Basque Studies and Beyond:
A Brief Presentation of this Special Issue

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It is for us a great pleasure to present this special issue on Basque Studies. The Etxepare Basque Institute had the great pleasure to foster the creation of a Basque Language and Culture lectureship at the University of Liverpool in 2012, a lectureship that became a permanent position in 2014 and that together with the creation of the Manuel Irujo Research Fellowship back in 2013, located the University of Liverpool as the leading academic institution in Basque Studies in the British context. All these facts and achievements will help us to reflect in the following lines on the international academic map of Basque Studies, as well as on the particular shape this map has taken in different countries. A brief presentation of the articles and contributors included in this special issue will complete this foreword.

Basque Studies Around the World

Encouraged by the benefits that he saw in the invention of the printing press for the diffusion of a small literature like that in Basque, Bernard Etxepare, the writer of the first book published in Basque, *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae* (1545) exhorted, ‘Euskara, jalgi hadi mundura!’ [Basque language, set out into the world!], thereby declaring his strong desire that our language should hold a place in the Republic of Letters. Etxepare’s verses have inspired public institutions such as the above-mentioned Instituto Vasco Etxepare/ Etxepare Euskal Institutua/ Etxepare Basque Institute created by the Basque government in 2007 and functioning since 2010, with the goal of promoting and diffusing the Basque language and culture internationally. The institute encourages spaces of interaction with other languages

1 This article has been written as a part of the MHLI group IT 1047–16 project, financed by the Basque Government.
2 See www.etxepare.eus [accessed 17 August 2016].
and communities, and sets up international academic programmes to better understand and research the Basque language and culture. This work involves a network of university lecturers, grants for students on these courses, chairs of Basque Studies for visiting professors and education focused on training Basque language lecturers. Furthermore, the Institute participates in top-level international language fairs, such as the Language Show in London, and organizes numerous events related to the language, approaching and informing foreign institutions and individuals about the Basque language and its reality.

The Etxepare Basque Institute now has agreements with 41 international universities in 17 countries (including 12 in the Americas; 23 in Europe, and 1 in Asia); and there are 29 Basque language and culture lecturers at universities all over the world. Around 2,800 students were enrolled in Basque language and culture courses in the 2014–2015 academic year. The Etxepare Basque Institute has to date created 9 international university chairs at American and European universities, all of which undertake annual academic programmes on Basque Studies, mainly at the postgraduate level.

The cartography of Basque Studies around the world reveals a field whose worldwide implementation has been quite limited. With the exception of the William Douglass Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, in the United States, founded (as the Basque Studies Program) in 1967, the remaining Basque Studies centres, such as IKER (Centre de Recherche sur la Langue et les Textes Basques; UMR 5478), which is based in Baiona (Bayonne, Department of the Atlantic Pyrenees, Aquitaine, France), are located in Basque-speaking territory. Moreover, a glance at the cartography of the international teaching of Basque Studies outside the Basque Country reveals that, to date, only five universities in Spain (Salamanca, Complutense, UNED, the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona and the Universitat de Barcelona) and two in France (the Université Bordeaux–Montaigne and Université de Pau and the Pays de l’Adour) have tenured professors in Basque Studies. To these one should add the above-mentioned permanent position at the University of Liverpool created with our help in 2014, and the four faculty members at the CBS, plus the four faculty members at Boise State University, Idaho, in the United States.

The present academic offer of Basque Studies around the world could be described, then, as truly precarious within the Spanish university system, in which any interest in the subject is mainly on the part of the Basque autonomous government; that is, the teaching and researching of the Basque language and culture is not widely considered an area of ‘state’ study. In contrast to that, there has been a clear increase in the interest shown towards implementing Basque Studies programmes at universities outside Spain thanks to the above-mentioned agreements that the Etxepare Basque Institute has signed with international universities. Besides, we could say that this international interest has also benefited, partially, from the overhaul that traditional Hispanism has been experiencing in recent years thanks to the gradual introduction of a new ground-

3 See www.basque.unr.edu [accessed 17 August 2016].
breaking discipline: Iberian Studies, a discipline whose novelty centres around ‘its intrinsic relationality and its reorganization of monolingual fields based on nation-states and their postcolonial extensions into a peninsular plurality of cultures and languages pre-existing and coexisting with the official cultures of the state’ (Resina 2013: vii), a ‘subfield of comparative studies’ (2013: 11) which, in contrast to national philologies or national literatures, does ‘not serve a political entity or legitimize a state’ (14).

If we have insisted on the importance that Iberian Studies has brought when it comes to breaking the resistance of traditional Hispanism to Iberian languages like ours it is because Hispanism or Romanistik, in countries like Germany, have been traditionally the destination of Basque language and literature lecturers. Bear in mind, for example, that Basque Studies were taught in seven German universities before the Second World War, while at present only four universities, all of them subsidized by the Etxepare Basque Institute, offer Basque Studies. We are talking about positions mainly devoted to undergraduate teaching, and we have to underline that the philological orientation of the curricula has been crucial to date when deciding in what department the position should be created.

And we say that the philological orientation has been crucial due, among other reasons, to the centrality that the Basque language and philological studies have had in shaping the field termed ‘Basque Studies’. Effectively, we should bear in mind that it was at the beginning of the twentieth century when Basque Philological Studies experienced a notable blossoming with the work of Resurrección María de Azkue and of Julio de Urquijo (1871–1950), the founder of the Revista Internacional de Estudios Vascos (RIEV), created in 1907. In fact, this boom could also be understood as a continuation of the growing international awareness of the Basque language and culture during the nineteenth century, especially under the influence of German Romanticism. Linguists such as Wilhelm Humboldt and Hugo Schuchardt, philologists/politicians like Luis Lucien Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon I, and the cultural and political Renaissance that followed the abolition of Basque autonomous rights, the fueros, after the end of the Second Carlist War in 1876, could be considered the clear precedents of the expanding interest in the study of the Basque language and culture during those years. The lack of a Basque university was partially compensated by initiatives like the creation of the Society of Basque Studies, Eusko Ikaskuntza, in 1918, an institution which organized the first Congress of Basque Studies that very same year (Olaziregi 2012: 143–45). Fields like the philology, literature, ethnography, history and anthropology of the Basques became central, especially studies of the Basque language, as we can see in the volumes that RIEV, a journal that became the main publication of the Society of Basque Studies in 1922, published through the twentieth century (Monreal 2001: 12). The subsequent conferences on Basque Studies that were organized by the Society of Basque Studies, a total of seventeen up to 2012, included a more interdisciplinary and transversal approach to the field.
However we understand all this, it is true that the panorama we have described up to this point in the field of Basque Studies, whether as regards the growing number of universities which offer it or the research fields that have historically dominated it, clearly calls for a critical reflection on its future and its aims. Both Basque society itself and the current diaspora community all over the world share characteristics and realities defined by globalization, marked by communication and interdependence between different countries. We are thus speaking about political, social and cultural changes which have affected discourses on Basque cultural identity and the role that language currently plays in it. Basque Studies, in this sense, could be constructed in a space where the dialogue between international (diaspora) and national (territorial, local) approaches leads to a more multidisciplinary and transversal conceptualization of the subject. Such a conceptualization, moreover, should benefit from or be infused by the debates currently taking place in the humanities and social sciences surrounding contemporary notions of cultural identities.

The University of Liverpool: The Inception and Structure of this Special Issue

The Department of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Liverpool is one of only two centres in the UK for Basque Studies, the other is the University of Edinburgh. At Liverpool, Basque Studies have been offered in the BA programmes in Hispanic Studies and Modern European Languages since the 2011–2012 academic year. But the significance and importance of the city of Liverpool and, especially, its port, goes beyond the Basque presence at its university. Effectively, as a recent post on the William Douglass Center for Basque Studies blog states ‘The importance of Liverpool as the major British port and the fact that it served as a key point of embarkation for transatlantic crossings, especially the Liverpool–New York passage, were key in attracting Basques to the city’ (William Douglass Center 2015b), a city where some of the Basques remained, and others passed through. Some of the most important shipping and shipbuilding companies were owned by Basques (like Olano, Larrinaga & Cía, mentioned by Koldo San Sebastian (2015)), and there was a network of Basque boarding houses in the city. In fact, Helen Forrester’s historical novel, The Liverpool Basque (1993), narrates the experience of Basque immigrants to the city. Professor Kirsty Hooper (University of Warwick, formerly a member of the University of Liverpool) heads an interesting project, ‘The Hispanic Liverpool Project’ (Hooper 2015), which aims to record the experiences of all communities originating in the Iberian Peninsula. The ‘Stories’ section of the project’s website offers thriving stories of displacement and alienation; and the ‘Boarding Houses’ section a map locating many boarding houses in the city.

Other Basque migrations, especially those marked by the harsh exile that followed the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), found in the UK a home away from home. Like the 4,000 children who, after the bombing of Durango and Gernika,
were evacuated to the UK aboard the SS *Habana* (see William Douglass Center for Basque Studies 2015a). That was also the case of Manuel Irujo Ollo (1891–1981), a renowned Basque nationalist, important member of the first Basque Government led by Jose Antonio Agirre, and minister in the Spanish Republican governments headed first by Francisco Largo Caballero, and then by Juan Negrín. His grandchildren, Ane Button Irujo and Miren Button Irujo, made a donation of 400 books and pamphlets and 117 periodicals to the Sydney Jones Library at the University of Liverpool, and with that generous gesture supported the Basque Studies programme at the university from the outset. The inauguration of the Research Fellowship named after Irujo was precisely the pretext for organizing a lecture about the eminent Basque politician delivered by Professor Ludger Mees, one of the authors whose work we have included in this volume, who is devoted mainly to four important areas of Basque Studies: literature, film studies, history and the arts. In the sections that follow, we will present briefly the chapters that make up this special issue.

Let us begin with the above-mentioned article on Irujo. Under the title: ‘Nationalism and Democracy. Manuel Irujo Ollo: The Leadership of a Heterodox Basque Nationalist’, Ludger Mees, from the University of the Basque Country, offers an interesting reflection on the contribution that Manuel Irujo Ollo made to Basque nationalism. Mees begins by saying that although Irujo’s career was perhaps the most enduring and intensive of any leader to emerge during the history of Basque nationalism, no academic biography has ever been written on his political life. He continues by underlining the fact that the Spanish and European dimensions of Irujo’s activism made him unique among the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party) members. From being a member of the regional government of Navarre during the Restoration Monarchy, to his important work as a minister in Spanish Republican governments headed first, as we said before, by Francisco Largo Caballero and then by Juan Negrín, as well as his appointment as the President of the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement in 1973, Irujo’s political activism and commitment to Basque nationalism are uniquely remarkable.

Basque politics are also very present in other chapters in this special issue. This is especially the case in regard to what has been termed the ‘Basque conflict’ or ‘Basque struggle’, that is, the terrorist activism of ETA from its creation in 1958 until its ceasefire in 2011. That is the case of the chapter ‘Razones y contextos de cuatro polémicas en el cine documental vasco’ by Joxean Fernández from the Université de Nantes and Director of the Basque Film Archive (Filmoteca Vasca–Euskadiko Filmategia). As Fernández states, as a topic, terrorism in the Basque Country has been widely addressed in Basque film, especially in the form of numerous documentaries. Dr Fernández cites some of the documentaries which, with other Basque film genres, have contributed in recent decades to addressing the topic of terrorism and to the controversy that accompanied their first screenings. The controversy that began with the premiere of *El proceso de Burgos* (dir. Imanol Uribe, 1979) at the San Sebastian Film Festival and reached a peak with
La pelota vasca. La piel contra la piedra (dir. Julio Medem, 2003) effectively tainted the Festival; but the reaction to Barrura begiratzeko leihoa (Interior windows, 2012) (dir. Josu Martinez, Txaber Larreategi, Enara Goikoetxea, Mireia Gabilondo and Eneko Olasagasti); and Asier eta biok (Asier and I, 2013), dir Aitor and Amaia Merino, released after the end of ETA violence in 2011, was less hostile. Dr Fernández’s article focuses on the public use of these four film readings of history. As he asserts, the four documentaries analysed allow for a dual historical discourse: on the one hand, explicit, which relates to the reading these documentaries make of history, and, on the other, more implicit, something one realizes in the article by Fernández, a reading which reveals the subordination of the former to the contemporary nature of its production/reception.

The other article on Basque Cinema that we have included in this special issue, entitled ‘Contemporary Basque Cinema: Online, Elsewhere and Otherwise Engaged’, offers a wider approach, both theoretical and historical, to the theme. It is co-authored by Rob Stone from the University of Birmingham and Pilar Rodríguez from the University of Deusto. The article begins by addressing a crucial question: what is Basque cinema and how has it been defined historically? After describing and reflecting on some limiting criteria, such as the language that the films are made in (Euskara and/or without Castilian), the percentage of Basque-born cast and crew, the geographical boundaries in which the films have been made, the emphasis or not on ‘Basque themes’ such as terrorism, and so on, the article states that any hierarchy of verifiable characteristics is irrelevant to a contemporary Basque cinema that is ‘partly about the Basque Country and consumed by the audiences who live there, only partly made by Basque-born filmmakers […], only partly in the Basque language and only partly in lieu to the experimentation with a particular aesthetic and film grammar of Basque artists and philosophers’. The fact that, in the opinion of the authors, contemporary Basque cinema is mostly online, transnational and diasporic, a cinema that does not fit traditional concepts of film, shows how dynamic and remarkable its evolution has been during the last century. To reflect on that evolution, the chapter continues by focusing on important questions that have conditioned it and reflects on the discussion that language has generated when addressing identity issues, on the importance of the diasporic communities’ Basque cinema, on the tensions between tradition and innovation, and, lastly, on the role of funding and film within a specific community and region that aims at comparative associations with other ‘small’ languages. Terms like ‘plurality’, ‘relativity’ and ‘instability’ are used to describe the approach that Basque cinema is taking nowadays towards the definition of Basque identity.

In this special issue contemporary Basque literature is analysed from different points of view by the following articles. A general and theoretical article by Gorka Mercero (University of Liverpool) is followed by two articles by lecturers at the University of the Basque Country. The first of these, by the writer Iban Zaldúa, is an essay about the decisions a Basque writer has to make with regard to the Basque conflict. The second, by Izaro Arroita, analyses sites of memory
in *Martutene*, a novel by Ramon Saizarbitoria. These are followed by ‘Looking for Paradise’, an article in which Lourdes Otaegi reflects on the pre-eminence of utopian spaces in contemporary Basque poetry, especially in the literary work of Bernardo Atxaga.

The departure point of the article entitled ‘Learning to Think Otherness: Towards a Typology of World Views in Contemporary Basque Fiction’ by Gorka Mercero is that the diversity observed within contemporary Basque fiction could be best explained by resorting to the level of world views, or Weltanschauung, reflected by those narrative works. To do this, Dr Mercero takes as a frame of reference the tension between modern essentialism and postmodernist non-essentialism, and as a result of his analysis he offers a tentative typology of world views at work in contemporary Basque fiction. Key concepts like *telos* and *reason* are used as a criteria to identify the world views and to establish a typology of novels that the author summarizes in four different world views: the utopian world view of premodernism in novels like Koldo Izagirre’s *Metxa esaten dioten Agirrietar baten ibili herrenak* [The Hobbled Wanderings of an Agirre they call Metxa] (1991), the nostalgic world view of early modernism in novels like Joan Mari Irigoien’s *Poliedroaren hostoak* [The Leaves of the Polyhedron] (1982), the apocalyptic world view of late modernism in works like Anjel Lertxundi’s *Argizariaren egunak* [Days of Wax] (1998) and, lastly, the promissory world view of postmodernism in novels like Joseba Sarrionandia’s *Lagun izoztua* [The frozen friend] (2001). As Dr Mercero argues, none of them has superseded completely its predecessor and, consequently, all of them came to coexist together towards the end of the last century. Furthermore, the author states that even though the Basques have entered a postnational stage, they still demand postmodernist national allegory.

A key concept in Memory Studies, Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* is the methodological tool that Arroita uses for her analysis of the novel *Martutene* (2012) by Ramon Saizarbitoria in her ‘Sites of Memory in Ramon Saizarbitoria’s *Martutene*’. As Izaro Arroita states, memory, the Spanish Civil War and the Basque conflicts are the thematic axes of Saizarbitoria’s works, central topics which allow the writer to reflect about Basque society’s memory and identity. The article focuses mainly on the interpretation of one of the sites of memory that stands out in *Martutene*, the Basque *baserri* (farmstead), or family seat. The first type of *baserri* is related to a way of life which is disappearing, a powerful nationalist heritage that includes the positive legacy of the Basque *gudariak* (soldiers) who fought in the Civil War and lost with dignity, and the negative heritage of ETA activists. The second type of *baserri* is, on the contrary, multicultural and represents the renewal of tradition and of nationalist heritage. In Izaro Arroita’s opinion, the deconstruction of nationalist myths about Basque history and identity from within leads Saizarbitoria to reflect on what could or could not be preserved in order to move forward in the peace process that the Basque Country is experiencing today.

One of the interesting questions that the article by the writer Iban Zaldúa
tries to answer concerns the role that Basque literature plays or has played in the peace process we are currently experiencing. He contends that the reflections he voices in the article bring together some of the concepts examined in his essay ‘Ese idioma raro y poderoso’ (2012), which was awarded the Euskadi Prize for Literature in 2013. Zaldúa carries out an interesting review of the treatment of ETA terrorism by Basque-language literature, to argue, at the outset, that precisely such treatment – of what he terms ‘La Cosa’ (the Thing) – has characterized Basque literature during the past 40 years. He continues by pointing out, for example, that it was in the 1990s that treatment of the topic experienced a clear quantitative and qualitative growth and, moreover, that it was more critical than it had been in previous years. Furthermore, he highlights the richness and variety that representation of the Basque conflict has had since 2000, and points out that short narrative work has been, in his opinion, the genre that has pushed the most boundaries when it comes to examining the conflict and violence. This donostiarra writer clearly outlines the role that Basque literature has been able to (and will) play in transforming society, so that the rejection of violence and the peace process in which we are immersed at the moment become a lasting reality. As Zaldúa says, literature has the power to nuance, to enrich official univocal versions, and to contribute with stories (in plural) to that necessary healing of wounds.

The pre-eminence of utopian spaces in contemporary Basque poetry serves as a departure point for the analysis that Lourdes Otaegi from the University of the Basque Country undertakes in regard to the poems of canonical poets like Joseba Sarriónandia, Koldo Izagirre and Bernardo Atxaga. In her ‘Looking for Paradise. Utopia as a Social Issue in Basque Poetry’, she underlines the observation that space in general and utopian spaces in particular have become a means of examining national identity, sometimes with nostalgia for a lost paradise, and at other times as a dream of an ideal future. The article focuses mainly on the poetry of the most translated and prizewinning Basque author, Bernardo Atxaga, whose poem ‘Written in the USA’ (2002) is analysed in depth. The nostalgia for an Arcadian land of the past accompanies a quest for a new Eden in the future that will overcome present-day conflicts. The intertextual references that the poem displays, such as those to ancient classics (Virgil), modern singers (Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen), referential poets (García Lorca), and children’s literature (Pinocchio) go hand in hand with the attentive reading of verses full of rhythm and seductive metaphors. The poem becomes a space for utopian resistance, an expressive artefact for a critical conscience on political, economic and social issues.

Just one article on Basque arts, by Ana María Rabe, from the University of Antioquia, Medellín (Colombia), completes the special issue. Her article, ‘La obra que se abre al otro. El papel de lo desconocido y la importancia de la variación en el arte y pensamiento de Eduardo Chillida’, emerged, as she says, within the framework of the first Eduardo Chillida Chair at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, an Etxepare Basque Institute Chair of which the author was the first holder.
in 2013. It is a thought-provoking and reflexive interpretation of the work of the *donostiarra* sculptor, an interpretation which starts from the premise that the coast and the horizon are the two poles which sustain Chillida’s artistic–spiritual universe. And between those two poles his desire to question through his art, questions with multiple and varied forms, full of life, which, like the waves that the sculptor was fascinated by, lead us to that intangible mysterious Other. The dialogue that Chillida establishes with philosophers, writers and musicians (Heidegger, Guillén, Janés and Bach, among others) helps the artist approach the unity he perceives to have existed between things, forms and elements of life. A Life, with a capital ‘L’, runs through Chillida’s work, permeates it, gives it humanism – work that dialogues with its surroundings and with life in general. Rabe highlights the fact that Chillida fled the ideal measurements of Euclidian geometry, which are not to be found in the natural world, and sought instead the more limited, imperfect and tolerant human scale, a heterodox symmetry. The author takes pleasure in Chillida’s fascination for Bach and for the sea, both irredeemably joined in those variations which inundate the present that Saint Augustine pointed out, which includes the past and future, a regenerating present. Rabe’s article concludes with an interpretation of several of Chillida’s best-known public works, such as the *Comb of the Wind* (1977) in Donostia and *Goethe’s Home* (1986) in Frankfurt.

Here we conclude this brief introduction to the special issue. It only remains for us to hope that anyone coming here to find out something about the current reality of Basque Studies through this special issue enjoys reading it.

Works Cited


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