

GOOD SPANISH, BETTER BASQUES. CULTURE, POLITICS, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN BASQUE DIASPORA OF THE 19th CENTURY

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Migration and national identity in the Basque Country in the 19th century

One of the consequences of overseas mass migratory movements from the Basque territories in the second half of the 19th century was the creation of several Basque diasporic communities in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and, to a lesser extent, the United States, Mexico and Chile, most of which endure until today (Álvarez Gila 2013). The presence of Basque immigrants in the Americas dates back to the earliest moments of the conquest and colonization of the continent, especially in the territories that had become imperial possessions of Castile (later, Spain) and France. During the entire colonial period, Basques had the right to participate like other Spanish or French subjects in the governing and exploitation of the lands, resources, and peoples of the newly acquired overseas territories. Stories of successful local *indianuak* (returnees) that came back to their homeland enriched after their American experiences could be found in almost any Basque village or town. Nonetheless, it was not until after the independence of most of the American continent by the second decade of the 19th century that Basque overseas migration started to escalate to numbers never seen before. As García-Sanz Marcotegui and Arizcun state:

From the last decade of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, Navarra, and all of the Basque Country in general, passed through a series of

negative circumstances that inhibited its population growth compared with that of Spain as a whole. (...) The causes of this slow growth were quite diverse, although interrelated. Bad harvests and wars, and the aftermath of both, such as epidemics, at times of multiple illness; inadequate sanitation, emigration; etc. were the principal factors. [Nonetheless] emigration provides the only logical explanation of this pronounced population stability (1989, 235-236).

Douglass and Bilbao (1975) roughly calculated that from 1840 to 1950 between 200,000 to 250,000 Basques may have left their homeland for a destination abroad, mainly in the Americas—an estimate that is still accepted today. To a certain extent, the roots of the contemporary Basque diasporic community lie almost solely in the consequences of this emigration. These figures include emigration abroad from all the Basque territories, either in Spain or in France. In order to have an accurate picture of the meaning of these amounts, it is interesting to compare them with the actual population of the Basque territories during the period, as reflected in the table #1.

INSERT TABLE #1

The Basque Country is a region located in the South-Western corner of Europe, along the coast of the Gulf of Biscay in the Atlantic Ocean, distributed on both sides of the Pyrenean mountains. The lack of any historical precedent of a unified political community for the whole Basque Country through a recognizable statehood has resulted in present-day difficulties in defining its limits, even for the Basques themselves (Larrañaga Elorza 1996, 478-479). The most commonly agreed definition focuses on cultural aspects, including the territories where the Basque language (the only remnant of a pre-Indo-European tongue in Europe) has persisted until now: in fact, the traditional Basque name to refer to the country, *Euskal Herria* or "Land of Basque Speakers," is centered on linguistic identity. Politically and

administratively, the Basque lands have been divided into several different kingdoms in a historical process that has led to the present-day division between a Northern, French-ruled and a Southern, Spanish-ruled Basque region, after the two crowns fixed their border along the Pyrenees in 1659. However, this chapter will be centered on the Spanish-ruled Basque Country.

Unlike in France, Basque territories in Spain were able to maintain most of their self-governing capacities during the 19th century. In fact, even when a process of political centralization was implemented by the liberal Spanish government during this century, they were able to retain most of those capacities. They even retained the most important of them, their fiscal autonomy, after the kingdom of Navarre was turned into a Spanish province (1840), and the so-called *Provincias Vascongadas* (i.e., Biscay, Araba, and Gipuzkoa) lost their *fueros* (customary laws of home rule) after their defeat in the last Carlist Civil War (1876). Even though the construction of a Spanish national identity preceded its Basque counterpart and was stronger during the 19th century, the pertinence of the notion of "double patriotism" has been argued for the case of the Basque provinces (Aizpuru and Portillo 2015, 68-74; Rubio Pobes 1999, 406-407). The most prominent feature of this notion is that it was based on the coexistence of two complementary identities that were not competing with each other: the reaffirmation of a *particular* Basque identity (based on the persistence of home-rule and promoted by local oligarchies) was not in collision with the acceptance of a wider, *generally* Spanish national identity (Molina and Oiarzabal 2009, 701). Only with the emergence by the end of the century of a new political movement, Sabino Arana's Basque nationalism—which challenged the Spanishness of Basque people—would the previous status quo radically change (Mees 2003, 9-12).

Massive migratory movements during the 19th century actually played a critical role in the process that led to the emergence of a visible and stronger Basque identity as well as the subsequent appearance of Basque political nationalism. The relevance of the social, economic, and cultural changes that were derived from the accelerated industrialization of the Basque Country, especially during the second half of the century, have been extensively researched. The presence of iron mines in the surroundings of Bilbao attracted local and foreign capital, which began the exploitation of iron ore for export, and after gave rise to a local ironworks industry. Both economic activities demanded rising numbers of workers, who immigrated to the area mainly from non-Basque regions of Spain (Montero García 1995, 50-53). It is not by chance that the founders and first organized groups of modern Basque nationalism were centered in the city of Bilbao itself, as the first ideological formulations of the newly minted Basque Nationalist Party (1893) highlighted a quite xenophobic reaction against immigration and its resulting outcome: a demographic shift that could threaten to turn Basques and Basque culture into a marginal constituent in their own country, “in grave danger of being denatured politically and exploited economically (...), as well as diluted demographically” (Douglass 2002, 95). However, less attention has been paid to study how the new overseas Basque immigrant communities also managed to create their own parallel paths towards the creation of a particular and recognizable identity in the societies they had settled in, whose echoes still persist today (Totoricaguena 2004, 10). A detailed analysis of this side of the debate must consequently be taken into account to have a more complete picture of the process (Álvarez Gila 2011, 45).

The construction of a visible community in the diasporaⁱ

Modern migration from the Basque Country to the Americas started very early in comparison to other Southern European regions. After the breakup of the previous model of internal

migration within the Spanish empire due to the processes of independence of most of today's Latin American countries, it took a few decades to resume the migratory movement again until the final years of the 1830s. This new migration, however, was constructed under new bases. Inter-Atlantic migratory movements had now developed into an international issue; the growing transformations in shipping technologies lowered the prices of transoceanic traffic; therefore, this allowed a wider segment of the population to enroll in the ranks of emigrants (Douglass 1989). Even though the authorities of Spain always tried to direct its emigrants towards the last remaining colonial territories in Cuba, Puerto Rico, or the Philippines, the attractiveness of other emerging destinations, especially the River Plate countries, soon prevailed. Cuba, for instance, was just the third most important point of arrival for Basque immigrants. Their presence in other destinations was always less in numbers, like Chile, Mexico or the United States (Azcona Pastor 2003, 145-150).

Like any other ethnic community developed within the framework of international migrations, the emergence of Basque-American communities depended both on “physical” and “symbolic” bases. The existence of a group of people that shared the same origin, cultural and linguistic features aside, it is nonetheless even more relevant to give this group a combination of internal/external identifications: a sense of self-identity reinforced by (and also reinforcing) an external, coherent image accepted by the society they lived within. In this regard, Basques were not unknown as an ethnic group in the Latin American countries they settled in. Totoricaguena states that “Basque ethnicity maintenance is visible in the historical record since the 1400s in the New World exploration and colonization processes” (2004, 79). As subjects of the former Spanish empire, Basques had been continuously present in their societies; and some of them—or their descendants—had actually taken part on both sides of the war during the processes of independence. Before this new wave of modern emigration

started, there was some kind of social stereotypical construct about who Basques were. Because of this, even at the very early stages of these new flows of Basque newcomers, they soon became a recognizable group, different from migrants of other ethnic or national origins.

However, there were also other reasons that help to explain their recognition. First of all, Basques' ethnic background played a key role in their everyday life, as was the case with any other immigrants who arrived in multicultural, multinational societies. Socially, immigrants were informally addressed taking into account their ethnic identity, thus deriving into the emergence of a group of "social nicknames" for each of the most visible immigrant groups. This is how, for instance in Argentina, the widespread use of national stereotypes was commonplace by the middle of the 19th century: the *tano* (Italian), the *gallego* (Spanish), the *gringo* (Western European), the *turco* (Eastern Mediterranean) or the *vasco* (Basque) (Illesca 2002). It is noteworthy that while other Spaniards were referred to with the general nickname of *gallegos* (a regional appellation, derived from the fact that the bulk of Spanish immigrants in the country came from Galicia), only Basques managed to get recognition through their own, separate stereotype, to a certain extent different from the main Spanish (but also French) identity. Sooner or later, similar processes also happened in other countries with appreciable Basque immigration. Even in the United States—which can be considered the last American country where this process can be found—Basques were able to construct their own space in the context of the so-called "hyphenated America" by the middle of the 20th century (Douglass and Bilbao 1975, 478).

Although Basques had settled into the newly independent countries of the Americas for quite some time, it is striking that they did not implement their own web of immigrant associations until a very late stage, during the last quarter of the century. Prior to this moment, most

Basque immigrants did not seem to have any problems in joining Spanish or French associations, depending on which side of the Pyrenees they had come from. For instance, some of the most prominent members of the Basque community in Buenos Aires, including those who would become “ethnic leaders” within the Basque group, started their careers as members of the Spanish or French mutual-aid societies that had been created since the middle of the century in the capital city of Argentina (Azcona Pastor 2003, 289). As Irianni states, these associations were a tool in the hands of an ethnic elite whose aim was both to help their fellow countrymen and to get social recognition and political prominence in substitution for direct participation in politics, as they were cast aside because of their foreignness (2010, 988). Among others, this was the case of Ciriaco Morea, a Navarrese-born immigrant who became a member of the advisory boards of the *Sociedad Española de Socorros Mutuos* (Spanish Society of Mutual Aid) and the *Hospital Español* (Spanish Hospital) (Fundación Juan de Garay 2000, 730).

Irianni suggests some of the reasons that could explain this delay in the creation of ethnic associations for the Basques. First of all, it may have been a simple matter of numbers: associations are easier to create in places with large (immigrant) populations. It is therefore not by chance that during the 19th century the only Basque institutions implemented in the diaspora were located in populous cities, such as Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Havana or Santiago (Irianni 2011). Secondly, a majority of immigrants never joined such associations, especially those that did not offer any practical services such as mutual aid or leisure and socialization (Azcona Pastor 2011, 128). Finally, it was also a question of identity: most Basques did not confront the idea of being labeled or labeling themselves as plain Spanish (or, in the other case, French) subjects. This does not mean that Basques were not by then in the process of (re)defining a particular identity in the context of their new host societies. In fact,

institutionalization of any ethnic community (understood as the creation of a web of associations with both legal and social recognition) is no more than the last stage of a previous, largely undercover process of informal organization that finally emerges in a more visible form, at least in the eyes of historians who have to rely on the available documentation—something legal bodies are more prone to offer. In the case of Basques, there were at least four elements that helped and therefore give some clues for the comprehension of the process of a gradual definition of their identity as a specific, distinct one:

First, as a consequence of “chain migration,” the system that introduced most Basques to immigration. Basques, like any other ethnic or national group, presented very specific patterns of settlement and a high tendency to specialize in a particular economic activity. This does not mean, of course, that all Basques who arrived at their new destination country had to be engaged in that activity, but on the contrary: seen from outside the Basque community, it became socially apparent for contemporary witnesses that some businesses, jobs, or economic areas were a kind of Basque monopoly (Irianni 1997, 402-403). In the case of Argentina and Uruguay, for instance, it was shepherding and working in meat-curing plants (*saladeros*) during the first three to four decades of the 19th century, soon changing into milk production and dairy businesses (Douglass and Totoricaguena 1999). José Antonio Wilde, an Argentine author, wrote in 1908 about Basques: “Empezaron a venir los vascos, decíamos; magnífica emigración, compuesta, en su mayor parte, de hombres atléticos, honrados y laboriosos, dedicándose entonces casi todos ellos a trabajos de saladero. Más tarde, fueron más variadas sus ocupaciones, haciéndose labradores, lecheros”ⁱⁱ (1908, 45). In fact, from the second half of the 19th century and even today, the image of the milkman in these two countries is closely linked to the cultural and iconic features attributed to Basques. This image applied to *all* Basques we should add, because both French and Spanish Basques shared this inclination

towards the same job specializations. From shopkeepers in Cuba, to tanners and shoemakers in Chile, shepherders in the United States and sugar cane cutters in Australia, similar patterns are found among Basque immigrants in other countries.

Secondly, contemporary witnesses and present-day historical researchers agree on the existence and significance of informal spaces for gathering, socialization, work, and leisure where Basques tended to concentrate. Among these spaces there are two that stand out: the Basque hotels or *fondas* and the courts for playing *pelota*, a traditional Basque sport. The role of Basque hotels has been thoroughly analyzed in the cases of Argentina and the United States (Echeverria 1999; Irianni 1998, 491-544). As Echeverria states, these hotels became “the central and crucial gathering place for groups of European and American Basques over the nineteenth century [that] clearly served as a critical social and ethnic institution,” offering the immigrants services like a “job agency, extended family and assistance league” (61).

Moreover, Irianni admits that the persistence of some of these hotels, especially in rural areas, became a hurdle for the formation of more formal Basque clubs. With regard to pelota courts or *frontones*, there is still no in-depth research on the topic, even though some preliminary views by contemporary witnesses seem to underline their relevance for more than the mere practice of sport (Cruset 2015, 108-109).

Thirdly, lacking the active presence of a state to protect them, immigrants had to rely on other external institutions to get some kind of support. Religion provided spiritual comfort, protection, and organizational resources from one of the few internationally-based institutions of the moment. As Catholics, Basques were soon subject to the attention of the authorities of the Church, not only in their places of arrival, but also in the homeland they had departed from. By the end of the decade of the 1830s, the first mentions of Catholic chaplains acting in

Argentina and Uruguay to minister on behalf of Basque immigrants appear. At the beginning, they were priests that had immigrated on their own from the Basque Country, appointed by the local bishops to parishes with large Basque populations: José Letamendi, for instance, obtained permission from the bishop of Montevideo in 1840 to minister sacraments *titulo linguae* to men and women that could not express themselves but in Basque language; or Dominique Sarrote, who was given the chaplaincy of a church in Montevideo that soon became popularly known as “the church of Basques” (Álvarez Gila 1997, 702-704). The growing need for clergy in this community prompted the bishop of Buenos Aires in 1850 to ask his counterpart in Bayonne (French Basque Country) to arrange for a formal system to regularly send priests to take care of Basque Catholics in Argentina. The contract was finally signed in 1855; and thus, from the next year onward, a stable presence of the so-called “Fathers of Bétharram” or “Basque Fathers” was set up in the major cities of Argentina and Uruguay. These priests opened new “Basque churches” combined with itinerant religious missions to preach and offer church services among Basques in rural areas. These activities were carried out during the entire 19th century, with the progressive incorporation of churchmen of new religious orders during the last two decades (Álvarez Gila 1997, 710-711). There is no doubt that the persistence of the Catholic Church’s activities for Basque immigrants contributed in a great extent to the formation of a collective sense of group identity during the period before formal associations.

Finally, the image from outside the group also played an important role in the diasporic process of the construction of Basque identity. To be known is the first step in recognition. Basques started to become visible as an easily identifiable group within the social spaces they settled. From journalism to jokes, from the accounts of foreign visitors to popular literature, a particular, clearly outlined image of the Basque (the *vasco* in Latin America, the *Bosco* or

Basco in late 19th century United States) emerged. For instance, most European visitors that left their written descriptions of the River Plate countries during this century invariably spoke of Basques as a separate, and often unified group with people from both Basque regions in Spain and France, usually echoing the stereotypes learned from their informants (Irianni 2009, 132). In 1843, a British tourist that visited Uruguay wrote that Basques “bring and retain their own customs and have created their own world. They have their own leisure places,” even though—he considered this worthy of explanation— “their region of origin is located in both countries,” Spain and France. Twenty-three years later, another British visitor, Pastor Murray, declared to have noticed “thousands of men of all ages from the Basque provinces” in Montevideo (Azcona Pastor 2003, 245). Basque characters also appeared in Argentinian and Uruguayan literary works: pivotal authors like José Hernández (*Martín Fierro*, 1872) or Miguel Cané (*Juvenilia*, 1884) included descriptions of Basque immigrants in their books when drawing the social landscape of Argentina throughout the century (Iriart 2009, 97 and 100-101). But high literature was not the only space for the Basques: popular theater—the so-called *sainete*—soon became the most important tool for fixing and spreading a crystalized stereotype, (Villanueva 2000, 11-12) which would be reinforced in the following century thanks to new mass-media such as cinema or television.

At the same time, Basques themselves also started self-defining themselves as such, instead of as another national category. A good example can be found in the first census of the State of Buenos Aires in 1855: more than a minority responded as “Basques,” or more specifically as “Basque-Spanish” or “Basque-French,” when asked about their nationality. This process, however, did not only happen in the River Plate countries: in general, we can assert that a similar evolution also took place in all the American countries Basques immigrated to in sizable numbers. In all these cases, the stereotypes that were developed included elements

such as language, job specialization, and other cultural and racial specificities. As late as 1940, for instance, a tourist guide for the state of Oregon in the United States presented a portrayal of Basque immigrants that could have been easily shared by an Argentinean one a hundred years before: Basques “are thrifty and energetic and have become prosperous. In manners they are courteous and pleasant, but reticent. They have to a great degree maintained the cultural habits of their native country. Besides English, most of them speak Spanish and their native tongue of Eskuara. Their appearance is marked by clear olive complexions, dark eyes, fine teeth and red lips” (Federal Writers Project 1940, 77).

A good example of the intermingling mixture of all these previous factors and its evolution can be found in the case of Barracas al Sud, a small town close to the city of Buenos Aires. In 1858, a committee of non-Basque residents addressed a complaint against the local Catholic parish priest, Manuel Eráusquin, because he preached during the dominical masses only in Basque. The answer of the priest to justify his behavior was that a majority of the local population—and therefore of parishioners—was Basque (Álvarez Gila 1997, 708). Barracas al Sud had at that moment one of the highest concentrations of Basque population in Argentina, due to the fact that the town was the seat of many *saladero* factories, a job market in which early Basques specialized in Argentina, as mentioned above (Iriani 1997). However, Basques in Barracas al Sud did not create their own association, *Euskal Echea de Quilmes*, until the beginning of the decade of 1910.

Organized communities

Nonetheless, Basques in other cities of the Americas did not take as long as in Barracas al Sud to organize communities. By the end of the 1870s they were already operating several Basque associations in diverse cities of Argentina, Uruguay, and Cuba, and soon others would also be

opened in Chile, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. There is still no agreed explanation to elucidate the deep reasons for such a boom in the creation of these kinds of institutions, taking into account that it was taking place in areas so far apart from each other. On the one hand, some researchers have highlighted that behind the flourishing of the new *Basque centers* –as they started to be known– there was a generational shift: a new team of younger ethnic leaders was taking over the representation of the Basque immigrant community (Ezkerro 2003, 26-27). But there were surely other reasons. As Molina and Oiarzabal state, “the nineteenth-century Basque diaspora associations were not far removed from Basque and Spanish politics” (2009, 709). In fact, the very first of these modern associations were born on the edge of the defeat of the Carlist army and the subsequent suppression of Basque home rule. Among them we can underline the birth of the oldest Basque club of Argentina, *Laurac Bat* (later *Laurak Bat*) that “was established in Buenos Aires as a political organization celebrating annual protests against the loss of Basque political autonomy” (Ezkerro 2003, 28-29). Although *Laurak Bat* cannot be defined as a “political organization,” it is true that the shock originated by the abrupt end of Basque home rule played a pivotal role in the emergence of a new set of associations among Basques in the diaspora that gave prominence to their ethnic identity over their political identification as Spanish. Nonetheless, this did not mean a rejection of their Spanishness: in fact, the names selected to label this first wave of Basque diasporic associations show no contradiction between the two identities. Both the *Laurak Bat* (“The Four Are One”) of Montevideo (1876) and Buenos Aires (1877), as well as the *Asociación Vasco-Navarra de Beneficencia* (“Basque-Navarrese Charitable Association”) of Havana (1878) referred to the four Basque territories in Spain, thus understanding their Basque identity within the wider Spanish one as a mere regional variety. Similar names were adopted by Basques in Bahía Blanca, Argentina (*Laurak Bat*, in 1899), and in Valparaíso, Chile (in this case *Irurak Bat* (“The Three Are One”) in 1902), referring only to the

Provincias Vascongadas, hence also confined to a regional Basque-Spanish space and identity (Araya Ariztía 2006, 125-127).ⁱⁱⁱ

The late 19th-century “fever” for associationism among Basques of the diaspora in the Americas did not confine itself to Basque centers understood as places of socialization. From these first organized groups of Basque immigrants, a wider range of initiatives were soon proposed: Basque schools for the children of immigrants to provide them with an education that would both assure their successful insertion in local societies but at the same time try to maintain their cultural features and Basque identity. Even though the first proposals dated back to the decade of the 1880s in Montevideo, the accomplishment of this dream did not start until 1895, when the *Euskal Echea* charitable institution was created in Buenos Aires. *Euskal Echea* also promoted the creation of a retirement home for poor elderly Basques. By 1905, both actions were already implemented (Irianni and Álvarez Gila 2003, 118-120). Other proposals for mutual aid and charity activities were implemented within already created Basque centers: the *Laurak Bat* of Montevideo, for instance, managed for more than a decade the so-called *Caja de Reempatrio*, to help poor Basques return to the homeland (Irigoyen Artetxe 1999, 159-160). Even the *Laurak Bat* of Buenos Aires included a similar purpose among its objectives, the *Caja Protectora del Inmigrante*, but with much less continuity (Ezkerro 2003, 49). According to the press, some leaders of the Basque community in Argentina even proposed the creation of a bank to serve Basque immigrants, but it only lasted for a few years.

Ethnic press must be outlined among all these endeavors that served to give unity and reinforce a sense of identity in the Basque diaspora. As the rest of the associations cited above, specific journals for the use of Basque communities did not appear until the last two

decades of the century. In fact, the first initiatives were closely linked to the newly formed Basque centers themselves. By 1880, three journals with the same title (*Laurak Bat*) were regularly published in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Havana on behalf of the local Basque centers. However, some independent journalists started directing their own private initiatives with no bonds that linked them with any Basque association (Zelaia 2018, 7). Among them, *La Vasconia* of Buenos Aires deserves special mention: founded in 1893, it was the longest standing journal of the Basque diaspora ever, appearing three times a month until it disappeared in 1943. The success of this private enterprise, along with other similar endeavors in other cities and countries, is indicative of how Basque diasporic communities had, by that moment, already reached a state of maturity and could offer a critical mass of readers (Zelaia 2018, 7-8). In fact, a total number of 122 journals are registered to have been created by and for Basques abroad between 1878 and 1978.^{iv}

Towards an (almost) unified diasporic identity: between discourse and symbolism

The implementation of a developed system of institutions and mass media among diasporic Basques has a two-fold relevance. In fact, it opens a window into the cultural and ideological debates that were structuring the limits of those Basque communities both internally and externally, as well as their identity as it was being defined. Unlike the preceding period, access to written documents from associations and the press allows us to pass from mere guessing to actual textual analysis, deepening analysis into the discourses that were being produced and rapidly evolving from within Basque communities. Among the topics that were introduced in these debates by the ethnic elites—not only the directing bodies of the newly created associations, but also and more importantly, the economic and cultural elites born at the interior of the same communities—cultural and political identity soon became one of the

most vibrant ones. During the last two decades of the century, diasporic Basques got introduced into a discussion on what being Basque should mean, focusing on two aspects: the role of the Basque language and the disputes over the unification of Spanish and French Basques under the same institutional umbrella.

Basques, as it has been said before, had traditionally self-defined themselves as a specific group by way of language. In spite of the growing implementation in Spain and France of measures for erasing local languages and merging regional identities into a sole national one, most Basques that migrated overseas during the 19th century came from rural areas in which the persistence of the Basque language and traditional society was still strong. Language, therefore, became one of the key elements in all discourse (Álvarez Gila 2015). Unlike the evolution of the first Basque political nationalism that was emerging at the same time, among diasporic Basques it was language or culture, and not race, that were used to determine the right to belong to the Basque community, or even nation. When Regino Galdos in 1887 promoted the creation of one of the first Basque centers not located in a big city, the *Euskaldunak Bat* (“Basques Are One”) of San José de Mayo, Uruguay, the new society adopted a very revealing motto: “Gorde gure itzkuntza zar, erria beziñ zarra dan euskera^v” (Álvarez Gila 2011, 51-52). Other cultural leaders among Basques in Uruguay, Chile, or Cuba expressed similar assertions. By 1898, for instance, the director of *Eskual-Herria. Journal des basque-français du Rio de la Plata*, published in Buenos Aires, affirmed that: “Eskuarak ditu egundainotik berezi eskualdunak bertze yendetarik halako gisaz, nun Franciako eta Espainiako eskualdunen egon lekhuak egiten baitu nacione berezi bat bezala munduan, deitzen dugu Eskual-Herria^{vi}” (Mehats 2005, 291).

Putting the key definition of Basqueness in language instead of other elements had an

unexpected consequence: to challenge the paradigm of “double patriotism” as it had been developed throughout the century, especially in the Spanish side of the Basque Country. In the Americas, Basques were living together and communicating with each other, sharing a common language and cultural tradition, although they belonged to—and unquestioningly accepted—two politically different national identities. By the middle of the 1880s, voices within all the Basque centers existing so far in the Americas—all of them promoted by Spanish-Basques—started questioning the pertinence of granting membership rights to French-Basques. Reactions were different in different countries. In Cuba, where the French-Basque colony was very small, they were accepted quite soon. In Argentina and Uruguay, where both Basque communities were quite similar in size, answers took a diverging path. In Uruguay the debate led to a process of total integration, that started by changing the name of the Basque center of Montevideo in 1886 to *Euskaldun Guziak Bat* (“All the Basques Are One”) to make it more visible that in the future it would admit Basque immigrants from the four Spanish provinces, as well as from the French department of Basses Pyrenées (Irigoyen Artetxe 1999). In Argentina, on the contrary, it evolved into a “separated friends” situation, in which French-Basques first created their own associations, like the *Centre Basque-Français* of Buenos Aires (1895), to start collaborating with their Spanish-Basque counterparts in common interests linked to culture, sport, and celebration (Álvarez Gila 2011, 55).

The creation and use of ethnic symbology also give us some clues to understand the stages of this process. By the beginning of the 1880s, Basques still had no common symbol to depict their identity as other nations or nations-to-be had developed by then in Europe. In fact, when Sabino Arana proposed a flag for the Basque Country in 1893, known as the *ikurriña*, it came to be accepted even by those that did not revendicate the sovereignty that it also represented. Nonetheless, today we know that Basques in the diaspora were already using their own

versions of a unified symbol (a flag and a coat of arms), long before it was designed in the Basque Country itself. First mentions of this earliest Basque flag started in 1881, when it was raised and incorporated into the everyday representation of Basqueness by associations and the press. The first version was organized under the symbology of the number “four,” thus primarily representing the Spanish side of the country. That is why, although this flag continued to be used until the first decade of the 20th century, other alternative proposals were also competing with it, like the flag used by *Euskaldun Guziak Bat* of Montevideo, which combined the flags of Spain and France with a green line in between to represent the Basque lands, or the symbology designed in 1895 by Florencio de Basaldua in Argentina, in this case constructed around the number seven—a way to bring together the four Basque provinces of Spain with the three French-Basque territories (Álvarez Gila, 2019).

Conclusion

By the end of the century, the landscape of Basque communities abroad presented a vibrant present. A myriad of associations, journals, and other collective initiatives were giving birth to a mature diasporic identity, based on—but a bit different from—the cultural and political discourses that were being created at the same time in the Basque Country itself. Based on cultural affinity, owning its own symbolic representation, and integrating Basques from both sides of the Franco-Spanish border, this diasporic identity led to a new, diasporically developed form of Basque nationalism previous to the one created in the mainland:

“¿Decimos jamás que somos españoles ó franceses?” asked Basaldua rhetorically in 1894;

“Respondemos, soy Basko y... nada más. Y llegará un día en que (..) la Nación euskelduna, libre, feliz é independiente, vuelva á reconstituirse^{vii}” (Álvarez Gila, 2019, 36). As this brief

overview of Basque associationism concludes, the still relatively unknown history of diasporic Basques challenges the dominant discourses on the evolution of Basque nationalism

opening other avenues of research into both ethnic identity and political nationalism.

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- i The use of the term “diaspora” to refer to the sum of Basque communities abroad has been sometimes disputed, although it is of common use today (Totoricaguena 2004, xiv-xvi).
- ii “They started to arrive, we said; quite a magnificent immigration, mainly composed of athletic, honest, hardworking males. Most of them came to work in meat-curing factories. Afterwards, they changed to other occupations, such as peasants or milkmen.”
- iii In fact, Irurak Bat was primarily an association created around a *pelota* court where Basques met with each other. It could therefore be considered a good example of the transition from the pre-associationism period as described above.
- iv All these journals and newspapers have been digitalized and put online thanks to the "Urazandi Digital" project. The complete collection is available at <http://urazandi.euskaletxeak.net/default.html>
- v “Preserve our old language, the *Euskara* that is as old as our country.”
- vi “The Basque language has always differentiated Basques from other peoples: therefore, the places where Basques live in France and Spain are like any other nation of the world, that we call the Basque Country.”
- vii “Do we ever say that we are Spanish or French? We answer, I am Basque,... nothing else. And a time will come (..) when the Basque nation, free, happy, and independent, will be reconstructed again.”