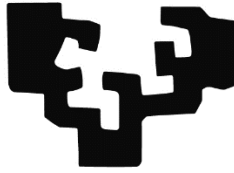


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**LITERARY PORTRAITS OF BASQUE-AMERICAN WOMEN  
FROM SHADOW TO PRESENCE**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background

The idea for this dissertation arose in 2010 while I was living in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and working on a *Specialist in Basque Studies* degree offered online through the Universidad del País Vasco (UPV) and the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). I had become aware of this program when, through euskalkultura.com, I found out that scholarships were available to diaspora Basques. Since I am a proponent of lifelong-learning and have always been interested in expanding my knowledge, I applied and received one of the scholarships.

The *Specialist in Basque Studies* program was an interdisciplinary post-graduate course of study composed of eleven modules that covered a wide range of topics, from history and geography to literature and anthropology. The final requirement was a research paper on a topic to be chosen by the student. Since I am Basque who lives in Idaho, a state with a significant Basque population, and my graduate school background is in Comparative Literature, I chose to research the images of Basques in the literature of the United States. Professor Jon Kortazar was in charge of evaluating my final paper. Apparently, he considered it worthy enough to forward to Professor David Río, an expert in the literature of the American West. Professor Río then contacted me about the possibility of working on a Ph.D. under his direction.

While reading many of the works written by both Basque-American and non-Basque authors that include Basque characters, it became obvious that women were largely absent. The Basques in these books could be ascribed to two distinct categories: shepherds or terrorists. However, the one common characteristic was that all protagonists were male. It was the disappointing albeit not surprising realization of women's absence that fueled my interest in exploring what is the topic of this dissertation. I became interested in learning more about the Basque women who left their home country to make the grueling journey across the Atlantic in order to settle in the United States and who helped establish Basque communities in the American

West. I thought it would be of interest to learn as much as possible about the lives and experiences of the real women in order to then compare and contrast these insights to their portrayal in a cultural product such as literature, and in particular, in Western American literature.

## **1.2. Objectives**

The main objective of this dissertation is to evaluate the presence and the representation of Basque-American women in the literature of the American West in order to formulate and test a hypothesis regarding symbolic literary females. My intention is to study a number of works of fiction and non-fiction published over a time period of approximately three quarters of a century and spanning different generations of writers in order to evaluate to what degree females have a presence in their literature.

Additionally, I am interested in finding out whether or not male and female authors create different female characters, how those characters resemble or differ from each other, and whether or not there has been a shift or a development in these characterizations over time. Basque women have clearly made a distinctive mark on the cultural landscape of the American West, and it is my hope to discover whether or not this influence has been acknowledged in literary production.

Some of the questions and issues to be explored are as follows: What images of women did Basque immigrants have when they arrived in the American West? What roles did Basque women play in their communities? Did these roles and images transform themselves in order to adapt to life the New World? What is the meaning of home and homeland for both Basque immigrant women and those born in the diaspora? Do women embrace or resist the cultures of their new countries? How is cultural identity displayed in diasporic life? What happens to women, their family and intergenerational relations in migration? What are the intergenerational conflicts for Basques caught between two worlds? What gender roles can be found in the literary works analyzed? Has there been an evolution in time? Is there an increased presence of women in Basque-American literary production? Are there differences in the representation of women depending on the author's gender? Are there any differences in generational perspectives? What is the symbolic literary representation of Basque-American women and how closely does it reflect real women?



In order to understand the literary images of women, we will attempt to compare and contrast the representation of single, married, and widowed women, as well as that of younger and older women. We will take into account the various dimensions of women's lives, both in the domestic and the public domain. Their familial and social relationships will be considered, along with the roles they play within the household or family economy, as well as their occupations and participation in gainful employment. Their personal and social activities, interests, and obligations, their involvement in their communities and social networks, and their participation in the economic, political and religious domains will also be examined. Family ties, courtship and marriage (connections through which women enter the family institution), in addition to friendship and work (through which women often build links beyond the primary group) are further aspects to be analyzed, as are the female immigration experience and ethnic identity formation.

### **1.3. Current state of the topic**

A review of scientific and literary works on the Basque people, their immigration to the United States and their diaspora in this country shows a lack of regard for the female presence. There obviously must have been Basque females or else no Basque communities could have been established on this side of the Atlantic. What is the reason for the lack of interest in these women and their invisibility?

Research involving Basque women is relatively scarce and, to my knowledge, no major studies exist that focus specifically on the representation of Basque-American women in the literature of the United States. It is therefore my hope that the present dissertation will constitute a worthwhile contribution to the academic field of comparative literature and to some degree to the areas of ethnic studies and gender studies.

Most of the studies about Basque women so far have been undertaken by female researchers within the last three or so decades. Two crucial works are Teresa del Valle's *Mujer Vasca: Imagen y Realidad* (1985) and Margaret Bullen's *Basque Gender Studies* (2003). In addition, we have Jeronima Echeverria's research on Basque pioneer women and Basque boardinghouses, Gloria Totoricagüena's sociological studies in migration and the diaspora, folklorist Jacqueline Thursby's fieldwork among women in the Basque Country and the American

West, and Begoña Pecharromán's migration studies in the field of feminist and applied anthropology.

The pioneering work *Mujer Vasca: Imagen y Realidad* (1985) is an invaluable source of information on Spanish-Basque women and an obligatory reference in Basque gender studies. The fruit of research carried out by a team directed by anthropologist Teresa del Valle, it is the first and most comprehensive study to analyze the ideal representation of Basque women and to compare and contrast it with reality. Del Valle's team studied the contemporary social and cultural situation of women in the Spanish Basque Country in the 1980s, expanding on the information derived from a predominantly rural setting to include the coastal and urban communities of *Euskal Herria*, and bringing up to date the available knowledge that was focused on the past.

Margaret Bullen's *Basque Gender Studies* (2003) is a unique and significant work in the field of gender studies because of its extensive coverage of Basque women. Bullen starts out by providing an overview of gender theory, and then discusses the role of Basque women as agents of cultural transmission in the context of the nationalist movement as well as in the diaspora. She draws on Teresa del Valle's research and questions the myths surrounding Basque matriarchy and the extent of women's rule fixed in a mythical past. While the powerful mother figure has a vital role in handing down Basque language and culture, contemporary women are also breaking old stereotypes and carving out new niches for themselves, at times coming into conflict with the forces of tradition. With regard to migration, Bullen states that "while the emigration of Basque men is widely covered, women have been largely absent from the stories recorded, and it is only in the last few years that more information is coming to light through the work of scholars such as Jeronima Echeverria, Gloria Totoricagüena, and Begoña Pecharromán" (215).

Historian Jeronima Echeverria has done extensive research on Basque pioneer women and boardinghouses in the American West, exploring the roles of females in these environments. She affirms that "Basque women have made a distinctive mark on the landscape of the American West" from the peak years of Basque migration. Also, despite the focus on the "lonely Basque shepherd" in Basque-American literature, women have played a greater part in the survival of early Basque communities than this literature suggests ("Basque Pioneer Women" 1). Echeverria's studies

explain the newcomers' reliance on Basque boardinghouses and the major roles pioneer women played in the running of these establishments as well as in their local communities. They were not only serving girls, chambermaids, housekeepers, and cooks but, as business women, also carried economic and financial responsibilities, served as confidants and matriarchs, and became cornerstones of their communities.

In "*Euskaldun Andreak: Basque Women as Hard Workers, Hoteleras, and Matriarchs*," Echeverria demonstrates that the key institution of the Basque boardinghouse (known as *ostatu* in the Basque language) served as the means to recruit women's labor through marriage. Single Basque immigrant women were initially hired as serving girls, housekeepers, or cooks, but most of them ended up finding suitable marriage partners at the *ostatuak*, and went on to perform enormous amounts of work to keep these establishments going. Most women's work, however, remained invisible and unacknowledged, except in the case of the isolated woman who managed to rise to the level of a matriarch and thus achieved some public recognition in a patriarchal system. Echeverria's studies establish links between kinship, work, and culture, thus offering one of the very few gendered perspectives of the Basque immigrant experience.

Gloria Toticagüena has published a number of studies on migration and the Basque diaspora. Her sociological work "Interconnected Disconnectedness: How Diaspora Basque Women Maintain Ethnic Identity" analyzes the reality of women in migration, with an emphasis on the experiences of Basque women. She states that "[w]omen have been essentially omitted from early studies of migration and, when considered at all, have been perceived as amendments to the men who migrated; non-thinking, non-emotional appendages with no choices, comparable to the valuable things packed in traveling trunks" (101). Toticagüena affirms that women's expected role as "reproducers of ethnic practices and traditions is often related to women being perceived as the 'cultural carriers' of that ethnic group" (102). In line with Basque Nationalist Party leader Sabino Arana's nationalism, the role of women consisted in passing on the Catholic faith and the Basque language to future generations. Women are expected to socialize children and ensure the transfer of cultural traditions. Toticagüena's study also explores the personal decisions and motivations involved in Basque women's international migration, not only to the United States but also other parts of the world.

Other works on Basque women include Roslyn M. Frank's ethnological study "*Etxeko Andrea: The Missing Link? Women in Basque Culture*," which aims at reconstructing the "role and status of women among the indigenous people of western Europe" (133). Frank starts by examining Basque women as the *etxeko-andrea* or mistress of the house, a role that was especially important when husbands in coastal areas, who were employed by fishing fleets, were absent for long periods of time, and those of the interior, dedicated to pastoral activities, were away for various months with their flocks. Frank states that "[t]he prolonged absences of the males of the family made it imperative that the woman take charge of the house and its interests" (146). The study further explores women's roles in the domestic, religious, and political spheres.

Roslyn Frank is also the author of a study entitled "A Diachronic Analysis of the Religious Role of the Woman in Basque Culture: The Serora and her Helpers" which explores the role of the *serora*, a woman who acts as an adjunct to the priest in the ritual activities of the Catholic Church. Frank argues that this ancient religious institution demonstrates the high status traditionally afforded to the female in Basque culture. While Frank's research focuses on Basque women in a European setting and not on Basque-American women, it does provide historical and anthropological information about the roles of European-born Basque females which may be useful for analyzing their literary portraits in the literature of the United States.

Folklorist Jacqueline S. Thursby's book *Mother's Table, Father's Chair: Cultural Narratives of Basque American Women* (1999) is based on her own fieldwork among women both in the Basque Country and in the American West. Each chapter includes a broad sampling of the narratives Thursby encountered among the women she interviewed as well as descriptions of food preparation, dances, and other ethno-cultural experiences within an American framework. As Michael Hoberman observes in his review of Thursby's book, the text offers "one of the most cogent and solidly anchored treatments of syncretism" encountered in any work by a folklorist. Hoberman further affirms that "Basque Americans, like so many other hyphenated people, occupy a middle ground of sorts. As self-consciously Basque as some of them may be, their dislocation from the homeland precludes any sort of full identification with Old World Basque traditions. But their reconstituted Old World allegiances keep them from melting into any sort of American pot" (88). Thursby herself invokes the concept of "marginal distribution" to describe Basque-

Americans, describing it as “a phenomenon which suggests that great distance from the cultural core usually strengthens folk custom and belief” (*Mother’s Table* 92). Her book separates men’s and women’s spheres, and offers ample evidence of the distinctiveness of the female experience of Basque-Americanism.

In reviewing Thursby’s work, Hoberman furthermore raises the interesting idea that Lévi-Strauss’s concept of “bricolage,” understood as “the ongoing process by which new ideas are broken down, compared and then synthesized with old ones” helps to explain “Basque Americans’ adaptability to the conditions of life in the American West, as well as their imaginative reinventions of Old World traditions” (89). In cultural studies, the concept of bricolage is used to refer to the processes by which people acquire objects from across social divisions to create new cultural identities. In particular, it is a feature of subcultures, where objects that possess one meaning or no meaning in the dominant culture are acquired and given a new, often subversive meaning.

In 2009, Asun Garikano published *Far Westeko Euskal Herria* in which she deals with Basque emigration and settlement in the Americas. Garikano covers topics such as the reasons for Basque emigration, the lifestyle and experiences of immigrants in the New World, their images and reputation in the United States, and other issues that would likely have provided useful information for the present dissertation. Unfortunately, Garikano’s book has so far only been published in the Basque language, which I am unable to read. This is the reason why Garikano’s book is not among my references.

*Ultrasounds: Basque Women Writers on Motherhood* (2014) is a recent publication of the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. *Ultrasounds* compiles a wide range of short stories written by seventeen contemporary female writers from the Basque Country who present their varying perspectives on the subject of motherhood. The stories in this anthology edited by Gema Lasarte explore and reexamine the role of the mother in Basque society. In the introduction, Lasarte points out that motherhood and the difficulties it poses for writers is a key theme in contemporary feminist criticism. The female writers whose stories are presented in *Ultrasounds* explore new concepts of motherhood and challenge the traditional notions of an archetypal and idealized image of the mother in Basque culture.

Among those who have researched the roles played by Basques in the literature of the United States is Richard W. Etulain, a prolific and renowned scholar who specializes in the history and culture of the American West. Etulain, himself the son of a Basque immigrant, is the author of a crucial essay entitled “The Basques in Western American Literature” in which he analyzes the treatment of this ethnic group in twentieth century Western American literature. Etulain’s essay concluded that “[l]ess than a dozen novels have utilized Basques as major characters, and thus the *Euskaldunak* remain immigrants in search of literary interpreter” (7). He also stated that “too many fictional works have dealt only with the Basque as a herder” while omitting “the experiences of Basque women and urbanites and the affairs of the second and third generation” (16).

In order to provide a framework to Etulain’s comments, one must bear in mind that the essay was published in 1977. As David Río points out, the presence of Basques in Western American literature is not uniform (“Presencia” n. pag.). Río distinguishes two distinct stages. During the first stage, which extends until the end of the 1950s, there are very few Basque characters found in American literature, and they are limited to being stereotyped secondary characters in Western-style novels written by non-Basque authors. Among the writers who include Basques in their novels is Harry Sinclair Drago, a well-known author of popular Western-style novels.

Drago published several novels with Basque characters, among them *Whispering Sage* (1922), *Smoke of the .45* (1923), and *Following the Grass* (1924). The first of these novels is set in Paradise Valley, Nevada and describes the struggle between ranchers and Basque settlers for control of the valuable local water supply. Basques in general are not liked by the Anglos in his novel. They are referred to with epithets such as “damned foreigners” and “black boscos.” The Basques in Drago’s novels are not considered white, and are often confused with Mexicans and associated with gypsies. In addition, Basques are portrayed as having “primitive minds” and not being very smart. Nevertheless, Drago also describes them as hard-working individuals, and he includes some respectable Basque characters such as ranch owner and patriarch José Arrascada.

The second novel, *Smoke of the .45* (1923) is set in the area of Winnemucca, Nevada. Again Drago tries to include Basque characters but ends up dealing with similar issues of stereotyping

and a lack of first-hand knowledge about this ethnic group. Ultimately, the elements of Basque identity in these novels are not essential parts of the plot nor are the Basque characters given an active voice to express elements of their own cultural heritage. Rather, they appear as an afterthought, as if they were only included to add an exotic element to a formulaic genre. Their secondary role is subordinated to the rigid patterns established by the plot and stereotypes that guide the development of characters in Western-style novels.

Drago authored a third novel set in Nevada, *Following the Grass* (1924), in which Basques also appear as characters. This time, a development can be observed in the knowledge the writer has acquired about this ethnic group. In fact, Drago dedicates the first thirty or so pages to outlining the arrival of Basques in the New World and provides historical and sociocultural details with surprising accuracy given the general lack of information about this topic that was available in the United States at the time. Despite the promising opening, *Following the Grass* also struggles to portray Basques accurately and continues to perpetuate the stereotypical views that were prevalent at the time.

As Etulain explains in “The Basques in Western American Literature,” the dominant image of Basques in the press and other non-literary sources during the first quarter of the twentieth century was generally negative. As often happens with new immigrants, Basques were viewed with suspicion. They were described as foreigners and cultural parasites who had no interest in learning English or adapting to American society, and were mostly associated with sheepherding, a profession that did not have a high social status (8).

This was the prevailing situation with regards to Basques in Western American literature during the first half of the twentieth century, which corresponds to the first stage outlined by David Río, as mentioned before. The second stage began with the publication in 1957 of Robert Laxalt’s *Sweet Promised Land* in which Basques are finally the protagonists in a non-fiction work authored by a Basque-American writer (“Presencia” 1). This is a personal story about the journey of the author’s father, Dominique, to his Basque homeland after forty-seven years as an immigrant sheepherder in the American West. Part of the book’s popularity, even with non-Basques, is the intimate approach taken by Laxalt to portray his father’s life and his personal and direct statements

about his father.

Basques at the time that *Sweet Promised Land* was written were neither well-known nor popular in America. They were a very small ethnic minority and were mostly identified with sheepherding, a denigrated occupation. Laxalt's book, as Río points out, was a vindication of the role of the immigrant Basque shepherd in this country. Basques in America identified with Dominique's story and felt encouraged to show their ethnic pride. The wider public in the United States discovered Basques at this time, but the image that became internalized was a romanticized view of the shepherd.

As Etulain mentioned, this excessive emphasis on the archetypal figure of the immigrant shepherd and an idyllic rural Basque Country ignores not only urban but also coastal Basques as well as women and younger generations of Basque-Americans. This one-sided portrayal of Basques has traditionally been a shortcoming in the literature of this ethnic group. However, there are a handful of works that seem to challenge Richard Etulain's statement that "no American Basque, except Robert Laxalt, has written significant imaginative literature his ethnic heritage" ("The Basques in Western American Literature" 2). Among them are the five works that I have selected for analysis in this dissertation, namely Mirim Isasi's *Basque Girl* (1940), Robert Laxalt's *Child of the Holy Ghost* (1992), Monique Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory* (1993), Gregory Martin's *Mountain City* (2000) and Joan Errea's *My Mama Marie* (2013).

When I first read these particular works, what caught my interest was their departure from the stereotype of the Basque as a herder. In addition, I found them unique in that they prominently feature Basque women. Isasi's<sup>1</sup> *Basque Girl* is a semi-autobiographical and nostalgic portrayal of her life as a young girl in the Basque Country and her yearning for her homeland. In Isasi's view, childhood and homeland both signify a perfect happiness. But this home country is not just any place; it is paradise for her. She evokes a Basque Country tied to her mother tongue *Euskara* and

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<sup>1</sup> Mirim Isasi is the pseudonym of Rosita Durán. Little is known about her, other than what can be gathered from her book, namely that Isasi grew up in the Basque Country in the first quarter of the twentieth century and immigrated to the United States as a young woman during the Spanish Civil War. She wrote two books, *Basque Girl* (1940) and *White Stars of Freedom: A Basque Shepherd Boy Becomes an American* (1942), this latter one in collaboration with Melcena Burns Denny. In the 1940s, these two novels were among the very few works that represented Basques within American literature.



to the Catholic faith (as the chapter “To be Basque is to be faithful” indicates) as well as to customs, tradition, and the past. Olaziregi points out that “only through the preservation of that past is it possible to maintain one’s identity intact, to remain *euskaldun*, a Basque.” Isasi’s Basque Country exemplifies characteristics that follow Sabino Arana’s essentialist traditional nationalism, which “encompasses a national identity linked to racial, linguistic, religious, and traditional ideas that are reflected in the novel’s paratext” (Olaziregi 346).

At the beginning of *Basque Girl*, there is a photograph of the author dressed in traditional Basque clothing in front of a Basque flag. Sabino Arana’s slogan “Jaun goikoa eta legi za a” (God and the *fueros*, or traditional Basque rights) is written on the flag. At the end of the book, we find part of an anthem that refers to the tree of Gernika in both Basque and English, along with the following proclamation, which serves to reinforce the above nationalist idea: “Devotion to Home, Pride of Race, Love of Tradition – I am Basque. Gora Euzkadi!”

*Basque Girl* is rich with detail about the female protagonist’s everyday life in a rural environment, her relationship to her family (in particular, her grandmother, but to a lesser degree also her father, mother and sister), her views on a multitude of issues such as arranged marriages and the education of women, as well as her dreams of becoming a dancer. In addition to the book’s focus on Basque females, I was also drawn by the underlying conflict it expresses between cultural traditions and expectations of women and the desires of the female protagonist to move beyond them.

Robert Laxalt’s work does not include leading female characters, with the possible exception of *Child of the Holy Ghost* (1992). In this the second book of the Basque family trilogy, the author explores the Basque heritage of an immigrant family, the Indarts. The story takes us back to the Basque Country to learn more about the peculiar circumstances of the birth and upbringing of the narrator’s mother. The “child” in the title is the narrator’s mother, Maitia, whose life has been tainted by her illegitimacy. Even though the book was written as fiction, it undoubtedly has a semi-autobiographical component. Laxalt explores the effect of cultural taboos on a family and its descendants and dedicates a large portion of this book to female characters such as his own mother (as fictionalized by Maitia) and his grandmother (represented by Jeanne in the

novel). *Child of the Holy Ghost* is the story of small minded people guided by thinking and tradition that have not changed for centuries. But there is hope and a future for Maitia when she immigrates to the United States and finds a freeness of thought that did not exist in her native land.

Monique Urza is Robert Laxalt's daughter. She published *The Deep Blue Memory* (1993), her only novel so far, just one year after Laxalt's *Child of the Holy Ghost*. I was interested in this particular work because Monique is Robert Laxalt's daughter and because her book is semi-autobiographic, which I thought would allow a different insight into the Laxalt family. As Río points out, *The Deep Blue Memory* "displays exceptional features such as the writer's emphasis on younger Basque-Americans (particularly on the third generation...) and her use of a female perspective to portray the conflict between loyalty to one's ethnic heritage and Americanization" ("Monique Laxalt" 86). Furthermore, Urza's novel is of interest because it serves "as an ideal companion to her father's books through its ability to portray a similar world from a different point of view" ("Monique Laxalt" 87).

*The Deep Blue Memory* is a fictionalized story of immigration told from the point of view of the granddaughter of Basque immigrant grandparents and daughter of a prominent first-generation family. Even though written as fiction, Urza's book is "psychologically autobiographic," as she described it to David Río during an interview ("Monique Laxalt" 92). In the book, the writer examines the role of ethnic legacy in contemporary American society, drawing on the experiences of four generations of her own family to portray how these individuals deal with the immigration experience. The first person narrator struggles to reconcile her memories of the simplicity of the past, evoked by the children playing under the grandmother's table, and the warmth and foods of the grandmother's house, with the reality of change and the family's loss of privacy and its increasing notoriety in the present. Urza examines themes that are human and universal, such as the search for identity, which for the immigrant generation is forward-looking, but at the level of the grandchildren too often looks backward, clinging to memories and images of a remembered past.

*The Deep Blue Memory* is about a Basque family and the changes it goes through when transposed to America. As the summary on the book's back cover concludes, the story "is a coming

to grips with the positive reality — the liberation of the individual — that over time is the gift of the immigration process” (n. pag.). As second-generation Basque-American and as a female, Monique Urza may offer a gendered view of some of the same characters and themes that are present in her own father’s work in addition to providing a closer look into the perspectives and experiences of the younger generations of Basques born in America.

Gregory Martin’s *Mountain City* (2000) brings us into Basque-American literature in the twenty-first century. Martin<sup>2</sup> is a descendant of Basque shepherds and Cornish miners, and a significant portion of *Mountain City* is dedicated to his Basque family’s story. His memoir is a beautifully told story about sense of place in the small northern Nevada town that gives the book its title. What made this work unique in my perspective is that Martin weaves the story of a remote and dying Western town with the story of his relatives, who are descendants of the original Basque settlers of the area. His Basque-American grandmother, Anastasia Zabala, plays a significant role in his book, so I was interested in comparing her portrayal to that of the Basque grandmothers who appear as characters in the other books I have selected for this dissertation.

The final book is *My Mama Marie*, which was published in 2013. It is a simple, non-fiction story written by Joan Errea,<sup>3</sup> a Basque-American from Nevada, about her own mother. She dedicates it to her grandson, Martin Iroz. The book recounts the sometimes heartwarming and sometimes heartbreaking story of Marie Jeanne Paris (néé Goyhenetche), from her years growing up in the French Basque Country to her immigration to the United States, and her ranching life in the American West. I found this book unique in that a Basque-American female author makes her mother the protagonist. The story is autobiographical — it is a daughter’s memoir to her deceased mother — and is told with unusual straightforwardness and honesty. It also portrays the troubled

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory Martin is currently a Professor of English at the University of New Mexico. He is the author of *Mountain City* (2000) and *Stories for Boys: A Memoir* (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Joan (Paris) Errea was born in Ely, Nevada. Her parents were Arnaud Paris, a Basque immigrant from Lasa, France who came to the U.S. to herd sheep, and Marie Jeanne Goyhenetche, who had come to Nevada (also from the French Basque Country) to cook at a Basque Hotel in Eureka. Joan Errea spent her early years growing up in a sheep camp, until her father purchased a cattle ranch in White Pine County, which he later to purchase another ranch in Pleasant Valley, near Winnemucca. Joan Errea was schooled on the family ranch with her four brothers, Arnaud, Mike, John and Pete. Later, she moved to Winnemucca to attend upper grades and high school. She married Louis Errea from Baigorri, France, who had come to the United States as a sheepherder, and had two children, Mike and Lianne. Joan Errea was employed as a technician in the Department of Motor Vehicles, from where she retired in 1997. (Source: Joan Errea, *My Mama Marie*)

relationship between mother and daughter and highlights the mixed feelings of love and hate that the author had towards her mother. *My Mama Marie* provides a gendered view of the life of Marie's family in the Basque Country as well as Errea's own experiences growing up as the daughter of immigrant parents in the United States.

#### **1.4. Methodology and structure**

The treatment given to women of Basque descent<sup>4</sup> as literary characters will be studied mainly through the works of two male and three female authors from different generations. The focus will be on the western United States because this is the place where those works were authored, and it is also the part of the country where the large majority of Basque immigrants settled. The rationale behind my particular selection of books and authors is that, by including a variety of generational and gendered perspectives, I hope to understand what, if any, are the differences and similarities in the representations of Basque-American women between male and female authors and across generations.

Chapter two sets the backdrop to the present study about Basque-American women in the literature of the American West by first outlining the historical context of the Basque people and their migration to the Americas. I briefly explain the reasons and circumstances for male and female immigration to the United States, talk about employment and life in this country, and provide a summary of the Basque settlement in the main states of the American West as well as a general discussion of the Basque diaspora. Sources here include *Amerikanuak*, Douglass and Bilbao's pioneering study of Basque migration and settlement in the Americas, some work by anthropologist Joseba Zulaika, Pedro J. Oiarzabal's examination of Basque diaspora creation and identity, and sociologist Herbert J. Gans' concept of "symbolic ethnicity."

A subsection of chapter two introduces information about women in the American West gathered in part from a collection of twenty-one essays edited by Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, in which they present a multidimensional portrait of western women and re-examine the American West through women's eyes. Some of the essays examine the ways in which gender

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<sup>4</sup> Women born both in Europe and the United States.

roles shaped western women's lives and others analyze how stereotypes of these women have perpetuated false mythologies. The section entitled "The Myth of the West" discusses the mythical significance of this region in the country's consciousness as well as in its literature. Information has been drawn from Patricia Nelson Limerick, who is considered one of the leading historians of the American West.

In the same chapter, and in connection with the myth of the West in literature, I analyze the concept of "masculinity" and the exploration of the masculine in American culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I draw from Daniel Worden's work *Masculine Style* which argues for the importance of "cowboy masculinity," as presented in late nineteenth-century dime novels and the writings of Willa Cather, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister, among others. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as well as Judith Halberstam's concept of "female masculinity" are also included in this exploration of the concept of masculinity.

An additional section in chapter two analyzes the roles of women during the development of the West and their images in the popular literature of the nineteenth century. The work of historians Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller in addition to that of Barbara Meldrum, Beverly Stoeltje and June Underwood provides a theoretical framework with regards to the literary stereotypes of western women in the era of the "Cult of True Womanhood." Lillian Schlissel's study about the Westering experiences of women based on their diaries is included to further present a picture of what life was like on the frontier. This section then transitions to the final part of chapter two's historical context by discussing the immigration of Basque females to the United States. Jeronima Echeverria's studies on Basque women and boardinghouses and Gloria Totoricagüena's work on Basque migration, identity and diaspora are part of the scholarly framework. The concept of the "marginal man," as coined by sociologists Robert E. Park and Everett V. Stonequist, is introduced to explain the duality of the life experiences of immigrants in their new adopted land.

Chapter three explores the literary representation of Basque women. Although the main topic of this dissertation is how Basque-American women are portrayed in the literature of the United States, in this chapter I take a look at female characters both in stories where the setting is the Basque Country as well as immigrant and American-born Basque women in stories set in the

United States. The rationale for widening the scope of analysis in the first part of this chapter is to present a more encompassing view of the literary portrayal of Basque females that can then serve as a baseline against which to compare and contrast the main five works at the center of this dissertation.

In the section “Women in the Shadow,” I introduce an overview of the neglected voices of women in the writings of Basque-American authors. To provide a theoretical framework of women’s historical invisibility both in society and in literature, I reference the work of Linda Kerber, Betty Friedan, Gerda Lerner, Helen Stauffer and Susan Rosowski. I also draw from Jane Tompkins and Krista Comer, in particular when discussing women’s roles in Western literature. Dorothea Schneider’s article about “The Literature on Women Immigrants to the United States” also proves useful in order to review the history of female migration to this country as studied in the social sciences and portrayed in literature. The feminist work of Spanish sociologist Judith Astelarra helps in the discussion of gender roles in Spanish society.

The literary analysis of the “shadow” roles of women is conducted on five works by Robert Laxalt, who to-date is the most prolific author to write about this ethnic group. Other authors whose novels or short stories are studied in this section are Vince Juaristi (*Back to Bizkaia*), Martin Etchart (*The Last Shepherd* and “Amatxi”), and Maria Davis Denzler (“Into the Dark”). These particular works were chosen because they represent a diverse sample of gendered and generational perspectives.

The second part of chapter three contains the comparative analysis of the main five works that have been chosen for this study, presented in chronological order by each book’s date of publication. The portrayal of women in these works will be examined according to larger categories such as gender, place, and cultural identity. The theoretical backdrop draws from literary analysis, gender and feminist studies, cultural and ethnic studies, as well as diaspora and migration studies.

The three categories of gender, place, and identity are not examined separately because they are interdependent and closely associated to each other. In order to answer questions about

how gender is linked to place and how this association contributes to the construction of identity, I have taken into account the work of economic and social geographers such as Linda McDowell and Doreen Massey who study the connections between geographical perspectives and feminist approaches to gender issues. To discuss the concept of “sense of place,” in addition to Massey’s essay “A Global Sense of Place,” I have taken into account the work of feminist geographer Gillian Rose, and that of historical geographers Donald Meinig and Jennifer Cross.

The first subsection under chapter three examines gender roles and the division of labor in the works of Isasi, Laxalt, Urza, Martin and Errea. I draw from Margaret Bullen, Teresa del Valle, Jeronima Echeverria, as well as William Douglass and Joseba Zulaika to offer the theoretical framework needed to discuss these issues with regards to Basque women. In connection with gender, I briefly discuss the concepts of power and agency and reference the work of Michel Foucault, Linda McDowell, Janet Saltzman Chafetz, and Sherry Ortner. Begoña Echeverria’s article on how masculinity is privileged in the social construction of Basque identity provides a connection between the above concepts and the Basque situation.

Additional sections in this chapter explore themes related to gender, patriarchy, power, and the social control of women, in particular through mechanisms such as the home and the institution of marriage. The theories of Veronica Beechey and Kate Millett on patriarchy, the work of Greer Litton Fox on the social control of women through value constructs, as well as Mark Wigley’s study on housing and gender establish the theoretical basis for the corresponding literary analysis. The section entitled “The Life of Objects” explores the expectation that females turn a house into a home and how this is done through decorations, photographs and other household items. These objects and images of the homeland are also a way to maintain ethnic identity and transmit it to younger generations. I introduce Marianne Hirsch’s compelling study on the connection between the photograph as the family’s primary means of self-representation and its role in the preservation of memories and ancestral history. Laura Beard’s perspective on this issue is also taken into account, and I utilize the insights gathered from both scholars to analyze the use of the photographs in the literary works being studied.

One more section in chapter three is dedicated to exploring Werner Sollors' theory of the struggle that American-born descendants of immigrants experience between what he refers to as relations of "consent" and "descent" and how this theory applies to the family relationships described in the works at the center of this dissertation. Sollors' theory applied to Basque-Americans ties in with the formation of an ethnic cultural identity. The final section on cultural identity references Honneth and Pizzorno's theories of recognition and collective identity, Stuart Hall's concept of "hybridity," and diasporic studies such as those of Robin Cohen and William Safran as well as Gloria Toticagüena, the latter specifically in connection with the Basque diaspora. I additionally touch on Lévi-Strauss's concept of "bricolage" as it relates to Basque-American identity formation.

Given the connection between religion and identity, in particular the association between the Basques and Roman Catholicism, the end of this chapter discusses the importance of religion. Catherine Albanese's three definitions of religion offer a brief theoretical framework. Roslyn Frank's unique ethnological study of the religious role of the woman in the Basque Country is presented in order to establish a connection between Basque women and religion. To conclude the main literary analysis presented in chapter three, I also introduce two very recent novels by non-Basque American authors Hank Nuwer and David Romtvedt, which include Basque female characters in either protagonist or leading roles. The purpose is to present a final contrast and comparison of these female characters to the portraits of women in the literature of the Basque-American authors whose works are at the center of this dissertation.

Chapter four finally summarizes the conclusions reached after having considered numerous scholarly sources and theories as well as their application to the analysis of the five literary works selected for detailed study. It is my hope that the conclusions I draw provide evidence for my hypothesis that one can observe a two-sided development in the representation of female characters in the works of Basque-American authors in the literature of the American West. On the one hand, Basque women appear to have moved from an almost complete absence in this literature to a more evident existence, that is, a transition "from shadow to presence," as the tagline to my dissertation suggests. On the other hand, over the nearly three quarters of a century between the publication of the first and the last work analyzed, namely Isasi's *Basque Girl* (1940) and Errea's *My Mama*



*Marie* (2013), there has been a development in the actual portrayal of women, from an idealized image of the mother/grandmother to a more well-rounded and realistic portrait of the Basque woman.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

#### 2.1. World Travelers: The Basques in the Americas

Basques have traveled the world throughout their history, in part due to the marine economy and commercial trade of their coastal areas as well as their long seafaring tradition. Noteworthy numbers of Basques began to leave the Basque Country permanently in the 1500s in connection with Spain's colonization endeavors. Basques made up the largest ethnic contingent in Christopher Columbus' voyages to the New World and also played important roles in the Spanish exploration and colonization of the Americas between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. They formed communities, commonly known as the Basque Diaspora, in Latin America, Australia, the Philippines, as well as the United States. In this country, Basques particularly settled in Western states, to which other Basques continued to migrate throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Anthropologist William Douglass identifies two main phases of Basque migration to the New World. The first, which he refers to as "old Basque migration," took place prior to 1880 to Latin America and then from there to California around the time of the Gold Rush. The second wave, or "new Basque migration," occurred post-1880 directly from the Basque Country to the American West ("Factors" 255).

There are social, economic, political, demographic, and cultural reasons why Basques migrated. Certain factors are of a constant or long-term nature, while others are person and period specific and thus change or shift depending on the circumstances. An example of a structural given of a constant nature is the importance of the stem-family household in rural contexts, which due to inheritance laws, produced disinherited family members who became prime candidates for emigration.

In her book *Basque Diaspora*, Totoricagüena outlines a number of factors pushing Basques to migrate. The economic and political opportunities available in the New World, when weighed against the Old World uncertainties and upheaval, generally provided the stimulus for significant emigration to the Americas. The most powerful push factors for Basque migration included the Spanish colonization of the Americas and the particular geographic and economic circumstances of the Basque Provinces.

Beginning with the 1492 arrival of Christopher Columbus and continuing for over three centuries, Spain expanded its territories across half of South America, most of Central America and the Caribbean Islands, and much of North America. The colonial expansion under the crown of Castile was initiated by the Spanish conquistadores and developed through the Crown's administrators and missionaries. The motivations for the colonial expansion were trade and the spread of the Catholic faith through the religious conversion of indigenous people.

This imperialist expansion in the Americas demanded certain types of professionals such as soldiers and sailors in the military and navy of the Spanish Empire, merchants, missionaries, and clergy. Given the limited economic opportunities in the Basque Country, many Basque men left home to join the Spanish forces and ended up settling in the Americas. Another factor in Basque migration is the geographic location of the Basque Provinces between Spain and France which led them to become the prime stage for Napoleon's military campaigns. The First and Second Carlist Wars, which occurred from 1833-1839 and 1872-1876, respectively, as well as the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the subsequent Franco dictatorship (1936-1975) pushed many Basques to migrate to the United States. Other factors that contributed to Basque emigration were the overpopulation of rural areas and the idiosyncratic Basque rules of inheritance, which will be explained in more detail below.

While the individual reasons for Basques to leave their homeland were diverse, Jacqueline Urla groups them into two major categories: changing financial conditions and traditional family inheritance practices. During the Spanish Industrial Revolution, rural Spanish Basques often faced difficult economic conditions, so they took advantage of the opportunity to accept jobs as

sheepherders in the American West for which they needed no prior experience and no English language ability (151).

With regards to traditional family inheritance practices, it is crucial to understand the role of the *baserri* or farmstead, an institution on which traditional Basque agrarian society is anchored. Although its economic relevance is mostly negligible nowadays, its historical and cultural significance are significant. Joseba Zulaika<sup>5</sup> explains that the Basque *baserri* is composed of a dwelling located approximately in the center of its combined land holdings. Ideally, a *baserri* can be worked by a single family while providing it with a sufficient living. The owner and spouse will select a single heir to the farm from among their children. Generally, the selection is determined by male primogeniture, although there are many exceptions. The non-inheriting children are expected to leave the *baserri*, and their options are to marry into a nearby farmstead, enter religious life, migrate to an urban area, or migrate abroad. Each farmstead has a name, which does not change over time. Traditionally, persons receive their social identity from their house name rather than from their last name. They were also expected to subordinate all personal interest to the well-being of the household as long as they lived in the *baserri* (“Basque Traditions” 15).

Since the well-being of the house has traditionally been a priority for Basque agrarian families, hence the impartibility of family land and property, which led to an unequal distribution of patrimony. Arrizabalaga writes that “the strategy consisted in selecting the single heir or heiress, allowing him or her to marry and stay in the house and securing him or her a greater share of family resources upon marriage” (58). The non-inheriting male descendants were relegated to a secondary role from which they could only escape by becoming priests or leaving their country.

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, Basques left their homeland not only as conquerors and explorers to participate in the Spanish colonization of Latin America but also as clergy, missionaries, and settlers. Douglass writes that, in Latin America, prior to its independence movements, Basques became a “ruling class” assuming “key administrative posts within both the civil and ecclesiastical bureaucracies and were a prominent segment of the colonial mercantile class” (“Factors” 253). Echeverria adds that they were also part of the first European settlement of

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<sup>5</sup> See Joseba Zulaika. “Basque Traditions.” Etxepare Basque Institute. [www.etxepareinstitutua.net](http://www.etxepareinstitutua.net)

New Mexico under Basque explorer Juan de Oñate as early as 1598, and the 1849 Gold Rush further drew many of them from Latin America to California (“Euskaldun Andreak” 299).

The “old Basque migration” revolved around the Carlist Wars, the last major European civil wars in which pretenders to the throne sought to establish their claims to kingship. Some eight thousand Basques were forced to flee their homeland for the Americas. The First Carlist War (1833-1839) lasted more than seven years, and the defeat of the Carlists in 1839 left the Basques with serious economic and political problems. The Second Carlist War (1872-1876), which began when Carlos VII entered Navarra from the French Basque Country in a premature attempt to foment an uprising against the Parliament, was an important push factor in sending Basques to Idaho, most of them from the province of Bizkaia.

After its Latin American colonies began their independence movements, the Spanish state required emigrants to depart through government-established channels, which included applying for a license, Totoricagüena recounts. However, there were numerous violations and most emigrants left Spain illegally and thus were not registered in the administration’s official counts. A majority of Spanish Basques traveled to the north of *Euskal Herria* across the French-Spanish border and departed from the French side, taking advantage of Basque preferential treatment and aid (*Boise Basques* 24).

During the 1850s and 1860s, Basques in the United States did not venture beyond the state of California (Zubiri 14). However, with the increase in the number of mining towns in the West, the need to supply meat also grew and along with it the demand for sheep and wool. The expanding sheep industry made plenty of herding jobs available, which caused Basque migration to shift east from California to areas in the Intermountain West. In addition to this factor, the economic crisis in Europe brought about massive emigration of Basques to the American West and Uruguay. Since Buenos Aires was the harbor where those heading for Uruguay had to disembark, many Basque shepherds stayed in Argentina. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 made it easier for immigrants to move west across the United States. Public lands in the West were utilized free of charge for grazing animals, and establishing communities and populating towns was a priority in that region (Totoricagüena, *Basque Diaspora* 204).

Once both coasts were connected by railroad, writes Totoricagüena, more Basques were able to immigrate directly to the western United States as travel by rail was safer, faster, and cheaper than other means previously used. This led Basque men to begin sending for their sons, brothers, and other family members, and later also called for their wives, daughters, or sisters to join them (*Basque Diaspora* 205). This is the reason why Basques in the United States are typically concentrated in areas according to their towns or regions of origin. Thus, many Basques in California are from Nafarroa and Nafarroa Beherea, with a lot of them coming from villages around the Donibane-Garazi area. In Idaho, on the other hand, the majority of Basques are from the province of Bizkaia.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a steady immigration path had been established between the Basque Country and the Americas, which quickly concentrated around the sheepherding communities of the western United States. Owners of sheep operations sought out Basque herders because of their reputation for being hard-working, dependable and able to withstand the loneliness. Even though these men were able to spend long months alone in the mountains, immigrant sheepherders who have been interviewed have told about their suffering. For example, a Basque sheepherder who was interviewed for the oral history “Artzaina Mintzo (A Sheepherder Speaks),”<sup>6</sup> explains how everyone suffered from loneliness, but some suffered more than others depending on their background. For those who had worked with sheep back home in the Basque Country, life was easier than for those who only knew life in town. The former found it easier working with the animals, and they had a more enjoyable life in the mountains. Many spoke of how they cried themselves to sleep, yearning for their family and home country, while some had nervous breakdowns and ended up losing their mind. Many also found that this occupation was a blessing in disguise because it kept them from spending their money, which in turn allowed them to save up most of their income for an eventual return to the Basque Country within three to five years.

As Douglass and Bilbao note in *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Basque emigrants sought out other members of their

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<sup>6</sup> See “Artzaina Mintzo (A Sheepherder Speaks),” Web. 28 Feb. 2015. <http://basquehistory.net>

ethnic group, which led to the phenomenon of “chain migration.” Chain migration can be defined as a “movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants.”<sup>7</sup> The pioneer migrant provides information about the location to which he or she has migrated to others in his or her family or village, which in turn prompts additional individuals from the town to migrate to the same location. The original immigrants then assist the newcomers with finding employment and with adjustment to the new community and country. Eventually, establishments (such as boardinghouses) and associations were created to cater specifically to the needs of the incoming migrants.

The sheep ranching industry in the western United States had become an important economic focus for Basque immigrants at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and the eventual prevalence of this ethnic group in the sheepherding industry is in great measure due to the process of chain migration by which new individuals were continuously being recruited from abroad to work with the sheep. Basques who arrived in the American West after the Gold Rush progressively settled throughout Great Basin states (California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming) where public grazing lands were still available and not as crowded as those in other states.

In the first half of the twentieth century, however, two key pieces of federal legislation, the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 severely curtailed Basque migration to the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924, also known as The Johnson-Reed Act, limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota. The quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality as of the 1890 national U.S. census.<sup>8</sup>

The most basic purpose of the 1924 Immigration Act was to preserve the ideal of American “homogeneity,” but in reality it resulted from widespread anti-immigrant sentiments and was

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<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, John S. and Leatrice D. MacDonald. "Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks". *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42 (1964): 82–97.

<sup>8</sup> See “Milestones: 1921–1936.” U.S. Department of State. Office of the Historian. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

meant to limit how many of them were allowed to enter the country each year. Basques were classified as either ethnically “Spanish” or “French” and therefore fell under the quota numbers allocated to these nations. In 1929, the yearly immigration quotas allowed 3,086 immigrants of “French” origin and only 252 of “Spanish” origin to enter the United States, and these quotas included Basques.

The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 USC 315), signed by President Roosevelt, is a United States federal law that provides for the regulation of grazing on the public lands (excluding Alaska) to improve range land conditions and regulate their use. It was passed as the federal government took an active role in regulating Western lands, in part to protect grazing terrain from ecological damage.<sup>9</sup> Prior to 1934, public lands had been open to anyone who wanted to use them for stock grazing, and itinerant shepherders utilized the land free of charge to graze their sheep on millions of acres of land owned by the federal government. Basques had been able to raise cattle and sheep inexpensively and with high profit margins on the public lands. Gerald Nash argues that the federal government’s generous policy of allowing stock grazing free of charge on public lands had eventually resulted in a “serious deterioration of the rangelands” (32). In addition, by 1933 the grazing lands owned by the federal government had been substantially reduced and were in poor condition. Sheep herders were accused of widespread destruction of the natural environment, and stock growers and conservationists pushed for federal regulation to protect the public lands that were left over (Nash 32).

The Taylor Grazing Act was enacted in 1934 “to protect the remaining patrimony from overgrazing and soil depletion” (Nash 32). It stipulated that stock growers either had to own the land on which they grazed their herds or had to obtain permits and pay a fee to graze on federal land. This Act reduced the number of jobs in the sheep industry available to immigrants, and many Basques wanting to leave war-torn Spain were no longer able to secure employment as herders in the American West. Not being able to speak English, other jobs in this country were also out of their reach, and therefore they migrated to regions such as Latin America, Australia, or the Philippines.

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior. Bureau of Land Management. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.



At the end of the 1940s, due to labor shortages after World War II, the sheepherding industry suffered a severe crisis because there were not enough herders in the United States to handle the herds. This led to Nevada senator Pat McCarran reestablishing the immigration of Basque shepherds in 1952 with a new law that authorized a quota of up to 500 “Spanish shepherds.” However, the pressure that stock growers and conservationists exercised on the federal government to curtail the availability of free grazing on public lands, coupled with the inherent challenges of sheep ranching, such as devastating weather conditions and a volatile market, ultimately led to a reduction in the numbers of sheep (Lane, “Trouble” 33). Inevitably, this translated into a loss of potential earnings for the industry, and thus the demand for Basque shepherds was also reduced. Totoricagüena further explains that, in 1966, “there were approximately twelve hundred Basque shepherds working in the United States, but by 1976, there were only 106 Basques with sheepherding contracts” (*Basque Diaspora* 219).

Initially, the relationship between Basque shepherds and their host society was strained. On the one hand, already established ranchers viewed these new immigrants as intruders. On the other hand, herding was a trade that was generally despised in the American West. In addition, cattle ranchers complained that a majority of Basques were not citizens of this country and were benefiting from using public lands free of charge and sending their profits back to their homeland without purchasing property or reinvesting these monies in their host country.

Most Basque sheepherders lived an isolated life in a harsh and frequently hostile landscape, considering it a transitory period. Many saw their stay in the United States as a kind of “purgatory” where they would earn some money in order to someday return to their homeland. Due in part to the harsh and isolated conditions in which these men lived and worked, the difficulties when trying to assimilate and build a family were insurmountable. Basques therefore continued to maintain close links to their homeland in the hope of going back some day.

While some did eventually return, a number of them decided to stay in the United States and were able to purchase ranches where they could exploit the sheepherding business. Many were also able to obtain citizenship and took brief trips to their homeland, often with the only goal of finding a spouse and returning with her to America. Most Basques settled down in the American

West, in communities such as Jordan Valley, Oregon, in the state of Idaho, as well as in Nevada towns such as Elko and Winnemucca.

Today, the sheep industry in the United States is on the decline, and Basques no longer enter the country for employment in this line of work. Those Basques who are still involved in the sheep and cattle business are owners and managers. However, the image of the lonely shepherd roaming the mountains with his donkey, his dog, and a herd with several thousand sheep is the stereotype of the Basque immigrant and has also become a literary archetype.

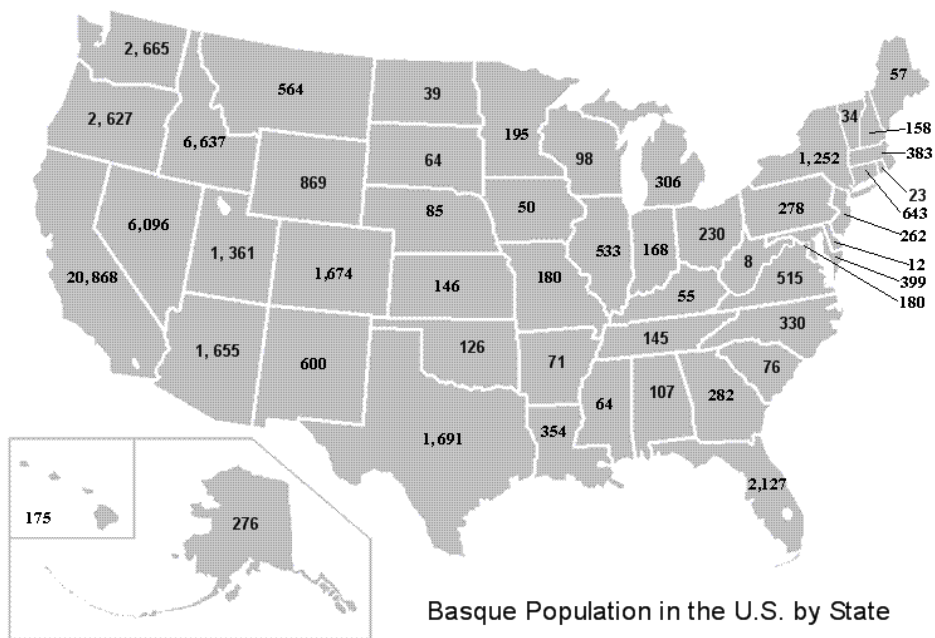
As the younger generations of Basque-Americans increasingly assimilate into U.S. life, their education levels have increased and they are entering white-collar jobs. First-generation immigrants realized the value of higher education in this country, pushing their descendants to study so that they would not have the hard life they themselves experienced. Bieter and Bieter outline that by the 1970s most second- and third-generation Basques had left agricultural labor behind and had moved into other professions, becoming bankers, managers, lawyers, and entrepreneurs (4).

## **2.2. The Basque Diaspora**

Douglass and Bilbao note that Basque emigrants frequently acted as a self-aware ethnic group, establishing and maintaining ties to each other as well as their homeland. These close ties led to the creation of trade networks, mutual assistance programs, schools for Basque children (*ikastolak*), and various clubs and associations for the maintenance of Basque culture, language, and traditions. In *Boise Basques*, Totoricagüena refers to these collective actions as “diaspora activities.” The word “diaspora” is used because “it categorizes ethnic groups who have departed their homelands and settled in other host countries, yet continued to maintain their ethnic identity and ties to their homeland” (17).

Some of the communities established in the American West ended up having fairly large Basque populations but, within the scope of the United States, Basques have never been a prominent minority. It is difficult to establish how many people of Basque descent actually live in

the United States because, before the 1980 census, there had never been a federally-recognized category for this ethnic group. The year 2000 census<sup>10</sup> lists 57,793 individuals who self-identify as having Basque ancestry, although the actual number is likely to be larger. The states with the largest Basque-American populations are California (20,868), Idaho (6,637), Nevada (6,096), Washington (2,665) and Oregon (2,627).



**Image 1. Basque Population in the U.S. by State. Source: Wikipedia entry “Basque American”**

Since the Basques came from such a small geographical area and socialized together in their communities in the U.S., a high level of interconnection and closeness developed at a local level. However, “the earliest immigrants from different provinces had no sense of shared ethnicity” because most had left their country before the rise of Sabino Arana’s nationalist movement (*Boise Basques* 50). In addition, Basques in different states did not associate with each other before the existence of Basque clubs. Largely thanks to the establishment of NABO (North American Basque Organizations, Inc.), regional differences have largely been put aside and Basques in the United States generally present a more united front with a strengthened cultural pride.

<sup>10</sup> Year 2000 Census, U.S. Census Bureau. Web. <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>

Diaspora researcher Pedro J. Oiarzabal notes that Diasporas like the Basques:

...are composed of migrants who share a collective identity in their homeland and have left by choice or by force, often as a result of structural socio-economic or political conditions. In their new homes, these migrants and their descendants maintain and develop cultural, religious and political expressions of identity. Collectively, they develop an identity distinct from—yet tied to—the dominant culture of their homeland. (“The Basque Diaspora,” n. pag.).

An individual’s identity results from a social construction and reconstruction that uses as materials those elements and circumstances we encounter throughout our lives. In *La Identidad Vasca en el Mundo*, Oiarzabal further argues that there are multiple definitions and uses of ethnic identity in the Basque communities around the world. In addition, diasporic populations have dual identities: an ethnic identity and a civic identity. For instance, U.S. Basques are proud of being “American” and do not see a conflict of interest in being both Basque (ethnic) and American (civic), unlike most Basques in Spain, who find it conflicting to define themselves as being simultaneously Basque and Spanish (15).

In order to understand the formation of a Basque identity in diasporic communities, Oiarzabal adds, there are a number of questions that ought to be considered (*La Identidad* 22):

- a. What factors make up the Basque identity and explain an individual’s self-assignment to that culture or group?
- b. How does “feeling Basque” relate to other identity-constituting elements such as family or ideology?
- c. What is the itinerary involved in the formation of that identity? What structures, symbols, myths, and practices intervene in it?
- d. How can “being Basque” be explained in relationship to other identities of coexistence and self-membership as are state or national identities?
- e. What is the future of Basque identity in a global world?

In the diaspora, the definition of who is Basque has become complicated as some associate it with birth or ancestry, while for others it is related to the ability to speak *Euskara*, the Basque

language. Basques typically refer to themselves as *Euskaldunak* or “speakers of *Euskara*.” However, in the diaspora, one does not have to speak the language to be defined as *Euskaldun*; one must have Basque ancestry. Totoricagüena explains how “over the years, several people in the Boise community have learned to speak Basque, have learned to play *pelota* and *pala*, have lived in and visited the Basque Country repeatedly, have promoted the Basque culture with all their energy, and have performed with the choirs and dance groups.”

However, these individuals are considered non-Basques and have been refused membership in the Euzkaldunak Incorporated<sup>11</sup> club because their parents do not have Basque ancestry (*Boise Basques* 43). On the other hand, there are individuals born into a family that carries a Basque last name who do not speak the language, have no interest in the culture or history, and also do not attend any activities within the Basque community, but these individuals are considered members of that ethnic group simply because they were born to a Basque. Totoricagüena leaves open the question of whether one can “become” Basque and argues that all of these questions regarding inclusivity or exclusivity need to be answered by and for each generation and changes will need to happen (*Boise Basques* 43).

Oiarzabal notes that the Basque diasporic communities are neither homogeneous nor monolithic but instead represent pluralistic cultural realities that integrate and accommodate immigrants from various regions and generations who then contribute their own sense of what it means to be Basque, thus helping to modify prior notions of “Basqueness” that may have been in existence in those communities (*La Identidad* 24). Ethnic identity is not static but rather evolves and develops over time according to multiple factors.

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<sup>11</sup> History of The Basque Center and Euzkaldunak, Inc. according to their website: “The Basque Center was built in 1949 and is a gathering place for Basque people in the area. We help maintain our heritage by supporting Basque dancing, events and gatherings. The Center acts as the primary home for our two dancing groups, Boiseko Gazteak, which teaches children from 4 to 13 years of age and the Oinkari Basque Dancers, a performance troupe for ages 14 and older. The Center is also home for a Basque music group, Txantxangorriak, which plays traditional music at many of the Basque festivals. Annually we hold tournaments for two traditional Basque card games, Mus and Briska. The Basque Center hosts several events throughout the year such as San Inazio in July, a typical Basque street festival. Every November we have a Mortzilla Dinner, traditional Basque blood sausage. In December we hold a Shepherder’s Ball Dinner and Dance to help raise money for our Basque Charities account, which allows us to help individuals and families in need throughout the year. Gatherings also include membership monthly dinners that run from August through May.”

An individual's identity combines cognitive elements of identification with affective elements that imbue that identity with more symbolic meaning. Basque identity in the United States has become an option that younger generations, such as second-, third-, or fourth-generation individuals, may or may not choose to exercise, and the manner of being Basque has adapted to its new environment. Herbert J. Gans describes the process of assimilation and acculturation not as a gradual and linear descent towards assimilation and eventual absorption of the ethnic group into the main culture, which the "melting pot" theorists used to believe, but rather as a "bumpy line" in which younger generations still categorize themselves as part of the ethnic group but mainly participate in ethnic activities with family and in their leisure time.

In his article "Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity," Gans refers to this phenomenon as "symbolic ethnicity" and states that it is "intended mainly for the purpose of feeling or being identified with a particular identity, but without either participating in an existing ethnic organization (formal or informal) or practicing an ongoing ethnic culture" (578). Therefore, activities such as cultural celebrations, ethnic foods or fashions are seen as "free from affiliation with ethnic groups and ethnic cultures, and instead dominated by the consumption of symbols, for example at ethnic restaurants, festivals, in stores that sell ethnic foods and ancestral collectibles, and through various trips to the Old Country" (Gans, "Comment" 44).

In *Identity, Culture, and Politics in the Basque Diaspora*, Totoricagüena takes issue with the implication that "symbolic" or "leisure-time" ethnicity may be considered less authentic or less meaningful than other expressions of identity. In an increasingly globalized world, a Basque person who chooses to eat lasagna for dinner and listen to British rock music is not necessarily less Basque than another who eats traditional foods, plays the accordion, and listens to Basque folk music. She also argues that, in the United States, there is an increasing interest in ethnic manifestation, demonstrated by the growth in the number of cultural organizations and new memberships by people of all ages (6). Totoricagüena theorizes that this "ethnic revival" may be connected to Marcus Hansen's "third-generation return hypothesis" by which the younger generations, who are already fully assimilated into the new culture, find their ethnic uniqueness appealing and seek out membership in these organizations in order to fulfill "their need to belong and be recognized as part of a group" (7).

One of the ways in which humans establish their identity, according to Anthony Giddens, is through narratives, through telling their own stories (54). Basque identity, especially in the diaspora communities which are at a geographical distance from their homeland, may thus be said to have been constructed through experiences, anecdotes, memories, or values that are shared among its members. Totoricagüena describes the process of identity formation and reformulation as “adding identities” rather than subtracting or substituting one for another (*Basque Diaspora* 430). Being both Basque and American does not require choosing between one or the other identity and also does not make that individual less Basque or less American, but rather enriches that person’s experience.

Even though, in the communities established in the American West, Basque culture and traditions have been maintained to a large degree, the progressive Americanization of the descendants is unavoidable. Nevertheless, numerous Basque-Americans still speak to each other in *Euskara*, cook Basque foods, play Basque sports (such as *pelota* or *pala*) and card games (*mus*, *briska*), organize festivals (for example, the *Jaialdi* held in Boise every five years) and other events, and coordinate their formal activities around clubs and Basque cultural centers. There are nearly fifty such clubs in this country alone and most belong to the umbrella organization known as NABO (North American Basque Organizations), whose function is to protect, preserve, and promote the historical, cultural, and social interests of Basques in the United States. NABO promotes exchanges between Basque-Americans and sponsors activities and events beyond those offered by the individual clubs.

On the academic side, Basque studies and research are fostered through the unique Center for Basque Studies housed at the University of Nevada-Reno, which publishes numerous scholarly and literary works on Basque topics through its University Press. Boise State University (BSU) additionally offers a Basque Studies Program where students can earn a minor in Basque Studies. According to the BSU website, the Basque Studies Program “involves all aspects of the language, culture and history of the Basque people” (n. pag.). Furthermore, the city of Boise has a Basque Museum and Cultural Center (BMCC) that provides a look into this ethnic group’s heritage through exhibits, collections, and tours. It is the only Basque museum in the country and serves as a gathering place for events and educational opportunities for people of all backgrounds interested

in learning more about Basque culture. Founded in 1983, its mission, as stated on its website, is “to preserve, promote, and perpetuate Basque history and culture.” In an effort to promote language maintenance, the BMCC offers various levels of Basque classes for adults which individuals of all ethnic backgrounds attend regularly.

The BMCC also operates the *Boiseko Ikastola* or Basque Pre-School, the only one of its kind outside the Basque Country. According to its website, the *Boiseko Ikastola* began in October 1998 when “a group of parents and educators with pride in the Basque heritage and a desire to see their children, as well as generations to come, learn the Basque language, made that dream a reality” (n. pag.). The Basque Government financed their first instructor and supplied instructional materials based on the curriculum being used in the Basque Autonomous Community and still continues to support *Boiseko Ikastola* year after year. Some in the Boise Basque community had hoped that the *ikastola* would make a difference in the usage of the Basque language; however, the reality is that English has become the predominant language among the majority of the diaspora population here, and given the lack of new Basque immigrants, the eventual loss of *Euskara* is a real possibility.

The Basque Government has actively been promoting efforts to teach *Euskara* overseas. Through HABE, a Basque government institution which works to help adults learn the Basque language, an online Basque language learning program called BOGA was developed and made available to local Basque clubs. In addition, several clubs (such as the one in Boise) offer face-to-face language classes for adults. A number of second- and third-generation Basque-Americans travel to the Basque Country regularly to visit friends and family, as well as to attend Basque immersion schools, known as *barnetegi*.

The stage of Basque emigration due to economic and political oppression has come to an end. There are scholars who believe that, lacking a new influx of immigration to the diaspora communities, maintaining ethnic identity may be increasingly difficult. Totoricagüena, however, disagrees and argues that such opinions are based on “the traditional view of emigration being a one-way and one-time phenomenon; that emigration must be a physical move; that culture is stagnant; and that diaspora ethnicity necessarily must be synonymous with homeland ethnicity”



(*Boise Basques* 42). She believes that this is not the case with the Basque diaspora because return migration is becoming more common with descendants “returning to their roots” in *Euskal Herria* to attend study abroad programs or for other reasons.

These return trips have occasionally given rise to an interesting development: In a turnaround to the practice in which immigrant Basque men returned to their homeland to find brides and bring them back, some of the younger members of the Basque-American community – mostly females – are going back to the Basque Country to study the language or on vacation and end up marrying Basques there. Modern travel is safer and cheaper than it used to be for the first Basque immigrants, making it possible to visit the homeland more frequently. In addition, new technologies such as the Internet, Skype and social media make it easier for Basques in Europe and Basques in other communities across the world to network and stay in contact with each other.

Totoricagüena believes that “the Basque diaspora is going through a critical phase in its existence” and that “the necessity of chain migration and the energy infused into a community by a new immigrant from *Euskal Herria* may be replaced by a surfing ‘virtual migrant’ of Internet communications” (*Boise Basques* 42). In a modern and globalized world, it may no longer be necessary for diaspora communities to receive new immigrants, nor for anyone to physically travel to the homeland. Perhaps, Totoricagüena adds, “Basque ethnic identity, language, information, etc., might be maintained through electronic communications without ever leaving one’s home, a ‘downloading’ of identity” (42).

In an interview with Basque Radio and Television (EiTB) reporter Igor Lansorena, Totoricagüena spoke of the challenges of maintaining the Basque culture and traditions in the United States. She stated that, until a few years ago, “the definition of Basqueness was very traditional” because it was associated with playing accordion or singing old songs from the civil war era; “it was to maintain the culture of their parents and grandparents.” The key to getting the younger generations on board is to show Basque-American teenagers that “it is cool to be Basque.” However, she also knows that there are places in the United States where ties with the Basque Country are not as strong as they are in Boise, Idaho, and where the members of the diaspora community do not speak any of the languages spoken in the Basque Country. In order for these

communities to keep their Basque identity, some sort of reconnection is needed.

### **2.1.1. Basques in Idaho**

In the national consciousness, there is perhaps no state more closely associated with Basque people and culture than Idaho. Approximately two percent of the state's population is part of this ethnic group, and especially in the state's capital Boise, Basques are an integral part of the social fabric, with numbers estimated to be around seven to ten thousand. Many prominent Basque-Americans, such as Pete Cenarrusa (Secretary of the State of Idaho from 1967–2003), Ben Ysursa (Secretary of the State of Idaho from 2003-2015), or David Bieter (Boise's mayor) have been elected to office. What is most remarkable about the Basque community in Idaho is that over 90 percent of its members can be traced back to the province of Bizkaia.

In *A Travel Guide to Basque America*, Nancy Zubiri points out that research has found pioneers with Basque last names in Idaho territories as early as the 1860s. The largest influx of Basques to this state, however, took place in the late 1880s. Discoveries of silver in southwestern Idaho drove some of these initial settlements but these pioneers soon left mining to go into sheepherding. They wrote home asking their neighbors and family members to join them, which led to hundreds arriving in the first one or two decades of the twentieth century (355).

During the first decade of the twentieth century, when total immigration into the United States reached its peak of 8.8 million, Bieter and Bieter outline in *An Enduring Legacy: The Story of Basques in Idaho*, the small Basque community forming in Idaho also expanded. By the year 1910, there were 999 Basques recorded in the total state population of 300,000. Most of the early Basque immigrants to Idaho were males under thirty, and more than 96 percent of them came from the province of Bizkaia. More than three-quarters were single, and of those who were married, half had left their wives behind. They did not have much money (fifty-three Boise-bound Basques who arrived in New York between 1897 and 1902 apparently only had an average of \$36.50). They were also not well educated; in 1910, only 50.9 percent of the Basques in Idaho were able to read and write (*Enduring* 30).

Fellow Basques in the state of Idaho as well as the boardinghouses (*ostatuak* in the Basque language) that had been established helped ease these immigrants' adjustment to a new culture and environment. The *ostatuak* allowed them to slowly explore American culture while simultaneously establishing small Basque communities in towns throughout various states, which functioned as safe havens where immigrants could retreat from American society. Shepherding jobs helped Basque men get settled in Idaho, but the boardinghouses helped keep them there (*Enduring* 43).

As we have seen, the boardinghouses went far beyond providing for the immigrants' basic needs of food and lodging, or a place where they could receive mail from home; they also offered a network of social support that contributed to their physical and mental well-being. Basques in Boise formed a tight-knit community that worked hard to help fellow Basques with almost any need they might have had. They set up mutual aid groups as early as 1908 to help their members with social security and unemployment benefits, which were unavailable in the United States when the Basques arrived. By the 1920s, for example, two private Basque insurance companies, the *Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos* (Mutual Aid Society) and *La Fraternidad Vasca Americana* (American Basque Fraternity) had been set up in Boise. These organizations served men exclusively, assisting them with the cost of hospital care, death benefits, and even repatriation expenses. In *Basque Diaspora*, Toticagüena narrates that a woman named Escolástica Arrandiaga Ondarza recognized the need to offer similar services for women and, in 1930, she helped set up the American Basque Fraternity Auxiliary group for Basque women, serving as its president for thirteen years (234). This organization furthermore promoted U.S. citizenship as well as learning English in order to help with the Americanization of Basques (235).

Someone who became quite well-known among the Boise Basque community is Juan ("John") Archabal, who arrived in the Boise Valley in 1893 when he was twenty years old. He managed to eventually build a large sheep operation and hired other Basques to work for him. This man's life is a true rags-to-riches story, as narrated by John Bieter in *Portraits of Basques in the New World*. Archabal fits the profile of the typical Basque immigrant at the end of the nineteenth century: "a male of agrarian background, with little or no education, who came to the United States to make money and planned to return to the Basque Country" (83). However, he married in 1901 and two years later declared his intent to become a U.S. citizen. Like many Basques of his

generation, John Archabal chose to marry someone of the same ethnic descent. Benedicta (“Bene”) Aldecoa had arrived in America in 1898 from Bizkaia and spent the years before her marriage working as a cook in a sheep camp. After their marriage, the Archabals moved to Boise, where their oldest daughter Hazel was born three years later.

Archabal managed to build substantial financial strength due to his hard work and entrepreneurial spirit, and from the 1920s to 1940s regularly provided work to between sixty and ninety men, becoming a major employer of Basque immigrants and gaining major status among the Boise Basque community (*Portraits* 86). His brother-in-law, Juan Domingo Aldecoa, started out with sheep but then converted to cattle ranching. Nowadays, the Aldecoas are one of the wealthiest families in the state of Idaho.

While her husband ran the business, Benedicta oversaw the household and raised their children. She was apparently known as “a quiet woman who always dressed nicely and held the busy home together” (*Portraits* 87). Having been born and raised in the “Old World,” Bene took on the traditional role of wife and mother. With some help from other Basque Country females, “she cooked, cleaned, and ran an immaculate and well-ordered household in a day when women were acutely aware of how these things were to be done.” Since she spent most of her time at home, Benedicta did not learn to speak English as well as her husband. And, as they grew up, their children spoke more and more English and increasingly less Basque (*Portraits* 87).

The Bieters’ book *An Enduring Legacy* retells numerous stories of first-generation sheepmen in Idaho, such as Francisco “Frank” Ciriaco Bilbao, and also present a few vignettes of women’s lives. They tell of the men’s dark and lonely days while herding thousands of sheep in the mountains and how they often yearned to return home. Men like Frank very rarely came down to town because they were determined to save money and there were apparently too many temptations and ways to spend money in towns like Emmett. When he did come down from the mountains, however, one of the places Frank used to frequent was a Basque boardinghouse where he danced with the young girls who were employed there. This is where he met his future wife, Frances.

Frances was only fifteen years old at the time she met Frank. They were married one year later, in 1936. Frances says that Frank liked her because she “wore bib overalls” and he knew that she “would be a hard worker, that’s why he liked me” (*Enduring* 13). After they married, Frances took a job cooking for the men in a lambing shed. A different woman described her average day as a sixteen-year-old boardinghouse maid as “work, work, work—you know—work, work, work—that’s all —work, work” (*Enduring* 49). Jay Hormaechea, another Boise Basque, relates how women “had to do all the dirty work: scrub the floors, clean the toilets.” They “became machines, laboring long, monotonous day after long, monotonous day. Lacking any amenities, they relied on their own hands to finish their work” (*Enduring* 51).

Before boardinghouses were established and provided a means for hundreds of Basque women to immigrate to the United States, the only female immigrants were wives or fiancées of Basque men who had established enough financial security to buy a house and start a business. The 1900 United States Census, for instance, recorded only five Basque females in Idaho. But just as shepherding offered a way for men to immigrate, the boardinghouses began to pull young, single women from Bizkaia to work as domestics. As new generations of native Basque Americans were born, women often became the principal carriers and preservers of cultural tradition as well as primary agents of Americanization, as they sought and encouraged their children to seek the educational and material benefits of the United States.

The second generation grew up as Basques at home and as Americans in public. The good work habits and values instilled in them by their immigrant parents, along with the educational opportunities they received, provided a solid base for a successful life in the United States. Most Basque parents worked extremely hard in professions that required backbreaking manual labor, so they set high expectations for their children and emphasized that education was the most important thing in the world. These immigrant parents wanted their children to have better work opportunities to keep them from experiencing the exhausting work and difficult life they themselves had faced. For the Basque children, the school system was perhaps the single most Americanizing force. Many Basque-Americans “climbed the social ladder to become managers, bankers, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. In the process, they became more American” (*Enduring* 49).

### 2.2.2. Basques in California

As Oiarzabal recounts in *Gardeners of Identity*, Basques had played a significant role in the exploration of the Californian coast and, under both the Hispanic and Mexican administrations, helped establish missions, forts and local governments (39). When gold was discovered in 1848, hundreds of thousands of people moved to California. Basques also made their way to this region, initially from Latin America and, once the transcontinental railway system was completed in 1869, new immigrants made their way west after their arrival in New York (47). Due to the influx of new immigrants, San Francisco County became the largest Basque settlement in California (68).

San Francisco Basques experienced a fairly quick upward social mobility, Oiarzabal notes (*Gardeners* 72). He quotes Arrizabalaga's "A Statistical Study of Basque Immigration into California, Nevada, Idaho and Wyoming between 1900 and 1910" which indicates that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, California Basques had very diverse occupations, even though Basque immigrants in other parts of the American West were mostly employed in the shepherding and ranching industries. Around 1910, between one third and one half of Basques worked in agriculture but the jobs of raising sheep and cattle were left to new immigrants. Permanent residents or Basques with U.S. citizenship had jobs as laborers or worked in hotels and laundry businesses. As the sheep industry declined, they took jobs as bakers, construction workers, or cooks and, by 1910, two-thirds of Basques in California worked in cities (*Gardeners* 73). And later, most Basque immigrants to California in the 1960s and 70s worked as gardeners, bakers and cooks (*Gardeners* 74). Many of these individuals had moved into gardening and landscaping businesses when the Japanese lost their control of this industry after they were sent to internment camps during World War II. Oiarzabal quotes a San Francisco Basque: "Gardening was like working in the farm, we like to be independent; no bosses" (*Gardeners* 76).

As mentioned earlier, Basques settled according to regional ties and kinship, and most California Basques have origins in the Navarra and Iparralde regions. Oiarzabal studied Bay Area Basques through questionnaires distributed in Basque clubs. With regards to age and gender, he found that "[o]ver 64% of Bay Area Basque clubs members are male" and "over 65% of their members were over forty-six years old [...] while only over 11% were between eighteen and thirty

years old” (*Gardeners* 94). In the San Francisco Basque associations, “53% are part of the first generation born outside the Basque Country,” which means that almost half of total membership is still made up by the immigrant generation (*Gardeners* 95).

Oiarzabal also notes that, “in the Bay Area over 66% of Basque club members speak Basque, and over 31% speak not only Basque but also Spanish, French and English,” especially the older members (*Gardeners* 99). However, he also found that less than 1% of the grandchildren’s generation speaks the Basque language. This shows how challenging it is to maintain a language like *Euskara* in the diaspora, where regular contact with fluent speakers is increasingly difficult as the first immigrant generation is slowly passing away. Even though the numbers show that many of the immigrant Basques speak *Euskara*, it was either not passed along to the younger generations or the predominance of English and the lack of opportunities to practice the language are leading to its demise in these communities.

Oiarzabal argues that Basque communities abroad exhibit a “duality of coexistence,” meaning that separate identities, such as being Basque and American at the same time, are compatible and not problematic. Also, new generations of “Basques born in the U.S. are replacing their parents’ and grandparents’ French or Spanish state identities and loyalties to France and Spain with their American citizenship and allegiance to the U.S.” (*Gardeners* 111).

In conclusion, California has the largest Basque population in the country, with the San Francisco Bay Area having “one of the oldest and largest concentrations of Basques in the nation” (*Gardeners* 112). Given that the first immigrant generation is slowly passing away and that the Basque language, which is often seen as an important identity marker, is only being transmitted to the younger generations at a minimal level, Oiarzabal raises questions about whether “Basque culture and linguistic identity in San Francisco is ‘diluting’” and how the generations that do not speak *Euskara* will articulate their own Basque identity (*Gardeners* 113).

### 2.2.3. Basques in Nevada

The state of Nevada is located between the two largest Basque population centers of California and Idaho, and it has the third largest Basque population in the United States. As Zubiri explains, Nevada still has desolate roads and wide open spaces that help conjure up the image of lonely herders surrounded by sheep which is so closely associated with Basques in the American West (243). Reno is also the place where the monument to the Basque sheepherder was built. It is a five-ton, 22 feet high bronze sculpture by Basque artist Nestor Basterrechea that “represents a sheepherder carrying a lamb on his shoulders under a full moon” (266).

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, booming mining towns were established in this state when gold and silver were discovered. Raising sheep to feed these mining towns provided jobs and a livelihood for some small communities. Mining continued to play a role in the state’s economy but tourism, Zubiri writes, is the main industry these days. And Basques bring a lot of tourism thanks to festivals like the Elko National Basque Festival or the one held in Winnemucca. And, of course, the restaurants along Highway 80 provide hearty Basque food.

In the Western mountain ranges, hundreds of aspen trees were carved by bored or lonely Basque sheepherders. Some just carved their initials or the dates they were there, while others wrote poems or drew pictures, but their “most common subjects were women and sex, their homeland, or ... their *baserri*” (Zubiri 247). The Basque tree carvings have become quite an artistic legacy in the aspen groves of the West.

In addition, the University of Nevada-Reno (UNR) has the strongest Basque Studies Program in the country along with a substantial Basque library, which holds more than 50,000 books. The University of Nevada Press publishes the Basque Series, “which has gained a reputation as one of the most successful specialized book series among the country’s university presses” (Zubiri 244). UNR also runs the University Studies Abroad Consortium through which around thirty U.S. universities offer their students semester- and year-long courses at the University of the Basque Country. Many of these participants are third- and fourth-generation Basques interested in learning about their ancestors’ homeland and also learning the Basque



language, which often the second generation never learned or forgot. These exchanges provide Basque-Americans with a new and fresh perspective of their ancestors' homeland which departs from the nostalgic images frozen in time of their parents and grandparents, and it may also help renew the younger generations' interest in keeping Basque culture alive.

Robert Laxalt (1923–2001) is probably the best-known Basque-American writer from Nevada. He founded the University of Nevada Press, which published almost all of the books he wrote after 1964. Through his works, Laxalt brought Basque identity to the forefront of those living in the Western States. His older brother, Paul Laxalt (born in 1922), served as Nevada governor from 1967 to 1971 and as United States Senator from 1974 to 1987. It is likely that the local popularity of Robert's most well-known book *Sweet Promised Land's* played a role in his brother Paul's early political victories in the state of Nevada.

Laxalt's parents, Thérèse and Dominique, had emigrated from the French Basque Country in the early twentieth century. Thérèse accompanied her husband as he worked as shepherd and ranch hand for various ranching outfits in California and Nevada. She also worked, cooking three meals a day for as many as thirty ranch hands. In 1926, the Laxalts moved to Carson City, the state capital, where they operated the French Hotel and owned the original Ormsby House. When Dominique went back to the sheep business, Thérèse tended to their joint business interests and assumed much of the task of raising their family of six children. Her dream was to give all the Laxalt children a college education so that they would earn their livelihoods with their minds rather than their hands, as most of their ancestors had done in the Basque Country.

In 1967, the Leisure Hour Club of Carson City nominated Thérèse Laxalt to be "Mother of the Year." This nomination led to her being called Mother of the State of Nevada for 1967 by the Nevada Committee of the American Mothers Committee, Inc., the official sponsor of National Mothers' Day. The nomination letter said the following about Mrs. Laxalt:<sup>12</sup>

It is not often that one individual can be found who so well embodies the many traits of character which have come to be highly regarded in mothers; our nominee

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<sup>12</sup> Nevada Women's History Project. Women's biographies: Thérèse Alpetche Laxalt. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

... exemplifies to a rare degree the qualities of courage, cheerfulness, patience, affection, understanding and homemaking ability... Because the entire Laxalt family has shown such appreciation for home, church and country, their example is a blessing to the community and state in which we live. (n. pag.)

The state of Nevada serves as the setting for a number of Robert Laxalt's literary works, such as *The Basque Hotel* (1989), *Child of the Holy Ghost* (1992) and *The Governor's Mansion* (1994), a trilogy based on his own family's immigrant experiences from the nineteenth century through the present. Laxalt's daughter Monique also narrates her grandmother's life in the state of Nevada in her semi-autobiographical novel *The Deep Blue Memory*. Urza's first novel is a fictionalized story of immigration told from the point of view of the granddaughter of Basque immigrant grandparents and daughter of a prominent first-generation family.

Gregory Martin's *Mountain City*, one of the five main literary works that will be studied in detail in this dissertation, is a memoir of the life of a town of thirty-three people in remote northeastern Nevada. By the end of Martin's unsentimental but affecting memoir, only thirty-one people — none of them children — live in Mountain City. The town's abandoned mines are testimony to the cycle of promise, exploitation, abandonment, and attrition that has repeated itself through the West of the United States. Yet the comings and goings at Tremewan's, the general store that Martin's family has operated for more than forty years, reveal a vibrant community that includes salty widows, Native Americans from a nearby reservation, and a number of Martin's deeply idiosyncratic Basque-descended relatives.

Another work by a Nevadan Basque-American author is Mary Ancho Davis's *Chorizos in an Iron Skillet: Memories and Recipes from an American Basque Daughter*, an intimate cookbook in which the author recalls her family's personal traditions and history and shares special memories of her mother Dominga's cooking. Ancho Davis was born in a Basque hotel in rural Battle Mountain, Nevada. She graduated from the University of Nevada-Reno, and worked teaching Spanish to both high school and university students. Her mother Dominga, who immigrated from Bizkaia, brought with her many traditional family recipes, which she put to good use during the decades she spent cooking in a ranch. Soon after arriving in Nevada, Dominga realized that her

ancestors' culinary traditions would need to be adapted since some of the ingredients were not easily available and American tastes were different from those back home.

As Ancho Davis narrates in her book, her father José Ancho was born in 1892 in a small village in Navarra, where his family faced a life of poverty and hardship on their *baserri*. Being the eldest child, José was meant to inherit the farm but instead decided to travel to the U.S. to build “a large nest egg that would be in place upon his return to Navarra.” He planned to “send the money he earned in America back to his family, who would put it in a Navarrese bank” (2).

José initially worked as a sheepherder and met Dominga Urriola, who was employed in a Basque hotel in Jack Creek, Nevada. After they married, José became foreman for a large ranching, cattle, and sheep organization operating in the state. Just around the time when their children were born, the Anchos found out that all the money José had been sending back home had been spent by his family, so there would be nothing for him to go back to.

In the introduction to her book, Ancho Davis speaks of the Martin Ranch, where she and her siblings grew up. It was part of the W.T. Jenkins Company, which ran about 10,000 cattle and 20,000 sheep. “Many of its employees were immigrants, mostly Basque but some Italians, Germans, and others. The sheep-producing part of the company was virtually all Basque” (1). Since José was fluent in Basque, Spanish, and English, it allowed him to communicate with most of the workers. He never returned to the Basque Country and died age 68. Dominga was a widow for twenty-one years until her death in 1981.

Dominga Urriolabeitia was born in 1896 in a small village in the province of Bizkaia. As a teenager, she was sent to the city of Bilbao to work as a waitress in a restaurant. Ancho Davis does not offer enough details in her book, but briefly mentions that Dominga was apparently meant to marry a young man who was to inherit a neighboring *baserri*. However, for unknown reasons, her mother decided that Dominga had to migrate to the United States, where she worked in a Basque hotel. Dominga ultimately shortened her last name to Urriola because apparently people were unable to spell or pronounce Urriolabeitia correctly. After Dominga married, she went from

working in the Basque boardinghouse to working as a ranch cook. She also helped her husband manage the Rock Creek Ranch (*Chorizos* 6).

Even though *Chorizos in an Iron Skillet* is primarily a Basque cookbook, Ancho Davis recalls memories of her childhood and offers wonderful details about life and meals on her family's Basque ranch. Through the stories about her mother, the author provides the reader with insight into the experiences of a first-generation immigrant woman like Dominga. The book is also a first-person narration of the author's own experiences as the daughter of immigrants making their livelihood in an isolated area of the state of Nevada. One striking memory, for instance, is that during elementary school Mary was sent to the town of Battle Mountain to board with the Oyarbide family because the Ancho's ranch was too remote for her to attend school.

"They were very kind to me," Mary narrates, "but I remember feeling traumatized because I spoke not one word of English when I started school" (*Chorizos* 10). This is a memory that other first-generation American-born Basque children have as well. Having grown up speaking Basque at home, and often being surrounded by other Basques in boardinghouses or sheep camps, they had little chance to be exposed to English before starting school.

Another memory is how Mary's father would not let his daughters ride horseback but did allow the boys do so. His reasoning was that the ranch foreman who had preceded him had a teenage daughter who had fallen off her horse and had died from her injuries. Mary expresses her frustration with the double standards that allowed her brothers to ride but not the girls (*Chorizos* 13).

In describing how Basque women adapted their cooking to the tastes of those in their new adopted country, Ancho Davis explains how many Basque recipes call for cooking chicken with tomato, onion, and green pepper but her mother never prepared it this way because "mom learned early on that almost everyone preferred fried chicken" (*Chorizos* 83). At Thanksgiving, their father would kill as many as fourteen turkeys, and their mother would cook turkey, which of course is not a native Basque dish, again an example of adaptation to New World foods.

Ancho Davis mentions that lamb is closely identified with the Basques in the American West and that everyone who is even part Basque is expected to be an expert on how to cook lamb. The truth, however, is that many immigrant Basques came from the seacoast areas of the Bay of Biscay so their diet was predominantly fish-based. This comes as a surprise to many Americans who have so closely identified Basques with sheep and shepherding that they assume that all Basques who worked as herders in this country had also done so back home.

Traditionally, Basque cuisine does not include many desserts. “The true infiltration of American-style desserts into Basque immigrants’ cooking,” Ancho Davis explains, “came when their daughters began to take home economics classes in high school” (161). Dominga’s oven had a broken temperature gage. However, she “would always place her calloused hand in the oven, and she would ‘know’ when the temperature was just right. Those work-worn hands that had cut up countless quarters of beef, using a hand saw, a sharp knife, or a hatchet, were still sensitive enough to be the temperature gage for all of our baking” (*Chorizos* 149). Ancho adds that “our mother, and countless other mothers of many and varied ethnic backgrounds, deserve special credit for creating wonderful desserts for their families, often under conditions that can only be described as less than ideal” (*Chorizos* 149). These were women who were not only strong and hard-working but also stoic and resourceful under often difficult circumstances.

#### **2.2.4. Basques in Oregon**

According to Richard Etulain’s entry on the Basques in *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, the first Basques to Oregon arrived in the late 1880s. Most migrated north and east from Nevada ranches and the California Gold Rush and settled in the southeast corner of the state, most often to take advantage of the opportunities for raising sheep. The number of Basques continued to expand in eastern Oregon into the 1920s and 1930s but started declining in the 1940s. Although Basque populations in the state of Oregon are smaller than in other western states, Jordan Valley was once known as “Home of the Basques,” and it has remained the most-recognized Basque settlement in eastern Oregon. The Basques in this community “established important markers of their ethnic presence by erecting several still-standing sandstone buildings, including three boarding houses, a

“fronton court” (for *jai alai*, *pelota*, or handball), and an essentially Basque-built Catholic church” (*Oregon Encyclopedia*, n. pag.).

Two Oregon state leaders, John Elorriaga, an attorney, and Anthony Yturri, who also had a law school education and became state senator five times, came from Jordan Valley. Both of their families as well as a few others operated boardinghouses in the town. Zubiri narrates the curious story of how Elorriaga’s father had saved up some money and wrote his wife in the Basque Country to come and join him. But she told him that “she wasn’t about to bring her children to Indian country” (*Travel* 441). In order to convince her to come to Jordan Valley, Elorriaga apparently built a replica of his wife’s family home in a town outside Bilbao. After Elorriaga’s death at a young age due to a mining accident, his wife operated the house as a boardinghouse and it provided her and their four children a livelihood.

The interwar years substantially changed the character of the Basque-American presence in Oregon. Economic hard times as a result of the Great Depression, immigration restrictions, the Taylor Grazing Act, and assimilation processes took their toll. The 1924 immigration quota restrictions for Spanish and French immigrants lessened the number of herders available from the Old Country, which forced the existing ones to have to do more of their own work. In addition, when the New Deal Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934, Basque livestock men who relied on public lands to graze their sheep immediately felt a sharp pinch. The Taylor Grazing Act led to a quick downturn in the sheep business, forcing Basques to cut expenses and reduce the size of their flocks.

Furthermore, the sheep industry also suffered the negative effects of international competition and diminishing demands for wool. As the economies of Spain and France gradually improved after World War II, fewer Basque men were interested in migrating to the American West. The prospect of working as poorly paid herders in lonely and difficult conditions under the open sky, far away from their homeland in Europe and removed for most of the year from other Basques became less and less appealing. Americans also did not want to do such hard and lonely work for meager pay, so ranchers began searching for herders in Mexico, South America, and even countries such as Nepal (*Oregon Encyclopedia*, n. pag.). Given that the numbers of Basques in

Oregon were already relatively small to begin with, eventually Basques married non-Basques, and the Basque language has all but been lost in Jordan Valley.

### **2.2.5. Basques in Wyoming**

Wyoming is one of the country's least populated states. However, the two traditional industries of sheepherding and mining attracted some Basques, mainly from Iparralde and Bizkaia, to small and isolated communities such as Buffalo and Rock Springs. In Buffalo, the Basques have been predominant enough that the rest of the community is aware of their culture, but in Rock Springs it has been difficult for them to pass on their traditions to younger generations and build any significant level of visibility (Zubiri 494).

How did a small community like Buffalo, which is located in the north of the state and did not even have a railroad in the early days, manage to attract a significant Basque population? The history of the Basque presence in Johnson County, whose main city is Buffalo, begins with the arrival of Jean Esponda in 1902 as reported by Dollie Iberlin and David Romtvedt in their book *Buffalotarrak*. Most Buffalo Basques originated in the French-Basque village of Baigorri (Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry in French), because Esponda, who came from this town, settled in that area of Wyoming. He was heading west in 1902 when he ran into a sheepman from Wyoming on the train who convinced Esponda to come work for him. Eventually, Esponda built a sheepherding operation that became the largest in the region. For nearly two decades, he continued to recruit other Basques from his own natal village and a neighboring one. He became known as the “King of the Basques” and passed away in 1936.

Apparently, all the existing Basque families in the Buffalo area have some connection to the original pioneers, the Esponda brothers, which demonstrates the tight interconnection of the community. Ellis Island records appear to show that around 500 Basques heading for Wyoming had come through Buffalo. By the end of the 1960s, Basque sheepmen owned over 250,000 acres (approximately 390 square mile) of Johnson County land, which was about 76% of the land of the entire province of Nafarroa Beherea.<sup>13</sup> Zubiri, referencing Joseph Castelli's dissertation “Basques

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<sup>13</sup> Pedro Oiarzabal. Basque Identity 2. Web. 28 February 2015. [www.blogseitb.us/basqueidentity20/tag/baigorri/](http://www.blogseitb.us/basqueidentity20/tag/baigorri/)

in the Western United States,” states that the decline in the numbers of Basques after the 1960s was especially significant in Buffalo because there were fewer opportunities to purchase land. According to the United States Census, in the year 2000 there were only 869 Basque people in Wyoming, which is now the smallest Basque community in the American West. In 1983, a small group started the Big Horn Basque Club in Buffalo but, according to Dennis Lawrence, one of its members, it is mostly the older generation that is working hard to keep the club going. Other than the dancers, “[t]he third and fourth generations have been remiss in keeping it up” (Zubiri 510).

The perception of this ethnic group has substantially changed over the years. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, non-Basque people in the American West came to think of Basques as exotic and foreign. This was mainly because they often spoke French, Spanish, and their native *Euskara*, but their English was almost non-existent. Therefore, English-speaking Americans preferred to deal with Basques by selecting a prominent man who spoke English and who in turn became an ambassador in the ranching communities. They often referred to this individual as “the King of the Basques.”

Nowadays, Romtvedt writes in *Buffalotarrak*, the descendants of Basque emigrants in the state of Wyoming are perceived as “hard-working, competitive and frugal people who have, historically, kept to themselves” (13). In addition, Buffalo Basques are said to be “good law-abiding citizens” who “drink, dance and party a lot but they stay out of trouble” (23). Other opinions that non-Basques in Wyoming have about their Basque neighbors are that they are closely associated with Catholicism and that they own most of the land in Johnson County. Romtvedt argues that, in the state of Wyoming, “the largest single factor holding the Basque Community together is ownership of land and the operation of sheep ranches on that land” (23).

According to *Buffalotarrak*, the history of the Buffalo Basques can be divided into three major time periods: 1902-1920, 1920-1950, and 1950-1969. During the first period, “single Basque men came to Buffalo, acquired sheep, and established families. They typically spoke Basque, lived on the ranches and, although dispersed widely throughout the area of sheep-raising, remained a tightly-knit social group” (24). These families consisted of both male and female



European-born Basque parents and were governed by Old World practices. Recreation was dominated by Basque games and the Catholic faith helped maintain Basque identity.

The second period from 1920-1950 saw an expansion in land ownership by Basques and was also a time in which the American public school system began to have a great influence on the Basques. The first generation of American-born Basques was exposed to two educational systems — the Basque family and the American school. The family remained culturally Basque and the language spoken at home continued to be *Euskara*. In addition, close ties were kept to the homeland as well as to other local Basques. The school system, however, stimulated acculturation. “American-born Basques who entered school unable to speak English were often ridiculed by their peers” (*Buffalotarrak* 25).

As these Basque-Americans became familiar with American ways and the English language, when they grew up and married, English became the language of the home, except when one of the spouses was born in the Basque Country. Recreation also started to lose its Basque emphasis with the younger generations playing more American sports such as football and basketball in school. Some Basque dances and the card games were perpetuated. Since there were still many transient herders, the Basque culture and language were preserved, and their need for housing during the off-season encouraged the maintenance of Basque boardinghouses.

During the third period (1950-1969), Romtvedt writes, “there was a decline in two interrelated factors that had played an important part in the maintenance of the Basque community” (*Buffalotarrak* 26). The first decline was in the number of herders that came into the community from the Basque Country, and the second was the availability of land in Johnson County. In this third period, the home still remained a strong influence even though Basque was no longer the common language; the school and community became totally American. As the time they spent in the United States increased, Basques became more politically active, and the first generation of American-born Basques started attending college (*Buffalotarrak* 28).

Cultural identity, however, continued to depend upon involvement in the sheep industry. The lack of new immigrants further removed the Buffalo Basques from their Old World roots.

*Buffalotarrak* argues that “if a distinctive Johnson County Basque culture is to remain alive in the future, it will be based on identity markers other than the traditional ones of Basque language use and participation in the sheep industry” (28). Currently, music and dance are being used as markers of ethnic pride and identity, and the business community has suggested that the dances be performed as part of an organized marketing campaign to increase tourism by profiting from the presence of its “colorful” Basque citizens (44).

The image of the Basques has changed significantly over the past century. They went from being despised as newcomers to becoming the romantic heroes of Western novels and later to honorable, trustworthy, and hard-working people. Non-Basques who nowadays frequent Basque restaurants and festivals see this ethnic group in the context of relaxation and recreation and thus take away “a new image of the hearty Basques who live for good food and wine, for sport and for dance” (*Buffalotarrak* 63). This is a sure way to gain public approval. As William A. Douglass has stated, “American society is most tolerant of ethnic differences in the areas of cuisine and innocuous folk arts” but, in many ways, “the Basques remain as inscrutable as ever” (*Amerikanuak* 395).

*Buffalotarrak* dedicates some space to two of the area’s Basque matriarchs: Jeanne Marie Etchemendy Iberlin, known to most of the local Basques simply as Aunt Jane, and Catherine Iriart, known as Mrs. Marton. Romtvedt dedicates the chapter “1920: Buffalo: Amatxi, Grandmother, the Dignity of Work,” to Jeanne Etchemendy, who became the Basques’ matriarch once there were no more male “kings of the Basques.” Jeanne was a single woman when she arrived in the United States and worked for forty shepherders but was married within a few months. As we have seen in numerous other cases, her life was filled with work and chores. “How little she needs to sleep, the woman awakened by her chores, by her task, by life. And some days it seems she will live forever. The work is always waiting,” writes Romtvedt. But Jeanne likes it that way because she believes that “[w]ork gives a woman a sense of place” (*Buffalotarrak* 49).

The chapter “Wyoming’s Mother of the Basques” by co-author Frances Beckner Thompson is about Catherine Iriart who was born in 1887 in Baigorri. When their brothers were killed in World War I, the family’s five girls had to manage the family farm. During those years

of hard work, the sense of responsibility gave rise to a spirit of independence that provided Catherine with a solid base on which to build her future. At the insistence of her older sister, who had entered the United States before her, twenty-three-year-old Catherine came to Wyoming with the assistance of a cousin who paid for her travel (*Buffalotarrak* 88).

During the time that Catherine worked for a family by the name of Baker, she met Bernard Marton, a young sheep rancher who happened to be from Arnegi (Arnéguy in French), a town just across the river from the Iriart household in France: “I knew his sister in the Old Country,” said Catherine. Her work ethic and sense of responsibility are demonstrated in a poignant anecdote about how she made Bernard wait for them to be married because she was busy with work. The family she worked for happened to have guests at the time, and Catherine did not want to leave them when they needed her help (*Buffalotarrak* 89). Bernard and Catherine had four sons and a daughter ranging in age from eleven to twenty-three years old and a 25,000 acre ranch to run, when she suddenly became a widow.

Not only did Catherine raise her children and manage the farm by herself, but each year in late April she went to the lambing camp to cook for six men in a sheep wagon. She had to bake bread every other day and often chopped her own firewood. After dinner was finished at 9 p.m., she would wash the dishes and go to bed to sleep for just a few hours before rising up again at dawn. “In the daily round of cooking, washing and mending, she had little time for leisure.” When Catherine had any free time, she would go out for a walk over the land she loved. Work for her was said to be “healing and rewarding” (*Buffalotarrak* 92).

She is said to have been a woman of great drive, with a great joy of living, as well as a compassionate woman. She cared for invalids and new mothers, comforted the bereaved, nursed sick shepherders back to health, welcomed everyone to her house, paid for her nephew’s passage to America, and also acted as interpreter for immigrants in stores, banks and at the hospital.

### **2.2.6. Future of the Basque Diaspora in the United States**

Social anthropologist William Douglass has conducted research on emigration and ethnic-group formation and studied the Basques and Basque-American identity. In “Basque-American Identity: Past Perspectives and Future Prospects,” Douglass speculates about the future for Basques as a discernible ethnic group in the United States and argues that, due to its unique demographic history, the Basque-American community has been hindered in establishing itself as a “distinct ethnic group within American society” (184). The reasons cited are that most Basque immigrants were single males from rural areas who initially only planned to stay in the U.S. for a few years before returning to their homeland with their savings, and therefore the Basque-American community was missing the female dimension that was required in order to establish a family life. Even though single women later entered the country to work, mainly in boardinghouses, and went on to marry the Basque men who had preceded them, family life developed slowly and the community remained fairly small and not very rooted in its host society.

An additional reason that is proposed is that Basque immigrants to this country — unlike those who chose to migrate to Latin America — were poorly educated and came from farming or fishing backgrounds. They therefore lacked the leadership skills and professional background to shape opinion in their new society. Since these immigrants were mostly young, single men, they also could not claim to have the life experiences or the moral authority that is typically gained by marriage and age. Douglass argues that early Basque-Americans lacked the professional class of “opinion makers,” such as politicians, doctors, lawyers, journalists, or educators, who typically establish initiatives and shape the visions that define ethnic identity for other immigrant groups in the United States. It was not that all Basques who migrated abroad were uneducated individuals, but the more educated ones chose Latin American countries, such as Argentina, where they could practice their own professions because of their familiarity with the Spanish language. Basques who migrated to the United States generally lacked formal job skills and knowledge of the English language, so their work options were limited to occupations such as sheepherding that did not require special abilities. This close involvement with the sheep industry, Douglass argues, “impeded the formation of a Basque-American ethnic group in three ways” (185).

Of these three ways, the first is the nature of their occupation, which spread shepherders out over hundreds of thousands of square miles of open-range grazing lands, making the formation of Basque-dominated communities difficult. The second reason given by Douglass has to do with the internal distinctions among Basques which limited the emergence of a collective identity even more. Not only do Basques refer to themselves as either French Basque or Spanish Basque, but they further identify with their own regions. Thus, Spanish Basques, for example, first tend to think of themselves as Bizkaians, Gipuzkoans, Navarrese, etc. Before the times of the Internet and the establishment of NABO, the national organization of Basque Clubs, Basques in different states of the American West were vaguely aware of each other's existence but had no regular contact (186).

The third reason Douglass offers is that the imagery surrounding shepherding did not lend itself to ethnic pride. Sheepmen carried a negative image that originated in tramp shepherding, an operation generally run by non-citizens who owned no land and were seen by ranchers (who most often were U.S.-born Anglos) as competitors for water and other scarce resources. Basque-Americans were aware of the negative image surrounding shepherding, which society considered one of the most denigrated occupations. In addition, since a large number of Basques had entered the United States from Spain, the average American associated them with Mexicans or other Hispanics, yet another disadvantage in a society that was prejudiced against Latinos. Boise, however, presents a unique case because most of its Basques originally came from the province of Bizkaia, and therefore it is one of the very few areas of the country where Basques were able to establish a distinct identity without being associated with other ethnic groups (187).

The image of the shepherd started improving once the passing of the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act did away with tramp shepherding and legislation ended up creating an extreme shortage of shepherders in the 1940s. These circumstances made those remaining or those who entered the country to engage in this profession heroes in the public eye ("Basque-American Identity" 190). Furthermore, the social changes of the 1960s led to the "roots phenomenon" in which Americans started celebrating their ethnicity and ethnic differences. All of a sudden, being "ethnic" took on a particular importance and gave the individual who claimed that ethnic ancestry a sense of being special. Being a WASP or simply an American with no ethnic identity appeared to impoverish that individual.

Douglass reminds us that both San Francisco and Boise led the way in the creation of the Basque-American ethnic identity through the establishment of the Zazpiak Bat Club in 1924 and the construction of the Boise Basque Center in 1951, respectively. This was also the time when Boise's Oinkari dancers were established as a club, and their performances at two world fairs provided an opportunity for public displays of Basque identity. In addition, the 1950s were the time of publication of Robert Laxalt's *Sweet Promised Land*, which provided the Basque community with a literary spokesman. The book became a best seller and served to communicate to a national audience what it meant to be Basque. Moreover, festivals began to be organized, and the University of Nevada founded its Basque Studies Program in 1967. A few years later, NABO was established as an overarching organization of all the U.S. Basque clubs. Despite some of these examples of "collective action" in specific communities, Douglass says that "they were few and far between" and most Basques in the American West "entered, struggled, triumphed to some degree, founded families, and raised their children to be Americans" (189). And, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, these hyphenated Americans sought to be accepted into the wider society and were more embarrassed about their parents' foreign accents than interested in displaying their ethnic pride and identity.

Even though there have been opportunities over the past half century to strengthen Basque-American ethnic identity and proudly project it to a non-Basque public, Douglass believes that the culture may not have a glorious future ahead unless its people are able to invent a new identity for the twenty-first century. He cites the changing demographic profile due to the discontinuation of substantial Basque immigration combined with the intermarriage of Basques and non-Basques in addition to the erosion in the use of *Euskara*, which many consider the soul of Basque culture. As the immigrant Basque-speaking generations pass away and the younger generations marry non-Basques, and due to a lack of schools where *Euskara* can be formally learned, the battle to preserve the Basque language has practically been lost in the American West. Douglass also sees the current tendency to externalize and commercialize ethnic identity, for example when boardinghouses, restaurants, or festivals are turned into tourist venues where "Basqueness" is staged, as a trend that risks trivializing Basque culture (196).

He believes that Basque-American communities are experiencing a crisis and that the ethnic identity that was established in the post-war period will eventually come to an end. This identity had its roots in an Old World rural heritage and a New World sheepherding legacy, two worlds that no longer exist. His fear is that the current Basque-American identity is based mostly on symbols and runs the risk of “becoming more show than substance” (197).

Douglass may be correct in pointing out that the post-war Basque identity has served out its purpose and is no longer relevant in the twenty-first century. But it is also true that many aspects of this ethnic group have changed in the diaspora. Basques are no longer just shepherds or boardinghouse domestics. The American-born generations currently include plenty of the professionals and opinion makers – politicians, lawyers, doctors, priests or journalists – that Douglass said were lacking among early immigrants. Also, associations such as NABO are working to promote a more unified “we Basque Americans” mentality as opposed to the original Spanish-Basque or French-Basque separations, in addition to building to improve the interconnectedness among Basques in the United States, Latin America and the Basque Country.

In addition, Basques in Europe are becoming more aware of the existence of a diaspora in the Americas thanks to the institutionalization of ethnic events such as Boise’s *Jaialdi* and the collaboration with and subsidies by the Basque Autonomous Government of diaspora communities. Nevertheless, there are still many struggles ahead if Basque culture and identity has a chance of future survival. According Argitxu Camus Etchecopar in her online essay “Basque Collective Action in the United States: Creation, Identity and Challenges,” only about ten percent of the self-defined Basques in the United States participate in Basque clubs. Unless the younger generations take an active interest in the preservation of Basque culture in this country, the future may not be a bright one.

However, from personal observations of the Basque community in Boise, which I believe may also be applied to the surrounding states with significant Basque populations, it is often women who are most actively engaged in the maintenance and transmission of Basque culture. The *ikastola* in Boise is directed by a woman and the children who attend are taught the Basque language by female teachers. The Basque Museum & Cultural Center also has a female director,

the museum's store is operated by a woman and the BMCC heavily depends on many female volunteers for its fundraising events, such as their annual Winefest. The adult language classes at the Basque Museum are taught by several women born in the Basque Country. Basque-American women are heavily involved with traditional sports such as pala/baleen, which they practice regularly at the Anduiza Fronton Building in Boise. They have a league that is played against players from other U.S. states and even other countries.

Despite this important role that women play in keeping Basque culture alive in the United States, they frequently do so not only without monetary remuneration but also without expecting any major public acknowledgment for their efforts. These cultural transmission efforts mostly happen quietly, in the shadow. As we will see in the following section, women of various ethnic backgrounds have been key players in the settlement and development of this country's western states, but their experiences and contributions were ignored and remained unknown to the general public for long periods of time.

### **2.3. Women and the American West**

Even though the West has played such a crucial role in shaping the image of this country's national identity, the image ingrained in our minds is of white, rugged men looking for freedom in an untamed territory. Women do not normally come to mind. Focusing only on white men's experiences is a one-dimensional and incomplete concept of the West that distorts historical accuracy. It also obscures the roles of many players by not taking race, ethnicity, culture, gender, economic status and other variables into account. While it may be true that in the earlier Euro-American frontier period there were few women in the mining areas and boom towns, once the West was inhabited for agricultural purposes, those settlers consisted largely of families.

In *The Women's West*, Armitage and Jameson write that, as research started to gain interest in western women and their experiences, a number of questions arose, among them how idealized eastern gender roles changed in the West, how the role definitions imposed on women impacted those who could not live up to that ideal, and whether the contradiction between daily reality and idealized expectations led to the creation of new roles for both men and women (4).



The definition of roles has affected both sexes. While women have been limited in their social, political and economic power, men have also suffered from narrow definitions of masculine behavior. Limiting women's roles to those of wife and mother and restricting them to the private sphere of the home in turn placed men in the public sphere and forced upon them the role and responsibility of family caretaker. Such narrow definitions create a sexual and familial division of labor that assigns each member a "proper" place on the role map, limiting their agency to choose.

The following sections will take a look at the roles that defined both men and women in the early pioneering days and which set the stage for their early literary portrayals, along with the establishment of a mythical view of the West in the national consciousness and the relationship of this image to the concept of masculinity.

### **2.3.1. The Myth of the West**

In the 1800s, pioneers traveled west into unexplored territory, known as "the frontier," to conquer and civilize the western United States. The West acquired an identity as the focal point of conquest, whose dominant feature was that of adventure. The main actors in this expansionism were English-speaking white men and women of all ethnicities were invisible.

The term frontier referred to the area of unsettled land outside the region of existing settlements where unlimited free land was available and thus there were endless opportunities for those who were willing to conquer it. Being a frontiersman, a cowboy, a rancher or a gold miner in this so-called "wild West" became idealized and romanticized in the written accounts of the time. The men who participated in this taming of the wilderness were glorified as rough, self-reliant and strong individuals. This gave rise to two "Wests": a real one where pioneers who made their living as farmers, ranchers or miners coexisted along with criminals and saloon girls, and the legendary West of cowboy novels that took root in the American imagination.

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner, founder of the field of Western history, published "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which he read before the American Historical Association during the Chicago World Fair. He set forth a thesis that would become intricately

associated with the history of the West. This ‘frontier thesis,’ or ‘Turner thesis’ as it became known, challenged established views of American civilization that pointed to European legacies as the most notable formative influences in American history. Turner asserted, to the contrary, that it was the American frontier, and not European traditions, that had done the most to spawn the democracy, individualism, and nationalism he saw and celebrated in American society (in Malone and Etulain 1).

Turner argued that the center of American history was actually found at its edges. The frontier was “the outer edge of the wave — the meeting point between savagery and civilization” and “the line of most effective and rapid Americanization.” It was the struggle with the wilderness that turned Europeans into Americans, and Turner made this process the central story of American history (Limerick 20). Scholars of the New Western History, including Patricia Nelson Limerick, argue that Turner’s thesis was also ethnocentric and nationalistic as he ignored gender, race and class in his work, focusing entirely on aspects of American exceptionalism. The one-dimensional aspects of his work can be seen in the stereotypically male frontier myth that endures.

Turner also claimed that, with the 1890 census, after “four centuries from the discovery of America,” the frontier had closed and with it the first period of American history. One problem with this argument is that Turner’s frontier rests on a single point of view: it requires that the viewer stand in the East and look to the West (Limerick 26). Another problem is that the West is not seen as a place but rather as a process, the process through which a relatively “primitive” society is transformed into a more complex one.

Limerick proposes to deemphasize Turner’s focus on the frontier and its supposed end and to understand the West as a place instead of a process. She proposes that “the history of the West is a study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences” (26). For Limerick, the place that roughly comprises the West includes the states of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Turner's singular point of view created a mythical view about the West being conquered and populated by Anglo white men who fought for land against Indians. This image of single-handed masculine conquest and resistance was picked up in novels, movies and other art forms, turning the West into a place of romance and adventure, while neglecting women and domestic elements of family and community. The romanticized vision of the West which captured the collective imagination of this country during the nineteenth century still lingers in the general consciousness; the West is the stage of the Gold Rush, of Indian raids, of cattle barons, cowboys, and outlaws, of gamblers, saloon-hall dancers and the building of the railroad to link East with West (Kowalewski 177).

Many myths and stereotypes were formed about frontier women, such as the notion that the frontier woman often ended up as a dance-hall girl or a prostitute 'with a heart of gold.' This western myth is not just profoundly hostile to women, but it is also hostile to language, and the result is a violence of silencing 'Others.' Women were silenced, Indians (uncivilized savages) were silenced, and so were minorities. Until fairly recently, minorities remained in the margins of stories about the American West. Representatives of various ethnic groups have frequently been portrayed as stock characters, being only given a few lines to say. Limerick aims to give the American West a new focus as a meeting ground of diverse groups and ethnicities tied into the same story and sharing a common ground. For her, the conquest also involved a contest for cultural dominance and a struggle over languages, cultures, and religions. She sees the American West as a "case study in race relations" (28).

Kowalewski points out that, in reference to American western women and, by extension, other minorities, Elizabeth Jameson has proposed that history should not be viewed "through the filters of prescriptive literature or concepts of frontier liberation and oppression, but through the experiences of the people who lived the story" (qtd. in Kowalewski 79). Through the letters and diaries written by women, a lot can be learned about the reality of life in the West during pioneer times. In addition, letters and diaries are written records that can be crafted by any reasonably literate person, regardless of gender or age.

In many of these writings, the landscape looms intimidatingly large. Mountains are particularly important because of their physical ability to isolate as well as to be an obstacle. The concern with landscape is accompanied by themes of isolation and separation, both of physical and emotional distance. Shannon Applegate affirms that “women’s loneliness stems from both physical isolation and psychological alienation from one’s milieu because normal outlets of discourse have been denied to them” (74). She adds that “the diary form has been important to women because it is analogous to their lives: emotional, fragmentary, interrupted, private ... and restricted” (74). Another theme that is often present is that of restlessness because, despite having reached the Promised Land, boom and bust economies kept people moving on (75-6).

The field of anthropology helps us analyze how white Americans thought about the West. Limerick reminds us that a key lesson of anthropology is the “power of cultural persistence” (35). And she further states that, among those persistent values, the idea of innocence is a powerful one. When settlers traveled west, the main motive was the opportunity to improve their lives. Even though, from the point of view of the Native Americans, these whites were trespassers, the whites never saw themselves as criminals and had no intention of injuring others; they saw themselves as pioneers with “innocence of intention.” All they wanted is to acquire personal property, which was in line with the national interest of expanding its territories, while at the same time “extending the domain of Christian civilization” (36).

Life in the mythical West, Limerick adds, was seen as “free, adventurous and romantic” (38) but this is far from reality for women. Missionaries like Narcissa Prentiss, spent most of their day doing hard physical work while suffering from poor health. They cooked in open fireplace and raised multiple children while at the same time they did missionary work. As a white woman who was murdered by Indians, Limerick adds, Narcissa embodies the “innocent victim,” a figure that stands out as a dominant motif in American history. Of all the possible candidates, “the long-suffering white female pioneer seemed to be the closest thing to an authentic innocent victim” (48).

Misfortune typically caused white Westerners to cast themselves in the role of the innocent victim, contrary to all the mythical associations of the West with self-reliance and individual

responsibility (Limerick 42). Misfortune was commonly seen as the doing of outside forces that preyed on innocence and vulnerability, forces that just were unfair. By blaming outside forces, pioneers eliminated the need to assume responsibility for behaviors that courted or caused their misfortunes.

Another powerful and persistent myth about the West, writes Limerick, was the fantasy that westward movement could set one free from the past. The West, with its sunshine and clean, dry air, for example, was sought out as a refuge for people with respiratory illnesses. However, the new arrivals, feeling homesick, attempted to replicate the yards and gardens they had left behind, thus re-creating the problems they were trying to escape. The image of the independent West, where one could start a new life and become independent from the past, soon gave way to the reality that people brought their problems with them. But the West had no magic power to dissolve the past, as people were reminded at all levels.

### **2.3.2. Masculinity in Western Male and Female Characters**

Men have figured prominently in the history and literature about the West. That mythical place portrayed in movies and novels is one where Anglo white men fought for land against Indians and finally conquered and populated the land. This image of single-handed masculine conquest requires imagining men who are rugged, individualistic, dominant and self-sufficient. There is also a calm confidence often associated with the Western hero.

In order to explore the concern of Westerns with the masculine, one must first understand the cultural and historical nature of masculinity. Masculinity, also called manliness or manhood, is traditionally defined as a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles generally associated with boys and men. It is made up of both socially defined and biologically created factors. Therefore, it is different from the definition of the biological male sex. Both men and women can exhibit masculine traits and behaviors. Traits traditionally associated with the masculine include courage, independence, and assertiveness, although traits associated with masculinity can vary depending on location and context, and are influenced by social and cultural factors.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* (1949) that “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman,” and the same can be said about men. Masculinity and femininity are not biologically assigned traits but are culturally and historically constructed and change over time and space. Often, as a consequence of having a penis, children are raised and socialized to become men and are expected to develop heterosexual desires.

Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, in the anthology *Male Trouble*, point out “that masculinity tends to be stabilized by an association with male dominance, patriarchy, masculinism, machismo, heterosexism, or heteronormativity” (qtd. in Worden 2). Mainstream scholarship disregards modes of masculinity that do not fit the mold of dominant manhood. In the Introduction to *Masculine Style*, Daniel Worden affirms that masculinity is not something that one possesses but it is a history made of images, actions, styles, texts, politics, etc. Worden sees masculinity not as a trait but as a “performance” that is accompanied by a series of gestures; one does not “possess masculinity” but rather one “acts in a masculine way” (xiii).

Worden says that his book *Masculine Style* builds on Judith Halberstam’s methodology but he focuses on both male and female masculinity, while Halberstam studies only the latter. In *Female Masculinity* (1998), gender and queer theorist and author Judith (aka “Jack”) Halberstam attempts to identify what constitutes masculinity in society and within the individual. “Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege” (Halberstam 2). The concept of “dominant masculinity” is associated with the power of the state, the power of inheritance, patriarchy, and the social privilege of white middle-class maleness and is dependent solely upon male bodies. Halberstam suggests that masculinity is a construction that promotes particular brands of “male-ness” while at the same time subordinating “alternative masculinities” and in her book proposes that masculinity cannot be reduced to the male body and its effects (1).

Traditionally, there is a persistence in thinking about masculinity and femininity in terms of binaries. However, insisting on a mutually exclusive and fixed relationship between these two terms results in viewing gender as a stable and immutable structure instead of as a series of conventions that can be changed. Worden’s interpretation of masculinity as performance has a theoretical background in Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble*:

*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler critiques the basis of traditional feminist theory on “identity” and “gender” and argues that these concepts, along with sex and sexuality, are performative. The gender into which children are socialized and men have to continually affirm themselves is a cultural construct, which Butler defines as performative. It only comes into existence at the moment a given act is performed and it requires repeated acts that produce the effect of a static or normal gender or what we traditionally consider to be “true gender.” Since masculinity, as well as femininity, is not a pure trait but rather a cultural construct, it can contain contradictions, thus opening up possibilities for revision.

Worden takes these theories and applies them to the analysis of literature, in particular Westerns, because for him literature has the ability to create lives and “imagine potentially unrealizable masculinities” that overcome the constraints of actual lived experiences (4). He argues that the American West is an ideal setting for exploring masculine performativity in late nineteenth and twentieth century America because the literature of this period reflects the shifts the masculinity has undergone (2). In addition, the Western genre is an important cultural product for the analysis of masculinity because of its concern with representations of manhood and male relationships. Westerns almost exclusively picture white men as protagonists, ignoring women and marginalizing other men who do not fit the mainstream mold. In addition, the Western became popular at the turn of the twentieth century, a period in which American men were in an apparent crisis. Through the depictions of “manly men” and their actions, Westerns reinforced and restored the sense of masculinity in American society at the time.

When discussing “performative masculinity,” in particular in connection with the American West, Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), who served as the 26th President of the United States, comes to mind. In fact, Roosevelt as the exemplar of American masculinity has become a major theme.<sup>14</sup> He is known for his exuberant personality, his range of interests and achievements, and his leadership of the Progressive Movement, but also for his cowboy persona and solid masculinity. However, this is a masculine persona that Roosevelt had to consciously build since he was not born with it. He came from a privileged New York family and was a sickly child who

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<sup>14</sup> See Arnaldo Testi. “The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity.” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (1995): 1509-1533.

suffered from asthma. In order to overcome his physical weakness, he embraced a strenuous life. He was home-schooled and later attended Harvard, where he was a classmate of Owen Wister, author of *The Virginian*, which is widely regarded as the cowboy novel that established the “classic tradition” and which Wister dedicated to Roosevelt.

According to H.W. Brands,<sup>15</sup> in order to understand both the public and the private Roosevelt one must understand the impact of his father’s death in his childhood, which denied him the opportunity to come to terms with his own manhood. When his first wife Alice died in 1884 of complications from childbirth, and his mother died the same day in the same house, Roosevelt was understandably heartbroken and in despair. His response, though, was to run away from it all. He temporarily abandoned politics and moved out West to become a cattle rancher in the Dakotas, leaving his newborn daughter to the care of his unmarried sister. Brand adds that, when his second wife Edith was seriously ill, Roosevelt left her to fight in the Spanish-American war.

Daniel Worden suggests that, as an author, Roosevelt rewrites the traditional concept of frontier masculinity. He presents both a militarist masculinity along with the more learned and even sentimental masculinity that he also values. Reading cultivates selfhood and, for Roosevelt, that involves the development of a masculine style through enjoyment. For him, “masculinity is a textual production” (38). In addition, Roosevelt’s works repeatedly emphasized the importance of fashion, bodily discipline, and intimacy to the production of masculinity. Worden argues that Roosevelt uses the West as a way of reaching across difference, that it comes to signify a kind of symbolic, democratic masculinity.

Among Roosevelt’s soldiers, masculinity becomes the unifying force rather than older divisions of region, class or race. Interestingly enough, Roosevelt does not necessarily consider domestic space as being feminine. He proposes that shared parenting duties and emotion, intimacy, attachment, and even weeping are all facets of the masculine self in his works. Worden affirms that Roosevelt’s manufactured masculinity crosses binaries, such a public/private, active/passive, stoic/sentimental, and so on instead of maintaining their separation. While he viewed the militaristic masculinity as a way of strengthening the United States’ position in world affairs, he

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<sup>15</sup> H.W. Brands. *T.R.: The Last Romantic*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997.



also contributed to the development of masculinity as a way of “producing egalitarian intimacies and emotional ties that traverse the traditional division of feminine and masculine affect” (49).

A 29-year-old Roosevelt wrote a series of articles for *The Century Magazine* in 1888, illustrated by Frederic Remington. They narrate stories of ranching and cattle round-ups and the hardships these men endured, while allowing Roosevelt to establish his concept of the “strenuous life” and his robust masculine persona. In “The Round-up,” he writes:

We still live in an iron age that the old civilized world has long passed by. The men of the border reckon upon stern and unending struggles with their iron-bound surroundings; against the grim harshness of their existence they set the strength and the abounding vitality that come with it. They run risks to life and limb that are unknown to the dwellers in cities; and what the men freely brave, the beasts that they own must also sometimes suffer. (867)

In another article entitled “Frontier Types,” Roosevelt writes about searching for some horses he had lost and running into several cowboys he did not know during his search. He says that they spent twenty-four hours searching for his horses and they brought them to him the day after. “All I could do in return was to give them some reading-matter—something for which the men in these lonely camps are always grateful” (835). This is a different Roosevelt than the rough and brawny cowboy; this is the Harvard-educated, New York born and bred Roosevelt who, as Worden argues, also favors a “more learned and even sentimental masculinity” (38).

Leroy G. Dorsey, writing about Roosevelt’s 1899 “Strenuous Life” speech,<sup>16</sup> discusses how during the late nineteenth century more and more American men were concerned that they had become too civilized. Roosevelt himself was preoccupied with an earlier era, addressing most issues facing the country from the perspective of the frontier. He embraced the story of America’s origin “of hardy frontiersmen struggling against impossible odds in an uncharted wilderness during the eighteenth century” (n. pag.). This romanticized notion of masculinity associated with the

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<sup>16</sup> Leroy G. Dorsey. “Theodore Roosevelt, ‘The Strenuous Life’ (10 April 1899).” Web. 1 March 2015.

frontier myth and an agrarian-based past had identified men as “conquerors” of nature. In the new turn-of-the-century business-based economic environment, however, this idea had given way to a “more civilized,” modern notion of masculinity defined by restraint, refinement and gentility. Yet, as men became more “civilized,” they also felt less in control of their environment and thus less “manly” (n. pag.).

In addition to the cultural fears of a decline in masculinity, white American males also felt threatened by a new working class that included increasing numbers of immigrants who were gaining economic and political power. It was exactly at this time of transition that Roosevelt became President. During his presidency, he repeatedly warned American men that they were becoming too office-bound, too complacent, and too comfortable with physical ease and moral laxity, and were failing in their duties to propagate the race and exhibit masculine vigor (Dorsey, “Managing” 425).

As Sarah Watts argues in *Rough Rider in the White House*, Roosevelt single-handedly created a new American “cowboy-soldier” hero model. He “sensed that ordinary men needed a clearly recognizable and easily appropriated hero who enacted themes about the body; the need for extremity, pain, and sacrifice; and the desire to exclude some men and bond with others” (123). Roosevelt himself crafted and consciously lived a “cowboy-soldier-statesman-hero” life, “providing men an image and a fantasy enlisted in service to the race-nation” (123). Eastern readers immediately recognized this new type of charismatic male personality after 1870 as more masculine because he spoke to their fantasies and psychological desires. In their imagination, they saw themselves as masters of their own fate, involved in violent adventure and comradeship with similar-minded men; they saw themselves at home in nature rather than inside office buildings or middle-class homes (124).

But men were not the only ones expected to embrace the “strenuous life.” Roosevelt even charged American women to uphold this kind of life by birthing many children in order to ensure the numerical superiority of native-born Americans over the foreigners that were arriving on U.S. soil in increasing numbers (Dorsey, “Strenuous Life” n. pag.). These exhortations for women to embrace traditional roles of motherhood and sacrifice in the name of nation building came at a

time where new images of women were also emerging. Traditional-minded men of Roosevelt's generation, for whom motherhood was the only proper role for women, feared the popularity of modern female models such as the liberated Gibson Girl created by American illustrator Charles Dana Gibson which began appearing in the 1890s. This new image of feminine beauty as depicted in popular magazines showed a poised and well-bred young woman who was much more spirited and independent than traditional Victorian females. Her eyes showed a flash of mischief that readers loved because it "exemplified the American spirit of resourcefulness, adventurousness, and liberation from European traditions" (n. pag).<sup>17</sup>

Hallmark characters of American masculinity in the late nineteenth century such as Buffalo Bill capitalized on the popular fascination with rugged, cowboy-themed frontier masculinity. Owen Wister's *The Virginian* is another prototypical Western hero. He is a man who is strong, quiet and contemplative, but can be violent when called upon to act. Worden, however, argues that the dime novel genre develops "a distinct masculinity that both resists and, in many cases, directly opposes genteel social conventions that code social behavior through gender" and thus pose a direct threat to "the imagined fraternity of white men" that constitutes the American patriarchal order (18). This "fraternity" refers to "the genteel juxtaposition of scientific knowledge, propriety, and moralism with patriarchal control of property, family life, and women's bodies" (19).

The first of publisher Erastus Beadle's "dime novels" appeared in 1860. These mass-produced Western adventure stories were formulaic and had next to no literary quality, but their popularity is an indication of the degree to which they appealed to the dream life of the reading public. The male protagonists in the Beadle novels evolved towards a handsome hero who is a younger and more genteel version of Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking*. These male characters experienced a development from the traditional Western hero to playing a part in the love story with the female heroine. For instance, Edward Wheeler's character Deadwood Dick is the "Prince of the Road;" he is a young self-made man, a scout and a hunter, but is also "a romantic lover of unquestioned status."<sup>18</sup> In the same story, we encounter Fearless Frank, a strapping young man who rescues a damsel in distress by the name of Alice from Sitting Bull and his band of warriors.

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Dana Gibson. Web. 1 March 2015. <http://www.heraldsquarehotel.com/CDGibson.htm>

<sup>18</sup> "The Western Hero in the Dime Novel." Web. 8 March 2015.

This saving a woman or two before they are victimized is the kind of “performance” traditionally expected from “real” men. But Fearless Frank also bends male gender expectations through his appearance: “One remarkable item about his personal appearance, apt to strike the beholder as being exceedingly strange and eccentric, was his costume--buck-skin throughout, and that dyed to the brightest scarlet hue” (n. pag.).

Fenimore Cooper was frustrated with America’s social changes away from the genteel landowning classes towards the urban factory owner class. He used his novels of manners and social class to illustrate what he believed were the proper gender roles for men and women. The ladies who populated his novels were awe-inspiring in their good manners and incapable of ever saying, doing, or even thinking anything indelicate. As the next section of this dissertation outlines, this is in accordance with the traits and roles that were expected from women at that time, namely refinement, piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. In Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, with the exception of Cora, women tended to play the role of passive sexual objects. However, with the arrival of dime novels, the Western story escaped from the established canons of gentility. This had much more significant consequences for the female characters than for the men due to the radical shift from the model of the genteel and refined woman in the traditional novel to heroines who now wore male attire, were able to shoot and ride horses and generally behaved like tomboys.<sup>19</sup> One such example is Calamity Jane, who dresses, fights and curses like a man.

Willa Cather (1873–1947), who achieved recognition for her novels of frontier life on the Great Plains is, according to Worden, an author who dares to revise the treatment of the frontier by featuring masculine heroines in her works *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918). As Michelle Ann Abate outlines, Cather’s own “gender iconoclasm” was well known. She spent most of her childhood on the plains of Nebraska, cut her hair, called herself “William” and engaged in boys activities (Abate 98). Through her heroines, we are presented with an instability of gender identity, and masculinity becomes a mode of performance in female as well as male bodies (Worden 82).

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<sup>19</sup> “The Dime Novel Heroine.” Web. 8 March 8, 2015.

In *My Ántonia*, the main character Antonia “Tony” Shimerda flexes her muscles and prides herself on being able to “work like mans now” (72). Cather’s “masculine heroines” do not reject the feminine but instead engage in the production of masculinity apart from, rather than in binary opposition to, femininity. They adopt the conventions of masculinity to explore masculine performance and resist submitting to conventional gender roles, thus creating a gender liminality. This female masculinity appears in other literary characters of the American West, such as Calamity Jane.

### **2.3.3. Female Roles in the Nineteenth Century**

Until a few decades ago, accomplished and famous men were the usual subjects of historical studies. Unaccomplished, or so-called “regular,” men, ethnic minorities and women did not typically become the focus of history. Settlement discourse made the West, in particular, an open plane for men’s actions. Women were either completely excluded or, if they were included, it was basically to patronize, denigrate or dismiss them as unimportant. Jensen and Miller point out that “women were not fur trappers, miners, assayers, explorers, pony express riders, cattle riders, military commanders, politicians, railroad builders, or Indian traders, and therefore [were] presumably non-essential in the development of the West” (“Gentle Tamers” 178).

Barbara Meldrum and Beverly J. Stoeltje, among others, have studied the literary stereotypes so frequent in popular westerns. Historians like Glenda Riley and Sandra Myres have also dealt with the images of women. In her study “A Helpmate for Man Indeed,” Beverly J. Stoeltje examines the image of the frontier woman and the roles of women during the settlement period of the frontier, focusing on the latter half of the nineteenth century. Stoeltje outlines that the three images of pioneer women most often encountered in literature are those of the refined lady, the helpmate, and the bad woman, which in turn are mirrored by three dominant male images: the cowboy, the settler, and the bad man. The ideal woman, often encountered as a literary stereotype of the time, was a “chaste, beautiful, princess-like, fragile creature, set apart from the real world upon a pedestal” where men could worship her from afar (27). The environment of the American West during the latter half of the nineteenth century placed hardships on its settlers, and the gentle lady types with sensitive and emotional personalities would suffer great unhappiness

and were unable to thrive unless they adapted their refined ways to the conditions that surrounded them (29).

Barbara Welter explored the image of this refined lady type in “The Cult of True Womanhood” as it appeared in women’s popular literature between 1820- 1860: “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife, woman. Without them [...] all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (152).

Stoeltje points out that multiple traits of the early symbolic frontier woman emerge as characteristic. She was (1.) strong and tough; (2.) took responsibility for the welfare of others; (3.) had a variety of skills which she used often; (4.) provided for her husband’s and children’s needs; (5.) expected no help or reciprocation; (6.) was a helpmate to her husband; and (7.) was highly valued by men for the above qualities, because frontier men did not value the leisure class standards of femininity. As we will see in the section on Basque women, the above characteristics were also traits often found in Basque immigrant women from Spain and France, and which Basque men equally valued.

Among the early European settlers, women’s roles were specifically defined, not only by the men but also by women themselves. The married woman was held responsible for her marriage and expected to do an excellent job of her chores. Bravery and endurance in women were also highly valued on the frontier, while emotional expression in any form appears to be rare and was valued only when successfully repressed (Stoeltje 37).

June Underwood, in “Western Women and True Womanhood” argues that women in the second half of the nineteenth century, just like men, “engaged in purposive group behavior” and brought to the West images that shaped their experiences. “Women’s images, however, were not the same as those guiding men. Western women, like their eastern sisters, organized their lives around domesticity and piety, and then used those concepts to expand their spheres” (“Western Women” 93).

Underwood reminds us, though, that the words used to describe these women in the literature are often the stereotypes that western writers have forced upon them. They are phrases like “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” which echo the prescriptive roles of women at the time. But Underwood stresses that “it is important to note that these ‘civilizing’ women were feisty, bright, funny, and totally human. They were neither masculine Calamity Janes nor victimized drudges.” In short, they were multifaceted real women who “did not submit patiently and passively to the wills of their husbands or to fate” but used their talents to move beyond the private sphere (“Western Women” 94).

Literature depicts nineteenth century men moving west to escape civilization. But women who moved west during the same time period were charged with bringing civilization to the frontier, conserving family values, social harmony, education, and religion. It was important to bring these values to the west because of the national concern with an uncivilized and violent frontier. Therefore, while men were seen as explorers and conquerors of “virgin territory,” the women were there as “civilizers,” to plant gardens and bring order and harmony to the wild frontier towns (“Western Women” 94).

The major components of the social adaptation process are the environment, behavior, as well as images – the symbolic representations of cultural beliefs. The environmental influences are relatively easy to identify as they are concrete and include the location, climate, resources, and other physical characteristics of the space the characters inhabit. Behavior and images, on the other hand, are more difficult to describe and distinguish. Cultural images influence behavior, behavior in turn will influence images, and the environment has an overall influence on the other two aspects.

Furthermore, written descriptions or literary expressions of experience are in turn influenced by the images their authors possess. We thus find, on the one hand, a symbolic environment that contains these images, and on the other hand a physical environment, with both influencing behavior. The adaptation process results from the interaction between the two and it is through the encounters of experience, possessed images, and evolving images that the universe is

restructured by members of the culture and new symbols and images assume the dominant position (Stoeltje 26).

Stoeltje hypothesizes that the environmental demands of the frontier forced a change in women's roles on the behavioral level from those roles they had practiced in their eastern, more "civilized," environment. In addition, cultural images and symbols had to be transformed and adapted, and the division of labor redefined. Finally, the opportunities to change the roles available to women on the frontier were limited so that the symbolic system would not disturb the general order (27).

Stoeltje analyzes the types of frontier female images (the refined lady, the helpmate, and the bad woman) and shows how they parallel and are defined by male frontier images (the cowboy, the settler, and the bad man). The cowboy is the stereotypical Western man as he symbolizes man's conquest of nature and the last frontier. He is generally portrayed as a lonely individual who has a horse and a pistol, is mobile, honorable, in contact with the elements and animals, and occasionally is a member of an all-male group where alcohol (often whiskey) plays a role. The cowboy's ideal woman is the "refined lady;" a chaste, beautiful, fragile creature that the cowboy sets apart from the real world upon a pedestal where he can worship her at a distance. While the cowboy may have this idealized image of women, he is more likely to associate occasionally with the "bad woman," because she is more accessible on a personal and sexual level. When doing so, though, the cowboy crosses over into the role of "bad man." Generally, literary cowboys are shown to shy away from romance altogether and thus really do not have a female counterpart.

The second male type, "the settler," is seen as aggressive, ambitious, determined and self-confident, with abundant physical endurance and vitality, an aptitude for hard work, and an ability to thrive in his contact with nature. It is the settler who typically brings the "refined lady" out to the West. This gentle lady type is the one Barbara Welter explored as it appeared in women's popular literature between 1820- 1860. The genteel woman is sensitive and emotional and embodies eastern Victorian virtues such as piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. She represents the image of women that both male and female settlers brought along with them to the West. Among other things, the new environment required strength and initiative from both men



and women. Female settlers who were unable to adapt to the difficult conditions due to being overcome by fear, loneliness, a yearning for the institutions of civilization, or an inability to participate in the environment, ended up suffering gravely or even breaking down under the physical and/or emotional strain.

The second type of female, “the helpmate,” represents those women who have successfully adapted to the conditions on the frontier. This type of woman has the required physical and emotional strength and the initiative to adapt to the demands of the new environment. She serves as a supportive partner to her husband by handling a variety of daily chores around the home (cooking, sewing, gardening, caring for animals, giving birth to and raising children, etc.) but also deals with emergencies, Indian attacks, droughts, illness and death. The helpmate is a somewhat of superwoman who expects close to nothing for herself (Stoeltje 32).

The characteristics of this woman, as described in the almanacs of the time, can be summarized as follows:

She was strong and tough; took responsibility for the welfare of others; had a variety of skills which she used often; provided for husband’s and children’s needs; expected no help or reciprocation; was a helpmate to her husband; was highly valued by men for the above qualities, for they did not value the leisure class standards of femininity. (Stoeltje 33)

The stalwart women — the helpmates — with their gutsy endurance adapted to any difficult circumstances and didn’t buckle when disaster struck. One example is Willa Cather’s *Ántonia* who survives a near-rape, is seduced and abandoned by a heartless lover, and has a baby out of wedlock but bears her maternal duties with stolid determination. She is able to emerge undiminished from bleak circumstances and create her own happiness.

The clash between the daily reality of life on the frontier and the idealized expectations of women that were brought along from out East, led to a transformation of the images and the creation of new roles for both men and women. Thus, the literature also portrays female characters who have blended the characteristics of the refined lady and the helpmate or “backwoods belle.”

This new type of woman has initiative and bravery but also has the delicacy and refinement needed to sing ballads, read the Bible, or teach children to read books. These women create a social life where there was none and bring culture to the lives of settlers and cowboys.

As to intimate or romantic relationships between the sexes, the literature describes them as “partnerships” rather than “romances.” The successful frontier couple consists of the settler and the helpmate, who is a “strong, enduring, nonsexual helper.” There is no place for the expression of passion or affection between the sexes within frontier society. Stoeltje summarizes the issue affirming that “we can consider economy and industry that help the husband, plus producing “quality” offspring, the valued traits of the frontier woman” (38).

Finally, we have the third male and female images which are the “bad woman” and the “bad man,” respectively. The bad woman is generally single and connected with raw nature and sexuality. In the towns, these women are especially associated with alcohol, dance halls, saloons and rowdy lifestyles. They are not necessarily prostitutes, but are not part of “respectable” society. Their image is defined by their male counterpart; they are bad women because bad men associate with them.

Cowboys and respectable men who visit saloons and associate with bad women temporarily acquire the role of “bad men” but become respectable again when they return to their normal lives. There are also true “bad men;” these are outlaws, like Billy the Kid or Jesse James, who choose not to participate in the institutions of respectable society and operate outside the norms of civilization. They make natural partners for “bad women.” The bad woman is the only one who manages to survive as a true female in the West, as compared to the “helpmate” who must become a nonsexual comrade and the “refined lady” who ceases to exist in her pure form (Stoeltje 40). Passion and sexuality only exist outside the margins of society, as embodied in the relationships between “bad men” and “bad women.”

In summary, the symbolic frontier woman who evolved from the transformation process outlined above was one who was able to manage basic institutions and thus bring civilization to the frontier. In the same way that white males “tamed” the West in its physical aspects, the white

women who followed these men were, as Jensen and Miller call them, the “gentle tamers” of social conditions, which, of course, included those white men (49). This model woman was industrious and resourceful, providing her husband the support needed to succeed. Females who followed the images of the refined lady and the bad woman did not succeed in the new society as, due to their characteristics, they were either excluded from it or failed to survive in it. Therefore, the strong and capable woman who was a comrade to her man and lived within institutional expectations became the symbolic frontier woman, since this female image had the capability to survive within frontier society (Stoeltje 41).

However, while analyzing these literary images may help increase our awareness about their context and their limitations, studying the literature does not necessarily help answer the question of the actual accuracy of these images, or to what extent they reflect the reality of women’s lives. Emigration greatly shifted the work roles and social expectations for everyone, but this was especially true for women. Direct accounts of Euro-American women migrating West in the nineteenth century indicate that women did take over certain work roles that were traditionally male, but women rarely moved into these male work roles permanently. In “Mothers and Daughters on the Western Frontier,” Lillian Schlissel analyzed women’s diaries and personal narratives written between 1840 and 1870 asking questions about how frontier women raised their daughters to take on the social and sex roles required to succeed under the demands of frontier life, and how were girls and women were educated in communities where masculine virtues were exclusively extolled.

In their original communities further east, a “woman’s sphere” was typically quite firmly established, and thus the “westward migration was a major dislocation in the emotional fabric of women's lives” (Schlissel 29). In the first place, it was not the women who determined to make the two-thousand-mile journey but husbands or fathers, with women’s protests falling on deaf ears. Men wanted the upward mobility that the ability to own free land would bring them. Women wanted to keep the family together and thus went along with selling their homes and gathering their children and possessions to follow their men.

Once on the Overland Trail heading west, women performed the same traditional roles they had done back home; i.e. washing, cooking, caring for children and the sick, serving as midwives and tending to the dying (Schlissel 30). But in addition to these well-established roles, they were forced to do whatever needed to be done, thus taking on the role of the “hired hand.” Among their new jobs were driving the animals that pulled the wagons, loading and unloading wagons when crossing rivers, melting lead and making bullets when their groups was attacked by Indians, or standing guard at night. This has been referred to as “the double burden of femininity,” since they did not only traditional females tasks but, in part, also men’s tasks.

In addition, Schlissel found that obedience and obligation “thrust daughters into the only frontier they were to know, the frontier of the wage-working class” (32). Immigrant daughters often had to take on wage labor to help support their foreign-born parents and siblings. The easiest job that a woman could get was that of household domestic, typically working in a rural or urban home for another woman. As Jensen points out, however, women’s occupational history has not been adequately described by historians, mainly due to the focus on industries, such as mining, that used mostly male labor in the West. In addition, society devalued women’s work and the census system generally did not record it either. For instance, rural women were quite industrious, but the census did not record their farm work because, in the nineteenth century, it was not considered a full-time occupation. And the work of the many prostitutes who could be found in mining and railroad towns was also not defined as “wage labor.”

#### **2.3.4. Women and Immigration: Basque Female Immigrants**

What role have women played in Basque immigration and the formation of diaspora communities? Numerous researchers, among them Pedraza, agree that “the role of women in migration had been totally neglected,” at least until recently, in part because the belief most commonly held has been that “the international migrant is a young, economically motivated male” (303). Even though data of international migration to the United States shows that women have outnumbered men consistently since 1930, it continues to be assumed that “males typically make the decision to migrate and that females follow” (306).

Totoricagüena's research about Basque immigration appears to confirm these assumptions. In *Boise Basques*, she presents data from her studies showing that the typical emigrant to the United States in the early 1900s was a single male between 15 and 25 years old whose relatives in the West needed his labor on their farms. These young men were also at a prime age for escaping from Spain's mandatory military service. A few women emigrated together with their husbands, and when Basque single women left their country, they were sent to live and work with family in the Americas, usually helping in a boardinghouse or cooking meals for ranch workers. The most common pattern was for the husband to travel alone to look for work and settle in the new community, while in the meantime the wife would stay behind running the family business or farm and raising the children. Once the husband had spent several years saving money, he would either send for his wife and children or would personally return to his home country with the earned savings.

An example of a married woman's perspective of the emigration experience is presented in *Boise Basques: Dreamers and Doers*. Cirilia Armaolea was in Lekeitio at the end of the 1950s caring for their first daughter while her husband Patxi Marcuerquiaga was herding sheep in the United States. She went to the U.S. consulate in Bilbao to apply for immigration paperwork, and the officers there insinuated that her husband might be living with another woman. Asked what she would do if that was the case, Cirilia responded, "Get my own job." The consulate officers' insulting reaction was to inquire whether she had ever worked as a prostitute.

In addition, she was shocked to find out that she was no longer Cirilia Armaolea, but instead was now registered as Cirilia Marcuerquiaga. "She no longer existed as a separate person with her own identity. In some ways the U.S. was modern, but in others it preserved its conservative British influences, which still seem ridiculous to many Basque women" (*Boise Basques* 37). This expectation that, in the United States, married women have the same last name as their husbands is an issue that several Basque women in Boise have complained about in my conversations with them. I met a woman called Maite (or Mari Tere) and when I asked her last name, her response was, "¿El de aquí o el de allí?" ("The one here or the one there?"). She had married a Basque man in the U.S. but was unable to keep her maiden name, as is customary in Spain, once she was married.

The single women who came to the U.S. from the Basque Country at the beginning of the twentieth century did so for economic reasons, just like the men had done, after hearing about jobs from other Basques. Emigration was an appealing option for many women because their options back home were much more limited than they were for men. Unless a woman happened to inherit the family *baserri*, her alternatives were to marry someone who had or would eventually inherit a farmstead, become a nun, or go to a city like Bilbao to work as household help for a meager salary of about ten pesetas<sup>20</sup> a month (*Enduring* 50). Some single women thought that they could come to America, do some work in a boardinghouse and eventually find a rich boyfriend who would marry and take care of them. But they quickly discovered that not only was work in the Basque hotels far from glamorous, but it was actually much more backbreaking and strenuous than labor on the family *baserri* back home had been (*Boise Basques* 50).

A majority of Basque single women in the American West ended up operating or working in boardinghouses that catered to the single men who had come over as shepherds. When discussing Basque history in the United States, shepherding and Basque boardinghouses are indeed inseparable. The shepherding industry is what had enticed men to leave their homes in the Spanish or French Basque Country and come to the American West. The Basque hotels and boardinghouses offered the communitarian space in which they could practice and keep alive their cultural traditions in the New World.

Statistics show that, in general, a boardinghouse or “*ostatu*” would be established within five years after the first Basque arrived in an area and started a sheep business. These ethnic hotels were typically be located near the train stations so that newcomers could easily see the Basque names on the hotel signs as soon as they stepped off the train. Generally, someone from the *ostatu* would go to the train station to wait for the trains, shouting greetings in *Euskara* and looking not only to help their fellow Basques but also trying to gather possible new customers (*Boise Basques* 49).

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<sup>20</sup> The “peseta” was the currency of Spain between 1869 and 2002. In 1967, the exchange rate of Pesetas to U.S. dollars was established at 70 Pesetas = 1 USD. In 2002, when the Euro replaced the Peseta, the exchange rate was around 166 Pesetas = 1 Euro.

These *ostatuak* were set up in the same way as European boardinghouses, with individual bedrooms and shared bathrooms down the hall. Meals were served in the main dining room, which the hotel owners reserved for their boarders during the week, but on the weekends they would welcome other Basques from the community to share meals and socialize. Eventually, many boardinghouse owners turned their dining rooms into restaurants in order to increase their income by not limiting themselves to their boarders, and so the clientele was ultimately no longer exclusively Basque.

The *ostatuak* could be said to be precursors to the current Basque Centers in that they provided immigrants with a common location where they could socialize with others from their ethnic group, play card games, speak their own language, enjoy home-cooked meals like those from back home, and have the mental comfort of knowing that there would be people at these hotels to offer help with multiple issues such as medical, legal, or employment questions. Some Basque boardinghouses had an attached two-wall court, known as *frontoi* or *pilotaleku* in Basque (*frontón* in Spanish, *fronton* in French) where boarders could play sports such as *pelota* or *pala*. In addition to supplying shepherds with the most immediate needs of lodging and meals, and providing boarders with needed information and a place where they could receive mail from home, the boardinghouse owners went as far as offering economic assistance to fellow Basques who needed it (*Basque Diaspora* 215).

For women in particular, these institutions provided options for financial independence that females in the late 1900s and early twentieth century otherwise would not have enjoyed. Hundreds of Basque women worked at the hotels buying supplies, taking care of laundry, cooking and serving meals, doing house maintenance, and caring for children. Even though financial independence was an advantage, for the majority of these women, work in a Basque hotel meant “seven days of unrelenting physical work preparing meals, laundering by hand, ironing, and cleaning after boarders” (*Basque Diaspora* 252). Nevertheless, being employed in such a crucial Basque institution also allowed these women to meet other Basques and interact with the rest of the community in which they had settled down, which in turn offered them the comfort and support of a social network.

As Jeronima Echeverria's studies showed, the boardinghouses became institutions that facilitated the networking of Old and New World Basques and promoted their functional, emotional, and psychological well-being. Often, the couple who owned the hotel consisted of an immigrant Basque male and a U.S.-born Basque woman. The husband would have the connection to the Old World and speak the Basque language while the woman would have the command of English and knowledge of New World matters necessary to assist boarders and other customers.

Even though customers would refer to the hotel by the name of the *etxeko aita* (father of the house), the quality of the boarders' stay was much more heavily influenced by the personality and hospitality of the *etxeko ama* (mother of the house). In fact, as Echeverria points out, "some of the *hoteleras* were much more critical to the success of their enterprise than is often imagined" (*Home Away* 218). One characteristic that the female boardinghouse owners shared is that they were in their hotels at all times. While the husbands frequently had other local jobs as shepherds, miners, or construction workers, the women were completely dedicated to the matters of the *ostatu* and to raising their children among the heavy demands of running their hotels. Since the Basque boardinghouses became a second home to those who lived in them, and the *hoteleras* were available to help boarders at all times, they became like surrogate mothers. As boardinghouse operator Maria Echanis put it: "These boys and girls were so far from home. They not only needed good food and a room they could call their own; they needed companionship" (qtd. in Echeverria, *Home Away* 219).

Just like real mothers do, some of these *etxeko amak* also dished out "tough love," as Patrick Bieter relates when writing about Boise *hotelera* Leandra Letemendi:

Anyone who showed up late for one of Leandra's meals was subjected to a serious tongue lashing. Yet one young Basque who learned the importance of punctuality in Leandra's house also benefited from her compassion. When she discovered him alone crying on the first birthday he had spent away from home, Leandra put her chores aside, sat down, and talked the young man through his homesickness. (qtd. in Echeverria, *Home Away* 221)



These women owners and managers became surrogate mothers to hundreds of young men and women who were not only boarders or came in for meals, but they also became close friends and confidants, thus providing these immigrants a true “home away from home.”

The first-generation American-born female hotel keepers, who were obviously familiar with the English language and American customs, tended to serve as unpaid interpreters for doctor’s appointments, visits to the bank, travel arrangements, writing and reading letters for those who were illiterate, and even provided psychological counseling to all those suffering from loneliness. The *etxeko amak* also frequently arranged dates or served as chaperones between their male boarders and the girls in their employment. When the wives of shepherds were pregnant, they often stayed at the boardinghouses until the delivery of the child, so the female owner also took on the role of midwife. Additionally, they cared for Basques who were ill or even on their deathbed. If there was no Catholic church in a small town, weddings, baptisms, and rosaries would be held at the boardinghouse.

Since single men used the Basque social networks to find wives in their new host society, endogamy among Basques was prevalent. According to Totoricagüena, one survey shows that close to 96% of the 119 Basques who immigrated to Idaho between 1889 and 1939 married other Basques (*Boise Basques* 28). The boardinghouses contributed greatly to the formation and continuation of Basque communities. They came to be known as “marriage mills” because many young single men would meet their future spouses among the girls who worked there as cooks and chambermaids. Given that the ratio of men to women was disproportionately high, and Basque men could not hope to date English-speaking American women due to their lack of English language skills, there was a lot of competition for the relatively few Basque single women.

In Idaho, Basque boardinghouses were family homes of the owners but also served as family residences for the wives and children of shepherders. Because most herders spent large amounts of time alone in the hills tending to their flocks, they did not own a home. Therefore, those who got married needed a place for their wives to stay. Once the wife was pregnant, she needed the help of a midwife to assist in the birth of the child. Evangelina (Ruby) Ysursa Basabe is a Boise Basque who was born at the Modern Rooming Hotel, owned by her parents Benito and

Asunción Camporredondo Ysursa. Asunción had spent all morning preparing food for the boarders' meals when her labor contractions began. Since there was no time to reach the hospital, Asunción delivered her daughter with her own sister-in-law serving as midwife. Ruby describes her mother's delivery as follows: "Mother said that Dr. George Collister came by later to make sure Mama and baby were okay, but those Basque women were tough. I mean they never thought of complaining. They just did what they had to do and got right back to work" (*Boise Basques* 49).

This image of women as strong, tough, and hard-working is a persistent one in studies of Basque female immigrants, but also in Basque-American literature, as we will see. In *Home Away From Home*, Echeverria references a study conducted among Great Plains non-Basque women with regards to their labor. They were found to be engaged in three modes of work: 1) farm labor, raising crops, milking cows, and preserving food; 2) work at home or on the farm to produce goods that could be sold or exchanged for others; 3) work outside the home to earn money to help support their household. Echeverria argues that Basque *hoteleras* actually engaged in a combination of all three modes of work by raising animals for their kitchens, sewing for their customers and families, trading for goods not found in their boardinghouses, and finally living with their families in their workplace (*Home Away* 224). Ruby Basabe, a Boise Basque, explains that her mother, who operated the Modern Rooms Hotel, had fifty rooms and every day they cooked family style lunches and dinners for all their boarders. Maria Josefa Aspiri Aldape is said to have spent her wedding night in 1911 scrubbing the floors of her boardinghouse and preparing for customers (*Boise Basques* 54).

For women who migrated to English-speaking countries such as the United States where, in addition to the normal struggles faced by any immigrant, newcomers experienced the added problems of language and communication, the solidarity and interconnectedness to other women in their same situation was especially important. In particular for women who did not work outside their homes, ethnic institutions such as the boardinghouses and later the Basque Centers acquired an increased role in their well-being and support.

Emigration did not only have repercussions for the host societies but also created social problems in the immigrants' homeland. In *Amerikanuak*, Douglass and Bilbao present a

seventeenth-century document that states: “In 1640, three-fourths of the population of Vizcaya is composed of women due to the number of men who leave to never return” (72). Totoricagüena outlines that in the Basque Country emigration led to a lack of youth and laborers and in particular to a lack of eligible males for marriage, which in turn “affected the roles and power of women in a society with fewer men” (*Basque Diaspora* 15). Single parenting by women is one such effect, even though it is not a new phenomenon in a country where men in rural and coastal areas often spent long periods of time away from home due to work. On the other hand, the traditional Basque extended family helped single parents by assisting them with the supervision of children and providing a network of aid. In the New World, the women of the boardinghouses often provided this network.

In discussing the colonization of South America, Totoricagüena mentions that the prominence of Basque men in this endeavor is well documented, but it is very difficult to determine what roles Basque women played given the lack of written records. Women’s roles have typically been ignored because of the perception that they only followed men in emigration and did not engage in any activities worth recording. Nevertheless, anthropologists and historians generally agree that women managed small farms and estates and worked alongside the men in agriculture. Basque women were often in charge of raising animals (such as chickens and hogs) near their farmhouse and cultivated gardens and orchards so they could produce fruits and vegetables for their family’s consumption. In addition, women were charged with the administration of the family household as well as with managing the food and clothing needs of their families or those of workers living in their household (*Basque Diaspora* 156).

In South America, women who came from upper economic classes assisted in financial accounting and family banking, and those who had an education and were literate assumed the role of communicators and disseminated information from relatives and friends by reading and writing letters for others. In Argentina and Uruguay, a number of women were employed in the dairy industry, and in the latter country they also managed Basque hotels and worked as cooks and chambermaids, an occupation that Basque female immigrants to the American West also took up, as we have seen (*Basque Diaspora* 156).

Even though the presence of Basque females in the New World was much more limited than that of single males, one must emphasize that it was the presence of women that ultimately allowed for the establishment of Basque communities in the American West. What was the women's motivation for leaving their homeland and immigrating to the United States? In the case of married couples, it is frequently difficult to separate the men's and the women's motivation because it is quite common for a couple to move where the husband has the best chance of employment. However, it is also true that for many single women, their situation as a female in their home country provided added incentives for leaving. Totoricagüena argues that "women also migrated to escape the various forms of oppression that are unique to their gender status" (*Basque Diaspora* 466). One can imagine that, as a female in a patriarchal and deeply religious Catholic country like Spain, women felt stifled by the limitations and expectations forced upon them. It must have been liberating to leave behind such an oppressive environment to live and work in a place like the American West. Once they experienced an improvement in their social and economic status in their adopted countries, women had little motivation to return to *Euskal Herria*.

On the other hand, women who were used to being respected as mothers and homemakers in the Basque Country may have had a negative experience in the United States where motherhood and homemaking do not enjoy an equally high status. Totoricagüena quotes Rachel Bard who describes how, around 700 B.C., women in small communities in the North of the Basque Country and larger ones in the central and southern regions "were in positions of power, because inheritance of land and honors were through the female line, and women were responsible for the farming" (*Basque Diaspora* 71). She adds that these leadership roles have often been maintained into modern days, with women generally enjoying a high status of respect in the Basque Country.

Furthermore, when Basque women left their homeland, they had to renegotiate their gender roles because in the Basque Country they often "exercised equal power and demanded and received respect and admiration from each other and from men" due to the matriarchal social structure of a society that was used to centuries of male emigration where fathers were absent for decades, and to a marine economy where men were away from home for months at a time. In such a society, women from rural villages and coastal areas were used to taking on roles as leaders in household

finances, medical decisions, and other family matters (*Basque Diaspora* 468). However, these old roles were no longer available in their new society due to the change in family dynamics.

In discussing the role of gender and ethnicity in Basque communities abroad in *Basque Diaspora*, Totoricagüena affirms that “Basque women in the diaspora have endeavored to perpetuate ethnic identities for themselves and their families” (466). She argues that women have the role of not only maintaining but also modifying social processes. Since they are often perceived as the “cultural carriers” of their ethnic group, women assume the role as “reproducers of ethnic ideologies” (466). It is often women who pass on language and cultural traditions to the younger generations.

It is unfortunate that women have been omitted from most studies of Basque migration simply because they were thought to be mere followers of the men who migrated. They have been relegated to secondary roles and seen only as migrants’ wives, mothers, or daughters but never considered as individuals who themselves may have consciously chosen to migrate. Since changes in a woman’s status undoubtedly affect her male partner, just as the opposite is true, it is ill-advised to think of immigrant women as passive dependents.

Totoricagüena herself is the daughter of Basque immigrants. She was born and raised in Boise and, through her mother, Mari Carmen Egurrola, has observed first-hand the personal and emotional stress that accompanies a migrant woman’s experience of attempting to rapidly adapt to a new environment in order to survive “in a transnational double world” (*Basque Diaspora* 472). Mari Carmen, who was born in Gernika but has lived in the United States for over fifty years, apparently continues to struggle with the challenges of living between two worlds. According to Gloria, her mother “has characteristics of many American women.” When she visits Gernika, they call her the “Amerikanoa” (the American), but when she is in Boise, she is referred to as “the Basque lady.” Women in this situation may feel a frustrating lack of acceptance or belonging both at home and in their adopted country. They are so-to-say “living in limbo” and may feel as if they are never completely connected to one place.

This sociological concept is known as the marginal man theory. It was first coined by Robert Ezra Park (1864–1944) who was one of the leading figures of the so-called Chicago school of sociology. Park did pioneering work on urban life, human ecology, race and ethnic relations, migration, and social disorganization. He originally presented his seminal concept of the “marginal man” in his 1928 article “Human Migration and the Marginal Man.” His student, Everett Verner Stonequist (1901–1979), later elaborated the theory in his 1937 book “The Marginal Man.” The term was meant to explain how an individual who is influenced by two differing ethnic or racial groups or is suspended between two cultural realities may struggle to establish his or her identity. In Park’s words: “The marginal man...is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures...his mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and, either wholly or in part, fuse.”<sup>21</sup>

For Gloria herself, her own identity has always been an inseparable mix of being both American and Basque. “I am not any less American for being Basque,” she said in an interview to EiTB on 12 November 2008, in which she discussed the role of the Basque communities abroad in a globalized world. “It is adding identities; it is having different combinations of identities.” She also affirmed that “the relationship between the Basque Country and the Diaspora is improving and the definition of who is Basque is widening.” Being Basque is no longer exclusively limited to those who are nationalists, have Basque last names, or speak the Basque language.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert E. Park. New World Encyclopedia. Web. 3 March 2015. [www.newworldencyclopedia.org](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org)

## CHAPTER THREE

### MAIN ANALYSIS: PORTRAITS OF BASQUE WOMEN

#### 3.1. Women in the Shadow

When thinking of the American West, the most common image is one evoked by Susan Armitage as she described what she called “Hisland” during the opening session of the first Women’s West Conference in 1983. This mythic place is one where “under perpetually cloudless western skies, a cast of heroic characters engage in dramatic combat, sometimes with nature, sometimes with each other” (*Writing the Range* 3). These heroes have diverse occupations: “they are mountain men, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, farmers, miners, and desperadoes, but they share one distinguishing characteristic – they are all men” (3). Women were rarely included and if they were, they only appeared “as brief diversions in a saloon or brothel” or they played indistinct supporting roles as “stoically oppressed or angelically supportive, and certainly voiceless and passive” (3).

In *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*, Douglass and Bilbao note that “the occupational specialization of the Basques isolated them physically from their neighbors and identified them with one of the least prestigious activities in the region’s economy.” As a result, “the Basques remained a ‘phantom-like’ element within the society of the American West, largely ignored by the literati” (367). But, if the men were largely ignored, the women received even less attention.

The neglect and denial of women’s contributions is older than western civilization and pervades written history. In the Neolithic period, just as men acquired and controlled the land, women also became a resource to be acquired and controlled, and one that could be used as property to be exchanged with men from other tribes. Classical Greeks distinguished between the private and the public, defining the former as limited by the impositions of biology, thus ruling out choice, while the latter was defined as the realm of action and choice. Greek philosopher Socrates,

although trying to advocate a sort of gender-blind social equality, still insisted that the accomplishments of women are naturally inferior, believing that biology plays a role in achievement. His disciple Plato, in Book V of *The Republic*, stated that “all the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, and in all of them a woman is only a lesser man.” However, to believe that woman is “only a lesser man” allows society to neglect the study of women’s issues in favor of a ‘his-story’ written by and about men.

In “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” Linda Kerber writes that, in 1840, historian and political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville addressed the situation of American women in the second volume of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville may well have been the first social critic to systematically examine the situation of women in U.S. society. His observations are restricted to a section of his book entitled “Influence of Democracy on Manners Properly So Called” where he alludes to the separation of male and female spheres in his observation of young middle-class American women. Tocqueville affirms that single women enjoy a relatively high degree of independence, which encourages a similarly high degree of self-confidence. However, as soon as the young woman marries, “the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes [her] within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it” (qtd. in Kerber 10).

This metaphor of the ‘sphere’ as a limiting boundary on women’s choices was a figure of speech that historians would continue to rely on hundreds of years later when describing women’s roles in society. “Women were said to live in a distinct ‘world,’ engaged in nurturing activities, focused on children, husbands, and family dependents” (Kerber 10). They were defined by their family life and had to behave according to others’ expectations and claims on them. A female’s position in society depended on the position of the men in her family or the man she married. Thus, women participated in the social hierarchy not as independent individuals but defined in relational terms, as daughters, sisters, mothers, or wives.

As opposed to this inner space or private sphere of female domesticity, men were said to inhabit the outer space of the public sphere. It was not only male historians who adopted the metaphor of separate spheres to select what to study, but female historians such as Barbara Welter



in “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” and Gerda Lerner in “The Lady and the Mill Girl” reinforced its centrality. These two historians had been influenced by the popular success of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which – after its publication in 1963 – was widely credited with sparking the beginning of the second-wave of feminism in the United States.

Friedan documented the widespread unhappiness of women in the 1950s and early 1960s and famously called this situation “the problem that has no name.” Her influential book discusses the lives of several housewives from across the country who displayed great unhappiness despite living in material comfort and apparently being happy wives and mothers. The expression “feminine mystique” refers to the false idea that women are naturally fulfilled by devoting their lives to their husbands, their household, and their children. In her book, Friedan writes about the role of wifehood, and she states that “the new image this mystique gives to American women is the old image: ‘Occupation: housewife.’ The new mystique makes the housewife-mothers, who never had a chance to be anything else, the model for all women” (43). She is also aware of the pressure and restrictions generated by motherhood. These women “must keep on having babies, because the feminine mystique says there is no other way for a woman to be a heroine” (45).

For her article “The Cult of True Womanhood,” Welter sampled women’s magazines, diaries, and fiction during the period of 1820 to 1860 to analyze the image of the ideal woman in the mid-nineteenth century. Writers of the period had identified a complex series of virtues as those that define “true womanhood.” Welter calls this stereotype the “Cult of True Womanhood” and, following Friedan, also refers to it as “mystique.” The four cardinal virtues “by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society” are piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (11). The home was said to be women’s “proper sphere” and religion was valued because, although it occasionally allowed women to go out of the home and interact in the community, it did not take them away from that place where they belong. Welter’s choice of the word “cult” purposely implies a negative judgment of the separate domain assigned to women because such separation kept women subordinate and it not only took away any options to choose their own destinies but ultimately denigrated them.

Lerner's important essay "The Lady and the Mill Girl" introduced social class into the analysis of the economic, political and social status of women in the first half of the nineteenth century. It attempts to interpret the ideological shifts that took place in American society with regards to the "proper" role of women. She argued that one result of American industrialization was the "increasing differences in life styles between women of different classes" and that "as class distinctions sharpened, social attitudes toward women became polarized" (11). She added that middle-class (white) women used the "cult of true womanhood" as a vehicle to elevate their status to that of "the lady," a status formerly reserved only for upper class women. Paradoxically, as more and more poor women had to leave their homes to go to perform industrial work that involved low status, low pay and low skill, the slogan of "a woman's place is in the home" took on an increased urgency in nineteenth-century society.

Marxism also argued that women's sphere took on a separate form that was subordinate to that of men. Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, outlined the dichotomy of the public versus the private mode of life, arguing that household management had become a "private service" with the nuclear family's home as the most important "psychic locus" and that, while the home was "understood to be a woman's place," it was "ultimately controlled by man" (137).

As Kerber states, "awareness of the socially constructed division between public and private, often expressed through the image of the sphere, gave energy to much Marxist-feminist writing in the late sixties and early seventies" (13). Marxism's interpretation not only described the separation of spheres, but also explained how the separate spheres were not caused by biological determinism or cultural accident but were social constructs that served the interests of the dominant classes (14). However, the loosely metaphorical language of separate spheres avoided any mention of race and class, and discussions of the subject mainly focused on the experiences of white middle-class women, although certainly other classes and races cannot have been immune to this ideology.

It has become clear that the concept of separate spheres is a convenient metaphor for complex power relations in social and economic contexts. In this regard, in capitalist systems since

the late eighteenth century women have been seen more as “helpers” than real workers, and since their true place was said to be in the home, when they did venture out into the public arena, they were assumed to be best suited for employment and tasks that replicated housework. By definition, this kind of work is typically unskilled, nurturing, temporary or interruptible, and is often rewarded not monetarily but rather by intangible means of appreciation such as “love” or “appreciation.” Women’s work has consistently been viewed as having less value than that of men (Kerber 28). Although in our modern times men’s and women’s spheres often overlap and the boundaries are not as clear-cut as they may have been centuries ago, our private and public spaces are still gendered in important aspects.

Stauffer and Rosowski affirm that “women have been – and still are – largely excluded from discussions of literature of the American West” because the myth of the West “glorifies a concept of heroism in which male endeavor and male figures often become the central characters” (v). The Western novel not only ignores women, it often hates them. For western literary heroes, women are either sexual or work objects, or they are helpless victims. Stauffer and Rosowski argue that, for a male character to become a hero in Western American literature, “all he has to do is struggle, see things as they really are, and benefit from his knowledge” (v).

In *West of Everything: The Secret Life of Westerns*, Jane Tompkins states that “the qualities required of the protagonist are ... self-discipline; unswerving purpose; the exercise of knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and excellent judgment; and a capacity to continue in the face of total exhaustion and overwhelming odds” (12). Tompkins explores the significance that the Western hero has had for the way twentieth-century Americans thought about themselves, and how it influenced people’s beliefs and codes of conduct. She affirms that physical sensations are fundamental to the Western genre because the impact that images have on the body and the emotions is what helped shape people’s ideas and values.

One example is Louis L’Amour’s *Hondo* (1953). In the first sentence, the hero “rolled the cigarette in his lips, liking the taste of the tobacco,” he “squint[ed] his eyes against the sun glare,” and “his buckskin shirt ... seasoned by sun, rain, and sweat, smelled stale and old.” The reader is able to feel all of the unpleasant tastes and sensations that the hero experiences. Tompkins adds that

“he is hot, tired, dirty, and thirsty much of the time; his muscles ache. His pain is part of our pleasure. It guarantees that the sensations are real. So does the fact that they come from nature: the sun’s glare, not the glare of a light bulb; a buckskin shirt, not a synthetic wash-and-wear” (3).

Tompkins argues that Western novels and films had the power to transform both men and women during the first three quarters of the twentieth century and that “people from all levels of society read Westerns” (4). One of the reasons for their popularity is that they offer city dwellers and others the hope of escaping from the often grim and unhappy “conditions of life in modern industrial society” into “fresh air, sunlight, blue sky, and open space” (4). That big sky western space is a symbol of freedom and it answers a deep human need for self-transformation “into something purer and more authentic, more intense, more real” (4).

Tompkins compares the elements of the sentimental novel, the most popular literary product in the nineteenth century, with those of the Western, which was popular in the twentieth century. She concludes that the Western is “the antithesis of the cult of domesticity that dominated American Victorian culture” (39). The place where the male heroes of the western novel live and act is nature, the outdoors. In the sentimental novel, actions happen indoors, in homes and parlors. The Western hero shows little emotion, dislikes conversation, expresses himself through physical action, is a loner, and rejects God, in contrast with the domestic novel’s free expression of emotions, the connections and conversations with other women, and evangelical Protestantism. She concludes that the reason why the Western rejects these elements is that “it seeks to marginalize and suppress the figure who stood for those ideals,” namely the woman (38-39).

The literary traditions about women in the West generally view females as ‘the Other.’ In contrast to male heroes, June Underwood writes, women in early western literature are not seen as creatures who are able to grow, learn, and expand to heroism but rather as vehicles for enlarging the male hero’s sense of the challenge and terror of the land (“The Civilizers” 3). Two writers who appear to be exceptions to this generalization are Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz. They portray women who are heroes themselves and as such have to carve out their own space in a society which would prefer to keep them ‘merely female.’ Underwood adds that, despite these noted exceptions, the majority of female characters in western literature exist as the female archetypes of the mother,

the victim, the seducer, or the seduced (“The Civilizers” 3). Even though these images of women are not necessarily incorrect, they do limit and distort the reality of women’s lives.

Underwood adds that, in the nineteenth century, women were generally considered to be physically, intellectually, and economically inferior to men, while they were thought to be superior “spiritually, emotionally, and for purposes of nurturing” (“The Civilizers” 4). Pioneer women who made the arduous trip west, took on the role of “civilizers.” They felt that it was a moral imperative and a God-given duty to transmit religious, social, and humane values to a lawless land. Men who went west did so as “economic explorers,” so their interest was in exploiting the land and protecting private property. Women, on the other hand, were concerned with human welfare and the future of their children. Therefore, they worked hard to cultivate public welfare and set up reform organizations (“The Civilizers” 6).

While altruistic and necessary to establish communities and “civilize” the West, in literature these female social activities would quite likely not make for interesting reading. As Underwood points out, “American literature has always idealized the loner, the individual who acts in isolation, and who, when his space gets too crowded, ‘lights out for the territory’” (“The Civilizers” 9). An example of this is Jack Schaefer’s *Shane*. The author intentionally portrays Shane as an enigmatic character, with an aura of mystery around him. He is a stranger who, one day in the old West, simply rides into a Wyoming valley, enters the lives and hearts of the Starrett family, and then leaves the town as quietly as he came. His last name is never mentioned and no information is given about his past.

This impulse to escape is naturally magnified in literature about the West, where space and isolation are basic themes. But, as Underwood adds, the “romantic individualistic streak in literature is especially damaging to writing about ordinary women’s lives, since community rather than individualism was basic to them” (“The Civilizers” 9). For women on the American frontier, especially for those who had emigrated from Europe and were uprooted from their traditional environment, family and kinship became increasingly important. Having been placed among strangers in the New World, family was the one constant in a world where everything else was different. Regardless of their prosperity, the diaries of women in the pioneer era show common

themes of homesickness and loneliness (not only physical but also psychological and social). The violence of the weather and barrenness of the landscape was a shock for newcomers, and thus the period of adjustment was often long and continued.

Jane Tompkins points out that most Western novels and movies destruct female authority. “Westerns either push women out of the picture completely or assign them roles in which they exist only to serve the needs of men” (40). Often women are used for men to play out their masculinity. Blood is shed for women to be protected. Gun battles and duels take place for women to be avenged. Women are rescued so that the male hero can appear manlier. But, as Tompkins asserts, the narrative ignores women’s own experiences and devalues their lives.

Susan Armitage argues that when women are at all mentioned in western literature, they are frequently “portrayed as uncomfortable and out of place on the frontier. They are reluctant pioneers: afraid of the wilderness, afraid of the Indians, homesick, and often physically or mentally sick as well” (“Reluctant” 40). While this literary portrayal is not completely false, we do know from diaries, journals and letters of actual frontier women that their reality was a lot more varied, representing an entire range of human experiences and emotions (“Reluctant” 40).

Women who had moved west from a more genteel society in the eastern United States would have naturally felt out of place and unhappy on the frontier because it was impossible for them to live up to the genteel standards of domesticity they were used to out east. Frontier conditions, Armitage writes, “prompted an apparently endless round of hard work just to maintain minimum standards of cleanliness” (“Reluctant” 43). Also, in the nineteenth century, the female archetype that was admired was the so-called “true woman.” This was someone who was meant to be pious, pure, domestic, and submissive. Armitage indicates that, in frontier literature, one encounters the image of the woman as the “gentle tamer” or culture-bearer who brings civilization to the West by helping build community institutions such as churches and schools (“Reluctant” 45).

In the pioneer West, women were unable to maintain a female subculture because settlements were often too far apart. They were no longer part of a tight community where they

would have all the female support that they were used to in the places they came from. Also, in the mining camps the population was too diverse and mobile for women to establish and rely on a familiar community. Thus, traditionally male frontier individualism was forced upon these women so they had to become more self-reliant and less communal than they had been before (Armitage, “Reluctant” 44).

In analyzing women’s images in the fiction of the American West, Barbara H. Meldrum points out that women who do appear in western American fiction are not real women but rather images of women. We find “modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schoolmarms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives, and so on. They exist only in relation to the protagonist (who is male).” The female characters we encounter “do not really exist at all – at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play but they are their public roles and not the private women” (qtd. in Stauffer and Rosowski 55). The images of women portrayed in western fiction derive from stereotyped notions of female behavior. These images are false myths: “convenient vehicles to express persistent concepts that may not be universally or everlastingly true” (67). The female characters never demonstrate the internal conflicts that the male protagonists struggle with. Women in literature are defined by their relationships to their children and to men, and many of the problems they struggle with are male-generated.

In the nineteenth century, the feminist movement called for women’s rights. However, as Frances W. Kaye explains, it did this on two grounds which were mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the feminists wanted equal rights for women on the basis of equity, as human beings, individuals, and citizens. On the other hand, they demanded political and social equality for women because, being considered morally superior to men, women were needed to reform the public sphere. Therefore, according to this type of reasoning, men and women were “equal in rights but different in powers.” The conservative argument, however, concluded that because women were better and purer than men, they required protection from the harsh political world and thus need to be confined in the sphere of home and family. “The 19th century suffrage associations accepted the traditional definition of woman’s nature but challenged the definition of her role” (qtd. in Stauffer and Rosowski 135).

Although many writers have advanced the idea that the American consciousness was to a great extent shaped by the frontier experience, western literature often focuses on only half of the story, namely, the male side of the western experience. Wallace Stegner, one of the few comprehensive theorists of western regional culture and literature, set out his general thesis in his essay “History, Myth and the Western Writer” (1967). He argued that dryness or aridity was the region’s unifying characteristic and that all human cultural adaptations proceeded from this physical fact. Consulting a range of narratives written from 1880 to 1960, Stegner characterized them as displaying a tendency toward realist narrative, a nostalgic tone, a belief in heroic virtue, a focus on the romantic frontier past rather than the urban present, and a special attention to western landscape. He also found a recurrent concern for gendered conflict, represented via what he calls the “roving man” and the “civilizing woman” (qtd. in Comer 40).

Krista Comer further outlines that Stegner saw gendered conflict recurring as a defining western theme. In his own novels, women were portrayed “not as symbols of entrapment but as complex characters with legitimate motivations and understandable needs” while men were imagined as “desirous of both western adventure and also domestic fulfillment.” He admits, moreover, that the frontier often meant different things to women versus men (46).

As Comer points out, the pioneering white woman, who is the most frequent representation of nineteenth-century women in popular iconography, is a female who is imagined to have or take few pleasures. Her face is stained with mud, and she is worn out by children, cooking, and chores. She is contained within the home and domestic farm spaces while her husband has the free run of the wilderness. Western womanhood means perseverance against all odds. The pioneering white woman is stoic, stalwart, dependable, hard-working, and loyal. These may be considered positive characteristics, but they are certainly not metaphors of passion and adventure.

White women’s lives in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century were controlled by the authority of the father, the husband or the church, and were defined and limited by family responsibilities and by notions of female propriety (Comer 202). It is difficult to imagine the white woman of those pioneering centuries “opening her legs to anything but the agonies of childbirth” (Comer 161). Non-white women, however, are imagined as just the opposite: always sexualized.



They are portrayed as “the willing squaw, the sweet-scented senorita, the pleasure-giving ‘oriental’,” Comer adds. By this time in western history, the dichotomy of the “while female drudge” or the “good-hearted prostitute” and the sensual Mexican or Indian woman are well-established in literature (161).

In her article “The Literature on Women Immigrants to the United States,” Dorothea Schneider extensively reviews the history of women’s migration to the U.S. as studied in the social sciences and portrayed in literature. She reminds us yet again that the traditional paradigms of immigrant history to this country are mostly based on the experiences of migratory men. On the rare occasions where women are mentioned, it is only “to highlight the crisis that traditional family relationships undergo” (1). In the early twentieth century, a group of female social scientists did make women the subject of their studies, focusing on the lives of working-class immigrant women. Extensive research was conducted on migrant women in urban areas like Chicago, highlighting in particular the relationship between the private sphere of their family and the public sphere of citizenship and political participation which they only entered reluctantly (2).

Studies of women’s history as well as immigrant history were overshadowed by other historical concerns between the 1930s and the late 1960s but did reemerge in the 1970s, thanks in part to the second feminist movement. The new paradigms focused on class and ethnicity. Gender was not a primary mode of analysis. As Schneider outlines, some studies exposed the problem of trying “to merge the traditional focus of women immigrants on family and childrearing with the new realities of being breadwinners and single wage earners in an urban environment” (3). Others looked at women’s history from a different perspective, as part of women’s liberation. They emphasized the theme of women’s self-assertion, focusing on female immigrants building a world of their own. There was a call to reevaluate the treatment of women immigrants in a way “that would lead away from stereotypes of passivity and suffering” (3).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the scholarship about female immigrants focused on the world of their work, both paid and unpaid. Most of these studies looked at fields such as the textile and garment industries, domestic service, and agriculture-related occupations. Among the themes that were studied was the way in which immigrant women reconciled the pressure from their family to

retain traditional roles with those of the workplace to take on a more public role. Published in 1994, Donna Gabaccia's *From the Other Side* provided a concise summary of the scholarship on women and immigrant life in the United States from 1820 to 1990.

In addition to the aforementioned historical and sociological studies, the stories of migrant women are also captured in literary accounts, often authored by female fiction writers. After World War II, Schneider points out, the mode of narration was mostly that of the autobiography. By the 1980s, a new generation of female authors wrote novels and stories about immigrant women. Among the best known are Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez or Cristina Garcia. Thanks to the popularity of fiction and the appeal, especially for female readers, of the themes that these writers deal with in their works, the field of women's immigration history became a major field in its own right in the twentieth century. The past two to three decades have brought major attention to one of the main topics to be studied in the social sciences, namely that of "the mobility of people and its impact upon the relationship of genders" (13).

The previous statements about women's lack of recognition and visibility in the history and literature of the American West are generally also applicable to the works of Basque-American writers. Most of the fictional and non-fictional works studied for this dissertation include women who can be said to live in the shadow of the male protagonists. These women are not prominently featured as lead characters but rather play secondary roles, even though, in several cases, those supporting roles are significant enough to be worth highlighting.

In contrast with their literary invisibility, rural women in the Basque Country have traditionally been accustomed to playing an important role in their families' economic life. For centuries, wives and mothers in farmsteads and fishing villages have run their households alone while their husbands were absent during the months long fishing seasons or due to other work-related responsibilities. Therefore, as Echeverria outlines in "Basque Pioneer Women," this tradition of having to step in to manage business affairs and taking up so-called men's work in the New World would not have seemed unusual to Basque immigrant women.

On the other hand, General Franco's forty year dictatorship in Spain was an extremely patriarchal regime that forbid women's access to the public sphere. During the 1940s, his Falangist ideology was transformed into laws that denied women the right to work outside the home, made divorce unavailable, established serious penalties for female adultery and use of contraception, and discriminated against children born out of wedlock. Changes to these laws were slow to emerge. Women's right to work was restored in 1961, access to abortion (only if the health of the mother was at risk) was granted in 1985, and divorce became legal in 1981.

However, these legal changes did not immediately translate into actual changes in the Spanish mentality regarding traditional gender roles, which continued to predominate throughout the 1990s and still varies greatly across generations. In Basque family life, gender roles are a facet that appears resistant to change. The overall impression is still one of traditional gender roles, with women responsible for housework and childcare while men work outside the home. And even if the woman also works outside the home, she is more often than not still expected to take charge of domestic chores and the care of children.

Even though gender equality studies such as those conducted by Judith Astelarra show that the younger generations who were born and raised after Spain's transition to democracy no longer believe in the traditional division of labor (269), for many women the reality is still that they are largely expected to fulfill their duties at home regardless of whether or not they do paid work outside the home. Basque women continue to feel responsible for domestic tasks and often teach their daughters to feel the same way, while men tend to distance themselves from housework and childcare. The Basques who migrated to the United States in large numbers came from generations where the above traditional gender roles were still very much in vogue, and it is therefore likely that this is how many Basques born in this country from immigrant parents were initially raised.

In order to understand the general image of immigrant Basque women in the United States, we will first present a review of several literary works by Basque-American authors in which we encounter women who play secondary or supporting roles. The literary portraits contained in the novels and short stories that have been selected for analysis in this section deal both with women in the Basque Country as well as immigrant Basques and American-born women. The rationale

for including works by Basque-American authors that feature not only Basque women in the United States but also those in *Euskal Herria* is to present a more encompassing view of Basque females that can serve as a baseline against which to compare and contrast the main five works at the center of this dissertation. By including an analysis of how Basque female characters are presented in both an Old and a New World setting, I am hoping to gather a broader perspective and more extensive material to ultimately determine the differences and similarities in their portrayal.

Since Robert Laxalt is one of the five authors who are the focus of the present research, several of his works (*Sweet Promised Land*, *In a Hundred Graves*, *The Basque Hotel*, *The Governor's Mansion*, and *The Land of My Fathers*) have been included in this section. Novels that are set both in Europe and the United States have been chosen in order to take a more in-depth look at Laxalt's literary portrayal of Basque women.

### **3.1.1. Robert Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land* (1957)**

As noted, Laxalt was a second-generation Basque born of immigrant French-Basque parents. *Sweet Promised Land* (1957), his best-known work, is based on the story of his father, Dominique, and his return to his homeland after half a century as an immigrant sheepherder in Nevada. Olaziregi points out that “[i]t was not until Robert Laxalt's *Sweet Promised Land* that Basque-American identity was not necessarily linked to a nostalgic land, the Basque Country, nor assimilated completely into the American landscape, but was instead linked to a third, ‘in-between,’ space – an intermediate hybrid; a permeable space”(117). This work not only “served to dignify the image of Basque emigrants,” but it also “increased their visibility and brought awareness of their archetypical characterization as shepherds in numerous works set in the American West” (117).

Unlike Mirim Isasi's representation of the homeland as the original land, as paradise, *Sweet Promised Land* explains that paradise is something we can build wherever we go. Nevertheless, this work is hardly a testimonial of an immigrant who has assimilated to life in the New World. Dominique is between two cultures and two worlds that are part of his person but have nothing in

common with each other. He feels a yearning for the Basque Country but, when he travels there, he feels like a stranger and yearns for the U.S. This double consciousness that Dominique experiences can be explained by what sociologists Robert Ezra Park and Everett V. Stonequist called the “marginal man.” This theory explains how an individual who lives in a bi-cultural or multi-cultural situation or is influenced by two races or ethnicities may struggle to establish his or her identity. In Stonequist’s words, it is as if the individual who is experiencing this double consciousness was regarding himself “through two looking-glasses presenting clashing images. The marginal individual passes through a life-cycle: introduction to the two cultures, crisis, and adjustment” (“The Problem” 1).

*Sweet Promised Land* opens with the sentence, “My father was a shepherd, and his home was the hills” (1). This is a story written by a son who wants to fully honor his father’s life by capturing both his struggles and successes in America. His mother is assigned a supporting role as a shepherd’s wife. Nevertheless, the few times that Therése Laxalt is mentioned are sufficient to allow the reader to imagine her as a strong, business-savvy, and self-sufficient woman.

The second paragraph expands on the above opening sentence: “My mother used to say that a man like that should never get married, because he didn’t go with a house” (1). This affirmation becomes clearer when, later on, the narrator adds that as he and his brothers were growing up, they can remember their father’s presence in their home in Carson City “only in rare and fleeting visits” (2). Despite these long absences, the son does not seem to be resentful about his father’s apparently selfishly choice to neglect his family responsibilities in order to live according to his own wishes. A possible reason may be the social assumption that a man, even if he is married and has a family to take care of, does have an inherent right to make his own choices as opposed to women, who are at the mercy of societal expectations of what their roles and duties ought to be.

The narrator tells of numerous incidents in which he, his siblings, and their mother were placed in difficult situations having to go search for their father in the extensive hills and canyons of Nevada. Dominique’s extended absences meant that his wife Therése was left alone raising six children in addition to running a business and a household. The father is apparently able to have it

all: a profession, a home, a wife and children, in addition to personal freedom. The mother, however, has no right to make such choices. Her role is to quietly provide the support that everyone expects of her.

Laxalt's parents had met in Nevada and his father had married his mother "when he was rich in sheep" (*Sweet* 9). She was also Basque, but actually came from "an old family whose position of authority among the lowland Basques dated back to the time of the Romans" (*Sweet* 81). Thérèse Laxalt is said to be a "practical woman" with a much more extensive education than her husband. She had learned about running a business at her parents' hotel and travel agency and in addition had attended cooking school in Paris. In fact, it is very likely that this couple would have never been allowed to marry in the Old Country due to the differences in their social status and education.

When the couple lost everything they had during the Depression, Laxalt's mother "had had to bear her children in rough camps and ghosted little towns" (*Sweet* 9). This is a woman from a good family, educated in the French capital, who in hard times is willing to deal with any circumstances life throws at her. She may be forced to do a lot of sacrifices but she is not a helpless victim. At one point, she decided to take "what little money they had and bought a small hotel in Carson City" where the family was able to prosper (*Sweet* 9). She later purchased other business properties as well as the house where the children were raised. Other women in *Sweet Promised Land*, such as the grandmother back in France, are also portrayed as enjoying "authority" while stoically learning to live with adversity and accepting it as part of life (119).

The narrator's mother is the rock on which the Laxalt family stands and the only figure on which the six children can rely since the father is mostly absent. "I think our family spent half of its growing-up life looking for my father," the narrator writes (*Sweet* 10). Since none of his sons wanted to follow in his footsteps but instead chose to go to college, Dominique sold his herd of sheep at age 65. However, he is unable to deal with this change of lifestyle: He "did not adjust very well to living in a house" and felt "caged" so he ended up returning to the hills (*Sweet* 14).

At one point, Dominique is asked to return to the Basque Country because one of his surviving sisters is seriously ill, but Thérèse is adamant about not wanting to accompany him. She “had never wanted to return.” France for her “was only a memory of a lifelong past” (*Sweet* 27). Robert is chosen to accompany his father. Once in France, Dominique is praised for having children who are “lawyers and teachers and journalists” and can “make their life not with their hands, but with their minds” (*Sweet* 121). He acknowledges that this is something he must thank his wife for: “It was their mother who wanted so badly to send them to college. That seemed to be all she wanted in her life, to see them with an education” (*Sweet* 121). He had never understood why Thérèse was so persistent in wanting her children to receive a college education, but once he is back in his homeland, he realizes that his children would probably never have had that opportunity in the Old Country.

When Thérèse Laxalt passed away in 1978, the Nevada State Journal published<sup>22</sup> the excerpt below from *Sweet Promised Land* under the title “A Son’s Tribute to His Mother.” It is a long quote, but one that I believe offers crucial information about her life and helps understand this woman’s traits and personality. The significance of gaining this knowledge about Thérèse Laxalt is that she appears as a character in other books written by her son Robert. In addition, she is also the character upon whom the grandmother in Monique Urza’s *The Deep Blue Memory* is based.

It took courage all right for a woman to live in the sheepcamps. And it took courage not to keep on living that way, to make her own opportunity and come to Carson City as she did, out of an old brown board cabin in the desert, with four children and a hundred dollars, to start another life in the little hotel, doing all the cooking for the workingmen boarders, on her feet from four o’clock in the morning until midnight, and with only half enough sleep at night. And it took courage for a pretty woman to watch slender legs become purple veins forever from standing on her feet until the last day of the ninth month, and then deliver her child and go back to work.

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<sup>22</sup> Women’s Biographies: Thérèse Alpetche Laxalt. Nevada Women’s History Project. Web. 3 March 2015. <http://www.unr.edu/nwhp/bios/women/laxalt.htm>

Even after we left the hotel and my father had gone back to the hills with his sheep, it took courage to face a life with six children who could have gone one way or another, and do it with an iron rule, without fear ever once showing, and with a love that was there in little things like a touch of the hand or an unguarded glance, because if she had every shown fear or weakness or too much love, she would have been lost.

It took courage, all right, but it took something else, too. It had to do with forty mornings of Lent, up when the sky was still dark and the snow was piled high on the ground, trudging a narrow path to the church, with her brood strung out behind her, little dark patches moving slowly through the white snow, huddled deep in their coats, shivering, and with eyes still stuck with sleep.

It had to do with winter nights when the big trees outside the house moaned fearfully with blizzards, and long after the children had gone to bed, a single candle burned in the living room, and a wife prayed for her husband in the hills.

*Sweet Promised Land* is a book dedicated to Laxalt's father, Dominique. However, the mother, despite her secondary role, is a constant that runs throughout the story. She may not be the protagonist, but it becomes clear that the support she provides to her husband and the family is crucial to their success and well-being. While Dominique may have worked hard and endured the many hardships that shepherds faced, as a male, he also enjoyed the prerogative of making choices that were not available to his wife. As the quote above outlines, the mother had to give birth to six children (four boys and two girls) and go back to work shortly after their birth. She had to raise these children with an iron fist not showing fear or weakness, but also not demonstrating too much love in case the children were "spoiled." And yet, Therèse had to find a way to show a mother's love through little gestures and kindness towards her children. She had to be a wife, a mother, a hotel owner and manager, and a cook, and do it all on four or less hours of sleep. As we gather from the quote her son chose in her tribute, she also had to be a pious woman, as was expected of good Catholic Basque women at the time. Even on cold and dark winter days, Therèse would be seen walking to church with her six children, but there is no mention of her husband. All of this she often did alone because Dominique would get "cabin fever" and escape to the hills for months on end. The wife and mother in *The Sweet Promised Land* did not have the option to escape. She



had to be there every day for her children, her husband, her boarders and hotel employees without doubts or weaknesses, always putting herself last.

Laxalt's admiration for his mother and acknowledgment of her efforts is ultimately one of the book's take-home messages. She had the ambition to leave the camps and with a little money she had, found and purchased a hotel in Carson City, Nevada. As Robert Laxalt tells in an interview conducted with Mateo Osa in Reno, Nevada,<sup>23</sup> "his mother took care of the taxes and business aspects of the hotel" because she did not trust his father to take care of these matters. "She was a highly respected woman in town, because she took care of all aspects of the hotel by herself with a little help from an Indian woman and her kids." In the same interview, Robert also tells how his mother "dominated family life" since his father was not a disciplinarian.

Thanks to Thérèse, the Laxalt children had a proper house in the state's capital where they could grow up instead of having to spend their lives living in a "brown board cabin in the desert." Thanks to her initiative and business sense, they owned and managed a business that generated a steady income for the family throughout the year. Thérèse made sure that her six children were raised well and were able to attend college and go on to lead successful careers. The mother in *Sweet Promised Land* may stand in the shadow of her husband in this particular book, but as I have outlined in the examples above, her role in the success of the Laxalt family is clearly a significant one.

### **3.1.2. Robert Laxalt, *In A Hundred Graves* (1972)**

*In A Hundred Graves: A Basque Portrait* presents an account of the inner workings of a Basque French village. Robert Laxalt spent a year living in the Basque Country with his family. They lived in a small village and the children attended Basque schools. Their trip, he said at the time, had two purposes: "First, my own writing, and second, to lay groundwork for a proposed Basque studies program at the University of Nevada."<sup>24</sup> They returned to the United States in

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<sup>23</sup> Oroitzapenak. Voices from Basque Americans. University of Nevada, Reno. Web. 8 March 2015. [http://basque.unr.edu/oralhistory/laxalt\\_robert/RobertLaxalt.html](http://basque.unr.edu/oralhistory/laxalt_robert/RobertLaxalt.html)

<sup>24</sup> Etxeto. Sweet Promised Land. Web. 8 March 2015. <http://www.etxeto.com/sweet.html>

August 1966. Through brief and varied vignettes, Laxalt introduces the reader to shepherds, tilemakers, merchants, *bertsolariak*, *pelota* players, bartenders, poets, smugglers, healers, priests, monks, and various other male characters such as the town crier.

Most stories indeed focus on the activities of men. Very few females are mentioned, and only in a handful of occasions are entire vignettes dedicated to them. One of these females is Dominika, a ten-year old playmate of the narrator's daughter. The first description on the girl focuses on her external appearance: "She is not very pretty, really, because she has a big nose and eyes that protrude. But she has golden hair that hangs in ringlets over her shoulders. Her hair is so beautiful that one cannot speak of Dominika without speaking of her hair" (*Graves* 8). She is also described as "polite and distant" which, the narrator affirms, is a typically Basque trait (*Graves* 9).

One day, the narrator finds out that Dominika is being raised by her grandparents because she is illegitimate, which instantly makes him feel pity for her. He tries to do something special for the girl by handing her an extra piece of candy, because "it is the American thing to do, to show by an overt action that we understand." However, "Dominika refused the candy, and there were suddenly a thousand miles between us" (*Graves* 9). The life of an illegitimate girl may be difficult in a staunchly Catholic rural environment, but she obviously has a strong spirit and pride about who she is and is not afraid to show that she does not need an outsider's pity.

The next story featuring women presents them washing laundry at a spring. "The women scrub and slap their wash on the stone slabs, and then rinse it clean in the running water beneath." There are many types of women and yet "because they have the same gestures and expressions born out of life in a village, they seem to resemble each other" (*Graves* 11). They are categorized into three main types, according to their physical appearance. There are "square and solid farm women with round faces and ruddy cheeks, and forearms grooved like a man's"; "willowy girls with auburn hair and hazel eyes or black hair and blue eyes, with rich color in their cheeks and music in their voices"; and finally, there are "old crones in long black dresses, a yellow tooth or two dangling, and voices dry as rasps" (*Graves* 11).

The women begin conversing about the weather, but soon move on to general gossip. However, the narrator says that “when they talk, the women deal always in discretion, because to do otherwise is not considered proper.” And yet, “the fabric of life in the village is spun out at the perpetual spring” since “all things are in time revealed” (*Graves* 11).

In a different story, it is Easter Sunday and the narrator remembers his father’s sister on the first anniversary of her death. His last memory of her is of “an old, old woman with a seamed face and hair that had never really turned white and a voice that boomed out of deep caverns.” He also recalls her humor as being “indomitable.” This woman had lived to be nearly one hundred years old but, “one night a week, she went without sleep to wash the family’s clothes in the icy creek” below their house. “The day before she died, she was planting corn” on the steep slopes surrounding their property (*Graves* 83). This is a topic that comes up in other works by authors of the Basque diaspora: Women working until the moment of their death.

Males and females are often shown in clearly different roles and environments. In church, “the women went down to the individual prayer chairs in the nave of the church” while “the men made their way up the creaky wooden stairway to the gallery above” (*Graves* 85). Also, women are physically “indistinguishable from each other in their black dresses and the scarves that hooded their heads” (*Graves* 86). Once outside, “the women gathered in the first circle around the grave, and men in the second circle, and the young behind” (*Graves* 87). It is the social expectation that women will dress in black to express their mourning for those who have passed away in their families. It is also expected that women will take the lead when it comes to religious matters, such as church attendance or mourning at funerals.

In a story that deals with a village marriage, the men “were gone to the bar” while “the old women in their high black dresses [...] gathered in a corner of the banquet room to compete in the nodding game of ailments and tribulations, and to place each other in the categories for which they would forever be known” (*Graves* 89). Women have few options: their physical appearance and dress must follow social expectations, and apparently so does their behavior. Once women are classified according to certain standards and assigned to static categories, they apparently are defined in that way for the rest of their lives.

In another story, Laxalt strays from the stereotypical female portrayals seen so far and presents a very different type of woman, Panchika, who is said to be “something out of the ordinary.” She stands out physically with her “flaming red hair and milk-white skin” and “no dress that her pious mother made her wear could hope to conceal the rising breasts and flaring hips” (*Graves* 107). Her voluptuous appearance seems to define her destiny. Her mother thinks that Panchika is “a decent girl”; however, “the boys in the village could have informed her otherwise” (*Graves* 107). The details of her story are somewhat veiled, but the narrator does make it known that, on a given night, Panchika stays at “a little inn of doubtful reputation” with Agustin, the son of a smuggler who is also known as a playboy (*Graves* 109). Panchika may be said to be “out of the ordinary,” but she represents the archetype of the woman as sinner, the woman as whore. In the Basque-American literary works reviewed for this dissertation, this is the first time that a Basque woman has been cast in this role.

Then we have Agustin’s mother, who is said to be a “woman with the toughness of heart that goes with being a smuggler’s wife.” She had been raised the daughter of a poor farm servant, so she had entered her marriage with a smuggler “knowing its drawbacks and its rewards.” Being poor, however, “the question of drawbacks is of small importance” (*Graves* 116). Clearly, having limited choices, marriage is this woman’s way out of poverty. Nevertheless, “finding herself so suddenly surrounded by wealth, she did not delude herself by confusing money with station.” Smuggling might be “an accepted occupation” but “not a respected one” in the Basque Country (*Graves* 116). This woman tries to keep a low profile by never flaunting her wealth and making sure that she never misses daily morning mass. Her one chance at respectability is that her eldest son has become a priest, which is a respected profession in the Basque Country; a mother earning her status through the achievements of her son.

### **3.1.3. Robert Laxalt, *The Basque Hotel* (1989)**

Laxalt’s so-called Basque Family Trilogy, which consists of *The Basque Hotel* (1989), *Child of the Holy Ghost* (1992), and *The Governor’s Mansion* (1994), is an important series of books that are semi-autobiographical in nature and where the women, especially the mother figure, are based on Laxalt’s own family.

*The Basque Hotel*, Laxalt's eighth book, is set in Carson City in the 1930s. At the time the book was written, Carson City had only a few thousand inhabitants, and it is said to be the smallest state capital in the United States.<sup>25</sup> The book narrates the protagonist's experiences as he undergoes various rites of passage. Pete is a young boy, the son of immigrant parents who run the Basque Hotel. He is indifferent to his Basque heritage and, at times, even ashamed of it as in the case of his parents' ignorance of American traditions such as Christmas trees. When boarders address him in Basque, he chooses to answer in English.

Pete is the protagonist but his mother plays a supporting role and is mentioned a few times throughout the book. Her roles are that of caretaker, disciplinarian, and hard worker. She is portrayed rising early, before anyone else in her household, and always working. One of the first times she is mentioned is on an occasion when Pete himself happens to get up early. He does so while "[t]he household was still asleep – except for his mother, who always seemed to be awake" (*Hotel 5*). Later, she is presented in the kitchen, chopping vegetables for the boarders' evening meal, her forehead beaded with sweat and her face strained (*Hotel 6*).

She is a strict mother who commands respect and does not hesitate to use Old World styles of discipline, such as physical punishment, on her children when needed. In one situation when Pete had misbehaved, "his mother had burst out the door in her big white apron and was running toward him. [...] He felt the strong hands pinion his arms and set him down on the ground." She slapped him and Pete "knew that if he said one word, another slap was ready for him" (*Hotel 7*).

One day, in his parents' bedroom, Pete finds a photograph "that seemed vaguely familiar." It shows a young girl leaning on a pedestal. "The arm that leaned on the pedestal was slender, and the hand that cupped the chin was fragile and white. The girl was more beautiful than anyone he had ever seen. She had a delicate face framed with soft black hair" and "huge and dark and wistful" eyes (*Hotel 8*). When he is about to return the picture, he realizes "with shock, that it was of his mother. He could not reconcile the girl in the picture with what his mother had become. The fragile hands had thickened and the slender arm was now grooved and muscled like a man's." The "dark,

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<sup>25</sup> As of the 2010 census, the population of Carson City was approximately 55,274 inhabitants (Source: Wikipedia). Nowadays, it is no longer among the top 10 smallest capital cities in the United States.

wistful eyes were stern and hardened now” (*Hotel 9*).

Even though *The Basque Hotel* is written as fiction, numerous elements can be said to be autobiographical. We know that Thérèse came from a well-to-do family but ended up marrying Dominique Laxalt whose background was significantly poorer and he was less educated. The description of the physical changes that time and a hard life of never-ending work, childbearing and childcare had imposed on Pete’s mother is a sad example of what many other immigrant women also experienced in the New World. Perhaps because they did not have the support network provided by close-knit extended families that is traditional in the rural Basque Country, women immigrants were forced to simultaneously handle long work hours, children, and household chores practically by themselves, which clearly took a toll on them.

The mother’s more upscale upbringing comes to light in a scene where she is serving beef stew at the hotel while “apologizing to the boarders and muttering that it was a scandal to serve a French dinner like this without wine” (*Hotel 24*). In another scene, she asks that the entire family attend a talk given by a U.S. Senator from Nevada because she has “some pretty high ambitions for Leon,” her eldest son (*Hotel 33*). On the walk back home, the father tells his children: “Your mother and I was rich once, you know. [...] Then the livestock crash came and we lost everything” and they ended up “living in a shack with dirt for a floor” (*Hotel 35*). He adds that this did not bother him, because he had nothing when he came to the U.S., but the mother “was raised different in the old country. She came from a family with property. I can’t figure out why she came in the first place, because she sure didn’t need to” (*Hotel 35*).<sup>26</sup> He then explains how thanks to the mother’s efforts to save money and her business savvy, she had put a down payment on the hotel they were currently managing.

The family takes for granted the mother’s good health and her constant presence. Pete remembers her having “surprisingly taken to her bed” only once, when she had given birth to one of his sisters. “And in a few days, his mother was up and about and back to her cooking as if nothing had happened” (*Hotel 50*). This description coincides with the stories told by real immigrant Basque women who would work until the labor pains set in, give birth to the child, and

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<sup>26</sup> *Child of the Holy Ghost* will provide an explanation for her reasons to leave France.

return to work almost immediately.

During the time Pete's parents own the Basque Hotel, there is no scene where the mother is portrayed while resting or doing leisure activities. After they sell the hotel and purchase a large family home, she is shown "sitting in the sunny alcove that jugged out of the living room, embroidering doilies" for their many corner tables. While Pete and his father felt lost in the "immensity of the house," his mother and older brother "had been right at home from the start" (*Hotel* 63-64). Even though embroidery can be considered a leisure activity, it is nevertheless a purposeful endeavor since it is meant to produce goods to be put to use in the household.

#### **3.1.4. Robert Laxalt, *The Governor's Mansion* (1994)**

*The Governor's Mansion* is the third volume of Laxalt's Basque Trilogy. In it, Leon, the eldest son of immigrant Basque parents, ponders the decision to enter American politics. The book is a candid and revealing novel about a family caught in uncharted territory and about the sacrifices they must make to support one of their own. "If I run, life will never be the same for us again," Leon says (20). "I could be in office for a long time. That will mean the end of our privacy as a family. We'll be public property from here on out" (20).

Early on, the narrator reflects on how he and his siblings have been raised in the political heart of Carson City, close to the Capitol and the governor's mansion, in a house that his mother had bought after selling the Basque hotel they used to manage. Their "family home fit in and did not fit in" in the neighborhood. Where an old barn used to stand, the mother had "built a Basque-style stucco house with a red-tiled roof in its place," which – according to Leon – "absolutely did not fit into the neighborhood architecture" (*Governor's* 5). However, from the practical point of view of his mother, "the little house brought in rent money, and that was first priority in those Depression days" (*Governor's* 6).

Leon offers further insights into the character of his mother. "The fact that my mother did not entertain people may have been one of those reasons why our house did not fit into the neighborhood. My mother felt she could not cope with the formal side of American society."

However, overshadowing that “was her passion for privacy, which I have come to understand is very Basque. In all the years of our growing up, the only adults who ever saw the inside of our house were her few Basque friends, an occasional sheepman or shepherd my father would bring by for a meal, and of course priests and nuns” (*Governor’s* 6).

The mother’s love of privacy and her reluctance to socialize formally the way it was expected in her upscale neighborhood led to certain individuals looking down on her. For instance, the Supreme Court judge treated her badly, always trying to put her down by talking about a social life to which Leon’s mother was not privy. However, that “didn’t bother my mother at all, she being one of the few really proud women I have ever known.” Something that really did hurt her, though, was “the business about pretending not to understand my mother’s English” (*Governor’s* 6). Some of Laxalt’s works deal with the issue of discrimination. In *The Basque Hotel*, Pete overhears some people referring to his family as “foreigners of some sort. Basque, I think, whatever that is.” Another time, he hears “the epithet he hated most in the world” (65), which we must assume is “Basco” or “black Basco.”

In addition to learning about Leon’s mother’s passion for privacy and her dislike of formal socializing, *The Governor’s Mansion* introduces her profound religiousness and her “penchant for religious icons.” In her house, she had “left the living room pretty much alone, but every inch of available space in dining room and kitchen and bedrooms was plastered with Bleeding Heart of Jesus calendars and pictures and figurines of more saints than I had known existed. I have seen religious shops less well stocked than our house” (7).

In *The Basque Hotel* the mother was given credit for her persistence in wanting her children to get an education. In *The Governor’s Mansion*, Leon states: “Then, my three brothers had gone on to become lawyers. My mother had something to do with this. As an immigrant trying to cope with American ways of doing business, she had always wanted a lawyer in the family.” And, as is the case with numerous Basque families in the Old World, one sibling had followed a religious path: “One of our sisters, Suzette, had become a nun, which had not pleased my father, who saw it as a waste of a good woman” (9). Reading such a statement, one must wonder what this man’s definition of a “good woman” is. The answer, one may assume, is that a “good woman” is a woman



who marries, has children, and selflessly works to provide for all her family's needs.

When Leon announces that he is running for governor, the mother is “shaken enough to sit down suddenly at the lunch table, something she never did when there was still clearing to be done.” Her only response at the time is: “Politics is such a dirty business” (*Governor's* 14). Leon is surprised by her reaction because “[f]rom the time we were children, I would have sworn that this was exactly what she had always had in mind for her eldest son. At times it had seemed to be that it was an obsession with her, to see her eldest son elevated to high station in life, and through that, her own station enhanced.” Now, she is wary and concerned about the uncertainty of what lies ahead for the entire family. “Much later I was to remember that look. Immigrant and unsophisticated, her instincts were better than ours” (*Governor's* 15).

In *The Governor's Mansion*, the family home that was “a fortress against the world” (9) and “had been our stronghold growing up” (85), now becomes the headquarters for Leon's political campaign. As the political meetings grow more frequent, the father is absent from the family home even more often. “My mother, however, was in her element. Not because of the prestige of her son running for governor, but because her sons were around so often these days. She pampered us as if we were still children” (87). The mother is willing to sacrifice her privacy and move beyond her comfort level by opening her home to strangers because, in exchange, she is able to have her children around more frequently.

Leon is ultimately elected governor of Nevada. His brother writes: “For my mother, it meant loss, regardless of Leon's assurance. For my father, it meant confusion and dismay and flight to the mountains [...]. For me, election night was a harbinger of things to come. It was the night when the treasured privacy of our family was violated, permanently” (*Governor's* 119). When the house is opened to strangers for the post-election celebrations, the mother makes sure “that the bedrooms were sealed off from everybody except members of family. That was a Basque custom so iron bound that even Leon did not dare suggest making them accessible to outsiders. [...] It was legend that few outsiders had ever seen anything of the inside of the house” (*Governor's* 120).

The mother is forced to entertain guests, and she is willing to sacrifice her natural wish for privacy, for the benefit of her son. “My mother’s long dining room table was laden with hors d’oeuvres and French wine cooling in buckets, while side tables held stronger stuff – whiskey and mixes. Not a beer can was to be seen. She would not tolerate that next to her cherished crystal and china.” However, the day after they notice that some her china has been broken; her only reaction is to “wince in silence.” She does not complain because “after all, it had been for her eldest son” (*Governor’s* 121).

After election night, Pete recalls her mother “beautiful with her gray-streaked auburn hair braided on her head and the single cameo brooch on her black silk blouse,” holding Leon’s hand in both of hers in her bedroom and saying to him, “I don’t want to lose you, Leon” (*Governor’s* 123). The family starts being attacked “by telephone calls and strangers at the front door.” Unable to handle the harassment, the father flees into the mountains. The mother cannot flee, though. She “bears the harassment better than our father,” but even she reaches a point where “she was beginning to look irritated” (*Governor’s* 156). When the father passes away, the mother is described as being “stoical as always” and needing “neither words nor displays of sympathy” (*Governor’s* 183).

### **3.1.5. Robert Laxalt, *The Land of my Fathers* (1999)**

While *Sweet Promised Land* (1957) deals with Dominique Laxalt’s return to his homeland, *The Land of my Fathers* (1999) is the product of Robert Laxalt’s personal journals from two trips he himself took to the Basque Country in the 1960s. On the first trip, the Laxalts moved to a small village in the French Pyrenees that was near his parents’ towns of origin and they were there for about a year. His intention was to learn as much as he could about the nature and lives of the Basques and the country his parents came from. In this brief work, subtitled “A Son’s Return to the Basque Country,” Laxalt describes market days and festivals, observes pilgrimages to mountain chapels, joins in dove hunts and harvests, shares the Basques’ sense of humor and history, their deep sense of nationalism, as well as their pride in their culture and their homes. As the book’s title *The Land of My Fathers* suggests, this is the land of men. It is not the land of Laxalt’s “parents” but rather a patriarchal place that belongs to generations of “fathers” and to

which the son returns.

One section that is of particular interest for our analysis of female literary portraits is the chapter “On Market Day” which describes a traditional Monday market day. Both buyers and sellers at the market are male and the narrator clarifies that “[w]omen almost never intrude upon the men’s market, which by tradition is their husbands’ domain” (*The Land* 9). The traditional division of labor is explained as follows: “Raising the animals and planting corn and wheat have always been the responsibility of the *etxeko jaun*, or master of the house.” The *etxeko ander* or mistress of the house is left in charge of “the conduct of the household and the raising of children” (*The Land* 9).

However, on that particular market day, “a woman had usurped her husband’s right” and stood by him at their allotted pen. “She wore a look of no-nonsense determination” (*The Land* 9). It is unclear whether the use of the words “usurped” and “her husband’s right” actually show the narrator’s personal stance towards this break in tradition or they are being used tongue-in-cheek to demonstrate the annoyance that traditionally-minded patriarchal Basque males must have felt at seeing a woman take their place.

A buyer approaches the couple and addresses himself to the husband, but to his annoyance, the wife answers. He responds saying that he has never met her before, which is “not unusual for a men’s market” (*The Land* 10). The woman, however, is not intimidated by this man’s words. On the contrary, she is smart enough to ignore his sexist and dismissive comment in order to keep the peace.

As the bartering begins, it becomes clear that the husband always consults his wife before proceeding. A price is named but only after giving the wife a “sideways glance” to which she “nodded shortly in approval” (*The Land* 11). When the buyer reacts outraged, the farmer “taking a cue from his wife” puts on a stone face and says nothing. The potential buyer walks away and the farmer, believing he has lost a customer, is immediately disheartened. His wife, however, is self-assured and responds that the potential customer will be back. She is indeed correct.

As the husband is ready to seal the deal with a handshake, a “sharp exclamation from his wife stopped him.” The buyer complains: “You are the first woman I have ever encountered in what is a men’s market” but again the farmer’s wife refuses to be intimidated; she responds that “there should be more women involved” (*The Land* 12). Her husband also complains that she had no right to shame his pride. “Where there is money needed to support a household, pride is not involved” is her response (*The Land* 12). The woman hands her husband some money and sends him off to have a drink with his friends to heal his wounded pride.

This interaction is humorous but also very valuable in order to highlight the contrast between traditionally patriarchal expectations of male behavior and limitations imposed on female behavior versus the reality of certain individuals’ lives. Here is one couple in which the female happens to have a strong personality, is business savvy, and has the common sense and determination to step into a non-traditional role to lead a transaction that is expected to be led by a male. Her main motivation is not personal gain of any sort but rather the well-being of her household and family.

There is also a women’s market day, which is held in the afternoon. “In contrast to the argument and tempers of the morning, the women’s market is a peaceful one.” They sell eggs, vegetables, or chickens but the “farm women come to market to visit as much as to sell” (*The Land* 13). This is one of the very few venues, other than church, where rural women are able to venture outside their farmhouses to mingle and socialize with others. In the evening, men will go to the “fronton court” while women keep an eye on their daughters at the village square dances, a place where, in the villages of the 1950s and 1960s, young males and females had a chance to meet potential partners.

In the chapter “The Fishing Fleet” Laxalt briefly mentions the Basque fleets that leave the Bay of Biscay in November to fish tuna along the western coast of Africa. The men are away from home for as long as six months. The narrator adds that “[l]ittle is heard about the wives who stay behind. Theirs is the task of keeping a household, feeding a family, acting the absent father’s role as disciplinarian to children, coping with emergencies and injuries, bargaining with butcher, baker, and cobbler” and obviously worrying about whether their husbands will come home safely (*The*

*Land* 18). Even though “all attention is focused upon the fishermen this day, it is the wives who are the unsung heroes of a fishing village” (*The Land* 19).

The coastal women are in the shadow performing unrecognized but crucial roles that keep their families going. Laxalt dedicates a later chapter exclusively to “Fishwives.” Once a fishing boat has docked, “the women take over.” They perform physical labor such as hauling the catch to trucks as well as selling it later in open-air markets. These are savvy and fierce women who “stand by the trucks guarding their husbands’ catch, and no one in his right mind would try to cheat them.” Their physical strength is emphasized: “They have arms that are Herculean from many years of hauling fish, and they too have piano legs” (*The Land* 91).

As telling as the presence of women in chapters like the two discussed above are their absences. Another chapter narrates the performance of the Dance of the Zamalzain, said to be a “pagan fertility dance to celebrate the coming of spring.” The narrator’s cousin Petya explains that the dance is a very difficult one and therefore “in order to do it properly, one must begin when he is ten years old” (*The Land* 33). The dancers are talked about with the male pronouns “he” and “his”, which leads one to believe that women are not allowed to learn or perform this particular dance, even though it is a “fertility dance.”

Cross-border smuggling is another activity where women are absent. One of the *contrabandiers* (smugglers) explains that he chooses “his men” carefully because to be a good smuggler’s helper “a young man must have strong legs, sharp eyes, good ears and nose, and an elastic conscience” (*The Land* 101). None of these features are exclusively male; in fact, many of the Basque women we have encountered so far could fit that description. One wonders why women are excluded from these activities other than the fact that contraband happens at night, a time of day when “decent women” are not supposed to be outside their homes. Also, smuggling is not legal, and Basque men would not want their women – who are supposed to be clean and pure – to be associated with criminal activities. Another possible reason is the danger of being caught and imprisoned or possibly killed. Basque men would certainly not want to place their women in dangerous situations, and thus they exclude them from activities such as smuggling.

Churches and chapels, however, are places where women are allowed and frequently found. In the very brief section entitled “High Mountain Chapel,” the women in the chapel “are indistinguishable from each other in their black dresses and black scarves that hood their heads” (*The Land* 38). During the years of Franco’s patriarchal dictatorship, women were expected to be pious and practice the Catholic faith. When there was a death in the family, females had to wear black mourning clothing, which was especially true in the more traditional rural areas. Men are typically not expected to participate in religious affairs, with the obvious exception of Catholic priests.

Later, Laxalt describes a pilgrimage to a mountain chapel. It is “mostly women and children” that make up the procession. “Only a few of the village men, mostly shopkeepers, made the seven-mile trek” (*The Land* 41). A special shepherds’ mass is held, which some shepherds do attend. “There was no uniformity at all in the shepherds’ dress” (*The Land* 42) unlike what we earlier saw in the case of women’s clothing. The shepherds “dress up for the Mass” but the clothing makes them feel uncomfortable and they are out of their element due to lack of habit.

“Pantasha” is a significant chapter that brings to light the reality of how certain Catholic priests abuse their positions of power victimizing the children who were put in their charge as assistants. Laxalt shows some unusual braveness in addressing such a taboo topic. The priest in this particular story is alone in the chapel with Pantasha, a girl who helps him with mass and in the sacristy. He calls her into “a little room with a cot in it.” She protests, “Not again, Father.” His response is: “You must obey your priest” to which the girl simply surrenders. When he is done with her, the priest has the arrogance to tell the girl that she must confess to him the week after. It is surprising that Laxalt has the courage to deal with a topic like Catholic priests’ sexual abuses of young children under their care. Everyone knows that this happens but it is typically swept under the rug because of the position of power that men of the cloth enjoy in the Catholic Church.

*The Land of My Fathers* describes the realities of life in the rural villages of the Basque Country in the 1960s. Much has changed in both the French and the Spanish Basque Country since then. For one, the creation of the European Union has done away with borders, which has rendered cross-border smugglers unnecessary. Certain aspects of life, however, are likely still very much

the same in the twenty-first century. Rural women are still expected to do farm work such as tending to fields and farm animals, while at the same time taking care of household chores and raising children. “Fishwives” in the coastal villages still very much perform the duties described above, which involve substantial physical labor, and they take positions of leadership when their husbands are away for part of the year.

### **3.1.6. Vince Juaristi, *Back to Bizkaia* (2011)**

The literary works presented above encompass the decades from the 1950s to the 1990s. A more recent book is Vince Juaristi’s *Back to Bizkaia: A Basque-American Memoir*, published in 2011. Juaristi is a second generation Basque-American born in Elko, Nevada. He works as CEO of a management consulting firm in Alexandria, Virginia, and *Back to Bizkaia: A Basque-American Memoir* is his first and only book so far. The focus of this semi-autobiographical novel is the relationship between a father and son, but it does include several Basque women, both American and European, in supporting roles.

*Back to Bizkaia: A Basque-American Memoir* presents a first-person account of a Basque-American man who takes his 78-year-old father back to the Basque Country, which the father had left 60 years earlier to escape Franco’s repressive government. The son chronicles the trip back as well as the memories of father and son both during the journey and those of their life in America.

In the Preface, Juaristi explains that he wrote *Back to Bizkaia* because he felt the need to tell his father’s story but also his own: “The second story was my own – that of a second-generation Basque American who grew up struggling with his roots and longing to explore the larger world beyond Elko’s comfortable streets” (vii). This again relates to the sociological marginal man theory coined by Park and Stonequist that explains how an individual who is influenced by two races or ethnicities or who is suspended between two cultural realities may struggle to establish his or her identity. It is a familiar situation for any ethnic American who has found himself bridging two cultures and trying to reconcile the ethnic identity with the American one.

When comparing the trip that the father is now taking to the Basque Country to the one the father took 60 years earlier when he migrated to America, the narrator unfortunately resorts to the somewhat clichéd description of the early immigrants' grueling trips to the New World. We read about the hard and long journey where the father "slept upright" in "tight quarters" while "hope and a heel of bread had kept him nourished"(7). Vince compares that first journey to their current luxury trip in first class on an airplane where they are served an outstanding meal, fine wines and Perrier water, where "the silverware was chilled," and they have the choice of three kinds of warm bread topped with butter. The statement, "He had left everything for America and arriving with nothing, he had built everything" (7), even though likely true for Vince's father, is used so often in tales of immigration that it starts off the narration on a nostalgic and clichéd note.

Vince's grandfather, Mariano, had apparently also come to work in America in 1910 because "his only brother, Vicente, had established himself as a reliable ranch hand, the masterful sheepherder, horseshoer, calf roper, fence builder, barn fixer" and so on. (59). According to Vince, his grandfather's "experience mirrored the romantic understanding that most Americans have of European immigrants, those huddled masses of whom Emma Lazarus so eloquently wrote, gracing our shores and yearning to breathe free" (60). His father's experience forty years later, however, was very different. It was a long and miserable journey and, upon arriving in Elko, his father was shocked that it was "covered in sagebrush, with few trees and little water," so unlike the Basque Country (62). Joe Juaristi spoke only Basque when he arrived in the United States and, ironically, only learned to speak Spanish on this side of the Atlantic. He also recalls the resentment he felt towards his own father for having sent him alone to the United States while keeping his brothers and sisters at home.

Even though *Back to Bizkaia* is written by a son to honor his father's memory, a few women are occasionally mentioned, usually in the context of an anecdote or memory. The women of Vince's immediate family are his mother and his sisters Jonna and Amy. He describes them as "three stubborn, opinionated women whom God Almighty saw fit to perch in my family tree" (5). The mother is portrayed in the traditional role of the caretaker who cooks, cleans, and serves meals to the family, and gives "dutiful attention" to both her children's and husband's needs. She is "overprotective" (11) but has firm control over everyone's actions: "I never won battles with



Mom,” Vince affirms (96). For over forty years, she had “laid out [her husband’s] clothes every morning” so that he “ordinarily had little to worry about” (19). Vince’s main memory of his mother is of her clutching a dish towel: “A washrag, slung over her shoulder or squeezed in her fist, crept into every image that I had of her” (11). She occasionally uses this dish towel to whip her husband with it when he acts in a way she dislikes. When questioning her son’s or husband’s actions, the mother is portrayed with her hand on her hips, “a sure sign of inflexibility” (2), and at other times we find her giving commands, yelling angrily, and using language such as “damn it” (11, 79), “son of a bitch” (16), or “ass” (79), which in the Old World would have been considered very inappropriate for a female.

Another Basque woman mentioned is Ana Mari Arbillaga, who is described as a matriarch of the Basques in Elko. During the day, Ana Mari cooked at one of Elko’s three Basque restaurants, and on weekends “turned into the patron saint of Elko’s Basque heritage – dance instructor, seamstress, Basque-to-English translator, and letter writer” (90). This matches the description of some of the roles we know matriarchs to have taken on in their communities as preservers of culture and, in general, as helpers to those who were either illiterate or unable to speak the English language.

Vince’s grandmother back in the Basque Country lived to be eighty-six. She is described as “gray-haired and stocky,” a woman who “had raised eight children, worked, cooked and cleaned, and cut her own wood for a rustic stove” (14). The narrator demonstrates great admiration for her strength of character, talking about her as “a rugged woman, independent and sure, with strength and determination,” and having “a profound wisdom” (105). He points out how much of the work mothers and grandmothers do is carried out in the shadow of men and goes unacknowledged. Vince remembers his grandmother as “an unlikely warrior, who wore no medals and showed no pride but deserved both. I wondered who noted her achievements or those of all mothers the world over” (105).

One of Joe’s memories of his mother, the woman for whom Vince shows so much admiration above, is of how sad and angry she was at being forced to send him to the United States. If his mother “had one gun, she would’ve shot Franco dead. She was mad as hell” about being

forced to send her son away to protect him from being drafted to serve Franco's armed forces (105).

Another woman that the narrator takes time to acknowledge is his "tía Pilar," a slender woman who "gave off her own light that lent brightness and joy to everyone around her" (116). She is mentioned three or four times throughout the book. "Her blond hair, parted and lying to one side, was as radiant as a fashion magazine, hardly befitting a woman of seventy-four years, but like the rest of her, it shined like silk." She repeatedly "orders" her husband to do various tasks and he responds in a "quiet and compliant" way (116). Vince loves everything about his aunt, "not only because she plied us with food and drink, tended to our whims, and anticipated our every need even before we knew we had one," but also because she is "a selfless, happy warrior with a good soul whose chief ambition was to make others feel safe and comfortable, not just in her home but in life" (116). She is furthermore described as a selfless and warmhearted individual who "spent little time on self," instead giving "her energy away, funneled it into hard work and good deeds." On the other hand, she is not a quiet woman sitting in her husband's shadow but is confident enough to express her "revolutionary" opinions about the economy, education, the government, or corporations' control of money right along with the men.

Although Vince's parents are first-generation immigrants, they do not appear to have maintained the gastronomic traditions of the Basque Country. The mother serves the children oatmeal or Cream of Wheat for breakfast and makes egg salad or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for their school lunches (11). Something they have maintained is the Catholic religion. Multiple mentions of God and religion pervade the narration. The Juaristis may have Catholic beliefs but the father's attitude is in line with how Basque men approach religious rituals: "He went to church for funerals, weddings, or the occasional baptism, but he did not put cash in the priest's plate, attend Sunday Mass, say the Rosary, render confession, or pray conventional prayers." The only times he knelt down were to mend irrigation hoses in the fields. "Despite not paying homage to these rituals, he sought God's intentions through daily deeds and hard work to find out for himself what he had to learn" (18).

As many sons of immigrant shepherds have done before, Vince deals with the difficult decision of taking a different path from the one his father chose and possibly expected him to follow. His father would say: “Someday, dese sheep, dey belong to you, but won’t be hundred sheep; you goin’ to have thousand or more. Dat’s how this country is, if you work hard enough” (133). Vince never doubted his father’s description of what his future would be like: “In bed at night, I pictured myself in my mind’s eye, herding, gutting, moving sprinklers, fixing fences, building barns, taking care of all of Dad’s daily chores” (133). However, one of Vince’s teachers helps him understand that in the U.S. he can be whatever he chooses. Mrs. Moschetti, “a grandmotherly figure,” is a teacher who gave her students “love and light and inspiration” (135). Vince feels guilty and worries about hurting his father’s feelings but ultimately tells him about his wish to go to college.

In the conclusion, Vince reflects on a son’s relationship to both his mother and his father, and how those bonds are different for each parent. “To a mother, a son owes kindness to the world, helpful hands, shoulders of comfort and warmth, and compassion.” And then “a mother can say of her son that she has taught him well, showed him to love and to be good to others” (150). A son’s duty to a father “is far more complicated.” Juaristi mentions the “need to obey and gain acceptance,” the “yearning as a child to make a father proud,” and the obligation to honor the father. He adds that it is a son’s duty to respect the father’s “origin and the hard fragments of his past, and in so doing, to embrace the voice and shadow in himself. And when the father turns to ash and dust, the son knows the transfer to be complete and feels the older living on inside the younger” (*Back* 151).

### **3.1.7. Martin Etchart, *The Last Shepherd* (2012)**

Another contemporary author who explores the generational relationships within Basque families is Martin Etchart. Etchart is a second-generation Basque-American who grew up in Arizona. His grandparents came to the United States from the French-Basque town of Urepel. He received a B.A and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Arizona State University and later obtained a Ph.D. In addition to his two novels, Etchart has written screenplays, and currently teaches Creative Writing and Film Studies at Phoenix College.

Etchart is the author of *The Good Oak* (2004) and *The Last Shepherd* (2012), two novels that feature young and male Basque-American protagonists. Interestingly enough, both of these main characters have names whose initials are the same as the author's, namely Matt Echbar in the first novel and Mathieu Etchiberri in the second. The main reason why I chose not to include Etchart's novels in the main analysis of this dissertation is the fact that their main protagonists are male. Their leitmotifs are traditional "journey to manhood," "coming of age," and "search for identity" themes and there is little if any room for noteworthy female characters, except perhaps in *The Last Shepherd*, as will be explained later.

Matt, the main character in *The Good Oak* is a thirteen-year-old boy who is angry at the world because his widowed father is too busy for him, and his grandfather — an unschooled Basque shepherd whose language and customs seem foreign as judged by the grandson's American lifestyle — is an embarrassment. As explained in the book's back cover, *The Good Oak* is a coming-of-age novel in which Matt and his *aitatxi* experience an adventure together during which the boy "learns the ancient skills of the shepherder and discovers the unexpected wisdom that has given his Old Country grandfather the strength and patience of a sturdy oak" (n. pag.).

*The Last Shepherd* again features a male protagonist by the name of Mathieu Etchiberri. This young man identifies more with his American persona and appears to struggle with Basque heritage. He is eager to leave his family's sheep ranch and go to the University of Arizona. "I'm dying here," he tells his father (6). But the father wants the son to take over the ranch: "Now, then, Mathieu, you know that sheep and the university can't be on the same list" (4). The son responds in frustration: "It's Matt. My name's Matt. That's what my friends call me – would call me – if they hadn't already left for the university" (4). Matt says that he hates the sheep, the ranch, his father, and even his thick and callused hands that are just like his father's, grandfather's and uncle's (4). Already as a 10-year-old boy, Matt resented his uncle and grandfather with their old world beliefs, religion, and heritage.

When his father suddenly dies in a car accident, Matt decides to sell the ranch but discovers that it is not his property after all. The deed to the ranch is in the name of a certain Isabelle

Etcheberri. “I tried to concentrate on the woman who had the same last name as me. A woman I had never heard of – did not know existed. Who was she? And why was her name on the deed to Artzainaskena?” (*Last Shepherd* 24). His father’s lawyer hands Matt a series of letters, all returned unopened, addressed to Isabelle Etcheberri at Gorrienea, Urepel, France. Mathieu wonders why his grandparents would have left the ranch to a daughter that he had never even heard them mention. He decides to travel to the French Basque town where his father and grandparents came from in order to settle the questions about his legacy.

In the second half of *The Last Shepherd*, Etchart does present a well-rounded portrait of a Basque female, his aunt Isabelle Etcheberri (also known by her married name Odolen). Before he travels to France, there is a moment where Mathieu is reflecting about women: “Maybe it was because I was only two years old when Mom died – hit by a car that didn’t even slow down. And even though my mother had no choice in the matter, she left me. And so I learned that women leave” (67). Matt not only fears abandonment, but is also afraid of women’s preference for verbal communication, which is in stark contrast to the rather quiet nature of the Basque men he has grown up with. “Maybe it was because after Amatxi passed away, I was raised by silent men who moved through the world where when something had to be said, it was almost never a good thing. And so I learned to fear a woman’s need for words” (67).

The orphaned and frustrated Matt blames Isabelle for his father’s death. “By not answering his letters, she had forced him – and me – to stay on the ranch. Isabelle Odolen was the reason we were driving down the mountain that day.” In his mind, he conjures up scenarios of revenge that include an image of a weeping and remorseful woman that he enjoy forcing into submission at his feet: “And I would find a way to use that against her. I saw myself throwing the letters onto the floor at her feet, watching as she crumpled to her knees before the truth of what she had done, weeping and begging me for forgiveness – which, I would refuse to give her, unless, of course, she signed the ranch over to me” (*Last Shepherd* 75).

Once in Europe, Matt’s first encounter with a Basque woman is at the bus station. “A woman with both the look and smell of my *amatxi* (stinky cheese and rose water) was my only companion. The woman wore a black shawl over her head and worked a rosary through her fingers

as her lips moved in silent prayer” (*Last Shepherd* 89). Looking out onto the streets through the bus window, Matt sees “versions of Aitatxi and Oxea: men in black coats with matching berets. Amatxi was also there: women in below-the-knees skirts with dark shawls tucked around their shoulders. They glanced my way as the bus passed. And I shrank into my seat, not wanting to be noticed again” (*Last Shepherd* 89).

Matt does not want to be “noticed” because he is recognizable as an outsider. Even though he is in the land of his ancestors, he stands out as not from around there. The men and women he observes resemble his grandparents, who came from this place. Their dress and behavior is that of traditional rural Basques. Men in black coats and berets and women wearing modest dark clothing, their heads covered while they hold rosaries and pray. Even the women’s smell evokes tradition: cheese and rose water. In the Old World, the latter is used to flavor food and as a component in some cosmetic and medical preparations, but it also used for religious purposes throughout Europe.

Later, Matt again encounters the old woman from the bus when he takes refuge from the rain in a little church. The “bent-over woman,” who is “no taller than [his] waist,” shuffles towards him down the aisle. She asks him a question in Basque, poking her left index finger into his chest. “As the woman waited for me to answer a question I had not understood, I saw that the shawl she wore was brown not black, and realized it was anchovies – not cheese – that mixed with her rose water” (*Last Shepherd* 94).

The woman points Matt in the direction of Gorriena, Isabelle’s house, which he enters. “Then I saw them, hanging on the wall next to the cabinet – Amatxi’s seven blue and white plates. And for a moment I was not walking into a house in France but one in Arizona. Having gone in a circle. Stepped through a door. Walked up some stairs. And ended up right back where I started. The plates, like always, hanging on the kitchen wall. And on the plates men still tended sheep, women still baked bread” (*Last Shepherd* 95-96).

As is the case with the descriptions of men’s and women’s clothing and even body odor, the plates hanging on the kitchen wall — both in France and in the U.S. — speak of ancient traditions. Matt’s grandmother had brought her set with her from France. Matt remembers seeing

them in her kitchen his whole life, but these were plates that as a kid he was not allowed to touch. The images on the plates portray men as shepherds and women baking bread, traditional roles from the Old World that Basques took with them to the sheep ranches of America, as if nothing ever changed.

In contrast to the women who wear black, bake bread or handle rosaries while praying, the first time Matt encounters Isabelle, she is holding a shotgun leveled at his face. He is an intruder and she is ready to fight him off. The second time, however, she is at the stove, cooking eggs. Later, she is using a cleaver to chop chunks of meat from a ham bone. She will be shown many more times in the kitchen, preparing meals and serving them to guests and family.

Matt soon learns that Isabelle has temper. As she is placing the food on one of the blue plates to serve him, Matt mentions that his grandmother had the same plates in the U.S. Isabelle's response is to slam the plate into the sink where it shatters. She then places a cup of coffee in front of him and fills it: "'Coffee,' she said, and it wasn't a question." Matt adds: "I didn't drink coffee, but I thought right then would be a good time to start" (*Last Shepherd* 101). Isabelle then goes to the stove and grabs the pan. "For a moment, I got the idea she was going to hit me upside the head with it. But instead she dumped the remaining pieces of ham onto my plate" (*Last Shepherd* 102).

The image of Isabelle that starts forming by this point in *The Last Shepherd* is in stark contrast with that of the weeping woman who begs for forgiveness crumpled to her knees which Matt had conjured up back in Arizona. Instead, he now shows a fearful respect for his aunt, who appears to be a rather strong, direct, and assertive woman who is not afraid to use a shotgun (or any other weapon, such as a cleaver or a pan) to protect herself and her daughter.

On Sunday, Isabelle takes Matt to church. As tradition calls for, the men's space is on the second floor, while women and children are in the pews below. "Isabelle had a black veil over her head that draped down onto her shoulders" (*Last Shepherd* 103). She and the old woman from the night before are in church, on their knees, praying and working a rosary through their hands. Isabelle addresses Matt in Basque while in public. "Maybe she didn't want anyone to know I was a foreigner? Maybe she was embarrassed by my not speaking the language of my family?" (*Last*

*Shepherd* 105).

Matt then notices a girl who “stole into church” wearing a red shawl over her head. The color red must have made her stand out in the sea of black shawls that women traditionally wear to church in rural areas. “The woman next to the girl leaned over and whispered something to her. The girl turned and looked up at me. And when I saw how her chin narrowed to a point like mine and how her green eyes caught the light, I almost called out to her –because I knew her. I had seen a photograph. Not the black-and-white photo I brought to Urepel. But another. In color. Only it couldn’t be. Because the girl in the photograph –who is forever leaning out of a pickup truck, waving, hair flying, green eyes flashing- that girl was dead” (*Last Shepherd* 106). Isabelle tells Matt that the girl is his cousin from his mother’s family. Her name is Maria Mendia. Mathieu’s mother was Helena Etcheberri, and she was killed by an automobile in 1962 when she was only 27 years old. Her headstone describes her as a “loving mother and wife.” This reflects the traditional view of women being defined by their relationships to others; a woman not as an individual with her own value and accomplishments but rather by her role as someone’s daughter, wife or mother.

In Urepel, Isabelle shows Matt the gravestones of his relatives in the cemetery. “Your great aunt, Beatrice. She make the dinner for whole family before she lie down for the last time” (*Last Shepherd* 110), she explains. Again, the only quality of this woman that appears worth mentioning (even by Isabelle, a fellow woman) is that she cooked dinner and took care of the entire family before she allowed herself to die.

At the cemetery, Isabelle tells Matt: “Come, we go for bar now.” He is shocked because “it’s only eight in the morning.” To which Isabelle replies: “We late” (*Last Shepherd* 112). At the bar, Isabelle gets some *arno gorria* (red wine) and hands Matt a glass of it, and then goes back for a second and even a third glass. “Then Isabelle said it was time to go home to make the noon-time meal,” but Maria Mendia walked into the bar at that time. “‘We eat one hour,’ Isabelle said and held her index finger in the air to make clear the point” (*Last Shepherd* 115).



Matt stood watching Maria and thinking about his mother. “Dad told me she had lived in Urepel until she came to America. She was sixteen when she met my father in Arizona. Two years later, they were married” (*Last Shepherd* 116). In the bar, Matt walks up to Maria and the woman she is talking to. “The women facing me fell silent –smiles fading as I walked up.” He introduces himself but none of the women says anything. “Maria’s face flushed. She glanced from side to side, looking for escape, like a sheep cornered by a coyote” (*Last Shepherd* 116).

Back at Isabelle’s house, Matt finds a “hulking man sitting at the head of the kitchen table drinking red wine” (*Last Shepherd* 123). Isabelle introduces him as Marcelino, her husband. She is dumping chopped onions into a frying pan and then setting dishes of steaming vegetables and meats onto the table where Marcelino is sitting. In a later scene, Matt finds Isabelle behind her house washing a pig. “The animal’s front and back legs were hobbled. And it had a rope around its neck. Isabelle held the rope with one hand while with the other she used a wet brush to scrub down the pig.” She then shoves a bucket into Matt’s hands “as she pulled a knife from the fold of her apron and jammed it into the pig’s neck” (*Last Shepherd* 140). “Isabelle thrust the knife into the pig’s belly; its intestines spilled out onto the grass. I covered my mouth and nose against the smell of rotting vegetables that mushroomed into the air.” She says: “We need intestines for blood sausage” (*Last Shepherd* 141). One would think that the task of butchering a pig is not a role that a single woman should take assume. But Isabelle is shown as having the physical strength to hold down a pig with one hand while scrubbing it with the other, and also no qualms about stabbing a knife into the animal’s neck and matter-of-factly gutting it shortly thereafter. Matt, on the contrary, appears ready to vomit or pass out at the sight of the pig’s blood and intestines.

We get further insights into Isabelle’s personality from Jacques, a local lawyer who appears to have a romantic interest in her. He jokes about “how all Basque woman marry ugly men so they [don’t] leave them.” And he then compliments Isabelle on being the “only Basque woman with brains I ever met” (*Last Shepherd* 126). For her part, Isabelle treats both his teasing and his compliments in the same impassive way; she neither laughs nor frowns, although she occasionally shoots back a comment. The following interaction between the two of them jokingly brings up stereotypical preconceived ideas that men and women traditionally have about each other. Jacques: “*Oui*, I tell you, Isabelle, you open restaurant ... You be infamous.” Isabelle gives Matt a smile at

the misused word. “That just like man,” she said, “always keep woman in kitchen.” Jacques responds: “*Oui*, just like woman to no see what good at.” To which Isabelle counters: “And man no know what woman good at.” And Jacques, again: “*Oui*, I tell you, Isabelle, talk with you like dance with bear. I no watch out, I get me-self bit.” This gets a crackle of laughter out of Isabelle, and she responds: “If I a bear, I bite someone with more meat on bones.” “*Oui*, Mathieu, you see, the women of Urepel always have something to say,” Jacques adds (*Last Shepherd* 126).

Matt finds out that Isabelle and her husband Marcelino live in separate houses, called Gorriena and Odolena, respectively. Marcelino does not want to divorce Isabelle because he is hoping to inherit Gorriena. However, Marcelino has fathered a son (Jean) with another woman. Matt is surprised that Isabelle is apparently still resentful and has not forgiven her parents for going to America without her, but she has forgiven Marcelino for having his son Jean with another woman. Isabelle’s parents had not wanted her to marry Marcelino, but she did so anyway once they left for America.

Matt is also stunned to learn that Isabelle had taught herself English with a program of tapes called “English Translation made easy” because she had wanted to be a translator. “And I wondered about Isabelle in this house for all these years, listening to English tapes, dreaming about a place that her parents had gone to, and feeling unwanted. Only it didn’t make sense. I knew Aitatxi. He never would have left his daughter behind. No matter what she did” (*Last Shepherd* 148). It is somewhat sad to find out that this intelligent woman actually had dreams of one day having a profession as a translator and that she had worked with so much determination to learn English without help in preparation for it. But she had to give up her dreams for a life as a wife and mother, cooking and doing chores around the farm as was expected of her. Later, Isabelle is again shown “at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes” but “[h]er translation tapes were spread out over the table. From the tape recorder a woman said, ‘I will have steak for dinner, please’” (*Last Shepherd* 153).

Isabelle makes Matt read to her from his journal. He reads a section he wrote about his grandmother, Isabelle’s mother: “Amatxi bakes on Saturdays. The smell of cinnamon draws me to the kitchen where she rolls out the dough. Flour hangs in the air, gathers in her hair, sprinkles down

over me. Peeled apples bob in a bowl of water. She cuts a slice of one and hands it to me. Then bakes me a piece of sugar-coated crust. [...] And sings to me in Euskara. [...] And picks me up and dances with me around the kitchen” (*Last Shepherd* 154). This is a familiar and somewhat stereotypical image of the Basque grandmother baking a pie for her grandchild, singing Basque songs and dancing.

Matt gives Isabelle one of the letters that his grandmother wrote and were returned unopened. Isabelle has never seen any of them and suddenly realizes that her husband must have hidden them from her and sent them back. She walks across the pasture toward Marcelino’s house, with the letter in her hand and a determined attitude. One can almost picture the anger building up in her. “Her back was stiff and her stride was sure, as if she knew exactly where she was going. The white sheet of paper fluttered like a handkerchief in her hand.” But when her daughter calls out to her from the house, Isabelle stops and “something in [her] body seemed to break. She collapsed forward. Shoulders shaking as she wept” (*Last Shepherd* 156). When she returns, “neither the letter nor the fact she had been crying was visible.” Isabelle apparently does not want to show any emotion or weakness in front of Matt. “She went to the stove and began preparing a lunch of blood sausage and potatoes. But her hands trembled as she cut the potatoes into quarters and dropped them into a pot of water” (*Last Shepherd* 158).

For the next few days, Isabelle goes into a “self-imposed confinement” and does not leave the house. “She busied herself in the kitchen, baking pies and making preserves from the apples she had me pick from the trees growing along the far end of the pasture. She only spoke when she needed to. Her sentences were short and to the point” (*Last Shepherd* 159). In a later scene, Matt finds Isabelle with her hands folded on her lap. “Which was surprising; I couldn’t recall ever seeing her hands without a bowl or bucket, a spoon or fork, a knife or gun in them. Isabelle’s hands were always full of things. Always doing something. But now they were just lying there, palms up, fingers spread wide—empty. The other surprising thing was how calm her face was. It was like she didn’t have a care in the world: no house to clean, no beds to make, no pies to bake. And it worried me” (*Last Shepherd* 160). Matt hands Isabelle all of the returned letters and tells her that it is all Marcelino’s fault. But her only response is, “I make something for eat.” She is not angry. She just looks out the window, resigned, and in a matter-of-fact way she continues chopping tomatoes (*Last*

*Shepherd* 166).

Although Isabelle Etcheberri is a secondary character in *The Last Shepherd*, she plays a prominent role in the novel. Etchart presents a female Basque character who is portrayed from many different angles. We do see her in traditional roles such as cooking, baking and serving food or attending church and praying, but we also see her as an intelligent and ambitious woman who has taught herself English and has dreams of becoming a translator. She can go to a bar and drink three glasses of red wine at 8 a.m., and is also capable of using guns and knives for butchering animals or for self- defense. Isabelle is a woman who has a complicated relationship with her husband and also cares for a daughter with special needs but is independent and self-sufficient in that she lives without a man, runs her own farmstead, and is not afraid to get her hands dirty. She is just as capable of showing emotions (being angry or crying) as she is of calmness and self-control. In short, this is a Basque woman who is portrayed as having both masculine and feminine characteristics.

### **3.1.8. Martin Etchart, “Amatxi”**

Etchart is also the author of the short story “Amatxi” whose protagonist is a young boy but equally devotes attention to the boy’s Basque grandmother, after whom the story is titled. “Amatxi” is part of the anthology *Amatxi, Amuma, Amona: Writings in Honor of Basque Women* (2003), which contains a collection of fiction and non-fiction works that highlight female experiences. The editors argue that “identity, whether gender or culture-based, does matter” because even in an increasingly globalized world, people turn “to elements of their own identity that help them maintain their individuality, even, ironically, if that means identification with particular groups” (1). They affirm that “Basque women have played strong, diverse roles within their cultures, both that of the Basque Country and that of the Basque community spread throughout the world” (2).

“Amatxi” depicts “a day of transition in the life of a thirteen-year-old Basque-American boy, Michael, who learns about love and hope and the power of family while helping his grandmother prepare Easter dinner” (2). Etchart incorporates personal memories of his own

childhood into his fiction and sprinkles Basque words into the story, both of which contribute a feeling of authenticity to his writing. The theme of the generational transition from immigrant to American-born is one that is featured prominently.

The story starts out on Easter Day with the boy being “stuck sitting at Amatxi’s wooden kitchen table cleaning green beans” (“Amatxi” 12). Despite the fact that he seems to resent having to be in the kitchen helping his grandmother, he recalls how Easter dinner at this Basque grandparents’ house is a family tradition that he truly enjoys because it “was like being in the middle of a cyclone where everything is sound and movement,” a chaos of many family members talking, singing, and laughing. When his mother tells Michael that he is old enough to help his eighty-eight-year-old grandmother with Easter dinner, his response is “But that’s girl stuff” to which the mother responds, “You sound like your father” (“Amatxi” 13). Apparently, even the younger generations of Basque-Americans have internalized the stereotypical roles where women are expected to be the ones working in the kitchen, and these stereotypes are passed on from father to son.

Michael’s parents are apparently getting divorced, and this thought occupies his mind. While in the kitchen, the grandmother suggests that thirteen is the perfect age to start looking for a wife. “You wait any longer, the good wives all gone” (“Amatxi” 15). One requirement, Amatxi adds, is that the wife “must have a big heart” so that “she can forgive you a lot” (“Amatxi” 15). She tells Michael that she first saw her future husband in church when she was eleven years old, and she was the one who married him, not the other way around. It appears that she had been the first one to kiss him because he was too shy to do so. At seventeen, she had been eager to get married because she needed “to start having babies” (“Amatxi” 15).

It is unusual to read about an Old World eighty-eight year old Basque woman who is so comfortable talking about private matters such as dating, marriage, and having children with her teenage grandson. She relates the story of her friend Agatha Carategia who was very pretty but had been told by her parents that she would have to marry a man who, by Amatxi’s description, was dull and physically repulsive. To help her friend, she suggests that she go to America with her and her husband because “you can marry anyone you want there,” which makes Agatha incredibly

happy. However, Agatha ends up marrying Roberto and having eight kids, “all with ham heads” like their father (“Amatxi” 18-19).

The point she is trying to make to the young boy is that nobody can judge a marriage but those who are involved in it, just as is happening to Michael’s parents. She is a wise woman who has a sense of humor and makes good use of metaphors. When Michael asks about his parents: “So they’ll get back together?” Amatxi’s response is, “No one likes to throw away wine... Even if sometimes it taste a little sour” (“Amatxi” 20). And, indeed, when the grandmother is clearing the table to prepare for dessert, Michael’s father and mother appear in the doorway, holding hands.

In a recent communication<sup>27</sup> with Martin Etchart about his views on Basque and/or Basque-American women as they are portrayed in his literature, he shared that there are four principal Basque women who have been very influential in his life and writing. The first is his “*amatchi*” (grandmother). Etchart said that his *amatchi* “was an elegant woman who, although she came from a rural setting, had a genteel air about her. Her silver hair was always swooped up in a perfectly coiffed bun.” He also “never saw her in anything but a dress — not even a skirt!” The second woman was his “Ttantta Mari,” who was his grandfather’s sister. Etchart told me that “Mari had a small farm outside of Chino where every Easter the whole family — cousins, first and second and beyond — would gather for a wonderful meal.” Much of the food he has in his books comes from those Easter gatherings. According to Etchart, his Ttantta Mari was the perfect contrast to his Amatchi. Mari “was a very down-to-earth person who worked outside and wasn’t afraid to get her hands dirty.” A lot of the character of Isabelle in *The Last Shepherd* comes from this woman, Etchart shared.

Finally, the other two influential Basque women in Martin Etchart’s life are his father’s sisters, Noeline and Arlette. They “seem to be mirror-images” of his amatchi and Ttantta Mari, Etchart adds: “Aunt Noel has a quiet strength and grace about her that reminds me of Amatchi. Aunt Arlette has an openness and practicality about her that reminds me of Ttantta Mari.” Etchart concluded that for the Basque women in his literature, he draws on all four of his relatives. “All of them are wonderful and fascinating with a deep strength and commitment to family that I

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<sup>27</sup> Personal email communication with Martin Etchart on March 9, 2015.

admire.”

### 3.1.9. Maria Davis Denzler, “Into the Dark”

Another short story that can be found in the anthology *Amatxi, Amuma, Amona* is Maria Davis Denzler’s “Into the Dark.” Denzler is a second-generation Nevadan whose parents were Basque immigrants who had contributed to building that state’s ranching industry in the early twentieth century. It is described as “a haunting, lyric tale of the presence of an owl that links grandmother to granddaughter” (3). The characters in her story are once again immigrant grandparents and American-born descendants. The repeated appearance of the owl connects “the past to the present as each woman – grandmother, mother, and daughter – feels the presence of the mysterious bird in her life” (3). The characters speak a mixture of Spanish and Basque, something common among Basque immigrants in the United States.

“Into the Dark” is set in 1931 at the Martin Ranch in the Nevada desert. The story begins with Jose, the ranch foreman, being told not to kill owls because doing so brings bad luck. Allegedly, this is why the foreman’s daughter Marichu is very sick. He feels “the pain that seared his mind and filled his gut” and he repeats to himself day after day that he wants his daughter to get well (22).

As Jose turns his attention to the kitchen, his wife Dominga is “cutting vegetables and stoking the wood fire for lunch.” The couple had “risen at 5:00 a.m. to start the wood stoves and begin the preparation for breakfast; steak and eggs” (22). Jose and Dominga Ancho are said to have been at the Martin Ranch in northeastern Nevada for six years with their four children. Jose is originally from Navarra and had come to the U.S. when he was nineteen. “Dominga had also emigrated to the States at nineteen and had gone to work for cousins in Jack Creek as a cook and housekeeper at a Basque hotel” (23).

In reading the description of Jose and Dominga, it soon becomes clear that these are not fictional characters but real Basque immigrants to Nevada. The Anchos were actually the parents of Mary Ancho Davis, author of *Chorizos in an Iron Skillet*. Maria Davis Denzler is Mary Ancho’s

daughter, and thus Jose and Dominga's granddaughter. Therefore, "Into the Dark" is a semi-autobiographical story.

"Into the Dark" describes the difficulties that Dominga had experienced in adjusting to her life as a recent immigrant working in Jack Creek. "Her time there had not been pleasant and there were many nights she cried bitter tears about leaving her home in the Pyrenees. But now she was at the Martin, and she loved the small house, and took care of it as if she had put down the money herself for the purchase" (23).

We learn that Jose's nine-year-old daughter Mary, who they refer to as "Marichu," has been sick for several days. Since this is a child who has never been sick, there is great family concern about her current illness. Jose observes how Dominga "was not standing at the sink, cutting potatoes and carrots for the stew" that she had talked about in the morning, but rather "was sitting uncharacteristically slumped at the kitchen table, staring out the kitchen window," her eyes "glazed and swollen." She was holding "a knotted white lace handkerchief in her right hand, soaked with tears, and gripped it fiercely" (24).

Father Mendiko, the priest, is called to come over to the ranch. Dominga "stood behind him, crying softly, holding her string of black beads tightly in her fingers, moving from one to the next, repeating over and over again the liturgy of the rosary" (25). Jose does not pray; he stays in the kitchen, sitting, and thinking about work-related matters. When the priest is giving Mary the last rites, "a weak voice rose from the bed," protesting that she is not going to die. The priest first sees terror in Mary's brown eyes and then "an amazing strength and anger appeared that he had not seen before" (25).

The story fast forwards to sixty years later in Reno. It would be the year 1991. A woman by the name of Kate recalls how, while standing at the kitchen window making dinner, she had seen a great horned owl perched on the telephone wires near the back fence of her garden. She wonders, "Why does it have to be tonight?" She is now in bed, pregnant, awaiting a Cesarean and talking to her mother. Kate is Mary's daughter and Mary is about 69 years old at this point. For Kate, "seeing an owl tonight, especially on this night, was unnerving. Owls held a special meaning



in her life. A kinship existed there, or maybe a mystical relationship, she was never sure” (26). She reminisces of all the times when she and her siblings were growing up on the ranch and they saw the owls; those encounters are associated with fear and uncertainty for her. This irrational fear leads to complications during the birth of her baby, but in the end everything is well.

Again the story fast forwards to nine years later, in the Nevada desert. It is approximately the year 2000 and all three women – Mary, Kate, and her small daughter – are at a campground. The little girl draws an owl and – to Kate’s surprise – exclaims, “Mommy, this is my favorite animal.” Mary, who is probably close to 78 years old, states matter-of-factly that her father used to kill the owls on the ranch. “The girls’ eyes grew round in disbelief” as she cannot understand why anyone would kill her favorite animal (29). The change in attitudes towards the owls is a metaphor for the change across the three generations of Basque women. There is an evolution in how the owls are viewed, from the superstition of the first immigrant generation (who believes that they bring back luck and feels the need to kill them in order to protect their chickens), to the kinship and mystical relationship of the second generation (which nevertheless is permeated with fear), to ultimately the youngest generation for whom an owl is just an animal, “just an owl” (30).

In contrast with the above novels and short-stories in which Basque women hold secondary or shadow roles, while the lead role is played by one or more males, it is worth mentioning the existence of several other stories that afford women a more significant part as protagonists. In order to explore these portraits of women, five works by Basque-American authors have been chosen. They are two male and three female authors of various generations, and the works cover a range of periods from the early twentieth century and the Spanish Civil War to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

These works that will constitute the focus of this dissertation are the following, listed in chronological order by their publication date: *Basque Girl* by Mirim Isasi (1940), *Child of the Holy Ghost* by Robert Laxalt (1992), *The Deep Blue Memory* by Monique Urza (1993), *Mountain City* by Gregory Martin (2000), and *My Mama Marie* by Joan Errea (2013).

### 3.2. Gender, Place and Identity

The concept of space has encountered interest not only in postmodernist social theory but also in feminist theory and geography because it reveals more about power relations than other concepts, such as time or history, which guided sociological studies until the 1970s. Feminist geography is a field that applies the theories, methods and critiques of feminism to the study of the human environment, society and geographical space. Feminist geographers focus on the lived experiences of individuals and groups in their own localities.

This discipline asks how aspects of identity such as gender, class, race or sexual orientation intersect and are re-made across social spaces. It stresses the need to deconstruct terms such as difference, patriarchy, resistance, and space by exploring the ways in which power and knowledge are produced and reproduced through these concepts. Drawing on the work of a broad range of theorists, feminist geographers have argued that a focus on concepts such as class and gender alone does not adequately explain important differences that also coexist in relation to race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality (Oberhauser 736). In particular, feminist geographers such as Gillian Rose have critiqued the notion that gendered identities and spaces are “natural” and “ontologically sealed” or that socio-spatial positions are fixed. Rose defined identity as “how we make sense of ourselves.” In *Feminism & Geography* (1993) she explains how human beings have different identities on different scales; for example, someone’s local identity likely differs from his or her global identity.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir challenged the assumption of biological determinism by arguing that women are not born but made. If gender is said to be socially constructed, we must ask how concepts of the masculine and the feminine change not only across space but also over time. When considering the cultural manifestations of ethnic groups, such as in our analysis of women in Basque-American literature, it may be useful to explore how a certain environment might have influenced and helped shape individual and group identities in that particular place. We would want to consider how leaving “home” to settle and build a life in geographies far away from one’s original birthplace might change people’s – in our particular study, women’s – circumstances and how these geographical movements are associated with the

renegotiation of gender divisions.

Linda McDowell reminds us that the forced or voluntary movement of peoples across the globe has changed “the relationships between individual and group identity, everyday life, and territory or place” (2). But despite these migrations, for the majority of people, everyday life continues to take place within a finite area. Places, however, are increasingly being seen as “contested, fluid and uncertain.” McDowell adds that “it is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion”(3). Power relations construct rules which define boundaries. These social and spatial boundaries define who belongs to a place and who can be excluded. Also, “in certain places, different people live together but distance between them may occur. Social distance does not always imply geographical distance, and occupants of the same geographical spaces may live in very different ‘places’” (5).

In Laxalt’s *Child of the Holy Ghost* we encounter a community in the village of Donibane that by all appearances is tight-knit and homogeneous, populated by Basques who have inhabited that area since ancestral times and who define their identities in opposition to *Others*, those from outside their boundaries. The Garats’ farmhouse, for instance, was built by one of their ancestors as far back as 1454 and multiple generations of the same family have resided in it ever since. However, not every member of this community, and certainly not every member of the Garat family, experiences that place equally.

When Jeanne Garat becomes pregnant, she is rejected by her family and forced to leave the village of her birth. What seems unclear is whether her biggest misstep is having had intercourse out of wedlock or rather having done so with a Frenchman, a non-Basque, an outsider. Jeanne had “made the ultimate error of loving a man who was not even Basque. He might as well have been a visitor from another planet” (*Child* 40). Jeanne’s grandson, Basque-American narrator Pete Indart, believes that he is returning to the “home” of his ancestors but experiences the shock of being publicly rejected by his relatives who label him as “merely an American friend” (*Child* 4).

Pete is told that the villagers had treated his mother Maitia with affection when she was a child and had taken her to heart because “her mother’s sin was not her sin” (*Child* 35). However, this affirmation is highly questionable in view of Maitia’s experience at her First Communion when “the first visible blow fell” (*Child* 41): There she is confronted with the word *illégitime*, which brands her as different and unworthy of the same treatment that the rest of the villagers enjoy. This confrontation with her “otherness” marks the moment when Maitia, like her mother before her, must leave the place of her birth for the city of Bordeaux. After she arrives there, Maitia is accepted by her stepfather Labadiste but not without conditions: She is told to shed her peasant clothing and stop using her native Basque language. Her former Basque rural self must be cast off in order to adopt a new and acceptable French city persona, imposed upon her by her stepfather.

In stark contrast with Jeanne and Maitia’s powerless struggle to remain and be accepted in their place of birth are the experiences of the men, Garat senior and his son Jean-Baptiste. By virtue of being land-owning males, they are secure in the knowledge that they will never have to become anyone’s servant and no plans will ever be made to marry them off to the best suitor without their consent, as is the case with Jeanne and Maitia. At Amatchi’s funeral, the older Garat feels entitled to be “his usual inhospitable self” and to leave his guests behind with the excuse of having to work (*Child* 83). Females do not have the freedom or power to choose such behavior. Garat’s son Jean-Baptiste also has the power to act pompously and pose as master of the household, even though he is not. As men, they are not obligated to behave in any given way or do anything simply because “it is expected of them” due to their gender.

However, a female’s experience of place can be quite different if lucky enough to be taken under the wing of a male. In Maitia’s childhood, being associated with her tarnished and powerless mother makes her earlier years in Donibane fraught with difficulty. Her situation changes when, as a young adult, she returns to her village to care for her grandfather. Under the protection and supervision of a respected senior male member of the community, and with his permission, Maitia is able to enjoy small glimpses of freedom such as “having a long and peaceful lunch in a restaurant,” walking to the *fronton* to watch the men play jai-alai, or dancing alone with Viktor in the town square (*Child* 90-91).

Gendered characteristics differ not only between countries and historical time, but also in everyday spaces and interactions (McDowell 15). Edward Soja talks about the “spatiality of social life” (44), i.e. the relationship between space and the construction of generic or social identity which is never innocent since race, class, and gender are inscribed as spatial metaphors. Feminists such as Nancy Duncan propose a new epistemology based on the idea that knowledge is corporeal, sexual, and intricately connected with space. Space itself affects the way in which not only gender but also social identity are constructed and conceived so that we could speak of a mutual correlation between identity and spatiality, as the influential British geographer Doreen Massey outlines.

In *Space, Place and Gender*, Massey asks why it is that “settlement or place *is* so frequently characterized as bounded, as enclosure, and as directly counterposed to spaces as flows” (6). She challenges the idea that, whereas time is seen as fluid and provisional, space and location tend to be theorized as stasis and fixity. Drawing on object-relations theory and other, mostly psychoanalytic, approaches to identity-formation, Massey summarizes the argument by stating that “the need for the security of boundaries, the requirement for such a defensive and counterpositional definition of identity, is culturally masculine,” adding that many feminists have argued against such definitions of identity and in favor of “thinking in terms of relations” (6).

Massey further affirms that thinking about places as “particular moments in intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed and renewed” implies that they are open and porous networks of social relations rather than bounded areas. It implies that ‘identities’ are “constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them” (120). This leads to what she calls a “global sense of place,” where ‘places’ are defined by certain socio-spatial relationships that are at play there and give that particular place its distinctive character.

One challenge may be defining what exactly is meant by ‘place.’ In the words of historical geographer Donald Meinig, place is a means by which “we pierce the finite blur of the world and fix a piece of our environment as something distinct and memorable” (3). Meinig describes the richness of our ordinary surroundings, suggesting at least ten different ways that a single place can

be labeled and located. In his understanding of landscape as place, Meinig states that “the individuality of places is a fundamental characteristic of subtle and immense importance to life on earth, that all human events *take place*, all problems are anchored in place, and ultimately can only be understood in such terms” (46).

And what does the expression “a sense of place” refer to? The concept has an interdisciplinary nature, and thus receives varying definitions and is used to suit various purposes depending on the discipline. Feminist geographer Gillian Rose describes sense of place as the process of infusing a place with “meaning and feeling.” It’s a state of mind that is derived when a place is infused with meaning and emotion by remembering important events that occurred in that place or by labeling a place with a certain character. Setha Low further states that this concept is also referred to as *place attachment*, *topophilia*, *insidedness*, and *community sentiment*. “*Place attachment* is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual’s and group’s understanding of and relation to the environment.” Therefore, place attachment goes beyond “an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place” (qtd. in Cross 1).

Despite migrations and mobility, local attachments, i.e. “places,” are still significant. Most of the time, people live spatially limited, geographically bounded lives; for example, in a home, a neighborhood, a city, a workplace, a country. And these places are constructed through various complex social relationships that intersect and operate at multiple levels, and that are affected by attitudes, beliefs, images and symbols of equal variability and complexity.

The truth is that individuals have no single sense of place but rather bring to the places they inhabit entire sets of cultural preconceptions. These shape the way people respond to a particular place and, to some extent, people also reshape the place to fit those preconceptions. A sense of place has a dual nature which involves individuals’ personal perspective, orientation and interpretation of an environment as well as their emotional reaction to that environment.

Jennifer E. Cross from the Department of Sociology at Colorado State University conducted research on community attachments in Nevada County, California. She became frustrated with the concept of sense of place or the related terms *place attachment*, *topophilia*, *insidedness*, or *community sentiment*. Cross argues that *sense of place* is composed of two separate facets that are nevertheless related. One aspect is the “relationships to place,” which refers to the ways that people relate to places, or the types of bonds (biographical, spiritual, ideological, etc.) they have with places. The other aspect is “community attachments,” which “consists of the depth and types of attachments to one particular place” (2).

Place is unique to each of us because we each build our attachments based on our personal history with a place, and these attachments often become our strongest and most enduring relationships. In these “biographical relationships,” as Cross calls them, place is an integral part of our personal history and identity as we connect to it in a cognitive, physical and emotional way. For example, we build an emotional attachment to a particular home that we have lived in for a long period of time, or a town where we know many people because our family has lived there for generations. The place and the people become infused in one’s psyche. Spending time in a place, Cross adds, “creates memories and experience, which become part of a person’s individual and community identity” (4).

Massey, however, argues that the persistence of an idealized notion of an era when ‘places’ were supposedly inhabited by coherent and homogeneous communities is actually problematic (146). In her view, this continued identification of *place* with *community* is actually a misidentification. She argues that communities can be formed and exist without being in the same place. Examples would include networks of friends who share common interests, and religious, ethnic or political communities. Furthermore, Massey states that it has become increasingly rare to find places that consist of single ‘communities’ in the sense of coherent social groups (153). And even if such homogeneous communities did exist, occupants of the same geographical space often experience each place very differently due to distinctions in social status, gender, or power status, so there really is no single sense of place. By using gender as a social and/or spatial construct, we can approach the concepts of femininity or masculinity as cultural identities that are place-specific and entail different spatial behaviors.

Wallace Stegner stated that the West is about “eighty percent urban” despite the mythology that colors our perception of the American West as a huge, semi-wild and sparsely populated area (Stegner 148). The places in which the women of the five works at the center of this dissertation spend their lives are mainly rural settings, such as the Isasi farmstead in *Basque Girl*, the small village of Donibane in *Child of the Holy Ghost*, the remote Nevada town of *Mountain City* in Gregory Martin’s memoir, or the small French Basque town of Banca, the lonely little town of Currie, Nevada and the various rural ranches in *My Mama Marie*.

Isasi’s *Basque Girl* starts out introducing the reader to the place where “page one” of her life unfolded, namely “an ancient Basque farm that hid among soft waves of a rolling countryside . . . on the Spanish side of that grand old Basque land which has remained through time always in one soul” (11). Her language signals the nostalgia and yearning for her homeland which she describes as “always green” and “fertile,” with “deep roots” and “abundant moisture” (13), as if in contrast with the shallow roots of her new country and the aridity of the Western landscape. In the narrator’s view, childhood and homeland are both tied to perfect happiness. The home country Isasi evokes is paradise for her. Following Sabino Arana’s traditional nationalism, this Basque Country is tied to ancient customs, tradition, and the past. Her family’s “old house” was built in the sixteenth century; the “new house had been built in the seventeenth century, by which time new and modern ideas had arisen” (29). This place she yearns for — we assume that from the United States, where Isasi took refuge during the Spanish Civil War — is the ancient home of her ancestors. It is a homeland tied to her mother tongue *Euskara* and to the Catholic faith.

At the time Isasi wrote her novel, the idea of the “melting pot” was very much in vogue in the United States. It is therefore not unexpected that the author would feel as if embracing a different culture implied renouncing her own, thus the expressions of yearning for her homeland and the book’s emphatic final declaration, “I am Basque. Gora Euzkadi!” The protagonist has two separate identities, Basque and American, which cannot come together in the figure of the Basque emigrant. Isasi’s identity representation is exclusivist and her only way of maintaining her Basque identity intact is by preserving that ancient past that is linked to her homeland. The autobiographical narrative speaks of her devotion to this country, her racial pride, and her love of Basque traditions, and the accompanying drawings and photographs reinforce these ideas.



Gregory Martin's memoir *Mountain City* is a good example of how the concept of "sense of place" is applied in literature. The place that gives the book its title is a small and remote northern Nevada town. To anyone unfamiliar with this place, it may initially come across as an unremarkable town that is almost deserted and close to extinction. But to Martin it appears to be the center of the universe. He writes sensitively about this town that he left long ago but is still attached to and to which he keeps returning. What draws him to this place are not just the inhabitants (some of them his family) but especially the fond memories of growing up in this town which he describes without being overly sentimental. Martin uses his own sense of place to evoke an emotional response on the part of readers so they are able to empathize with the beauty he finds in the town and its people.

The first chapter starts off on a humorous note, introducing us to Uncle Mel and the Tremewan's store. But soon after that, we are introduced to the place that is at the center of the story. Martin reminisces about the time when he was 10 years old and his grandfather took him to tour the old mining town of Rio Tinto, just outside Mountain City. He is able to convey the beauty he finds in the abandoned shacks and crumbling foundations of homes and the schoolhouse, and in the rusted-out cars and trucks. He writes that "Mountain City is not a town or city or anything else. Mountain City is copper and a little silver and less gold. Mountain City is a state of flux and impermanence" (45). It is "a Western archetype for hope and failed hope and failure" (46). Martin admires the courage of the three dozen elderly residents who remain in Mountain City and trust that the prosperity that the town once enjoyed might circle around again.

The town is small and only has three dozen inhabitants, but it has some racial diversity, with Indians and Chinese, and even an Iranian man, as well as people of Basque and Cornish ancestry sharing life in this place. An interesting chapter is the one where Gregory reflects on the connection between Basque last names and places. He talks about how, in times past in the Basque Country, Basques who once lived in a certain place, such as a house above some area or a place by a stream, were known and identified by their connection to that place. However, after the Basques migrated to the United States, this connection between place and last name was lost in their new American context. Gregory thinks about how, in his own case, even though he is only three generations removed from the homeplace his ancestors lived in, he has lived "in twenty-one

places in twelve states in twenty-seven years” (55).

The geographic and economic reality of Mountain City has a bearing on the experiences of the women who live in the town. For instance, most people in the town live in mobile homes that are permanent. One reason is that nobody can afford to have a new house built because of the high cost of transporting materials and laborers from Elko, which is eighty-four miles away. However, for the widows (Rosella, Bobbie, Dorothy and Margaret), “trailer homes are more practical than new houses” because they are smaller, “with less space to feel absences” (56).

As to how the women perceive and relate to this place, I will mainly address Gregory’s grandmother. She is said to be eighty-four years old “and has lived in Mountain City for forty years” (22), even though she was born in Elko. Despite having lived most of her adult life in Mountain City, she feels excluded by a group of four other elderly women. Grandma is frustrated at not being allowed to join the group known as “the widows,” which consists of four widowed elderly women who meet daily at ten in the morning “at the Miner’s Club to drink coffee and play the slots” (20). Grandma does not want to become a widow but she can’t stand being excluded from the daily get-togethers at the Miner’s Club, even though she has a chance to interact with these women on plenty of other occasions. This exclusion makes grandma bitter enough that she hides in the store or turns away from “the widows” when she sees them approaching.

Another place that is central to Gregory and his family is the grandparents’ home, in particular their kitchen and kitchen table. The kitchen is not exclusively a female place in this story. Both grandparents share the duties while preparing dinner for the whole family and the whole family will gather around the kitchen table. “Grandma peeling potatoes. Gramps stirring the gravy” (88). Mel Basañez ate dinner every day of the year in that kitchen when he was 16 and first started courting Gregory’s aunt Lou (77). The kitchen table is where Grandma sits with fresh baked cookies and a glass of milk waiting for Gregory until as late as two in the morning when he drives into town for a visit (30). And Gregory, his aunts and his grandmother sit around that same kitchen table until late at night playing cards (94). As was the case with the grandmother’s table in *The Deep Blue Memory*, the grandparents’ kitchen table in Martin’s story is a place of warmth, love, laughter and experiences shared with family. It is a place that is rich with memories for everyone

involved.

In contrast with this warmth of the kitchen, we have the “brutal” winter weather in Mountain City. The climate in this area is another element that creates a certain sense of place of its inhabitants. Its influence is such that it defines the moods and personality of the book’s characters. For example, Gramps has the same morning routine, but the mood is very different in winter. “In winter, Gramps does exactly those same things,<sup>28</sup> this same ritual, but the silence that attends those mornings is as different as the contrary seasons. It is as cold as the wind” (149). In Grandma’s case, she takes the weather with stoicism. For her, cold is cold, even when it is “[s]ixty below, not counting windchill” (113). “My grandmother, unlike Gramps, is an emotional person, but not about the weather. For more than eighty years, she’s been taught to believe that, if you live in this part of the country, the weather is hard, but it’s not as hard as you are” (114). In addition, people in Mountain City figure that the cold weather will “break before they do” (114). Summer brings along a burst of activity, and Gregory’s grandparents go out for walks after dinner, hand in hand. Watching them brings up mixed feelings of happiness and anxiety in the narrator because he knows that winter return soon enough and he does not know “what will become of us all when winter comes again” (151).

In the Introduction to *My Mama Marie*, Daniel Montero, Publications Coordinator at the Center for Basque Studies of the University of Nevada, Reno, writes about the importance of the places where the story plays out. He also mentions the theme of immigrants finding opportunity in a landscape “that should, or could have daunted them, beaten them, as it did many others” (8) and how they fight to “create a life in a landscape that was in many ways inhospitable” (4).

*My Mama Marie* begins in the town of Banca in the French Basque Country, where Marie Jeanne Goyhenetche was born in the early 1900s. This place for her is connected to the grim circumstances of her upbringing. In Banca, Marie spent her childhood and teenage years practically as an orphan, with an absent father and an uninvolved mother, and exploited by a strict

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<sup>28</sup> “Each morning at exactly ten before eight, Gramps finishes his breakfast, takes his cap from the top of the refrigerator, puts it on, and gets his green sweatshirt from its hook on the back of the hall closet door. He comes back to the kitchen and kisses Grandma on the cheek as she watches Good Morning America” (149).

and abusive uncle who was a priest. Indoor spaces are associated with work as a maid and punishment and beatings by the priest. The outdoors, where birds sang and flowers bloomed, is where Marie escapes from the “musty cat smell” of the “dark old house” (27) where she is forced to live as a servant to an old lady. She is removed from these conditions when her uncle sends money to bring her to America, but Marie Jeanne is said to have left France and her grandmother behind “with a very sad heart” (34).

After forty days, she arrived in “the smoky, dismal-looking port of New York City” and her first thought is to return to France as soon as she can. She is still in shock about never seeing her family and home country again and fearful of what lies ahead. However, the many new things Marie experiences, such as the sight of the first black man, fascinate her and she soon starts opening up to the possibility of “rewarding new sights and opportunities” (40) in the United States. She is “amazed” by a large deposit of salt, “marveled at the size of this country” (41) and is “bewildered” when she arrives at the “desolate little train stop in Currie, Nevada” (4). One can only imagine what Marie must have thought arriving in Nevada in the hot desert sun after having spent her life in the green and rainy Basque Country. But the personal connection and life-long friendship that Marie ends up building with Gregoria, her employer in Currie, “a very warm-hearted, loving, and kind person,” provides her a glimpse of what her life will be like in America (53).

Marie then goes to work in Eureka, Nevada, at a hotel which was owned by a Basque couple who were friends of her brother. This place is associated with long hours of hard work but also the fun that a young single woman had at the dances that were held at the hotel. These were the years where Marie was beautiful and popular, and had many single men courting her. One could say that this time in Eureka corresponds to a time where Marie is happy and carefree, and it culminates in her marriage to Arnaud Paris.

In the couple’s first home in Secret Pass in Elko County, Marie “felt at home” (62). A proverb says that “home is where the heart is,” and this does seem to be true in Marie’s case. Even though the young couple lived in “an old line camp in a one-room cabin ... where the sheep were” and “every day was a hardworking day for the young bride” (62), this is where Marie feels truly

at home because she is with the person that she loves most. Here Marie has her first three children, so it is a place associated with family and new beginnings. Her daughter, Joan, also recalls spending her happiest days in this place fishing with her father (9). In the sheep camp, the family's home is a big wagon but, despite the cramped quarters, Joan was happy there. "Being a child in a moving home will always be a good memory for me. Our life really made for togetherness and family unity" (68). For the author, the connection between this place and happiness has to do with the people she shared those special moments with, in particular the father she adores.

Before the fourth child is born, Arnaud purchases a ranch called Forest Home that "had a big log house with six bedrooms" (69). Even though this new housing situation is a step up from their one-room cabin, the descriptions of life for Joan appear to be filled with nightmares, punishment and frequent encounters with her impatient and often angry mother. For Marie, a bigger house also meant more work and likely more stress; she was raising five children, growing and canning vegetables, keeping a large home clean and tending to the herders at the ranch. But, overall, everyone appears to have enjoyed life at Forest Home: "Life on the ranch was quite wonderful and though we all had our responsibilities and chores, we had fun growing up" (98).

This contentedness changes when Joan's parents purchase a home in the town of Winnemucca so that the children can attend upper grades in school. The Paris children hated "every darn minute of it" because they were "the original 'hicks from the sticks'" (125). Winnemucca is an urban place where they do not fit in. Having been raised in the rural environment of sheep camps and ranches, Joan and her brothers feel like outsiders because everything in town is different from their past experiences. Even their mother dislikes life in town: "We all hated town life, but Mama hated it most of all of us. She stuck it out for a while, but then she went back to the ranch" (126).

When the mother left town and returned to the ranch, she left her daughter "to watch the boys and take care of the big old house," which she "had to keep waxed and polished like glass all the time" (126). Putting the daughter but not the sons in charge of household chores and the care of children is an example of the separation of labor along gender lines that will be dealt with in the following section.

### 3.2.1. Gender Roles and the Division of Labor

In his book *Buffalotarrak* about the Basques in Wyoming, Romtvedt dedicates the chapter “1920: Buffalo: Amatxi, Grandmother, the Dignity of Work” to Jeanne Etchemendy, who took on the role of matriarch to the Basques in that area once there were no more male “kings of the Basques.” As we have seen in the stories told by boardinghouse workers, ranch cooks and many other Basque women in the American West, Jeanne’s life was filled with work and chores. She got little sleep and the work was always waiting, Romtvedt writes. However, he also says that Jeanne liked it that way because she believed that “[w]ork gives a woman a sense of place” (49). This statement made me interested in exploring Basque women’s attitude to work and their approach to staying occupied for long hours with a multitude of chores.

Traditionally, in rural Basque households, three generations live in a *baserri* (farmhouse), and roles are often assigned according to a set of unwritten rules. This family arrangement can also be found in Mirim Isasi’s *Basque Girl*. Basque farms tend to house an elder couple, which in Isasi’s novel is represented by the widowed grandmother (*Grandmere*), and a married child of the elder couple with his/her spouse and children, which in our story is the narrator’s father with his wife and two daughters, Erena and Delores [sic]. Occasionally, Basque *baserriak* also house unmarried siblings of the younger couple as well as an occasional live-in farm laborer or servant; in *Basque Girl* we encounter two of these servants, Mari and Estaban [sic].

In her pivotal work *Basque Gender Studies*, Margaret Bullen discusses the traditional Basque rural family and the division of labor at the *baserri*: “Work on the land was divided between the *etxeokak*, the members of the household, which typically comprised three generations. The senior couple handed over ownership and management of the farm to one of their sons or daughters, but continued to live on the farm, though technically retired from work. The junior couple, the inheriting son or daughter with their spouse, together formed the central core of the household’s labor force and were aided by their own children as they grew up, as well as by any unmarried siblings who remained in the *baserri*” (73). These family roles Bullen describes are somewhat different from those encountered in *Basque Girl*, where the widowed grandmother single-handedly manages the family farm, demonstrating her autonomy and authority, while her

son is absent for long periods of time. The son's wife merely plays a subordinate role and is not portrayed as offering any assistance with work on the land or other farm-management duties.

The narrator's grandfather and father are described as absent males. Of the former, the narrator says that he was a "medicine man" who would "leave home for days or maybe weeks" traveling around the countryside helping the sick. Erena's father also "traveled far from his native Basque land," first to England for his education and later to Cuba, among other countries. Erena blames these long absences to the Basques' "itching foot" (14) and their desire to travel but it is not uncommon for males in rural farmhouses to have to seek additional employment outside their farm to supplement the family income.

While the Isasi males are going about "their far and carefree ways" (15), it is the grandmother who holds the estate together. She is in control of every activity, from managing the farm and household and giving orders, to planting crops, making wine and cider, trading goods, and paying taxes to the Spanish state. Despite being portrayed as wise and capable, however, as soon as her son returns to the *baserri*, this apparently strong and confident woman assumes a subservient role: "*Grandmere*, it is true, enjoyed a status of some dignity. Overseer of the family acres, a manager with authority while the man of the family was on his travels, she was ready to take orders when he returned (117)."

This is consistent with the traditional way in which rural Basque *baserriak* are operated: the *etxeoandre* (woman-of-the-house) takes over when the *etxejoaun* (man-of-the-house) is away. The grandmother appears to have a great amount of power since she is in control of household and farm management activities as well as the handling of money. In *Basque Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, Douglass and Zulaika affirm that during the lengthy absences of sojourning males, "the active female head of the household becomes the compensating authority figure, with corresponding social diminishment and marginalization of her male consort's familial role" (391).

Del Valle further points out that, in Basque culture, the topic of financial administration has been considered an indication of the power that women supposedly exercise (163). However,

this notion of power is misleading since it is ultimately the male who owns and controls the money, while the female merely administers it (164). In *Basque Girl*, as soon as Erena's father returns home from his travels, *grandmere* ceases to exercise control and willingly reverts to a secondary and subservient role. When the father arrives, "the master is at home." Special drinks and foods are served, and the women must take care of this quickly because "the senor is fatigued and desires refreshment" (122). Everyone caters to Mr. Isasi as if to a king and his original power as patriarch and master of the house is immediately restored.

It is immediately clear that the narrator has a special admiration and love for her grandmother. Erena's focus on *grandmere* and their close relationship initially may lead readers to believe that the girl has no mother, but we later find out that although the mother is indeed alive, the bonds between mother and daughter are not as strong as the connection between Erena and her grandmother. The mother's character and physical appearance are diametrically opposed to those of her daughter and mother-in-law. She is described as "fine china," while the other two women are "brass or steel." What Erena mainly remembers about her mother is "her beauty, her rare and delicate complexion, her great waves of auburn hair, her figure that held the grace of a swan in every movement" (16). The mother is also serene, quiet and solitary. With her "supple fingers" and her patience, she weaves the flax thread into fine and intricate patterns to produce clothing for the family. The rest of her time is spent in stereotypically feminine leisure activities such as reading, dancing and singing. She is the epitome of the domestic woman who to some extent contributes to the household economy, for example through the production of clothing for family members, but is also free to dedicate large amounts of time to leisure. Most of her activities take place inside the home, and she is never portrayed doing physical work around the farm or in the fields, as is the case with the grandmother.

Erena, who is about nine years old at the beginning of the story, also has a sister, Delores, who is a year older and is "the studious one of the family" (21). She practices music and gives concerts which the family audience largely does not know how to appreciate. Erena emphasizes her close bonds to her grandmother but leaves her mother and sister outside the inner circle she shares with *grandmere*. While Erena and *grandmere* play and run "unafraid" and go on trips "like partners," her "tranquil" sister and mother are relegated to a separate and more homely realm. In



*Basque Girl*, we encounter two different portraits of women, one tranquil and domestic, represented by Delores and her mother, and another of a more empowered and unrestrained kind of female, a more “masculine” type, like Erena and her grandmother. The narrator is easily bored by domestic activities such as tatting and crocheting, which her grandmother nevertheless expects her to do; she would rather be climbing and swinging from the fence around the house. Set expectations of women’s roles and duties do not allow Erena to freely follow her wishes and preferred behavior; men, however, do not encounter these restraints.

According to Teresa del Valle’s anthropological study carried out in the Basque Country, *Mujer Vasca: Imagen y Realidad*, the sexual division of labor appears to be the norm in rural settings. Women are in charge of everything related to domestic organization as well as the care of children, socialization tasks, and language transmission. The spaces in which women appear are those of work, festivities, and rituals, displaying various forms of interaction. Within the framework of the family, the interaction with children is the one activity that stands out. Socially, women are seen to interact with their neighbors, individuals in their own age group, or the local priest (24). In *Basque Girl*, the grandmother is presented in the role of transmitter of culture, since she enjoys telling legends and folk tales about the Basques: “*Grandmere* was imparting to me the usual education of a Basque child just as all good Basque mothers and grandmothers throughout the land were doing to their children,” says Erena (45).

Del Valle’s research on gender identity among Old World Basques found that women differentiate their roles from those of men along consistent lines. The three attributes most valued for Basque women were being a good mother, a clean person, and a hard worker. These three characteristics support “the centrality of the woman within the domestic sphere, of her role as both supporter and mediator.” Other salient attributes were being sober and restrained, helpful, a good organizer and administrator, as well as healthy (24). Del Valle’s study additionally found that women’s lives are strongly conditioned by family and domestic activities, and that within Basque culture, the general premise from which women infer their focal values and which permeates their behavior, activities, and relationships is that “women define themselves according to others” (193). Thus, women are defined as daughters, wives, mothers, grandmothers, and so on. This implies that a) women assume their identity based on roles external to themselves; b) such roles depend on the

position they occupy within the family; and c) with marriage, they assume a secondary position (193). Furthermore, in Basque society, there is a strong focus on the figure of the mother, although – as del Valle points out – it is an “idealized vision of the mother” (146).

In Monique Urza’s *The Deep Blue Memory*, gender roles and labor appear to be divided along consistent lines early on in the novel: “Grandma would bring fresh coffee from the kitchen, and Grandpa would stand and add wood to the stove.” The book opens with the narrator and other children playing under the grandmother’s dining table, a place that is “dark and warm like the earth” (3). This image of warmth and darkness conjures up the association with “Mother Earth” and by extension the female womb. The image of warmth and domesticity is further developed in the juxtaposition of images such as the white lace tablecloth that the grandmother uses to cover the dining table around which the family congregates, and the white, gold-rimmed cups and saucers she uses when guests come to visit.

Urza’s *Grandma* is portrayed as “strong and sturdy, imposing” (4), clearly a “healthy” Basque woman. Her hair is “braided neatly across the top of her head” and she wears an “elbow-sleeved dress made of black wool” along with “stockings and thick-heeled black shoes” (4), features that reflect the ideal and desired female attributes of soberness, restraint, and cleanliness mentioned in del Valle’s study. When the grandchildren are dropped off at her house for the weekend, Grandma is the one who rises early to light the stove, and prepare hot chocolate or rolled pancakes and bake bear claws for the children. Thus, she also embodies the ideal female attributes of being a good mother, helpful, and hard-working.

Monique Urza’s real grandmother was Thérèse Alpetche, who first came to the United States in 1921 from the French-Basque village of Baigorri. According to her son Paul Laxalt’s book *Nevada’s Paul Laxalt: A Memoir* (2000), Thérèse had come to Reno with the intention of picking up her younger brother, Michel, who had suffered serious health problems after having been gassed as a French officer during World War I. Michel ended up dying in Reno, which is where Thérèse met Dominique Laxalt. Their son, Paul, describes his mother as “ever strong-willed, well-educated and cultured” (3), adding that she was a graduate of the prestigious Cordon Bleu School in Paris, the premier cooking school in France. Her son also says that Thérèse was “a

woman no one ... would or should trifle with.” She was apparently strong-willed, blunt and authoritarian but “combined that with a great tenderness toward those she loved” (4).

Therése Laxalt came from a very different social background than her husband Dominique, who only had a fourth-grade education. As Paul Laxalt explains in his memoir, his mother’s family was comfortably situated and “had the means to expose her to educational and cultural opportunities that resulted in a beautiful, sophisticated young woman” (7). However, after she was married, she experienced some rough times, having to live in sheep camps, and later “working 16 to 18 hours a day” running a small Basque hotel that she had purchased in Carson City while at the same time she raised six children all by herself (10). The Laxalt matriarch apparently raised her children with an iron hand in “old country fashion” (19) and nobody dared challenge her authority. “Her word was the absolute law” (20), states Paul, who furthermore describes his mother as “one of the first feminists,” and one must acknowledge that she certainly demonstrated her entrepreneurial spirit when she purchased the Basque hotel for one hundred dollars. At this family-operated establishment Therése applied her culinary skills and word of her fabulous cooking rapidly spread throughout the area. She is also portrayed as being “intensely religious” (20), which is why she sent all of her sons to study at Santa Clara University in California, a school run by the Jesuits, which is an order founded by St. Ignatius, a Basque.

In Urza’s novel, the first generation is represented by the narrator’s grandparents who immigrated to the United States from France to work in the shepherding industry. When they were younger and their first child only a year old, they lost everything when the sheep market plunged. Grandma then had to live in a sheep camp in California, and in “shacks and tents throughout eastern California and western Nevada, in country that was as harsh, as barren, as any you would want to know” (10). Her strength and spirit of self-sacrifice are evident not only in the difficult early conditions she endured, but also in how she later took it upon herself to lease a boarding house, where “for eighteen hours a day she cooked and served and cleared and washed” (11) while her husband would only show up to help sporadically when he was not away from home on one of his long absences. She continued to work hard and give birth to another three boys.

The grandmother later ran an *ostatu* or boarding house, working long hours mostly by herself while her husband was absent spending long months in the sheep camps. These two roles, of the female *ostatu* keeper and the male sheep herder, were typical – almost stereotypically so – for immigrant Basques in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As historian Jeronima Echeverria points out in *Home Away From Home*, the *hoteleras* “were in the hotels at all times, with very rare exception. Their husbands or business partners may have also worked seasonally in sheep camps or on ranches, or locally as blacksmiths, lumberjacks, miners, or construction workers, but the women dedicated their entire effort to the concerns of the *ostatu*, raising their own children in and around the steady demands of hotel keeping” (218).

These women of the Basque boardinghouses often took on roles as second mothers to new immigrants and “acted as ‘mother, counselor, and nurse’ for young herders and serving girls” (221). Since there is a strong association between one’s home and maternal figures, it is likely that the young men and women recently arrived from *Euskal Herria* found it easy to associate the familiarity of the Basque language, the foods, and the nurturance provided by these hotel keepers with their own mothers, so that eventually the *hoteleras* were symbolically accepted as surrogate maternal figures (219).

Echeverria affirms that the *hoteleras* in the peak years of 1890 to 1930 do not fit neatly into any of the dominant images of frontier females at that time. As previously mentioned, Beverly Stoeltje offers three common stereotypes of frontier women in the American West: 1) the “refined lady,” 2) the “loyal helpmate,” and 3) the “bad woman” (27). Unfortunately, none of these roles provide useful models with which to categorize the Basque hotel keepers. While the majority of *hoteleras* might most closely identify with the “loyal helpmate” model, this category falls short when we consider strong and entrepreneurial women such as Monique Urza’s grandmother in *The Deep Blue Memory* who took it upon herself to handle numerous tasks without her husband’s help.

As Echeverria further indicates in *Home Away From Home*, rural Basques “brought with them to the New World a high regard for the self-sufficiency they had developed on their farmsteads” (20). The typical Basque *hotelera* was typically “[u]p in the early morning and active until the late evening,” focusing on “preparing food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; on organizing

cleaning girls and food servers; on coordinating special requests from boarders; on washing and gardening; and on caring for her own children” (223). Echeverria’s studies suggest that “compared to their male counterparts, the *hoteleras* did more than their share of the work and had more rigorous schedules than the men did” (224). Several children raised in boardinghouses were of the opinion that their mother worked harder than their father. The women who worked in the Basque hotels of the American West were often described as “virtually slaves, performing every variety of task needed to keep the enterprise going” (224).

In fact, this modern-day slavery is a type of exploitation that happened not only to Basque women but also to men. Due to their lack of English language skills, both immigrant males and females had little choice but to accept difficult and low-paying jobs like shepherding or working as hotel maids in rural areas, or washing and ironing in French laundries in urban areas like San Francisco. Often, it was other Basques – those who owned these businesses – who exploited their fellow Basques. Through chain migration, Basques came to work for others of their same ethnic group who were either family members or acquaintances of their family back home. The sense of collective identity and the sentimental or emotional attachment to the group likely led most of these overworked “slaves” to continue working without complaining. This is probably especially true of women because, due to their upbringing and socialization in an androcentric society such as the Basque one, they are socialized to take care of the needs of others without expecting anything in return and to keep their voices down and their opinions to themselves.

Urza depicts her grandmother in *The Deep Blue Memory* as a nurturing, hard-working, and self-sacrificing woman who appears content with domesticity; a woman portrayed as always giving but taking next to nothing for herself. No room is provided for the expression of exhaustion, frustration, disappointment or even rage about the imposed drudgery of domestic labor. Never once does the novel depict *Grandma* complaining about the dull, exhausting, and unpaid work of cleaning and dusting, or cooking and caregiving. Her personal wants, needs or desires are never uttered; we are only presented with the sacrifices she makes on behalf of the family. Even though Urza insists that her novel is fiction, we can safely assume that the grandmother’s character is indeed based on Therése Alpetxe, who her son, Paul Laxalt (2000), described as a “strong-willed, well-educated and cultured” woman (3), a sophisticated and talented individual from a well-

situated family, and who graduated from France's premier cooking school. Knowing this about the real woman, Urza's portrayal of her grandmother appears somewhat flat and limited, and would lead one to question whether Urza's novel truly provides a gendered view of the Laxalt family. She appears to present an idealized and one-sided portrait of a woman who we know was a lot more complex than the character we encounter in *The Deep Blue Memory*.

Monique Urza's father, Robert Laxalt, explores his mother's youth and early years in the French Basque Country in his novel *Child of the Holy Ghost*. Even though Laxalt wrote this as fiction, the character of Maitia Garat is also based on Therése Alpetxe. In the book, the two main female characters, Maitia and her mother Jeanne, come from an "old and respected family, neither rich nor poor, but with a fine strong house" built as long ago as 1454 (11).

As the narrator describes the scene on Monday market day in the rural village of Donibane, the gendered division of labor is observed with men rising early to transport livestock from the farm to market, where it will be sold during the morning. No women are found among this crowd. The rural women would finish their chores by noon and walk to town to sell fruit and vegetables at the market during the afternoon. It is at this time of the day that no men are found at the market because they have "retired to the restaurants and the bars and they would not be seen again until the market was done" (15). Men have their assigned tasks and so do women, and never are they expected to mix or share each other's work or spaces.

The first half of the novel does not show Maitia or her mother Jeanne engaging in any work within the Garat farmhouse. Later on, Jeanne is married off to an older man, Labadiste, who owns a Basque hotel – the Hotel Amerika – in the city of Bordeaux. Although the novel contains no descriptions of Jeanne actually working at the hotel, we do find out through the words of her son Michel that "[t]he hotel is full of soldiers and *he* is making a lot of money" while she is sick with consumption and "is working too hard" (133).

Both Jeanne and Maitia are strong-willed and practical women, but they are forced to submit to patriarchal expectations of what proper female roles and behavior ought to be. These traditional expectations are so deeply ingrained in the culture that they are often internalized by

the women themselves. For example, after *Amatchi* dies, Maitia feels the obligation to stay in Donibane to care for her grandfather. She tells Jeanne, “You know I have to stay. [...] Aitatchi has no one to take care of him now” (58). In reality, this is not true since the older Garat does have a son, Jean-Baptiste. What Maitia really means is that there is no *woman* to take care of the older man and handle the household chores that men are never expected to do. Jeanne responds: “You know what to expect if you stay here. You will have to cook for him, wash his clothes, take care of all his wants. You’ll have to do everything that your *amatchi* did” (85). Maitia does stay in the family farmhouse but, in her practical and business-like manner, hires a farmhand to handle the more physically-demanding labor. However, “[t]he caring for the garden, the cooking, and the washing were left to Maitia” (88). In the mornings, she is the first one to rise; she adds wood to the fire, goes out to feed the chickens, and handles a multitude of other chores while the men sleep. Again, she assumes this role matter-of-factly, always giving, but taking next to nothing for herself.

After her grandfather’s death, Maitia’s status in the community changes as she goes from being “a young woman of no station or wealth or expectation” to becoming “a landowner, the head of a prosperous farm and an ancient and honored house” (105). This change in status in turn leads to a change in how she is treated by the villagers, most of whom now address her with “respect and deference” (105). Nevertheless, she continues to handle the cooking, washing, and other domestic tasks at the house of Garat. Her own mother, Jeanne, never once complained or uttered her own opinion when she was forbidden to see the man who had fathered Maitia, or when she is married off to an older man. The cycle of women’s subjugation and servitude is difficult to break when a woman like Jeanne, raised to suppress her own needs and to sublimate her own desires and strivings in order to care for and serve others, is forced to swallow her disappointment. She is thus ultimately unable to pass on to her own daughter any feelings of authority or entitlement she may have had. Maitia’s own liberation and emancipation from these Old World bonds is only possible when she leaves France for America, a change that is symbolically portrayed by her seeing the Statue of Liberty from the deck of the ship taking her to the New World.

Gregory Martin also makes his Basque-American grandmother, Anastasia Zabala, one of the main characters in his memoir *Mountain City*. Martin is a descendant of Basque shepherds and Cornish miners, and dedicates a significant portion of his memoir to his Basque family’s story.

Gregory, the narrator, has a very close relationship with his grandmother whom he describes as a woman “not quite five feet tall,” adding that in Basque “zabala” means “wide” and that “there’s no better way to describe Grandma than this” (13). The grandmother assumes the role as transmitter of culture and language as she tells Gregory all sorts of family stories and teaches him to speak the Basque language.

As often happened in Basque communities of the American West, Grandma Zabala was born in a Basque hotel. This was in the year 1913 at the Overland Hotel, an *ostatu* where all the Zabala children as well as most Basques in Elko were born in those days. Gregory adds that when his grandmother was not giving birth herself, she was the midwife (15). The grandmother’s own father, whom she calls *Aita*, was a first generation Basque immigrant who worked as a sheepherder and later came to own the Overland Hotel. As was typically the case with many Basque women who worked in boarding houses, the narrator’s great-grandmother and her four daughters spent most of their waking hours working indoors, doing laundry, changing linens, cleaning chamber pots and cooking. In the meantime, “[t]he boys would be playing outside” (15). This difference in gender roles and expectations between males and females is also highlighted with regards to educational opportunities, since the boys in this family – Pete and Frank – were able to college while, as Grandma explains, “none of us girls got to go to college” (15).

Nevertheless, the question of access to educational opportunities may not necessarily depend on gender as much as a given family’s background or financial situation. In the case of Gregory’s uncle, Mel Basañez, we find out that despite doing well in high school Mel did not attend college because his parents did not encourage him to do so. “He was raised by and beside immigrant Basques who had little or no command of English and who, by necessity, valued physical work far more than education. They had no education” (24). However, Gregory’s mother did attend college and became a college professor. She was able to succeed thanks to the support of her family: her sister Lou and her husband Mel as well as her grandparents helped pay for her to go to college.

Being a memoir, *Mountain City*, presents a realistic portrait of the daily lives of immigrant Basques and their descendants in the American West. Gregory’s uncle Mel also grew up in a



Basque *ostatu*, the Martin Hotel in Winnemucca, where his mother worked as a chambermaid and waitress. He “knew what it meant to empty and clean chamber pots, change thousands of linens, and wait tables at breakfast, lunch, and dinner” (24) because he had seen his mother do so, not because he had done much of that himself. Again, it is the women working in the *ostatuak* who ended up bearing the brunt of hard physical work. Mel was aware of the “weariness” in his parents and hotel patrons from early on, and later did not escape it himself as he worked “seven days a week, ten hours a day, 362 days a year” (25) running the family’s Tremewan Store in Mountain City.

Whenever Gregory drives to Mountain City to visit his family, his grandmother stays up waiting for him, sitting at the kitchen table reading or writing letters. She also bakes cookies and has a glass of milk ready for him in the refrigerator. The bed is made in an apartment that is kept vacant just for family, and the rooms are vacuumed and clean (30). As mentioned earlier, del Valle’s research on gender identity found that Basque women are valued for being good mothers, clean, and hard-working, in addition to being sober, restrained, helpful, good organizers and administrators, as well as healthy (24). Gregory’s grandmother, with her willingness to stay up late waiting for him, in addition to baking and cleaning, appears to fit most of these attributes.

However, Grandma in *Mountain City* differs from the females we have encountered in the three works previously analyzed in that she is not forced into a stereotypical female mold of the self-sacrificing, content and domestic older woman who silently takes care of her family members without ever complaining. Grandma may bake cookies for Gregory’s visits, but she does not conceal her emotions. On the contrary, Martin allows this character to scream and freely express her rage using a certain vocabulary that would traditionally be considered inappropriate for women.

In one scene, Grandma is quilting when she overhears Gregory agreeing to help one of his cousins instead of going to work in the Tremewan Store as planned. She unexpectedly starts screaming at her grandson, the “veins in her neck bulging” and using some strong words. Gregory “had come that fall after college to work in the store, and Grandma thought . . . that any deviation from that purpose was a form of betrayal” (118). She accuses him of “not doing anything for

anybody but [him]self” (118). Even though her rage appears irrational, Gregory adds that “[t]here was always a logic to her anger” and that trying to argue would do no good (118). We later find out that the day before, her husband had been hospitalized: “When Gramps is sick, Grandma’s anger is unpredictable, and she directs it outward as precisely as a shotgun blast, at anyone, even at Gramps” (119).

Later in the story, when Gramps’ brother dies without wanting to have a funeral, she is again shown openly uttering her opinion as well as her rage and frustration: “Grandma isn’t in the store for three seconds before she starts raging, her eyes wild, her teeth bared like a badger’s” (156). She feels no constraints uttering words such as “bastard” and “goddamn” (157) to express herself. Gregory is surprised by her fierceness, loyalty, and insight into her husband’s emotional core, but more than anything Gregory is surprised by her wisdom: “What she’s said strikes me as particularly wise, a wisdom I don’t credit her with nearly enough. We all attribute wisdom to Gramps because he is so quiet, and we equate Grandma’s chatter with superficiality, when perhaps the ratio of words spoken to folly or wisdom indicates nothing but habit, predisposition” (157).

Of the works analyzed, *Mountain City* stands out in its portrayal of women standing to a large degree on equal footing with men. They are shown as capable individuals who work along their spouses, such as Aunt Lou who runs the Tremewan store with her husband Mel, or Grandma who also worked in the store for two decades and later assisted her husband, a judge, by acting as his clerk. “Grandma had always been thoroughly capable, excellent even, with figures. Before she retired, she had kept the store’s books for twenty years” (175). The women are portrayed as equal partners, not as beings who are inferior or subservient to men: “It’s been a true partnership, good for both of them, keeping them sharp, active” (174), says Gregory about his grandparents. Both his aunts and grandmother are depicted as women with strong characters who are free to express their opinions, anger, and frustration by means of “unfeminine” vocabulary. Martin does not let his female characters be limited by their gender but prefers to portray them as real and well-rounded individuals.

These are Basque women who are cornerstones of their communities and pillars of their families, who work and care for others without expecting or taking much for themselves. They are

strong and healthy and are always there for everybody, so they are often taken for granted. When Grandma passes away, Gregory suddenly realizes that he had not contemplated the possibility of his grandmother dying before her husband: “We always worried about Gramps, never Grandma. Sometimes she said she thought she was being ‘taken for *granite*.’ And she was. She was supposed to be the rock, the sturdy one” (181).

The difference in the portrayal of women in Gregory Martin’s memoir may indicate a development in their roles and status. *Mountain City* contains a variety of female characters: we encounter women – such as Gregory’s aunt Sarah – who “are married but were previously divorced” (143), women who “wear belt buckles” (142), others – like Grandma – who wear “polyester pants” and have “mechanical knees” (149), or are “moody and unpredictable, depressed at times, like most people” (177). These are not quiet and domestic Basque women who only wear black dresses and stay at home cooking and taking care of their husbands as Basque rural grandmothers are traditionally pictured. These women in Martin’s memoir are well-rounded characters who over time have adapted to the dress, the customs and the culture of the places they now inhabit. These women are allowed to be human; they can be moody and depressed, just like anyone else. And their behavior is not constrained by Catholic expectations of propriety and the imposition of indissoluble marriages.

Joan Errea’s non-fiction book *My Mama Marie*, published in 2013, is the most recent work to be studied here. It portrays the life of the author’s mother, Marie Jeanne Goyhenetche, from her youth in the Basque Country to her immigration to the United States and her ranching life in the American West. Marie Jeanne was born in 1911 in the town of Banca in the French Basque Country. The way her early life is described — as an 8-year-old child who is treated like a slave by her fat and greedy uncle and made to work all day as a maid by a cruel old lady who owns a nasty cat — it conjures up the image of a real life Cinderella. For all purposes, Marie is an orphan, because her father Santiago deserted the French military and fled across the border to Spain leaving his wife and children behind. And her mother, Santiago’s second wife, is apparently unable to raise her by herself, so the very young Marie is passed on to an uncle. Don Cruz is a greedy and abusive Catholic priest who had acquired a power of attorney over his brother’s home, family and financial affairs. The 8-year-old Marie is sent to work as a maid for an old lady who was a friend of her

uncle. “Every morning, she would walk to a nearby convent to attend sewing classes as she was to be apprenticed as a seamstress” (24). And after a full day sewing, Marie had to clean the house, sweep the hearth, run errands and help prepare meals. If the rooms weren’t clean enough or if she cried for her mother or siblings, Marie was “stripped naked and whipped” and sent to bed without dinner (24). The uncle is never described as doing any type of work but does benefit financially from his niece’s work.

A few months later, her brother Louis offered Marie an apprenticeship with relatives who operated a hotel and café in Baigorri. Here, she apprenticed under a master chef and was able to learn “haute cuisine as well as every day workingmen’s fare” (31). Even though Marie Jeanne does not appear to have received a formal school education, she may have been fortunate to have the chance to do two apprenticeships. Nevertheless, she was taught traditional skills for females at the beginning of the century: sewing and cooking. These domestic skills were probably considered suitable for females because they could be applied both for employment purposes as well as in serving a husband and children through marriage.

Ultimately, Marie’s brother and sister, who lived in the U.S., sent money and had her join them in the U.S. She first worked at the Currie Hotel in Nevada, where she helped hotel owner Gregoria Mariluch with cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. After a while, her brother Louis came to get Marie and took her to Eureka, where she worked at the Eureka Hotel, owned by the Etchegaray family.

At the time, Eureka was the hub of the sheep and cattle industries, so the hotel was very busy. As was typical of female employees at Basque boardinghouses, Marie “rose at four in the morning and often found herself still busy at midnight” (54). She was paid \$30 a month plus room and board and, in exchange, she cooked three meals a day, helped the maid with the hotel and also helped the owner do the shopping. There was very little time to do much else than work. However, on the weekends Marie occasionally had the chance to enjoy dancing until the early hours of the morning with young men from the ranches and sheep camps who came to town for gatherings and dances. Eventually, she was able to repay her brother for her passage from France.

After her arrival in Nevada, Marie Jeanne married another French Basque, Arnaud Paris. The first home after Marie and Arnaud married was “an old line camp in a one-room cabin in Secret Pass in Elko County, where the sheep were” (62). Here, Marie “felt at home” but “[e]very day was a hardworking day for the young bride” (62-3). She did traditionally female tasks such as baking bread, cooking meals, and washing and ironing clothes. She baked the bread in Dutch ovens and fed all the herders in the camp; she also washed the shepherders’ clothes, scrubbing them on a washboard, and ironed them with flatirons that had to be heated on the stove. She also cooked gourmet meals and “always had a hot meal on the back of the stove when her tired and hungry husband would come ‘home’” (64). But, in addition to these tasks, Marie also handled other duties that are traditionally associated with men because of their more physically demanding nature. For example, in order to bake bread, she had to first dig pits in the ground to place the Dutch ovens. In addition, she had to haul the wood for the fires as well as the water.

However, no matter how physically demanding and busy her days were, Marie seemed to be satisfied with her life. “Sometimes, it was a very exhausted young bride that fell heavily into her bed at night and nestled happily in the arms of her proud and happy husband, for too soon the dawn would break and it would be time to start a new day” (64). Marie gave birth to three children in line cabins and sheep wagons in Elko County, where she followed her husband while he tended his bands of sheep. Marie’s daughter says that even though both her parents were “from the Old Country, their life together was distinctly American.”

Joan Errea describes her mother as being a “wonderful cook” who prepared many “gastronomical delights” (94). This image of the Basque woman as an outstanding cook who is ready to share her many recipes from the Old Country is as stereotypical as the archetypal lonely Basque shepherd. In fact, the association between Basque women and traditional cooking has given rise to an entire subgenre of Basque-American books that provide long-held family recipes while often retelling the family’s memoirs. *My Mama Marie* is one of such books, along with others such as Mary Alustiza’s *The Basque Table* (1996) or Mary Ancho Davis’ *Chorizos in an Iron Skillet: Memories and Recipes from an American Basque Daughter* (2002).

In Joan's description of her mother, we encounter many of the attributes that del Valle lists as being valued in Basque women, such as cleanliness, working hard, or administering and organizing things well. Marie Jeanne is described as "an incessantly, tireless housekeeper, an avid gardener, and poultry farmer. She kept our family fed, our big house immaculately clean, and the orchard well-tended. She preserved all the vegetables and fruits we needed for winter survival, not only for family use but for the sheep camp provisions. She canned everything" (95). After her husband purchases a bigger ranch, Marie Jeanne apparently finds a way to create even more work for herself. At the new ranch, "[i]n spite of having all modern conveniences, Mama worked harder than ever" (112). She ended up growing a bigger garden and doing more chores than before. Thanks to Marie, the family was practically self-sufficient because she grew most of the food the family ate, so that they only needed to make a trip to town about every three months. Other than a few items like sugar, coffee, flour or oil, practically everything else was homegrown.

Another role that Marie Jeanne took on while she helped operate sheep camps and cattle ranches is that of becoming a "surrogate mother" to the hired shepherders. This is a distinctly feminine role which Basque hotel owners are described as adopting with regards to their boarders, and one that women cooking in sheep camps also seemed to naturally take on. Joan says that all the herders loved her mother. "She took the place of the mother so many of the young men had left in the old country. She was their friend and sometimes their doctor. I often saw her administering to cuts, wounds, bad colds, tick bites, broken hearts, and even helping with things such as hangovers" (117).

After her long days of physically demanding work around the ranch, Marie also dedicated time to hobbies that are considered uniquely feminine, such as crocheting. In the same way that both grandmothers in Isasi's *Basque Girl* and Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory* spent time crocheting, Errea says that her mother's "way of relaxing was to sit at night and knit or crochet." There were "crocheted table cloths, bedspreads, and doilies all over the house. Each of us had embroidered pillow cases over homemade pillows on our beds" (119). The crocheted lace doilies conjure up the domesticity of a middle-class Old World lifestyle and decorating their homes with them is possibly a way in which these immigrant Basque women maintain part of their identity in the New World.

Physically, young Marie is described as “a beautiful child with snappy black eyes that often sparked with mischief, and she had a headful of rippling black hair that hung to her waist. She was sturdy and strong and always a willing worker” (21). She is also described as being “wild and defiant” and is said to have threatened the priest’s authority, responding to it “with dry-eyed contempt” (21). In addition, Marie’s “famous temper” is given a good amount of coverage in different parts of the book. When she was an 8-year-old girl and working as maid, the old lady had a cat that Marie hated “because it always seemed to be staring at her” (26). One day, “her mind seemed to snap” and she grabbed a “heavy wooden rosary off the wall [and] proceeded to beat the living daylight out of the animal” (27).

When she first arrives in Currie, Nevada, and a man speaks to her in Spanish, indicating that she should follow him. Marie “began to kick at her luggage until her toes stung, all the while flinging implications that she most certainly had never learned at the knees of her Uncle Cruz” (43). She yelled back at this man in Basque that she was not going anywhere but Ely, Nevada. Later, she is described as “boxing” the ears of two men and also giving them “a tongue-lashing” (58). This personality trait is not in line with the soberness and restraint expected of women in the Old World but rather reminds us of Gregory’s grandmother in *Mountain City*.

Joan says that her mother was “[n]ever very mellow and responsive, but, after having four boys and a girl, “became strict and limited her love.” She apparently treated her boys in a different manner, allowing them to “slide a little,” although she was not overly emotional with them either. “They got their share of slaps and recriminations at times, for Mama was always quick with the back of her hand,” but it seems that Joan always “caught her slap and the brunt of her temper” and she was expected to excel at whatever she did (45). Her father, on the contrary, “never loved with restrictions. He gave us all unconditional love” (45). This description makes us wonder if Marie would fit the required female attribute of “being a good mother” mentioned by del Valle.

Despite appearing to be cold and heartless as a mother, Marie Jeanne is shown to have a softer side. This side is portrayed when her husband Arnaud gets sick with cancer: “Mama would dress his dreadful wounds with tenderness and cleaned his colostomy bag every few hours, sleeping in a chair near his bed at night, holding his hand...” (130). It is not much of a surprise to

find out that Marie Jeanne acts the part of the dutiful wife while caring for her sick husband, since this is another traditional role that would have been expected of women in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Nothing is said in the book about whether this woman who apparently restricted her love towards her children took on this role as cancer nurse out of sincere love for her husband or out of a sense of duty and expectation.

Ultimately, Joan ends up being very similar to her mother in terms of her personality. The relationship between Joan and Marie was likely complicated because both women were stubborn and strong-willed. The author behaves like a tomboy and does not want to conform to the roles that are expected of her. She was “loud, boisterous, and a troublemaker” and she would push her mother to the limit. This power Joan felt to be herself despite her mother’s punishment ties in with the concepts of power and agency, which will be addressed hereafter.

### **3.2.2. Power and Agency**

Michel Foucault argued that the history of spaces<sup>29</sup> also involves a history of power. Where we are located, where we speak from, has a significant bearing on whose voices are sanctioned. Not all “Others” have an equal voice nor equal power. Often, “the female subject is defined by her position within dominant structures of power” (qtd. in McDowell 221).

Power is a central concept in the field of Gender Studies since it serves to establish and maintain asymmetrical gender systems. Margaret Bullen, in discussing the concept of power in her book *Gender Studies*, mentions the perception – upon which Basques generally pride themselves – that Basque women are powerful, are the true heads of their households, exercise authority over their family, manage financial matters, and make most decisions in the domestic domain. This notion is also connected to the theory promoted by several scholars that Basque society was originally a matriarchy focused around a religion that worshipped the mythical figure of the goddess Mari. However, feminist critics have challenged these theories as based largely on myth and have questioned the true power of women in contemporary Basque society (111).

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<sup>29</sup> “Space” is the term Foucault used rather than “place.”



In order to analyze and understand Basque women's position with respect to power, we would want to first define this concept. Janet Saltzman Chafetz states that "[p]ower is defined in the Weberian sense as the ability of persons or groups to command compliance from other persons or groups, even in the face of opposition" (32). Those who exercise power possess something that those who comply with their demands want or need. Michel Foucault's notion of power/knowledge differs from Chafetz's in that he argues that power is not something to be possessed in a larger or smaller amount but it is rather a "force that is diffused through a web of social interaction and struggled over" (qtd. in Bullen 113). Foucault posits that the concept of power is not monolithic but rather is "diffused through a complicated system of interrelationships" and operates across various social divisions such as gender, class, race, age, and so on. "Individuals have complex identities constructed in relation to these variables, which gives them different power potentials in different contexts" (114).

The concepts of authority, legitimacy, and responsibility are also connected to the concept of power, so in discussing gender asymmetries one must consider how male power is legitimated and converted into authority, and how this process can be changed. Power exists at the micro level, where male authority forces women to comply with men's decisions or commands. It also exists at the macro level, where power and authority reside in certain dominant roles of social institutions (political, economic, religious, educational, and cultural) which in gender-stratified societies are predominantly held by men.

Closely connected to the concept of power is that of agency. By agency we mean an individual's or a group's ability to act independently, make effective choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes. Thus, agency is crucial to understanding how gender outcomes emerge and why they are equal or unequal. Across all countries women and men differ in their ability to make effective choices in a range of spheres, with women typically at a disadvantage. A woman's ability to choose and act at any point in time partly reflects foundations laid earlier in life. Examples of such expressions of agency are the ability to:

- Move freely, measured by women's freedom to decide their movements and their ability to move outside their homes.

- Make decisions about family formation; e.g. when and whom to marry, when and how many children to have, and if and when to leave a marriage.
- Control resources, measured by the ability to earn and control income and to own, use, and dispose of material assets.
- Have a voice and influence in society by participating in formal politics and having the freedom to associate and engage in collective action.

Formal and informal institutions as well as social norms shape women's agency. They determine the opportunities that females have and whether they can exercise the choice to use them. Social norms define and constrain the space for women to exercise their agency by imposing penalties both on those who deviate from them and those who do not enforce the norms. Mobility, for instance, is driven by social norms about acceptable behavior for women, norms around their role as caregivers, codes of modesty or honor, as well as by beliefs about women's safety in public spaces.

In order to address the relation between power and gender in the Basque context, it is important to analyze what is perceived as ideal and contrast it with reality. Teresa del Valle's *Mujer vasca: Imagen y realidad* studied these two realms. She observes that most anthropological studies about women in a rural setting focus on descriptions of the female as an important axis in the home, so in the Basque context female power is mostly limited to the home and family: "The Basque woman makes her decisions mainly in the domestic sphere, constrained by family roles" (7). No matter how important these subsistence decisions may be to the woman and her family, they are not areas of activity that carry great social worth or recognition.

In her article "Privileging masculinity in the social construction of Basque identity," Begoña Echeverría argues that schools in the Basque Country promote a male-centered vision of the Basque nation and that an "iconic relationship is thereby created between authentic Basque identity, Basque culture, Basque linguistic forms and masculinity" (339). Despite the fact that women have played key roles in transmitting the Basque language, such as by organizing the first *Euskara* classes in the 1930s and teaching clandestinely during Franco's dictatorship, they receive little public credit for their efforts. The activities and institutions related to the Basque language

that have the most social prestige, such as the Royal Academy of the Basque Language or *Euskaltzaindia*, have traditionally been led by men. As recently as a decade ago, only two women (Miren Azkarate and Ana Toledo) were academic members of *Euskaltzaindia*, an institution that has been in existence since 1919. Nowadays, this number is closer to five females out of 32 total academic members. There is no prestige associated with language transmission in the home, to children or in primary education, where women play important roles (341). It is also difficult for Basque female writers to be accepted into the literary canon.

Echeverria also points out that the concept of *indarra*, which, as defined by Sandra Ott, “combines tremendous stamina, determination and energy with great strength” is most closely associated with “men of action [*‘ekintza’*], who engage in tests of physical strength” (343). And Basque Country textbooks often represent men “displaying their *indarra* in the public sphere in activities such as rock-lifting” (343) while women’s images tend to focus on “how well they tend to the needs of others in the private sphere”(344), such as in the role of the housewife. Del Valle affirms that “Basque nationalist political ideology has elaborated a unitary vision of the Basque woman, based on the rural woman, which focuses on her role as a mother, and as the transmitter of the Basque language and culture” (qtd. in Echeverria 346).

Some women have tried to use the public sphere to challenge these androcentric gender ideologies, such as by attempting to participate in community dances or events traditionally considered exclusively for men, for example, the ‘Alarde’ parade in Hondarribia. However, a segment of the Basque population resents and rejects this attempt of women to fight the gendered nature of Basque society. In fact, the women who attempted to march alongside men in the ‘Alarde’ in Hondarribia at the end of the 1990s, were insulted and prevented from proceeding by a group of traditionalist Basque women. And women who dare to compete with men on their own terms, Mercedes Ugalde points out, are often denigrated as “mari-gizonak” or “masculine women” (qtd. in Echeverria 349).

The inferior or devalued status of women in society appears to be a universal given that is accepted as truth across cultures. As anthropologist Sherry Ortner observes, however, “the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations of woman are extraordinarily diverse.” In addition, “the

actual treatment of women and their relative power and contribution vary enormously from culture to culture, and over different periods in the history of particular cultural traditions” (68). Why is it that women’s roles, tasks, work, and products are generally attributed less prestige than men’s contributions? Anthropologists have failed to prove that biological differences or genetic determinism have any bearing on gender-based value perceptions.

Ortner suggests that women’s lower value is due to their association with “nature,” which is generally assigned a lower order of existence than “culture,” which in most societies is associated with males. Women’s physiology and natural procreative functions make them appear closer to natural processes. The male, lacking the ability to naturally create life, is thus freed to express his creativity artificially through cultural expressions. Culture is broadly equated with the products of thought and technology by which humans control and subordinate the natural world. Its distinctiveness and perceived superiority rests on its ability to ‘socialize’ and ‘culturalize,’ i.e. transform, nature (73). Women’s association with birth and child rearing thus leads to cultural value systems that place females in the domestic space.

We find that the rural Basque woman is portrayed as the cohesive and stabilizing element in the domestic sphere, having qualities that promote her image as a worker in the socio-economic unit of the Basque farmhouse, as an active agent in the socialization of the children, and as a significant piece when it comes to establishing alliances between families through matrimony. Del Valle further argues that the general value premise that “women are defined according to others” contains the guidelines, norms, and focal values that govern the activities and relationships of Basque women (18).

The same research study also found that, in Basque culture, the topic of financial administration has been considered an indicator of the power supposedly exercised by women (del Valle 162). However, in reality it is men who own the money, and women merely play the role of administrators, which means that females do not actually possess direct power in financial matters. In *Basque Girl*, Erena’s view of her family’s reality is thus in line with the idealized image of women’s power and status held in Basque society. She explains that it is “generally a Basque custom for money and matters of family finance to be in charge of the women of the household,”

and adds that most women are successful at being thrifty and able to save but are not very good as “makers of wealth.” Nevertheless, her grandmother seems to be an exception to this general rule, since she is also described as “a sort of genius as an executive and manager” (15).

Douglass and Zulaika propose that “[i]n a world in which men’s and women’s activities are compartmentalized and autonomous domains, the women make the basic decisions concerning family purchases and initiatives while keeping the husbands informed of what is going on” (235). Del Valle further observes that the domestic sphere is the domain that women may manage to control and dominate to some extent due to their almost exclusive dedication to it. It is in this area that women are able to assume responsibilities, introduce variations, and put into play their organizational and planning abilities (197). These statements are problematic insofar as they deal with women’s issues mostly in terms of cultural patterns, family roles, and the long held public versus private domain dichotomy that has been much criticized by feminist theorists. Women are given a semblance of control, but in reality they are subject to an ideology that restricts their lives to marriage, child bearing, child care, and domestic work or, at the most, the administration of their husband’s money to serve the needs of the family. Their options to transcend the private domain and gain a minimum of social prestige for their own contributions to public life are severely restricted.

*Mujer Vasca* questioned the traditional unified vision that had been put forth in past studies of Basque anthropology in which women – in particular the *etxeakoandreak* in rural settings – were idealized, giving the appearance that they enjoyed egalitarian and complementary existences along their male counterparts or *etxejojaunak*. In reality there are significant differences among women’s lives and roles depending on their place of residence, age, employment and marital status. Various social contexts, such as work, leisure, and domesticity were found to have a gendered nature. Traditionally, these contexts have been conditioned by the primary dichotomy of the domestic space as women’s domain versus the public or work space as a domain under men’s control, and conflicts arise when trying to depart from this long-established model.

Interestingly enough, women themselves appear to have internalized this traditional separation of domains as exemplified in *Basque Girl* when Erena is setting the table and Estaban,

the caretaker, offers to help. Mari, the cook, shows “disgust” at his offer and mutters “that such a thing had never before happened in our household, and that men should, after all, know their places” (213).

In Errea’s *My Mama Marie*, very little is said about men’s work. In fact, some of the men portrayed do not appear in a very positive light. Joan’s own father, Santiago, abandons his wife and children, fleeing the country so he does not have to perform military work in the French army. Santiago’s brother, the Catholic priest, Don Cruz, is described as a greedy, hypocritical and abusive glutton who enslaves his own niece and takes advantage of his position of power in the community as a man of the faith. We once hear Joan’s father being described as hard working and we know that he tended bands of sheep and later owned two cattle ranches. But it is the women who appear to perform the brunt of the work.

We encounter Gregoria Mariluch, the owner of the Currie Hotel, whom Marie helps with cooking, cleaning and child care. We also hear about Maria Echevarria from Ely, who catered the food for Marie’s and Arnaud’s wedding. Marie Jeanne herself does enormous amounts of work, covering both traditionally female tasks, such as housework, cooking, gardening, raising children, knitting and crocheting, as well as some work that one would typically expect men to do (hauling wood, hauling water). Physically and emotionally, Marie Jeanne also appears to have somewhat masculine characteristics. She is said to be “sturdy and strong” (21), “tough and formidable,” (72), “strong and muscular” (86), “never very mellow” and “not overly emotional” (45), in addition to having a bad temper. Her husband is the opposite; he is calm, mellow and “never loved with restrictions.” He gave his children “unconditional love” (45). In this particular book, it is the father who offers his children the nurturing and comfort typically associated with the mother, thus departing from traditional expectations of Basque men.

It is through Joan, though, that we see a change in roles and expectations. Already as a girl, she is strong-willed and despises the female role expectations with regards to dress and behavior. She describes herself as “smelly” and not being “the most appealing child in the world” because she preferred overalls or Levis hand-me-downs from her brothers to the “pretty dresses” that her mother made for her. “Mama wanted me to be gentle and dainty and to be a lady. I was not pink

and shiny and dimpled. I was big and broad-shouldered, rough, tough, and an incredible tomboy. I just was not dress material and was never the pretty doll she wanted. I stomped around like a big old boy, in my old shoes that I could not tie. [...] I was loud, boisterous, and a troublemaker, and I drove Mama crazy” (76). While her mother does not think much of books, Joan is like her father in that she enjoys them very much. Her father “was a man who loved to read” (83) and taught her to read and write in Basque.

Joan is able to embrace her tomboy personality and allows herself to dream of employment possibilities that would have been unrealistic in the Old World. For instance, she dreams of becoming a shepherd: “I would go to the hills with my sheep and dogs and live the hermitic life of the herder in complete happiness. I could read to my heart’s content, and never have to do anything else but look after my beloved sheep and be with my wonderful dog” (128). Joan dreams of doing a job that, throughout history, has uniquely been associated with men. The fact that, as a female, she would consider a harsh, lonely and typically male occupation to be her “dream job” may demonstrate a progression in the level of self-empowerment shown by Basque women in the literature we have analyzed so far. We know that the author of *My Mama Marie* ended up working as a technician in the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles, so this is a woman who performed a job in the public domain that departs from the more domestic or traditional occupations of other female characters in the works we have analyzed.

### **3.2.3. Patriarchy and the Social Control of Women**

One more concept that is closely related to power is that of “patriarchy.” Feminist discourse has traditionally utilized this concept to analyze the underlying principles in women’s subordination and oppression. Beechey’s article “On Patriarchy” clarifies that patriarchy is a complex concept with a variety of meanings. Radical feminists, like Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1969), used it to describe the power relationships utilized by men to dominate women. For Millett, the family is the fundamental unit of patriarchy which “functions to socialize children into sexually differentiated roles, temperaments and statuses, and to maintain women in a state of subordination” (qtd. in Beechey 68). Revolutionary feminists such as Shulamith Firestone claimed that gender differences can indeed be explained in terms of the biological differences between the sexes, and

asserted that women's subordination "does lie in women's reproductive capacities insofar as these have been controlled by men" (qtd. in Beechey 69). Other feminist authors argue that the first division of labor developed due to women's dependency on men for physical survival as a result of their biology and limitations during menstruation, childbearing, and so on. This female dependency on males created an asymmetrical system of power relationships, as it were, a "sex class system."

Marxist feminism focused on the relationship between women's subordination and capitalist modes of production, and extended the concept to the analysis of class exploitation. For example, Juliet Mitchell has used the term patriarchy "to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women and to the symbolic power which fathers have within these systems" (qtd. in Beechey 66). Unlike radical and revolutionary feminist analyses, Mitchell asserts that it is "*fathers* and their 'representatives' and not *men*" who exert power over women in patriarchal cultures, and argues against biological reductionism as a means to explain unequal power relationships.

According to Lévi-Strauss's analysis of kinship systems, the father assumes the power to control women because "exchange relations lie at the foundation of human societies, and the exchange of women by men is a fundamental form of exchange which accounts for the particular social position in which women are placed in all human societies" (qtd. in Beechey 72). Women are used as trade objects because of the universality of the incest taboo, as developed by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1950). This taboo gives rise to "the rule of exogamy" which forces individuals to marry outside their own nuclear family.

Del Valley in *Mujer Vasca* suggests that the inequality between the sexes is especially found in regard to marriage relationships, in which women become "the element of economic transaction at the service of family interests" (42). Her research found that "the possibilities for women to establish themselves socially are marriage or religion, or the prototype of the single aunt or sister who remain in the home with the married brother or sister" (42).

Douglass and Zulaika indicate that "matchmaking by professionals has long characterized rural Basque society" (247). In the rural setting of Mirim Isasi's novel *Basque Girl*, marriage



becomes not only an economic but also a social transaction, as it ensures financial stability for the women as well as lasting local bonds between desirable families. When the town mayor addresses the congregation at Delores Isasi and Mario Oudot's wedding, he proclaims that their marriage is a way of perpetuating Basque traditions and the purity of the Basque blood. The arrangement is a "union between the ancient and honorable house of Isasi and the equally old and highly esteemed family of Oudot" as well as "a merging of pure Basque blood," a tradition through which "our people have through past ages held their place secure and superior to other men in the world" (124).

Erena returns to the Basque Country from England for her sister's wedding only to find her grandmother "in a state of mild hysteria" because she was "pleased with Mario Oudot ... and confided to [Erena] her satisfaction with his material prospects" (108). Erena has also been promised in marriage to a local boy, a union that again will benefit two families. When *grandmere* talks to his granddaughter about her future marriage, she says: "Either in viewing your marriage as a matter of lands and estates, wedding settlements, the providing of a good, respected place for you in this land of your birth, I have been a ground watcher only" (140). The reason why the grandmother's role has simply been that of a "ground watcher" is that the family's patriarch, Erena's father, is ultimately in control of the transaction.

Both fathers in *Basque Girl* and *Child of the Holy Ghost*, Isasi and Garat, respectively, make pacts with other local Basques to set up marriages for their daughters. In the latter novel, Jeanne has no options and no freedom to make successful choices of her own. The Garat patriarch makes all the decisions, and he chooses who his daughter is meant to marry: "No one bothered to ask Jeanne if she reciprocated Labadiste's affections" (20). She is "told of her engagement" and "accepted the news of her engagement with an inscrutable expression" (20). When she gives birth later on, she is again "told in no uncertain terms exactly what had happened and what was to happen" (33). Garat's decision-making power does not stop with his daughter but extends to his granddaughter; he begins thinking of arranging a marriage for Maitia: "Garat did not pause for a moment to consider Maitia's wishes in the matter. That was not his way, nor ever had been" (92).

By contemporary Western world standards, the females in *Basque Girl* are traded into marriage at a very young age. Erena is only nine years old at the beginning of the story but has already been promised to Quinzano Aprais, a young man from a good family. “[Erena] had often seen him at the church, and at festivals, but had never spoken to him” (39). Grandmere tells Erena how she herself wanted to get married before she became “an old maid at age 16” but adds that it is not the young women who should pick their partners, but rather the parents who ought to plan and take care of these marriage arrangements (68). Nevertheless, Erena is already well aware of what her father has planned for her:

In only half a dozen years more I would be married, for did I not already have nine and a half years, and surely I would not want to be fleeing from the clutches of the old maid. Of course I knew plans had been made for my marriage long years before, probably at the time I was born. Every properly reared Basque girl is betrothed while she is still a baby, by a solemn agreement between her parents and those of the boy she will marry. This is an inviolable custom that the girl must not only be kept in ignorance of the identity of her intended husband until she is fourteen or fifteen years old, but that she shall be restrained from asking questions about him. (81)

In “Nice Girl,” Greer Litton Fox analyzes the social control of women through value constructs. She proposes that, despite cross-cultural variation, there are basically three strategies (confinement, protection, and normative restriction) that societies use to control women’s behavior and regulate their freedom. These three modes of control differ depending on how much interaction with the world the controlled subjects are allowed to have. *Confinement* is one strategy that restricts women to the boundaries of their home and limits their ability to independently interact with the world outside the home. *Protection* is a second strategy; in this case women are indeed allowed access to the world but only when guarded by designated protectors. The third control method is *normative restriction*, in which control is exercised by means of value constructs such as the terms “lady” or “nice girl” which connote that a particular female is “chaste, gentle, gracious, ingenuous, good, clean, kind, virtuous, noncontroversial, and above suspicion and reproach” (805).

The first two control methods are extrinsic since someone, most frequently a male, confines or controls the female within certain boundaries. In the third case, the woman appears to have unrestricted access to the world and freedom to interact with it. However, this is not necessarily the case since the value constructs do administer control, albeit of an intrinsic sort: “self-control through the internalization of values and norms” (Fox 806). Ultimately, these patterns of control are predominantly aimed at “the protection of the virginity of young women prior to their betrothal and marriage” (808). The literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is full of examples of how misfortune and public ostracism are the lot of the “fallen woman” while virtue is always rewarded by the appreciation and protection of men.

One of the defining qualities of a “nice girl” is the maintenance of her chastity until marriage, and unequivocal evidence of a lack of chastity is being pregnant while still single. In Laxalt’s *Child of the Holy Ghost*, the narrator reminds us that when an unmarried girl becomes pregnant and gives birth, “the family must bear the stigma on its respectability. Their neighbors will never let them forget it unto the third generation” (10). Having been born and raised in the United States, where they “don’t care about that Middle Ages nonsense” (5), these Old World attitudes become an eye opener for Pete: “When I learned that and saw it in practice, part of the riddle of my mother’s obsession with respectability in America was revealed to me. I understood things I had wondered about vaguely before” (10).

The importance of respectability and reputation is another theme treated in *Child of the Holy Ghost*: “So it was that every Sunday night before Monday market day, Garat had lectured Jeanne on the importance of respectability. [...] A good reputation is worth more than a golden belt” (14). Since family ties carry great weight in Basque culture, the entire family must bear the stigma when a taboo such as premarital intercourse is broken. “As for the girl who commits the indiscretion of mothering outside of wedlock, there is no protection. She might as well be dead” (10). Pete explains that there is, however, one somewhat hypocritical exception to this rule: “Unless, that is, she is the eldest child and therefore the heiress to a substantial property. In that case, the practical nature of the Basques asserts itself and the unwed mother will have no shortage of suitors among the young men of poorer communities” (10). In our narrator’s case, his grandmother, Jeanne, was the eldest child, and so was his own mother Maitia. However, Pete adds

that “as things turned out, it did my mother no good” (10).

Fox further asserts that the reason for having to protect women so carefully or keeping them secluded inside their homes is that they are often viewed as “creatures of insatiable sexuality who cannot be trusted to control themselves” (810). Women and their associated characteristics of femininity are defined as irrational, emotional, dependent and private, closer to nature than to culture. It is commonly argued that women are at the mercy of their bodies and their emotions, whereas men transcend these baser features; men are mind to women’s bodies (McDowell 11). As Eve in the Garden of Eden falling prey to the serpent’s invitation to taste the apple of evil, women are believed to be bad and lustful by nature, and it is for this reason that they would need to be placed under the protection of a male as soon as possible through an early marriage.

The *normative control* proposed by Fox also restricts women spatially as well as temporally. As the familiar “what’s a (nice) girl like you doing in a place like this?” suggests, there are certain places – such as bars or brothels – where nice girls are not meant to be found. There must be a valid reason for being out, since nice girls do not go out “just to be out.” Fox states that “their traverse in the world must be purposive”; that is, it must be “movement from one place to another” (814). Finding nice girls out in public on their own can only be a daytime occurrence, as the night is restricted to other kinds of women. Going to church or to the market would be an example of a purposive daytime activity that would be perfectly acceptable and reasonable for nice girls to engage in.

In *Child of the Holy Ghost*, the exterior realm is both spatially and temporally separated by gender. On Monday market day, the men rise up early to prepare livestock for sale and “that made up the morning’s activity” (14). “Morning was the men’s time and the main street of the village was a panoply of black berets, coats of black and brown, and dark blue, loose-fitting pants worn over good trousers” (14). This is not a space or time of day that women are allowed to share with men. Rather, the “women of the *quartier* finished up their chores by noon and walked to Donibane for the afternoon market” since by then “the men had retired to the restaurants and the bars and they would not be seen again until the market was done” (15). Males and females inhabit the market at different times of the day with the purpose of engaging in different activities: men sell

livestock in the morning, while farm women sell vegetables and fruits in the afternoon.

Jeanne Garat, despite her parents' close control and supervision, meets and falls in love with Arnaud, a married Frenchman. "Arnaud and Jeanne must have met on a Monday market day. There was no other place they could have met. At Sunday Mass or at vespers, the protective Garat and his wife were present to ensure there were no clandestine meetings of any sort" (25). As mentioned, the spaces that single "nice girls" are permitted to inhabit without external control are very limited: "The market was the only place where Jeanne could walk without scrutiny" (25), but she was apparently cunning and imaginative enough to find the way to secretly meet her lover. By engaging in pre-marital intercourse and becoming pregnant, Jeanne breaks the rules of "niceness" and stops being considered a good girl from a good house. She consequently must suffer the punishment and ostracism of her family and society for breaching the rules and failing to live up to their expectations. In *Basque Girl*, when Erena ventures out of the family house, she is normally accompanied and watched by her grandmother. On one occasion, she meets with Quinzano at Bilbao's Hotel Carlton but is well aware of the rules of entertaining 'nicely': "We were in the well-furnished lounging room of the Carlton, this being the only place in the hotel where it would have been proper for a girl to be seen with a man, unattended by her chaperone" (168).

As opposed to extrinsic controls, socially controlling women through normative constructs "gives the appearance of non-restriction and non-control, thus reducing the potential for resistance." Since this type of control "operates through the mechanisms of shared values, norms, and understandings – which are universally accessible to both sexes, to all ages, races, and socioeconomic strata – all persons can be involved as control agents" (Fox 816). While ensuring adherence to norms is everyone's business, failure to comply becomes the sole responsibility of the individual woman and she alone must bear the consequences. Women can benefit from adhering to the normative construct by receiving personal physical security and protection; however, their freedom to participate in the public world and to access knowledge and information in an unrestricted way is severely limited, which in turn limits their potential for power and control (817).

Thus, marriage and the home are social constructs to keep women under control. The ideology that “a woman’s place is in the home” became dominant in the nineteenth century and exercised a vital hold on the minds and lives women across all social classes. Women were encouraged, and in some circumstances forced to identify with and restrict themselves to the home. The home thus became alternatively a place of disenfranchisement, abuse and fulfillment. While men have traditionally been encouraged to “earn a good living,” women are still expected to “keep house.” Since this housekeeping was seen to rely on women’s ‘natural’ skills and was financially unrewarded, it was correspondingly devalued.

#### **3.2.4. Home and Marriage as Mechanisms of Control**

Doreen Massey, in *Space, Place and Gender*, argues that “the masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity (‘flexible sexism’) may be tied in with a desire to fix in space and place”(6). The patriarchal construction of the house as woman’s proper place is a familiar concept. This assumed feminine space is associated with the private, the personal, the nurturing, the emotionalized, and even the sexualized and erratic sphere of the home in contrast with the other side of this binary pair: the more impersonal, structured, and rational ‘public’ domain where men are expected to be found (Wigley 330). The exterior realm has traditionally been associated with male mobility in opposition with female stasis in the interior.

Martina Löw argues that, traditionally, spaces are imagined as women/women’s bodies. She references anthropologist Karl Schmidt who, in 1865, wrote that “the man appears as time incarnate, the incarnate process of becoming; woman as space, as being. Activity and passivity, mind and body, brain and heart, head and belly, individual and species, positive and negative pole: man and woman’ (126). Schmidt’s view has not changed significantly insofar as the male is still frequently conceived of as active and mobile and therefore as an expression of time, while the female, at the opposite end, symbolizes space and is associated with being static, passive and corporeal.

This concept can be traced back to ancient Greece, where it was believed that women lacked the natural self-control attributed to men as the very mark of their masculinity. In “The Housing of Gender,” Wigley argues that a woman’s active role in outside spaces calls into question her virtue because, once she is no longer static and controlled within the boundaries of the house, she is implicitly sexually mobile (335). Since woman is by nature unable to control herself, she must be domesticated by institutions such as marriage and bound by the domestic space, the family home. “The house then assumes the role of the man’s self-control. The virtuous woman becomes woman-plus-house or, rather, woman-as-housed, such that her virtue cannot be separated from the physical space” (337). Spaces inside the home are further classified insofar as things have a proper place where they naturally belong. “The wife learns her ‘natural’ place by learning the place of things. She is ‘domesticated’ by internalizing the very spatial order that confines her” (340).

In Urza’s *The Deep Blue Memory*, the female narrator’s grandmother is a central character but she remains nameless. She is merely known as “grandma.” This affirms del Valle’s statement that women are defined by their relationships to others. Women are grandmothers, mothers, wives, or daughters; their identity is built in reference to someone else. When *Grandma*, a first-generation Basque immigrant, is introduced, she is sitting in a corner of the living room by the window, watching “the afternoon Nevada snow fall quietly outside” (4). By the corner window, she is seen “producing ... the round lace doilies that ornamented the house” (5). Throughout the novel, she is described as being “in the corner by the window, maternal, contented” (64). This corner is the space inside the home that the grandmother has either claimed for herself or that has been assigned to her in the couple’s natural order. *Grandma* is engaged in virtuous and stereotypically feminine tasks, such as crocheting and producing home ornaments, cooking and baking, serving guests, and taking care of grandchildren, all in a physical indoor space that cannot be separated from her and her activities.

In *Child of the Holy Ghost*, space and gender are found at a particular intersection insofar as the house becomes a mechanism utilized by patriarchal authority figures for the control and domestication of women. When Jeanne chooses to love Arnaud, an outsider, her father locks her up in her room to stop her from meeting her lover. “Her confinement was total. She was not permitted to leave the boundaries of the farm, and even if she had been, there was no place to go.

She had no money of her own” (29). Maitia is also confined in her room before she is allowed to meet her disgraced mother for the first time: She “was made to wait in her closed bedroom until she was summoned by her *amatchi* to the formal little parlor” (39).

The house of Garat, however, is not just a tool used by the father to confine and domesticate the non-compliant daughter; Jeanne herself has internalized the connection to the family’s house to the point where “[t]he prospect of having to leave her house and home was like the taste of bitter almonds in Jeanne’s mouth” (21). Her attachment to the house is stronger than the promise of fine clothes, servants, travels to faraway lands, and “things that few people from this poor corner of the world would ever hope to see” (20), all things she would gain through her marriage to Labadiste. As her son Pete later explains, “At the end of her life, Jeanne wanted to die in her ancestral home surrounded by her ancestral lands” (21).

The dwelling and the home are indeed key elements in the development of people’s sense of themselves as belonging to a place. The home, with its connotations of shelter and security, of pleasure and of being a storehouse of memories, and its association with family has a special importance in the social construction of meaning and sense of self. The concept of the modern family started emerging in the fifteenth century and reached its peak in the seventeenth century. Its appearance was connected with the progressive importance of private life and the rise of the middle class. As Wigley points out, there is a close relationship between the family and private property: “The family is established by the enclosure of private property, and that property is under the absolute control of the father” (131). Woman is considered property, value, and visible measure of man’s honor.

The power of male domination in the beginning of capitalist society, a period in which the spheres of work and home were kept separate, brings with it the reduction of women to the family sphere (Cascardi 166). Inserting the family in the political sphere had consequences for the exercise of social power. The family established itself as a microcosm of the state and the head of the family had absolute control:



The head of the family was accountable for its members. In exchange for the protection and recognition of the state, he had to guarantee the faithfulness to public order of those who were part of that order . . . In compensation for his responsibility towards the authorities that bound him, the head of the family had virtually a discretionary power over those around him. (Donzelot 49)

The home and marriage become mechanisms used by the head of the family to domesticate and control women. In fact, the institution of matrimony could not be conceived outside of that home that made it possible (Wigley 336). Doreen Massey adds that the attempt to relegate women to the domestic sphere consists in a spatial as well as social control of feminine identity (179). The notion of the home as a cultural construction for the benefit of a capitalist economic system has its origins in Engels' definition of monogamy as "a great historical advance," that nevertheless also "inaugurated, along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch, lasting until today, in which every advance is likewise a relative regression, in which the well-being and development of the one group are attained by the misery and repression of the other" (*Origin of the Family* 74).

The home can thus be understood as a medium that imposes internal identity barriers or a self-control that women are not expected to be able to maintain (Wigley 335). By keeping women inside the family home and limiting their participation in the public sphere, the house contributes to producing the docile and domestic feminine nature of the virtuous woman. Furnished by man, it becomes a mechanism that takes charge of controlling the possessions contained inside it; thus the home becomes "man's eye" as far as it becomes his representative (Wigley 341).

Even inside the home, woman is an object, subjected to the controlling gaze of man and society. Insofar as the control from inside the home is male, we must question the assignment of women to an illusory private sphere in which they are supposed to exercise central control. The home works as a spatial metaphor by defining woman on the basis of an inside/outside duality, with "woman inside the home" seen as hard-working, industrious and virtuous in contrast with the "bad woman" located outside. The woman outside the home is, by implication, sexually mobile since her sexuality cannot be controlled by the home (Wigley 335).

In *Basque Girl*, Erena yearns to find out more details about the boy she is to eventually marry but also knows that “it is unladylike” to ask or even think about her future bridegroom (82). However, she refuses to accept these rules and, risking her grandmother’s displeasure, does ask about Quinzano. *Grandmere* insists that the “good manners of the Basque maiden must go with her wherever she goes” (83).

Grandmere has taken care of Erena’s education, teaching her to read Basque and even some English language. However, one day the father decides that Erena must be sent to school in England because “she must have the English language and the training they can give her there” (85). This decision appears progressive and egalitarian until we realize that Mr. Isasi does not want his daughter “to become a prodigy of learning – but just to speak good English, and to have enough of art, music, and literature to make her a woman who can help her husband and give pleasure to her family” (94). The patriarchal society portrayed in *Basque Girl* does not grant women an education for the sake of learning or to provide them with knowledge to seek fulfilling employment outside the home. Rather, education for women must serve the utilitarian purpose of service to their husband and family.

After spending some time abroad, Erena realizes that she has become “a hybrid,” not English but never again completely Basque because she has “lived in a country where men and women worked and learned and played on equal terms” (116). Breaking out of the androcentric rural Basque society in which she had been raised opens her eyes to a new world of possibilities available to women in more progressive and egalitarian societies. At one point, Erena refers to her sister’s arranged marriage as “a problem” and suddenly realizes how odd it is to be engaged to a stranger. In England, she has enjoyed the freedom to engage in discussions around the dinner table about many topics, including sports, love, and politics, something that she knows would not have been allowed back home (115).

On the other hand, her hereditary ties to the Basque Country make her feel the need to defend Basque customs in England, letting “these English young people” know “that our marriages are sure and lasting, that our children never suffer from the home divided against itself, that we know nothing of divorce, that a Basque is always faithful”(116). Erena clearly has a naïve and

idealized notion of Basque customs and never stops to consider that the lack of divorce may be less a function of the quality and happiness of marital relationships than the lack of options for women in a staunchly Catholic and androcentric or patriarchal society. Women forced into arranged marriages at a young age, with little or no education and lacking job skills, do not have the agency to make choices and control their own life situation.

By her own description, Erena has become “a rebel against a system created by men for men” but also concedes that “the (Basque) system had its virtues” and that “not all liberty makes for happiness” (116). She is torn between the value system that she was raised with and has internalized and that which she later acquired by exposure to life in another country. Erena further adds that “the Basque men revere their women even as they revere their Gods. They are husbands and fathers, tender, faithful and kind.” However, she also criticizes the fact that “they reserve for men alone that ‘true companionship of mind and mind,’ that is marked by the laugh, the shared sport, the hearty story, and the heated argument, this last being the most positive and precious sign of true companionship” (116).

The narrator of *Basque Girl* reflects about the two “Basque wives” she has known well, her mother and grandmother. She used to believe that her father was better than other Basque men “because of his far travels and great learning” but now realizes that even he is content to accept his wife’s “submergence in the tasks of the household.” When Erena reflects upon her parents’ relationship, she comes to the realization that she has never heard them laugh together and that her father never discussed the books he read with his wife. The mother “was a quiet, ghostlike figure that moved quietly about in the background” (117). It becomes clear to her that from her mother “came a perfume, a sense of comfort” and that it “was she who oiled the machinery of our being, but much of the time Father seemed unconscious of her presence” (117).

### **3.2.5. The Life of Objects**

In fulfilling the expectation to ‘keep house,’ it becomes the female’s responsibility to turn a dwelling, a house, into a ‘home.’ Women become ‘house-wives’ and ‘home-makers.’ Women are also in charge of preserving national traditions and transmitting their ethnic identity to younger

generations. Decorations, photographs and other images of the homeland are one way in which women add this layer of comfort and customization to the home while serving as important transatlantic ties.

In studying Basque diaspora women, Totoricagüena found that there is often a heavy reliance on symbols and photographs in their home decorations to express and bolster their ethnic identity. This is a way to symbolically connect with the Basque Country and to compensate for the lack of physical proximity to the homeland (*Basque Diaspora* 450). This may take the form of a copy of Picasso's *Guernica* hanging on the wall or displaying *lauburus* or *ikurriñas*<sup>30</sup> inside the home. This construction of an evolving or 'hybrid' Basque-American identity through symbols can be tied in with the concept of "bricolage nationalism" (upon which we will expand later) by which immigrant Basques and those born in the United States compose a new identity by matching and mixing elements from both cultures.

The works analyzed here do not heavily feature ethnic symbols or home decorations, although in Monique Urza's novel, Grandma's house is ornamented with the round lace doilies that she crochets herself, her dining table perennially covered by a white lace tablecloth. Joan Errea's mother in *My Mama Marie* also has "crocheted table cloths, bedspreads, and doilies all over the house" and the children have "embroidered pillow cases over homemade pillows" on their beds (119).

White lace and embroidery have an air of 'old worldliness;' they evoke an association with cleanliness and good housekeeping, something that was expected from Basque women, at least throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The rosary is another object that appears throughout Urza's novel and is associated with the deeply Catholic grandmother. The "old dark rosaries that hung from the bedpost" (95) are a symbol of the grandmother and are something that the grandchildren also interact with. In the quiet of the grandmother's bedroom, the children "touch" and "rattle" the rosaries and there is "play" and "dance" around them as well (20). On Sundays, before she takes the children to Mass, the grandmother "would hand a rosary to each of

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<sup>30</sup> The "lauburu" or "Basque Cross" is an ancient Basque symbol. The "ikurriña" is the white, green and red Basque flag.

[them]” (7). The rosary becomes an object that is passed on down through the generations and become part of the sense of familial belonging almost at an equal level as the shared physical aspects. “The nineteen of us, we had the good skin that tanned dark in summer. We had the eyes. We had the same rosaries from Grandma. We knew the music of the old language that we did not understand, we had eaten the same pancakes soaked in syrup and rum. We had the same playground under Grandma’s dining room table...” (19).

The rosary also appears briefly in *Mountain City* and *My Mama Marie*. In Martin’s memoir, the family is gathered at the grandmother’s wake. “[M]y mom and dad went up to the lectern and led us all in the rosary. Most of us didn’t know how to work our rosaries, but that didn’t matter because it’s what Grandma would have wanted” (180). The rosary is a symbol of the Catholic religion, which apparently had significant importance for the grandmother and even the narrator’s parents. The younger American-born generations, however, have lost the knowledge of or the interest in the religion and its symbolical representations. It is something foreign to them, which they do not know how to handle but nevertheless still respect as it is part of something that matters to the family.

In Errea’s book, the rosary is both a symbol of hypocritical piousness as well as a weapon to fight against hypocrisy and evil. Errea narrates how, when her mother Marie was working as a maid for an old lady who was her uncle’s acquaintance, “[b]efore every evening meal, the lady would pull up a rocker, take her very large cat on her lap, remove heavy wooden carved beads from the hook by the fireplace and made the child kneel on the cold floor where they would proceed to say the rosary in a pious way to atone for any sins committed during the day” (26). Marie Jeanne adds that, in her opinion, the old lady “should have spent most of her life on her knees” since she was so evil and abusive. At one point in the story, Marie’s “mind seemed to snap, and snatching the heavy wooden rosary off the wall, she proceeded to beat the living daylights” out of the old lady’s cat (27). The old lady and her black cat are associated with a witch and a devil-possessed cat, both evil forces. Marie later believes that God will strike her dead because she might have offended him “by using the beads in such a way” (28). But the only consequence is that the hypocritical old lady no longer uses her rosary when she prays and the nasty cat is forever removed from Marie’s life.

In *The Deep Blue Memory*, Urza introduces a series of images to highlight the bonds between the family members and their connection to their ancient Old World heritage. Another tool she utilizes to assist with the narration of the family's story is imbuing objects with a life of their own almost as important as that of the human characters. Objects become subjects that help tell the story. The grandmother's round wooden dining table, around which the adults congregate and under which the children play, becomes a symbol of family unity and support. The white linen tablecloth, the gold-rimmed coffee cups, and the crocheted lace doilies conjure up the domesticity of a middle-class Old World lifestyle, while the fresh coffee and cigarettes reflect the hospitality and familiarity shared around the dining table.

Later in the story, after Uncle Luke is running for public office and the privacy of this Basque family has been disturbed, Grandma's "white lace of the dining room table" is covered with "crystal dishes filled with nuts and olives" (70) on election night. These are strange and foreign objects on the family table, no longer the familiar coffee cups, or the cream and sugar that the narrator associates with warm memories. In addition, Grandma appears "dressed in lavender, smiling politely" (72), which is also new and strange, since she normally wears the same "black wool dress" and "black wool scarf," the very clothes she will choose to wear when she dies (96). Pastel colors are not traditional in the Basque Country, especially not for older women. These colors are much more common in the United States. This change in the matriarch's clothing as well as her forced polite smile are possibly a way to show her in a more New World style to the strangers who fill the Laxalts' house on election night. The motherly and domestic Grandma, who is very private and content inside her home, is forced into the limelight of becoming a public figure when she is elected "Mother of the Year" and her photograph, with the title "Immigrant Mother of Five," appears on the front page of the Nevada State Journal.

A particular type of object that serves to tell the narrator's family saga in Urza's 'psychological autobiography' is the photograph. Photographs are objects that connect reality to memory, the present to the past. Memory serves to close the gap between past and present. As a physical and material representation of the past, the photograph is an object that provides evidence of and a connection to the past. Especially the family photograph is an instrument that chronicles family rituals, displays ideal images of a family's cohesion, and perpetuates snapshots of

memorable moments and family togetherness.

As is the case with many autobiographical or semi-autobiographical texts and as the book's title reflects, memory is a central theme in Urza's narrative. Through remembering and writing about her family's genealogy and history, she attempts to preserve the memories of the old country, memories of uprooting and her grandparents' immigrant experience, the arrival in the New World, and the memories of the second and third generations growing up and "becoming American." Through the description of everyday events, Urza shows changes in social, economic, and educational levels from one generation to another. The grandfather started out as an immigrant shepherd, but his children achieve a college education and become lawyers, writers, and teachers.

Early in the novel, the reader's attention is directed to "a brown-and-white photograph on the mantel" that shows Grandpa and Grandma and their five children, and which is said to represent "the immigrant story" (9). The story is that they had both arrived in the United States separately from the French Basque Country, fifteen years apart. The grandfather came as a sheepherder and the grandmother as a "young woman hired to cook for a sheep ranch in western Nevada" (10). They were married in a Catholic church in Reno, and one year later their first boy was born. The grandmother dressed him in lace and strolled around with him in a "carriage fit for a king," but then their luck changed and they lost all their assets due to a plunge in the sheep market. Their second boy was born in a sheep camp in California, "in the desert hills where the father had found work as a herder" (10). They lived "in shacks and tents" in California and Nevada, in a harsh and barren environment.

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch states that "[f]amily pictures depend on such a narrative act of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generations" (xii). Especially in the lives of immigrants, uprooted through exile and relocation, and where families and friendships are dispersed and interrupted, photographs are objects that provide subjects with an "illusion of continuity over time and space" (xi).

When Urza's narrator looks at the brown-and-white photograph, she recognizes the "same round, deep brown eyes," the likeness of "a hundred generations of sameness" which constitutes the familial look that fosters a sense of mutual recognition and consolidates their family's relations. Furthermore, Hirsch affirms that "photographs, as the only material traces of an irrecoverable past, derive their power and their important cultural role from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of family life" (5).

Urza's narration of the story behind the brown-and-white photograph is full of positive images, hope, and nostalgia. It tells of the immigrant desire for self-improvement, of dreams of a better life in the New World come true, of the pride of seeing the second generation's success. The narrator, as viewer of this photograph, projects "a screen made up of dominant mythologies and preconceptions that shapes the representation" (Hirsch 7). Her own expectations circumscribe and filter what she wants to see and what she decides to allow the reader to see. Memory can be imperfect and unreliable, clouded by nostalgia. We often embellish, adjust, and make sly cuts when we tell our life story, and the reader is never in a position to challenge a narrator's account.

In *The Deep Blue Memory* there is a familial mythology, an image of "a hundred generations of sameness" that our narrator and the younger generations must live up to, and this image of "sameness" and "making it in America" shapes her desire to tell a certain story. Hirsch argues that "the family photograph, widely available as a medium of familial self-representation ... can reduce the strains of family life by sustaining an imaginary cohesion" but at the same time it may exacerbate those strains "by creating images that real families cannot uphold" (7).

Photographs have the capacity to make viewers tap into their narrative and imaginary power. Hirsch further suggests that "photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life" (8). As the reader of Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory* will later find out with Aunt Sondra's story, family is not only the site of desire, longing, and nostalgia, but also a space where familial bonds and duty are so strong that one can die while trying to live up to expectations. The lived reality of family life is also a site of pain, betrayal, and tears, as well as of anxiety and resistance.



The choice of photographs in Urza's novel mirrors the narrator's choice of which exact stories to tell in her family saga. During the family's Christmas reunion, the narrator and other members of the younger generation "ignored [their] own photographs, which were in color and were too recent, too familiar to have significance" (8). Instead, they focus on a "brown-and-white print of a family of seven," the photograph which tells the immigrant story the narrator wishes to retell. However, the story that follows cannot be a product of the narrator's own memory, since the grandparents' history dates back to times before the narrator's birth. It is thus a "memory" inherited from someone else, from prior tellings and retellings of the family saga. Just like pictures are not unmediated representations of a certain past, our memory is never completely ours. A subject looking at a photograph constructs a fantastic past, just like the "memory" of this family's immigrant story is only a version of a real life, tainted by contributions from other "narrators" and their transformations of the story over time.

In *Acts of Narrative Resistance*, Laura Beard points out that "[t]he question of which stories can and cannot be told within a family history or within an autobiography again raises the problematic nature of autobiography, always teetering between the classifications of fiction and nonfiction" (83). Photographs are nonverbal representations of a moment in history visually frozen for future viewings, but they also allow space for creative interpretations of that moment and that history. Autobiographical writing operates in a similar fashion, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, between representation and creation. Beard affirms that "[e]very autobiography, like every photograph, is both representation and creation, so that the inclusion of photographs within autobiographical texts seems particularly appropriate" because photography and autobiography "both operate at the interstices of memory and imagination" (84).

Just like photographs may serve as the family's main instrument of self-knowledge and representation, an object that holds the emotional power to perpetuate and pass on family memories to future generations, the act of writing itself is also an act of retrieving memory, an act of remembering. The narrator's father in *The Deep Blue Memory* writes the "deep blue book" which contains his version of the family's memory. Growing up with a father who is a writer marks a difference in the narrator's childhood as her "earliest memory was of the sound of the typewriter" (13). The deep blue book is passed on from the father, the second generation, to his children, like

the family stories from the Old Country have been passed on from one generation to the next. This “deep blue book” becomes an object that acquires the importance of a fetish. As the narrator puts it, “The deep blue book was that which each of us, if ever a fire had struck our house, would have taken first” (14). Being a Basque-American means living in two worlds: the past, which is – often nostalgically – retrieved and preserved through memories, and the present. In her novel, Urza recovers the past world of the Basque Country through memories, objects, and photographs, while simultaneously inscribing herself and her extended family into American culture.

Beard adds that “family photography can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious” (13). Because of the reading they demand, photographs are imbued with ambiguity and do not transparently offer a single truth (25).

Mentions of photographs are also found in *Child of the Holy Ghost*, although they do not carry the symbolical weight they do in *The Deep Blue Memory*. Laxalt’s narrator recalls that, in his mother’s bedroom in the family home in Carson City, “there was an oval photograph in gilt-edged framing of *her* mother, Jeanne Garat. The portrait had been blown up and tinted in the fashion of that time in America” (11). This picture shows an image of Jeanne as a slender girl with auburn hair that is pulled away from her face to highlight her delicate facial bones. Her forehead is said to be “high and proud” and her eyes “gray and intelligent.” The narrator adds that this photograph “bore out what [he] had heard from the old women of Donibane. In a country where pretty girls are commonplace, Jeanne was known for her extraordinary beauty, though some said she carried her head too high for their tastes” (11).

Later on in the book, the narrator and his mother are seen quietly looking at photographs from the Old Country in the mother’s house in America. We gather that these pictures had remained guarded from the son because of the mother’s secret about her childhood and life in the Old Country. Only now does Pete find out what Arnaud, his mother’s father, looked like. “Now that I knew her story, or at least a good share of it, she could talk more openly about the identity of people in the old photos” (22). The photograph in question shows Maitia’s half-brother Michel “standing with other French soldiers in the rubble of a shelled city. It must have been a rest between

battles, because everyone was relaxed. A French officer was with the men” (23). Suddenly, “on a sudden impulse,” the mother takes the photo away from her son’s hands. “She peered at it intently: ‘Peter, look at me!’ she said. Puzzled, I did. With a strange expression, she said, ‘My God, you have the same eyes *he* has’” (23). This photograph serves the purpose of becoming the missing piece of the puzzle that brings to light the identity of Maitia’s father. It is now that she realizes that the French officer pictured in the photograph is Arnaud, her father.

At a later point in the narration, yet another photograph of Arnaud reveals further clues about him. Michel is being cared for in a hospital in the U.S. when he shows Jeanne and Maitia a photo from the war taken during a rest leave, in which the same French officer from the previous photograph is pictured. Michel explains that this man his captain and tells the story about how this man died saving Michel’s life. Jeanne asks: “‘Your captain, did he know your family name?’ ‘He did,’ said Michel. ‘He was very curious about our family.’ ‘He gave his life for you. He gave his life for me!’ whispered Jeanne,” as she slumped forward listlessly in her chair (146).

It is interesting that the two photographs Laxalt chooses to highlight in *Child of the Holy Ghost* feature the man who had remained absent, hidden and secret from Pete and others in his family. As Beard quote above affirms, photographs, like autobiographies, are “both representation and creation” and “both operate at the interstices of memory and imagination” (84). Is it true that Arnaud actually gave his life for his daughter’s half-brother? Or is this a possibly an imagined interpretation of an event that happened years before during the chaos of war? Is it maybe a convenient “creation” of a story that presents this French man, who was banned and rejected by the Garat family, in a heroic and thus more positive light? Since all the reader has to go by are the characters’ memories and their personal interpretations of a moment frozen in time in a photograph, the truth remains as mysterious as the character of Arnaud had remained for many years.

### 3.2.6. Family Bonds: Consent and Descent Relations

Analyses of American immigrant and ethnic literature often focus on the nature of the “immigrant experience” as encountered in fictional and autobiographical works. The paradigm for such studies is based on the reflection theory of literature, which seeks to identify and analyze literary works as reflections of historical transformations or social change. Gert Buelens affirms in his review essay “Beyond Ethnicity?” that the “reductive nature of such a categorical approach” makes arbitrary assumptions about the nature of ethnicity and misrepresents the complexity of immigrant literary production (315). Buelens points out that Werner Sollors’ work *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986) radically departs from the socio-historical orientation of previous studies in its “real attempt to come to grips with the problematical nature of ethnicity in America” (316).

Sollors reveals the limitations of the term “ethnicity” and successfully demonstrates that “there is no fixed cultural content to be associated with any one ‘ethnic’ group” (qtd. in Buelens 316). He concurs with Frederick Barth in affirming that it is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Sollors 27), thus describing the formation of ethnic groups through “boundary construction and social distancing.” Therefore, it is “the contrast with people who are not considered ethnics which often shapes the delineation of the various ethnic groups; and both sides are contrastively homogenized in the process” (Sollors 178).

John and Mark Bieter, in their book outlining the history of Basques in Idaho, state that in an effort to fit in or blend in, that is, to “consent” to becoming American, the second generation tried to shed its ties to the Old World. However, after the 1960s, being “ethnic” became increasingly popular, and the third generation adopted and affirmed their ethnic pride as an identity that set them apart and distinguished them from those who were not “ethnic” but were simply “American” (3-5).

Sollors’ study shifts the focus from the concept of ethnicity based on biological or national origin to the “cultural construction of the codes of consent and descent.” Descent relations are described as relations of ‘substance’ (by blood or nature) while consent relations refer to those of

'law' or 'marriage' (6). Already in the early 1800s, President John Quincy Adams reminded new immigrants that they "must cast off the European skin, never to resume it." They were told to "look forward to their posterity rather than backward to their ancestors" (qtd. in Sollors 4). This expresses the idea of newcomers being reborn into a "forward-looking culture of consent." Sollors affirms that it is this tension between the hereditary or ancestral and the self-made or contractual that defines American identity. Descent language thus stresses "our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements" while consent language emphasizes our freedom to choose our spouses, destinies, fates, or political systems (6). Immigrants experience the tension between rejecting their hierarchical and hereditary old-world past and the vision of a more individualistic and democratic present or future of "consent" in America.

When extrapolating this theory to literary production, Sollors believes that far from being an irresolvable conflict that might stifle American ethnic authors, this double consciousness of *descent* and *consent* allows them to explore a wide range of "possibilities of playfulness in establishing their voice" (252).

The Americans' unsystematic desire to identify with intermediary groups – larger than the family, smaller than the nation – may be based on real or imagined descent, on old or newly adopted religions, on geographic area of origin, socialization, or residence, on external categorization, on voluntary association, or on defiance. In all of these cases, symbolic boundaries are constructed in a perplexing variety of continuously shifting forms. This messy reality challenges us to transcend statically conceived generalizations about regions and ethnic groups in America. (Sollors 175)

While the five main works analyzed in this dissertation differ in significant ways, one common theme is the importance of family bonds among Basques. The topic of family and family relations is featured prominently in these books, but there are peculiarities as to how each author addresses the issue. One useful theoretical approach to analyzing the theme of Basque family ties is utilizing Sollors' terminology of "descent" and "consent" relations as outlined above.

The works of Basque-American authors often depict situations in which we encounter this conflict between ancestral or hereditary bonds and self-made or contractual identity or, as David Río phrases it, “the conflict between the concern for one’s racial, ethnic and familial heritage and the natural desire to choose one’s own destiny, even if this means departing from such a heritage” (“Family Ties” n. pag.).

Mirim Isasi (pseudonym of Rosita Durán) is a European Basque who came to the United States to escape the Spanish Civil War. In 1940, she published *Basque Girl*, a semi-autobiographical work narrated by Erena, whom the reader follows from her early years as a nine-year-old girl until she leaves her home country for America as an adult. In a nostalgic tone that expresses her yearning for her homeland, the narrator presents her family members and their everyday life experiences in a rural setting, presenting a multitude of vignettes of Basque life and customs.

The narrator introduces the reader to all her family members: there is the now deceased grandfather, a “medicine man” who would “leave home for days or maybe weeks” (14) traveling around the countryside helping the sick; the grandmother, whom she calls *Grandmere* and with whom she has a very close relationship; her father, Mr. Isasi, who is constantly absent, traveling the world for work-related reasons; her mother, a delicate woman with whom Erena appears to have nothing in common; and her older sister, Delores, “the studious one of the family” (21). A significant part of the novel is dedicated to Erena’s close relationship to her grandmother, the most memorable character in Isasi’s book. The bonds that connect the two of them are emphasized and Erena talks about the numerous activities she does with the older woman, while her mother and sister are left outside their closed circle. It is significant how Erena separates the female members of her family into two clearly distinct fields:

With my father so much of the time away, there were the four of us, two young girls, a lovely, quiet lady, and a strong and ageless grandmere. Our lives at first flowed through the years softly, a small river between smooth and pleasant banks, happy and useful. But as Delores and I grew older, I see now that the little river divided into two streams. The one, Delores and my mother, flowed with an even more tranquil current. The other, my grandmere and I, we made a laughing brook

that leaped and played over sun-polished stones and ran adventuring unafraid beneath shadowy boulders. (22)

While Erena and *Grandmere* play and run “unafraid” and go on trips “like partners,” her “tranquil” sister and mother are relegated to a separate and more quiet or homely realm. The lack of emotion or connectedness with which the narrator refers to her own mother as “a lovely, quiet lady” (22) leads one to wonder how this split in the Isasi family relationships ever came to happen.

*Grandmere* is Erena’s “playmate, teacher, and ideal” (13) and takes on a central role in her life, on the one hand because her parents are either physically or emotionally absent, and on the other because their personalities so closely resemble each other’s. The mother is described as “fine china,” while Erena and *Grandmere* are “brass or steel” (17). What Erena mainly remembers about her mother is “her beauty, her rare and delicate complexion, her great waves of auburn hair, her figure that held the grace of a swan in every movement” (16). The mother is also serene, quiet and solitary, very much unlike her daughter and mother-in-law, who “might have been cast in the same mold as each other” (17).

There is also little interaction between Mr. Isasi and his daughter because he is away from home the majority of the time, just like his own father had done in turn. As Erena puts it, while the men are going about “their far and carefree ways” (15), it is the grandmother who holds the Isasi estate together. She explains that in the Basque Country each family has its “‘stem house’, the center of a little kingdom, ruled wisely if not democratically by the father – or in his absence, the grandmother” (176). The father’s main role in *Basque Girl* is to make significant and overarching decisions about his daughters’ futures, such as establishing early alliances with local families for Erena’s and Delores’ future marriage, or deciding that Erena must be sent away to school in England because “she must have the English language and the training they can give her there” (85). While providing a Basque girl with an international education may seem surprisingly progressive considering this is before the Spanish Civil War, Mr. Isasi does not want his daughter “to become a prodigy of learning – but just to speak good English, and to have enough of art, music, and literature to make her a woman who can help her husband and give pleasure to her family (94).”

After spending time away from her homeland while living and studying in England, Erena realizes that she has become “a hybrid,” not English but never again completely Basque because she has “lived in a country where men and women worked and learned and played on equal terms” (116). Breaking out of the patriarchal rural Basque society in which she was raised opens Erena’s eyes to a new world of possibilities in more progressive and egalitarian societies. For instance, upon returning home for a visit, she refers to her sister’s arranged marriage as “a problem” and suddenly realizes how odd it is for her to be engaged to a stranger. In England Erena has enjoyed the freedom to engage in arguments around the dinner table about a wide variety of topics, including sports, love, and politics, something that she knows would not have been allowed “back home” (115). On the other hand, her hereditary ties to the Basque Country make her feel the need to defend Basque customs in England, letting “these English young people” know “that our marriages are sure and lasting, that our children never suffer from the home divided against itself, that we know nothing of divorce, that a Basque is always faithful (116).”

Erena clearly suffers from naïve and idealized notions of Basque life and traditions. She does not consider that the reason for the lack of divorce may not be the actual quality and happiness of marital relationships as much as the lack of options for women in a staunchly Catholic and patriarchal society. Women forced into arranged marriages at a young age, with little or no education and lacking job skills do not have the power or freedom to control their own life situation.

After having been exposed to life in a different country from her own, Erena obviously begins to experience the tension between “descent” and “consent” relations. As an immigrant in England, she feels the conflict between rejecting her hierarchical and hereditary past and the vision of a more individualistic and democratic present. Her comments after having spent time in England portray the complexity of these relationships and the clash between the ancient Basque values she has always known and the possibility of a new and more progressive life in Britain.

According to her own description, Erena is now “a rebel against a system created by men for men” but also concedes that “the (Basque) system had its virtues” and that “not all liberty makes for happiness (116).” She further adds that “Basque men revere their women even as they



revere their Gods. They are husbands and fathers, tender, faithful and kind.” However, she also criticizes the fact that “they reserve for men alone that ‘true companionship of mind and mind,’ that is marked by the laugh, the shared sport, the hearty story, and the heated argument, this last being the most positive and precious sign of true companionship”(116-7).

When Erena thinks about her mother and grandmother, the two “Basque wives” she has known well, she realizes that her father is perfectly content with women’s “submergence in the tasks of the household.” And when she reflects upon her parents’ relationship, she comes to the realization that she has never heard them laugh together or that her father never discussed his books with his wife. Erena’s mother is “a quiet, ghostlike figure that moved quietly about in the background” (117). Her mother emanates “a perfume, a sense of comfort” and that she was the one “who oiled the machinery of our being, but much of the time Father seemed unconscious of her presence” (117).

Erena also reflects upon the differences between English and Basque girls as struggles with the internal conflict between her identity as a Basque, her cultural traditions and her family’s expectations:

English girls, very many of them – looked forward to careers in the arts, in letters, on the stage, or even in business. Me – I had inherited my *grandmere*’s great energy and my father’s love of life and action. I wanted very much, to express myself in bodily interpretation of music – I wanted to be a dancer. But Basque women do not dance for money. [...] For a daughter of the Isasi to become a professional dancer would be a disgrace so black that it could never be lived down nor forgotten. [...] So – I must marry Quinzano and spend my energy in creating future *pelota* players for the admiration of the *fronton* galleries. But how delicious it would be to hear the applause for oneself.... (175)

At the end of the book, Erena manages to realize her dream of becoming a professional dancer and also chooses not marry, thus breaking with the tradition of continuing to live and work on the Isasi family *baserri*. But in order for her to become the architect of her own fate, she must leave her ancestral home in the Basque Country and move to America, where she can freely choose

her own future without the constraint of ancient hereditary traditions.

Robert Laxalt also explores Basque values and behavior in many of his books and family ties play a prominent role in his literary production. In his Basque trilogy Laxalt offers us his most profound accounts of the power of family bonds. These three novels, *The Basque Hotel* (1989), *Child of the Holy Ghost* (1992), and *The Governor's Mansion* (1994), narrate the story of a Basque immigrant family in the Western United States from the point of view of the son, Pete Indart, a second generation Basque-American.

Laxalt explores the country of his ancestors and its idiosyncrasies with the mentality of a man born and raised in America. For this reason, he focuses on those elements that stand out from his American point of view. Thus, he underscores the importance of traditions in *Euskal Herria*, the narrow relationship between the Basques and their past, and their fidelity to myths and customs transmitted by their ancestors as the center of Basque identity.

In *Child of the Holy Ghost* Laxalt explores the Indarts' Basque heritage by having the now grown-up Pete travel to the land of his ancestors in search of his roots. This journey of a descendant of immigrants to the first generation's homeland can be seen as a logical consequence of the immigration process and the younger generations' coming to terms with the conflicts created by the realization of an ethnic identity in the United States. As Rio affirms, after the children of immigrants "have become adults and have achieved their integration into American society," they "often fear the dissipation of their heritage and long for some kind of continuity with the past" ("Family Ties" n. pag.). It is an active search for one's ethnic origins that becomes even stronger in the third generation, the grandchildren of immigrants, who are well established and integrated into American society but suddenly fear losing the ethnic identity that makes them "special" as it differentiates them from everyone else. They yearn to find out more about the land and the customs of their ancestors so that the ties of *descent* are not completely lost for their own children and future generations.

*Child of the Holy Ghost* has two parallel plots: A lesser one is the account of how Pete's father, Petya, struggles with life as a shepherd in the American West while enduring the loneliness

of the open range and the temptations of town life. The other plot, which contains the most noteworthy sections of the novel, centers around the narrator's journey to his mother's place of birth in the French Basque Country "to learn about the ways of the Basques in their ancestral villages" and to see "how they lived and thought in their natural element" (3). In these more extensive sections of the book, Laxalt explores the significance of family bonds in the Basque Country by focusing on the problematic circumstances of the birth and upbringing of the narrator's mother, Maitia Garat. She is of particular interest for the purposes of this dissertation because she is one of the novel's main characters as well as one of Laxalt's few strong female characters.

Through Pete's observations about his relatives in Donibane Laxalt emphasizes the importance of family bonds in the Basque Country at the turn of the century and highlights the peculiarity of the ancient Basque inheritance system, according to which the first-born child alone inherits the family farmhouse and its properties to avoid their division among siblings. In the French Basque Country, this tradition circumvents the Napoleonic code which required that properties be equally divided at their owner's death. Thus, when Maitia's grandfather passes away, she becomes the sole beneficiary of the house of Garat, leaving both her mother Jeanne and her uncle Jean-Baptiste disinherited (105). Laxalt uses this situation to make the point that when it comes to Basque family matters, tradition is more important than the law.

Pete explains how the "disinherited," the young men of poor farm houses who are not first-borns and whose only options are to become priests or stay in the family home as servants, are those who tried their luck in the Americas. He stresses, however, that very few of them willingly leave their mountains because "they love their ancient earth and surrender it only in extreme circumstance" (7). Laxalt also comments on the difficulties that those who emigrated would encounter when trying to return to their homeland: "Once having left the Basque Country, they were never really regarded as Basque again" and were called *Amerikanoak*. "Despite ten thousand years of being Basque, they had in a few years of absence become outsiders" (16).

This rejection of those who left by those who stayed is due to the Basque villagers' resistance to accept change and any disruption of the status quo. As the narrator observes, "the Basque Country is suspicious of change, believing that it means disrupting an order that has been

tested and proven” (14). Adherence to tradition also precludes the formation of new family bonds, such as the marriage between Basques of different socio-economic levels or the union of Basques and non-Basques. Jeanne’s parents “were of an old and respected family, neither rich nor poor, but with a fine strong square house” (11), and could therefore not accept that their daughter would fall in love with Arnaud, an agricultural specialist on assignment from the French government. As Pete puts it,

The village saw neither romance nor tragedy in what she had done. It was still a day when a boy from on Basque village would not dare to fall in love with a girl from another village ten kilometers away. In the rare cases that it happened, he could count on disinheritance and being shunned for the rest of his days, denied even by his family. And in Jeanne’s case, she had made the ultimate error of loving a man who was not even Basque. He might as well have been a visitor from another planet. (40)

In his exploration of his mother’s early years in the French Basque Country, Pete ends up discovering a dark secret, namely that Maitia Garat was born as a “child of the Holy Ghost,” which is the “charitable” way to refer to illegitimate children in the region of Basse Navarre. Illegitimacy in a strongly Catholic and patriarchal society such as the Basque Country is a cultural taboo that limits the individual’s personal development in a society in which “a good reputation is worth more than a golden belt” (14). This ancient and traditional code contrasts with the modern American mentality that considers illegitimacy as “Middle Ages nonsense” (5). It may be thought of as nonsense in the New World, but as Pete states, “the family must bear the stigma on its respectability. Their neighbors will never let them forget it unto the third generation.” Making this discovery and observing the villagers’ reactions helps Pete understand his mother’s “obsession with respectability in America” (10) and other aspects of her that he had wondered about.

Even though *Child of the Holy Ghost* shows the strong bond of family relationships in the Old World, it also emphasizes the fact that the ancient code of honor and respectability is even more important than blood relationships. The consequence of Jeanne’s defiance of the traditional moral code is the loss of social and familial support, to the point where she must break the ties with her family and abandon her home town. Even though everyone in the Garat household suffers

the consequences of her actions, it is Jeanne and Maitia who are punished the most by being ridiculed and ostracized. As long as they remain in their village, they are unable to free themselves from the pressure and stress that *descent* relations place on them. It is only at the end of the book, when Maitia chooses to immigrate to the United States that she is finally released from these chains. The Statue of Liberty becomes the symbol of her final liberation from the stigma of illegitimacy.

Laxalt's *Child of the Holy Ghost* underscores the relevance of family bonds and the conflict between *descent* and *consent* relations from the point of view of the second generation, to which he belongs, but he does not offer any account of how subsequent generations of Basque-Americans view these issues. This is where analyzing his daughter's literary production serves as a way to expand on the Laxalts' family perspective not only because the attitude of the third and fourth generations is taken into account, but also because of the gendered view that Monique Urza is able to contribute.

Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory* explores the complexity of family relationships and the clash between ancient values and modern American life by drawing upon the experiences of various generations of the same Basque family. Its individual members experience the conflict "between the rewards brought by assimilation into American society and the price to be paid for integration and success" (Rio, "Success and Stress" 489). While for the first generation of immigrants the path in a new country is mostly immediate and singular, for their offspring it is full of opposition and obstacles. As Jeanne Claire van Ryzin's states in her brief book review on the back cover of Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory*, younger generations are often "[c]aught between their own experienced present and the remembered past of their elders, the children and grandchildren wrestle with the anxiety and uncertainty nurtured by the admixture of moving forward while retaining a bequeathed past of diminished returns" (n. pag.). *The Deep Blue Memory* highlights the third generation's balancing act between assimilation and affirmation of their ethnic roots.

The first generation, which is represented by the narrator's grandparents, holds on to its ethnic identity and inherited customs and is reluctant to give them up in exchange for integration

and acceptance by their new society. This attitude is reflected in the traditional black wool clothing the grandmother chooses to wear, the home decorations and ornaments, the maintenance of their Catholic faith, and the speaking of the Basque language among the elder couple. However, there is a recognition that their children will need to follow a different path to succeed. Thus, when her older sons are five and six years old, the grandmother makes the decision to speak only English to them and sends them “to roam in the room where Nevada’s senators and judges drank and talked business over hot meals” (11). As a result of this decision, their English ability is greatly improved but, in exchange, knowledge of the Basque language is lost in the second generation.

Language is another element that highlights the tension between consent and descent for Basque-Americans. Most second-generation Basques were more focused on carving out a successful future for themselves in the United States than looking back at the country of their parents. As a consequence, the Basque language became largely lost to the second generation as they became immersed in an English-speaking culture. In *The Deep Blue Memory*, the narrator and her siblings “could hear the distant, quiet, enchanted sound of the old language that [they] did not understand” (6), but the English language is “clean and lucid and full of meaning” (42).

Nevertheless, the break between the first and second generations is not immediate and radical. The two eldest sons, the narrator’s father and his older brother “bore the scent of the old country” while the youngest three “were infused with the light of the new world” (18). All five brothers will nevertheless work hard to achieve recognition and professional success, going on to earn university degrees and becoming more educated and better integrated into American society than their immigrant parents. “The children learned things, saw things, knew things that went light years beyond what their parents had any hope of knowing” (12). This generation has voluntarily consented to becoming American; their brilliant careers – especially Uncle Luke’s, who becomes a governor and later a U.S. senator – are proof that they have achieved the American Dream. However, a high price must be paid for this success and recognition insofar as the family’s treasured privacy is violated and one of their family members is led to commit suicide.

At the level of the third generation, life “was a world apart” from their grandparents’ “yet connected with it” (13). Since their parents have already achieved success in America, the

grandchildren of immigrants do not necessarily feel the pressure to prove themselves and be successful. They have consented to life in the U.S. and have become fully integrated; however, they are also subject to contradictory influences. They fear losing their Basque roots and feel closer to their grandparents' generation; the narrator uses a series of images of "sameness" to highlight this connection. This tension can be interpreted according to Hansen's controversial "law": "What the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember." Marcus Hansen, a historian of American immigration, in a 1938 essay entitled "The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant" wrote that ethnicity is preserved among immigrants, weakens among their children, and returns with the grandchildren. Children of immigrants tend to reject the foreign ways of their parents and want to join the American mainstream, but the next generation wants to retain and reaffirm the values of their ancestors.

Early in *The Deep Blue Memory*, the narrator emphasizes the strong bonds that tie the family together in this country but also binds them in a full circle "back to the old earth" that bore their grandparents "and their grandparents for ten thousand years back" (26). The bonds to "the creature called family" are described as "unconditional" and "unquestioned" (27). However, as the story progresses, the tensions mentioned above take center stage as the various family members struggle with the conflict between loyalty to the family group and the individual process of searching for identity. While Urza's novel celebrates the power of unity of the Basque family, "it also underscores the importance of consent-based relations" for the descendants of immigrants to develop as individuals (Río, "Success and Stress" 491).

Uncle Luke's success as a politician sets in motion a series of events that start tearing at the bonds of this family. The whole family makes an effort to support his political campaign for the common good while suppressing their individual goals and views. But a personal attack from a rival, "the allegation that was black in color" (Urza 91), tarnishes the family name and damages its relationships. At one point, the narrator's father refuses to meet his brother Luke at a restaurant during one of his visits back from Washington D.C., but the most shocking example of how the stress from the attacks undermines the family's happiness is Aunt Sondra taking her own life. The attacks and risks for the family are both external and internal, and the narrator realizes that "the *stronger* the family, the more valuable it is, the more *vulnerable* it is, the more needful of

protection” (113).

The tensions and struggles of the second and third generations with *descent* and *consent* relations, however, begin to lose their importance in the fourth generation, that of the narrator’s children. Their Basque heritage is no longer the most significant factor shaping their personal sense of reality or individuality. This generation has not known Grandma’s round wooden table, or her Basque language, or any of the objects and images of “sameness” that connect them to the Old World. The narrator looks at her own son at the end of the novel and realizes that his face “bore nothing of the green hills, nothing of the dark earth”; the face of the fourth generation is “open,” “unrestrained” and “free” from the bonds of descent (Urza 156).

As the leading Basque-American writers have done in the past several decades, a younger generation Basque-American, Gregory Martin, also provides an insightful portrait of the role of family ties among Basque immigrants in the American West in *Mountain City*. In this memoir, Martin explores daily life in a remote town of the same name in Nevada where he spent time as a child and continues to visit as an adult. With its thirty-odd inhabitants and abandoned mines, Mountain City provides testimony to the cycle of promises, exploitation, and abandonment that has so often been repeated in many communities of the American West.

Most of the activities take place around Tremewan’s, the only grocery store in town, which the narrator’s relatives, descendants of the original Basque settlers of the area as well as Cornish miners, has operated for over forty years. Oliver Tremewan (*Gramps*) is not a Basque but is married to Anastasia Zabala, a Basque woman who is the narrator’s grandmother. Gregory has a very close relationship with his grandmother, and she is one of the main characters in his story. He describes her as a woman “not quite five feet tall” and adds that in Basque “zabala” means “wide” and that “there’s no better way to describe Grandma than this” (13). *Grandma* tells Gregory family stories and is teaching him to speak Basque, something that the narrator’s own mother and sisters, and even his cousins, never learned to do. Gregory, however, has taken an interest in his ancestors’ language.



The difference in attitude towards the Basque language between these two generations might be interpreted according to Hansen's "law" which claims that "what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember." Marcus Hansen, a historian of American immigration, in a 1938 essay entitled "The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant," wrote that ethnicity is preserved among immigrants, weakens among their children, and returns with the grandchildren. Children of immigrants tend to reject the foreign ways of their parents and want to join the American mainstream, but the next generation wishes to retain and reaffirm the values of their ancestors. However, as Werner Sollors has argued, "it is possible to be second generation and act third generation" (qtd. in Buelens 219). In *Mountain City*, the second generation – represented by Grandma Zabala – does speak Basque, but the third generation never learned it, and now it is the great-grandchild who wants to learn it again.

Gregory's family, both Basques and non-Basques, have extremely tight bonds since they all live in a very small town and work together to run the family store. The narrator's Uncle Mel and Aunt Lou operate Tremewan's while Gregory helps stock shelves and bag groceries. Gramps Tremewan and Grandma Zabala used to run the store before them. Even though Gregory can only be at the store on a temporary basis, when he is in town there appears to be an expectation that he will dedicate his time to help out with the family business. When one day he attempts to deviate from this expectation, his grandmother accuses him of "not doing anything for anybody but [him]self" (118). Thus, acting out of self-interest instead of for the common interest of the family is something that cannot be tolerated. Gregory's Basque grandmother expects loyalty to the family and any deviation is seen as a form of betrayal.

In the traditional Basque family, each of its members is assigned a specific role according to certain unwritten rules. These roles create expectations that are often difficult to live up to. However, it is not only the older generation that sets expectations for the younger one, but also the other way around. For instance, when Grandma passes away, Gregory realizes that everyone in the family had expected her "to be the rock, the sturdy one," and that – as she herself had once put it – she was "being taken for *granite*" (181). Anastasia Zabala was such a strong woman and such a pillar of her family and community that no one ever showed any concern for her: "I hadn't even contemplated the possibility of Grandma dying before Gramps. [...] We always worried about

Gramps, never Grandma” (181).

The entire family, young and old, pulls together when necessary to live up to what is expected of them at any given time. “At Grandma’s wake ... my mom and dad went up to the lectern and led us all in the rosary. Most of us didn’t know how to work our rosaries, but that didn’t matter because it’s what Grandma would have wanted” (180). The Basque family’s Catholic traditions are obviously foreign to Gregory and his younger relatives, but their close family bonds compel them to come together to pay respect to her grandmother’s wishes.

What makes Martin’s memoir unique among the works analyzed is that there is not only a Basque but also a non-Basque side to the narrator’s family, which serves to compare and contrast their behaviors and attitudes. For instance, when the grandfather’s brother dies, Gregory observes his family’s behavior: “We each tell Gramps that we’re sorry, but no one moves to hug Gramps except for Mel, who is not a Tremewan and is not limited by the same stoic blood that constricts Lou, Mitch, and me” (156). Mel is the only Basque in this group and he apparently expresses his empathy with more warmth and openness than the non-Basque family members, with whom Gregory appears to be identifying in this instance.

Although *Mountain City* addresses the theme of family bonds among Basques in the American West, Martin does not explore the conflict between “descent” and “consent” relations. In fact, the narrator comes across as being self-assured in his identity and content with the interactions with his family members. He feels “at home” in Mountain City, even though he was not raised there: “*Home* means different things to different people. [...] I wasn’t raised in Mountain City, I don’t live there now, and I’ll never live there again. I visit every few months. To me, *home* is the place I can’t keep from disappearing” (191). He sees himself as a member of that small community which welcomes him life family: “Thirty-three people live in Mountain City,” he adds. “I come and go, but when I’m here that makes thirty-four” (191).

Daniel Montero, in the introduction to Joan Errea’s *My Mama Marie*, proposes that the tension and the battle of wills between mother and daughter “serves as a metaphor for the process of immigration and assimilation, of leaving behind the old and embracing the new, all the while

holding on dearly to the traditions, language, and ways of life in the Old Country” (5).

Language is a way in which the tension between consent and descent relations is partially highlighted in this book. When Marie migrates to the U.S., first arriving in Nevada, the Basque language is an integral part of her identity, and she kicks and yells at a man who speaks to her in Spanish (43). She also “despaired learning English” (56) and “never did learn to speak it very well” (84). Her children showed their irritation when their immigrant mother read aloud “in an accented voice” (84). Joan’s father, Arnaud, also an immigrant, teaches his daughter to read and write in Basque. There is no mention of whether the U.S.-born children of this immigrant couple actually do manage to speak and maintain the Basque language, but it may not have been the case.

Another source of tension between mother and daughter relates to the female role expectations with regards to dress and behavior. The immigrant mother wants her daughter “to be gentle and dainty and to be a lady” (76), but Joan would rather “stomp around like a big old boy” (76) and preferred to wear overalls and hand-me-down Levis from her brothers. The mother to a certain degree conforms to the Old World expectations of a woman’s role in that she marries a Basque man, has several children in quick succession, is a good housekeeper and excellent cook, and puts the needs of everyone else before her own. The daughter, however, rejects those expectations because she has assimilated to life as an American. She wants to dress like her brothers, is “loud, boisterous, and a troublemaker” (76), is interested in books, history, and poetry (82), and even dreams of working as a shepherd.

When comparing and contrasting the works analyzed, a development can be observed with regards to how they address the issue of family bonds and the tension between the hereditary or ancestral and the self-made or contractual that Werner Sollors affirms is at the heart of American identity. In *Basque Girl*, we do not find a tight-knit family but are rather presented with a girl who has a close emotional connection with the grandmother who raised her. There is also little conflict between *consent* and *descent* relations.

In *My Mama Marie*, the narrator is part of the first generation born in the U.S. so there is some tension and struggle between her and her immigrant mother. Marie identifies closely with

using the Basque language and fulfilling the expectations of a woman in terms of clothing and behavior and wants her daughter to also dress and behave in a certain way. Joan, however, rejects these expectations about dressing like a girl and keeping a clean household. She wants to dress and be treated like her brothers, is interested in books (unlike her mother), and wants to work as a shepherd (like her father) but asserting her will to become who she wants to be leads to great turmoil and conflict with her mother's differing point of view. In *My Mama Marie*, unfortunately, this conflict between the European-born mother and the American-born daughter is never resolved, which actually becomes one of the reasons for the book being written. The reader can sense the turmoil and regret that Joan feels about her complicated love-hate relationship with her mother and for not having been able to reconcile with her before her death.

In both Robert Laxalt's and Monique Urza's works, we encounter families with very close-knit bonds that nevertheless force their members to struggle with loyalty to the family traditions and expectations (*descent*) in opposition to each individual's wish for self-realization (*consent*). This is the nature of life for many second- and third-generation ethnic Americans, and it appears to be particularly true for Basque-Americans, as they are still navigating their identities as children of immigrants in the United States.

In *Mountain City*, the narrator is already integrated and secure in his identity as an American. The tensions and struggles of the second and third generations with *descent* and *consent* relations begin to lose their importance in the fourth generation and their Basque heritage is no longer the most significant factor shaping their personal sense of reality or individuality. Gregory can choose to identify with his Basque side of the family or the Cornish one; he can choose to live away from Mountain City but still feel at home there when he visits. He has fully consented to being an American and has freed himself from the conflict experienced by previous generations.

### **3.2.7. Cultural Identity in the Basque Diaspora**

In the United States, the formation of a Basque identity took place mainly in the West, a large geographical area where most immigrant Basques worked primarily in shepherding. Since this was an occupation that did not allow for regular contact with American society and many of

these men intended to eventually return to their home country after they had earned enough money, their assimilation into mainstream society happened slowly. The fact that they were isolated due to the requirements of the shepherding profession, along with their general lack of social integration and their tendency to mostly associate with other Basques due in part to their lack of English language abilities, led to a perception of Basques as different or mysterious. At the beginning of the twentieth century, popular non-Basque writers, such as Harry Sinclair Drago, created and perpetuated certain images and stereotypes of Basques, perhaps in an effort to understand this ethnic group that had recently migrated to the United States.

Edurne Arostegui's insightful paper on the construction of Basque-American identity examines how Basques in the United States began to build a cultural identity that they presented to American society. She suggests that authors such as Harry Sinclair Drago, whose Western novels had widespread reception in the first quarter of the twentieth century, started including Basque characters in their fiction and that this is how American society as a whole became acquainted with the Basques. "American authors used Basque characters in order to give their writing a sort of exotic novelty in a genre that was rather formulaic," Arostegui writes (3).

While it may be true that Basques first appeared as literary characters in Drago's novels, their depictions in this genre were stereotypical, romanticized and often lacking in accuracy due to the authors' lack of knowledge. It is not until the publication of *Sweet Promised Land* by Robert Laxalt in 1957 that Basques are accurately portrayed in North American literature and gain true visibility among a wider readership. Nevertheless, the stereotypes presented in Drago's novels were likely generally accepted given that the majority of the population had no direct contact with actual Basque individuals. Stereotypes are images of an "Other" that we create in our minds or we subconsciously adopt from society when we have no direct access to or knowledge of the original. Their construction requires establishing boundaries of gender, race, ethnicity, geography, or some other category that will allow us to establish the superiority of one side of that boundary. This moral judgment of one being better than the other is what gives rise to disapproval and prejudice.

In dime novels such as *Whispering Sage*, authored by H.S. Drago in 1922, Basques are in part presented as 'clannish' and are not very well liked because they are said to prosper by taking

over areas of grazing land and using water that ranchers want for themselves. They are often called ethnic slurs such as “black boscos” and are compared to or confused with Mexicans and called “greasers.” On the other hand, Drago’s novels also portray Basques as hard working, proud, thrifty and industrious (*Following the Grass* 18-19). Even though he gets many things wrong, Drago does generally portray the Basques as pioneers who helped establish the West through their hard work and good ethics.

Arostegui introduces the theories of recognition and collective identity developed by sociologists Axel Honneth and Alessandro Pizzorno to “help explain the choices made by Basque-Americans to both maintain Basque identity and integrate into American society” (4). The main concept of the above-mentioned theories is that “identity depends on recognition by another, someone who does not subscribe to that identity” (4). In short, characteristics of group identity are only successfully established and internalized once they also become accepted by others outside the group. In the case of the Basques, their initial stereotypical representation in literature opened the way for a more general recognition by American society. And Basques then turned these images into positive aspects of a new hyphenated Basque-American group identity, a diasporic identity.

Raman Selden proposes that the “experience of migrant or diasporic people is central to contemporary societies” (231). Studies of race and ethnicity, seeking to articulate this postmodern reality, have increasingly gained in significance. Race, however, is not synonymous with ethnicity and therefore a crucial distinction must be made between these concepts along with an effort to eliminate the assumption that there is a fixed or unified national identity behind these terms. As Selden points out, contemporary concerns and a readiness to explore the uncertainties of time, subjectivity and meaning have led to a new critical interest, especially in postcolonial studies, in the idea of destabilized borders and identities. This interest has given rise to terms such as “hybridity,” “syncretism” and “liminality,” which are also utilized in race and ethnicity studies (154).

Stuart Hall, for instance, uses “hybridity” as a metaphor to assist him in theorizing the “black experience” in Britain and the Caribbean as a “diaspora experience.” The concept aids him

in bringing to the forefront the “doubleness” or “double-voiced” structures which he claims are part of this experience (qtd. in Selden 229). In similar fashion, the concept of hybridity may be useful in exploring the characteristics of the Basque diasporic experience in the United States as its members bridge the duplicity of two cultures.

Diaspora is a term first used to refer to the dispersion of Jewish people in Babylonian times and later after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. However, Hall adds, the more recent and common notion of diaspora describes “the combination of migrancy and continued cultural affiliation that characterizes many racial, ethnic and national groups scattered throughout the world” (qtd. in Ashcroft 425). Hall, however, does not use the term diaspora in this traditional sense of a “scattered” people whose identity is defined in relation to an ancestral homeland to which they dream of returning. Instead, for him the diaspora experience is defined “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (qtd. in Ashcroft 438).

Not all peoples scattered around the world can be referred to as Diasporas. In using the term, there is a sense of a minority lacking social power and trying to establish their cultural identity against a dominant or majoritarian rule. As an analytical tool, “diaspora” may be defined according to Robin Cohen (*Global Diasporas* 6), who extends William Safran’s (1991) considerations, as having the following basic features: forced or unforced dispersal from an original homeland; retention of a collective memory, vision or myth about their ancestral home, which is idealized and to which the diasporic subject may wish to return; a distinct ethnic group consciousness and sense of solidarity with communities of the same ethnicity in other places, often coupled with a problematic relationship to the host society.

While not every one of the above characteristics may apply to the Basque-American communities in the United States, the term diaspora is to a large degree appropriate when discussing this group’s experiences and identity. The concept of diaspora disrupts the notion of unity and coherence that is inherent in concepts such as nation and national identity. In countries like the United States, where the majority is of white, European ancestry, Basques are generally

not distinguishable from the dominant majority by their skin color, clothing, or general behavior. Therefore, when third or fourth generation Basque-Americans define themselves as “Basques,” this identification with a ‘nation’ or geographically-based community they may never even have visited, is clearly a conscious choice. In this choice of affiliation, we encounter a fluidity of identity. Basque-Americans can choose to be Basque in one situation and American in the next. It is especially in the notion of diaspora that the creation, construction or reconstruction of identity operating through subjective agency is highlighted.

There is a fundamental ambivalence in the diasporic subject due to the fact that members of these groups experience a split in their sense of identity and cultural affiliation as they find themselves looking in two directions: on the one hand, to the historical cultural identity of the “homeland” and, on the other, to the identity of the society into which they have relocated. This reality highlights the characteristics of hybridity and duality that are at the core of postcolonial discourse. The concept of hybridity is thus applicable to the duality that constitutes the Basque-American experience, which exists in the liminal space between immigrant and mainstream culture.

As Stuart Hall points out, there are at least two ways of thinking about cultural identity. One position defines it in terms of a single, shared culture; a “one true self” so to speak, underlying all the other more superficial or artificially imposed “selves” that individuals with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. According to this definition, our cultural identities would reflect the shared historical experiences and cultural codes that provide us stable and unchanging frames of reference. The other position, however, acknowledges that in addition to the many shared similarities, there are also deep and substantial differences that no longer allow us to talk about “one experience” or “one identity.” Even though cultural identities have an origin and a history, they are “fluid” and are subjected to constant transformation (qtd. in Ashcroft 435).

Studies of Basque diaspora communities have long debated the issue of identity formation and questioned why ethnic identity persists with salience in certain individuals but not in others. In *Basque Diaspora*, Toticagüena points out that so-called “primordialists” focus on the natural and affective attachments of identity. Proponents of primordialism center their attention on the



emotional strength of ethnic bonds based on descent and ancestry because they strongly believe that these are “natural givens” and not subject to change. According to Edward Shils, who coined the theory of primordialism which was later developed by Geertz in the 1950s, race and ethnicity are “primary sources of loyalty and the essence of the manner in which people group themselves” (qtd. in Totoricagüena 105). Primordialism is a question of “feelings” that create attachments or bonds to an ethnic group.

However, scholars like Jack David Eller and Reed M. Coughlan express skepticism about the theory of primordialism.<sup>31</sup> These more recent alternative approaches focus less on the emotional or affective aspects and more on the structural and circumstantial or situational conditions that create ethnic group identity and behavior (Eller and Coughlan 183). Indeed, not every individual with Basque ancestry self-identifies as Basque. Identities, critics of primordialism argue, are fluid and subject to change; they undergo transformations and adaptations, which often leads to new identities being constructed or reconstructed.

Totoricagüena raises the debate of what it means to be Basque and brings forth the notion of a “constructed” Basque culture. She points out that in our current era, the globalization and creation of a “transformed network society, a culture constructed by an interconnected and diversified media system” has led to “an increase in powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge modernization and globalization in favor of a local, communal, separate identity and cultural distinctiveness” (*Identity, Culture and Politics* 147). She adds that, on the one hand, the global connectedness produces an “outward-expanding model of identity and subsequent homogenization” while at the same time we encounter an “ethnonationalism that converges on the historical, the traditional, a known ethnic identity and ensuing heterogeneity and cultural difference” (147). In her view, the various identities in one person are not necessarily in conflict with each other but rather are complementary of each other.

Diasporic Basques generally focus on the cultural or folkloric aspects of Basque identity such as language, festivals, music or gastronomy, while choosing to ignore the political

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<sup>31</sup> See “The Poverty of Primordialism: The mystification of ethnic attachment.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 16 (April 1993): 183-201.

nationalism oriented toward the construction of a sovereign state which still has significant relevance in the Basque Country. Hyphenated Basque identity prides itself in a unique mix of ambiguity, diversity, and complexity. In many cases, one identity – such as the Basque one – is displayed in private while a different one – American – is used in public.

By creating a sort of “new Basque culture,” diasporic individuals have found a way to bridge the tensions between their immigrant heritage and the reality of modern-day American life. This again relates to Werner Sollors’ concept of consent and descent relations seen in an earlier section. Basque-Americans have constructed an identity that serves to amalgamate the “descent” part of their Basque heritage which they have learned and internalized from their immigrant ancestors, and the “consent” part of their reality as U.S. born and raised individuals.

This constructed Basque identity can be associated with a concept that we will call “bricolage nationalism.” In his work *The Savage Mind* (1966), French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss coined the term *bricoleur* to refer to an individual who uses any means at hand to create something new. This includes any instruments he may find at his disposition, which may not have originally been conceived with an eye to the particular application for which the *bricoleur* then uses them. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, “the ‘bricoleur’ ... is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks” and “the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’” (17). This individual “interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed” and “remains within the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization” (19).

In cultural studies, the concept of *bricolage* is used to refer to the processes by which people acquire objects from across social divisions to create new cultural identities. *Bricolage*, by its nature, does not proceed in a straightforward manner but rather seems to stray or wander from one thing to another with concepts bouncing in different directions due to the abundance of interrelations and connections. This nonlinear, irrational, and fragmented nature of *bricolage* reflects its affinity with the do-it-yourself and bottom-up fashion in which Basque-Americans have crafted a culture from a diverse range of ideas that happened to be available.

Gregory Martin explores the theme of cultural identity in *Mountain City* as he reflects on the meaning of Basque last names and their connection to “heritage and rootedness and belonging” as well as what they say “about history, about the *homeplace*” (54). Gregory considers the case of the Goikoetxeas, whose last name means “the house above” because at some point in their family’s history, their ancestors in the Basque Country lived in such a place, in a house above some area, and that is how they were known and identified. Now living in the United States, the Goikoetxeas are “thousands of miles away from home, away from themselves” (54). They are now ranchers who live along a stream, so their last name no longer makes sense in their new American context. It has “lost its metaphoric bond, its figurative connection to landscape. Cultural identity, the homeplace, and the relationship between cultural identity and homeplace are lost” (55). Gregory then considers his own situation: “Three generations from that homeplace, I’ve lived in twenty-one places in twelve states in twenty-seven years” (55).

Another example of how Basque cultural expressions lose their meaning in the different space of the New World is Uncle Mel’s interaction with a Basque couple from Boise passing through Mountain City on their way to Las Vegas. As they leave his store, he shouts his farewell by saying “*Ondo ibili eta gutxi gastatu!*” (Have a good trip and don’t spend too much!), which is ironical given that they are traveling to Las Vegas, the stereotypical “sin city” of gambling and money spending. The narrator comments that “Mel’s Basco expression is one of so many pithy expressions in the West, in northern Nevada, which capture and contain an entire context, an entire immigrant world” but “like so many expressions of this kind, its context is gone, extinct, or so near extinct it’s irrevocable” (24). Regardless of this, “Mel’s still putting the expression to use. He can’t help thinking it, context or no context” (24).

*Mountain City* presents a picture of Basques who do not make a living herding sheep as the large majority of male immigrants of this ethnic group once did. The introduction of other occupations such as mining or shopkeeping can be understood as an attempt to disrupt the association and consequent stereotyping of Basques as shepherds. Gregory’s uncle, Mel Basañez, is a second-generation Basque-American who operates a family-owned grocery store. His father, who was illiterate and spoke no English, had come from the Basque Country as a teenager to herd sheep but, once he got married, had eventually gone to work for the railroad (24).

Mel's mother worked in a Basque hotel as a chambermaid and waitress, one of the traditional occupations of immigrant Basque women. Since the Western American open-range industry declined in the 1970s, "new Basques," such as those who inhabit Mountain City, had no choice but to find occupations in other fields.

The 'Bascos' of Martin's memoir are characters who exist in a symbiotic relationship with the West; they are a part of it and it is a part of them. They can remain stoic about extreme weather conditions such as "eight inches of snow or sixty-mile-per-hour winds" (113). As the narrator points out, his grandmother had "been taught to believe that, if you live in this part of the country, the weather is hard, but it's not as hard as you are" (114). These individuals have also learned to live with the state of flux and impermanence that has become a constant in their town (45). Following the boom and bust cycles of the mining industry, Mountain City has seen its population grow and decrease hundredfold many times over. Despite the town's small size, the inhabitants of Mountain City are used to living in harmony in an ethnically-diverse community where Basques share the space with Native Americans, the Tremewans from Cornwall, Chinese, Iranians, and other nationalities.

Monique Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory* is another work in which we encounter an exploration of the "Basqueness" that marks younger Basque-American generations in the West. Basque-American identity has to be negotiated, invented. The generational conflicts of 'old' and 'new' Basques and the clash between modern American ways and ancient Basque values bring forth the realization of the inevitable vanishing of old ways and the need to become part of a new identity through a marriage between American and Basque elements.

The older couple in *The Deep Blue Memory* conforms to the stereotypical image of first-generation Basque immigrants: They are both Basque, Catholic, and speak *Euskara*; the husband was a shepherd while the wife ran a boardinghouse. In the second generation, however, a new identity is established: The narrator's father is a writer and director of the press at the University of Nevada-Reno, lives with his family in "a new subdivision on the edge of town," and sings *Clementine*, *Home on the Range*, and *My Old Kentucky* to his children at night (16). In addition, the third brother is described as "an enigma of likeness and unlikeness to our grandfather" (17).

And, as the narrator puts it, the two older brothers “bore the scent of the old country” while the two youngest “were infused with the light of the new world” (18).

The narrator is also forging a new identity that is separate from the traditional and close-knit circle of the family in Nevada. She goes to law school, “heading out across the state with which the family name was synonymous by now” and goes eastward “two thousand miles away” (101) from where the rest of the family remains. However, despite the physical separation and her attempt at independence, the narrator is constantly reminded of the strong connection to her family as expressed through words like “duty,” “fiduciary” or “entrustment” (102). When the grandchildren return to the former home of the grandparents, which a new couple has bought, the familiar smell that was associated with the grandmother is gone. The living room has been changed; there is no round dining table and no chair by the window, no smell of coffee or cream or cigarettes any more (150). This image marks the end of the time and place that connected the Old World born generation and their traditions to the American-born children and grandchildren.

Religion, in particular the Catholic one, is another integral aspect of Basque culture and identity. In order to conceptualize religious appeal, we may want to first define the term and its various aspects. In the preface to her book, *America: Religions and Religion*, Catherine Albanese summarizes three ways of defining religion: substantive, functional, and formal. Substantive definitions, which are favored by theologians and philosophers, focus on the essence of religion and usually talk about it as the vehicle by which humans relate to some higher reality. In this sense, religion is a system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people struggles to understand and deal with the ultimate problems of human life. Functional definitions, favored by social scientists, emphasize how religion affects the lives of individuals and societies and the functions it performs for them. Sociologists are not interested in explaining the theological points of religion. Instead, their interest lies in the symbols, rituals, moral codes, and practices of religion. Functionalist social scientists tend to note the positive aspects of religion, such as how it helps to maintain stability and keep the society together. Marxists, on the other hand, note the negative aspects of religion, viewing it as an ideological tool that the ruling class utilizes to control and exploit the working class. Finally, formal definitions, which are of use to historians of religion,

discuss the structure of religion and consider that religion is present when a certain set of forms or structures is present, regardless of individual points of view or results.

Traditionally, Basques have adhered mostly to the Roman Catholic religion and, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Basques generally remained devout and churchgoing. However, in keeping up with the secularization of Western Europe, church attendance in the Basque Country has declined and opinion polls tend to show that only about half of Basques currently profess some belief in God. The differences in religious belief are frequently split across generations, with younger people being more agnostic and older ones more religious.

In the United States, Basque religious men, such as Jesuits and Franciscans, founded and managed some of the missions that were established in California under the rule of the Spanish Crown. Douglass and Bilbao also point out that the first Roman Catholic churches in several areas of Oregon, California, Nevada and Idaho were erected thanks to Basques (*Amerikanuak* 355-56). Oiarzabal reminds us that Basque chaplains and missionaries have been offering religious services in Euskara to Basque communities in the American West for over one hundred years (*Gardeners* 280). He argues that “the role that Basque native missionaries and chaplains ... have played ... is paramount and has sometimes been underestimated” (288). He adds that these men have not only managed to maintain the Catholic faith among Basque immigrants and their descendants even though Roman Catholicism is often a minority faith in many areas of the country but they have also played a role in maintaining and reactivating the Basque language as a communication tool. Oiarzabal concludes that “the Catholic Church and its clergymen are indeed a fundamental part of the social fabric of Basque America” (288).

It is interesting to note in this dissertation about Basque women that, prior to the Christianization of the Basque regions,<sup>32</sup> Pre-Christian belief seems to have centered on a goddess called Mari. Several places in the Basque Country contain this name, which would suggest worship related to this goddess at these places. There is speculation about the origin of the name Mari and its coincidence with the Christian name “María” but, nevertheless, “Andra Mari” is one of the

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<sup>32</sup> Depending on the definition of “Christianization,” some date the arrival of Christianity arrived in the Basque Country in the 4th or 5th century while other views claim that it did not take place until the 12th and 13th centuries.

oldest worshiped Christian icons and a common name for churches in the Basque territories.<sup>33</sup>

The importance of religion in this dissertation lies not only in its association with Basque identity and culture, but also in how religion is one of the few public domains in which women have traditionally been allowed involvement. Females are expected to adopt a leading role in the area of faith and religion, especially in connection with church activities and with the transmission of the faith to the younger generations. Religion has often been considered a valued activity for women because, even though it allows them to leave the home and interact with others, involvement in church activities is seen as a “proper” and socially approved activity. In addition, faith and religion are tied to the practice of virtuous activities, an area to which traditional expectations of women are closely attached.

In the case of Basque women, this greater involvement in religious matters may historically stem from the importance of the institution of the *serora* (also known as *sorora*, *benedicta* and *beata*, among other terms), which dates back hundreds of centuries and nowadays still exists in some churches of *Euskal Herria*. In *Costumbres y ritos funerarios del País Vasco: del siglo XVI a nuestros días* (2007), Juan Garmendia Larrañaga describes the *seroras* as women fully dedicated to the service of the Church (5). The *serora* is a sort of nun in charge of the sacristy, who does everything that a woman is allowed to do. She lives near the church and prepares for its functions.

Ethnologist Roslyn Frank describes the role that these women play in the realm of religion as one “that clearly demonstrates the high status traditionally afforded to the female in Basque culture” (“Diachronic Analysis” 1) even while their continuing presence in the twenty-first century may represent an anachronism and anomaly when taking into account the official stand of the Catholic hierarchy concerning the approved role of women in the Church.

Frank states that the wide range of duties and privileges of the *serora* fall into two broad categories: a) care-taking of the church, and b) acting as priestess or mistress of ceremonies for the women of the parish. Among the first category are duties such as cleaning the sanctuary; laying out altar ornaments and liturgical instruments needed before mass; collecting the various offerings;

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<sup>33</sup> Source: “Basques.” Wikipedia. Web. 15 March 2015.

handling the financial accounts of the church or hermitage; lighting and extinguishing candles as needed during religious rituals; ringing the church bell when needed, etc. (2).

In the second function, the *serora* takes on the role of priestess or mistress of ceremonies for the *etxeoandreak* (“mistresses of the house”) of the parish. The *etxeoandreak* presided as domestic priestesses of their *etxe* or house, caring for the souls of both the living and the dead, lighting the sacred fires and watching over the health of the family and flocks. Included in this set of functions was “the duty of praying, mourning and offering sacrifices for the souls of the dead ancestors of the individual family unit” (4).

Most of the activities listed above as responsibilities of the *serora* have been traditionally assigned to males in the rest of Catholic Europe, which again may point to a special status of Basque women in this regard. Interestingly enough, neither the *etxejoaunak* (“masters of the house”) nor their male relatives were in any way involved in the funeral rituals associated with the *jarleku*, which was seen as the exclusive domain of the *etxeoandre*, the *serora* and other female members of the parish, as Frank points out.

The Basques were traditionally rural dwellers. The first unit of organization of rural Basque society was the *baserri* (farmstead) or the *etxe* (family house), while the secondary unit was the *auzoa*, which would typically be made up of a small number of farmsteads. As Frank explains, the *auzoa* not only served as the politico-judicial center for the various households but each also had its own hermitage or religious site, the care of which was exclusively assigned to the woman. With time, the *auzoak* evolved into small villages and the local religious sites became incorporated into Christianity (5).

The fact that these Basque women had such a central role in the caretaking of their churches presented a threat to the patriarchal authorities of the Catholic Church who attempted to abolish the institution both in rural areas and in the larger urban parishes. However, Frank adds, in those areas where Basque was the only language understood by the parishioners, it was imperative that the cleric be a Basque speaker, and thus the Basque language acted to delay the expansion of the accepted structures of the Catholic Church and was a central factor that contributed to the survival



of the institution of the *serora* (5).

Given the lower status of women in the Catholic Church's and their exclusion from priesthood, certain male members of the ruling hierarchy would have found it shocking or even sacrilegious to find women acting as *sacristans* or *seroras* in Basque churches. In coastal areas, where fishing was the main industry, the prolonged absences of males would have required women take an active role in local affairs while the men were away. This situation also promoted the greater participation of females in the management of household and economic affairs. Basque worshippers, used to women having always served in the church, would have considered it an established and obligatory component of the Basque liturgy to have the *serora* and her helpers serve in their traditional functions.

Frank adds that although the institution of the *serora* was "repeatedly attacked in a multitude of decrees, she has continued to survive into the twentieth century" (12). Nevertheless, "the cumulative effect of centuries of embattled opposition seems to have impacted negatively on the high status previously enjoyed by Basque women" and has gradually undermined the importance of the *serora* and the value of the ceremonies attached to her office (12).

As the Basque Country became increasingly urbanized and members of rural populations came into closer contact with ideas circulating in Europe, they became aware of what a rarity it was to have women serve in a capacity that was reserved for men elsewhere. "Pressure to conform to the standards accepted by the Catholic Church in the rest of Europe frequently led to the replacement of the *serora* by a male sacristan. When this occurred, her role was often devalued to that of little more than a cleaning lady" (12). However, the fact that an institution such as the *serora* and her helpers existed in the Basque Country "provides valuable evidence concerning the possible roles played by women in the indigenous religious and social practices [...] prior to the imposition of gender restrictions brought about by the patriarchal attitudes of the Catholic Church" (Frank 13).

Del Valle affirms that, in the sphere of religion, women act both as recipients and transmitters. In their role as transmitters, they are in charge of teaching prayers to their children

from a very young age, they later direct children's beliefs, and once the children have grown up, women take care of supervising the observance of their grandchildren's religious obligations (131).

Basque men, on the other hand, are not expected to actively participate in religious activities. In Isasi's *Basque Girl*, Erena observes that after church, the "men gathered to talk to each other about their affairs, important happenings to the neighborhood, matters too intricate to have been grasped by feminine mind, I am sure" (65). Erena's comment comes across as tongue-in-cheek since both she and her grandmother defy stereotyped perceptions of females with their natural intelligence and love of learning. *Grandmere* has the mindset of a scientist or archeologist and is "known to be a student of old Basque history and language" (66). For instance, she heads out to explore a recently-discovered ancient cave, and decides to copy the animal drawings and hieroglyphics because they "are very old and we must study them deeply... for they may have an interest beyond that of our own Basque land" (80). However, with regards to religion, *Grandmere* does conform to traditional expectations and she is shown praying at various times throughout the novel.

The grandmother in Urza's *The Deep Blue Memory* takes her grandchildren to Saint Theresa's Catholic Church on Sundays, just like the real Therése Laxalt used to do. She takes on the role of teaching her American-born grandchildren about the Catholic rituals and hands each a rosary. The children follow the older woman's lead, imitating her as they bow their heads, finger the rosary beads, and silently move their lips in prayer, until they break out into laughter at which time the grandmother would throw them "a black scowl" to discipline them (7). The grandfather typically arrives late and stands at the back, even when the church is half empty, and then leaves early, right after Communion, going to stand outside.

Laxalt's *Child of the Holy Ghost* describes how Maitia, the narrator's mother, did not become aware of her designation as "illegitimate" until well after she had started school in the village, and even then she did not comprehend what it meant. For a while, she imagined it to be a special sort of compliment having something to do with the fact that "she loved God, went to vespers, and said her prayers every morning and night" (9). Although piety and religiousness are expected of women, no degree of religiousness is sufficient to make the Basques in these rural and

ancestral villages forget or even forgive the sexual indiscretion of an unwed female. Since most rural Basque families would arrange the marriages of daughters to sons from other *baserriak*, a girl's purity and chastity become commodities that must be guarded in order to be traded for the family's benefit. Viktor, the man she is supposed to marry, says this of his relationship: "Maitia will be my wife. I don't mind helping here because I am protecting my investment" (132).

In *Mountain City*, Gregory's grandmother describes a funeral that was held at the Zabala hotel. Her father had his children gather all the Basques they could find on the streets and bring them back to the hotel to act as mourners for a deceased Basque shepherd. "Aita would take a picture of everyone gathered around the open casket looking serious, the men with their hands behind their backs, the women fingering rosaries. . . . Aita would send the photograph and a note to the family back in the old country" (14). In this scene, the women do the praying while men simply stand by. For the American-born children, however, these activities feel "very mysterious;" they "always felt the old world in the recyvydor, with the candles and the altar and Mary and the baby Jesus, and sometimes we'd make ourselves cry the way Ama would cry in there alone" (16).

Unlike what is expected of women, there is no requirement for men to be pious. In *Child of the Holy Ghost*, Pete explains that "these are little sacrileges, and they are the exclusive property of men. The village priests must look for satisfaction of their mission in Basque women, who, I have come to understand, put on a good show of being pious. The men have never pretended to piety. They go to Mass mainly as an excuse to sing, and afterwards to indulge in food and drink" (9). After church, "men bid goodbye to their wives and hurry to the bars and restaurants that abound near the village church" where "they drink and eat and sing until the middle of the afternoon" (10).

The topic of religion is presented in a somewhat negative light in *My Mama Marie*, especially in connection with Marie's childhood in the Basque Country. Since she is practically fatherless, she gets entrusted to her uncle, Don Cruz: "He was a revered and respected man of the cloth in the deeply religious town, but was in reality a hypocrite and an abusive, self-centered, greedy man" (20). The priest is also presented as an intolerant and gluttonous man who "weighed over three hundred pounds" (23) and practically "ate himself to death" (33). Nobody in Banca

“dared to contradict him or question his teachings,” and “the children of the parish were petrified of him” (20). The narrator adds a very critical comment about the impunity with which the Catholic priests commits its abusive acts: “Uncle Cruz would have looked perfectly at home with his big hands clutched around jail bars, but even today older Basques look on the clergy with much the same respect and reverence, often closing their eyes to any infallibility” (31).

Another representation of hypocritical religiousness is the old lady for whom Marie works as a maid. This witchy woman mistreats the young girl but then, every evening, would “say the rosary in a pious way to atone for any sins committed during the day” (26), which appear to be many according to the narrator. Marie ends up using this same rosary to take revenge against the woman by beating up her evil cat with it. She does experience a moment of horror thinking she might have “offended God by using the beads in such a way” and “fully expected to be struck dead at any moment” (28). Religion plays no role at all in the story once Marie moves to the United States. There is no talk about her transmitting the Catholic religion to her children, which is understandable, given her negative childhood experiences with Don Cruz.

### **3.3. Basque Women through the Eyes of non-Basque Authors**

We have seen how authors of Basque heritage characterize women in their works both in more prominent as well as secondary roles. In order to further expand the analysis of this portrayal, it would be of interest to analyze the treatment of Basque and non-Basque female characters in novels by non-Basque writers. For this purpose, I have chosen two recent novels by Anglo-American authors: Hank Nuwer’s *Sons of the Dawn: A Basque Odyssey* (2013) and David W. Romtvedt, *Zelestina Urza in Outer Space* (estimated publication in 2015).

Hank Nuwer is a veteran journalist and professor at Franklin College in Indiana. He is known as an expert on bullying and hazing, two topics that are addressed in his novel *Sons of the Dawn: A Basque Odyssey*. Nuwer also has an interest in the study of Basque life and culture which began in the 1970s when he spent time trailing sheep with Basque herders and also conducted interviews on Basque life in various states of the American West for a series of magazine articles.

*Sons of the Dawn* is a work of fiction but is partly based on actual historical events that took place in Idaho and Spain from 1897 through 1937 and also draws from the experiences of the author with Basque shepherders. In an interview with Indianapolis newspaper NUVO, the author says that *Sons of the Dawn* is “about one of the classic battles of the American West, the cattlemen vs. the sheep herders, many of them Basques from Spain and France” and that his “idea in this novel and future novels is to highlight underrepresented minorities in the West as protagonists” (n. pag.).

The story begins in 1897 in the emblematic Basque town of Guernica, where “young giant Anton Ibarra” is ready to compete in the stonelifting event of a celebration called the Basque Games. Anton, who is described as big, tall and strong, is feeling “pressure on his huge shoulders to win” because he is representing “his family honor as an Ibarra” (ch. 1). He and his brother Nikolas (Nicky) are orphans who live in a monastery under the care of a priest by the name of Paulo. Their parents were killed in an avalanche during which the mother saved the two boys by hiding them under her coat when the family was suddenly buried under the snow.

At that time, the priest’s stepbrother Raoul had wanted to adopt the boys and take them to live with him, his wife Dominique and his daughter Martina in Idaho, which he calls “a land of limitless opportunity”(ch. 2). However, the priest’s abbey had decided that the boys remain in the Basque Country, where they were able to learn languages and receive some level of formal education. “Thanks to the patient insistence of the padre, the brothers learned many languages and perfected their own guttural Basque. This love of learning distinguished the brothers from oafs ... who dismissed studying as foolishness fit merely for monks, nuns and the daughters of wealthy merchants” (ch. 5).

The first female character is introduced early on. She is Clarisse Millex, Anton’s teenage crush. Clarisse is described as the “tallest and boldest of the village lasses” (ch. 1) and has “lustrous chestnut eyes” (ch. 3). She also creates and chants comic verses (doggerel) about Anton while she shouts encouragement during the competition with “determination” on her “saucy face” (ch. 3). Clarisse makes Anton blush by waving at him and is also said to inspire Anton “to do silly things,” like carving her initials into the bark of trees. In addition, she is one of the girls who have been

selected as dancers to open up the ceremonies. Clarisse's mother has accompanied her daughter to the stonelifting event "as she was obligated to do for her daughter's reputation. The sour grimace on the older woman's face told the world how her frisky daughter had misjudged how a 'raised right' Basque girl needed to act" (ch. 1). Later, Clarisse whistles through her teeth and shouts "Good job, handsome" while "her mother tried in vain to subdue her for fear of scandal" (ch. 3).

Our first impression of Clarisse is that she not only a physically attractive teenage girl but also fiercely independent and artistically creative. She appears to be unbound by the social expectations of modesty and appropriateness that "nice" and "raised right" young women were supposed to adhere to in the late 1900s. To her mother's disgust, Clarisse does not hesitate to be herself and behave in spontaneously. She seizes her chance to create and chant comic verses in public, as well as to whistle, wave and cheer on her sweetheart, apparently without sharing her mother's concerns about propriety and what others may think of her.

Another competitor, Bernard Navarre, "flexed shoulders that were as wide as the yoke of an ox." He had "a hateful look ... caused in part by decayed front teeth." He also "possessed the confident air of a firstborn son destined to inherit his family's farm" (ch. 3). Bernard is interested in Clarisse but she does not reciprocate his feelings. The girl's mother, however, does seem to prefer this particular suitor because his family is wealthy, while Anton is "a poor boy with no prospects" (ch. 3).

Bernard's brother, Henry, is also a stonelifter with "upper arms as wide as fence posts" and an ego to match his physical size. He is further described as "a roaring hellion, a man mountain of three hundred pounds," more fleshy than his brother and with a face pitted with acne that bears a permanent grimace. He is envious and bitter and resents the fact that his elder brother is meant to inherit the family's property (ch. 3).

In addition to the bold and cheeky Clarisse, another female character who we briefly meet is the Senora Laka, the rectory's housekeeper. She is not clearly identified as Basque but we must assume that she is. Nevertheless, she is truly a secondary character and only briefly described in two chapters. Senora Laka is said to be a "small wren of a woman" who has "ample hips" and

“hopped like a bird from task to task” (ch. 5). As the housekeeper, she lives in a cottage a short walk away from the rectory. Anton later describes her as a “sweet and simple” woman and “a woman of few words, all of them clichés” (ch. 24).

Spanish soldiers come through town to taking young men prisoners to work in the Crown’s service protecting the Cuban colonies from the Americans. The priest tells his adopted sons that they would be safe from the Spanish government if they get to Idaho before a war starts (435). Anton dismissively responds that “everyone knows that [Idaho] is where Basques go to earn a fortune and come back to Spain with their hearts broken and [their] pockets empty” (ch. 5). The priest partly agrees but says that his stepbrother had left for America many years ago and has succeeded there. “He sailed with twenty dollars, steamship tickets and boundless energy when he took off with his wife and baby. He worked hard and made a new life, a decent life in Idaho, in spite of many hardships” (ch. 5). Raoul now needs herders to watch over “his great flocks of sheep on grazing lands” (ch. 5). Anton complains that “when the flocks are on graze land the herders work seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day” (ch. 5).

Nevertheless, it is decided that the Ibarra brothers will leave for Idaho. Anton goes to see Clarisse to inform her of his departure but her father stands next to them, watching. “Clarisse reached for my hand, but her father slapped it away. He told her that she must forget this poor church mouse that had not so much as a goat to call his own” (ch. 9).

Upon the brothers’ arrival in Hailey, Idaho, they are greeted by Raoul’s camp tender Tubal Buscal, an old Basque man who knows all about the sheep business. He is said to be from the town of Muxika and to be neither able to speak straight Basque nor straight English. Tubal takes the boys to a mercantile store in Hailey as well as to a Basque boardinghouse. Xavier Xaga’s Basque Hotel and Boardinghouse is a busy place. “Young girls in traditional Basque dress ran this way and that, waiting on tables” (ch. 15). Xaga is a widower who has many daughters. One of them is Mara, whom Tubal describes as “the mean daughter” and says that she is worse than a rattlesnake. She is said to be “an attractive young woman except for lips pinched tight” (ch. 15).

Raoul's wife Dominique has passed away but his daughter Martina "is strong and smart and beautiful like her late mother" (ch. 7). Dominique was a "very beautiful" woman, "dark-haired" and "with an assured expression and Mediterranean beauty" (ch. 19). When asked how his wife died, Raoul says: "Hard work. [...] My wife was a woman of courage, and she served as my camptender while I herded. She also worked for Xaga as a cook in the hotel in exchange for a room for the baby and her while I slept on the graze land with the flock. She labored with Martina strapped to her back when she cooked or tended camp. One November she brought supplies to Tubal and me and came down with influenza because she let herself get run down juggling her duties. She returned to Xaga's to work but died that night..." (ch. 23). In Anton's teenage mind, Dominique "sounds like the kind of woman every Basque man dreams about" (ch. 23).

Tubal explains that Martina is Raoul's greatest love and that he "guards her like a miser guards his gold coins" (ch. 15). When the two brothers first see her, Martina is described as follows: "A small, delicate girl with sharp, carved cheekbones." She wore "an embroidered blouse with ruffled sleeves and a gold brooch at the throat. She hoisted the bottom of her long skirt to navigate the stairs" (ch. 19). Nicky thinks that Martina is "the most beautiful girl in the world" (ch. 19). But Martina is not just pretty and well-mannered, she also appears to have a feminist streak and opinions of her own. When the Basque Wool Growers Association is established and the first meeting is held at Xaga's Basque Hotel, Martina is very upset when her father tells her that the meeting is only for men. "She reminded him that Idaho allowed women to vote two years ago" (ch. 40). She is also upset and "huffed and gathered her skirts and ran back to the house" when she is told that she cannot come along on an expedition with Nicky and Tubal because "it may be dangerous" (ch. 41).

As a woman at the end of the 1900s, Martina is limited in the activities that she is allowed to participate in, so she is mostly pictured baking and tending to the men, going to church, or wearing pretty dresses and looking beautiful for the men's enjoyment. Martina brings the brothers freshly-baked apple pies and even a birthday cake to their sheep wagon. Nicky is again and again smitten by the girl's beauty. "She wore a simple long yellow dress with a sash around her narrow waist that complimented her figure. A jaunty bonnet completed her outfit. She and her father soon would take their horse-drawn carriage to attend Mass" (ch. 26).



One day, Anton receives a letter from Clarisse and his brother teases him: “‘Oh Clarisse,’ [...] ‘I am now in Idaho and am already a millionaire. Come kiss me passionately, and wash my dirty, smelly, stinky socks, and bear me fourteen sons who will work hard while I sit on my throne and paint pictures instead of working’” (ch. 18). Nicky says this jokingly, but there is truth in this representation of the relationship between a sheepherder and his wife. Judging by other accounts of life in the sheep camps, the Basque women who worked there led extremely hard lives giving birth to child after child in difficult conditions, washing, cooking and tending to the men in addition to doing physical work in the camps and often working much longer hours than the men.

Tubal’s opinion of Basque women is that “Basque girls always say the same thing. [...] I dream of you. I want you madly. Now hurry and pay for my ticket to America” (ch. 24). Tubal may be saying this because he is grieving about not being able to be reunited in America with the Basque woman he loves. He has saved no money, and therefore cannot afford to bring her to join him. Later, Anton receives another letter from Clarisse in which she says that she has married Bernard Navarre. As if in her own defense, she explains that the villages in the Basque country “are full of no-longer young women who promised their hearts to handsome young Basques who went to America. [...] Some of these women waited three, five, ten years. What do they have now to show but worry lines and no hopes? They are virgin widows who never married” (ch. 23). However, she adds that she never shared the marriage bed with Bernard because he was taken by Spanish soldiers during their wedding celebration (ch. 24).

Now that Clarisse is married, Anton wonders if he should “settle for a pretty thing like one of the Xaga sisters and make the best of having a wife and children” (ch. 40). This thought of “settling” leads us to believe that, even though he is only a teenager, Anton has certain ideas about what values and characteristics he wishes in a marriage partner and physical beauty alone is not sufficient. His brother Nicky is ordering lunch at the Basque Hotel and asks Louise, the “youngest and prettiest of the Xaga daughters,” to serve them “plenty of whatever is available.” Louise throws Anton a wink and says “I’m available” (ch. 45). Anton blushes but cannot help and smile. “With Clarisse unavailable, perhaps he needed to move on and, to be sure, Louise was pert and pretty and knew how to make a man laugh. These American women were so much bolder than the girls in Spain with their chaperones ever hovering” (ch. 44). “I love seeing you big fellows blush,”

Louise adds. “I’m not available, but I can be—with a ring on my finger, Anton” (ch. 44). Anton’s comment about American Basque women being “so much bolder” than Spanish Basque girls is interesting, given the way Clarisse was portrayed at the beginning of the novel. She did indeed have her mother as a chaperone, but she is also described as being “bold” and “saucy,” and her loud cheering and chanting during the competition seems to suggest that she does not much care for conforming to conventionally accepted standards of behavior at the time.

Nicky starts courting Martina and they take strolls after he is done with work, although the couple has to stay within sight of her father. Martina tells Nick that she wished she could travel with him in his wagon. “Do you think you could stand the quiet and loneliness?” he asks. “My mother did, and so I know I could too. [...] If two people are in love and together, there is loneliness no longer,” she responds. “I think you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen,” Nicky tells her. She teases him, giggling: “I think you are the handsomest young man in this state. [...] Although in Idaho most men look and smell like Tubal, so don’t let your head swell” (ch. 50).

The book has the word *Odyssey* in the title and Anton plays the key role of Odysseus/Ulysses, a just and self-restrained man who is nevertheless scorned by others. He is also a wanderer who encounters many travails and is constantly longing for his Penelope (Clarisse). Just like Odysseus incurs the wrath of Poseidon, so does Anton endure the attacks of the cunning and ruthless Faro Sinclair. Isaac Pollert, in his online review of *Sons of the Dawn* extends the analogy further: “From The Caves in St. Mammes (Hades), to the wandering winds of New York City, and to the fight with the Hydra (Western rattlesnake) that left a young lamb motherless, the Ibarra boys' journey is integral to their character development. There was even a short conversation between Anton and Tubal about the importance of a herder reading the land like a captain reads the sea” (8).

Clarisse undergoes her own kind of *Odyssey* in order to be reunited with Anton. Their unexpected encounter happens at the Xaga boardinghouse where, in the meantime, she is working as a server. She explains that her husband Bernard was killed in the war and that her sisters-in-law resented her so, in order to get rid of her, the father-in-law bought her a first-class ticket for the steamship. She also tells how a man had tried to rob her at the train station in New York, but she

grabbed his arm and held him until the police arrived (ch. 58). This is a strong and courageous Basque woman who is clearly capable of fending for herself. She is also resourceful in that she manages to make her way across the country all the way to Idaho and secures herself a job at the Xaga hotel.

Tubal says to Clarisse: “You are twice as beautiful as Anton says” (ch. 58). And adds: “Clarisse, maybe one day you will make a Basque man a fine wife.” She shows her sense of humor when she responds in a deadpan voice: “Are you asking me to marry you, Tubal? [...] It’s awfully sudden, but I’ll consider it” (ch. 58).

The book ends in Guernica in 1937. Anton and Clarisse ultimately married and had a son, Dominic, who is said to have finished a doctorate in history and became a professor at the University of Idaho. But we also find out that Anton was killed during the bombing of Guernica while trying to save a little girl. Martina and Nicky also ended up marrying and had eight children who all graduated from college.

*Sons of the Dawn* brings out the inner-workings of the lives of these men and women such as the loneliness herding sheep, the experience of being a Basque from Spain during the war with Cuba, and the harassment and racism experienced by immigrants at the hands of those who considered themselves to be the “real” Americans. The young Basque men in this novel (such as the Ibarra and the Navarre brothers) are described as muscular and physically strong. However, Anton is also somewhat unique in that he has an artistic streak which he is determined enough to end up pursuing.

The women in *Sons of the Dawn* are seen through the eyes of teenagers Anton and Nikki as well as the grieving adults Raoul and Tubal. They are first and foremost described as pretty or beautiful females. And they all seem ultimately interested in marriage, which is understandable given that the novel is set at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century when women were expected to become wives and mothers. Clarisse Millex is the one female character whose portrayal seems most well rounded. In her teenage years in the Basque Country, she is not just said to be tall and beautiful, but is also described as determined, bold, frisky and

saucy, and clearly unafraid to express her enthusiasm about Anton in public. These may be unusual characteristics for a young woman to have at the end of the 1900s, especially one who was “raised right.” However, the fact that she is not typical adds strength and credibility to her literary character. Like her sweetheart Anton, Clarisse is also artistically inclined with her dancing and poetic skills. As she matures in womanhood, she is not only able to overcome the adversity of becoming a widow soon after her wedding and dealing with the rejection of her in-laws, but is also brave enough to leave her home and travel cross country to reunite with Anton.

Raoul’s late wife, Dominique, is portrayed as dark haired, very beautiful, courageous, loyal and hard-working, so much so that she labors endlessly in the sheep camp and at the Xaga boardinghouse even while she is sick with influenza, carrying her baby girl on her back, until she is too sick to continue and ultimately dies. For teenage Anton, these are the virtues and determination he admires and seeks for lifelong marriage and partnership, thus his comment about Dominique being the kind of wife every Basque man would want.

The other Basque female characters are not described with as much detail but we are left with a general impression that the Basque women in *Sons of the Dawn* are fiercely independent but also loyal, reliable, and hardworking. In addition to these Basque female characters, *Sons of the Dawn* also features non-Basque women, such as Mrs. Zane, Mrs. Garcia and Emma. It may be of interest to compare the portrayal of these different female characters to find out if there are any particular features that separate or connect the two groups of women.

Mrs. Zane is a widow who is originally from Zanesville, Ohio. People know her as “Widow Zane,” a name she dislikes. She apparently comes from a well-to-do or educated background, as her “cultivated Midwestern accent” and her good manners (like covering her mouth with her hand when she coughs) suggest (ch. 54). Her husband had apparently always wanted to homestead, so they moved to Idaho after the government gave them one hundred and sixty acres as long as they would work the land. To Mrs. Zane, the move to Idaho appears to have required some sacrifice, such as losing some of the prosperity that she had enjoyed back home in Ohio. She serves Nicky tea with “teacups on a silver tray,” which she says are “a relic of more prosperous days back in Ohio” (ch. 54). One also glimpses that she was once attractive, as Nicky’s observation that “her

eyes must once have delighted a suitor” leads us to believe (ch. 54).

She tells Nicky that, in Idaho, she and her family “were poor but happy” but that the rancher Faro Sinclair was responsible for the deaths of her husband and daughter. Apparently, Sinclair drove off their only horse and, when James and Bella got sick with influenza, Mrs. Zane was unable to go get a doctor. After her husband and daughter died, Mrs. Zane abandoned the ranch and moved into a cabin closer to town. Her dreams of a happy life homesteading in the West were destroyed by the rancher’s harassment of her family. Nevertheless, she is not intimidated by Sinclair and confronts him when, after his trial, he accuses her of ruining his life: “‘No, I didn’t,’ Mrs. Zane replied. ‘You ruined yourself, you awful man’” (ch. 58). In the end, Mrs. Zane sells her ranch to Nicky Ibarra and returns to her home state of Ohio.

Mrs. Zane fits the mold of the “innocent victim” and, to some extent, the “long-suffering white female pioneer” that Patricia Nelson Limerick outlines in *The Legacy of Conquest* (48). To use Limerick’s words, Mrs. Zane can be described as “the closest thing to an authentic innocent victim” because her life and experiences in the American West resemble those of the frontierswomen who were “torn from family and civilization, overworked and lonely” and were “tragic martyrs to their husbands’ willful ambitions” (*Legacy* 48). Even though she says that it was her dream to get married and make a life out West, it was her husband who always wanted to homestead and she followed him. One can imagine that raising sheep and growing vegetables on a 160-acre extension of land must have been difficult and lonely for a “cultivated” woman from the Midwest. She clearly had no roots or connection to Idaho since in the end she chose to return home.

Another non-Basque female character is Mrs. Garcia, who works as a housekeeper for Henry Navarre’s uncle. She is described as “a stout woman with her hair tied in a huge bun” and is said to be “almost as big as Henry” (ch. 41). We must assume that she is Spanish or Hispanic since, at one point she “yelled and ... cursed in Spanish” (ch. 42). Mrs. Garcia appears to be a formidable woman, not just because of her physical size but also because of her use of swear words and her aggressive behavior. In one incident, she is “madder than a dog with a can on its tail” because she thinks that Henry Navarre has exposed himself to her on purpose (ch. 42). She is so

angry that she tips over the outhouse where Henry is hiding “with one big heave” and then she tackles him and beats with a carpet beater (ch. 42).

Mrs. Garcia is a character who only appears in a few pages and seems to serve the purpose of offering some comic relief in the story. Even though she has a traditionally female occupation as a housekeeper in the Navarre household, Mrs. Garcia is a rather masculine character, both in her appearance and behavior. She appears to belong to a different social class than the more middle-class Mrs. Zane. One pictures Mrs. Garcia as the type of stalwart woman who is somewhat rough around the edges and has the physical strength and gutsy ability to defend herself under any circumstances. She is capable of standing up to any man and confront them on equal terms, whether the use of irate foul language or physical aggression are required.

One last non-Basque character is Emma. She does not play a significant role and therefore appears infrequently in the story. She is said to be a “wizened widow” who works for Raoul as a cook and housekeeper. Emma is physically described as “buxom” and is said to wear her hair “in a severe bun” (ch. 20). We find out that her husband was killed in a mining accident at about the same time that Raoul’s wife Dominique passed away. Raoul hired her to help with the household and to take care of his daughter Martina to whom she has been like a second mother. Even though we know very little about her, Emma’s portrayal is perhaps the most traditional of all non-Basque female characters in *Sons of the Dawn*: she was once married, is now widowed, is employed as household help, styles her hair in a restrained manner, and has played the role of mother to Martina.

The other novel that I would like to analyze in this section is David Romtvedt’s *Zelestina Urza in Outer Space*. Romtvedt is an American poet and professor of English at the University of Wyoming. Along with Dollie Iberlin, he is the editor of *Buffalotarrak: An Anthology of the Basques of Buffalo, Wyoming* (1995) as well as several essays in the *Basque Diaspora and Migration Studies Series #6* (2011). His novel *Zelestina Urza in Outer Space*, which follows the lives of two women in northern Wyoming—a Basque immigrant and a half Cheyenne, half Arapaho orphan—is expected to be published in 2015 by the University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies. The author of this dissertation was fortunate enough to receive a copy of the novel’s manuscript before its publication. Page numbers assigned to the quotes below correspond

to pages in the author's manuscript (a Word document), since the printed version of the book is not yet available.

The story begins at Zelestina Urza's funeral, with the narrator explaining how it was thanks to this Basque woman that he was accepted by the members of this ethnic community in Wolf, Wyoming. The officiating priest, Father Bill, is "an American who knows nothing about the Basque people" (4). We get a humorous first glimpse of what Zelestina might have been like while she was alive: "I could hear Zelestina, trapped in her satin bed, pounding on the inside of the coffin lid and shouting, 'What kind of a name is that for a priest? Father Bill—it sounds like an Episcopalian outreach ministry in a shopping mall'" (5). Apparently, she was not a quiet woman who had no personal opinions or who cared to keep those opinions to herself. Even in death, Zelestina might likely point out something she disliked.

Zelestina was born in the town of Arnegi, in the Basque province of Nafarroa Beherea. She was "the first baby born in Arnegi in 1886—New Year's Day a little before dawn" (9). By the time she was a young woman, two thirds of the men in her village had left for Argentina, Venezuela or California to try to make a fortune and return home rich. "Most of the young men who left never came home. They went to Amerika and disappeared. And a good chunk of the women did the same. Mostly, they were sent as brides for the young men. But some of them—like Zelestina—went on their own" (12).

Zelestina knew that life would be easier for her family "if there were fewer mouths to feed," so she told her parents that "she wanted to go to America," that "she could take care of herself" and that "they wouldn't have to worry" (14). She had a lot of confidence because she was still young and truly didn't know what awaited her but at the same time she was "scared out of her wits" (14). Her father took her to Donibane board the ship that would take her across the Atlantic. His parting reassurance to his daughter was to tell her that she would be safe in this world because she is ugly (14).

As most Basques who immigrated to the United States did, Zelestina traveled to New York by ship and then continued to Chicago and Wyoming by train. She was only sixteen when she

arrived in Clearmont, Wyoming. As she stepped off the train, Zelestina “slipped on a patch of ice” and fell backwards, hitting her head on one of the train’s steps in view of the stationmaster. “Zelestina’s dress had flown up and her legs, encased in tight full-length undergarments whose style the stationmaster had never seen before, were, to some extent, exposed. Enough to see, anyway, that it was obvious she had great legs” (15). Her face is described as large and square, which is why her father had called her ugly. Nevertheless, the narrator adds, she was “a good-looking woman” (16).

Zelestina carries a card that explains she speaks Basque and French, some Spanish, but no English, and that her destination is Wolf, where her employers will meet her. After much difficulty with communication, she manages to board the coach to Wolf, but starts feeling cold along the way because her clothing is not adequate for the weather. Her solution is to jump off the coach and run along its side to warm up. This episode highlights this young woman’s sense of independence and her determination. She refuses to accept warm clothing from the coach driver and walks or runs almost half the thirty mile distance between Clearmont and Wolf. “Zelestina would accept nothing. She made use of her inability to speak English, pretending she had no idea what the man meant when he tried to remove his coat and give it to her. She wanted to run; she would have wanted to run whatever the temperature. She needed to get wherever she was going on her own” (24). Zelestina’s determination persists throughout her life. Much later in the novel, when she is close to 60 years old, she walks almost an hour and a half to go find her best friend, Yellow Bird Daughter (230).

When they arrive at the Etxeko Hotel, Zelestina felt “momentarily hysterical and feared she might scream or throw up” so she “put one hand to her mouth and coughed to hide her feeling” (24). Once she is inside the hotel, she realizes that she is alone for the first time in her life. “She had spent weeks traveling on foot and by horse cart, by boat and train, across ocean, mountains, and plains to finally reach Wolf, Wyoming” (25). This is a sixteen-year-old girl who has left her home and family for the first time in her life and has undergone an exhausting ordeal to reach a foreign land where she knows no one and does not speak the language. And yet, she tries to keep a straight face, not allowing herself to break down or express her fear.



Later on, however, the narrator says that “[w]ith Zelestina you always knew what she felt and believed” (26). The young girl became a woman who had “read a lot” (6) and would not hesitate to express her views and opinions. At one point in the story, when she is asked about her last name Urza, she responds that her family is not really Basque because they had moved from the Alsace Lorraine region along the French German border. “So you’re not Basque but when did your family move to the Basque Country?” the narrator asks. “Oh, I’m not sure, I think about seven hundred years ago” Zelestina responds with a straight face.

At the ranch of her employers, a Danish couple by the name of Soren and Smylla Christiansen, young Zelestina worked “her ass off” (54) from morning to night, heating frozen water on the stove twice a day to wash the udders of the milking cows, which she would milk and then carry the milk into the Christiansen’s house. She was also in charge of the pigs, a task she disliked, but she fed them daily and eventually butchered them to make “cured pork, lard, sausages, and ham” (54). In addition, Zelestina collected eggs from the chickens and, when it was time, was also in charge of killing them. She felt that there was “more blood on her hands” in her adopted country than there had ever been back home in Iparralde. Zelestina also cooked in the Christiansen’s home, making “chicken soup, roast chicken, fried chicken” and even “learned to make chicken and dumplings” (55). Other tasks that were part of Zelestina’s work on the ranch include the harvesting of fruits and vegetables.

Since she did not speak English, communication between Zelestina and her employers was very basic. “The Christiansens were limited to giving orders and Zelestina was reduced to receiving them” (55). She was cold and lonely, her skin dry and chapped from the cold and the hard work, but she does not complain because “she understood she was not the only one” (55). This statement highlights the mental strength, stoicism and resignation that Zelestina showed when she was only a teenager.

Before her birth, a fortuneteller in the village of Arnegi had told Zelestina’s father that she was “an important baby and will be an important woman” (11). The narrator explains that he had interviewed over half of the Basques in the town at least once when he was a student carrying out an oral history project in Wolf. But he had interviewed Zelestina up to four times because there

was something different and special about her. “There was something about her, that little spark we feel in the presence of some people as if they are just a tad more alive than the rest of us” (56). Zelestina had “charisma” and “sex appeal;” she had “physical energy” and “grace” (56).

The narrator identifies with the confusion that Zelestina must have felt when she first arrived in Wyoming at age 16 and how difficult leaving her home country for the United States must have been. She came from a culture where family is very important, and the Basques have lived in the same area for a very long time. Zelestina refused to talk about her parents, possibly because she knew that she would never see them again. The narrator adds that Zelestina may have been an “adventurer” when she left her home country but she was also a “refugee.” Her case was full of contradictions since she was “excited to go”— since the Basque Country and her family were so poor at that time — but “desolate to leave” because she came from a happy home (101).

With regards to religion, Zelestina’s parents were apparently “not particularly observant Catholics” but in Wolf, “Zelestina needed something to hold on to and she found herself attending Mass most mornings. The more confused she felt, the more often she attended” (88). And if attending Mass or sitting inside the church did not help clear her mind and find answers, “the other place to look was in work” (94). In *Buffalotarrak*, Jeanne Etchemendy, who was a Basque matriarch in the Buffalo, Wyoming, area narrated that she used to get little sleep and the work was always waiting. But she also liked it that way because she believed that “work gives a woman a sense of place” (*Buffalotarrak* 49). This may be why Zelestina would look to her work for answers that she could not find in religion. In work she may have found a sense of dignity, purpose and belonging to this new place she now called home.

The Indian woman Yellow Bird Daughter would become Zelestina’s best friend. The first time they meet is when Teague and Yellow Bird Daughter fall down the stairs at the courthouse, where Teague was forcing the Indian young woman to marry him. Zelestina immediately runs over to the injured couple in order to help. She even insists on accompanying them to the hospital and serving as an assistant nurse even though they are complete strangers to her. Zelestina sits by Yellow Bird Daughter’s bed for several days until the Indian woman wakes up. The narrator explains that Zelestina had a “pure and great” heart and that she is one of only two such great-

hearted people he has ever met (133).

Zelestina not only fulfills the traditional female roles of “caretaker” and “nurturer,” as exemplified when she repeatedly helps and nurses Yellow Bird Daughter back to health. But she also shows traits that are considered more masculine. She appears to be intelligent and enjoys using logic during the many philosophical discussions she has with the narrator. For example, they discuss “papal infallibility” and the role of women in the church (110), ask each other whether it is God or Nature that is crueler (147), what traits make us human (150) or they talk about what happened between Abraham and Isaac (202), among other examples. Zelestina liked to “think and question.” As the narrator puts it: “I had heard Zelestina talk this way and knew that this was the point where she usually stopped, the point when she had no answer for her own question. I loved that about her — that she would ask questions for which she had no answer” (112).

She is also brave and fearless, willing to fight and risk her life to defend those she cares about. When an angry Teague storms into the cabin where she and the Yellow Bird Daughter are staying, Zelestina puts on a tough fight against this man and even ends up being shot near her lung. “Teague extended his arm and took aim at her but it was too late. Zelestina had picked up a shoe and thrown it, striking Teague’s arm and making the pistol fly into the air” (140). Even though she is injured, she then slams her full body weight against her attacker, taking him down. Again later, she hooks the handle of an umbrella around Teague’s leg, making him fall one more time (141).

In other descriptions of Zelestina’s personality, the narrator explains that she did not often show impatience, disdain or anger (134). She is also direct, which is “disconcerting” (159) to others most likely because this is not a trait expected of women. Her directness is especially evident when it comes to negotiations. For example, she is not ashamed to say that she wishes to “economize” when selecting a coffin for Teague (159) and she later also negotiates a better price for a paint job being done on her car (256).

Zelestina loves figures of speech of the English language such as “Cool as a cucumber,” “Easy as pie,” or “A piece of cake” (148) and other idiomatic expressions, which may be a sign of her curiosity and love of learning. For example, she tells the stationmaster: “I like these expressions

– keen on, mad about, crazy for. A person should be crazy for something” (180). He invites her to visit him in Clearmont. At the station, they “met in the manner of two businessmen who were on friendly terms” (182). They go for a walk and talk about Zelestina’s first day in Wyoming when she slipped and fell on the ice after stepping off the train. When the stationmaster says that he has never been married, “Zelestina wanted to say more but didn’t. She had no real plan. It would be more honest to admit that she had a plan whose nature she was reluctant to express” (183). However, she then goes on to tell the stationmaster how back in the Basque Country, young people have many ways to learn to know each other because everybody knows everyone else in a certain village. But she says that she cannot do that in Wyoming because she is alone. “Already much time has gone by and I hope to be careful without waiting too long” (183).

The stationmaster is stunned by Zelestina’s honesty and straightforwardness. “No woman had ever spoken to the stationmaster this way before” (183). This is another example of Zelestina’s directness and ability to express what she wants. “I’m saying that perhaps two people should know each other somewhat before they decide things that will be permanent. God, I hope, will understand this and maybe this is part of his plan,” she adds (184). The stationmaster proceeds to take Zelestina to his private quarters, and she follows without talking or touching him. As he is washing up, he is thinking of the many details about how he had imagined that their relationship would unfold. “He had imagined a courtship—taking Zelestina to dinner in Wolf, bringing roses and asking the serving girl to put them on the table” (186).

The roles of man and woman appear to be reversed in this instance, since one would typically expect the woman to imagine a romantic courtship in great detail, while the man would be more inclined to be direct and pragmatic. In this case, however, it is Zelestina who does not want to waste time trying to court someone who she may not be compatible with. We gather that they probably end up making love in his room. “Zelestina was facing away from him, her shoulders raised and rigid. It was as if she had turned to stone she was so still. The stationmaster approached her, leaned over and touched her arm which was covered with goose bumps. She put her hand up and ran it along his cheek” (188). She later lets herself out of the room and gets back to Wolf on the train. The reader never finds out if she ever saw this man again, since she never tells the narrator anything else about the relationship.

Zelestina was born before automobiles even existed but she ends up having a great love of cars, probably because they allow her the freedom to go wherever she wants. She buys her first car and wants to have it painted in a “butter and sugar creamed together” (ivory) color because she dislikes the original black. She takes it to a Mr. Goikoetxea and asks if he can do the job. His response is that “of course” he can do it. “I’ve always admired that in men,” Zelestina thinks, “the way they believe in themselves. Sometimes no matter how much evidence there is to the contrary” (197). She is apparently insulted by Mr. Goikoetxea’s comment that it is a shame to remove brand new paint for no better reason than personal whim. “He put an awful emphasis on the word whim. Like my level of seriousness was about on a par with a Miss America candidate. Well, let him think what he wants” (198). And she truly does not care about what anyone thinks of her because, later in her life, she buys other cars that she also has repainted (254). She is also persistent and a tough negotiator, managing to get Mr. Goikoetxea to deduct a total of ten percent from the price to paint her car (256). Despite her love of automobiles, Zelestina is described as being a bad driver who scares and worries everyone in town when she is out on the road (258). She ultimately has a heart attack while driving her car, hits her forehead against the steering wheel and drives down an embankment into the river in 20 degree weather in the winter (265).

After Zelestina death, the narrator says that he misses her because her stories helped him find a way to live in Wyoming, a state that the census bureau still defines as a frontier. “It’s an alien land to those of us dropped here by God from our mother’s wombs and even more alien to those of us like Zelestina and me who found our way here by some twist of fate” (247). People like them are “children of exile—aliens in our own world” (248). Even though, throughout the novel, Zelestina gives us the impression of being satisfied with her life, the narrator believes that God did some very bad workmanship on Zelestina’s life: “Exiled at sixteen, never married, never had children, her one great friend gone back to the world from which she’d come, her parents and brothers never seen again” (253). Expressed in this manner, this may sound like a raw deal of a life to someone who has not experienced the life of an immigrant. This situation, however, may not have been that unusual in the early 1900s when staying in touch with friends and family back home or even traveling back to their country was next to impossible for immigrants.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I have evaluated the representation of women in Basque-American literature. The analysis is presented in two main chapters subdivided into sections. The first chapter introduces the historical context of Basque immigration to the Americas and the establishment of a Basque diaspora, mainly in the Western part of the country. Given that the arrival of the earlier Basque female immigrants to the Western United States took place towards the end of the nineteenth century, I have included a section that outlines the roles of women during the settlement of the “frontier” and their images in the literature of that century. In order to establish the literary background, this chapter additionally takes a look at the mythical dimension of the West and also explores the topic of masculinity in Western literature.

The second chapter presents the main literary analysis, which begins with an overview of secondary — or “shadow”— roles played by females in Basque-American literary production, as exemplified by a sampling of novels and short stories by authors like Robert Laxalt, Vince Juaristi, Martin Etchart or Maria Davis Denzler. The importance of gender, place and cultural identity is explored in relation to the main five works that are at the center of this dissertation and the detailed literary analysis is undertaken from several perspectives under the above-mentioned three categories. I discuss gender roles and the division of labor; the concepts of power and agency; the social control of women through patriarchy, home and marriage; as well as the importance of family bonds in Basque culture with a special focus on the tension between “consent” and “descent” relations as outlined by Werner Sollors’ theories. Cultural identity in the diaspora is examined through the evaluation of external expressions of ethnicity such as photographs and home decorations, the creation of a “hybrid” or “bricolage” diaspora ethnicity, and the role of the Catholic religion. As a final contrast and comparison to the portraits of women in the literature of Basque-American authors, I also present a brief analysis of the images of Basque female characters in the novels of two non-Basque American authors.

These sections attempt to provide evidence for the hypothesis stated in the introduction to this dissertation, namely that the literary representation of Basque women has undergone a dual development in the literature of the American West from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. On the one hand, Basque women have gone from being nearly absent or playing secondary roles to being more evidently present and even becoming central characters in their own right. On the other hand, over the nearly three quarters of a century between the publication of the first and the last work analyzed in this study, namely Isasi's *Basque Girl* (1940) and Errea's *My Mama Marie* (2013), the manner in which Basque women are portrayed has also undergone some changes.

As stated early in this dissertation, in his essay about "The Basques in Western American Literature," Richard Etulain argued that members of this ethnic group had only been major characters in less than a dozen novels, mainly those authored by Robert Laxalt. In addition, by focusing almost exclusively on the archetype of the lonely immigrant shepherd and on rural environments, the literature had ignored the experiences of women and city dwellers as well as those of the younger generations of Basque-Americans. The present study has focused on the works of five representative authors of both genders and different generations in an attempt to include varying perspectives, but one could nevertheless argue that this is not a substantial enough sample to make sweeping and conclusive statements about Basque-American literature. However, given that the literary production of this ethnic group in the United States is relatively limited, I believe that the present study has attempted to show that, since the publication of Etulain's article in the 1970s, there has been a small but significant shift in how Basque-American authors (and even non-Basque authors) portray Basque women in their works.

In the Introduction, I advanced a series of questions that I intended to explore in the course of my research study and literary analysis. Among them were questions about what images of women Basque immigrants had when they arrived in the American West, what roles Basque women played in their communities, and whether these images and roles had transformed themselves in order to adapt to life in the New World. I also wondered about the meaning of home or homeland for Basque immigrant women and for those born in the diaspora, and raised the topic of intergenerational conflicts that came up for Basques in migration. With regards to the literature, I was interested in the types of gender roles that can be found in the works analyzed and whether

or not an evolution can be seen. I finally wanted to see if differences in the representation of women could be observed depending on the author's gender and generational perspective. I believe these topics have been covered in the main body of this dissertation, but I will summarize the key points of my findings in the following pages.

The first Basque female immigrants started arriving in the United States during the nineteenth century, when women in this country were shaped by what was known as the "cult of true womanhood." As we have seen, this referred to a series of public attitudes that associated the essence of a "true" woman with her home and family and expected women to have four main virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Customs of the time presumed that women did not have the suitable temperament nor the ability to be involved in hard labor, political life or the rapidly increasing industrial economy of America. By staying at home, they were presumably protected from the negative influence of public affairs. The literature of the time made it appear as if women directed their households effortlessly, while exercising positive moral influences on their husbands and children.

However, this "cult of true womanhood" rarely represented the reality of women's experiences. Even in more well-to-do families, the wife cooked, cleaned, did laundry by hand, sewed, cared for sick family members, often raised numerous children, and took care of numerous other chores. It was hard labor since there were innumerable jobs that needed to be handled without the help of other humans or machines. Women's domestic contributions were crucial for the economic survival of the household but nineteenth-century America insisted on separating the sphere of the home from the industrial workplaces that increasingly exploited workers and calculated human worth in terms of cash. More and more, men based their manhood on their role as breadwinners, and along with this attitude the work performed by women at home was largely unacknowledged.

These attitudes about what defined an ideal feminine woman in nineteenth-century America were represented in literature by stereotypes that writers forced upon their female characters. The expressions like piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity that were used to describe women in literature reflect the prescriptive roles of women at the time. However, this



value system prevailed mostly among the upper and middle classes, and the men and women who promoted these standards were generally white, Protestant, and lived in New England and the Northeastern United States. Even though the assumption was that women were to live according to this ideal of femininity, social prejudice often excluded non-white, working class, and immigrant women from the definition of “true womanhood.”

In contrast with these eastern ideals was the reality of western frontier life. Conquering nature in the uncivilized western territories required hard work and effort for everyone involved. Frontier men wanted strong women who would help them handle whatever tasks were necessary and therefore did not value the leisure class eastern standards of femininity. The type of female they valued was a woman with the required physical and emotional strength and the initiative to adapt to the demands of the new environment. This symbolic frontier woman was expected to be strong and tough, bear the responsibility for the welfare of others, have a variety of skills that she would put to use often, and provide for her husband’s and her children’s needs while expecting no help or reciprocation. Her role was to serve as a supportive partner to her husband by handling the many different traditional household chores, but also be capable of dealing with emergencies, droughts, attacks by Indians, illness and death. These “frontier superwomen” represent a type of female that had managed to successfully adapt to the challenging conditions that existed during the settlement of the western United States.

The majority of Basque women who migrated to the American West during the late 1800s and early 1900s came from rural or coastal backgrounds and had left the Basque Country mostly for economic reasons. Others, though, as Totoricagüena has pointed out “migrated to escape the various forms of oppression that are unique to their gender status” (*Basque* 466). Cases like these are exemplified by Maitia’s situation as an ostracized illegitimate child in Laxalt’s *Child of the Holy Ghost*, and by Marie’s childhood situation of abuse and exploitation in Errea’s *My Mama Marie*. The jobs that were available to immigrant women with little or no formal education and a lack of English knowledge were those of household helpers, ranch cooks, or maids and serving girls in Basque boardinghouses. The descriptions we read about these early immigrants in articles such as Jeronima Echeverria’s studies of Basque pioneer women and boardinghouse workers or in the stories told in Mark and John Bieter’s book about the Basques in Idaho lead us to believe that

these Basque immigrant females shared many similarities with American pioneer women on the frontier in terms of their strength of character, stoicism, resilience, and work ethic.

In the Basque Country, rural women were traditionally accustomed to playing an important role in their families' economic life. For centuries, wives and mothers in farmsteads and fishing villages have run their households alone while the male members of the family were away during the fishing season or due to other work-related responsibilities. Therefore, for Basque immigrant women to step in and manage business affairs or take up so-called men's work in the New World would not have seemed unusual. However, as Teresa del Valle's research on gender identity among Basques in Spain concluded, women and men typically differentiate their roles along consistent lines. Being a good mother, a clean person, and a hard worker were the three attributes most appreciated in Basque women. These are three characteristics that serve to support a woman's central role within the domestic sphere as well as her role as both supporter and mediator. Other valuable attributes cited were good health, sobriety and restraint, helpfulness, and having good organizational and administrative skills, characteristics that in one form or another are found in the female characters of the works we have analyzed.

Women's lives are strongly influenced by family and domestic activities, and they are often defined and also define themselves by their relationships to others. Thus, women are mainly seen as daughters, wives, mothers, or grandmothers, which implies that they assume their identity based on external roles that depend on the position they occupy within the family. This shapes their focal values and permeates their behavior, activities, and relationships. Del Valle also pointed out that, even though in Basque society there is a strong focus on the figure of the mother, it is an idealized vision that is linked to myths about Basque matriarchy and the extent of women's rule fixed in a mythical past. This idealized vision of the mother/grandmother figure is found in Isasi's *Basque Girl* in the descriptions of the mother and the grandmother, and is especially striking in Urza's portrayal of her grandmother in *The Deep Blue Memory*. The powerful mother figure plays an important role in handing down Basque language and culture.

Basque women who migrated to the United States towards the end of the nineteenth-century and throughout the twentieth-century were raised under the influence of conservative and

patriarchal ideologies, such the tenets of the Roman Catholic faith, Sabino Arana's Basque nationalism and Francisco Franco's authoritarian regime. Arana's nationalism towards the end of the 1800s espoused religious integrist and traditional gender roles which for women consisted in passing on the Catholic faith and the Basque language to future generations. Francoism also professed a strong devotion to Catholicism, hypermasculinity and the traditional role of women in society. Women under Franco's fascist regime were expected to reside with their families, as loving daughters and sisters to their parents and brothers, or as faithful wives to their husbands, and caring mothers to their children. Purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity (the same exact traits that women in Victorian times were expected to have) were heavily valued in Spain well into the middle of the twentieth century.

Women born and raised in the Old World often took on the traditional role of wife and mother, oversaw the household and raised their children. However, while in the Basque Country they would have adopted these feminine roles exclusively (as exemplified by Erena's mother and grandmother in *Basque Girl*), those who migrated to the United States also took on additional duties that would typically be considered the domain of men, such as remunerated work outside the household or unpaid work assisting their husbands with ranches or other businesses. When Basque women left their homeland, they had to renegotiate their gender roles because motherhood and homemaking did not enjoy the same high status in America as was the case in their home county. Emigration shifted the work roles and social expectations for everyone, but this was especially true for women who often had the so-called "double burden of femininity," handling both feminine and masculine duties in order to provide their husbands and families the support needed to succeed.

Basques of the immigrant generation generally chose to marry someone of their same ethnic background, and we see this exemplified in Dominique and Therése Laxalt (as fictionalized in Monique Urza's and Robert Laxalt's works), and in Marie and Arnaud Paris (in *My Mama Marie*). In *Mountain City*, the grandmother, Anastasia Zabala, was born in the United States, and she married a man of Cornish origin. Other than the topic of childbirth out of wedlock which is at the center of *Child of the Holy Ghost*, intimate or romantic relationships between the sexes are practically not addressed in the rest of our works. If any mention is made, the relationships between

couples are described as “partnerships” rather than “romances.” The successful couples in at least four of the five works basically consist of the figure of the “settler” (the male shepherd, miner, rancher, etc.) and the “helpmate,” a Basque wife who is a strong, sturdy, nonsexual helper.

In fact, our Basque literary women, much like the pioneering white women frequently represented in nineteenth-century popular iconography, are females who seemingly have few pleasures. The married women are held responsible for their marriage and expected to do an excellent job of their chores. They wake up early and go to bed late and, during their long days take care of household or farm chores, cooking, and the care of children or grandchildren. There is very little time for anything else. Like pioneering women, they are often portrayed as strong, stoic, dependable, loyal, reliable, and hard-working.

For example, in *Mountain City*, Gregory Martin portrays Basque-American women who, to a large degree, stand on equal footing with men. They are shown as capable individuals who are partners to their spouses (such as Aunt Lou who helps her husband Mel run their store, or Grandma who had done the bookkeeping in the store for twenty years and later assisted her husband, a judge, by acting as his clerk). “It’s been a true partnership, good for both of them, keeping them sharp, active” (174), says Gregory about his grandparents. There are only one or two brief mentions of affection, such as when the grandparents go out hand in hand for summer walks after dinner, or when the grandfather kisses his wife on the cheek before he leaves for the day.

In *My Mama Marie*, there is a brief mention of sexuality when Joan is attacked by a herder who tears her shirt and exposes himself. Marie is alarmed when she hears about it. She hugs and kisses her daughter, and wants to make sure she has not been hurt. But when soon after Joan asks an innocent question about a woman who is expecting a baby, Marie slaps her “for being a snot” (121). “So much for my sex education,” writes Joan (121). Judging by stories such as this one and the descriptions of the women in the literary works we have considered, one would think that all Basque women are pure and innocent moral beings with no sexual thoughts or desires, which would of course be in keeping with the restraint and propriety that has traditionally been expected of good Catholic women.

With regards to the meaning of home or homeland, in the first novel, *Basque Girl*, Isasi evokes a Basque Country tied to her mother tongue *Euskara* and to the Catholic faith as well as to customs, tradition, and the past. This Basque Country that the narrator yearns for embodies the ideas of race, language, religion, and tradition that were central to Sabino Arana's nationalism towards the end of the nineteenth century, and are visually emphasized by the photograph and proclamation with which the book ends: "Devotion to Home, Pride of Race, Love of Tradition – I am Basque." In Isasi's view, childhood and homeland are both equivalent to perfect happiness. She presents a vision of the homeland as paradise, as the original land. It is a vision that is backwards-looking and only by preserving that past is it possible for her to keep her identity as a Basque intact. As an immigrant to the United States around the time of the Spanish Civil War, the author appears to have an exclusivist representation of identity. She resists the "melting pot" view of an idealized process of immigration and acculturation in which different nationalities, cultures and ethnicities would blend into a new community giving rise to a new "American" individual. In her view, being Basque and being American are mutually exclusive.

In *The Deep Blue Memory*, Urza also examines themes like the search for identity and the exploration of the "bumpy line" process of assimilation and acculturation in both the immigrant generation but especially in the younger generations of Basque-Americans. We have an older couple that conforms to a stereotypical image of first-generation immigrants: Both are Basque, Catholic, and speak *Euskara*; the husband was a shepherd and the wife ran a boardinghouse. The physical description of the grandmother reflects the traditional image of older Basque females: she wears a black wool dress with elbow-length sleeves, stockings, and thick-heeled black shoes, and her hair is braided neatly across the top of the head. She cooks for her family, bakes for her grandchildren, and sacrifices her privacy to be a gracious host to her family's guests. Her home is decorated with elements reminiscent of the Old World, such as white lace tablecloths, crocheted lace doilies, gold-rimmed white cups and saucers used for guests, and family photographs reminiscent of life in the Basque Country. Grandma in Urza's novel also embodies the ideal female attributes of being healthy, strong and sturdy, nurturing, a good mother, helpful, hard-working.

However, this immigrant woman's attitude to life is forward-looking in that she has a desire for self-improvement. She has made an effort to adapt to her new reality and make the best of the

opportunities offered to her in her adopted country. Despite having had a better upbringing and more formal education than her husband in the Basque Country, she is presented as a business-savvy and entrepreneurial woman who works hard to overcome the challenges of starting life in her new country. She moves the family out of the sheep camps and invests in a business (a Basque hotel) that she later operates practically on her own, and also pushed her children to pursue a college education. Interestingly enough, in *The Deep Blue Memory* it is actually the third generation, the grandchildren, who look backward, clinging to memories and images of life in the grandparents' homeland. This is part of the process by which the younger Basque-American generations explore their "Basqueness." It's part of the "bumpy line" process of assimilation and acculturation outlined by Herbert Gans. Basque-American identity needs to be invented through a marriage between American and Basque elements.

We know that the real Therése Laxalt, on whom the characters of "Grandma" in *The Deep Blue Memory* and Maitia in *The Child of the Holy Ghost* are based was a highly respected woman in her community of Carson City, Nevada. She was admired for taking care of all the aspects of running her hotel by herself, without help from her husband. In 1967, she became "Mother of the State of Nevada" for 1967. That year, the Nevada Appeal printed a large feature of her that included several testimonials from members of the community praising her exemplary work. This is what one of the letters said:

...What more could a mother be? Unselfish enough to give up all worldly satisfactions for her children, brave enough to face adversity, capable enough to operate a business in order to provide for her family, and determined enough to instill honesty, ambition, love of family and the love of God into each of them...Therése Laxalt is the ideal candidate to be Mother of the Year.<sup>34</sup>

The five books that make up the core of this study have several things in common. They are semi-autobiographical, and they focus on the figure of the mother or the grandmother and the memories of growing up with these Basque women. The women are generally portrayed as strong, clean, good housekeepers, industrious and resourceful, and extremely hardworking. In *Isasi*, Laxalt

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<sup>34</sup> Letter from a Mrs. Milton Badt of Carson City. Nevada Women's History Project. Women's Biographies: Therése Alpetche Laxalt (<http://www.unr.edu/nwhp/bios/women/laxalt.htm>)

and especially Urza we find a somewhat idealized image which is possibly tainted by memory and a nostalgic view of the past. The portrayal starts becoming more well-rounded and balanced in Martin's *Mountain City*, where the grandmother wears "polyester pants" instead of the traditional black dresses, and is allowed to be curse and shout, and be "moody and unpredictable, depressed at times, like most people" (177).

But it is perhaps Joan Errea's memoir about her mother that presents that most believable female characters and also most clearly shows a departure from typical gender roles. As a young woman in the Basque Country, Marie, was indeed sent off to do traditional feminine apprenticeships where she learns to sew and cook. After migrating to the United States, she worked in two hotels as many single Basque women did. There, she helped with cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. As was the case with boardinghouse workers, Marie's entire day revolved around work, working twenty-hour days. She does also perform other traditionally female tasks such as baking bread, cooking meals, and washing and ironing clothes. However, in addition to these tasks, Marie handled duties that are traditionally associated with men because of their more physically demanding nature. For example, in order to bake bread, she first dug pits in the ground to place the Dutch ovens. In addition, she hauled the wood to make the fires as well as the water that was needed. Marie is shown doing truly staggering amounts of work throughout the book, in contrast with the almost non-existent mention of men's activities.

Another way in which *My Mama Marie* differs from the other four works is in the description of Marie's personality and her attitude as a mother. Possibly because she had been raised without much affection and had been subjected to corporal punishment as a young girl, Marie treats her own children — in particular her only daughter — in a seemingly abrupt and unloving manner. Joan describes the troubled relationship between mother and daughter with great honesty, and her mixed feelings of love and hate towards her mother are expressed openly. We hear of bad tempers, physical punishment, and lack of love and displays of emotion. Physically and emotionally, Marie Jeanne is a woman who appears to possess somewhat masculine characteristics. She is physically described as sturdy, strong, muscular, tough, and formidable, and emotionally as never mellow and not overly emotional; she also has a bad temper. She comes across as a no-nonsense, harsh and somewhat scary female. Her husband appears to embody a

more “feminine masculinity” in that he is calm and mellow, and displays love towards his children unconditionally and without restrictions. In this particular book, it is the father who offers children the nurturing and comfort typically associated with mothers and grandmothers, thus departing both from the image of an idealized Basque mother but also from traditional role expectations of Basque men.

It is especially through the daughter’s character in *My Mama Marie* that we observe the change in gender roles and expectations. Joan is strong-willed from a young age and refuses to conform to the roles that that adults expect of her. She is proud to be a masculine female and describes herself as “an incredible tomboy.” Instead of the girly dresses that her mother wants her to wear, Joan prefers to dress in overalls or her brothers’ clothes. In her own description, she is rough, “big and broad-shouldered,” as well as “loud, boisterous, and a troublemaker” (*My Mama* 76). Furthermore, her dream job is working as a shepherd. This resistance of Joan to being the “gentle and dainty” lady that her mother expects her to be is one way in which the American-born daughter negotiates intergenerational relations. She is trying to establish her freedom to choose who she wants to be and rejecting traditional images of what a female ought to be like.

When comparing the characteristics of female characters like the mother and daughter in *My Mama Marie* and grandmother Zabala in *Mountain City* to the women encountered in the other three works, one is able to appreciate the development I spoke about earlier. These women do still adhere to some traditionally feminine roles such as caring for family members as well as their households, but they also are portrayed as better-rounded and more authentic characters in that they are allowed to show less flattering aspects of their personalities, such as their tempers or other flaws. This less “idealized” portrayal helps make them more real and believable characters and it also helps the reader relate to them. One could say that they are fully “Americanized” Basque women in that they are aware of and in touch with their ethnic identity but have additionally adopted the freedom and the less restrictive attitudes that characterize life in America.

If we think back on Etulain’s statement about how Basque-American literature had ignored the experiences of women, younger generations and city dwellers in favor of rural environments and the archetype of the lonely shepherd, we can say that some progress has been made. All five



authors included in this dissertation have addressed the experiences of women, both young and old, and at least Urza and Errea have included the perspective of the younger generations. What I have not observed is any clearly noticeable difference in the type of female characters that male and female authors create. I believe that any differences observed in the portrayal of the Basque women have to do with the particular generation that a character belongs to; that is, whether it is an immigrant woman or a first- or second-generation U.S.-born woman. Something that has not changed, though, is the fact that the places these female characters inhabit still are rural environments. Basque nationalism tended to romanticize the countryside and idealize rural areas as the essence of the Basque nation. To some extent, this tendency also appears in the Basque diaspora, which typically focuses on traditional and folkloric representations of Basque culture instead of contemporary images (Totoricagüena, *Basque* 460).

In *West of Everything*, Jane Tompkins states that “the qualities required of the protagonist” in Western novels are “self-discipline; unswerving purpose; the exercise of knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and excellent judgment; and a capacity to continue in the face of total exhaustion and overwhelming odds” (12). She is talking about the male heroes of Western novels, but after having read about the extraordinary women in the literary works of Mirim Isasi, Robert Laxalt, Monique Urza, Gregory Martin and Joan Errea, one can safely venture to say that the above description can easily apply to the Basque women who play central roles these five works. It is no longer just the lonely shepherd who personifies the essence of a Basque literary character. Basque-American women have earned the attention of writers and have reached a level of literary portrayal that elevates them to protagonists in their own right.

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