over the family farm.

This corpus was collected as part of a broader research project. In collaboration with different institutions such as the Iker Research Center located in Bayonne, the Jon Bilbao Basque Library at the University of Nevada in Reno, United States, and the Bilketa Library Network in the French Basque Country, we are working on implementing a program that intends to locate and collect private correspondences linked to the Basque migration phenomenon, to ensure its preservation, but also for dissemination and research purposes.

Of course, when studying private correspondence, one must be aware of its limits, as with any other source. For instance, the question of representativeness and completeness must be addressed. This type of source is not representative from a statistical point of view. Very few of



the letters that were sent back and forth between Europe and the Americas in the 19th and 20th centuries have been uncovered, and the corpses available are very rarely complete. For instance,

all the corpses found so far as part of our project happen to be incomplete. For example, Graxi Hourçourigaray immigrated to the United States in 1904, but the first letter she wrote that can be

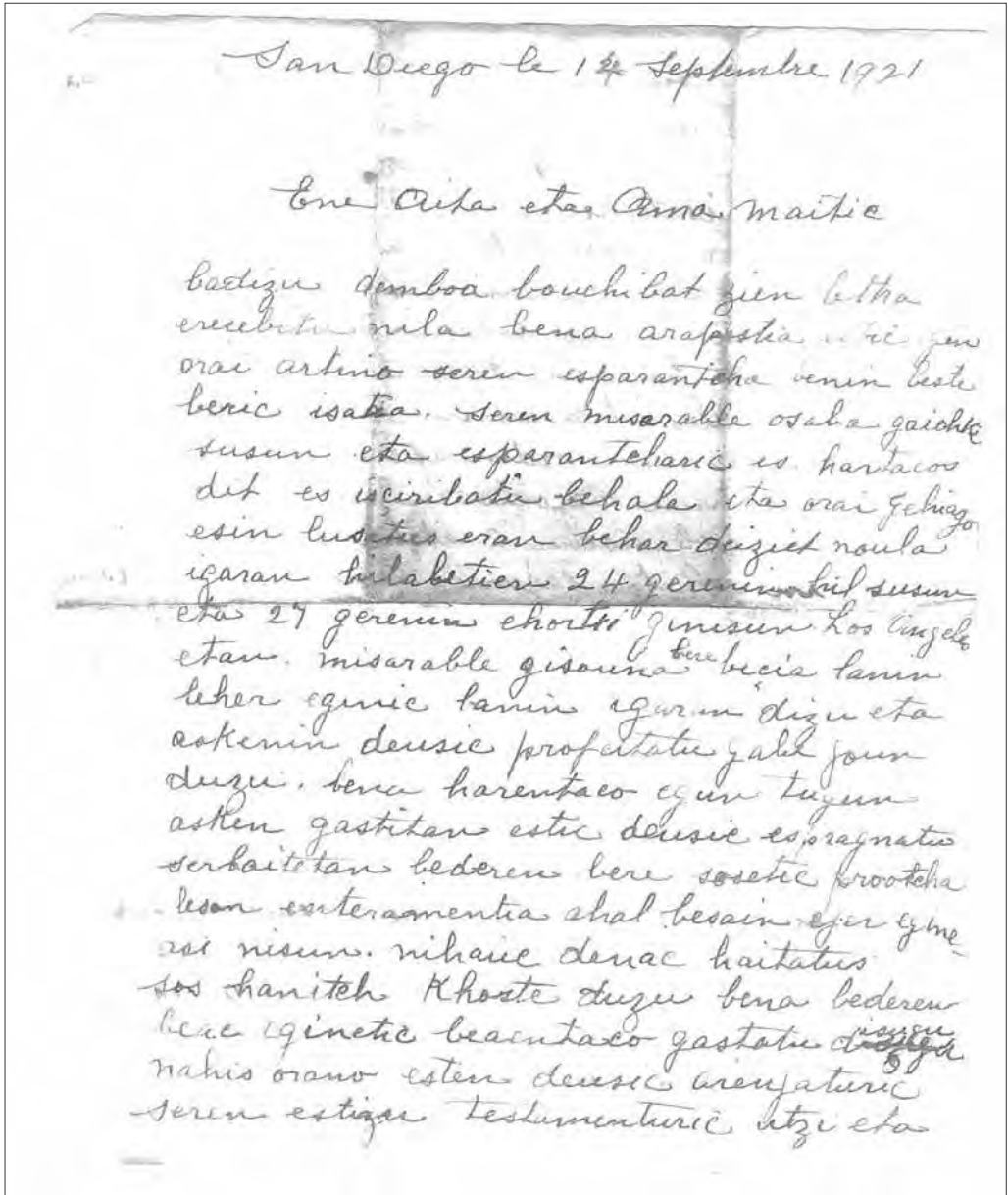


Figure 1: Letter written by Graxi Hourçourigaray to her parents (extract), September 14, 1921, source: Mochoua Archive

found in the “Mochoua archive” was written in 1921.

Finally, when studying this type of source, we must be careful not to let our expectations mislead us. We cannot expect these letters to answer all the big questions we historians ask ourselves about the emigration phenomenon. We need to look at them in their real context and take them as they are, with whatever information they have to offer:

... We cannot expect a source written in a particular context and for a very specific purpose to illuminate us about questions or aspects that were never in the mind of the author, unless in a tangential way. It is not the historians but primarily the authors who decide what kind of information they consider relevant for their aims and purposes, and it is only within the context of the production and dissemination of that information where historians must find the departing point of their research in order to accurately understand the documents and take real advantage of their contents... (Alvarez Gila 2016: 101-122)

### **The relationship across time and space**

The corpus under study gives us much to think about with regard to the relationships across time and space involved in the process of emigration and immigration.

From reading the letters, one understands that Graxi lived in at least three different places in California and Nevada, all of them quite distant geographically. She arrived in Reno, Nevada in 1904, where she joined her husband-to-be and

where she immediately started working in a Basque hotel. With her husband she later moved to San Diego, California (559 miles or 900 km from Reno) where they ran a hotel. In 1930 they went to live with Graxi’s brothers (Raymond and Joseph) in Flanigan, Nevada (615 miles or 990 km from San Diego) who ran a sheep business there, before settling again in Reno (66 miles or 106 km from Flanigan) a few years later. She wrote a few letters from San Francisco (501 miles or 806 km from San Diego) where she visited and took care of her brother who was hospitalized there, before his passing in 1930. She also visited family and Basque friends in Los Angeles when living in San Diego.<sup>4</sup>

The need to wait is omnipresent in the letters. Months go by between the letters, some letters even never reached those they were sent to: “*Orai dela 2 hilabete iskiribatu neisun arapostia behala galtegitas eta phentsatsen dit nounbait galdu dela edo enia edo souria*” [I wrote to you two months ago asking you to answer quickly and I think that somewhere yours or mine got lost] (Mochoua Archive 1921).

For many years Graxi maintained long-distance and long-term correspondence with friends and family members that she saw for the last time before leaving for America in 1904. When she refers to her hometown, it is as if time had stopped in her birthplace. Graxi had three godchildren in the Basque Country, a nephew and two nieces, whom she never met but with whom she communicated via letters. Following her last will, each one of them received money when she died. Graxi and her husband did not have any children.

Graxi and her family members in the Basque Country were so far apart and so

close at the same time. Letters and photographs played an important role intended to fill the void left by the distance and absence: “*Orai badutut abantsu familiaren denen potretak egineasirik eta segur ountsa estimatsen beitutut sien denen potretak*” [I now have almost all family members’ portraits and I sure appreciate having all of your portraits] (Mochoua Archive 1947); “*J’ai mon appartement couvert des photos de ma famille et amies*” [My appartement is filled with pictures of family and friends] (Mochoua Archive 1967).

Such letters, even before the telephone or more recently the Internet, contributed to a certain sense of a shrinking world, and influenced the perception of the world (real or imaginary) of those who received and read them. If they communicated on a regular basis with friends and relatives there, places as far from the Basque Country as San Francisco or Los Angeles could seem closer to Basques than other places, such as Paris or Madrid, where -although geographically closer- they had no acquaintances. And this is also true for those who emigrated, as they stayed emotionally linked with their home country that way: “*gogos eta bihotzes usu siekin nun*” [My heart and my thoughts often go out to you] (Mochoua Archive 1947).

### Graxi’s personal experience in the United States

In the letters considered here, Graxi’s silence about her own personal experiences is immediately striking. Apart from a few specific and short mentions, she does not share much with the receivers of the letters, all of whom are family members. In each of the letters Graxi briefly mentions she is doing fine, then barely talks about her

life: “*gu denac ountsa gutuzu, gure jincouari esker*” [We are all fine, thanks to God] (Mochoua Archive 1923). Interestingly, the little information she shares in the letters is found in those addressed to one of her nieces in the 1950s. To give one example, here is how she briefly describes her arrival in the United States:

*...le 18 mars egin din 51 ourthe Renoa heltu nintsala bakhar bakhara goisanco 2 orenetan. Ene senhar senac edien nindigna (a la gare) haidu eya nour jinen othesen ene tcherka haek etza kigna deus ere ene berik. Béré oteleat eraman nindigna eta bihamenin berrin lanin hasi han berian. Le 2 octobre eskountu guntigna gora behera hanitchen igaraiteko bena jinkouari eskerac gihauen artin bethi bisi houna igaran ginigna 40 ourthes eta hara orai heben bakharic...* (Mochoua Archive 1955)

[On March 18th it has been 51 years since I arrived alone to Reno, at 2 a.m. My late husband came to pick me up (at the train station), I was wondering who was going to come as he had not heard from me. He took me to his hotel and I started working there right away the following day. We got married on October 2, we went through many ups and downs, but we had a good life together for 40 years, thanks to God, but I am alone now...]

She also briefly recalls how her husband and brother-in-law fell out due to a business issue: “*De mon côté j’ai essayé mais il y a toujours une barriere et tout cela parce que leur pere et mon pauvre defunt [mari]*

*avait eu des difficultés de commerce entre eux. Rien de sérieux. Chose que je pourrez expliqué de vive voix plus facilement que par écriture*<sup>5</sup> [I have tried but there is always a barrier between us. This is due to a business issue between their father and my late husband. Nothing serious. Those things are easier to explain orally than in writing] (Mochoua Archive 1952).

This is all Graxi shares about her personal experience in the 30 letters of the corpus under study. However, we know by cross-referencing with other sources that she had a very full life in the host country. We gathered some oral testimonies for Graxi's descendants in the Basque Country, who were able to share the memories kept in the family about those ancestors who had left. Moreover, the other letters that make up the "Mochoua archive" sent by one of Graxi's friends, Henriette, and one of her brothers, Raymond allow us to add to our knowledge of what Graxi experienced in the United States. In fact, from the information found in the other sources, we now know that Graxi ran a hotel with her husband which went bankrupt, that her husband had a significant gambling problem, and that she worked in a laundry business in Reno for 30 years.

As a consequence, given the gap between what Graxi shares (not much) in the letters and what she actually experienced in the host country, some very important questions arise: Did she deliberately choose to stay silent about all the difficulties she was going through? If so, why? Perhaps not to worry her family? Was she ashamed to talk about these difficulties?

Or -and this leads us to the last part of this article-, was it just not the point of these letters to describe Graxi's personal experience in the host country?

### **Graxi's relationship with "home" as the central theme of the corpus**

While Graxi says very little about her individual experience, she often asks for news about what is happening in her hometown: "*Igor berric chebeki*" [Send me detailed news] (Mochoua Archive 1922); "*Othoi siek igor horco berric chebeki*" [Please send me detailed news from home] (Mochoua Archive 1965). She shares detailed news regarding other Basques in the United States (including people known to her family members), Basque people she visited, others who are going to travel to the Basque Country... "*Bihar abioun nusu Ttelleleco 3 anaye arrebien ikhoustea hebetik estusu isigarri hurrun eta etheat joun gabe bisita egin gei diet* »... *Orai baduzu hebetik horat jiten dien bi emaste eta hekin mintzatu ahal isanen sirade seren osaba sena egona susun bataen etchen ourthe hanitches eta badakit plaser isanen duzula aho mihis nourbaiteganic berrien jaquitis* [Tomorrow I will be going to the three Ttelleleco brothers and sisters, as they live close to here, I will pay them a visit before going back home... Two women will leave here [US] to go there [Basque Country] and I know you will be able to share news with them, as uncle lived many years in the house of one of them. I know you will be happy to have news orally] (Mochoua Archive 1923).

One event was particularly well described by Graxi to her family: the visit of a missionary priest from her hometown, Barkoxe-Barcus, to Reno.

Bi herroka hories heltu nusu isan dudan plaseraen souri pharte egitera erran nahi beitut Coyos aphasak egin deitan bisitas. Harreki igarran dutudan memento gochouk estitit

bertan ahatseko. Egias beris Ameltzen bisi nunduzun hareki horko berien cheheki mintzatzieki. Familiaren denen eta askasi eta adiscide gusien berien ara beritzieki uduri saisu beste mundu batin sirela. Estisugu dembora handirik isan burus buru mintzatzeko bena bai ountza profeitatu isan tugunak. Heben 4 egun eta erdi egon sen bena bethi ocupatia etheki dute aphen eta serorek. Ostegun goisan heltu sen houna eta astelehen eguerditan beris phartitu. Hotel Uskaldun batin hartu nakon khambea. Ountsa kountent isan da heben isan din atentzionis... (Mochoua Archive 1951)

[With this letter, I am going to share with you the pleasure I had to receive the visit of Father Coyos. I am not going to forget the nice moments I spent with him. It was like living in Ameltze again [name of a neighbourhood in Barkoxe-Barcus], with all the news he shared with me. When hearing fresh news from family members and friends, it was like I was living in another world. We did not have much face-to-face time, but we surely spent the time we had together well. He stayed here four and a half days, but the priests and nuns kept him very busy. He arrived on Thursday morning, and he left on Sunday. I booked him a room in one of the Basque boarding houses. He left very happy with all the attention he received here...]

Graxi often mentions how her brothers Raymond and Joseph, who settled in Flanigan, Nevada, are doing. We know

that the brothers and sisters who had moved to the western United States communicated via letters. After Raymond's passing in 1930 Graxi had been given or had taken on the duty of continuing the link with the family back home for the two surviving siblings, Joseph and herself, as before his death Raymond was the one maintaining the link for the brothers. In a letter written in 1936, Graxi writes the following concerning her brother Joseph, who never wrote to the family: "*Plaser hartsen du siek igori letren irakourtzen bena berak iskribatzeko estu coajeik orai haimbeste demboraren burin soustout dakilaik nik egiten dudala. Batek egines geros uduri sako aski dela*" [He takes great pleasure reading the letters you send him but he has no strength to write letters himself, especially after so many years have passed, and especially knowing that I write to you. It seems to him that if one does it, it is enough] (Mochoua Archive 1936).

One of the letters is particularly touching as Graxi explains to her family the circumstances of the death of Raymond in 1930:

*Basia 15 ourthe sofritzen sila guti edo hanitch. Eraiten çikia goure jincoua othoi genesan begia gintsan min biçitic houa sela gaisa teriblia... Harec barne gusia hartia eta jana sia asken operationia egin dakotelarik bena beac basakia etzila chantzaric sendotzeco operatu beno lehen medesiac eran siousa bena bentuas bicia lusatucheco sakotela eta gachoua harec orano bici nahi arasoueki. Hoi jaquin silaric ospitalin sarthu beno lehen Josephi eta eni inciribatu sikia bena es eran ser min sin etzia nahi guc jaquin genesan*

*phenaric es emaiteco eta testamentia ere egin sia ber demboran...* (Mochoua Archive 1930)

[He had been suffering for 15 years. He was telling us to pray the lord so that he would keep us from cancer, because it was a terrible thing. His inside was all eaten up the last time they operated on him. The doctor had informed him that he was condemned but that maybe he could live a little longer, poor thing, he was hoping to. After knowing that, before entering the hospital, he wrote to Joseph and myself, but without telling us exactly what was going on as he did not want us to worry, and he also wrote his will...]

Ariane Bruneton, an ethnologue who has collected thousands of emigrant letters in Béarn, France observes a pattern in the letters written by the Béarnais who had emigrated to the Americas in the 19th century: *“Elles ne contiennent pratiquement aucun élément permettant aux destinataires de visualiser concrètement le scripteur dans son nouvel environnement”* [They hardly contain any element allowing the receivers to concretely visualize the writer in his new environment]. And she continues: *Les lettres “devaient sans doute davantage représenter des visites au pays que des invitations au voyage”* [The letters were probably intended to offer visits to the country rather than invitations to travel] (Bruneton 2012: 63-74). Very rarely do the letters describe everyday life (food, lodging, atmosphere) and the popular experience in general. The letters written by Graxi clearly fit the pattern observed by Ariane Bruneton.

Having said that, not all the corpuses of letters we collected as part of our project fit this description.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, three of the letters written by Raymond to his family in the Basque Country can be found in the “Mochoua archive”, and they quite a contrast with the letters written by his sister, Graxi, as he gives details about his everyday life as a shepherd and about his declining health, for example: *“Beas etheco maytiac guk oay heben ourtheco lanic handienay bus gutusu. Goue espancha oro daygun hilabetin disugu. Huntan espadugu suerteik ourtheco iabasik beris ere ayza countatuen tisugu. Achourca hasten sikezu aphilaen bostin. Batisugu 2 mila ygancheik ernay. Ylhia dila soumait egun saldu nisun 39 sos libeaco. Heben ardi bakhotchak bana beste 8 libea emayten disie...”* [So, dear family, we are about to face the biggest job of the year. All our hope is turned toward next month. If we are not lucky, our earnings will once again be easily counted. Lambing season will start April 5. We have 2,000 sheep ready to lamb. We sold the wool a few days ago, 39 cents. A sheep gives us on average 8 dollars...] (Mochoua Archive 1924).

## Conclusion

To conclude, the interest in obtaining and maintaining a large-scale collection of letters is undeniable. First, to save them from a possible destruction. Second, to contribute to the memory of the Basque diaspora. Finally, from an academic point of view this endeavour is very important as it allows researchers to complete, affine and contrast our knowledge on the emigration phenomenon in general, and the Basque experience in particular.

In this sense, the body of letters presented in this work, the “Mochoua archive”,

illustrates our point well. It gives us much information on the relationship across time and space involved in the writer's process of immigration, as well as on the relationship she maintained with "home". Of course, whenever possible it is important to complete and contrast the epistolary source with other existing sources (oral testimonies, other collection of letters, official records...). In fact, as explained by Cécile Dauphin, every writer "*ajuste ses propos à une sorte de règle tacite : ce qu'il est permis de dire, ce qu'il convient de montrer, ce qu'il est possible d'écrire*" [every writer adjusts its remarks to a sort of tacit rule : what can be said, what should be shown, what can be written] (Dauphin 2002: 43-50).

Different institutions in the Basque Country, and particularly the Basque Government, have embraced this very key endeavour by promoting and financing different research and dissemination projects. In this regard, one of the last initiatives initiated by the Basque Government must be mentioned, as the Basque Diaspora Archive was created in 2018 within the Historical Museum of Euskadi located in Bilbo-Bilbao. The letters we have collected so far and the ones we might be collecting in the future could find their home in that place dedicated to the memory of the Basque Diaspora.

So far, very few projects have used letters as evidence in academic research on the migratory experience of Basques, hence the need to show that private correspondence is a useful primary source when it comes to research. As examination of their content shows, such letters deserve all our attention.

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## Notes

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2. It is common to refer to these sources as “ordinary letters”, and to present their writers as “ordinary” or “anonymous” protagonists (Papy 1999: 125-151).
3. I am very grateful to the descendants of the “Mochoua” house in Barkoxe-Barcus for allowing me to study this corpus of letters and to use them for research purposes, as well as to Robert Elissondo, president of the Ikerzaleak Historical Society in Zuberoa (Basque Country) who informed me of the existence of it (among other corpuses). [www.ikerzaleak.org](http://www.ikerzaleak.org)
4. The first letter of the corpus, written in 1921, talks about her uncle whom she visited at the hospital in Los Angeles and who passed away.
5. The extracts are transcribed as they appear in the letters.
6. To mention one example, the “Clementia archive”: 92 letters written by four brothers native of the village of Urdiñarbe-Ordarp (Lambarre neighbourhood), in the “Clementia” house, in the Basque Country, and living in Argentina and Chile in the early 20th century (Camus Etchecopar, publication in progress).



# Volver (Return)

*Susana Sabín-Fernández<sup>1</sup>*

## Abstract

The tango *Volver* (Return) by Carlos Gardel and Alfredo Le Pera has been a recurrent theme connected to the concept of return in a variety of contexts, and has been used in cultural productions from various perspectives. This paper seeks to shed light on the meaning of home and the myth involved in the idea of return by analysing the narratives of the Basque refugee children of the Spanish Civil War, and contrasting them with the lyrics of the legendary tango. The sources used for the analysis are drawn largely from participant observations of community life, remembrance events, ethnographic semi-structured interviews/conversations, written memoirs, and archival evidence with direct testimonies.

## *Volver, para volver a partir, dejando corazón* (return, to depart again, leaving something of their heart behind)

On 21st May 1937, as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War and particularly the bombing of the Basque town of Gernika, nearly 3,900 *Niños Vascos*<sup>2</sup> were evacuated from the port of Santurtzi, near Bilbao (Figure 1), to the port of Southampton

in the UK for safety. Approximately 440 of those children stayed in the UK permanently, never to return to live in their homeland.

In June 2008, within the context of a vibrant public debate framed by a discourse of *recuperación de la memoria histórica* (recuperation of historical memory), a



Figure 1: The steamship *Habana* leaving the port of Santurtzi on 20th May 1937 with the children on board. Breakdown of evacuees by age and gender (photo of poster in exhibition in Bilbao, June 2008, taken by Susana Sabín-Fernández)



*Figure 2: Homage event to the Basque children in Santurtzi. June 2008 (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)*

series of homage events (Figure 2) called *Homenaje a los niños y niñas de la guerra vascos* (Homage to the Basque boys and girls of the war) was organised in Bilbao to pay tribute to a number of surviving Basque refugee children of the Spanish Civil War.

Those “children” at the reunion in Bilbao, who were by then in their late 70s and 80s,<sup>3</sup> were not only from the UK but from several other countries, mainly elsewhere in Europe or from the Americas (Irujo, Sabín-Fernández 2016).

These (temporary) returnees were part of a highly heterogeneous group

of people who had been forced to leave their homeland during childhood. It is thus necessary to remind ourselves of some key peculiarities of their experience of migration. When they departed they were not migrants motivated by economic or financial reasons, or by a desire for adventure; nor did they choose exile, but it was their parents’ decision to send them away to keep them safe from the effects of a particularly brutal war, a civil war.

A significant characteristic that distinguishes Spanish exile from many others is its generally long duration. That raises the questions of when and why these

refugees decided the timing of their return. Those who were not repatriated after a few months and who reached their adulthood in the host-country would have had the opportunity to choose whether to return and when. Did it take them a few years – or rather a few decades – to make that decision? Did they ever return? Did they stay in the country of asylum permanently, or perhaps they underwent further exile experiences from there?

Some of those who attended the events declared that they had never returned “home” until then, that this was the first time since they had departed 71 years earlier. As planned by the organisers, the event contemplated a temporary return that I am tempted to classify as “tourism return”, which would give them the opportunity to spend a few days in Bilbao. After the event they would go back to their respective homes, it was *a*

*return to depart again, like before, leaving something of their heart behind* once more. They would return to a hostland which, after so many years, had become a “surrogate” homeland.

In addition to taking the opportunity to see family and friends, to get immersed in that culture and revisit their childhood spaces, an important factor that influenced the participants’ decision to return was the “recognition” of their silenced past suffering involved in such acts of homage. This implied they were not invisible and forgotten anymore, as they had felt all their lives since their displacement started. The society they left behind was now accepting and celebrating them publicly. They made the headlines of newspapers, television, radio, and other media. This triumph would also provide them with the chance to speak out in order to gain “reparation” for what they



*Figure 3: Performance of the tango Volver at the Euskalduna Jauregia. Bilbao, June 2008 (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)*

had long felt to be an injustice. They had for many years paid the price of being on the losing side of a war fought by their parents' generation. Amongst all the various psychological factors at play there was the implicit therapeutic element of "closure" to emotionally unfinished business, especially at a time when they felt they were approaching the end of their lives.

During the closing ceremony for this reunion, a local choir (Figure 3) opened the performance with Carlos Gardel's tango *Volver*. The emotional impact this had on the audience was remarkable.

This is a song I grew up listening to when I was a child in the Spain of the 1960s and 1970s, very popular during Franco's era, which my parents played endlessly at home. I always thought it was merely a love song which I interpreted as the return to an old love, to the first love. But then I realised that it has been a recurrent theme connected to the concept of return in a variety of contexts.

In 2006 I went on a course called *De los Niños de la Guerra a los Nietos de la Memoria*<sup>4</sup> (From the Children of the War to the Grandchildren of the Memory), and a film made by the daughter of a Republican soldier exiled in France after the Spanish Civil War was shown as part of the course. When the director presented her film, whose soundtrack included this tango, she made us aware of a different meaning of the song. The return to "the loved one" was not about a person anymore, and instead she referred to its significance within the circle of exiles in Toulouse, who thought of it as the return to "the loved home" they had left behind. For those exiles it had become a symbol, an anthem.

Since then it became a recurrent theme, not necessarily within the context of the Spanish Republican exiles' memory, but a symbol of a broader meaning of "return" which I heard, for example, in other films – such as Almodóvar's *Volver* – representing some form of return.

It has been used in cultural productions of all kinds from various perspectives, but I will confine my study to the context of exile and forced migration. After naming a few examples of works in different arts which touch upon the subject, I will move on to focus on how return has been represented in this particular piece, the tango *Volver*, and the ontological implications of such a representation. Is it an adequate representation of return? Moreover, does an accurate representation of return even exist?

Exile and return have been staged by actors and directors, many of whom experienced it themselves. There are also exile writers and poets, such as María Teresa León, Rafael Alberti and José Bergamín who wrote about their experiences. In the three dramatic pieces, *La Vuelta 1947*, *La Vuelta 1960*, and *La Vuelta 1964* included in *Las Vueltas* (The Returns) (1964) of Max Aub, the author writes about the exile who returns to their homeland contrasting the Spain they left with the Spain they encounter upon their return. We also have excellent examples of films that examine the topic. For instance, Fernando Solanas' *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel* (1985) is a very good example of a political film that explores exile and the uprootedness that pervades the existence of those who experience it, in this case a group of Argentine exiles in Paris.

During the time of the Spanish Civil War and throughout the decades that

followed, the radio was the predominant medium of broadcasting that reached the spaces where the meanings of home and return were constructed and reconstructed. The concepts of homecoming redefined individuals and established their identities, and how these ideas were represented in music and songs was therefore of enormous importance. They were powerful tools to both instigate reflection, and to reinforce and amplify messages and narratives by repetition which set and maintained widespread opinion. The theme of *volver* is recurrent in a number of popular tangos that resulted from a prolific partnership between the Argentine lyricist Alfredo Le Pera and the French-born Argentine tango singer Carlos Gardel. They composed more than 30 tangos together, and the *volver* they repeat in so many of them refers sometimes to a person, as in *Volvió una noche* (She Returned One Night); return to the home(land) left behind, as in *Mi Buenos Aires querido* (My Beloved Buenos Aires); or to all those memories and moments left behind, as in *Volver*.

In *Volvió una noche*, contemporaneous with *Volver*, the returnee is an old love asking the stayee (who remained at home) for forgiveness to be able to resuscitate the past, *el tiempo viejo otra vez vendrá* (the old time will come back again) she says, whereas the stayee considers those times a ghost of the past, *las horas que pasan ya no vuelven más* (the hours that pass don't come back again).

In *Mi Buenos Aires querido* the returnee dreams of a return to a homeland that he sees as a mythical Paradise where everything was perfect, and still will be after his return.

Finally, the film *El día que me quieras* (Reinhardt 1935) starring Gardel,

premiered in La Habana (Havana), Cuba, in 1935, very soon after both Gardel and Le Pera died in a plane crash. In the most famous scene of the film Gardel sings the tango *Volver*, which he introduces with the words *Volver, para volver a partir dejando corazón* (return, to depart again, leaving something of their heart behind). Its compelling lyrics include memorable lines such as *que veinte años no es nada* (twenty years is nothing) which have entered the language in the Latin-speaking world.

The tango so brilliantly depicts the sorrow and nostalgia of exile, the fleeting quality of life, the clinging to bittersweet memories of the past and the mixture of tensions and hopes that the return to that past entails, that not only did the Argentine exiles adopt it as a symbol of their experiences and feelings, but so did others who had been, or still were, living under similar circumstances. To this day it is still an unquestionable anthem of return, for the returnee, the diasporised, and for those forced to migrate.

After introducing the context of this study, I next focus on the theoretical framework that I intend to use to analyse the lyrics of the tango *Volver* in the final section. First, I will attempt to demonstrate the complexities involved in any analysis of the concept of “home”, which evidently has a decisive effect on how “return” is perceived.

### **There is no place like home**

Return is broadly understood as going back home, back to the place of origin, thus in order to analyse it I will first examine the idea of “home” itself, which is a conspicuously comprehensive and problematic concept.

Traditionally it has been linked to feelings of security and shelter, familiarity, stability, and to being part of a community. It has been defined as the stable physical centre of one's universe (Rapport, Dawson 1998), and it is assumed that everyone belongs to a unique place. Everyone has their village, town, region, and nation/country, thus one is either from here or from there, one of "us" or the excluded "other". By this definition everyone has a safe and stable place to leave and to which they can finally and physically return.

However, that traditional dualistic and static definition of the concept of home is insufficient in the complex and rapidly changing world of today<sup>5</sup>, deeply transformed by technological progress, which is characterised by the transnational movement of people. As Rapport and Dawson propose (Rapport, Dawson 1998), a broader understanding is not only possible but also necessary, one more concerned with the fluidity of individuals' continuous movement through space and time. Another important factor that needs to be taken into consideration is how those individuals change their positioning regarding their "multitude of identities and belonging which we are adopting at the same time, and which we unfold in a different way according to the circumstances" (Oiarzabal, Oiarzabal 2005: 31).

The broader perspectives contemplated above will allow us to move from a essentialist notion of home seen as an immovable space, to considering it as a multidimensional and hybrid space historically produced which is constantly (re)constructed, contested, and subject to negotiation.

What it means to be home may sometimes be linked to an idea of home as a homogeneous terrain where people share a history, similar standards, and political, ethical, and cultural values. At a different and more personal level individuals might think of home as those familiar constituents of their daily life, such as the colours, sounds, or smells of their environment. In its advertising a furniture company is currently claiming that a sofa is one of the biggest investments you will make for your home, calling it the piece of furniture "at the heart of your home", adding that their sofas "help everyone feel at home". There are endless songs that present various meanings of home in the lyrics, such as "they say home is where the heart is", or "I'm thankful for my country home, it gives me peace of mind".

More interestingly, those who live on the move usually remark on the tensions of having multiple homes, or none at all, or an unstable concept of home that is always shifting in meaning and frequently changes over time and space.

I am originally from the Basque Country (my home) but have lived in the UK (my home as well) for more than 25 years. In one of my trips to the Basque Country I was musing about the meaning of home, thinking that those trips are never a holiday since they are going home from home and back home again. A song I heard on the plane caught my attention, it was so appropriate that I felt it was dedicated to me, so that I could put an end to this constructing and reconstructing the idea of home, a battle that plays in my mind so often. In a very upbeat tone the chorus sang "home is wherever I'm with you" – but if only it were that simple.

Supporting the argument that home does not need to be a fixed place of origin, one line of my reasoning defends the construction of home when this is “discovered and adopted” in a new setting by those who feel a strong affinity with it, whom I call the “converted”.

We can find a number of definitions which are sometimes connected to a physical space, the interior of a house, the building where we live. However, does a home need to be anything built at all? Reflecting on this the architectural historian Joseph Rykwert marks the distinction between the physical space, the house, and home as a situation of “well-being, stability, ownership” (Rykwert 1991: 54).

A common understanding identifies home as a place of refuge and safety which stimulates feelings of where one belongs, but this is challenged as people think of their relation to places in a new manner, with many “living ‘in-between’ different nations, feeling neither here nor there unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either place” (McLeod 2000: 214).

Within the exiles’ context the term home tends to be interchangeable with homeland, which can be related to the psychological sphere and affective component, or time, and is also related to the concept of belonging and well-being.

Following this line, and in connection with the increasing number of refugees and displaced persons these days, it is also important to mention the territory of not-belonging. Whilst exiles are conscious of their attachment to at least two homes, the homeland they left and the new setting where they forcibly need to settle, they often feel alienated in both of them. In order to banish their feeling of not-belonging the two most feasible

options for them are to either try to become an integral part in the receiving society, which usually proves to be an exceedingly difficult task, or to keep their umbilical cord with their home country unbroken.

Ironically, for the exiles home(land) is a place to which they cannot go back, it is a place where they cannot be. This unsolvable conundrum might generate the mythical sense attached to the idea of the home country so common among migrant populations.

For many exiles their daily lives may be guided by the dream of return, as they see the receiving country as an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment, as a temporary refuge, but not as a new homeland where they can put down new roots. This in turn creates a provisional identity which influences their decision-making on the most fundamental issues, such as:

- Where they would like to spend their old age, if in one home (the homeland) or the other (hostland). As years and decades go by exiles sometimes ask themselves whether they made the right decision. This was discussed in a conversation I had with a *niña vasca* of 83 years of age:

Because you’re not well, and also your age, you don’t go out, you can’t do this, you can’t do that and then you think about what happened to you when you were little, coming to England, ending up on your own and you’re thinking, thinking, and I get very sad. Spain calls you. I believe that the Basque children, when you read the book of memories I believe that they also think, Spain really calls them. I think that when you go to another country, afterwards, like you for instance, if you stay here with Mark



and grow old, Spain will call you. Not now, I don't, well, I did think a lot. If you grow old and stay here I think that you'll often think "Spain calls me". Because I believe that the country you were born in calls you.

- Where they want their mortal remains to be placed. In connection with this there is a well-known quote by the writer María Teresa León, the spouse of the poet Rafael Alberti (both Spanish exiles): "I'm tired of not knowing where to die. That is the greatest sadness of the migrant. What do we have to do with the cemeteries of the countries where we live?" (also cited in Grandes 2011).
- Whether to apply for citizenship, which poses a great dilemma if that means losing their previous one and therefore losing an important bond to the homeland.
- Whether to buy a house and where.
- Even whether to attempt to forge any affective relationships and become part of a community that they might abandon in the near future.

It also affects how to proceed with the less significant decisions they need to make on a daily basis, such as how domestic spaces are structured. It has been noted amongst exiles, at least during the initial stages of their forced migration, that there is a profound lack of interest in buying furniture or acquiring items that might tie them to a place they consider a temporary home.

One of the *Niños Vascos* who attended the events in Bilbao in 2008 pointed out that for many years he did not think of buying a home, and chose to live in rented accommodation in rather Spartan

conditions, along with his family, keeping the minimum furniture as they dreamt of a return that would require a set of suitcases instead. He also observed that exiles and migrants who married their compatriots always contemplated the possibility of return in more realistic terms, not only because the couple shared a place of origin, but also because it was easier for them to maintain a strong sense of attachment to the homeland during exile by, for instance, keeping their native language alive and passing it on to their children.

In contrast, depending on their degree of integration in the country that receives them, the migrants' idea of home may be adjusted and switch sides from one country to the other, which gradually takes away the idea, or dream, of return.

The pace and effectiveness of this process of becoming part of the new society is determined by multiple factors. Some of them relate to the personal profile of the migrant with regard to age, gender, what they like and dislike, socio-financial-cultural and political background, beliefs, etc., and, more crucially, the earlier the migrant feels compatible with the new setting the earlier they will start switching sides. This process is accelerated when there is a positive attitude towards them from the host population, which may introduce new policies to facilitate their integration. Moreover, if the migrants can overcome certain barriers they face by finding stable employment with good conditions, and by sharing values with the host society, they are more likely to stay and become a permanent part of the social tapestry. The hostland then stops being perceived as a society that "gives" and gets nothing in return, since the migrant has become a contributor who



helps construct that society. This is the key turning point when the perception of home moves from the point of departure to the point of arrival. However, this is certainly not always a final and immovable turn, but a process full of contradictions and changes of opinion. A common feature noticed amongst the accounts of the *Niños Vascos* is a constant struggle which alternates between a slight feeling of disengagement and, most often, considering Britain as home.

Having explored the notion of “home” I next move on to the second and final part of the theoretical framework of this discussion, to contemplate the aspects I consider more relevant to take into account in a critical analysis of the concept of “return”.

***Siempre se vuelve al primer amor*  
(one always returns to their  
first love)**

Return is often described as disquieting, harsh, painful, and sometimes also hopeless. Whilst not completely in disagreement with this statement, I contest that since each returnee’s experience of exile is different – depending on the factors mentioned above – there is no universal rule that applies to all of them regarding how painful return might be, or furthermore, whether it is painful at all.

Return is also, as will transpire from the analysis of the tango *Volver*, a highly emotionally loaded process, particularly at the initial stages of return or repatriation.

This is corroborated by the vast numbers of terms relating to emotions used during the discourses of the events of reunion and homage held in 2008 in Bilbao: “bubbling emotions” (*emociones a flor de piel*)... “emotional moments, always from the

heart”... “tears”... “another avalanche of collective emotions”... “words smothered by the emotion” (*las palabras ahogadas por la emoción*)... “we have spent a few days overwhelmed by the emotion” (*hemos vivido unos días de emoción desbordada*)... “very moving moments, nearly crying with emotion” (*momentos verdaderamente conmovedores, casi llorando de emoción*).

The statements above appeared in the DVD and booklet produced after the events (Idi Ezkerra 2009), although – interestingly – the speakers and audience had already seen and heard them before the events. Departing from a political dimension and emphasising a celebratory agenda put the accent on the emotional side of the events. This register, that to some extent depoliticised the character of the events, was supported by the media, thus setting a tone and context within a universe of emotions that a broad audience could find easier to sympathise with. As a result of this, two key aspects were relegated to the background. One was the fact that those Basque children had left the homeland as refugees. The other was that the implications discussed above regarding how they seized upon the recognition and reparation elements of the events as a strong reason to attend them, were to some extent diminished. Consequently, the intricacies and tensions involved in the idea of return were not fully explored.

The migration process has been affecting more and more people, and as it has grown in complexity so has the return. The notion of return involves some conceptual problems, due to the ambiguities which encompass both the place of departure and also the place of return, as discussed in the previous section.

Owing to its complexity we see a lack of agreement defining the term, particularly *returnee*, the person who returns. When does a returnee stop being considered a returnee? Do we restrict the definition of “returnee” only to those who return to stay forever? And what about the exile who at some point, when they are allowed to do so, returns periodically but never to settle permanently? Is that a returnee? A visitor? A tourist? In any case there is always the sense of return to the “point of origin”, regardless of how that point is identified.

In order to understand return we need to consider the perception of the returnee, as sometimes they will talk of return even though it might be a return to a point which is not the physical place where they were born or from which they left. On the one hand this might be understood in a broad sense as their home territory, a place close to their birthplace, geographically or psychologically. On the other, tangos frequently describe return as *un estado del alma* (a state of the soul) that for the returnee is a type of melancholy or sadness. Furthermore, migrants can also think of return in terms of time, a return to that past which froze in their minds when they left, especially in the case of those who were forced to migrate under traumatic circumstances such as a war. Some will “return” for an emergency when (they feel) “their country” needs them, for instance because it is being invaded, and although they are settled somewhere else they feel the duty to fight and defend their homeland against invasion.

After a long absence in exile, and especially for those who fled a civil war, the first realisation is how much what they left behind has changed at a socio-political level, as well as in details such as the physical

environment or the colloquial language. These are mobile individuals who very often occupied a separate place in the social landscape wherever they moved to. But when they return to their point of origin, their home, their homeland, this has changed. It is not the same as before, they frequently feel that even there they are not part of the social fabric. They feel foreign, strangers, outsiders in an alien and barely recognisable environment. In this respect, I had a conversation with a *niño vasco* (Basque child) who was not repatriated once the war finished and stayed in the UK permanently. He recalled his first encounter with his older siblings who had not been evacuated: “I met my brothers [...] The 23-year separation had made us strangers. I felt out of place”. His simple, yet highly powerful statement summarises the views of many others.

Secondly, returnees become aware that due to the numerous life-changing experiences they have experienced while in exile they are not the same people anymore. Their marital status has probably changed, they might have a new family and children, they have learnt new skills and developed their professional life, they have acquired new routines, and so on.

In addition to the disappointment of a homecoming that does not live up to the expected ideal, there are a number of other barriers that can make a return a distressing episode in a person’s new life. In particular political refugees may have to adapt to a regime that was the reason why they had to flee in the first place. By the time they fled to safety, home was not home for them anymore and many had become exiles in their own homeland. This was the case for many Basque refugee children who were displaced from the

areas of conflict as Franco's troops were on the march and they had to escape from danger. Moreover, after the war the lack of economic resources, employment opportunities, and help with resettlement would have put the returnees in a vulnerable position of extreme social pressure, exacerbated by the fear of violence and retribution against them.

Paradoxically, return is yet another migration, and thus the returnees once again have to overcome the tensions and struggles of a major break in their lives. They first suffered the separation from their homeland and now they are going through a similar process when they leave the host country. In addition, they may also face strong pressure from the family they have formed there, who do not want to move away.

Considering how profoundly the role of women in exile normally changes, it is not surprising that they often reject the idea of return, a movement they consider to be backwards. Moreover, those who do not share a place of origin with their spouse are unlikely to want to move to a place that offers so much uncertainty. Finally, the place of asylum is the only home that the children who were born there know, and thus they may refuse to leave it.

Consequently, the potential returnee has the problematic task of negotiating a return. But if failing to achieve that, is there an alternative? When there is no possible return and the memory of the lost country has become a permanent reference, are there other ways to return that are not necessarily a geographical move?

Much has been written with regard to the idea of the homeland as "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 1996: 192). This is a place of

no return, which I maintain is born from "a necessity to cope with the difficulties to settle in the new place encountered" (Sabín-Fernández 2011: 43). In conversations I have maintained for a number of years with some Basque refugee children who settled in the UK, it transpires that some of them clung firmly to that ideal and mythical homeland for decades. But more remarkably, now that they have grown-up children, grandchildren, and in some cases great-grandchildren, this somehow idyllic portrait of the homeland has been transmitted to those younger generations, becoming part of their imaginations as well. The second generation in particular are aware of the impact their parents' hopes had on them. This is exemplified in the words of the daughter of a refugee at one of the events in Bilbao: "The children of the war grew up, they became older, they formed families and had their own children. For that generation the adventure of their parents has formed part of their own personality, and in many cases they have made it theirs, they have taken the baton and today they are the ones charged with keeping their memories alive."

This point is also substantiated by the son of a *niña vasca* and a Spanish exile: "Father [was] always dreaming of return. Sometimes the Basque Children wouldn't buy a home because it [was] felt as capitulating. This was a struggle."

That mythic place, as Naficy postulates, can be "temporary and [...] moveable; it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination" (Naficy 1999: 6), therefore it is possible to return to that mythical imaginary place and time by means of imagination (McLeod 2000), and the (creative) arts.

It is not unusual to find novelists, artists, or intellectuals among those exiles who construct worlds of their own to rule. The Chilean exile poet Marjorie Agosin states that as a writer “It seems that I am always prepared to leave somewhere, taking with me the only possible homeland: language, memory, the invention of it.” Not only do writers record what “is”, but also they have the power to invent what “could” or “should” be. As Agosin puts it, her “only possible return was through words” (Agosin 1995: 13-15). This phenomenon of using the arts to convey the meanings of exile, home, and return is a constant in the works of a number of *Niños Vascos*.

Firstly, we can confidently claim that their works create new spaces of at-homeness and return. Secondly, by means of art they can assume a new identity<sup>6</sup> and their feelings might also be expressed to an audience while keeping control of what is given, how much, and in what way. While reflection and interaction might be painful and could require giving what one might not be willing to give or to get into, the artistic production as a creative experience is somehow cathartic for and has positive connotations (Sabín-Fernández 2011).

To conclude the discussion I will briefly debate the notion of double and multiple returns.

Due to the changing nature of the idea of home, there can be multiple returns, as return does not necessarily need to be a once in a lifetime event. Not only can an individual experience a return to the homeland, to their point of origin, but also from there they can return, once again, to the hostland which gave them asylum in the first place.

Amongst the *Niños Vascos* we can see individuals for whom after a long period

of settlement in the hostland, this had become their homeland. Some of those experienced yet another type of return, as they left this second homeland to go to a third country, but when then they decided to go back “home” they chose the surrogate homeland – that is, the country that had taken them as refugee children. This point is illustrated by the account of a *niña vasca* who was evacuated to the UK, and from there she went to France only to return to the UK again, which is recounted in the film *The Guernica Children* (Bowles 2005):

I was in France for five or six months I think, and came back here and came back from France into this house where I have been 60 years. So I made my life here, I had two more children, two more boys, so I channel my views and my life in here you know... Spain was increasingly becoming a place of no return, where not only was the political situation unfavourable, but also where family links had been broken: Well, Spain became distant because of my political beliefs, I couldn't imagine going back to Spain under dictatorship at all and my father, nor my mother either, so they stayed in France. My father died in France, my mother died here [UK] in this house, so there was family in Spain, but they were in very peculiar circumstances as well you know. Totally different than what they used to be, and they went, they went through a lot during the Second World War, so I didn't see any future in going back to Spain at all, none. No I couldn't.

Arrien reports cases of returnees who – missing the life in the receiving country when they returned back “home” due to the difficulties encountered – regretted their homecoming and tried to go back to the country from which they had returned (Arrien 2014). For some that was not possible, thus they stayed in Spain or migrated to another country looking for a better life.<sup>7</sup>

The previous sections have provided an outline of the context in which the narratives of the *Niños Vascos* with regard to their ideas of home and return can be

placed, both at the homage and reunion events and also at a theoretical level.

In the next section I start to analyse the lyrics of the tango *Volver*, looking for similarities with, or divergences from, the often overlapping feelings and observations of the group under scrutiny, the *Niños Vascos*.

The analysis of the data will consist of three main parts. Broadly speaking, the first part of the tango relates mainly to the departure, the second concerns the time between departure and return, and finally, the third refers more specifically to the return itself.

## ***Volver***

## **Return**

*By Carlos Gardel & Alfredo Le Pera  
(Translation into English by Susana Sabín-Fernández,  
adapted from a translation by Jacob Lubliner)*

*Yo imagino el parpadeo  
de las luces que a lo lejos  
van marcando mi retorno.  
Son las mismas que alumbraron  
con sus pálidos reflejos  
hondas horas de dolor.  
Y aunque no quise el regreso,  
siempre se vuelve al primer amor.  
La vieja calle donde el eco dijo  
tuya es su vida, tuyo es su querer  
bajo el burlón mirar de las estrellas  
que con indiferencia hoy me ven volver.*

*Volver... con la frente marchita,  
las nieves del tiempo platearon mi sien.  
Sentir... que es un soplo la vida,  
que veinte años no es nada,  
que febril la mirada,  
errante en las sombras,  
te busca y te nombra.*

*I imagine the flickering  
of the lights that in the distance  
mark the way of my returning.  
They are the very ones that lit up  
with their pale reflections  
intense hours of deep pain.  
Although it was not what I wanted  
one always returns to their first love.  
The old street where – said the echo –  
her life is yours, her love is yours  
under the mocking gaze of the stars  
which, with indifference, today see me return.*

*Return... with my withered brow,  
the snows of time silvered my temples.  
To feel... that life is but a breath,  
that twenty years is nothing,  
that my fevered gaze,  
wandering in the shadows,  
seeks you and calls you.*

*Vivir... con el alma aferrada  
a un dulce recuerdo  
que lloro otra vez.*

*Tengo miedo del encuentro  
con el pasado que vuelve  
a enfrentarse con mi vida.  
Tengo miedo de las noches  
que pobladas de recuerdos  
encadenen mi soñar.  
Pero el viajero que huye  
tarde o temprano detiene su andar.  
Y aunque el olvido, que todo lo destruye,  
haya matado mi vieja ilusión,  
guardo escondida una esperanza humilde  
que es toda la fortuna de mi corazón.*

*Volver...*

### **Home sweet home... Is that what I left?**

*I imagine the flickering  
of the lights that in the distance  
mark the way of my returning.*  
The *Niños Vascos* departed from the port of Santurtzi, near Bilbao, which these days is a protected area, fully lit at night, that has hardly changed. That is without doubt one of the last images of the homeland they saw before departure. The picture of home at the moment they were leaving was frozen in their minds for many years of prolonged asylum, so we can confidently claim that the lines of the tango represent an exact image more closely related to a reality than an imaginary thought.

*They are the very ones that lit up  
with their pale reflections  
intense hours of deep pain.*

*To live... with the soul firmly clinging  
to a sweet memory  
that I cry once again.*

*I am frightened of the encounter  
with the past that is returning  
to confront my life.  
I am frightened of the nights  
that loaded with memories  
might shackle my dreams.  
Yet the traveller who is fleeing  
sooner or later stops on the way.  
And while forgetting, which destroys all,  
may have killed my old enthusiasm,  
yet I keep hidden a humble hope  
that is the whole fortune of my heart.*

*Return...*

The pessimistic tone set by these lines will be reinforced throughout the tango. The feelings the evacuees experienced before and during departure accord well with the “pale reflections” and “intense hours of deep pain” in the tango lyrics. These children had suffered harsh months of a war, nearly a year, and they were now being severed from family, friends, and their familiar environment, in short, from home.

*Although it was not what I wanted  
one always returns to their first love.*

In this context “first love” is understood as the home they left, but it has been established that it had already started to break apart long before they departed, and there is no certainty that it has been rebuilt and that the scars have healed after the destruction of the war. On the other hand, the returnee still remembers all the pain. Who wants to return when homecoming reactivates those memories?

Despite these feelings some do long to return, not our singer – “It was not what I wanted”, he sings. However, he does return, as if pulled by a mighty force that seems to always make people return to their first love. This is precisely what the *niña vasca* quoted above meant: “If you grow old and stay here I think that you’ll often think ‘Spain calls me’. Because I believe that the country you were born in calls you”.

*The old street where – said the echo –  
her life is yours, her love is yours  
under the mocking gaze of the stars  
which, with indifference, today see me return.*  
Although the returnee is aware of the broken home he left, he also remembers

the love he received, manifested by the echo of that familiar environment. But he has become a stranger at home. Both the departure and the return are couched in negative terms. If “pale reflections” saw him leave, now the “mocking” stars will see him return.

Here the author expresses how the old love, home, the stayees, receive the returnee and perceive his return, which is as important as how he perceives it himself. There is a sense of defeat, the stayees were the victors while the refugees were the losers, and thus there is no welcoming, only indifference. They consider the returnee a failure. And he often ends up being a burden on his kin, as they are probably



Figure 4: Homage event to welcome the Basque children in Santurtzi. June 2008 (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)



the ones he has to rely on as there are no prospects of finding a job easily. The stayees are not interested in the returnee, basically they do not recognise him/her as one of them – , (s)he is an intruder, “the other”.

The tango evokes a sense of failure in the return to a place, to a past time, but at this point there is an important departure from the tango in contrast with the Basque children’s return to Bilbao. They were “invited” to a series of events. That meant that the community of origin, including the authorities, a number of public and private institutions, and the media, gave them a warm reception. They were being celebrated without the need to prove their

success in life, and for a few days they were the celebrities of the moment, as Figure 4 clearly shows.

### **Time flies when you are having fun, but was I having fun?**

*Return... with my withered brow  
the snows of time silvered my temples.*

The second part of the tango deals largely with the time that has gone between departure and return. This has been a protracted period in the receiving country which has inevitably left some marks, not only on a psychological level, but also with visible effects on the body.



*Figures 5, 6 and 7: The Niños Vascos at a number of private and public events (photos: Susana Sabin-Fernández)*



In the film *El día que me quieras*, we see a middle aged Gardel singing *Volver*. The lyrics offer some apposite metaphors which represent those effects that time has on the migrant. However, those metaphors become a reality when we see the *Niños Vascos*. The “withered brow” and the “silvered temples” are not mere literary figures, but are exactly how these people look now in their old age (Figures 5, 6 and 7).

Whilst the snow and silvered temples have a more neutral connotation, and may even be taken as something beautiful and positive which comes with age, the linguistic mark “withered” is semantically charged, it is part of that series of words that set a tone of negative meanings and mournfulness. It embodies decay, a lack of liveliness, of force, and of freshness.

However, nobody who hears in Spanish that highly poetic *las nieves del tiempo platearon mi sien* (the snows of time silvered my temples) will picture anything unpleasant, in fact just the opposite. It will definitely evoke fabulous images of pure white snow and silver. In contrast, although the withered brow is also a sign of time passing, of old age, it is seen as an unattractive feature, caused not only by age, but by suffering and hardship throughout life.

*To feel... that life is but a breath,  
that twenty years is nothing,*

The perfect expression of the fleetingness of life.

There are several lines in this tango that have entered the language throughout the entire Latin-speaking world. These lines are probably the best-known and most relevant within the Spanish exile context.

The Spanish Civil War started in 1936 and produced a vast number of refugees

and displaced people, many of whom stayed abroad for decades for various reasons that I will not examine now, as this is not the purpose of this study. The choice of twenty years in the lyrics is remarkably apposite in the context of this study. Firstly, because of the generally long duration of the Spanish exile compared with other exiles. Secondly, because from the mid-1950s many of the exiles were able to obtain a passport from Spanish consulates abroad and legally return to Spain for the first time, approximately 20 years after the conflict started.

*that my fevered gaze,  
wandering in the shadows,  
seeks you and calls you.*

This entire section, which started above with “to feel”, unmistakably corresponds to how the exile experiences his time away from home. During those “twenty” years which have left marks on both his psyche and body, and which have passed so quickly, he has felt like an agitated and restless alien, his gaze “fevered”, a rolling stone lacking direction, roaming in the “shadows”. This long-term, gloomy tone is highlighted in many testimonies of the *Niños Vascos*:

The realisation after the end of the war in 1945, that we could not return in the foreseeable future had caused disillusionment to all of us... we found ourselves in a sort of limbo.

The years following the end of World War Two had been very unsettling. Many of us young exiles had been living in a sort of limbo.

We had arrived in England as Basque children or Basque refugees; after the start of the Second World War, when we reached the age of sixteen we became enemy aliens, and after the war we were stateless persons resident in the UK – citizens of the United Nations with passports and safe conducts issued by this organisation (obviously not valid in the Francoist Spain) which only allowed us to leave and return to the country of residency. We thought that position was unbearable.

The tango uses the “gaze” to represent the whole person, the eventual returnee, who looks for and “calls” the beloved, the homeland. In an excerpt quoted above we saw that a *niña vasca* also uses the same verb, “call”, but her call is directed towards herself by Spain, the homeland. The difference with the tango is that she is not calling her love, she is being called by it instead. She is old, but that mighty force pulling her towards the homeland has not lost any strength, but as a matter of fact has become more powerful. Inserted in only a few sentences she repeats her



Figure 8: Niños Vascos displaying the ikurriña at an annual reunion (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)

mantra five times: “Spain calls you... [the Basque Children] also think, Spain really calls them... Spain will call you... you’ll often think Spain ‘calls me’... Because I believe that the country you were born in calls you.”

*To live... with the soul firmly clinging  
to a sweet memory  
that I cry once again.*

In order to cope with the impossibility of return that a *niño vasco* describes as “Going back had always been an event in the future that had never materialised”, the tango singer lives chained to an idea, a “memory” of the cherished homeland, which as we saw above may be the only possible homeland (Agosin 1995). Grandes cites León’s very apt words in this context, “For thirty years we yearned for our lost paradise, a paradise of ours, unique, special” (Grandes 2011), which perfectly encapsulates the idea of clinging for a long time to a sweet memory.

Some strategies used by the *Niños Vascos* to re-enact home, and the memory of home, are rituals, cultural practices, and other representations of the Basque culture performed at public events and also in private. For instance, the displays of the *ikurriña* (the Basque flag) and the *txapela* (Basque beret) shown in Figures 8 and 9:

Although a line in the tango describes this memory as “*dulce*”, sweet, I argue that it is a bittersweet one, otherwise why would he “cry once again”? The literary juxtaposition underlines that constant ambiguity and switching between the positive feelings, the myth, the dream of home, and the negativity that is also perceived intermittently.

The exile cries because of the impossibility of his return, so he looks for it amongst



Figure 9: Koque Martínez, *niño vasco*, wearing a *txapela* sporting the *ikurriña* (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)

the “shadows” where he is, thus he needs to find an alternate way to perform it and restore continuity with the past, while the quantifiable return is on hold.

The way numerous Basque children managed to make that journey was through art and imagination. A number of the Basque Children of 1937 chose creative professions, such as painters, dancers, and photographers (Figure 10), or spent a significant part of their lives painting and writing (Figure 11). One of them, Koque Martínez (known artistically as *Kokë Markíniz*), was an internationally acclaimed artist whose works ranged from paintings to poetry, as well as sculpture and other artistic creations (Figure 9, 11 and 12).

The struggle of a life of bittersweet memories of home is noticed very often in the work of those artists. Their works



*Figure 10: A semi-professional photographer amongst the Niños Vascos with a childhood friend, also a Basque child refugee (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)*



*Figure 11: Koque Martínez's grave stone showing the different types of art he practised (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)*

of art usually reflect their lives as exiles, which are presented in a mixture of dark and chaotic productions next to representations of a happy life full of lighter colours (Figure 13).

### **Back home for real, but all that glitters is not gold**

*I am frightened of the encounter  
with the past that is returning  
to confront my life.*

*I am frightened of the nights  
that loaded with memories  
might shackle my dreams.*

In this last part of the tango return finally comes. It is not a fantasy anymore, but a tangible reality. Gardel is on his way back, and this induces him to think of how he





Figure 12: A number of awards received by Koque Martínez (photo of poster in exhibition in London, January 2008, taken by Susana Sabín-Fernández)

feels about it. His first impression is being “frightened”.

The material return usually entails that fear, but also excitement and hope, as the last lines of the tango will reveal. If he has been dreaming of this encounter for years, for decades, why is he frightened when it becomes a reality?

Reflecting on that precise question a *niño vasco* stated: “But at last, I was returning to that nostalgic clouded past of my childhood and to my family, a family I did not really know.”

Getting back to a past that had been fractured implied entering an unknown territory that made him feel anxious.

Besides this emotional struggle, a returnee who has fled a war is frightened of recalling their harrowing memories and bringing them back to life when they return to the place where the event happened, and may also feel “survivor’s guilt”. Moreover, they also fear the stayees will see them as a voice of the past, which will awaken the problematical memories they tried to forget.

In addition to the fear of physical encounters, Gardel is also frightened that those memories might take over his nights and “shackle” his dreams. The refugees might have experienced this before homecoming, as seen in the dark tone of some of the art produced by the exiles. For instance the *niño vasco* Koque Martínez painted some triptychs characterised by nightmarish illustrations which were a reminder of the tragedy of exile and chaos of war. Picasso’s *Guernica* presents a perfect example of this sinister symbology.

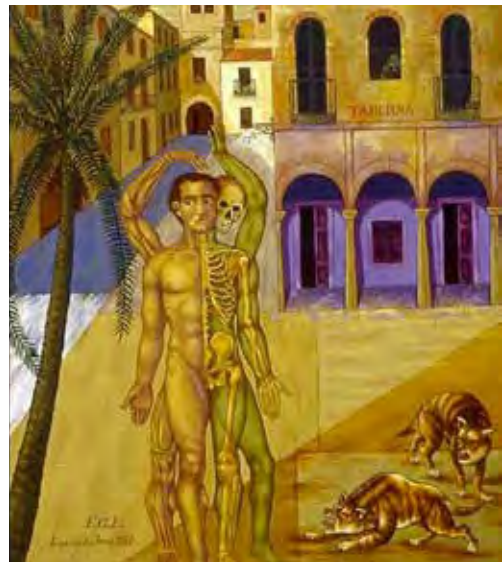


Figure 13: A painting by Koque Martínez (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)

*Yet the traveller who is fleeing  
sooner or later stops on the way.*

Despite the hesitation and the fears of what may come, those who flee ultimately have to “stop” at some point, be it at the receiving country that has become their new home, at another one chosen for a new start, or back at their point of origin where their constructed fantasy might finally become a reality.

*And while forgetting, which destroys all,  
may have killed my old enthusiasm,*

A crucial part of the migration process is “forgetting”, always hand-in-hand with memory and remembrance. I contend that forgetting is not always destructive, but often positive, even necessary. It would be impossible to remember all the experiences of a lifetime, and it would not help human relations if we remembered all the times we have been hurt. Forgetting may be

liberating, letting us avoid constant guilt for some unfortunate decision or act in the past (Sabín-Fernández 2011).

In contrast, the “forgetting” of the tango might refer to that negative forgetting that is indeed destructive and kills enthusiasm. There is also the possibility that the returnee is thinking not of his own forgetting, but that of the stayees who are now indifferent. They ignore him, have forgotten him.

*yet I keep hidden a humble hope  
that is the whole fortune of my heart.*

Finally, despite the sombre tone of the lyrics as a result of absence or defeat of old desires the tango finishes opening a door to “hope”.

Does this signify there might not be an end to exile and a closure of the migration cycle? Could the migrant or refugee be forever locked in a cycle of return(s) or the hope of it (them)?



Figure 14: Re-encounter with Josefina in 2005 (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)

## Ama

*Ama* (which means “mother” in Basque), and her three siblings, who were among the Basque Children evacuated to the UK in 1937 after the bombing of Gernika, were repatriated via France to the Basque Country after two years, when World War Two was about to start. Only after almost 70 years of no contact with the children who stayed permanently in the UK, the *Niños Vascos*, did my mother learn about a regular event in London which they organised every year to commemorate their arrival as children. She attended it, and was ecstatic to meet her childhood friends.

*Ama* was particularly enthusiastic to revive her friendship with Josefina (Figure 14), a *niña vasca* to whom she had been especially close when they spent the first few months together in a *colonia* (children’s home) for refugees.



This was her return to a time she had mythologised and endlessly talked about for many years.

By the time she reconnected with the *Niños Vascos* I was living in Hampshire, in the UK, coincidentally very close to the place where those children arrived in 1937, and where I have been living for more than 25 years.

She transmitted to me her passion for that idyllic place and time of her childhood. She planted those seeds which somehow directed me to the UK in my adulthood, and gradually germinated to grow those strong roots I can confidently say I have now. It is not a question of “here” or “there”, of “us” or the “other”, being a Basque in the UK or an “*inglesa*” (English woman) as they call me in the Basque Country. I am positively both.

*Ama* attended the annual meal of the *Niños Vascos* until, and due to family reasons, she experienced yet another “return”, this one from Spain to the UK (Figure 16), sadly this time escaping from her son’s abuse from the moment she became a widow. She moved back to the UK to live with me.

Once again the country which had taken her as a child, when she was nine years old, was welcoming her, providing her with refuge, now as an octogenarian. *Ama* passed away when she was 90, very peacefully in the country that she always loved so dearly.

Figure 15: *Ama* showing a picture of a group of *Niños Vascos* including her, wearing the traditional Basque costumes at one of the children’s homes where they stayed (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)





Figure 16: Ama with her childhood friend Josefina (photo: Susana Sabín-Fernández)

The circle of her returns closed then, and she is the reason for my research in the field of migration studies, as she inspired me to explore the themes of forced migration, and the topics explored in this paper (i.e. the complexity of home, return, and their dimensions) being an excellent example of quite a few of them. In a way, as the tango says... she always *vivió aferrada a un dulce recuerdo* (she always lived with the soul firmly clinging to a sweet memory)... she always hoped.

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## Notes

1. PhD, BA(Hons) in Philosophy and Literature, independent researcher, Hampshire, UK; susana.sabin@btinternet.com.
2. Throughout the article the term “Niños Vascos” (Basque Children) (note the capitalisation of both words) refers specifically to that particular group of children who were evacuated to the UK on the 20th of May of 1937 on the steamer Habana. That was the only evacuation to the UK, and they are seen as a unique entity, thus the capitalisation. I use “Basque children” and “Basque refugee children” to identify the rest of the children who, in different groups and at different times, left as refugees for safety in other countries. The terms in lower case “niña vasca/niño vasco” (Basque child female/male) refer to any child who left the Basque Country as a refugee of the Spanish Civil War. However, passages reproduced from original sources may not follow this naming protocol.
3. *Toda una vida siendo niños* (An entire life being children) was the title of the exhibition which opened the week of homage and reunion in Bilbao. The so called “children” were making jokes at the fact that they are still being called niños (children) despite their old age, both in Spain and in the countries where many of them settled permanently. In the UK they are always identified as the Basque Children, or even as the Niños Vascos (in Spanish) by those who are more familiar with their stories.
4. The course *De los niños de la Guerra a los nietos de la memoria* (From the Children of the War to the Grandchildren of the Memory), Curso de Extensión Universitaria de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Llanes, Spain, 23-25 August 2006.
5. Only in the last two years we, in the UK, have seen rapid changes brought about by Brexit and the global pandemic that we would never have imagined happening so quickly, affecting our ways of living profoundly. While still trying to adapt to such changes, we have the new challenge of Ukraine being invaded, and it remains to be seen how that will shape our lives from now on.
6. We see an excellent example of this identity creation through the arts by the choice of a niño vasco to have different names according to the circumstances. His birth name Jose María Martínez Castillo becomes Coqué (or even Coquë) and Kokë Markiniz” depending on whether he is the writer, or the painter or the sculptor, while he was known as Koke by friends and relatives.
7. That was for instance the case of my uncle. He was a *niño vasco* evacuated to the UK with his three sisters (one of them my mother) in 1937. All of them were repatriated in 1939 via a refugee camp in France, where they met their parents (my grandparents). After a short period of time, and once the Spanish Civil War had finished, the family returned to the Basque Country. However, owing to the bad conditions they suffered (since they were on the losing side in the war), my uncle ended up migrating to France, where he spent some years before he retired and eventually went back “home” to the Basque Country.



# Hyperconnected diasporas

Igor Calzada<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Abstract

This article argues that, since the COVID-19 outbreak, ‘digital diasporas’ worldwide have become more vulnerable with regard to their digital rights and are now facing unprecedented technopolitical risks. Against this backdrop, this article proposes a novel term – *Hyperconnected Diasporas* – by suggesting (i) a technopolitical wake-up call for regional governments worldwide when dealing with paradiplomacy and diaspora engagement initiatives, and (ii) a necessary critical standpoint on the understanding and use of extractivist and pervasively hegemonic social media platforms that clearly impact diasporic citizens’ data privacy, ethics, and ownership.

## Introduction: What Are We Talking About When We Talk About *Hyperconnected Diasporas*?

Over the last few decades, globalization has led so far to a new class of *world citizens* (Arendt 1958; Calzada 2020; Žižek 2020). However, this cosmopolitan globalization rhetoric of a borderless world has been drastically slowed down by COVID-19 alongside the end of multilateralism as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, by particularly affecting the understanding of diasporas and how much they rely on the potential

of hyperconnected societies driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, Machine Learning, among other emerging digital and biometric technologies, tools, and devices (Arshad-Ayaz, Naseem 2021; Dumbrava 2017; Fourcade 2021; Carter 2001; Zhang et al. 2022). This scenario has been particularly characterized by being extremely reliant on the so-called hegemonic *dataism*, the religion of Big Data (Lohr 2015), stemming from extractivist practices of commercial social media Big Tech platforms such as Facebook and Google (Srivastava 2021; Forestal 2020; McElroy 2019; Kim et al. 2018; Taplin 2017; Verdegem 2022). For instance, on 4 October 2021, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp were all out of service, creating a vulnerable sense of apparent hyperconnectivity which showed the highly brittle and fragile *datafied* broken coverage for diasporic citizens (The Guardian 2021).

Furthermore, COVID-19 has also hit people dramatically, not only creating a general risk-driven environment encompassing a wide array of migration uncertainties and economic vulnerabilities, but also exposing them to pervasive digital risks, such as biosurveillance, misinformation, and e-democracy algorithmic threats (Aradau 2015). Countries also implemented restrictions to curb the

spread of the virus, affecting mobility around the world. A United Nations population report estimates that, with an assumption of zero growth in the number of migrants between 1 March and 1 July 2020, the number of international migrants may have decreased by nearly two million against the initial expectations. Consequently, digitalization has been heightened by the impact of COVID-19 by creating new diasporic-related patterns, such as digital diasporas (Ponzanesi 2020), digital borders (Amoore 2016), or even digital nomads (Cook 2020; Moravec 2013) that this article considers in the Discussion section.

Digital communication is portrayed as the key factor to bridge the post-pandemic restrictions and communication gaps in effective diaspora engagement. But what is not said is that COVID-19 has pervasively spread massive datafication processes with little or no regulation. How can global diasporas take advantage of these digital platforms without falling into fraudulent and unreliable peer-to-peer interactions? Surprisingly, leading diaspora engagement organizations and initiatives such as Diaspora Digital News, the Global Irish Diaspora Directory, Chinese diaspora YouTube Vloggers, EU Global Diaspora Facility, or Migration & Diaspora podcast recommend only creating targeted communication channels and content for and by the diaspora and say nothing about the datafication processes that these channels involve for diasporic users.

Therefore, as soon as countries started lifting pandemic restrictions the debate about reopening borders by allowing international travel introduced a set of technopolitical issues related to the ethical dimensions of *vaccine passports* and

biometric components, insofar as they might be fostering a sort of unethical *vaccine nationalism* (Ada Lovelace Institute 2021; Amoore 2006; Shachar 2020). In the meantime, diaspora engagement and governance initiatives, projects, and platforms may have overlooked several datafication-related side-effects of the post-pandemic technopolitics amid contemporary democracies, as this article attempts to point out.

As such – and this is the key message of this article – so far academic, civil, and governmental agencies (as well as gurus) around both diaspora studies and management have uncritically referred to social media platforms when dealing with diaspora engagement. Moreover, they assume no harm around the tsunami of data and the extractivism of algorithms through code (Echeverría 2000). When Big Tech ‘data-opolies’ – oligopolies of data – and super-state control of data have become the norm rather than the exception (Bria 2021), many experts and historians in diaspora studies might have overlooked the negative effects with regard to the lack of privacy with regard to diasporic citizens’ digital rights (Calzada, Pérez-Batlle, Batlle-Montserrat 2021).

This article is structured as follows: (i) first this introduction, followed by (ii) the rationale for the article, which essentially refers to the high cost of relying on an uncritical hyperconnectivity argument in diaspora engagement. Then, (iii) the article looks at the Basque e-diaspora case to illustrate an ongoing action research project called *HanHemen* (2022) led by the Basque Government (Bennett, Brunner 2020). Then, (iv) it introduces the three research questions that lead this article, while (v) addresses the implications

of *hyperconnected diasporas*. Next, (vi) the article discusses three main research avenues and policy pathways, including three main areas: (vi.a) digital diaspora, (vi.b) digital borders, and (vi.c) digital nomads. Finally, (vii) the article concludes by answering the three research questions.

### **Rationale: The High Cost of Relying on Uncritical *Hyperconnected Diasporas***

Hyperconnectivity always seems to resonate with the high efficiency and speed allowing interaction and networking, yet with no attribution to the extractive nature of the digital interactions that the commercial social media produce. The Cambridge Analytica affair demonstrated one way in which citizens' data is sucked up and used in an unfair and unethical manner. Many diaspora sites became masters at harnessing Facebook's newsfeed with feel-good articles, videos, and stories, although Facebook wanted the various diaspora engagement portals to keep their users on Facebook and get their actual news there. Moreover, and as several diaspora portals acknowledged at the time, there are not any real alternatives to Facebook, and the portals were never able to grow their alternative channels big enough due to the 'Network Effect' to overcome the appeal of the huge amount of traffic Facebook was sending them. Alternatives have started to build around emerging terms and techniques such as Decentralised Autonomous Organizations, Platform and Data Co-operatives, and Blockchain (Calzada 2021c; 2020), despite the fact that they are still in an early stage of their development. Consequently, these diaspora sites were thus essentially addicted to Facebook, and no

other source of traffic was very significant. The lesson they all learned from this seems to be simple: with Facebook you get the benefit of instant access to millions of users, and fast growth. However, those who run diaspora sites can ever really sleep well at night because they know that at any time the traffic can all be taken away with just a simple change in the algorithm, like Facebook does in a regular basis. The cautionary tale for every diaspora platform is as follows: To choose the social media platforms they use wisely, and always remember if Facebook can give it, then it can take it as well. It goes without saying that the recent European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade (2022) is clearly contributing to an alternative policy cycle in which diasporic citizens must push for their digital rights to be protected (European Commission 2022; Calzada, Almirall 2022; Calzada, Pérez-Batlle, Batlle-Montserrat 2021). Alongside the EU, similar policy discussions are happening in Australia, India, and the US. The latter is currently working on a Digital Bill of Rights, with lot of convergence between the US and EU approaches. In the meantime, China has started regulating AI, with no clear clues about the potential results of this development (Wired 2022). Nonetheless, there is widespread concern worldwide about the high cost associated with an uncritical reliance on social media (Oiarzabal 2012; Rodima-Taylor, Grimes 2019).

Against this backdrop, this article situates hyperconnectivity at the centre of the diasporic analysis by claiming an alternative vision of the way (digital) citizens use technologies in diaspora practices (Hintz, Denck, Wahl-Jorgensen 2019);

Isin, Ruppert 2015; McCosker, Vivienne, Johns 2016; Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal 2007; Moraes, Andrade 2015; Ohler 2010; Hintz, Brown 2017; Ratto, Boler 2014). Besides, it seems very significant that diaspora engagement is clearly being affected by today's hyperconnected and highly viralized societal patterns (Calzada 2021d). Emerging digital citizenship regimes are by-products of such a digital revolution that affects the ways in which we could interpret and contextualise diasporas (Calzada 2022a). Consequently, diaspora engagement deserves not only a historical view but also a prospective standpoint to anticipate forthcoming trends on new migrations, digitalization, datafication, mobility, and return movements turning from cohesive, territorially rooted communities towards globally scattered post-pandemic, digital, and global citizens who might or might not maintain ties with their home countries (Calzada 2011). Global citizenship as we have known it so far is fading away and being replaced by several forms of digital citizenship regimes (Calzada 2022b; Hintz, Dencik, Wahl-Jorgensen 2019; Isin, Ruppert 2015; McCosker, Vivienne, Johns 2016; Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, 2007; Moraes and Andrade, 2015; Ohler, 2010; Hintz, Brown 2017; Ratto, Boler 2014).

### **The Case Study of the Basque e-Diaspora: The Transition from the *Basque Global Network* to *HanHemen* Action Research-Driven Public Innovation**

Specifically, this article slightly illustrates its main argument with a preliminary action research-driven public innovation project called *HanHemen* (*ThereHere* in

Basque language) being currently undertaken by the Basque Government to show the way regional governments can publicly innovate and experiment in the globalized context of *hyperconnected diasporas* without falling into their digital risks and maximizing the potential of the related technologies (<https://hanhemen.eus/euskal-komunitate-globalaren-lehen-topaketa-digitala/>). *HanHemen* is driven by three principles: (i) digital co-operativism (Calzada 2020), (ii) democratic governance and digital rights (Calzada 2021e), and (iii) social innovation (Calzada 2021c). The case of the Basque e-diaspora, in light of the foundational strategy of the Basque Government entitled *Internationalisation Framework Strategy – Euskadi Basque Country: 2025 External Action Plan* (Eusko Jaurlaritz 2022), could inspire other regional governments, paradiplomatic/protodiplomatic activities (Cornago 2017), and diaspora projects worldwide in tackling negative and hidden side-effects of *hyperconnected diasporas* (Calzada 2011) by experimenting with alternative prototypes based on data privacy and driven by blockchain technology (De Filippi et al. 2020).

The case of the Basque e-diaspora is remarkable at present given the strategic change that is occurring regarding the way this regional government is learning from past projects such as [www.basque-globalnetwork.eus](http://www.basque-globalnetwork.eus) in order to experiment with new social media platforms about digital and social innovation, with the aim of setting up a new diaspora mechanism from the bottom-up and suggesting an alternative to extractivist global models through the use of a blockchain ([www.hanhemen.eus](http://www.hanhemen.eus)). This emerging governmental initiative, which resonates with social and

digital innovation from the public sector, aims to connect 2,000 Basque diasporic, digital, and global citizens worldwide through a reliable, self-owned, and hybrid platform. This new platform is being tested at present with the participation of Basque citizens worldwide through blockchain technology by setting up an experimental approach to the challenges that *hyperconnected diasporas* pose in an ethical and democratic manner. These developments might lead this project to experiment with Decentralised Autonomous Organizations (DAOs), blockchain, and data commons (Hassan, De Filippi 2021). In the past, [www.basqueglobalnetwork.eus](http://www.basqueglobalnetwork.eus) (Basque Global Network 2022) attempted to build and structure a Global Basque Community that could interconnect the different profiles of Basque citizens abroad. However, this attempt was unsuccessful given it was based on a static and institutionally driven rationale without considering the social innovations that such institutional-social dynamics required. At present, [www.hanhemen.eus](http://www.hanhemen.eus) is attempting to address this issue by accurately characterizing the Basque community abroad, along with interactions that are enabled thanks to the reliable peer-to-peer digital tools that *HanHemen* should have. [www.hanhemen.eus](http://www.hanhemen.eus) is defining, experimenting, co-producing, and disseminating the initiative in close collaboration with diasporic citizens by aiming to gather 2,000 citizens worldwide by the end of its mandate in three years' time (Eusko Jaurlaritza 2022: 378).

This initiative responds to two main transitions occurring around the Basque e-diaspora (Calzada 2011), and likely common to other diasporas worldwide:

(i) The first transition refers to the

pervasive and ongoing transition occurring from the geographically rooted notion of a cohesive ethnically and community-driven diaspora towards a scattered and detached 'liquid' and digital global citizenship, as is already shaping diaspora experience in the US.

(ii) This first transition results in another (second) transition that shapes new practices, meanings, and exchanges from the folkloric and traditional revival-liked approach towards the construction of a new Basque cultural remixed-identity in real-time.

This article poses several questions around hyperconnected societies and digital globalized citizenship in relation to the contemporary post-pandemic Basque diaspora, by paying special attention in the way technology is used and should be used by diasporic citizens (Totoricagüena 2006). Against the backdrop of the pandemic, the term *hyperconnected diasporas* blends two digital emerging citizenship regimes that are likely to influence the academic literature and governmental policy implementations around digital engagement and diasporas in post-pandemic times (Ponzanesi 2020): pandemic citizenship (Calzada 2021a, 2021b; Calzada et al. 2022) and algorithmic citizenship (Calzada 2018a). *Pandemic citizens* are digital citizens on permanent alert, with reduced mobility patterns, hyper-connected 24/7, and affected consciously or unconsciously by a globalized interdependence (Calzada 2022). In contrast, *algorithmic citizenship* refers to the mode of identification that governments use to determine users'

citizenship status when no documentation is available (Cheney-Lippold 2017). *Hyperconnected diasporas* therefore combines the side-effects of the pandemic and the way it established a new algorithmic beginning that should not be overlooked insofar as it (the pandemic) may be evolving towards uncertain scenarios rather than simply disappearing (Milan, Treré, Masiero 2021).

### Three Research Questions around *Hyperconnected Diasporas*

Consequently, this article presents the following three open research questions to spark a discussion around *hyperconnected diasporas*:

- (i) What does diaspora mean in the post-pandemic hyperconnected societies? And how are hyperconnected societies affecting diaspora experiences and engagement?
- (ii) How is the diaspora shaped when the hegemonic model of surveillance capitalism in the US is based on extractivist data governance models such as Facebook and Google? Consequently, can we rely on this model for diaspora engagement by inviting Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft (the so-called GAFAM, or *Trojan Horses* of the digital disruption) to handle diasporic citizens' data and therefore trust? Can we easily have given our data away from us for nothing?
- (iii) How should regional and local governments implementing paradiplomacy or protodiplomacy engage with diasporas (Aguirre 2013; Aldedea, Keating 2013; Cornago, 2017; Lecours 2022; Nye 2008)?

Perhaps by: (i) acknowledging the side-effects and risks associated with a lack of privacy, ethics, ownership, and cybersecurity, and (ii) experimenting with data sovereignty-led platforms through decentralized digital architectures driven by the blockchain and distributed ledgers (Atzori 2017; Amoore 2016; Calzada 2018a; Dupont 2017; Gstrein, Kochenov 2020; Orgad, Bauböck 2018).

In the case of the Basque diaspora, there is a remarkable documentary called *Amerikanuak* about Basque immigrants who went to the US looking for work as shepherds, as well as a better future (Amerikanuak 2010). It takes place in Elko, Nevada. In this little western town, the documentary shows what difficulties the immigrants had when they first arrived. Basically, *Amerikanuak* talks about feeling homesick, about struggling to make a decent living in a different country, and about being part of a community. This documentary thus shows an analogue, not digital, community encompassing Basque immigrants with strong social capital and face-to-face interactions. As such, as Hoeg argued, "there is only one way to understand another culture; living it" (2005). Homesick and memories are part of the emotional connections of diasporas. Amelia Earhart clearly expressed this view as follows: "The more one does, sees, and feels... the more genuine may be one's appreciation of fundamental things like home". Thus, diaspora engagement, either analogue or digital, should be manifest and understood by implementing a mutual understanding between here and there,



there and here. A mutual understanding that requires a profound sense of translocality. Translocality, therefore, consists of a multi-scalar repertoire of connections between here and there that span across imaginations, practices, and affects (Brickell, Datta 2011).

Still, how does hyperconnectivity effectively link diasporic global citizens by protecting their digital rights and explicitly ensuring their privacy when connecting with peers? At the end of the day everything boils down to trust and social capital when enabling diasporic translocal connections (Geraci et al. 2022; Calzada, Cobo 2015). And it seems obvious that despite the fact that several diaspora gurus, including Aikins, tend to follow a mantra of networking and connecting (2021), it is no less true that “being digitally connected is no guarantee of being smart” (Evans 2002: 34), even considering the instrumental value of networking and connecting. Furthermore, as Harari rightly argues, “we are already becoming tiny chips inside an algorithmic giant system that nobody really understands” (2018: 1). Essentially, technology and digital networking are not free of charge, and have never been presented without shortcomings. When Raymond Williams defined technology, he did it with clear indications that we could experience it in various ways, good and bad: “Technology is never neutral, and it has the potential and capacity to be used socially and politically for quite different purposes” (1983: 128).

Beyond dystopia and techno-scepticism though, there are niche experiments that can be launched and tested accordingly. Pentland, from MIT, went a bit further when he argued that a New Deal on

Data was necessary, and this is essentially applicable to the term that this article coins: *hyperconnected diasporas*. Pentland explicitly states: “We need a ‘New Deal on Data’ putting citizens in control of data that is about them and also creating a data commons to improve both government and private industry” (2014: 1). As such, Barcelona has shown the way such as New Deal on Data is possible (Calzada 2018b; Monge et al. 2022). The questions here remain: How should regional governments dealing with paradiplomacy and diaspora engagement platforms deal with data (Keating 2013)? And which is the *correct* data governance model to respect the privacy, ownership, and ethics of diasporic citizens’ data and digital rights?

It seems rather pertinent to note here that is not just about disrupting, connecting, and interacting institutions and diasporic citizens, or such contacts among the peer diasporic citizens themselves. Instead, an entire universe of algorithms and data are floating around diasporic relationships, and it remains to be seen how networking and interaction will be feasible if not reliable and not based on platforms that are trustworthy and can ensure privacy. The social media platforms embodied by the Big Tech multinationals, known together as GAFAM, were originally built on an ethos of disruption as lean, scrappy, and innovative underdogs taking on the powerful, entrenched status quo, freeing the consumer from the shackles of history. But disruption and networking do not just happen through social media platforms, but also through the diasporic citizens as users who build apps and other platforms atop WhatsApp and Facebook to meet their needs to be

connected. There is a line now created between healthy disruption and damaging fraud, disruption, destruction, and illegality, with GAFAM becoming arbiters of that line. The absence of a debate on this in diaspora engagement and transnational citizenship studies has a high cost, and deserves more research attention (Haugen 2022; Ho, McConnell 2017).

### **Implications of *Hyperconnected Diasporas* for Citizenship: Pandemic and Algorithmic Citizenships**

A diaspora refers to a post-national space that problematizes the relationships among nation, soil, and identity (Ponzanesi 2020). Moreover, this article defines *hyperconnected diasporas* as post-pandemic, globalized, and highly generalizable diaspora patterns that are managed and led by corporate-driven Big Tech platforms that directly – consciously or unwittingly – affect diasporic citizens’ digital rights, privacy and intimacy, yet not necessarily all diaspora communities with the same level of exposure, by extracting their data and exacerbating their digital vulnerability and associated risks. *Hyperconnected diasporas* stem from and are embedded in the idea of “hyperconnected societies that enthusiastically embrace Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a key component of the infrastructure of modern cities” (Calzada, Cobo 2015:24). Moreover, the term *hyperconnected diasporas* resonates with the extreme condition of highly hyperconnected geographies, which Khanna referred to as “connectographies” (2016).

The end of *world citizens* and the advent of other forms of further pervasive

emerging forms of digital citizenship, such as pandemic and algorithmic citizenship, both constitute the current trend that we call *hyperconnected diasporas* by acknowledging two main notions. First, the existence (although not yet fully visible) of side-effects and risks associated with digital technologies in terms of data sovereignty, privacy, ethics, ownership, and cybersecurity (Calzada 2021c). Second, the potential opportunity for regional and subnational governments to experiment with data sovereignty-led platforms through decentralized digital architectures driven by a blockchain (Diaspora 2021; Al-Saqaf, Seilder 2017; Atzori 2017; De Filippi, Mannan, Reijers 2020; De Filippi, Lavayssi re 2020; Gstrein, Kochenov 2020; Dupont 2017; Sonnino et al. 2020).

Globalization has led to a new class of *global citizenship* characterized by the widespread notion of world citizens, exemplified by the sense of belonging to everywhere worldwide – without any preference of attachment, and thus a rootless global identity. While access to this global citizenship remains uneven, many diasporic citizens have enjoyed unlimited freedom to move, work, and travel. However, COVID-19 drastically slowed the expansion of this global citizenship regime and introduced a ubiquitous new vulnerability in global affairs by giving rise to an ongoing pandemic citizenship regime in which citizens – regardless of their locations – share fears, uncertainties, and risks. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic is deeply and pervasively related to “data and AI governance issues, which expose citizens’ vulnerabilities under potential surveillance states and markets” (Calzada 2022a: 10).

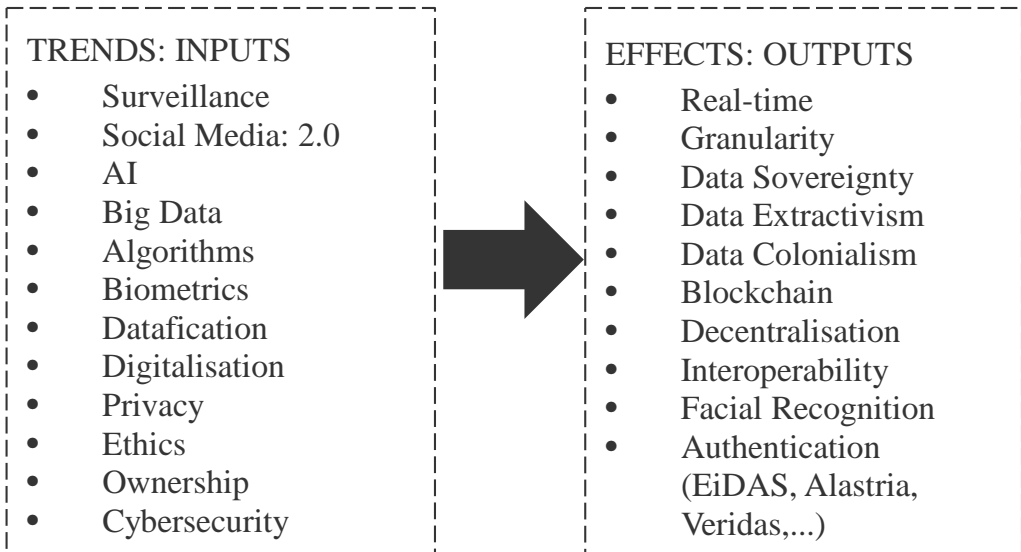
Against the backdrop of this uncertain scenario, this paper sheds light on the way COVID-19 may end up with the notion of *world citizens* by initiating a new and permanent era characterized by *pandemic citizenship*, meaning (i) a permanent state of uncertainty in terms of migration for diasporic citizens (Levitt, de la Dehesa 2003), (ii) who thereby are highly dependent on their specific overseas location and country, and (iii) are extremely reliant on hyperconnectivity.

Ironically, yet dramatically, this rationale behind *pandemic citizenship* may resonate with the well-known statement made by the former UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, when she argued that “if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere”. Amidst the post-COVID-19 in the UK (further exacerbated now by the impacts of Brexit), this article acknowledges that at present this statement makes total sense.

This article therefore pays attention to the notion of *pandemic citizenship* as a transitional phase of the former *world citizenship*, of living overseas and being part of a diaspora while being exposed (consciously or unwittingly) to such technopolitical consequences of the pandemic in their daily life regarding privacy, surveillance, ethics, and ownership of data.

**Discussion: Three Research Avenues and Policy Pathways to Curb the Narrow Techno-Deterministic Vision of Hyperconnected Diasporas**

Diaspora engagement has been portrayed as the effective result of ten *-ings*: (i) networking, (ii) connecting, (iii) cross-bordering/travelling, (iv) lobbying, (v) paradiplomacy, (vi) matchmaking, (vii) philanthropy, (viii) professional emigrating/returning, (ix) transnational entrepreneuring, and (x) nomading.



Graph 1: Hyperconnected diasporas, trends/inputs and effects/outputs (Graph: Igor Calzada, source: 2022)

Furthermore, according to Aikins the big wheel of diaspora capital encompasses the (i) flow of people, (ii) flow of ideas, and (iii) flow of financial capital in order to gain a triple win – (i) for the home country, (ii) host country, and (iii) diasporic citizen. Consequently, at present *hyperconnected diasporas* are exposed to several trends as inputs and might be subverted through several outputs as effects, as show in the following graph.

But how may these trends and effects determine the evolution of *hyperconnected diasporas* as we know them at present? This article is in part a wake-up call with regard to the nexus of digital technologies and diaspora. Although it is rather early to be conclusive with such a debate, this article articulates three main topics to contribute to a more fruitful conversation in this context.

In the meantime, it is noteworthy that the European Strategy for Data (2020) alongside the Data Governance Act (2020) and more recently the Data Act (2022) and Digital Service Act (Haugen 2022) could contribute to reversing the general *hyperconnected diasporas* trend by providing an interesting policy framework. The European Strategy for Data aimed to make the EU a leader in a data-driven society. The Data Governance Act (2020) facilitates data sharing across sectors and Member States, while the Data Act (2022) clarifies who can create value from data, and the Digital Service Act (2022) encourages civil society to take the lead in this context. With regard to the latter, the benefits are lower prices, new opportunities, and better access.

Thus, in order to establish a research agenda and a potential policy pathway around *hyperconnected diasporas*, and in

light of recent policy advances (at least in Europe), the article sets up three main research avenues that provide several insights and potential responses to formulate alternative initiatives, such as *HanHemen*, to curb the negative side-effects of extractivist data practices around diasporic citizens. This section attempts to spark an academically rich and policy-driven discussion to re-formulate strategies and initiatives that may need to acknowledge that technology is never neutral, given the impact of datafication processes in diasporic interactions. These avenues for a future research and policy agenda aim to change surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019) and its consequences in diaspora engagement and management by exploring in-depth the concepts of (i) digital diasporas, (ii) digital borders, and (iii) digital nomads.

### *Digital Diasporas*

There is no consensus on what digital diaspora means exactly, because it depends on its many disciplinary takes and media-specific variations, such as ‘e-diasporas’, ‘digital diasporas’, ‘net-diasporas’, and ‘web-diasporas’. However, there is consensus on the profound ways in which digital connectivity has transformed privileged terms of spatiality, belonging, and self-identification (Ponzanesi 2020). Thus, according to Ponzanesi (2020: 977) “digital diasporas provide new possible cartographies to map the self in relation to increasingly complex patterns of globalization and localization, while avoiding closures and the negative effects of identity politics”. The notion of ‘digital diaspora’ does not mean that the old (analogue or face-to-face) notion of diaspora has been superseded or replace by new digital

diasporas. Instead, digital technologies facilitate and transform the possibilities for diasporic affiliations.

As we can observe, the notion of 'digital diasporas' remains valid insofar as it contributes to adding a digital layer to the emotional and analogue layer. Having said that, it is equally true that there is a lack of discussion about the digital-related risks in diaspora studies. The concept of dataveillance, or the losing of privacy to gain these diasporic affiliations, remains underexplored when examining digital communications around diasporic exchanges and transnational networks.

Longstanding studies of diasporas thus need to put forward a critical data perspective and assess the cost of this massive exposure for users (Aradau 2015). Digital users are not only connected users, but as social media platforms also mediate between them, with no accountability and little scrutiny. It is necessary to grasp a timely post-pandemic technopolitical notion that considers digital diasporas in a broader sense by including the side-effects of hyperconnectivity and extreme datafication (Calzada 2022b). In addition to the uneven distribution of digital access, we should acknowledge the fact that there is a further divide, a data divide. Consequently, the concept of a digital diaspora questions and challenges the differences and asymmetries that insidiously persist within the celebratory discourses on the abolition of digital frontiers. Furthermore, *hyperconnected diasporas* goes further when it suggests that the even the potential abolition of digital frontiers might present extra complexities and asymmetries around datafication and extractivism. Databases and biometrics monitor digital diasporic

citizens, ensuring there is a link between national security, migration and international terrorism (Amoore 2006).

Future research avenues on the digital diaspora thus need to embrace the critical agenda that the term *hyperconnected diaspora* suggests given the absence of any realistic diagnosis of the increasing control and extraction of diasporic citizens' data by Big Tech platforms.

### *Digital Borders*

Although digital diasporas probably do not include the hyperconnected element in communication among peers, digital borders are the most hidden part of cross-border data flows (Amoore 2021). Digital borders have given the nation-state (Agnew 1994), knowable as a cluster of attributes, a set of boundary lines that are also learnings, inclinations, and propensities (Wimmer, Glick 2002). The resulting digital *border*, stemming from the political geographic term 'deep border', is a machine-learning border that learns representations from data, and generates meaning from its exposures to the world. As such, digital borders may exceed the strictly biometric extraction of the diasporic citizen's face and extend to multiple features of his/her past political positions, which have probably been captured from extractivist social media feeds. Digital borders thus precisely recombine and reorder both dynamic technology and ordinary/mundane daily experiences from the apparently abstract deep neural nets that extracted such data. Learning algorithms are reordering what the concept of a border means for diaspora studies, how the boundaries of political community can be imagined, and how borderwork can function in the hyperconnected world.

It increasingly more difficult distinguish digital borders in the offline and online environments, probably because context collapse is ubiquitous, including for diasporic citizens, either in digital or analogue forms, when walking through an airport terminal (Calzada, Cobo 2015). Hyperconnectivity is a feature that manifests and is represented with no distinction in both worlds, being channelized through a tsunami of data flows.

### *Digital Nomads*

The last avenue for a research and policy agenda refers to the term *digital nomads* (Cook 2020). The metaphor of the nomad has often been used to explain the mobile quality of contemporary social life, where deterritorialized forms of societies are constituted by fluid lines of movements rather than by fixed nodes in space. Several authors have been rather critical when using the nomad metaphor for explaining a mobile lifestyle, since modern mobile groups are free of regulatory rules that might inhibit their movements, unlike policies that constrain traditional desert nomads.

Nomadism could be very much related to hyperconnected diasporas. Terms like *backpackers* gathering in independent leisure-oriented communities, *flashbackers* using the available digital and logistic infrastructures to ensure an individualized mobile lifestyle, and *global nomads* who are interested in contacts with local communities but do their utmost to avoid the economic restrictions of national systems. Although these types of *nomadisms* are all characterized by a high level of physical mobility, the concept of a *hyperconnected diasporas* significantly affect their lifestyles. Digital nomads, crossing digital borders

and being active parts of digital diasporas, are using information and communication technologies most intensively to mix work and leisure in their highly connected lifestyles. As a result, Moravec (2013) coined the term *knowmads* referring to people who are independent from time and location, able to work with anybody in location-independent job arrangements, and who spread knowledge and innovation across the globe.

*Digital nomadism* is not only about changes in spatial behaviour, but also reflects radical shifts in the character of work and libertarian values, enabling flexible, self-determined forms of work, through the use of digital resources, like paperless operations, as well as integrated platforms. *Hyperconnected diasporas* may effectively nurture the exponential expansion of several forms of digital nomadism that are characterized by rootless and intensive digital activity. Flexible work, mobile telework, and fluid work have been used to characterize a wide range of digital nomadisms. Digital nomadism is considered a form of post-identitarian mobility, where national identities are rejected, and identity is built around the global community. It remains to be seen how digital nomadism could be enacted within digital diasporas. Does digital nomadism imply certain forms of counter-hegemonic diaspora practices and lifestyles? How does *digital nomadism* as a subculture affect the paradiplomatic activities of regional governments? How can a nomadic digital subculture create a counter-hegemonic narrative beyond the official version of governments? Will digital nomadism ultimately modify the architectures and mechanisms used in peer-to-peer diasporic communications

through decentralized forms, and tools such as blockchains?

In relation to digital diasporas, several studies have revealed issues regarding the digital nomad paradox, like the constant contradiction between security through a sense of belonging to a diasporic community and individual freedom. Both aspects are inherent to digitally enabled virtual spaces in the context of digital diasporas. Studies about the state-led enablement of digital nomadism have focused on issues of digital infrastructure in urban environments, showing a digital nomad paradox: the individuals' desire to gain the freedom of mobility, both physically and virtually through digital means, is intense conflict with the host government's need to tightly control mobility in order to ensure security for the state.

Diaspora studies could use the concept of digital diasporas to consider the roles that various digital means play in the shifts in mobility experiences in those situations where cross-border mobility is only virtual and does not assume any physical resettlement. This is the case of the e-residency selective migration pattern, where e-residents do not have physical residency status but could obtain instead a fiscal/digital/data citizenship status, with the e-residency card in Estonia being the key example of this at present (Calzada 2022a; Masso, Kasapoglu, Tammpuu, Calzada 2022). How can this new pattern of algorithmic citizenship affect digital diasporas through digital borders in light of the increasing post-pandemic teleworking lifestyle?

*Digital nomads* in diasporas are often characterized as mobile workers, and mostly fall under the category of highly skilled workers, like those with STEM degrees or

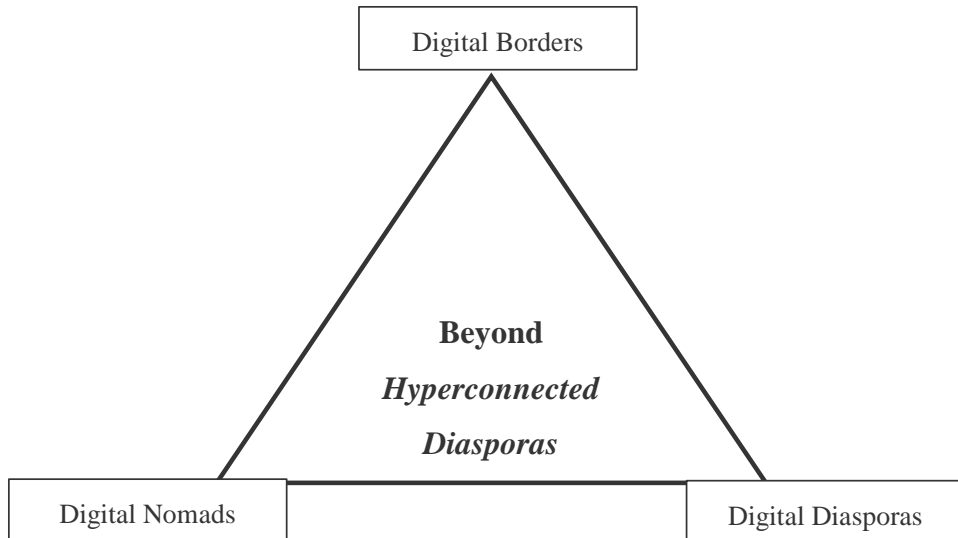
jobs in such fields. Digital nomads tend to be the most mobile among professionals, both physically as well as digitally. Such a lifestyle is possible due to their high degree of individual digital literacy skills and their access to the technological resources necessary to be digitally mobile. For instance, empirical research shows that e-residency programmes in Estonia are more accessible to applicants from countries with higher levels of e-government and economic development (Calzada 2022a).

Future research and policy avenues may explore the linkage between selective migration policies and digital nomads as a way to expand digital diasporas. Selective migration policies play a significant role in enabling and at the same time restricting nomads' mobilities, which inevitably may affect the interest of some paradiplomatic initiatives to allow networking among peer diaspora citizens. What is more, these selective migration policies may legislate proactively to provide secure ID connections to these digital nomads that ask to be part of the country from overseas. Here the experimental role played by blockchain and Ethereum seems to be unexplored yet. A trend that we expect to increasingly happen is that digital diasporas will be connected with selective migration policies to attract highly skilled individuals, like in the UK and Germany.

Beyond the risks and threats that this article has described, a way to subvert the extractivist nature of *hyperconnected diasporas* may be inspired by the model implemented in Estonia. Its e-residency programme may offer a critical pathway for overcoming the highlighted obstacles around privacy and security, through providing alternatives to traditional forms of migration that assume physical relocation,

and via digitally enabled access to transnational services and digital authentication. The initiative by the Basque Government presented briefly beforehand, *HanHemen*, resonates with this and is directly inspired by the digital innovations stemming from e-Estonia insofar as the blockchain may suggest a path to follow and experiment with. *HanHemen* identified 1,385 global, diasporic, and digital citizens through an online survey responded by 30.25% (419 responses) through a fieldwork carried out from 1 February to 31 March 2022. Overall, it is a very positive starting point for this project. The main findings of the survey will eventually be widely shared, along with some measures to deal with the risks and challenges of *hyperconnected diasporas* in forthcoming research articles. The main results were disseminated through the first encounter *HanHemen* of the Basque Global Community on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022 ([\*topaketa-digitala/\*\). In this survey, ten factors were researched: \(i\) Sense of belonging, \(ii\) ties with the homeland, \(iii\) institutional support of the Basque Government to the diasporic civil society, \(iv\) peer-to-peer interactions, \(v\) Basque Clubs and their function for socialization, \(vi\) offline/online/hybrid format preferences, \(vii\) social networks, \(viii\) privacy issues, \(ix\) digital nomads and mobility patters, and finally, \(x\) return to the homeland.](https://hanhemen.eus/euskal-komunitate-globalaren-lehen-</a></p>
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Given that diasporic citizens unwittingly follow the lifestyle and digital patterns related to digital nomads, we ask how can blockchain-driven paradiplomatic initiatives such as *HanHemen* – avoiding the negative side-effects of *hyperconnected diasporas* – benefit from the new digital trends crossing digital borders to enable people to safely connect with peers (with no data risks) and enhance the potential value of an online diasporic community created from the bottom-up?



*Graph 2: Three research avenues and policy pathways: digital diasporas, borders, and nomads (Graph: Igor Calzada, source: 2022)*



## Conclusion

This article raised three main research questions that could be answered as follows.

First, what does diaspora mean in the post-COVID-19 hyperconnected societies, when they are affecting diaspora experiences and engagement more than even before (Ponzanesi 2020)? The term digital diasporas help to highlight that both risks and opportunities arise from the fact that diasporic citizens are data subjects, meaning their interactions count as a potentially risky and emancipatory data experience (Calzada 2022b). Policy actions should thus be taken to reverse this by-default mechanism of networking.

Second, is how the concept of diaspora shaped when the hegemonic model of *surveillance capitalism* in the US is based on extractivist data governance models such as Facebook (Forestal 2020; McElroy 2019; Kim et al. 2018; Taplin 2017; Bucher 2012)? Digital diasporas inevitably need to acknowledge this pernicious trend and experiment with niche initiatives to set up bottom-up networks by on the one hand, benefitting from the light profiles of commercial social media platforms (social media authentication), while also creating their own data sovereignty by migrating users to hard profiles with e-authentication systems securely stored and managed using a blockchain (digital certification authentication).

Third, how should regional and subnational governments deal with connecting diasporic citizens by, on the one hand, acknowledging the side-effects and associated risks in terms of privacy, ethics, ownership, and cybersecurity, and on the other hand experimenting with data sovereignty-led platforms through decentralized digital architectures driven by blockchain

among others? Paradiplomacy should probably be driven by trusted networks of peer diasporic citizens, rather than large scale campaigns and slogans.

The main hypothesis of this article is that digital diasporas worldwide may have been shaped by various post-pandemic social pressures that have further exposed diasporic citizens' digital rights to some unprecedented technopolitical risks. Against this backdrop, this article presented a novel description of post-pandemic times using the term *hyperconnected diasporas* by calling for: (i) a technopolitical wake-up call for regional governments worldwide dealing with diaspora engagement initiatives, and (ii) a critical standpoint on the understanding and use of data and digital technologies regarding datafication processes involving data privacy, ethics, and ownership. As such, the novelty of this article relies on the articulation of the term *hyperconnected diasporas* insofar as in diaspora engagement the use of Big Tech platforms, such as Facebook, is very widespread while the negative side-effects are unexplored.

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## Notes

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# Why are they leaving and not returning? Disconnection with the homeland. Is there a risk of Argentinization of the Basque society?

*Imanol Galdos Irazabal<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

This article was presented as a paper at the 31st AEMI conference held in Donostia. The article deals with a phenomenon that is repeated in many parts of the world – the departure of young people and in many cases their non-return to the country of origin. There is no doubt that the causes vary from one country to another, and that even within a country there are diverse typologies and different circumstances. In this context, the article addresses the specificity of the Basque case: a stable society, with a robust economy, without great inequalities and in which there should not be a pressing need to leave the country. The article thus dives into possible hypotheses that would explain a phenomenon that will have an enormous impact on the future of an increasingly aging society.

## **Introduction**

Last week I went on my first business trip since the start of the pandemic. I was in Lithuania, specifically the city of

Kaunas, to attend the annual meeting of representatives of cities who have been, are due to be, and aspire to be a European Capital of Culture. As has now become my habit – I have been representing San Sebastián at these meetings since 2017 – I tried to gauge the culture of the country as soon as I arrived, even on my journey from the airport to my hotel, as I have learnt that taxi drivers often give us suggestive clues. My predictions about Lithuania were validated, as also happened when I travelled to Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Durban and Buenos Aires, and so on: there exists a sense of orphanhood and sadness, mainly due to the exodus of the younger generations who have given up on the idea of their homeland and choose not to contribute to a future that they don't believe in from their positions in the diaspora.

This phenomenon of departure is universal, and I contribute nothing by saying that it has happened and it will keep happening for different reasons in diverse ways. The growing inequality that

is ravaging many parts of the world, along with the terrible predictions announced by the scientific community about the consequences of climate change and global warming, lead us to imagine a global population characterized by incessant movement in search of a paradise that likely doesn't exist. It's also fitting to mention in advance that this diagnosis deserves long-term reflection and, unfortunately, it's a topic that should worry and unsettle *us* specifically. Despite this, it's very possible that at present it does not worry the vast majority of the Basque population.

Not long ago, I heard evidence of an alternative perspective from someone with responsibilities in the Basque government – they felt that the fact that young people were leaving was, in fact, a source of pride. What's wrong with that? Obviously, there should be no debate about whether the youth should be *able* to leave – to study, work and experience life abroad and, of course, if they decide to, they must be free to develop their lives outside of their home countries. No-one denies this, quite the contrary. As a father of two university students, I implore them to leave their comfort zones. In a similar move to the Australian government, in the post-Brexit period Boris Johnson is attempting to create a new 'Global Britain' through the Turing Scheme which aims to spread 40,000 students across the globe, beyond European borders.

However, there is a stark contrast between having the opportunity to experience life abroad, and feeling you have no other option but to abandon the country of your birth. 'Ezeiza', the Buenos Aires airport has become an emblem of the undesirable, irreversible scenario in Argentina, and is the overriding symbol

of the failure of society. That a significant part of Argentine society concludes that there is no alternative to Ezeiza should make us reflect on the risks that exist as consequences of incorrect management and interpretation of historical processes. No-one is a winner forever. Democracy seemed unstoppable and in a short amount of time we have been witnesses to its dangerous stumbling in certain places. Fortunately, Loiu, Foronda, Hondarribia, Noain and Biarritz today continue to be platforms of comings and goings of citizens, students, businessmen, tourists, emigrants and immigrants. Ezeiza is the symbol that we must avoid in order that what are now natural dynamics do not become the decline and decadence of a country and a society that has everything it needs to triumph in the world.

But beyond my own feelings, what I intend to do here is share some reflections, reflections which are always open to debate and contradiction, and also deal with an issue that in such times of uncertainty will decide the future of our society. The great problem with this issue is that it is urgent, and if it is not considered a first priority of the country we put the survival of our people at risk. Our refusal to consider it could lead to the demise of a national project that once aroused the greatest admiration in the world.

Far away from the events and concepts that currently dominate global attention, migrational phenomena continue to occur (Mehta 2019). Movement forms part of our genetics, and in this sense it seems difficult to establish coercive barriers that belong to the field of personal decision. The search for liberty is the motor that is surely behind every migratory movement.



Departing from this premise, however, strategies, actions and narratives that characterize the migratory phenomena will determine the future of societies. In the Basque case, we must choose between perceiving this exodus as normality, a logical consequence of events which we accept with resignation, or, on the contrary, we can choose to situate the issue on the axis of institutional action and of society itself – and the decision we make will determine the future of the Basque community. This article is developed in four chapters. The first deals with stability as one of the pillars of Basque society, but which in turn is not capable of retaining part of Basque youth. The second chapter reflects on the objective of creating a community of connected Basques living in all corners of the world. The third chapter develops the role of diasporas in the 21st century. Finally, the fourth chapter focuses on the risk of a phenomenon similar to the one occurring in Argentina, with the significant outflow of part of the country's human capital.

### **A Stable Country - Stability is not enough to retain people**

First of all, the Basque case has particular characteristics that are worth highlighting: we are part of a society with a solid economic fabric – a stable social and institutional structure, a strong welfare system and high standards of living. Therefore, it is not a society that causes exodus due to its a lack of life and work opportunities that impede the development of future projects. In principle, it is not possible to identify factors that define a state of social urgency that would lead to an ever-growing number of young people leaving. Far from other models, the Basque case is

situated in a specific, distinct scenario. A stable country, but one that suffers because it cannot manage to retain its youth. Moreover, this circumstance lives alongside a paradox which is difficult to explain – the country has a wonderful image, envied for its considerable capacity to attract foreigners.

Put differently, we must urgently consider whether the countless programs that have been put in place to reduce emigration or stimulate returns are the axes where efforts and resources should rest. Something that has still not been particularly developed is all that related to the capacity of attraction that we possess, but to which we have not paid enough attention. Centred on retention (the idea of stopping emigration) and promoting returns, such efforts could possibly be useless once the decision to abandon one's homeland has been taken. The figures highlight the few returns, and, in this sense, it is worth asking whether it is worth dedicating resources and efforts to encouraging members of the diaspora to do so. In the framework that characterizes this field today, a return home would mean a loss that few are willing to admit from a social status perspective.

The search for substitutes for those who leave is possibly the solution that best fits the Basque context, because there are other places which are socially and economically developed, but whose inhabitants want a change of scenery. The Basque Country offers a range of positive characteristics and thus could become an attractive destination, in this way addressing the vacuum left by those who choose to leave.

At a quick glance, a snapshot of the country suggests no great reasons to justify

the departure of so many young people, and thus causes need to be identified and understood in the context of another typology. The following data is worth noting in this context: GDP per capita, €38,850; unemployment rate, 10.5% of the active population (2020); personal income index, personal = 0.5250, familial = 0.42 (Orkestra 2022).

Reality, however, follows complexities that can hardly be dispatched with generalities and complacency, which is also help little. In this context, for example, the first thing we must consider is that we are facing a phenomenon that is responding to the logic of the reality of today's era. Beyond the most recent questioning of the phenomenon, globalization has opened doors and raised opportunities in an unprecedented way. In this context, there are few institutional strategies that could limit decisions that belong to the personal and private spheres.

But starting from a reality in which few nuances can be made out, other reasons must be added that would explain the ever-growing number of young people who leave the Basque Country for different opportunities than those offered by the long-praised stability of the region. I am going to highlight some of the hypotheses that could explain, in part, what is behind the Basque case.

### *Dimension/Vitality*

Gaps of various types are enough to explain the high levels of dissatisfaction that are seen around the world. The generation gap and that which has opened up between rural and urban communities are perhaps the biggest issues here. There is not a country in the world that has managed to mitigate the distance between big cities

and rural spaces, which are irretrievably being emptied, despite the numerous attempts to put in place a narrative that convinces the population that it is possible to develop vital projects in under-inhabited and aging environments.

Indeed, the task seems to be difficult if not impossible. What large cities offer – multicultural and cosmopolitan environments – is unbeatable (Glaeser 2021). Even the most conservative people yearn for their sons and daughters to reach the big cities. They may detest the multiculturalism and liberal discourse that exists there, but they can't help but recognize their enormous attraction.

The Basque Country is somewhat of an atypical case in this regard. The two provinces with the largest populations (Guipuzcoa and Biscay, with their respective capitals of San Sebastian and Bilbao) are relatively small with a strong balance of territorial/internal space, and are also very cohesive, with an economic structure which is very much based on nucleic populations of a medium size, and where there is no absorbent effect of the rural population. But despite these unique and, in principle, attractive characteristics, some Basque youth still succumb to the attraction that big cities exert. Although the small size of a country does not necessarily have to be a negative factor, small countries certainly seem to be at a disadvantage in competition with larger ones. And if the playing field of one's life has already been reduced to that of a relatively small country, then this reduction will only be greater if other negative factors are involved.

In this context it is worth highlighting that the capacity of attraction of countries and cities is found more in their intangible

features rather than in any bureaucratic typology (Galdos 2021). Deciding to focus on documents and rules instead of trying to understand the feelings held by young people who leave puts at risk the survival of our Basque society, with one of the fastest aging populations in the Western world. There is little attraction for many in embarking on a life project in a society with an aging population, one where the concerns of baby boomers still prevail on institutional agendas, leaving little space for others. San Sebastian is an example of a city that restricts access to housing for young people, something that, whether consciously or not, designs the future of the city in such a way that it will only be inhabited by those with high purchasing power.

This problem exists at a global level – with young people being ‘expelled’ from a range of places, from Silicon Valley to London and Paris, simply because they cannot purchase a home – and is also making possible the rise of new destinations, like Austin, Texas.

The debate over whether it can become the alternative to Silicon Valley is gradually being answered. But some figures are immediately telling. The move of the company, Oracle, to the city is a symbol of the exodus that is being produced from the bay of San Francisco to Austin; as well as the recent announcement by Elon Musk (Tesla and SpaceX) that he is moving to the Texan city (Galdos 2021).

Another issue in this context is the causes that explain the process of abandonment that is being seen in the San Francisco

Bay area, but also in other parts of California, with migratory flows to Idaho, Montana and Texas. The problems faced by many entrepreneurs from the Silicon Valley ecosystem with regard to buying a home, or the excessive regulations that are imposed on firms in California, are also behind such migrations.

While the cost of housing can make life completely untenable in San Francisco, the city of Austin, Texas, remains attractive to those aged between 25 and 35, something that explains the President Biden’s victory in historically conservative areas. Austin itself is one of the rare blue islands in an otherwise red state.

The example of Austin illustrates a model that is not limited to issues related to work and residency, as cultural issues are also important.

But it is also worth adding another factor that explains the capacity of Austin to attract. It is self-named the Live Music Capital (also as the City of the Violet Crown), and all the studies carried out indicate that its cultural offering, range of festivals, nightlife and general vitality can attract businesspeople, students or young professionals who yearn for friendly and empathetic surroundings, terms and concepts that today have become part of the antidote to the pandemic. Austin is an example of an ecosystem that integrates so many tangible aspects of subsistence (access to housing and jobs) as well as those of a more emotional nature (leisure, sociability, community), and thus will be able to survive in the future (Galdos 2021).

This calls for a deep reflection on the elements that today determine people's life decisions. Affability, kindness and empathy as elements of attraction, in contrast to the a reproachful tone, scolding and marginalization that young people face in other societies. Incorporating a sense of freedom of expression – and not in the empty sense referred to when discussing political correctness – into the offering of a country is just as important as digitalization and modernization of industry.

*Accumulated Fatigue: The Hedonism that Empowers our Lives*

The Basque Country is a tired land that is passing through a moment that some would call a transition. From the perspective of the optimists, a moment of rebuilding strength is discussed, but evaluations differ and there are those that highlight that the structural changes that have been produced are irreversible. They are here to stay, and this makes necessary a profound change in the paradigm of analysis and the accuracy of the presentation of Basque society. Instead we still insist on describing a society that ceases to exist, feeding false expectations.

First of all, inevitably, we have to refer to what happened in the Basque Country in the last few decades and why these processes had some important consequences. Rupture, conflict, polarization and division have left profound wounds that will need years to heal. The same phenomena that today are crossing the world were seen earlier in Basque society. In some way, we predicted them. Paradoxically, and here you will note an element of self-defensiveness, in facing the convulsions that characterize the majority of countries, the Basque Country

has almost become a haven of peace, distancing itself from various conflicts. We have stopped being a society where lots of things happen, and instead are one where little happens at all.

We have taken refuge in our lives, in consumption and sports practice, unusual in other parts of the world. Shying away from our engagement with and participation in the community, all this in a society that has made its distinguishing brand *auzolan*, or community. That is, the values, ideas or sense of belonging to the community that derive from traditional neighbourhood work dynamics (neighbours who come together periodically to work on shared projects). The cooperatives of Mondragon, the *ikastolas* (primary or secondary schools in which pupils are taught either entirely or predominantly in the Basque language), the process of revitalization of *euskera* (Basque language), to cite three of the landmarks that rest on an action and dynamism that have strong community components. Far from institutional interventions, what made the Basque model of epicness and lyricism possible was the generosity and commitment of individual Basque citizens. But now this soul faces the bureaucratic scheme that today has taken over almost all the dynamics in the Basque Country. The phenomenon of the crisis of communitarianism does not exist exclusively in the Basque Country as sociologists of Putnam's (2015) stature insist, but it is worth highlighting.

A formerly very politicized society, with high levels of participation in political parties, has started to turn its back on political and civic involvement. This can be seen all over the Western world, where disengagement from politics has given way

to hedonistic societies. Although there are those who consider that this abrupt change hides a failure, and thus dream about the recuperation of a state that could possibly never return, hedonism, like individualism, responds to a multiplicity of factors and is something that is not only made up of negative aspects. In any case, instead of values, in the new prioritization and hierarchy, consequences come more from determined practices than from any heroism in the management of a new scenario.

The secularization of society, previously in Europe and now in the US (Thompson 2019), has come into being thanks to a large range of factors, shaking some of the traditional structures of societies. This leads us to rule out a certainly widespread tendency to mythologise foreign and distant spaces where their values, criteria and ways of life mirror those that once characterized the first civilizations. Global societies go through incomparable processes of homogenization in which non-existent paradises disappear. More than a loss, we should focus the analysis on the process of the brutal substitution of a new paradigm that has definitively erased all the earlier hallmarks of our societies.

Less engagement, less emotional charge in the country, other methods of social engagement and much pragmatism – this is the narrative of young people in the Basque Country.

*An Abrupt Change in Values and Priorities*  
We highlight hedonism as a factor that explains the behaviour of a new generation that has broken with a way of living and understanding the identity (or multiple identities) that is (or are) hosted by Basque society. Hedonism is the first in a long list

of factors that lie behind the departure of young people.

Many of the bonds that unite Basques within the community have been abandoned, and there remain individuals who are not willing to renounce the possibilities offered by globalization. Despite this general trend, it is fair to say that there have been period of times – coinciding also with the economic take-off of the country that was supposed to reduce the need to emigrate – where commitment to the community overcame the possibility of leaving. However, liberalization has continued its triumphal march and doors have been gradually opening for more and more people to leave, and there are no signs that they will be closed again. Erasmus and many other program opened the borders, and in turn kicked off a process of decapitalization of the state.

Even the scenery from before has been transformed. The public squares of towns, centres for socializing, have stopped being full of people as young people have turned to the mountains in search of new experiences. Old forms of socializing, like gastronomic societies, are facing serious difficulties in guaranteeing generational replacement and thus their own survival. In the younger generation these and other forms of traditional socializing have lost their charm, despite being written into the histories of generations who defined their existence with a close relation to their communities.

Businesses, learning centres, sports clubs, political parties, unions, the church, and associations as a whole are facing serious problems in trying to recruit new members. May young people have opted for new ways of living and are prioritizing their wellbeing, without the old ties that

could limit their achievements. Siren songs come from all corners of the planet, and the most distant ones can be found at the top of the list of many people's priorities. Communal sacrifices are a story of the past, although the harshness of this diagnosis hurts. The transmission of the tradition has failed miserably, being the responsibility shared between the old and new generations. An entire way of understanding and living is about to disappear. The images of this country are no longer the same.

*Factors of an Emotional Type:  
Lack of a Compelling Story*

The pandemic has accelerated a sense of fatigue, without a doubt, a fatigue that is completely different in rich compared to poor societies. The perspective varies depending on the level of development we enjoy. For a large part of humanity life is all about survival, a preoccupation with meeting basic needs, and thus urgent truths that from the perspective of Western "fatigue" we cannot hope to understand.

Facing the magnitude of these dramas, as rich citizens of rich countries, we manage our small dramas and push to resume the normality that had characterized our lives. If some lesson is to be learned it's that we have woken up from a long sleep, seen the harsh reality and realized the finite nature of our existence. Immortality has been held off. The question is how long do we have left? In the liquid society in which we are surviving perhaps the fears will disappear, and until the next crisis we will appreciate even more our lives before the pandemic (Robinson 2021).

The Basque Country belongs to the league of the privileged, and our desires in that sense connect with those of others

in the Western world. But nuances also appear. It must be insisted upon – and there is no doubt that in other places fatigue has been more dramatic, or at least of a different type – that the Basque Country has experienced its own fatigue (terrorism and harsh political tension, rising unemployment and job insecurity, rising prices, an aging society, etc.)

In this context, the anxiety of the search for a space that guarantees wellbeing and happiness is increasing exponentially. Those who equip themselves with a convincing and attractive narrative will drag along those who strive for those objectives that, although apparently diffuse, are what decide the balance of affairs. Beyond the understanding that some who leave will be more aware of the negative consequences, flights will resume and some places on the planet (whether cold or hot, rural or urban) will become destinations that will supply what our developed environments cannot guarantee. To arm ourselves with an emotional narrative is a great challenge for Basque society in order to debunk this increasingly powerful claim that we live in a place with high levels of wellbeing but that is actually very boring. A place for older people who do not listen to the young.

The fatigue of Basque society has produced blemishes (the Franco dictatorship, the ravages of terrorism and many other factors) so that it feels the need for relief and an imperious liberalization. At present there are too many restrictions and pressures on a tired society.

It's also fitting to call for the need to look up, stop thinking about what *has happened* and instead focus what *is happening* in countries like Ireland. As with the Basque Country, the weight of

Catholicism and other factors have burdened many generations. The pressure on the community (not only due to religious factors) explains, for example, the act of rebellion formed mainly of young people in Ireland in the elections of February 2020. The static scheme of 100 years of the political system in Ireland is an example that explains phenomena like the departure of young people from their country of origin. The lack of freedom (and not the formal liberty that many countries guarantee) emerges as one of the principal reasons for leaving. Freedom of expression or of thought or its absences, can this explain the silent departure of so many?

### *Predictability*

Predictability remains attractive, but it reduces curiosity (a determining factor in migratory movement), forces us to sink into routine, damaging creativity and forming a horizon that lacks prospects. It is also a factor that does not enable us to avoid mass departures. To live in an environment where things happen according to some customs and traditions, without a trace of surprise, damages in some way the possibilities for growth and experiencing novelty that we all legitimately aspire to.

At a similar meeting in 2018 I warned my listeners about the danger that comes with living in a restrictive, rigid society which is little inclined to risk somersaults (Galdos 2018). More than three years have passed since that reflection, and the scenario I described has now settled, with no signs of change. On the contrary, of all the convulsions that the pandemic has decisively accelerated around the world, in the Basque Country the turn away from any form change has become even more

pressing. The fear of the loss of a standard of living that was attained through the efforts of decades stops people from any temptation to turn, adjust or change. In this scenario it is undoubtedly the social structure that determines almost exclusively the agenda of a country. Continuity and the absence of novelty may be the clearest signs of the immobility that closed social structures drive. In this sense, beyond personal appetite and inclinations, the objective data reveals the absolute absence of newness, data that contrasts with what is happening in the rest of the world (Galdos 2018).

Perhaps the Basque Country also needs to make a somersault, as this is demanded by new times and what is difficult for us to achieve. We continue with too much rigidity, and whilst we continue in this way I doubt that we will be able to, for one thing, stop the departure of our youth, nor will we be capable of filling the resulting holes in society that are befalling us today. The question is very clear, is it attractive to our youth to live in such a rigid society?

On the other hand, the safety offered by Basque society is valued, and it is an aspect which paradoxically attracts people who choose to live in the Basque Country as a destination where they wish to initiate new life and professional projects. To leave societies where life has little or no value and find oneself in one where safety can be offered to families and young people, where one can grow and develop, is a factor that should, of course, be perceived with positivity. However, and this is the paradox, that which serves as an element which hooks some people can become a huge push factor to leave for others. This is a dilemma that the Basque Country must resolve.

### *Freedom*

During the pandemic, Pope Francis published an article in the *New York Times*, making a firm plea in favour of personal liberty. This could possibly be our eternal challenge, and one that never fails to be a pressing subject. What moves us, what limits us, what touches us, what worries us. “In every personal COVID, in every ‘stoppage’, what is revealed is what needs to change: our lack of internal freedom, the idols we have been serving, the ideologies we have tried to live by, the relationships we have neglected”, Pope Francis said (2020).

The Basque Country has built a narrative almost mythical in nature, legendary, unparalleled, tremendously attractive, a powerful brand, with a huge capacity for resilience in its yearning for freedom. A narrative that undoubtedly has served to catapult our territory into being a significant state. It has been its motor and brand of presentation before the world.

There would undoubtedly be room for nuance when assessing and quantifying the contribution of society and its citizens. It was not that certain narratives established the combination of Basque society which took up arms and has pushed itself in the direction that it goes in today. All over the world history is being rewritten, and amnesia characterizes all narratives. In any case, and beyond necessary nuances, the achievement of liberty was the motor that since the 1970s woke up a weak country.

After an academic examination of the situation, and after overcoming some very complicated moments, Basque society should confront its own lessons. The management of freedom in its own land. And here I note that problems naturally exist, some of them with a strong

cultural meaning, one could say an anthropological meaning. Formal democracy is unquestionable, but the community weighs heavily, where there are also very deep-rooted fears with regard to showing differences and externalizing contrasting opinions. The strong institutional predominance in our lives in the context of a formerly dynamic civil society, very deliberately paints an unflattering panorama in order to give a channel to ways of life and thought that do not fit with the established customs. In times when transparency (alongside innovation) has become one of the mantras of institutional and academic discourse, the scheme of fixing problems at home without airing them continues to impose itself on our lives. This, and it is a hypothesis that should be analysed in more depth, could be one of the causes, yet another one, that would explain some of the departures.

In this context, and it is a pending study, it is not possible to disdain the psychological reasons that hide behind the departures of many. These are universal phenomenon, the need to find a place in the world where self-esteem and recognition can develop. It is the dignified exit of those who for personal reasons (a lack of social skills, personal imbalances) or ones attributable to their community environment have not known or have not been able to integrate properly. The power and weight of the group, its ancestry, the sense of belonging to it, characterize Basque society. Together with the family, they are two of the axes of a society (although aged) that weathers much better the trauma of loneliness, a real scourge of the most advanced societies in the 21st century. But there are also those who are left out of this scheme. It



would be necessary to analyse if the lack of integration of some explains some of the departures. In any case, there is greater rigor in many of the analyses.

### *Narratives*

In the post-modern era, narrative has imposed itself as a new mantra at a time when analysing events and, on occasion, it unfortunately impedes the sincerity of reflection. In any case, a framework taken from Michael Sandel's (2020) recent book, *The Tyranny of Merit*, may be helpful in understanding the era of winners and losers we are now living in. The first are those who, wherever they are, whatever conditions they are in, have left their country and form part of the winners. To leave the country has become a synonym for elevated status. In contrast, in the absence of strategy for the country, a those who stay are associated with failure and a supposed lack of ambition.

It is necessary to articulate, therefore, a more positive narrative – inclusive, respectful and efficient. The paradigm which is in vogue today creates victims and above all endangers the balance of Basque society. What is not permissible is that a scheme is created which marginalizes, highlights and stigmatizes those who decide to stay here.

But in order to overcome this perverse scheme of winners and losers and to advance to a new, healthy and positive paradigm, but above all respond in justice to reality and fundamentally so that it does not establish a fictitious and harmful narrative, it is necessary to propose a radical change in the communicative strategy that is followed by the public and private media of the Basque Country. There are narratives that are influencing the future of the country, and the institutions within

their responsibilities must lead a new approach, provided that they agree with this diagnosis. Because in the first place we must share the analysis that there is an imbalance in the messages that the media convey about the Basque Country.

In general, the story that predominates today in the media (the number of TV programs, all of similar format, that flood the schedule is overwhelming) is characterized as follows – wherever they are in the world (the list includes the most soulless places on the planet), the image of those who have left their homeland is one of extreme success. One understands that the intention is not to show the miseries and failures that also exist, and that indirectly it is intended to transfer the image of a country that has citizens with the capacity to 'take on the world'. The effect, however, is the opposite. Without paying attention to the causes, motivations or possibilities that hide behind the departures of the protagonists who appear in such shows, the message is devastating – those who left are winners (Galdos 2016), with a life full of successes (they practice surfing regularly, live in wonderful houses, enjoy the sun, have many friends, live very happily, earn a lot of money, etc, and not a single downside is shown).

However, this scheme and narrative is actually doubly perverse. For in obvious opposition to this meritocracy that still is a sign of the most developed societies (Markovits 2019; Sandel 2020) are those who are better able to access the labour market simply thanks to the economic and social circles that have dominated and still dominate, with growing ease, the world of work. It's simply insulting that such people present themselves to us as talented when talent is exactly what they

lack. When we consider these people, we seem to ignore the economic factors and their social status which essentially define their futures.

Because, without a doubt, we can refer to many concepts that form part of political correctness, but if we do so we will continue without understanding the profound causes of the most uncertain and spasmodic eras in recent times. We would say that we have woken up from a dream and have realized that the story is not as simple as we thought. There was much fantasy, and from this tale that has dominated our thinking has emerged the possibility to grow from the base of personal strength, an argument that is increasingly discussed in the academic world (Putnam 2015). Ordinary events have developed into a crude reality. Access to Ivy League universities comes with hidden shortcuts (Medina, Benner, Taylor 2019), and although not unexpected, the fact that money can buy such access is a ticking-time bomb that is adding to the unease that is destroying Western societies. There is a deepening loss of credibility. The same can happen with diaspora. That is, credibility is lost when it is discussed without taking into account the complexities surrounding these communities.

### **Creating a great community of connected Basques – but why and for what purpose?**

It would be said that diasporas are, for many, a discovery, and what usually happens in these circumstances is that enthusiasm grows and in many cases the discoverers form a new barrier (in the same way as converts), setting the stage and ignoring all previous history. They try, to put it differently, to rewrite a history

that has many chapters that have already been written and many protagonists/heroes that should be listened to with greater attention.

In general lines a romantic discourse takes precedence, one that is melancholy, historical and anthropological. Full of good intentions but far off from reality. In this context, there is a strengthening belief that an Arcadia is found in our diaspora – where many essences are deposited, our original values, and where we can find the solution to our current problems and deficiencies.

First, although it is obvious, we should highlight the enormous diversity of our presence abroad. The cast is formed by the historic diasporic groups clustered around the Basque Cultural Centres, but also individual and commercial presences that are not organized around structures, and in many instances do not maintain any link with systematized actions and dynamics. All this should be the object of our rigorous reflection.

Secondly, it is fitting to affirm with important role that the diaspora has played and should continue to play in the Basque Country of the 21st century. From the perspective of public diplomacy, those who live abroad can be a decisive part of the articulation of Basque public policy.

However, before this all we must act on a reality that, on occasions, we escape and ignore. It is an aspect that is tightly linked to one of the principal theses of this presentation – in the world many things are happening and therefore many things are happening within our diaspora as well. It is not an immune entity, protected from the eternal and distant changes, no matter how far away they are. Those

who live abroad also suffer under the convulsions of our current times. Let us point out some of those upheavals: The demographic decline that we suffer in the three administrative regions of the country. The loss of young people, increasingly scattered and dispersed – as the new geographical centres where the new Basque presences are located do not necessarily coincide with the former classical centres where the network of Basque centres has been built – hinders the management of the large Basque community. Finally, profound changes are also taking place in what has been the bulwark of the diaspora. No one is immune to the unstoppable process of change. The Euskal Etxeak, organizations that were created in order to maintain living Basque culture far from the Basque Country, face the challenge of their survival and adaptation to a new reality. In some of the old squares of the Basque diaspora, displacements are taking place in the opposite direction to those that originated the Basque migratory movements (Argentina and Venezuela attest to this).

Let's direct our gaze for a moment at one of our most important references within the universe of the Basque diaspora. It is not being given too much attention at present, but increasingly there is a trickle of members of the Basque diaspora in Argentina making the opposite journey that their ancestors made in the past. This changes the look and the strategy in relation to a reality that is diminishing (the shrinking of the Basque community in Argentina), for one part and for another, it should be the object of our attention, beyond assistant or other programs established at that time. What this phenomenon requires without a doubt is

a profound reflection on the consequences that these movements have in our form of understanding the diaspora.

In this respect, there is, for example, a broad unanimity in accepting that the new profiles that characterize the new presences abroad rarely approach (in the places where the possibility is given) the spaces (Euskal Etxeak and similar) where the Basque community is organized in a structured and systematized way. These individuals don't feel the vital need for such activities. I must clearly point out that in many cases these are people who have grown up and been educated in cultural and linguistic values that guarantee the acquisition of what we assume the Basque identity is. It is an identity acquired and internalized in a natural way, without having mediated the process of effort that characterized things in the not too distant past. Having acquired that identity, those values, they also do not feel the need to unite and prioritize projects that reinforce their feeling of Basqueness when they are physically outside the Basque Country. But this should not at all be interpreted as renouncing the feeling of belonging to a nation and a culture.

It is another way of living through the Basque identity, according to new parameters that must be assumed as not arising from resignation, but rather from the acceptance of a reality that widens and enriches the space of the Basque community abroad. Said in a way that might seem somewhat contradictory: we intend to promote connectivity among Basques in the world (including the new and most recent additions), but in the same way in that broad field there are perspectives and views of the Basque identity that seek to express in a global way a certain

disconnection. Here is the challenge. Seek the commitment, contribution and participation of those who seek in some way to move away, enrich themselves with other perspectives and disconnect from a way of understanding an identity of which they are proud, but who need to expand their vision of the world. The success of this depends to a large extent on our being able to strengthen the bonds and values that unite our community in the 21st century, if we are able to reformulate and adapt the Basque identity (or the set of Basque identities) for today.

In this context, we must accept that due to the historical circumstances and different contexts in which organizations and structures have been configured, within the historical diaspora feelings and bonds of greater emotional charge with the motherland predominate. The most idealized, most romantic, effective and melancholic visions predominate. Aspects, without a doubt, of enormous value and that must be taken advantage of to their full extent. This must be combined with the new realities. Both are complementary and not exclusive. Both can and should contribute to articulating a renewed strategy to ambitiously promote the Basque agenda in the 21st century, a century that is bringing us so many transformations.

We must also start from accepting a reality. The plurality and enormous social, economic, political and cultural diversity of the Basque community abroad, and also of the community that exists in the country itself. It is worth noting this fact because sometimes we find it difficult to engage with, as instead we often distance ourselves from the complexity and diversity of our realities abroad, and leave to one side the differences between us and

put value on those elements that have the potential to unite us. The aim here is laudable but lacks realism, it is situated in mere symbolism, it reduces efficiency and above all is in contradiction with our objectives.

But in this life everything is politics, few things remain outside the margin of politics and, especially in these moments in which we live, we are all playing a lot. The future of the planet is being played with, the future of the next generation, the future of the diaspora, of the Basque language, so many things that it's impossible to find something that politics doesn't touch. Contradictions may emerge, but they must be assumed naturally. Trying to achieve unanimity seems a very complicated task. As in other diasporas, embedding existing diversity can be the starting point for working on a common goal and agenda. Work so that the Basque (in its multiple expressions) gains relevance and weight in the world, so that we become increasingly influential, and so that an identity that has contributed so much can continue to be important in the future. A lobbying task in which we can all be protagonists, without exclusions.

Finally, there is a key question. What is the purpose for us to be connected? Obviously, it is understood – and with this the whole strategy has been justified for a very long time – that trying to strengthen the links between Basques around the world is in itself an objective that does not need further reflection.

### **Diasporas, communities and individuals - their role in the Basque Country of the 21st century**

There are those who consider that the diaspora has not got the recognition that

it deserves, that such individuals deserve more of a central role and that they should be listened to more. There is no doubt that there is a long way to go before they form a part of the agendas and dynamics of the country.

That said, it is true that as the country has strengthened institutionally, economically and politically, the voice of the diaspora has begun to sound stronger and increasingly occupy a more relevant role. This does not mean that before the institutionalization of part of the Basque Country (since the beginning of the 1980s) its work was insignificant. On the contrary, part of the Basque diaspora (especially that located in South America) played a decisive and invaluable role in the visualization and internationalization of the Basque problem.

There is no doubt – and Boise, Idaho, USA, is an excellent example of this – that the diaspora has established good models and have always had the support of the institutions and companies that have articulated and continue to articulate the Euskadi (Basque Country) of the 21st century. It has thus been possible to place the paradigm of the diaspora in the parameters and in the contemporary context. It should also be noted, to avoid the risk that the analysis is limited to the perspective of the institutions, that Basque companies have also played a crucial role as agents and ambassadors of the Basque Country. As they have spread out in the world, the country's radius of action and influence has grown dramatically. The greater the number of Basque companies operating abroad, the more opportunities members of the Basque diasporas have.

All this leads us back to the first reflection. There are strong and influential

diasporas when a country is strong. Balance is fundamental, and this is at stake in the success of the Basque Country's project. The imbalances (between the motherland and its representations abroad) do nothing to strengthen the project. Armenia, a country that has an envied and exemplary diaspora, is going through convulsions that do not help to achieve the objectives that the community is pursuing. Hence, the premise is clear: homework must be done at home. If the motherland is solid, its projection is immediate.

### *Realism (and Ambition)*

The diasporas, the Basque and the rest, are unbeatable in the emotional field. They play with the advantage that they escape the routines and normality that characterize the societies of their homelands. Distance is always an advantage over those who live in a reality where (and this is an achievement that came after a lot of work, passion, dedication, soul) the use of Basque (with all its challenges) is part of the landscape.

But having said that, it is necessary to demand a more realistic outlook, less idealistic, more attached to reality, and hoping that the diaspora can overcome shortcomings is an exercise that sometimes distorts the analysis. Both in the Basque Country and in each of the territories that host the different Basque communities, many things are happening, and no one is oblivious to the convulsions, profound transformations and conflicts that today travel the world. Abstracting ourselves from this reality we do a disservice to an approach that needs realism that aspires to effectiveness, without this meaning that we must discard ambition. But there are no paradises in the world.

### *Excessive Guardianship? The Necessary Balance*

Achieving a balance between the dynamics that arise in the diaspora itself and the action that is managed by Basque institutions and agents in relation to the diaspora is the horizon that must never be lost sight of – it is the value that has made possible the success of a poignant story that must now be adapted to a new reality that is emerging with force.

As required by law, but above all out of responsibility, Basque institutions have deployed resources, efforts and finances to help and promote actions and programs that strengthen the world of the diaspora. The institutions understand that the diasporas play a crucial role in many fields and perspectives that determine the future of the country. Their role, for example, in the articulation of public diplomacy is essential. Therefore, there is nothing but praise for the action deployed by the Basque institutions (I am mainly referring to those belonging to the Basque autonomous area), since the assumption of competences forty years ago. The resulting institutions and the groups of citizens and agents have configured a successful model of Basque paradiplomacy.

Taking this reality as a starting point, however, it is worth warning of the inconvenience of falling into excessive tutelage, into a certain dirigisme or into an artificially driven action from Euskadi towards the Basque diasporas. To put it another way, to artificially support a reality that, unlike other similar realities, has an enviable strength and health. This is not the Basque case, since we are fortunate to have an unequalled strength, with a network of structures that have sustained the Basque identity for decades.

Enthusiastic support for the dynamics and specificities of each Basque presence abroad is a treasure that we must preserve. Changes and events are also taking place in the diversity of Basque presences that must be the object of new strategies. The future of the Basque centres (Euskal Etxeak), their capacity to attract new generations, their readaptation to new needs or the birth of new and renewed ways of strengthening the Basque communities in the world, are the axes on which the new narrative will rest,

In this context, any temptation to impose agendas, rhythms or programs that could collide with the very dynamics arising from the heart of the different forms of Basque diaspora must be avoided. Respect for these dynamics must be the guide for action, avoiding the feeling of invasion.

The dispersion of the new Basque presences abroad, their identification and correct management have thus become the main challenges for the near future.

### **Last considerations. Is there a risk of the Argentinization of Basque Society?**

Responding to the question of what is the main thread of this paper, we must conclude that we are far from the metaphor of the Ezeiza airport, or from what I observed in my visit to Lithuania, but there are indications that at least should be taken into consideration. Despite its stability, its economic structure and so many other strengths that distinguish it from other realities, the Basque Country is not immune to the maelstrom of events that are ravaging the world. The deficits that Euskadi accumulates (not very different from those of other realities) will mark its future, with the aging of its society one

of the key issues. The way we manage the relationship between our presence abroad and the Basque Country will determine to a large extent its future. We must, first of all, accept the phenomenon from a perspective of historical normality, without drama or trauma, without the melancholy tones that characterize these processes. A more global, comprehensive and inclusive analysis must also be considered. Finally, accepting the fact as an opportunity, avoiding fatalism, will alleviate the agonizing analysis of an area that will regain unusual strength in the times to come. The migratory flows (in one direction and in another, departures and arrivals) and the new diasporas that are established (their own abroad as well as those that are being articulated in Euskadi) are going to determine to a great extent the future picture. We could venture that perhaps there is some light ahead and the answers to many of the structural problems that are looming large on the horizon panorama.

The approximation to the phenomenon of the Basque diaspora has a fundamentally historic focus. Put differently, there is still a lack of reflection and investigation into analysing contemporary diasporas. The events that have been going on in the last few decades have configured an unpublished paradigm of the diaspora that is starting to call for urgent reflection. Without a doubt, we are before a new wave of diasporas, of a diverse typology and with few similarities with historic versions that have marked a sustained narrative in time. Using the Irish example, the reasons and circumstances are accumulating to address a process of rethinking the Basque diaspora from a novel and contemporary prism (Trew, Pierse 2018).

### *Another Country, Other Answers*

The country has changed radically and this must be the starting point to face a new era. A very cohesive country, with a very cohesive community, with a strong identity is beginning to be, for some, for *many*, a burden in the face of the strong attraction of the globalized world. Or to put it another way, a new paradigm is emerging with force, one where no one closes doors to the immense possibilities offered by a planet that is approachable and hospitable. It is not as fierce or as big as it was painted. The pandemic has placed us in front of our own mirror, and the anxiety before an existence that is certainly limited accelerates the rush to know the world. Faced with the impossibility of immortality, no one wants to cling to a scenario that is immovable and eternal. It is necessary to experiment and to do it quickly. The way of facing the future of work has also changed radically. Lifelong employment ties are becoming a relic of the past. The dream of getting a permanent job is no longer a dream for many young people. It is not the aspiration that previous generations fought for.

Generations of young people who have naturally internalized cultural, linguistic and identity traits do not experience the anguish and anxiety of previous generations. The emotional disconnection of the new incorporations abroad with the motherland is another factor that must be analysed. The role of the Euskal Etxeak that have articulated the weight of our representation abroad must also be rethought. Finally, the growing geographical dispersion of our presence abroad is a challenge in terms of articulating strategic action in the face of the phenomenon of the diaspora. There are many tasks ahead of us.

### *The New Narrative of Corruption versus Meritocracy*

It is very poignant to hear from taxi drivers and young people in countless countries that the scourge of corruption completely undermines their future and that of the country itself. Corruption has its own medicine and its own name. The more meritocracy, the less risk of breaking emotionally with the environment where you have grown up. Sandel (2020) and Markovits (2019) alerted us to the enormous danger that exists in today's societies if we shun meritocracy. Meritocracy must be the axis around which any plan for the future must pivot.

### *Permanent Listening (to Taxi Drivers and Young People)*

Secondly, listening. The speeches, plans and eternal intentions to advance in a scenario where a new governance is born, where democracy is strengthened, where new voices and sensitivities have a place, are reiterated, but we are far from reaching the beginning of a new period. The loss of credibility and faith in politics, the scepticism that is getting every stronger, are the clear symptoms that we are not getting it right, and the facts are irrefutable. Populism and autocracy are the unmistakable signs that the former moderation, centrism and dialogue are no longer working.

In this context, we are still not listening to young people. The pandemic was an opportunity for us to start a new period of reflection. But instead, the gap has widened. Sometimes and possibly on many occasions for good reasons, but reproach is not the way. The younger generation feel that their voice is not heard and therefore in many societies opt for a

traumatic way out: a break with everything around them. It must thus be remembered that if we do not want to move towards an undesirable scenario we need more empathy, listening and respect.

### *Exhaustive Evaluation of Internationalization Plans*

On a more concrete level, and it is not the purpose of this reflection to deal with the content of each program, an analysis of the totality of the plans and strategies that institutions have to encourage young people to experiment abroad should be considered. Although impeccable in their intention, it is worth considering the results they achieve. We consider a more rigorous evaluation is needed on the returns that should exist for a society that sustains an internationalization policy. A society that pays for work experience abroad is in danger of losing people who it financially supported through their entire education. Australia, another country that enthusiastically supports the overseas experiences of its young people, sets clear criteria for the recovery of the investment made. Care must be taken between encouraging young people to have new experiences and pushing them to leave the country forever.

More rigor, more balance, more moderation and fewer surprises are thus required in the related strategy. There is much to rethink, much to evaluate and, above all, a more normal tone is required. The communicative strategy must be rethought if we do not want the damage to be irreparable. Heroes are neither those who tell us wonderful stories that take place in exotic places, nor those who choose to remain in their homeland. Let us try to make our existence a happy one,



wherever we live. There are no paradises that satisfy our longings and dreams. Sunday afternoons are just as miserable in any corner of the world, just as Monday and the depression it drags down are the same all over the planet. And routine knows no boundaries. Let's avoid Ezeizas. Argentina is a great country that offered thousands of Basques (including some of my family) a new life, new opportunities, dreams. This is the spirit that should guide the future. Never the feeling of failure.

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### Notes

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# Boise, Idaho: Connecting academia, other diaspora communities, and the Basque Country

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## **Abstract**

This paper applies a multidisciplinary analysis, within the theoretical, historical, transnational, and cultural framework of diaspora studies, to examine the distinctive elements of the Basque diasporic community in Boise, Idaho (USA). The paper examines the importance of academic service carried out through Basque Studies at Boise State University as a way to connect the Basque diaspora locally, nationally and globally. We maintain that the ongoing construction of Basque identity in Boise is very much alive in the community through different local institutions and cultural manifestations. We highlight that in Boise, Basque diasporic life, identity, memory, and belonging gravitates in a triangular way between the global diaspora community, Boise State University, and the homeland. This creates a local and global network among students, academia, the diaspora, and the Basque Country and a continuous flow

of people, knowledge, and teamwork. The connections among these three main pillars are foundational to understanding the history, creation, and adaptation of the Basques in Boise from the end of the 19th century until the present.

## **From the Basque Country to Boise**

It was Sunday, August 1st, 2010 and the last day of the Jaialdi International Basque Festival in Boise. The Basque-American band Amuma Says No played music for hundreds of dancers, trying their best to wring out the last bit of fun before the festival ended. Over the course of the week, an estimated 30,000 participants attended events that included: men's and women's pala (Basque paddle ball) championships, Basque dancing and singing, traditional Basque sports, an international academic conference on Basque Studies, Basque exhibits such as sheepherding wagons, food stalls, arts and crafts and souvenirs, Basque movies, and a

professionally choreographed performance at the Morrison Center on the campus of Boise State. Most importantly for many attendees, the festival offered endless opportunities to connect with Basques and non-Basques from Boise, throughout the American West and far beyond, from New York and Connecticut, to Montreal, Argentina, Australia and especially from the Basque Country. One friend told me that he visited a local supermarket and heard more Basque being spoken than English. Similarly, at this final street dance, one visitor from the Basque Country looked out at the vast sea of bobbing heads dancing to the music and commented, “I don’t know where I am – Boise or the Basque Country.”

How did the Basques end up in Boise? It is part of a larger story of the Basques that unfortunately is not commonly known. Going back to earliest times, evidence points to continuous human occupation in the Basque area that straddles the Pyrenees Mountains from at least the Cro-Magnon era. Even the most conservative estimate places the Basques in this region of northern Spain and southwestern France from 5,000 to 3,000 BC – making them the oldest permanent residents of Western Europe. Traditionally, the area has comprised of four historical territories on the southern (Spanish) side and three on the northern (French) side. Basque anthropologists have found human skulls in local caves that they claim to have Basque features, and blood type studies have revealed an unusually high proportion of Rh-negative blood type that would point towards a lengthy, continuous occupation in the area. However, it is the language, Euskera, which linguists have not been able to link

with any other Indo-European language, which has left the Basques shrouded in mystery (Douglass, Bilbao 1975: 10-11).

While the Basques have an ancient history in this region, they also have a long history of leaving it. Since the 7th century, Basque whalers hunted in the Bay of Biscay and fished their way across the Atlantic and eventually reached Newfoundland, as linguistic and archaeological evidence points to a Basque presence there in the second half of the 16th century (Hadingham 1992: 34-42). From making up a significant portion of Columbus’ crew, to colonizing and missionary efforts in what would become Mexico, Uruguay, Colombia, and Venezuela, Basques played a significant role throughout the history of settlement in the New World. One Basque explorer founded the northern Mexican province of Nueva Vizcaya, naming its capital after his Bizkaian birthplace, Durango. Another man with Basque heritage became even more famous: Simon Bolivar, the liberator of South America (Douglass, Bilbao 1975: 72).

In the 1800s, Basques became involved in the Latin American sheep industry, especially in its earliest developments in the pampas of Argentina. Indeed, it was a secondary migration for Basques from this region that brought the earliest Basques to California after the discovery of gold. While few had success mining, their efforts in the booming livestock industry provided an opportunity for a new life. From this region, they fanned throughout the American West trailing sheep in the open range and providing further opportunities for family and friends from the Basque Country to cross the Atlantic. Chain migration created a pattern of settlement, with French and

Navarrese Basques establishing themselves in California while Spanish Basques, predominantly from the province of Bizkaia, concentrated in Nevada and Idaho.

Boise became one of the prominent hubs for Basques in southwest Idaho. While almost all the male immigrants came to work in the fast growing sheep industry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Basque immigrant women often found work in the Basque boarding houses that sprang up in communities along the Snake River. At one point, Boise boasted as many as 40 such houses. Both sheepherding and working in boarding houses offered opportunities that did not require formal education or knowledge of the English language. As one herder joked in an oral history interview, “What the hell did you think I was going to do, become a stockbroker?” (Artiach 1993).

When Basques arrived in Idaho, they stayed together. Basque immigrants worked, formed business partnerships, and married almost exclusively among themselves. Most of them arrived young and single, and their common experience so far from home helped them to forge strong friendships. Moreover, they came from an agrarian culture that measured self-worth through hard physical labour, and this was a good match with the American work ethic. Almost all arrived with the idea of returning to the Basque Country after having saved some money. Some did. Many, however, chose to stay. Those who stayed created opportunities and choices for the next generation.

The second generation grew up as Basques at home and Americans outside of it. Their immigrant parents worked hard to give them even more opportunities and to instil in them good work habits and

values. This formative background, when coupled with an education, provided a solid foundation for a successful life in the United States. Many climbed the social ladder to become managers, bankers, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. In the process they became more American. They were part of a hyphenated American generation that came of age during World War II, that great Americanizing period.

Most second-generation Basques were thus not infused with tales of life in the Basque Country, and the difficult conditions that had motivated their parents to leave home. Instead, their focus was on a brighter future. The Basque language, spoken almost universally by the first generation, was often lost by the second, as the children learned English in American schools. Some Americanized their names, moved away from Idaho, and married non-Basques. Others married Basques and never left their ethnic communities. The majority settled somewhere in between. Some of the second generation did preserve Basque traditions through dances, picnics, and sporting events, and this kept certain cultural traditions alive and set the stage for the third generation.

The third generation, the ethnic generation, developed during a period of immense change in the United States. During the 1960s and beyond, it became less fashionable to be simply American – living in what many considered to be a bland, vanilla culture – and increasingly popular to be from somewhere, to have an identity that set one apart. A preservation movement by a number of third-generation Basques in Idaho proved a theory proposed by sociologist Marcus Lee Hansen: “What the children

[of immigrants] wish to forget, the grandchildren want to remember.” Whenever any immigrant group reaches the third generation he wrote, “a spontaneous and almost irresistible impulse arises” that brings together different people from various backgrounds based on one common factor: “heritage – the heritage of blood” (Hansen 1959: 31).

This bond of heritage continues. While today there are Basques of all of the generations described, any significant Basque immigration to Idaho had ended by the late 1970s. This means that the majority of young Basques today are of the fourth or fifth generations. While the way the culture is lived out has certainly changed from that of the immigrant generation, in many ways the celebration of Basque culture is as strong as ever. From the only Basque language pre-school (an *Ikastola* in Basque) and the *Biotzetik* (From the Heart) Basque choir to Basque markets and restaurants on the Basque Block, from opportunities to study the Basque language, history and culture at Boise State University to a yearlong immersive experience through the University Studies Abroad Consortium in the Basque Country, there are a large number and diverse ways to “be Basque”.

And while it took months to exchange letters and many of the original Basque immigrants to Idaho never returned to their homeland, today’s communication is instant and travel to and from the Basque Country exponentially faster. The evolution of technology coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic both forced and allowed us to communicate in new and creative ways with Basques from the Basque Country, but also with the global Basque diaspora. These opportunities will

likely expand, although most still prefer face-to-face contact. Sadly, the *Jaialdi* 2020 International Basque Festival in Boise had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. However, *Jaialdi* 2025 promises to be one of the largest gatherings of the Basque global diaspora.

### Why Boise?

Some have asked, “Why Boise”? What is the reason for the strong Basque cultural persistence that exists there today? An answer may be found in examining the symbiotic relationship between the evolution of a cultural landscape and multiple diasporic generations. The case study of Boise from the end of the 19th century to the present-day provides insight into how each generation’s distinct places reflect Basque identity as they evolved. From the immigrant generation’s boarding houses to the second generation’s Basque Center to today’s vibrant Basque Block, Basque culture has persisted – and even prospered – in Boise. Because the study area is relatively small geographically, and some of the institutions can also be seen in Basque diaspora communities elsewhere, there must be additional considerations to support the argument that the evolution of place through several generations has impacted cultural persistence.

Surely, demographics, politics, and economics can be considered, as each has impacted Basque residential, occupational, religious, and recreational places for generations. Today, though, there is another critical factor: Boise hosts many *places of education* that enrich an understanding of the Basques past, present, and future. This emphasis on *learning about the Basques* in various places not only teaches the general public, but it provides a critical connection

for those of Basque descent to claim and strengthen their identity. Ultimately, this supports the preservation of Basque culture in the present. Indeed, there is significant power of place when considering Basque cultural persistence in Boise, Idaho.

*The Basque Places of Boise:*

*A Generational Evolution*

“Izan zirelako gara, garelako izango dira.”  
 “We are because they were, and because we are, they will be.”

From the late 1800s, the first Basque immigrants carried Old World values to new, faraway places, including the principles of community (*auzoa*) and communal work (*auzolan*) (Douglass, Zulaika 2007: 224–227). Each generation contributed to the community that evolved through the years, and thus it is helpful to understand this evolution by studying generational periods of time:

- *Amerikanuak*: 1st Generation (Late 1800s-1920s)
  - o “Places by Basques, for Basques”
- *Tartekoak*: 2nd Generation (1930s-1950s)
  - o “Bridges Between Two Worlds”
- *Egunoak*: 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation (1960s-Present)
  - o “Public Places of Shared Learning”

*Amerikanuak: “Places by Basques, For Basques”*

Amerikanuak immigrants were the first to migrate to America. They were internally focused; Euskara speakers (possibly also Spanish or French), and dependent upon fellow Basques for social structure and economic viability. This generation

relied on a collective memory of the homeland and *auzolan* to build a community in their new home.

- *Boarding houses*: These communal “homes away from home” provided shelter for male sheepherders and work for women as domestic help. They served a critical social need as gathering places with familiar language, food, and customs that enabled the retention of Basque culture (Basque Museum & Cultural Center “Ostatuak” 2015; Laxalt 2018: 130-131).
- *The Church*: The Church of the Good Shepherd was a Basque Catholic Church that served sacramental and social needs for the Basque community. It was the first, and only, Basque church in the American West. It was closed in 1921 by the Diocese and replaced with St. John’s, which then became a central Basque place (Paseman 2014: 48-63; St. John’s Parish records).
- *Frontons*: Frontons (Basque handball courts) were where Basques gathered to share familiar cultural customs and socialize, including sports and language. The Anduiza Fronton, built in 1914, exemplifies this (Bieter, Bieter 2014: 64-83).
- *Sheep Camps*: The camps were simultaneously places of work and home. Herders lived in tents or sheep wagons while they traversed miles of high desert hills to move bands of sheep. Sheep camps were solitary places, though, unlike the Amerikanuak communal places.

*Tartekoak: “Bridges Between Two Worlds”*

Tartekoak (“in-between”) were the children of immigrant parents who lived between two worlds with a dual identity.

They straddled being Basque at home and American outside of it. Expressing primary allegiance to the US presented a difficult dichotomy for them during this transitional phase, both linguistically and politically (Bieter, Bieter 2000: 87). Robert Laxalt's *Sweet Promised Land* (Laxalt 1957: 66) best expresses their tenuous position between old and new:

All of us together were of a generation born of old country people who spoke English with an accent and prayed in another language, who drank red wine and cooked their food in the old country way, and peeled apples and pears after dinner. We were among the last whose names would tell our blood and the kind of faces we had, to know another language in our homes, to suffer youthful shame because of that language and refuse to speak it, and a later shame because of what we had done, and hurt because we had caused a hurt so deep it could never find words. And the irony of it was that our mothers and fathers were truer Americans than we, because they had forsaken home and family, and gone into the unknown of a new land with only courage and the hands that God gave them, and had given us in our turn the right to be born American. And in a little while, even our sons would forget, and the old country people would be only a dimming memory, and names would mean nothing, and the melting would be done.

A gap exists in the establishment of new Basque places between the 1930s and

the late 1940s – more than half of this era. This period was marked by growing wariness of the foreign-born and demands for loyalty solely to the US. Basque places reflect this middle ground of being Basque *and* American, with places such as:

- *Residences*: Tartekoak moved from communal boarding houses to single-family residences. Economic, geographic, and educational mobility were key to this period, which encouraged dispersion from solely Basque American communities.
- *Cemetery*: Tartekoak were the first generation to bury Basque relatives on American soil. Many Basques are buried in concentrated sections of Boise's Morris Hill Cemetery (St. John's Catholic Church, Sections 4 through 13; records).
- *Workplaces*: Tartekoak usually worked away from their living places, marking a cultural shift. They purchased homes and property, established businesses, and worked for non-Basque companies. Tartekoak inched further toward American assimilation, establishing barbershops, restaurants, and grocery stores that carried very little, if any, evidence of Basque ancestry. These were outwardly American places, not Basque.
- *Transitional Places*: The "hyphenated" generation balanced being Basque and being American, but their Basque roots were firm: "They saw their future in America, yet some felt it was important to hold on to elements of the past culture." (Bieter, Bieter 2000: 73). Communal boarding-house gatherings were fading, but Tartekoak worked hard to retain connections with their fellow Basques. They gathered in "transitional" places, such as Boise's Municipal Park, for



picnics, and at the annual Sheepherder's Ball or in church halls after funerals.

- *Euzkaldunak – Boise's Basque Center*: Some Tartekoak worried that their language and cultural traditions were headed for extinction. In 1949, 500 charter members founded Euzkaldunak, Inc. and built a Basque-only social centre at 601 Grove St. (Toticaguena 2002: 226). Today, it has a public bar, card room, dance/dining hall, and kitchen (Hummer 2014: 156-167). Still fully operational, Boise's Basque Center is a living testament to the Tartekoak generation's contribution to Basque cultural preservation.
- *Restaurants*: Tartekoak exchanged boarding house kitchens and communal tables for meals and gatherings at the Basque Center and in private homes. Today, Basque restaurants and markets preserve Basque culture through food and communal gathering (Basque Museum, Yursa 2014, 2015).

### *Egungoak: "Public Places, Shared Learning"*

Marcus Lee Hansen's words ring true for the Egungoak generation: "What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember." (Hansen 1938). They are the grandchildren of first-generation immigrants: "those of today" (Bieter 1994). They often have mixed ancestral heritage, express their ethnicity through conscious choice, and are culturally inclusive. Egungoak are products of "cultural identity pride" from the 1960s and 1970s, when a groundswell of pride in ethnic heritage was felt by many Americans (Gill 2015). This pushed Egungoak to connect with others in the Basque Country and throughout the Basque diaspora to revive

Basque culture in new ways. Once-disparate Basques were also connected by modern technology and transportation, which resulted in global connections.

Egungoak places are very public expressions of "being Basque", including museums, restaurants, and festivals that occur on places like the Basque Block. Egungoak built on the Amerikanuak and Tartekoak legacies, forming new places that seek to preserve Basque culture with an emphasis on experiencing and sharing it through language, food, dance, music, sports, and scholarly activities.

### *The Basque Block*

Boise's Basque Block deserves its own credit as a unique – and vibrant – Egungoak place. Completed in 2000, it is the only district in the United States dedicated to Basque culture. The Basque Block has three Basque restaurants, a Basque Market, the Basque Museum & Cultural Center, a restored historic boarding house, the Anduiza Fronton, the Basque Center, and hosts dances, catered and special events, and festivals such as Jaialdi and San Inazio on the street. It's also a place of education, where anyone can learn about the Basques.

The Basque saying "*Indarrak biltruk obro doke ezik barriatruk*" means "the sum of the strengths is greater than each individually." That is the *auzolan* principle that helped build and maintain this very special place: the culmination of the evolution of the Basque people and place in Boise. It is also a product of a conscious choice to use public education and an outward demonstration of ethnicity to preserve Basque culture. Boise Basques are now challenged with passing this legacy of place along to the next generations

so they, too, can ensure Basque cultural persistence into the future (Laxalt 2018).

### *Places of Education*

Education plays a central role through “public places of shared learning”, such as academic institutions, the museum, and festivals in Boise, where there are many places to learn about Basques:

- Basque Museum & Cultural Center (Euskara classes, presentations, library, special collections, exhibits, internships, volunteers, gift shop, public tours of Cyrus Jacobs-Uberuaga Boarding house)
- Boiseko Ikastola (language immersion preschool owned/operated by Basque Museum & Cultural Center)
- Anduiza Fronton (active leagues for men/women)
- Public Art (Basque Block and nearby)

Boise State University is a foundational place of Basque education, with academic and cultural partnerships in the US, diaspora, and Basque Country. The Basque Studies program at Boise State is the culmination of institutional commitment and community engagement. It was born from the efforts of many, who believe in the importance of collaborative relationships between the social and academic communities to enrich the Basque culture and language in the North American Basque diaspora.

### **The history and trajectory of Basque Studies at Boise State University and how students get to learn about the world through Basque Studies**

The history of the beginnings of the Basque Studies program is well summarized by Meggan Laxalt (2018: 66-67):

The first serious educational step was taken in 1972 when Congress appropriated funds for the National Ethnic Heritage Studies Program Act. This paved the way for a \$52,285 grant through the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish a Basque Studies Program in Boise, Idaho. The goals were to create a robust program with Basque language and cultural studies, a Basque library and a six week summer study abroad program to the Basque Country. In 1974, Pat Bieter and Eloise Garmendia, and others established the first study abroad program in the Basque Country in the Gipuzkoa town of Oñati.

Since then, many students and faculty members have had the chance to participate in courses organized by the University Studies Abroad Consortium, known as USAC. As a result of the effort of those Basque Studies pioneers and the hardworking Basque community in the Boise area, Basque Studies at Boise State University went through a period of rebirth in 2004 when Dr. Sabine Klahr (Director of the International Programs, Boise State), Dr. John Bieter (Director, Cenarrusa Center for Basque Studies, Boise), Teresa Boucher (Chair, Modern Languages and Literatures at Boise State), Dr. Peter Buhler (Chair, Department of History at Boise State), and Patty Miller (Director, Basque Museum and Cultural Center, Boise) submitted a Title VI grant proposal to the US Department of Education to establish the Basque Studies program at the university. Their work paid off, and they were awarded a grant for \$158,589 over two years, for 2005-2007. During a follow-up visit to

the Basque Country, Sabine Klahr, John Bieter, and Pete Cenarrusa, former Idaho Secretary of State, met with Basque Government officials to discuss establishing a Basque Studies Minor at Boise State University and to ask for support for this program. The Basque Government pledged \$50,000 per year for three years to establish an interdisciplinary Basque Studies Minor at Boise State University beginning in fall 2005. Thanks to these funds, Boise State University was able to get the Basque Studies program up and running. Pete Cenarrusa, along with his wife Freda, supported the program generously in those early years. Once the funding was secured, in 2005, a Basque Studies international search to hire a professor was conducted, and Dr. Xabier Irujo was the first Visiting Senior Lecturer in Basque hired at Boise State University.

The Basque Studies Minor is geared towards a multi-disciplinary, advanced study of the Basque people, involving language, the arts, history, politics, literature, environmental studies, gender studies and other areas. Our mission in Basque Studies aligns seamlessly with the university's mission statement (2022), which emphasizes that "Boise State provides an innovative, transformative, and equitable educational environment that prepares students for success and advances Idaho and the world". Additionally, Basque Studies strives to form globally competent students and follows the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2020) guidelines:

1. Offering students a diverse and informed worldview;
2. Helping them to comprehend the international dimensions of their major field of study.

3. Teaching them to communicate effectively in another language and/or cross-culturally.
4. Emphasizing the acquisition of cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability.
5. Encouraging them to carry global competencies throughout life.

With all those goals in mind, we have built our curriculum and offer Elementary and Intermediate certificates in the Basque language, a certificate in Basque Cultural Studies and a Minor in Basque Studies.

Since its foundation in 2005, some 7,600 students have taken Basque language and culture courses as electives for their majors, and 25 students even completed the Basque Studies Minor. The program's foundation is its students, and therefore the program offers a varied curriculum that, in addition to regular classes, teaches weekend workshops. These weekend classes are so popular that often the class enrolment capacity must be increased.

The Basque Studies unit works side by side with other departments throughout the university, such as Communication, English, Anthropology, Sociology, Gender Studies, History and Global Studies, to mention just a few. This creates a diverse and inclusive environment of class offerings that welcomes students to get involved with Basque institutions, researchers and professors, as well as the Basque the community here, in Boise, and abroad.

The program collaborates with many local, national and international researchers in Basque Studies. Over these 15 years professors affiliated with the University of Nevada, Reno, North Carolina State,

Michigan State, Indiana University Northwest, University of Oregon, University of Missouri, University of California, Santa Barbara, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Elmhurst College and California State University Bakersfield have shared their expertise with Boise State students and with the Boise Basque and non-Basque community through public lectures. These local and out-of-state professors have taught more than 50 different workshops on campus.

1. These titles explicitly indicate that the topic of study will be a specific aspect of Basque culture or history:
  - Basque Nationalist Women
  - Contemporary Basque Politics
  - Basque Culture through Cinema
  - Basques in Idaho
  - Basque Tree Carvings in Idaho
  - Lekuak: Communal Basque Places
2. In the following group, course titles make reference to a global issue and use the “Basque case” as a case study.
  - Cooperativism: The Basque Case
  - Culture and Resistance: The Basques
  - Culture, Memory and Identity: The Basques
  - Environmental Agriculture: Basque Country
  - Globalization and Minority Literatures: The Basque Case
  - Sports, Values and Identity: The Basques
  - Language and Identity: The Basques

Basque Studies at Boise State University has agreements with different local and international programs that promote the participation and engagement of students

in the community through volunteer work and credit-bearing internships. Basque language students can complete internships at the Boiseko Ikastola (the only Basque language immersion preschool program outside of the Basque Country, founded in 1998), at the Boise Basque Museum and Cultural Center and at the Boise State University Pulse student radio station where students host Basque music radio shows while practicing their language skills and furthering their knowledge about Basque music. All these internships are supervised by professors and the organizations where students are working.

Students also have the opportunity to study abroad through USAC and by attending intensive language programs in the Basque Country. Those who participate in USAC have also opportunities to complete internships in the Basque Country. Some students choose to immerse themselves in the Basque language and opt to enrol in intensive language programs. Students have attended Basque language immersion schools in Lazkao and Zornotza (Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia). Boise State has a direct exchange program with the University of the Basque Country. Students at Boise State benefit from a wide array of Basque scholarships that they can obtain to study both on campus and in the Basque Country.

Boise State also collaborates with the International Mobility Program known as the “Global Training Program”. Through this initiative, young Basque professionals obtain a six-month grant to come to Boise State to collaborate with us. Two young Basque professionals have participated in this program so far. One of them came to create Spanish language teaching materials

and work as a teaching assistant, and the other came recently to create Basque language teaching materials and assist with Conversation Labs.

Seeing the impact that Basque Studies is having on students, colleagues and the community in general, in 2015 the Eloise Garmendia Bieter Chair in Basque Studies was created through an agreement between Boise State and the Etxepare Basque Institute. The goal of this Chair is to strengthen the academic presence of Basque culture at the university and in the Treasure Valley community. Since its beginning, the Chair has hosted five scholars from the Basque Country who helped our program to promote Basque culture and made connections with other departments and colleagues here at Boise State. Two of the professors taught undergraduate and graduate weekend workshops, and the other three guest-lectured in graduate and undergraduate courses.

Basque Studies at Boise State exists and will endure thanks to visionaries who sailed the oceans of academia, to committed professors, generous donors, the continuous support of the Basque Government, selfless community members, and the connections that the younger generation will keep, nurture and forge with other communities and the homeland.

### **Basque Studies Program: University and Community**

Boise State University, the largest university in Idaho with a total of 24,103 students (data from Boise State University, Fall Semester 2021) is a public metropolitan university that offers about 200 programs of study. Basque Studies is part of the Department of World Languages founded in 1940. This department offers

courses in 12 languages: three majors (French, German, and Spanish) and 16 minors and certificates. The Department of World Languages is one of the 17 departments that are part of the College of Art and Sciences (COAS) at Boise State University. The mission of the COAS is: “To enhance the scientific, ethical and cultural foundation of society through education, research, creative activity and community engagement, thereby improving our individual and collective quality of life” (College of Arts and Science 2021). COAS includes mathematics, sciences, humanities and the arts departments, different fields *a priori*, but working together and enriching the academic curriculum of Boise State students.

Basque Studies at Boise State University is a holistic multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary program of advanced study of the Basque people that involves varied aspects of language, history, politics, economics, etc., all the while seeking to forge learning links to empower students, Basque and non-Basque alike, to generate a satisfying, self-directed pursuit of lifelong learning. The hallmark of Basque Studies is its curriculum and pedagogy, where the teaching of Basque culture and language becomes the essence and main pillar of the department’s identity. In Basque Studies we teach topics such as language, diaspora, literature, politics, history, gastronomy, gender, culture, and cinema, among others. Our faculty comes from very different fields and backgrounds, allowing us to provide a robust curriculum and pedagogy. Our department is composed of two professors from the Basque Country, with the collaboration of faculty from the history department where we have two professors and an adjunct

professor. We also have visiting professors from other American universities and the Basque Country.

The complexity and multidimensionality of cultural identity, gender, class and religious diversity receives much attention. In fact, the Basque Studies program has developed intercultural competence and education as well as kept up with the latest pedagogical approaches. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Boise State University and Etxepare Basque Institute are some of the main resources for the curricular and pedagogical formation and development of the program's learning outcomes. Both institutions have been pioneers and leaders in the latest intercultural and transcultural education pedagogy.

The CTL (2006) was founded with the vision to be the nucleus of a university culture that values teaching and learning. The CTL supports, promotes, and enhances inclusive teaching and effective pedagogical practice to support student learning and success. The Etxepare Basque Institute (2010) is responsible for ongoing training for Basque Studies instructors at our partner universities abroad. Working with universities and institutions in the Basque Country, Etxepare organizes courses on the methodology, strategies and resources for learning and teaching Basque as a foreign language.

Basque Studies strives to form whole and globally competent students by creating an inclusive classroom community where the students feel comfortable, included, safe, and respected being who they are. We believe the journey of education and learning should be a lifelong process where professors and students go together, learn together, invite, struggle and listen to each other. As educators, it is our goal to

provide a variety of resources and ways of teaching the material, so that each student can find their pathway of understanding and success. But above all we want our students to feel part of our community, we want them to connect with what we teach, and feel it has value in their lives.

Kierra Hansen, a former student stated (Department of World Languages, Bilingual Bronco section 2019):

Even though I only studied Basque for a year, it had a huge impact on my life. Basque has given me the chance to connect with so many people here in the community and from the Basque country. I would see the Basque students from campus downtown or at my job and talk to them in Basque. I practiced at events like the Sagardotegi, Cider House in Basque. I attended a cultural event to see a film from the Basque country *Dantza* and got to meet the director and some of the dancers from the film in person, which was an incredible experience.

### *Whole and Globally Competent Students*

Connections, community, and belonging are very important concepts that must be taken into account in this dynamic and evolving world. The university is a nest for future generations, and it is necessary to provide students with the best tools to be successful in the world. In Basque Studies, concepts such as language, religion, diversity, heritage, minority cultures, and so on are used to examine diversity, cross-cultural interactions, beliefs, and values. Our program can provide students with a sense of community and belonging.

Students can see, feel, eat, and get involved in the community. They can connect with a minority culture through their life experience, and at the same time learn about their own culture.

The goal of the program is to help students acquire the tools needed to learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together, and learn to be, the four pillars of education based on Jacques Delors' report *Learning: The Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*. The UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education state that “interculturality is a dynamic concept and refers to evolving relations between cultural groups. It has been defined as: “The existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect” (2006: 17). This flow of ideas, knowledge, resources, products, cultures, and people is part of the world we live in. It is therefore necessary to prepare our students for the complexity of this global and dynamic society, as Cheryl Hunter and Donna Pearson state: “Intercultural is what occurs between two cultures, or cultural agents, when they engage socially. Interculturalization represents, more specifically, the subsequent experience that then must be understood in relation to prior accumulated learning” (Hunter, Pearson 2015: 2).

Sherry Sullivan, Howard Tu, Sandra L. Russo, and Leigh Ann Osborne, amongst others, have examined the characteristics of globally competent students (2022). Sullivan and Tu in their article “Developing Globally Competent Students: A Review and Recommendations” (1995), present and examine specific ways in

which university professors can help students become more globally competent managers and citizens. In order to explore how the Basque Studies program helps students become globally competent, the seven characteristics promoted by Sullivan and Tu are used to demonstrate how the curricular and pedagogical project of the program is at the forefront of the latest educational trends:

- Global perspective: Self-knowledge is necessary for everyone. Questions such as “Who am I?”, although simple *a priori*, are key for our students to understand and examine their own environment in order to start their journey of life. In Basque Studies, the cultural and language classes become key courses for our students to learn not only about other cultures and languages, but also their own. These classes are a catalyst to open discussions, thoughts, and ideas about themselves and others.
- Local responsiveness: The program has the latest materials, /books/articles in Basque Cultural Studies and Basque language. It also offers weekend workshops, a minor and certificates (culture and language). Having the Basque Block so close to the campus gives the students a sense of connection between school and community and helps them connect. In fact, Basque Studies designs the courses, workshops, and assessments centred on students' engagement. These classes invite reflection, feedback, and growth. This program acknowledges and learns about oppression of groups other than our own. It is aware that the Basque identity can impact others. In order to create a welcoming campus and a welcoming classroom environment we work on strategies for an inclusive,

diverse, and integrative environment in class and motivate students to learn important skills such as:

1. Setting high standards and communicating with confidence with other students.
  2. Encouraging multiple perspectives in discussions.
  3. Avoiding assumptions and trying to anticipate possible situations.
  4. Connecting the course in a global/societal context.
  5. Using appropriate, personal anecdotes to create interest among students.
  6. Using materials that recognize diverse identities and experiences. Our students do not understand or see Basque as “the Other”, but as part of Boise and themselves. Something intrinsically connected to Idaho’s identity, culture and history, but at the same time as a transnational element that connects them to the world.
- Transition and adaptation: What the students learn in Basque culture and language classes can be applied in other spaces and scenarios. Basque Studies does not want to be marketed as an isolated, exotic, and obsolete element, but as a useful tool for success.
  - Synergistic learning: Every professor and student matters. Basque Studies considers teachers’ education and its professional framework essential, as well as student-centred teaching. The students’ discourse and stories are important for the professors, and they are accountable for them. Our courses, workshops and assessments are designed centred on students’ engagement.
  - Collaboration: Professors from different universities (national and international) come to Boise State every year. For the Eloise Garmendia Bieter Chair, a Basque professor from the Basque Country gives a course in a graduate level class and teaches one of the Basque culture classes for a week every year. Every semester the students in the cultural and language classes go to the Basque Museum & Cultural Center to learn more about the Basque culture, language, and diaspora.
  - Cross-cultural interaction: Boise State University is an interaction zone between communities. Curricular and extracurricular activities are part of the Basque Studies curriculum and teaching pedagogy. For example:
    - International Day of the Basque Language (every fall): In order to celebrate the International Day of the Basque Language, *Euskararen Eguna*, that takes place every 3rd of December, the Basque Studies Program organized several activities involving the Boise State community, the Basque community, and the Boise community in general. This activity takes place with the collaboration of many institutions, both local and international.
    - Boiseko Taupada Radio Program (since fall 2017): The weekly radio show, Boiseko Taudapa, Boises Heartbeat in Basque, carries on a Boise Basque radio tradition that was started many years ago by Julian Lachiondo in 1952. The radio program, presented in the Basque language and English, showcases a variety of Basque music and Basque cultural topics. It is one of the most listened to programs inside the University Pulse Radio project at



Boise State. This show was created by a Basque Studies student as an internship under Professor Lete's guidance.

- Foreign experience: Basque Studies has agreements with local (Basque Museum & Cultural Center and Boiseko Ikastola) and international programs such as Lazkaoko-Zornotzako Barnetegia, Basque Boarding Schools, Etxepare Basque Institute and the Global Training International Mobility Program for young people from the Basque Country. We want to promote the active participation and engagement of our students in the community through volunteer work and credit-bearing internships. As Renee Rohman, a Basque Studies Minor student, put it her testimonial: "As a student at Boise State pursuing a minor in Basque Studies, getting the opportunity to go to the Basque Country was like a dream come true! I was finally able to make connections between things I had learned in the classroom with how they worked in the Basque Country" (Basque Studies, Basque Studies Minor 2022: 3).

For us it is important that the classroom is dynamic and filled with student-centred learning and active participation that encourages students to extrapolate from the cultural impact of the Basque experience in order to promote the inclusion of other cultures.

## Conclusion

"Why Boise?" Boise has long standing community, diaspora, and Basque Country *connections*. Basque families migrated to Boise from the Basque Country, which established a firm foundation for interconnectivity among families and friends in the US and Euskal Herria.

Ties between Boise and the Basque Country grew stronger in 1974 when Dr. Patrick Bieter from Boise State University established the first academic Basque Studies Abroad Program in Oñati, along with students from the University of Nevada, Reno. Both cities shared faculty and students on this program, which proved to be foundational to long-standing relationships between the Basque Country and cities in the western US. The Boise and Reno universities continue close ties with their Basque Studies programs, special events, weekend workshop exchanges, and Etxepare Institute Basque Studies Chairs. Boise's Etxepare Chair, founded in 2015, honours Eloise Garmendia Bieter for her lifelong support of Basque culture.

Generous Basque benefactors connect academic institutions to cultural organizations and businesses. The Basque Government provides fiscal support to Boise's educational institutions, including Boise State University and the Basque Museum & Cultural Center. Boise is a thriving college town with a burgeoning population and healthy business sector with partnerships that support trade and cultural tourism, civic partnerships, and other endeavours that support Basque culture.

Without a doubt, the interconnections between academia and the community have been a central feature in the development of a triangular relationship among the global diaspora community, Boise State University, and the homeland. Boise is by no means the sole bastion of Basque culture today in the United States or elsewhere, but it will continue to serve as an inspiration for cultural persistence well into the future due to its unique characteristics.

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# Teaching Basque to children in the diaspora: Maintaining a legacy for future generations

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## **Abstract**

In the last few centuries, the American continent has received thousands of Basque migrants. Amongst this predominantly Basque-American population, many still make the effort to maintain the Basque language by attending schools where it is taught. The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to expand upon the literature on Basque diasporic schools in the American continent, and second, to examine the challenges K-12 schools face in the Basque diaspora. This exploration will hopefully contribute to form a specific curriculum for the teaching of Basque, as well as an international network of communication, which could eventually foster the knowledge and use of Basque outside the Basque Country.

## **Introduction**

The educational history of each Basque diasporic community must be understood in its uniqueness before making the mistake of homogenizing and stereotyping them. The internal complexity of each

community deserves an independent comprehensive study covering different factors, in this case, education. The vast number of articles and books written on this matter are not enough for a global understanding of the current situation, and therefore historians can continue to study this topic. The intention of this article is not to study the social aspects of the different diasporic schools, but rather to focus on the common purposes of each school and to use the diasporic connections to build upon the established attempts. This proposal focuses on an idea that encompasses the spread and maintenance of the Basque language among children of the diasporic communities.

The seven (historical) regions of the Basque Country have a population of approximately 3,170,891 inhabitants (Gaindegia 2019). However, it is difficult to know the exact percentage of the Basques living around the world. Douglass (2016: 4) claimed that any calculation should be considered an imprecise exercise because of its “definitional

and computational issues”. According to Goirizelaia and Iturriegui (2019), there may be around 8 million Basques living outside the Basque Country, which is referred as the *Basque Diaspora*, *the Eighth Province*, or *the Basque Country Abroad*, which is a complex reality. Nowadays there are new migrations or Diaspora 2.0, which are the Basques who have gone to other countries in search of professional development or education. These often have the intention of coming back to their homeland after some years abroad. Hence, maintaining Euskara, the Basque language, can be bound to ethnic authenticity and legitimacy (Totoricagüena, Urrutia 2008).

Many factors play against a minority language’s survival, since the time, effort and money necessary to succeed in its learning reap little reward, and the political conditions provided by the host country can also be detrimental.

When reviewing the literature related to the Basque language’s transmission outside the Basque Country, Ruiz de Erentxun Tapiz (2017) notes that continuous displacements and migratory flows are perceived in our current society, and therefore people not only acquire new languages but also lose them, as in the case of language erosion / attrition, which is the loss of the first language as a result of migrating to a country in which a different language is spoken, something that is especially likely to apply to children who migrate with parents, as explained by González (2016: 57). Ruiz de Erentxun Tapiz (2017) also claims that there are hardly any studies regarding the transmission of Basque in the diaspora and its consequent probable attrition as language attrition<sup>2</sup>.

### **The importance of transferring the language: preserving identity and belonging**

Many people from the diaspora place a great emphasis on Euskara, the Basque language, as part of their identity, and this relationship with the language could be termed romantic, since most members of the diaspora are not able to speak it. In this context, Díaz (2020: 42) declares that language can become an agent of hegemony, and that “there are three linguistic outcomes of prolonged contact among ethnic groups: language maintenance, bilingualism or multilingualism or language shift”.

Lasagabaster (2008) studied the issue of language maintenance, and argues that the Basque language in the diaspora has not received a lot of scholarly attention, which is surprising since the language(s) in a community tend to play a key role in many cases. He also agrees with some previous researchers that language alone is not what forms identities, but that this is more related to the “ideological interpretations of such uses of language which mediate these effects” (2008: 72). Therefore, the diasporans who decide to study the language are conscious that they will not get a higher salary, a better job or any economic rewards.

In addition, the author also notes that school and family are two key elements for the intergenerational transmission of the language. As Lasagabaster (2008) claims: “If, for whatever sociolinguistic reasons the family cannot provide their component, the educational system ineluctably becomes the main piece to successfully complete the language puzzle,” (Lasagabaster 2008: 83).

Different authors, such as Echeverria (2005: 250) or Lasagabaster (2008),

have shown that learners who attend to Basque-speaking schools identify themselves more as Basques compared to learners who attend Spanish-speaking schools, claiming that “these positive attitudes toward Basque are correlated with exposure to Basque in both the home and school domains; in this sense, schooling has no independent effect on language attitudes”, in line with Echeverría (2005: 250).

In Lasagabaster (2006: 118), we can read that most of the time the second generation get involved in the educational system of the host country, and most of them go to university. Totoricagüena (2003) acknowledges that most ethnic groups tend to lose their language by the third generation, even if there are always some exceptions. These results were confirmed by Bieter and Bieter (2005), who said that the Basque-Americans of the third generation are a totally integrated in American society and do not feel the need to reaffirm their US character, while at the same time developing a more expansive idea of the motto “Proud to be Basque”. Lasagabaster (2008: 80) concludes that the linguistic competence of the third generations had decreased from that of the previous generation. The same author also notes one main factor that helps the maintenance of the language: visiting the Basque Country. Lasagabaster (2006) also highlights the importance of the participation of the diasporic Basques in the immersion programs held in Oñati and Donostia.

Different organizations, such as NABO (North American Basque Organization), FEVA (Federación de Entidades Vasco Argentinas), the Basque Centres in different countries, Etxepare Basque Institute

(which sends Basque lecturers to the universities all over the world) or the Foreign Affairs Department of the Basque Government (*Eusko Jaurlaritza*) are trying to support and boost the presence of the Basque language among the diaspora.

Díaz (2020: 81–82) remarks of her research study interviews that “people are calling for the foundation of stronger bidirectional bridges between homeland and diaspora, specially and notably based on education”. With this being said, new technologies have created new teaching possibilities, and Diaz also claims that more interest in learning the Basque language should be encouraged in order help preserve this unique language for future generations.

It is considered essential to focus on the use of Euskara in the Basque Centres and in community activities by actively promoting a language use policy, day to day activities, projects or functions in Basque and language lessons. One policy suggested by Totoricagüena (2008: 46) is “giving hiring preference to the bartenders or waitresses that speak Euskara”. She also mentions that since the authorities of the Basque Centres are trusted, elected and volunteer leaders who “are not usually specialists and especially not linguists or sociolinguists, there generally are not any Basque Center language policies for learning Basque, using Basque or preserving Basque”. This could become a challenge in the creation of an educational board for children’s Basque lessons. As noted by Oregi (2009), Totoricagüena led a brainstorming session of a NABO convention and she emphasized the importance of training the leaders and professionals of the Basque communities.

## Programs to promote Basque in the Diaspora

There is no doubt that knowledge of the Basque language is declining. Even if Basque has been a key component of the Basque identity, knowledge of it is not a priority for the current generations of the diaspora. The effort to learn the language is smaller nowadays, and the balance between the effort required to learn the language and the benefits of speaking it is negative. The following initiatives, which were included in a research paper by Alvarez (2009), are some of the examples of Basque schools of the diaspora that were created to provide education and transmit the Basque language and culture to the descendants of Basque immigrants on the American continent, from the late 17th century on: Colegio de San Ignacio de Loyola, Las Vizcaínas in México (1767); San José Ikastetxea in Buenos Aires, Argentina (1858); Colegio Inmaculada Concepción “Los Vascos” in Montevideo, Uruguay (1867); the failure of Laurak-Bat, the Basque Centre of Montevideo, which made a huge effort to open an Escuela Euskara (attempted in 1882); Euskal Echea School in Buenos Aires, Argentina (1899-1950); Euskal Echea School in Llavallol, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1905); the failure of the Euskal Erria school in Montevideo, Uruguay (attempted in 1915 and 1925-1927); Euzkadi Venezuela Ikastola, Venezuela (1965-1985); Boiseko Ikastola, Boise, Idaho, USA (1998); Colegio Euskadi, Medellín, Colombia (1987); Koxkorrak Goiz Eskola, San Francisco, California, USA (attempted in 2004); Txiki txoko eskola, Zelaiko Etxea Basque Club, Santa Rosa, Argentina (attempted in 2005); Necochea Ikastola, Buenos Aires,

Argentina (2009); Riverbend Multilingual and Nature-based Preschool, Boise, Idaho, USA (2013); and Escuela Euskal Herria Institutua, Euskal Herria Instituto de Políticas Públicas, Lanus, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2013).

After analysing the theoretical background of the diasporic schools, it has been concluded that children and youth are the key for the survival of the Basque language in the diaspora.

Due to the Basque language’s ability to define connection, community, and identity, as claimed by Ray and Lete (2010: 129), it is believed that a common curriculum for children and youth should be developed, to complement the already established curriculum for adults.

## The study

Basques who emigrated in the previous centuries brought the Basque language with them, but, over time, the knowledge of this language has faded among their descendants. The focus of this study is to analyse the spread and maintenance of the Basque language among children of diasporic communities.

## Research questions

After looking at the complex and ever-changing world of the different diasporic communities, the present study intends to address the following research questions, aided by the results from the questionnaires and the personal interviews:

RQ1. What are the political conditions of the hostland and homeland for the maintenance and perpetuation of the Ikastolak in the American diaspora?

RQ2. What is the importance of having a common curriculum for teaching Euskara to children?



RQ3. What are the institutions responsible for facilitating the teaching orientation?

RQ4. What kind of methodology is used to teach Basque to children in the diaspora?

The first step to do this work was to find enough information about the different diasporic communities, and to analyse their key aspects. A combination of a qualitative and quantitative research design was employed in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of contextualized phenomena.

### *Participants*

This was a two-part survey in which different people participated in each part. On the one hand, the questionnaires were answered by 27 teachers who were active on Facebook groups such as Idaho Basques And Beyond, Basques In Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah And Nevada, Centro Vasco Necochea, Centro Vasco Mexico, Los Baños Basque Language And Culture, South San Francisco Basque Cultural Center, Gooding, Basque Identity 2.0 - Eitb.Eus, Descendientes Vascos En La Argentina, Zazpiak Bat - Reno, Santa Rosa Basque Club, Basques In New York, Vascos En Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Zazpiak Bat Rosario, and also from some email contacts that were provided by [www.euskaletxeak.eus](http://www.euskaletxeak.eus), as well as from other personal email contacts that were provided by different Basque Centres.

Sixty-one per cent of the children's teachers of the Basque diaspora were full-time teachers, whereas the rest considered themselves part-time teachers. Most of the teachers had a contract for a year, followed by 23% of the teachers who had a

contract for more than a year, and another 23% of the teachers who were working as volunteers. Only 15% of the teachers were permanent employees. As far as the Basque language level is concerned, according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) half of the respondents have a C1 or advanced level. Many have the C2 level (27%) and some (11.5%) have the B2 or upper intermediate level followed by another 11.5% with a B1 or intermediate level. Half of the respondents were teachers who have taught at Boiseko Ikastola, in Boise, Idaho. Apart from those teachers, we found other who taught in the following schools: Necochea, Riverbend Multilingual Preschool, Viedma Patagones, Washington DC, Habana, Colegio Euskal Echea from Buenos Aires, South San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and Elko Basque Club. While the teachers who worked at Boiseko Ikastola worked with children who were aged from 3 to 6 years old, the rest of the participants claimed that they have worked with children from preschoolers to 12-year-olds. In some cases, like in Habana, Salt Lake City, or Elko, teachers also taught to students who were 18.

In addition to this, and in order to obtain deeper insights on the situation, three participants were carefully chosen through personal contacts for the qualitative interviews. To avoid potential biases and meaningful external factors that can hamper a successful and reliable drawing of the results, the study was carried out by teachers from three different schools, and the interviews ranged from one hour to three hours and twenty minutes. The teachers were given the opportunity to choose which interview format they preferred: face-to-face, by telephone or video

call. These interviews were conducted from March to April 2021.

Teacher number 1 was born in Caracas, Venezuela, 51 years ago. His parents, both from San Sebastian, migrated first to the Northern Basque Country and later on to Venezuela, between 1965 and 1966. His father was one of the main directors at the hospital in Caracas, and his mother home-schooled all of their seven children at home. The family moved back to San Sebastian once the Franco dictatorship was over, when this teacher was 7 years old. He studied in Santo Tomas Lizeoa, and left the Basque Country on his twenties. He moved to the Boise, Idaho, in 2015, where he started working in Riverbend Multilingual Preschool. His connection to the Basque language is immense, he sees the language not only as a way of communication, but also considers it as his “real language, his heart and part of his identity”.

Since he works in a multilingual preschool he understands languages as tools for opening the mind, and he is conscious about the parental language choice. This participant has spent more time living outside the Basque Country, but he reads about the political struggles there, the socio-linguistic features, language and education by making an effort to read the *Berria* newspaper.

Teacher number 2 was born in Lekeitio, Basque Country, 39 years ago. After working in Abusu Ikastola for ten years, he was chosen to teach at Boiseko Ikastola from 2019 to 2020. This teacher has been carefully chosen, partly because of his teaching experience, and also for having a current vision of the Basque Country and diaspora. He is an active member of the Basque community in Boise: teaching at

the Ikastola and in the museum, playing a variety of Basque sports, playing the card game *mus* with the elders from the community, and so on. For him, the Basque language is his identity, his essence, and a door to a new culture. He well understands the diglossic situation of the Basque language in the diaspora.

Teacher number 3 was born in Necochea, Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is a son of Basque parents, from Hernani and Olereta. His father was one of the founders of the Centro Vasco in 1945–1947. He moved to the Basque Country to study business and administration in Sarriko in the late 1980s. After that, when he moved back to Argentina, he worked as a Basque language teacher, as dance director, as the director of the delegation of Euskadi in Argentina, Mercosur, and for FEVA (Federación de Entidades Vasco Argentinas).

This participant has been chosen because he tried to open an Ikastola in 2009, in Necochea, Argentina, has the ambition to create an international network of Basque schools for the diaspora, and believes in the importance of having a common curriculum. This teacher was aware of the importance of teaching culture and language at a young age. He used his business minded approach to connect teachers from the Basque Country looking for work to teaching opportunities abroad. His efforts to build relationships between the Basque Country and Argentina have been significant.

During the three interviews, in general, I tried to be as casual as possible, since I wanted to make them feel comfortable. An interview-guide was prepared for the teachers, and I tried to be more sensitive since I was interested in the participants’

1. Participants:		
2. 27 teachers who answered the questionnaire		
3. Interviewee:	4. Country of origin:	5. School:
6. Teacher number 1	7. Caracas, Venezuela	8. Riverbend Multilingual Preschool
9. Teacher number 2	10. Lekeitio, Bizkaia, Basque Country	11. Boiseko Ikastola
12. Teacher number 3	13. Necochea, Buenos Aires, Argentina	14. Necochea Ikastola

Figure 1: Summary of the participants

critiques of the situation with diasporic schools. I framed my questions in order to know more about the social, political and economic challenges they faced when teaching Basque to children outside the Basque Country. I expected that the teachers would adopt a very critical stance. Some of the questions were adjusted to their areas of expertise and knowledge.

*Instruments*

Since the aim was to investigate the challenges that Basque diasporic schools face, a questionnaire for teachers was prepared in Basque, English and Spanish. Learning about the difficulties other teachers experienced allows the reader to get a wider vision of the current situation, and it allowed me to narrow the focus of the qualitative personal interviews.

Between January and April 2021, I compiled data from a self-administered online Google Form questionnaire. A short questionnaire was prepared in three languages (Basque, Spanish and English) for the teachers from the North, Central and South American diaspora who are teaching or had been teaching Basque to children. The purpose of these open-ended

and multiple-choice questionnaires was to learn more about the perspectives and challenges other teachers faced while teaching in the Basque diasporic schools.

To reach a diverse audience, I contacted potential candidates through Facebook and email. The Facebook post and emails began with a short presentation of myself, and went on to explain that I wanted to collect the right data about the challenges schools in the Basque diaspora are facing. It was also explained that our target audience included everyone who had taught Basque to children in the diaspora, and that we would be very grateful if they could share or forward the questionnaire among their friends if they had done so. This message inspired a “snowball effect” (Oiarzabal 2012: 1474), in which individuals reproduced the message by sharing it on their social media profiles or sending it to the teachers they knew.

The questionnaire was composed of sixteen questions: The first part contained nine questions about biographic information. It included questions such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, employment status, the teacher status, Basque level, the ages of the children and

about the institutions where they have taught. The second part contained seven open-ended questions, designed to better understand their personal experiences as a children's teacher in the Basque diaspora.

From there on, some qualitative interviews were prepared. This qualitative study was accomplished through semi-structured interviews, and the results are described in the next section. It is important to bear in mind that these semi-structured interviews allowed time for the interviewees to talk about the topics they were not directly asked about. It is noteworthy that each participant was given the choice to carry out the interview in their preferred language. This type of environment allowed a deeper understanding of the participants as well as a natural, flowing conversation.

The recordings of these meetings were examined carefully through transcription, and the most important information was chosen and then used to enrich the theoretical aspects of this study.

One last key element of this research has been the time I spent living in the Basque community of Boise. Living a different reality of the "Basqueness" has shown me new ideas and perspectives that have changed my mind. The participant observation in the Basque community of Boise has helped me contextualize the results of this study.

During my stay in Boise, I had the opportunity to experience the Basque community and to teach at Boiseko Ikastola for 13 months, from 2019 to 2020. Apart from observing my co-worker and the director of the school, I was an active part of the Basque community. I was in constant cooperation with the other teachers from the Basque Museum and

Cultural Center, with the parents from the school and with some other key members of the Basque community in Boise.

### *Results*

In this section, the following results are reported with the data collected from the analyses of the questionnaires and the personal interviews.

#### Conditions for the maintenance, perpetuation or weakening the Ikastolak

The first research question (RQ1) was the following: What are the political conditions of the hostland and of the homeland for the maintenance and perpetuation of the Ikastolak in the American diaspora?

In this section the results related to RQ1 will be presented. The data to answer this research question have been obtained from the questionnaires and interviews.

According to the information from the questionnaires, the teachers agreed that the implementation of high-quality Basque lessons for children has not been fulfilled, partly due to the lack of official support from the homeland and hostland. Teachers mentioned a variety of logistic and practical problems, such as "issues with the lack of curricula, pedagogical methods, availability of qualified Basque teachers, parental support, or alignment with the regular law of education of each country". Hence, the educators claimed that providing education in Basque outside the Basque Country is difficult, mainly because children do not receive the necessary input outside the school. On the other hand, it was discussed that collaboration with institutions that are in charge of the maintenance of the Basque diaspora in some communities is a sensitive issue.

The results from the questionnaires demonstrate that political conditions affect the maintenance of the Basque schools of the diaspora, although over 30% of the respondents did not know how to answer to this question, and one respondent clearly stated that there are no political conditions for such support. Twenty-six per cent of the respondents mentioned financial help that comes from various different resources, including the Basque Government, NABO, FEVA, and Basque Museum & Cultural Center. Three educators mentioned the political support for their work, and they expressed the need to establish stronger relationships between the Basque Government (*Eusko Jaurilaritza*) and diasporic communities. For example, P17 explained that some politicians from *Eusko Jaurilaritza* visited their school in order to see the job they were doing at the Ikastola. Nevertheless, this teacher believes that those visits were not enough, and that in general politicians could do more in this regard. P15 talked about the importance of spreading the idea of the Basque diaspora in the Basque Country in order to strengthen the relationships between the two:

Euskal Erakundeek ulertu behar dute euskal munduaren ezagutza eta hautematea eguneratu eta mantetzeko ezinbestekoa dela euskara eta euskal kultura modu programatiko, moderno, antolatu eta instituzion- alizatu lantzea. Umeek jakin behar dute beste ume askok, beste taldeko umeek ere euskara eta euskal kultura lantzen dutela. Diasporako umeek eta Euskal Herrikoek elkarren erreferentzia izan beharko lukete bere garapena argitu eta indartzeko. (P15)

[The Basque organizations must understand that it is vital to promote and maintain the knowledge and perception of the Basque language in the world and to work on it in a modern, organized, and institutionalized way. Children must know that many other children are working and preserving the Basque culture. The children of the diaspora and children of the Basque Country should be a reference for each other to strengthen their development.]

Nearly 15% of the respondents related this question to the maintenance of the Basque language. They explained that the Basque community should work on the maintenance of the Basque language, and not only the Ikastola, Euskal Etxea or the dance group. P7 declared the following in this context: “Araza nire ustez gurasoek euskararen mantentzearen lana instituzioei pasatzen dietela (ikastola, euskal etxea, dantza taldea...) eta ez dutela beraiek etxean hizkuntza/euskara ikasteko behar den giroa sortzen. Horrela zaila izango da euskara bizirik mantentzea.” [I think the problem is that many parents are handing over the job of maintaining the Basque language to different institutions (to the school, the Basque house, the dance group...) and do not create the language-learning atmosphere at home. In this way, it will be difficult to keep Basque alive.]

Teacher number 1, in the personal interview, expressed his sadness related to the decline of the Basque language in the diaspora. This educator stated that people do not do enough to promote the language, and that “essential events like Euskararen Eguna or Korrika do not get enough attention”.

In the case of the teacher who is currently working in the Patagonian Viedma, who has previously worked in Río Colorado, Bahía Blanca and Coronel Pringles, she acknowledged that they try to make use of the Basque language in many of the public events of the Basque community (celebrations, picnics, etc): “Gure kasuan euskera lehentasuna da eta toki guztietara eramaten saiatzen gara.” (P8). [In our case, Basque is a priority, and we try to take it everywhere.]

Some of the respondents seem to identify the challenges some communities are facing. For example, P 10 mentioned that the financial help for such work is not sufficient, and that it is essential to provide real support and resources to help the teachers in their teaching. This teacher also mentioned that a decent educational plan is needed, something that will not be remembered as an “anecdote”. Another teacher from Washington DC explained that the problem in her city is the lack of any great concentration of children of Basque origin (she considers Boiseko Ikastola an exception), and for her, there are not enough students in DC to create an Ikastola. For her, the Basque institutions and the Basque Centre should start thinking about solutions for the demographic problem:

Demografia honetarako estrategiak pentsatu beharko liratekeela uste dut. Politikoki baditugu azpiegiturak. Izan ere, euskal administrazio erakundeak ditugu alde batetik eta diasporako euskal etxeen sarea bestetik. Helduen euskalduntzerako lankidetzaz bultzatzen den bezala, haurren euskalduntzea ere kontuan hartu beharko litzateke eta diaspora osora hedatu. (P9)

[I think you should think of demographic strategies. In terms of politics, we have the appropriate structures. We have on the one hand the network of Basque Centres in the diaspora. In the same way adults' Basque cooperation is encouraged, a children's network should also be considered in the entire diaspora.]

Even though schools get financial help from different institutions, the respondents agreed that the various factors mentioned above are necessary for the maintenance and perpetuation of the schools.

From the results, it is clear that teachers classified the difficulties they experienced in the following groups: lack of materials, the lack of language immersion and not having the need to communicate in Basque, lack of communication with the rest of the children's teachers from the diaspora, high workload, the inability to continue learning Basque in middle school, demographic issues, not having the same opinions as other teachers, having teaching as a second job and facing scheduling problems.

The interviews also brought to light these challenges, as all the interviewees agreed in stressing that a lack of collaboration and coordination among the teachers is a problem that could easily be solved. Teacher number 1 stated that there must be “a conscious effort” from the institutions of the homeland and hostland about the language and its preservation, and claimed “there is a need to revive that consciousness”.

The results from the questionnaires also showed that nearly half of the teachers mentioned the lack of materials for teaching children of the Basque diaspora.

The teachers also said that there are not any digitalized materials and resources to teach Basque to children. Many of them mentioned that the teaching materials that exist are only for adults (such as those that are part of the Euskara Munduan program) or are not adapted to the needs of the children of the diaspora. What is more, P1 explained that she did not have the storytelling books she needed. The second challenge that was mentioned most is the lack of language immersion and exposure to the Basque language.

Ikastolatik kanpo haurrek ezin dutela euskara askorik praktikatu. Horrek prozesua asko zailtzen du. Baita gerora jarraipen bat ez egotea ere. Boiseko kasuan, Boiseko Ikastola haur hezkuntzako ikastola da bakarrik, eta gero Lehen Hezkuntzan ez dute aukera hori. Euskal museoa euskarazko klase batzuk ematen dira, baina klaseak motzegiak dira, astean behin, eta hilabete zehatz batzutan. (P16)

[That children outside the school can't practice much Basque. This makes the process very difficult. And the absence of any further continuation. In the case of Boise, the Boiseko Ikastola is only a children's education course, and then they don't have the chance to continue learning the language after preschool. The Basque Museum offers Basque classes, but classes are too short, once a week, and for only a few months.]

Twenty-six per cent of the teachers explained that their students are not able to make use of the language outside the classroom, unless they visit the Basque

Country: "Eskolatik kanpo ez zaiola euskarari behar den garrantzia ematen. Eskolan egindakoarekin hizkuntza ikasiko dutela uste dute batzuk, baina eskolatik ateratzean ere mantendu behar da." (P7)

[Outside the school, it does not have the proper importance. Some people think they'll learn the language with what they did at school, but you must maintain it when you get out of school.]

Another problem that mentioned more than once is the lack of communication among the teachers of the diaspora:

The distance between teachers is difficult to navigate to have regular meetings or workshops. Teaching Euskara is something that most teachers do aside from their regular work, meaning they only do this a couple of hours a week, and the compensation is minimal. Though they are very good, and dedicated to teaching Euskara (...). (P23)

P18 explained that the Basque community is spread out in California, and this makes it hard for some children to attend to the classes.

#### The importance of having a common curriculum for teaching Basque to children of the Basque diaspora

The second research question (RQ2) was the following: What is the importance of having a common curriculum for teaching Euskara to children? In this section the results related to RQ2 will be presented.

The data to answer this research question were obtained from the questionnaire and the interviews. As I mentioned above, a great effort has been made to preserve Basque customs and culture (Zinkunegi,

2010), with people creating Basque dancing groups, *pilota* and *mus* tournaments, and so on. These customs continued from generation to generation, but the Basque language was left behind. Language thus attrition happened, as claimed by González (2016: 57) and Erentxun Tapiz (2017), and Basque gradually lost its place in the diaspora. In order to prevent the loss of the language and find new speakers among the Basque community, many clubs began to organize language schools in different countries. There were different opinions after asking the children's teachers about the importance of having a common curriculum for teaching Basque to children of the diaspora, including some (over 18%) who claimed it was extremely necessary:

Irakasleei batez ere oso lagungarria izango zaie, beren irakaskuntza lanean bide bat markatuta izango baitute modu honetara. Eta horrek, nahi eta ez, ikasleen ikasketa mailan eragin ona izango du ondorioz. Azken finean, hauxe da guztiaren helburua, ikasleek ahalik eta modu eraginkor eta egokienean ikastea, eta kurrikulum bateratu bat hori lortzeko funtsezkoa. (P 13)

[It will be especially helpful for the teachers, because their practice will have a path to follow. And that, whether you like it or not, will have a good impact on the level of student's learning process. After all, that's the goal, in the most efficient and proper manner possible for the students to learn, and a united curriculum is essential for achieving it.]

P18: “Lagungarria litzake dudarik gabe, antzeko hizkuntza beharrak eta egoerak sortuko dira herrialde ezberdinetan zihur-erik. Esperientzi ezberdinen partekatzea inoiz baino errazagoa den honetan ederra litzake halako kurrikulum bat.” [It would certainly help. People might have similar needs and might face similar situations in different countries. Nowadays, sharing experiences is incredibly easy, and a common curriculum would be wonderful.]

A teacher from Colegio Euskal Echea from Buenos Aires explained that she was chosen because she was well-known in the community: “Sinceramente fui seleccionada para este cargo por ser conocida y hoy actualmente estar estudiando Euskara. Lo que si requieren es que tengas conocimientos del idioma y de la cultura.” (P23) [Honestly, I was selected for this position because I was a well-known person, and because I am currently studying Euskara. The only requirement is to have knowledge of the Basque language and culture.]

As we explained in the theoretical background, Totoricagüena (2008: 46) claimed that many teachers or those active in the Basque Centres and communities abroad are trusted, elected and volunteer leaders with no prior experience in the educational field, in linguistics or sociolinguistics.

The information obtained in the interviews with the teachers confirms these findings. For example, teacher number 3 expressed his difficulties in finding teachers from the Basque Country who could teach in Argentina. He contacted many different institutions (universities, relatives, friends...). As a consequence, three or four teachers from Mondragon University have now been to Buenos Aires to do their teaching internships.



Likewise, teacher number 3 used the term *paracaidistas* to refer to the people who fall into leadership positions within the Basque Centres without first having basic knowledge about the management of the community.

Going back to the information from the questionnaires, P24 also mentioned that “It would be nice for all of our teachers to have a common curriculum so we can track our students progress and in the event of changing teachers, have them continue progressing smoothly”. P24 talked about the immensity of the Basque diaspora and the distance between teachers, and claimed that a common curriculum could facilitate a greater connection among them. P26 declared that a unified curriculum would ensure the children are learning the same things, and P27 added the following: “The structure of a common curriculum is important and set to be easy to follow. It assures the teacher and parents that the children are learning each objective and getting all the information they need to know in Basque from their instructors.”

Forty per cent of the respondents explained that a common curriculum for teaching children of the diaspora is necessary, and 26% of the educators acknowledged it would be convenient.

Handia. Gure kasuan ikastolara iritsi eta ez zegoen ia ezer martxan. Zeretik hasi ginen. Gure lan esperientzia oinarritzat hartu genuen eta hortik bi hezkuntza sistemak bateratzen zituen curriculumak sortu genuen. Baina hasiera, gogorra izan zen. Ezerezetik abiatzean, ez genekien markatzen ari ginen bideak ikaste prozesu esanguratsu bat bermatuko ote zuen ala ez. (P17)

[Big. In our case, there was almost nothing prepared at the school. We started from zero. Based on our own experience, we created a curriculum that combined both educational systems. But the beginning was hard. When we started out of nowhere, we didn't know if the road we were marking would guarantee a significant learning process or not.]

For this educator, to start teaching from zero was very hard, and he explains that at the beginning he was not sure that the curriculum they were creating and using would even work.

However, 11% of the teachers stated that a common curriculum is not necessary, explaining that “there is no real demand for it” or that “people will not use it. I think it is wonderful and like to adapt and change, but so many are set in the ways of how they learned Euskara”. Only 4% of the participants did not know how to answer to this question.

Nearly half of the participants talked about the adaptability of the curriculum to each diasporic area. As explained at the beginning, it is believed that each community must be understood in its uniqueness, and all the respondents believed that the internal complexity of each of the communities should be taken into account, such as their history, educational law, community, duration, size, or even their students' background and families.

Garrantzitsua izango litzateke kurrikulum bateratu bat izatea euskal herrian baita Euskal diasporan ere, mugikortasunari limiteak ez jartzeko (familiaren bat, denbora batez beste herrialde batera joan izan nahi balu,

edota Euskal diasporatik Euskal Herriara joatea denboraldi batez). Hala ere, garrantzitsua da, baita ere, kontuan izatea kontestuak desberdinak direla, eta ikastolaren inguruko kultura desberdina dela kasu bakoitzean, eta agian kurrikulua berdina izanda ere, moldatu beharko litzateke herrialde bakoitzaren beharretara. (P16)

[It would be important to have a unified curricula in the Basque Country as well as in the Basque diaspora, so as not to put restrictions on mobility (if a family wanted to move to a different country for a while, or to move from the Basque diaspora to the Basque Country for a while). However, it is also important to note that the context as well as the culture could be different, and perhaps the curriculum should be adapted to the needs of each country.]

P7 said: “Ez legoke gaizki, baina eskola bakoitzak erronka desberdinak ditu eta gauza zaila deritzot. Orduz desberdinak dira, haurrak ez dire denak egun kopuru berdinetan eskolara joaten, irakasleen prestakuntza desberdina da...” [It wouldn’t be bad, but every school has different challenges and I think it would be hard. The hours are different, the children don’t all go to school for the same number of days, the training of the teachers is different...] P24 explained: “I also believe that our students are unique, in that most are not accustomed to learning more than just one language, and progress at a different capacity than those following a Common European Framework, and therefore, require a different, adaptation or end goal in the curriculum taught.”

Apart from the adaptability, some teachers claimed that the curriculum should be flexible. P20 claimed that the work of the teachers is not stable at the diasporic Basque schools, and thus that it is essential to have a unified curriculum so that new teachers continue working in the same direction as the previous teachers, facilitating and supporting the new teachers’ work.

The personal interviews also supported this view of a common curriculum, since all the interviewees emphasized that there are many differences from one diasporic community to another. For instance, teacher number 2 explained that a common curriculum to teach Basque to children would facilitate collaboration among teachers and greater reflection about the challenges they face. Moreover, this educator explained that it would improve both the teaching process as well as the students’ outcomes.

#### Institutions for teachers’ orientation

The third research question (RQ3) was the following: What are the institutions responsible for facilitating the teaching orientation?

In this section the results related to RQ3 will be presented. The data to answer the questions related to the institutions that help with the teaching orientation have been obtained from the questionnaire and the interviews.

Thirty-three percent of those who took part in the questionnaire had difficulties in answering the question about the institutions that helped teachers. The respondents who did not receive outside help from other institutions were confused about this question, so they contacted me for clarification. In the end, 23% of

the participants answered that “no one” helped them with teaching orientation.

The teachers from Boiseko Ikastola, received help from the Basque Museum and Cultural Center from Boise. In South San Francisco, one respondent claimed that they received help from a former teacher from Boise, Idaho. Thirty-four per cent of the participants mentioned that they received help from the Etxepare Basque Institute, more specifically from the coordinator of Euskara Munduan. About a fifth (19%) mentioned the Basque Government and *Eusko Jaurlaritza*. Despite the fact that NABO and FEVA are two different associations, both of them assist their communities with the dissemination of Basque and Basque culture. Some participants (15%) named the institutions mentioned above, while nearly 8% named HABE (*Helduen Alfabetatze eta Berreuskalduntzerako Erakundea*), which helps adults learn the Basque language. In addition, one participant mentioned *Ikastolen Elkarte*, and another one Idaho Stars, who work with childcare providers to improve the quality of childcare in Idaho. Additionally, almost 8% of the participants brought up their colleagues and director in this section.

This shows that the teachers receive general guidelines and materials from different institutions (as confirmed by their comments during the interviews). In the personal interviews, teachers number 1 and 2 explained that even if teachers do receive materials for teaching, there is not any school curricula. The second interviewed teacher enthusiastically explained that a common teaching guideline is necessary for two reasons: first, to direct the work carried out in different communities in a systematic and

integrated manner, based on a coherent, common criteria; and second, to cover the needs and challenges detected in the different schools.

### Teaching Methodology

The fourth research question (RQ4) was the following: What kind of methodology is used to teach Basque to children in the diaspora?

In this section the results related to RQ4 will be presented, using data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews.

In the second section of the questionnaire, we asked the participants about the methodology they used to teach Basque to children. The majority of the respondents – (who were the teachers who have worked at Boiseko Ikastola – mentioned the Urtxintxa project, combined with their own ideas. A teacher from this school explained that they used Josep Maria Artigal’s storytelling approach (Ready for a Story), adapted from English to Basque. Moreover, the activity books from Ibaizabal publishing house were used. About a quarter of the teachers (26%) explained that they have used storytelling, games and songs at class. The songs, stories or games that were used were not specified, but it could be interesting to analyse and compare the specific resources used in each place: “Basque children’s music was used while instituting normal children’s games and activities. It was intended to foster friendship, community, and give children an introduction to the Basque language.” (P19).

A respondent explained how the teacher used to relate songs with the vocabulary that the students were learning at the moment: “Kantatzeari garrantzi handia eman nion, eta ikasleak ikasten

ari ziren hiztegiarekin loturikoak landu nituen batez ere. Eguneroko bizitzako elkarrizketetan balioko zien hiztegia ikas zezaten saiatu nintzen.” (P13) [I gave a lot of importance to singing songs, and I mainly worked on the vocabulary the students were studying. I tried to learn the vocabulary that would be useful for them in their daily conversations.]

However, the results from the personal interviews go beyond this aspect: teacher number 2 stated that they struggled with the Urtxintxa Project. This educator explained that their students were not able to carry out the projects proposed by Urtxintxa in Basque, and that they had to combine the curriculum with their own projects, materials and ideas: “Basque is in a diglossia in the diaspora. Our students only knew basic Basque, they were not able to fulfil the projects and tasks proposed by Urtxintxa Project. First of all, because Nubaris is based on the interest of the children of the Basque Country, and second, because the didactic objectives were not appropriate for children who live so far away from the Basque Country.”

As I mentioned above, according to this teacher the children were not proficient enough in Basque. They thus decided to follow some guidelines and projects from Urtxintxa and create their own projects. Another teacher from Patagonia (Argentina), explained she uses the Montessori method: “Hemen ez dago ikastolarik baina euskal etxeetan duela 16 urte umeei euskera erakusten diet. Batez ere Montessori metodoak oinarrituta, nire kabuz joaten naiz horren formakuntza izaten. Astean behin ematen dugunez euskara eta kultura tailerra poliki goaz baina txikitatio 13

mila kilometrotan euskera entzuten da.” (P8) [There is not any school here, but I’ve been teaching Basque to children for the last 16 years. I teach it on my own way, mainly based on the Montessori method. Since we only have one class per week with the students, it is a slow process, but you can hear Basque language for 13,000 kilometres.]

The Montessori method aims to provide a prepared environment that is tidy, pleasing in appearance, simple and real, where each element exists for a reason in order to help in the development of the child, as stated in *The Montessori Method* (2021: 1). This teacher explained that she attends her own personal teacher training classes about the Montessori method. Another characteristic of this method is that it integrates children of different age groups into one class, which facilitates respect, socialization and solidarity.

P15 mentioned that she uses the direct method of teaching, making use of visuals and verbally reciting the words simultaneously, using a repetitive sequence. She gave importance to kinaesthetic learning by adding words to actions, such as moving in directions, counting with fingers and through song and dance. In addition, P22 acknowledged that instructional scaffolding is used in their classes. This strategy supports children when new concepts are first introduced, and it includes resources like templates, guidance, giving advice or/and coaching. One last methodology that was mentioned is learning corners. According to the webpage Prep International Kindergarten (2021), this is a child-centred approach that enables children to work on different tasks in the same classroom, but in different spaces.

## Conclusions

This research study began by examining historical discourse on the Basque diaspora on the American continent, and has analysed the different educational approaches and attempts that have been carried out in different countries to teach Basque to children of the diaspora. It is difficult to start assessing the importance and weight of each Basque community abroad, since the historical and present contribution and value of each is unique and priceless, and they all require attention and support from the homeland.

On this basis, we conclude that the Basque diasporans on the American continent (mainly in the western USA, Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela) have maintained strong cultural and social Basque roots (Baeta et al. 2015: 8). The Basques settled in an entirely different geographic context, thus, providing an exceptional chance to analyse the dynamics of the diaspora populations.

In light of the evidence, a new stage is now emerging in the history of the Basque diaspora, which is affected by globalization and diversity. As stated by Sheffer (2007: 19): "Diasporas are not only perpetrators of difficulties, unrest, conflicts, disloyalty, terrorism and crimes. Rather, diasporas immensely contribute to the culture and to the economies of their host countries. Therefore, they deserve a lot of understanding and patience from host societies and governments." A good way of acknowledging and contributing to the different diasporic communities could be to create a common children's curriculum, although it should be noted that in the different diasporic communities I have analysed there are no educational boards in charge of language transmission

for children. Despite this, and based on the research reported in this article, the Basque language helps to define a connection, identity, and community with the homeland.

The literature suggests (Totoricagüena 2003; Douglass 2003; Bieter, Bieter 2005) that the differences between the different Basque diasporic communities are considerable, and therefore the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the students of different origins may also vary significantly. Our data suggest that we still have a long way to go, but opening or maintaining new *Ikastolak* may depend on different factors (organization, leadership, unity, prestige, parental language choice, and so on). However, after considering the results we can conclude that providing a useful and comprehensive common curriculum to the different communities to teach Basque to children outside the Basque Country would respond to the need for change and, as claimed by many of the respondents, ensure decent teaching.

Some correspondents from the Basque Country, as well as from the diasporic communities, should be in charge of the organization and internal relations of these schools. A common curriculum to teach Basque to children of the diaspora will bring together the teachers from different countries, and it will give coherence to the various factors related to the teaching and learning process.

As mentioned previously (see Lasagabaster 2008), French and Spanish are taught as foreign languages in primary education in many places, and the possibility of setting up schools where Basque could be learnt should be considered, as explained by Lasagabaster (2008: 83). Hence, as

noted by Schukking et al. (2020: 18), the Basque Avtonomus Community and Navarre have a qualified support system for teachers, called Berritzegunea. Not only do they have experts by curriculum subject, but there is also a coordinator of language planning within the schools, who is in collaboration with the Department of Education. Schukking et al. (2020: 18) explained that a specific team, the Basque Service, supervises the “Basquisition” activities, as well as teaching and learning materials. One of the research questions was to see if the diasporic schools are supported by the institutions of the homeland and hostland – however, the results from imply that there is no support from institutions like the Berritzegune or Department of Education. Nonetheless, the majority of the teachers responded that they receive support from the Basque Centre, FEVA, NABO, Etxepare, or the Foreign Affairs Department of the Basque Government.

In summary, all the teachers who took part in this study supported the idea of having common coherent guidelines to teach Basque to the children of the diaspora. It can thus be concluded that, after having a common scholar curriculum, each school of the diaspora will need to review the different areas, and will have to draw up its own framework, in order to have effective teacher planning, and ensure the transmission of the Basque language and culture to all the children. To do so, the functions and teaching methods of the different schools should be identified and shared among all the diasporans, including those drawn from the pedagogical and institutional fields of the homeland and hostland. The participation of the entire Basque community

will be necessary in order to deal with the challenges the schools have to face.

If parents (and members) of the Basque diaspora sustain a positive attitude towards the Basque language, as proposed by Lasagabaster (2008), the different institutions should keep promoting a conscious language choice. Indeed, the motivation of the children who attend Basque lessons will grow by itself in this context. It is also worth mentioning again here that the educational system will become the main piece to complete the language puzzle when families cannot provide much help on their own (Lasagabaster 2008: 83).

### **Limitations and further research**

Firstly, with regard to the limitations of the present study, the generalizability of this work is limited by the use of a Google Forms survey with a small sample of teachers, which could likely be affected by the unequal distribution of the survey through emails and Facebook diasporic groups, resulting in a limited sample of the total diasporic population. Our guess is that many teachers who have taught in the Basque diaspora do not use Facebook groups or email due to their advanced ages. Further experimental research may take a closer look at the specific complexities of these factors, using more objective measures.

What is more, after considering that no prior research has been done on this particular aspect of the Basque diaspora, it is not easy to determine whether these findings would apply in other contexts. I would like to continue studying this topic by analysing the levels of language acquisition among the students, in order to discover the best motivational techniques.

Each diasporic community is unique, and they must be understood without homogenizing or stereotyping them, as their inner complexity deserves an independent study.

Moreover, as far as the quality of the qualitative research is concerned, it is almost impossible to separate my (the researcher's) values and beliefs from the nature or subjectivity of the topic being researched. However, I did make a conscious effort when I had to reflect on the results and interpretations.

Overall, diasporic schools could play a key role in the near future to ensure and transfer the Basque language to children. A huge commitment and effort should be made by Basque educational and governmental institutions in order to keep promoting the language as well as the culture. The creation of an educational board to teach Basque to children will facilitate the communication among teachers and will cover the needs detected in different countries. Furthermore, it will give coherence to various factors related to teaching orientation. Parents will have to start making a conscious choice to bring their children to bilingual or even multilingual schools, and the diasporic institutions should promote this.

Since this research has only touched the surface of a large topic, I strongly suggest a further in-depth investigation of the educational attempts that have been made to create an international network of diaspora schools, which can be pursued at a much deeper level with qualitative, ethnographic, comparative or descriptive methods. There is a need to develop studies to create some theoretical islands that could work as bases for further understanding of this matter.

On the other hand, although this research represents only the beginning of the historiography of education in the Basque diaspora, it is a good starting point for further investigations in the following specific area – the role of women in the schools of the diaspora. Due to the androcentric historical approach, the role of women has not been studied in the Basque diaspora. For instance, Vitullo (2011) tried to give visibility to the activities of Basque Argentinian women who developed a group that only women belonged to, considering women as subjects and protagonists immersed in a predominantly male gender system. Fernández et al. (2008) analysed the role of women in the diaspora, focusing mainly on the *Ikastola* of Caracas, Venezuela. The role and the stories of women who emigrated from the Basque Country to America have been silenced for a long time, and thus we should now try to give a voice to the participation of women.

Ultimately, in the same way an apple never falls far from the tree and will always be dependent on the nutrients the tree absorbs from its roots, the children's passion for the Basque language will continuously grow (or not), based on the components and events a child experiences in life. The parental language choice and continuous institutional support will help these trees to grow and blossom.

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## External Links

Boiseko Ikastola: <https://www.boisekoikastola.org/>

Colegio Las Vizcainas: <https://colegiovizcainas.edu.mx/>



Colegio Euskadi: <https://www.colegioeuskadi.edu.co/nuestro-colegio> Colegio San Jose: <https://colegiosanjose.edu.ar/informacion-institucional>

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Los Vascos en Uruguay: <https://www.colegiolosvascos.edu.uy/los-vascos-en-uruguay/>

Riverbend Multilingual Preschool: <http://www.riverbendpreschool.com/>

## Notes

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2. See Seliger, Vago 1991a; Ventureyra, Pallier 2004; Yoshitomi 1992 for further investigations.



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9. Endnotes: please do not use endnotes to acknowledge the source of a quotation or paraphrase. Instead, please use in-text citations (parenthetical citations, i.e. name-year system, see below). Use short endnotes only in case you need to provide explanatory comments that would interrupt the flow of the main text.
10. Please use in-text citations citing the author and the year of publication in brackets. Use the following form: (Anderson 2003: 91–99). When citing several sources, separate them with a semicolon (Vah Jevšnik, Lukšič Hacin 2011: 251–253; Brumen 2017: 210).

Avoid underlining and using bold in all texts. Italics should be used when emphasizing a word or a phrase. Italics should also be used when citing titles of books and newspapers. The following abbreviations should be used: *ibid.*, *et al.*, *ed./eds.* When using quotation marks, use “this type of double quotation marks”; ‘this type of single quotation marks’ should be used when embedding quotations or concepts within quotations. Please do not use other types of quotation marks. Omitted parts of quotations should be indicated by square brackets with ellipsis [...].

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<https://isim.zrc-sazu.si/en/strani/aemi-journal#v>.

## Quotations

Long quotations (five lines or more) should be typed separately as an indented paragraph (using the “tab” key) without quotation marks, with an empty line before and after the quoted passage. The first line of the paragraph after the quotation should not be indented. Quotations shorter than five lines should be included in the main text and separated with “this type of double quotation marks,” in normal font (not italic).

## List of references

A list of references should be placed at the end of the article and arranged in alphabetical order according to the author’s surname. The form of the paragraphs here should be hanging (by 1,25 cm). The list of references should include only the cited sources and literature. Multiple references by one author should be arranged according to the year of publication in ascending order. Multiple references by one author published in the same year should be separated with lower-case letters (e.g. Ford 1999a; 1999b). Some examples:

## a) Books:

Anderson, Benedict (1995). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, New York: Verso.

## b) Articles in collections of papers:

Brumen, Jerneja (2017). Okoljske migracije kot diskurzivni fenomen. *Raziskovanje slovenskega izseljenstva: Vidiki, pristopi, vsebine* (eds. Janja Žitnik Serafin, Aleksej Kalc). Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 205–219.

## c) Articles in journals:

Vah Jevšnik, Mojca, Lukšič Hacin, Marina (2011). Theorising Immigrant/Ethnic Entrepreneurship in the Context of Welfare States. *Migracijske i etničke teme* 27 (2), 249–261.

## d) Internet sources:

De Santos - Vigo, Ágatha (2012). Los científicos gallegos, preocupados por la fuga de cerebros a causa de la crisis. *Faro de Vigo*, 1st August, <http://www.farodevigo.es/sociedad-cultura/2012/08/01/cientificos-gallegos-preocupados-fuga-cerebros-causa-crisis/670335.html> (16 July 2018).

Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, <http://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en> (1 Feb. 2018).

## Graphs, tables and figures

Photographs, illustrations, maps, charts and other figures should not be included in the submitted document (with the exception of tables and charts created and editable in Word). All illustrative material needs to be numbered and submitted separately (charts preferably in Excel) with the author's surname. Please submit photos in .jpeg format, minimum picture quality 300 dpi.

Locations of figures in the text should be marked as follows:

*Figure 1: Lisa Cook in New York in 1905 (photo: Janez Novak, source: Archives of Slovenia, 1415, 313/14)*

*Graph 1: Natural and migration changes of the population of Slovenia (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Stat'O'Book: Statistical Overview of Slovenia 2017, p. 8)*

Authors should obtain permission to publish the graphic and illustrative material for which they do not have copyright.



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