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The Basque Language (Euskera) As an Ideological Instrument in the Historical Construction of Basque Ethnic Identity

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how studies of a language and the language itself can be used as symbolic instruments to construct or support a differential ideological identity. The analyses of these studies have allowed us to undertake a sort of "archaeology" of the process of Basque ethnogenesis. All the authors instrumentalized philological studies as a way of expressing and claiming their ethnic identity, building their arguments on the basis of previous works (the "archaeological" layer being immediately underneath) at the same time that they reformulated them in order to better suit their specific conception of Basque identity as well as their particular sociopolitical interests. As if we were looking at a stratigraphic cut of an uninterrupted human settlement, the research unravels the existence of a narrative thread that, stratum upon stratum (that is, author upon author) connects the Basque chroniclers of the 16th to 18th centuries with the romantic *fuerista* writers of the 19th century, as well as Sabino de Arana-Goiri, the founder of the contemporary Basque Nationalist Party.

Keywords

Basque ethnic identity; Basque nationalism; Euskera

Introduction. The Instrumentalization of Philological Studies in the Process of Active Ethnogenesis: The Basque Case

The Basque people have retained a strong collective identity in spite of centuries-long acculturative pressures from the Spanish and French states. That does not mean, of course, that identity has remained unchanged over time. The Basque ethnogenesis process, like any other, has gone through different historical phases. During most of its history Basque ethnicity was passed on spontaneously from generation to generation via objective markers of group identity such as geographical boundaries (a mountainous area relatively isolated from urban centers), a tribal social organization, an animist religion (which survived at least until the early Middle Ages) and a related

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group of dialects that were very distinctive from the neighboring Celtic and Iberian languages first, and later on, Latin and the romance languages derived from them. In the early Middle Ages some independent or semiautonomous feudal polities inhabited mainly by Basques were formed (the Kingdom of Navarre; the Duchy of Vasconia; and the Lordships of Biscay, Gipuzkoa, and Alava), but they would not purposefully promote a Basque identity. Latin or the romance languages were used in the administration, and their ruling classes (clergy, nobility) were comprised of a mixture of non-Basque and acculturated Basque elites. From the High Middle Ages to the Early Modern period, a strong process of urbanization and integration within the economic, political, and cultural structures of the rising Castilian (Spanish from 1479 onward) and French monarchies would lead to an increase of acculturation throughout the Basque territories, especially among urban dwellers. It was probably acculturation itself, however, that would trigger the birth of an active process of ethnogenesis for the first time in Basque history. As opposed to the passive form, active ethnogenesis is deliberately constructed. It is driven by a narrative that uses both objective and symbolic markers as building blocks of a differentiated, collective identity. There is abundant literature about how ethnicity can be shaped, recreated, or even manufactured by means of different discursive tools such as the instrumentalization of history or religion, the invention of myths of origin and collective symbols, the creation of a national literature, and so on (Roosens 1989; Anderson 2006). In modern societies it is usually intellectuals who have the leading role in this kind of engineered ethnogenesis.

This paper analyzes a particular kind of ethnic-identity building tool, the historical and philological studies about a language, by using the historical process of Basque ethnogenesis as case study. In the Early Modern age, the acculturation process was already quite advanced and sparked a nativistic reaction (in the sense of Linton and Hallowell 1943) among other Basque intellectuals. A significant part of this reaction came in the form of an erudite interest in the study of the Basque language (Euskera), its origins, and lexicon. Because Euskera is one of the few non-Indo-European languages on the continent and a language isolate with no relation to any other known language (Lakarra 2017), it became a fertile ground for speculation about the origins of the Basque people. The paper will show how Euskera was used by a string of intellectuals spanning four centuries as a "metaphorical avatar" of ethnic identity. By means of this symbolic connection, all the characteristics of the Basque language allegedly discovered were also predicated upon knowledge of the Basque people. The analysis of historical and philological studies of Euskera has allowed us to undertake a sort of "archaeology" of Basque

ethnogenesis, revealing how this process underwent a series of consecutive phases, each one built on the symbolic materials produced by the previous one (the "archaeological" layer immediately underneath). This research unravels the existence of a narrative thread that, stratum upon stratum (that is, author upon author) connects the Basque chroniclers of the Habsburg Monarchy to the 18th century Enlightenment academics, the 19th century Basque romantic writers, and Sabino de Arana-Goiri, the founder of the contemporary Basque Nationalist Party, in the early 20th century. The paper will therefore show not only how studies on Euskera were purposefully used to strengthen a distinctive Basque ethnicity but also how this ethnic identity was reshaped at every step of process as it would be reformulated by successive authors in order to align it with the particular worldview, interests, and sociopolitical agenda of the social group they represented (the lower nobility first and the petty bourgeoisie later). Thus, three main consecutive narrative threads can be singled out throughout the historical timeline of the studies on Euskera, each one corresponding to a different identity discourse: (1) from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the metaphorical connection between language and people would not work to build an ethnic identity *en soi* and *pour soi* but rather was used as a proof of the universal aristocratic nature and unquestionable Catholicism of all Basques, which, in the *ancien régime* society of the time gave them an advantage to vie for power within the imperial administration; (2) in the 19th century the romantic *fuerista* movement would use most of the same narratives to claim that Basques had an ethnicity of their own, at the same time that they faithfully clung to a more encompassing Spanish identity; and (3) the ethnic cleavage introduced by the *fuerista* narrative was plagued with ambiguity. This tension would be resolved by Sabino de Arana-Goiri, the founder of Basque nationalism. For him, Basques are not only a different ethnic group, but a nation completely different from the Spanish one, entitled to have its own modern independent state. This paper will analyze in depth these three historical phases of the ethnogenesis process.

The 16th to 18th Centuries: The Tubalic Myth About the Basque Language and the *Ancien Régime* Basque Aristocratic Identity

When the Jesuit Manuel de Larramendi published his *Trilingual Dictionary of Castilian, Basque, and Latin* in 1745, the first Basque dictionary in history, he did so as a response to the debate that confronted him with Gregorio Mayans, the Royal Librarian, and with the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (Martínez 1990; Gómez, 1991). The extensive Prologue to the Dictionary is a fiery defense of the Basque language (Euskera) against those who considered it a barbaric and primitive tongue. His main arguments can be summarized

by the chapter headings: *Part One: I. Basque is the most perfect language.... VII. Basque is the language of the major matrices*[2]. *Part Two: Basque is the primitive and universal language of Spain.... Part Three: I.... Current Basque is the same as it was two and three thousand years ago* (Larramendi 1745)[3].

None of these ideas were new. In fact, Larramendi was just one of the last epigones of a well-established historiographical tradition: that of resorting to mythology to explain the origins of languages, a recurrent philological method since the Renaissance. *Studia Humanitatis* had transformed philology, till then neglected by the Scholastics, into a paramount science (Juaristi 1992). The nascent modern European states instrumentalized it in order to advertise their power and strengthen their subjects' proto-national sentiment. In societies still driven by an aristocratic ethos, the best way of exalting a language and by extension the people who spoke it and the king who governed them was to show that the origin of its lineage was old and noble. The dispersion of Noah's progeny and the myth of Babel became an ideal symbolic quarry for doing that. Another form of distinction was the rate of that language's diffusion: "a language would be all the more noble the more of its words could be found in other languages" (Dubois 1970, 84). A language's alleged past geographical extension also became a proof of its historical importance and destiny and a legitimation of its present conquests. The nobility, the geographical and the demographical dimensions of a language became a metaphor for that of the state and its people.

The theory that Euskera was the common language of ancient Spain and one of the seventy-two tongues that emerged from the fall of the Tower of Babel (the so-called "matrix languages" from which the rest would have originated) stems from a tradition that goes back to Flavius Josephus, who, in his 93 AD *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, wrote, "Thobel [Noah's grandson] founded the Thobelites, who are now called Iberes" (Josephus 1800, 22). Josephus was referring, apparently, to the Georgians, but Saint Jerome confused them with the Iberians from Hispania, and this interpretation would be enshrined in Saint Isidore's *Etymologies*, Medieval Spain's highest intellectual authority. At the beginning of the thirteenth century Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, archbishop of Toledo, defended this view again in his *Chronicle* (Ximénez 1893, 14). In the first half of the fifteenth century, Fernández de Madrigal claimed that the language of Tubal is "ours, Castilian" (Tovar 1980, 22). It seems, on the other hand, that the belief that Basque was the primitive

2 That is, it is one of the seventy-two languages born during the confusion of Babel.

3 All the quotations in this paper have been translated into English from their original languages, Spanish and French, by the author.

language of all of Spain was already present at that time. We find it in 1425 on Enrique de Villena's prologue to his translation of the *Aeneid.* This idea was very widespread among ordinary people (Tovar 1980, López 1985) and was probably based on the historical presence of Basque-speakers in the very same regions where Castilian had evolved from Latin (La Rioja and Burgos) and on the process through which Castilian itself had come into being, as a sort of pidgin used in the fringe area between the Latin- and Basque-speaking territories (López 1985).

It was probably the Basque chronicler Esteban de Garibay who by the mid-sixteenth century linked both legends, that of Tubal as patriarch of the Iberians and that of Basque as the ancient language of the entire Peninsula, to create the Tubalic myth of the Basques: Tubal's descendants, ancestors of the Iberians (that is, the Spaniards), would have spoken Euskera. This filiation automatically granted Euskera the condition of "matrix language," that is to say, a pure and immutable one, "never … miscegenated with strange nations," as Garibay puts it (in Anchústegui 2011, 33), coming directly from the Adamic language as opposed to the languages derived from it "through corruption." Garibay also gave voice to a widespread belief that identified the Basque people with the ancient Cantabrians, a symbolic embodiment of the heroic and proud resistance of the native peoples of the Iberianpeninsula to Roman (that is foreign) assimilation. "[Euskera is] the first language of Spain, which until today is spoken in most of Cantabria" (Garibay 1671, in Tovar 1980, 49).

Garibay was the first to use the etymological method to prove his claims about Euskera, in a profoundly unscientific way. His work would be continued by other Basque authors, such as Andrés de Poza, who interprets numerous toponyms throughout the Iberian Peninsula as having an Euskera origin (Poza 1901 [1587]). From Poza onward the Tubalic myth would be accepted by all Basque authors writing on the subject (Tovar 1980; Zubiaur 1990; Larrañaga 1998) and each of them is a milestone on a road that leads uninterruptedly to the nineteenth century: Martínez de Zaldivia (1560), Coscojales (cc. 1590), Echave (1607), Martínez de Isasti (1620), Oinehart 1656, Moret (1665, 1684), Larramendi (1728, 1736, l745), Astarloa (1803).

If the Castilian version of the Tubalic myth, represented by the abovementioned Fernández de Madrigal, can be straightforwardly interpreted as a piece of Spanish imperial propaganda, the Basque version calls for a more complex interpretation. On the one hand, it can be considered as a simply defensive reaction by a group of intellectuals who were proud of their ethnic origin (Larrañaga 1998). Renaissance idolatry of Greco-Roman antiquity had, as

a consequence, the devaluation of, and even open contempt for, a language such as Euskera, spoken mainly by illiterate peasants. This belittling attitude also had much to do with the imperial propaganda that portrayed Castilian Spanish as a sacred language and a pillar of Catholicism—the language to speak with God, in the well-known expression by Emperor Charles I (Lopez 1985, 46). Basque chronicles and philologists made it very clear that they wanted to respond to those authors, such as Pedro de Medina, in the second half of the fifteenth century (in Tovar 1980, 52), or Juan de Mariana in his 1605 *Historia de rebus Hispaniae* (in Larrañaga 1998, 185), who had stigmatized Euskera as a barbaric and uncivilized language**.** Poza explicitly stated that he had written his book "to defend our Basque language from some who are not too keen on it" (De Poza in Juaristi 1992, 59). On the other hand, even if the myth could be, to some extent, a reflection of a certain ethnic identity, that was never its main intention. Rather, the myth's main purpose had much more to do with the defense of a particularly idiosyncratic aristocratic identity and the status and competitive advantages that came with it, all within the context of the Spanish *ancien régime* society and its dominant values. Indeed, the Basque *intelligentsia* used the Tubalic myth as an instrument to reinforce their condition as *cristianos viejos* ("Old Christians")[4] in order to gain advantage within the Empire's administration, where a *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity)[5] certificate was sometimes required or at least could be a significant asset when it came to vying for positions. At this point in history the ideology conveyed by the Tubalic myth can be better described as a sort of aristocratic particularism rather than an ethnic identity, as it helped to reinforce the preexisting idea of the *hidalguía universal* (universal nobility) of all the Basques. Indeed, from the sixteenth century onward, many people thought of the Basques as being noble just because of their ethnicity. Since the Muslims never conquered or settled the Basque provinces, the Basques would have "historically proven" their blood purity. This idea was indeed so mainstream and powerful that the Crown ended up enshrining it into law (Soria 2006; Arrieta 2014). The myth, therefore, would make of the Basques the "quintessential Spaniards," as according to the myth, they would "have preserved the blood and the Spanish origin more purely than any other people" (Moret 1684 in Tovar 1980, 63).

4 That was the term used beginning in the late fifteenth century, after the expulsion of all Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Catholicism, to refer to the original Christians, the descendants of the conquistadors from the north of the peninsula, as opposed to those converts of Moorish or Jewish descent, called *cristianos nuevos* (New Christians).

5 *Limpieza de sangre* meant not having any Moorish, Jewish, Gypsy, or other non-European ancestors.

In all these philological works the Basque language is not only a metonymy of the Basque people (Juaristi 1987), but also a metonymy of the Spanish *ancien régime*'s social order: if Euskera was the oldest language in Spain, that made the Basques the original Spaniards; if Euskera was a language "without any miscegenation with foreign nations" (Moret 1684; in Tovar 1980, 64), the Basques were free from suspicion of Jewish or Moorish descent. And if Basques/Cantabrians were never tamed by foreign conquerors, the Basque language was a testimony to the eternal essence of Spain and its unyielding resistance against any past, present, or future external enemy. If the Basque language was "perfect, elegant, substantial and philosophical" (Poza 1587 in Juaristi 1992, 81), so were the Basques, who embodied the chivalric virtues of the Spanish nobleman. If Basque was an immutable language "without any change" (Lucio Marineo Sículo 1530; in Tovar 1980, 26), so must the social order be, whose most perfect manifestation was embodied by the Basques.

In order to enhance the advantage of Basques as "Old Christians," philological studies introduced yet another myth: that of the early Christianity of Basques. This myth can be probably attributed to Andrés de Poza. Ironically inspired by the Jewish Kabbalah, which affirms that every term in a matrix language carries the essence of what it stands for, Poza defended the *avant-la-lettre* Christianism of Tubal's lineage by means of a very convoluted philological method: it started from the Euskera word for God, *jeaun*, for which Poza supposed a primitive form, *iaon*, composed of the terms *i* ("you"), *a* ("that"), and *on* ("good"), a tripartite structure that he related to the Holy Trinity and thus concluded that God had already revealed His true nature to the lineage of Tubal. This myth was defended by many Basque authors from then on; in the Basque country, "there were never oracles or temples for the gentilic superstition" (Larramendi 1728 73) and "in order to speak to the angels in their language it is necessary to speak to them in Basque" (Larramendi 1728, 114). Others would praise "the perpetual immobility and firmness of the Basque people with regard to the true religion throughout all the prodigious time of their existence" (Astarloa 1803, 335).

The Basque Tubalic myth awoke criticism among another group of intellectuals whose interest was on a collision course with those of the Basque low nobility: converts of Jewish descent (*cristianos nuevos* or "New Christians") who, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, were very numerous within the Imperial administration. Using a very similar logic, Florián de Ocampo would affirm that the language spoken by Tubal was ancient Chaldean, a Semitic tongue (Perea 2012). This argument somehow positioned Sephardic Jews as the original Spaniards. It is again quite obvious that there was much

more than intellectual (or even ethnic) pride at stake in the philological and historical controversy. The debate was one of several battlegrounds if the fate of a whole ideology of segregation that threatened to expel "New Christians" from public life were to be decided. And in the end, the converts would lose. The progressive implementation of *limpieza de sangre* requirements since the late fifteenth century brought, as a consequence, their eventual preterition (Sycroff 1985; Hering 2011) within the Imperial bureaucracy (Imízcoz 2008).

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, "Old Christian" Castilians, equally jealous of the privileges of the Basques, would take the place of Sephardic converts in the philological controversy. Some years after the publication of Poza's work, Gregorio López Madera, a member of the Royal Exchequer, defended a renewed Castilian version of the Tubalic myth using as evidence a blatant religious fraud: a recently discovered parchment allegedly written in Castilian by Saint Cecil, an apostle from the first century AD! From there it ensued that Castilian "was one of the original languages which appeared in the confusion of Babylon" (López Madera 1601, 61). In his eagerness to ennoble the language (and by extension Spanish imperial identity) he affirms that it is Latin that derives from Castilian and not the other way around because [at the place] "where Rome was later founded and Latins first resided there were already many Spanish colonies and population" (López Madera 1601, 61)

In 1601 the Basques had already become the strongest group within the imperial administration. As Juaristi has put it, "a legion of [Basque] secretaries and scribes ... propped up ... the Empire" (Juaristi 1992, 60). Madera was the last significant opponent to the Basque Tubalic myth of whom we know. From then on, the Basque thesis would be overwhelmingly accepted (López García 1985; Juaristi 1992). Paradoxically, at the same time, Castilian would eclipse the other peninsular languages in the political and public realms, relegating them to the status of local, domestic dialects.

When Larramendi published his works between 1728 and 1745, however, the pendulum had already begun to swing again. Philip V, the first Spanish Bourbon king, brought an agenda from France aimed at state centralization and cultural homogenization. In addition, the Age of Enlightenment's rationality advocated the demolition of the old myths. In the light of this new *zeitgeist* the times of *limpieza de sangre* and the concomitant Basque hegemony could not last for long. As a matter of fact, the new Bourbon dynasty had already brought some administrative cadres from abroad and started recruiting Spanish clerks according to new criteria. The Basques, the standard-bearers of the old Habsburg order under which they held a privileged status,

began to feel cornered. The *Nueva Planta* Decrees ended the self-government institutions (*fueros*) in the Crown of Aragon territories but spared those of the Euskera-speaking provinces because they had been loyal to Philip V during the Succession War (1700–1714). Nonetheless, they imposed nationwide compulsory primary education in Spanish (Dedieu 2000), threatening in the long term the survival of local, mostly illiterate speakers of a language such as Euskera. A new generation of civil servants and intellectuals, such as Gregorio Mayans, Royal Librarian, (Peset 1966; Martínez 1990) or Enrique Flórez (Salas 2009) began to question once more the theories about Euskera; the publication between 1726 and 1739 of the *Dictionary of Authorities* by the newly created Royal Academy of the Spanish Language dealt a very important blow to the Basque Tubalic myth by reducing to no more than a hundred the Castilian words of Euskera origin (Urgell 1998). Ignacio de Armesto claimed to have written his critique to the Tubalic theories of Euskera "in order to defend the Spanish Academy from this slander" (Larramendi 1745, 228). The Basque intelligentsia probably felt wounded in their aristocratic pride and some of them might have perceived all those changes as an attempt to marginalize them from the new state project.

It is in this historical context that Larramendi's work emerges. His works spring to a certain extent from the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment, but his objectives remain fundamentally ideological. Being the dowager queen's confessor (the widow of the last Habsburg Charles II), he was a man loyal to the previous dynasty and ideologically closer to the seventeenth century (Michelena 1959; Gomez 1991). He was also a member of the Jesuit Order, the armed wing of the Counter-Reformation (and one of the few who ever considered imposing *limpieza de sangre* requirements to recruit its members[6]). As he himself let us know (Larramendi 1745), the aim of his *Trilingual Dictionary* was twofold:

1) To defend the known theories about the Euskera using reliable data (fruit of fifteen years of compilation and linguistic systematization) to confront authors such as Mayans and Armesto.

2) To convince the Royal Academy of the significant influence Euskera had on Spanish so that it was taken into account in the second edition of its *Dictionary of Authorities* (Larramendi 1745, 229).

The philological debate as a proxy for identity is as present with Larramendi as it was with the authors from previous centuries: the Royal Academy can be understood as a metaphor of the Spanish Monarchy, and therefore, as a fervent

6 Ignatius of Loyola refused to implement them, but there was pressure from a good part of the Basque Jesuits to do so (Juaristi 1992).

believer in the sacred power of absolute Christian monarchs, Larramendi takes a pledge to defend it even if he does not approve of its policy (Gómez 1991); the scarce presence of Euskera in the *Dictionary of Authorities* parallels the loss of Basque hegemony within the new Bourbon administration; Larramendi is the standard-bearer of a feeling shared by many Basques, "a hero in whom the natural loquacity of the Fatherhood's Language shines with vividness," in the words of Bartolomé de Galarza, the Basque censor of his *Trilingual Dictionary* (Galarza in Larramendi 1745, 8). A hero who delivers, through his philological endeavors, the reply that ethnic and aristocratic honor demanded, the one that many Basque intellectuals had been "impatiently awaiting," in Galarza's words (Galarza in Larramendi 1745, 8). Spain had decided to forget the Basque language but "the language will not allow its own nation to carry out this plan and will firmly oppose it" (Larramendi 1745, 2).

The defense of Basque aristocratic identity and unwavering allegiance to the Spanish unitary state. In the mid-eighteenth century, Basque intellectuals such as Larramendi remained faithful to the political model of the Habsburg Empire and to a strong Spanish identity. Some decades later history would start to move along paths that would make it increasingly difficult to reconcile both loyalties. In the twilight of the eighteenth century, Prime Minister Godoy proposed the abolition of the *fueros* to complete the Bourbons' centralizing project (Juaristi 1987). It may not be a coincidence that around the same time, the Basque priest Pablo Pedro de Astarloa felt the need to remind his fellow Spaniards once more that Euskera was "the language of the first settlers" (Astarloa 1803, 193) and that "the oldest families in Spain have Basque surnames" (Astarloa 1803, 194).

19th Century Romantic Literature, Linguistic Societies and the *Fuerista* Ideology

The construction of the Spanish liberal state was a very slow process, fraught with numerous coups d'état, revolutions, and civil wars between its defendants and the supporters of a return to absolute monarchical rule (called Carlists after the ultraconservative pretender to the throne Carlos María de Borbón). It is not surprising that nineteenth-century Carlist traditionalism took root most strongly in the four Euskera-speaking territories because, as we know, the aristocratic ethos was very strongly rooted there and because the Carlists defended the Basque *fueros* and their old medieval institutions of self-governance. The Basque Carlists, however, unlike the Basque intellectuals of the previous centuries, did not advocate an essentially differential ethnic identity *vis-à-vis* the rest of the Spaniards. It was first and foremost an

identity based on a political and societal ideology: that of the principles of the *ancien régime*[7]. Many Basques, who, with or without noble titles, thought of themselves as noblemen (Urrastabaso 2018) and considered themselves the embodiment of that social and moral order. Consequently, they enlisted in the three Carlist wars to fight against liberalism and to defend their own idea of Spain. It was from this point of view that Carlist authors such as Juan Bautista de Erro y Azpiroz—appointed Universal Minister by the Carlist pretender in 1836—rekindled the old myths about Euskera (Tovar 1980).

The end of the first Carlist war in 1839 resulted in the partial mutilation of the Navarre's *fuero* and the total derogation of those in the three Basque provinces. In 1844, however, the rise of moderates to power in Madrid led to their partial restoration, but they would not get back their previous customs and judicial independence, epitomized in the so-called *pase foral* (Clemente 2011)[8]. Moderantism was hegemonic during Isabel II's reign and represented a kind of intermediate ideology between the *ancien régime* and a full-fledged liberalism. For Spanish moderates, the traditional institutions of the four Euskera-speaking territories "constituted the historical proof of the feasibility of their political ideal: a society in which theoretical equality coexists with the practice of census suffrage.... The Basque Country was the utopia of conservative Spain" (Juaristi 1987:26). The *fueros*, however, would be definitively abolished in 1876, after the liberals' victory in the Third Carlist war. By the last third of the nineteenth century, urban and industrial development had given birth to a powerful Basque industrial bourgeoisie. Many of them had supported the liberals during the war, and the *fueros* were nothing but a hindrance to their interests, which required free trade and the seamless insertion of the Basque economy into the Spanish market instead. Nonetheless, support for Carlism remained strong in the region, especially in the rural areas. Carlists would keep demanding the restitution of the *fueros*, and they wouldn't be the only ones. The abolition also triggered a reaction among a conservative sector of the Basque petty bourgeoise, who, marginalized in both economic and political power, made the *fueros* their main political banner.

Within this latter group, Basque identity would take a new path, first evolving into a sort of proto-nationalist regionalism (the so-called *fuerismo*) and later into full-fledged modern nationalism (Elorza and Castells 1985; Arizcun

7 Carlism is a very complex and multifaceted ideology that spans three centuries. In this paper we discuss only the original and oldest form of Carlism, the one that developed between the three Carlist wars, from 1833 to 1876.

8 The *pase foral* was a special jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Navarre and the three Basque provinces that had the authority to refuse to abide by state legislation if it was considered to go against their own legislation.

2001; Pérez-Agote 2006). The new sentiment resulted from a double attack on the traditional way of life: the abolition of the *fueros,* on the one hand, and industrialization, which triggered a tsunami of social mutations on the other. It was through the defense of the *fueros*, as an embodiment of an *avant-la-lettre* conservative but democratic *gemeinschaft* of citizens, that the very Catholic and dissatisfied Basque petty bourgeoisie would construct a nostalgic collective identity that idealized the rural Euskera-speaking society of yesteryear as a template to be applied in the present. In their minds this identity was still compatible with the Spanish one. *Fuerismo* can be considered "the Basque and Navarrese expression of Spanish moderantism" (Juaristi 1987, 26).

Though reinterpreted in the light of liberal ideology, some of the premodern narratives were present in regionalist *fuerista* thought: the *hidalguía universal* of the Basques—according to them, a historical precedent of the "democratic" values they advocated (Urrastabaso 2018)—and the myths about Euskera (which reinforced the differential identity of the Basque people *vis-à-vis* other Spaniards, without challenging the country's unity). *Fuerismo* was never a strong and cohesive political option, and its ideology was expressed mainly through literature and cultural associations.

Fuerista literature was very much like the rest of European national (and nationalist) literature of the time (Juaristi 1987): an instrument aimed at bringing to light the *volkgeist* of the Basques. There were no better construction blocks for that than the myths about Euskera, which were not perhaps more present in the Basque collective subconscious, in order to forge an ethnic identity. The old theories of Basque-Iberism and Basque-Cantabrism or the proto-Christianism of Basques became, together with the medieval epic rescued by Romanticism, the backbone of a Basque identity which was still indisputably linked to the Spanish nation.

The newborn ethnic consciousness would also be fostered by *fueristas* through two cultural societies aimed at preserving and promoting Basque culture and language: the Euskara society, founded in 1877 in Navarre, and the Euskal-Herria society, created some years later in Bilbao (Zabaltza 2018). The societies' journals published *fuerista* manifestos and other political writings (Elorza and Castells 1985), and in them Euskera once again became a metonymy for the Basque people. In Arturo Campión's words, founder of the Euskara society, "[l]anguage is nationality. As long as Basques retain their original and exclusive language, there is no fear that love for their coveted *fueros* diminishes, because every word they utter will remind them of the social and political station of their forefathers and will encourage them never

to give up on the legal claim to their imprescriptible rights" (Campión 1876). Remnants of the *ancien régime* ideology can be traced to this idea. It could not be otherwise: the *Fueristas* sought Basque identity in the values of a utopian egalitarian agrarian society, but that arcadian myth, custodian of the Basque essence, was nothing more than the idealized reflection of the disappeared premodern feudal order, which had only been given a nineteenth-century bourgeois varnish.

In the end, *fuerismo* failed as a political option because it did not know how to reconcile the tensions created by two sets of opposing ideas: on the one hand, its proto-nationalism and its refusal to recant the Spanish identity and on the other hand, its archaic rural utopianism and a modern project of national construction aimed at the future (Juaristi 1987).

From Regionalism to Ethnic Nationalism: Agustin Chao and the Myth of Aitor

Fuerista authors, without intending it, had let the genie out of the bottle. A genie that would lead to Sabino de Arana's xenophobic anti-Spanish nationalism. Basque-French Joseph Augustin Chaho, whom Juaristi considers "a precursor of independentism" (Juaristi 1987, 84) illustrates this evolution from regionalism to nationalism. And it does so by means of yet another myth about the origin of the Basques and Euskera. Mimicking the Tubalic tradition, Chaho (1847) created a new myth of origin starring a new kind of patriarch, Aitor[9], which literally means "nobleman" (López Antón 1996). He has nothing to do with Tubal (which is, after all, a myth stemming from a Jewish/Semitic tradition) nor with the pre-Roman Iberians: Aitor is related to the ancient Indo-Iranians and is an "Aryan" patriarch who leads his people in an epic odyssey from their ancestral Eurasian plains to the historical land of the Basques. Chaho highlights the relationship between Euskera and Sanskrit and affirms that the Basques' "primitive monotheism" is none other than the natural religion, the first form of Revelation, practiced by ancient Indo-European peoples (Juaristi 1987; Bazán et al. 2002). In this way Chaho endows the Basques "with a common ancestor of their own, different from that of the other Spaniards and separates the genealogy of the Basque people from that of the Semitic peoples" (Juaristi 1987, 96). If by the latter he did nothing but continue the centuries-old anti-Semitic ideology embodied in *limpieza de sangre* by the former he became a precursor of a new ideology, one that, breaking away from Basque-Iberism, affirmed the radical difference

9 Chaho took that name from the terms *aitoren seme,* used also by the Basque-French Oihenart in 1656 to refer to the Basques.

of the Basque people and language with respect to the rest of Spain. His nineteenth-century historicist anti-Semitism fully resolves the contradictions that its Renaissance counterpart, of biblical foundation, had not been able to dodge and lay the foundations for the "Maketophobic" racism of Sabino de Arana-Goiri[10] (Douglass 2002; De la Granja 2006; González 2013).

The Instrumentation of Euskera and Euskera Philological Studies by Sabino de Arana-Goiri's Nationalism

Arana's new political doctrine was solidly based on the foundations laid by his predecessors. Inspired by that tradition, Arana would also use philological studies as an ideological instrument. However, his ideology is also characterized by two fundamental divergences from the past: (1) the quest for independence and (2) the exaltation of the Basque people as distinct and superior to the Spanish one. The former broke a centuries-long ideological chain that had started with the Basque imperial aristocracy and clergy; the latter revisited the "Old-Christian/New-Christian" categories in the light of the new "anthropological" racism of the period, the pseudoscientific ideology that authors such as Gobineau were making fashionable all across the Western world (Elorza 2001; Douglass 2002).

Arana's political project did not wish for a restitution of the *fueros* but rather for an independent modern nation. The reader who takes a look at his *Complete Works*, however, will not find many explicit political texts there but, instead, a great lot of systematization and analysis of the Euskera lexicon and syntax (Elorza and Castells 1985), which is true for two reasons:

(1) Arana had understood, as the *fueristas* had before, the futility of a direct political confrontation with the Spanish state. First, the Basques had to be empowered through the revival and strengthening of their language. It was the only way to make the nationalist and patriotic feeling grow. Arana blamed the education system, which used Spanish/Castilian as a teaching language, for the loss of the Basque identity. That is why in his *Lessons of Biscayan Euskera Orthography* (1896) he undertook a unification and regulation of the phonetic, orthographic, and grammatical rules of the Biscay dialects, creating a single *koiné*, in order to transform it into a modern language, with the capacity to be the vehicle of a future Basque education system. Language, thus, became the cornerstone of his political project.

10 *Maketo* is a pejorative term used from the late nineteenth century till the present day in the Basque Country to refer to immigrants from other Spanish regions. Arana-Goiri added a racist connotation to it.

Knowledgeable of the historical exegesis on the Basque language, Arana found in the study and theorization about Euskera the most appropriate means to building and broadcasting his ideas. Once again, the language became a metonymy for the people.

We shall find that symbolic connection underpinning the entire allegedly "scientific" stance of his *Lessons*. It is no coincidence that, as reported in the *Editors' note,* Arana created exactly seventy-two neologisms for Euskera (Arana 1980 [1896], 810), the same number as for the biblical matrix languages. Although very transformed, elements of the myth of Babel are also present in Arana, and so are some of the consequences that this mythical tradition implied. The Aranist mythology shares with the Tubalic myth the idea of the prehistoric origin of Euskera. However, Arana could not accept the identification of Basques with Iberians because that would have dismantled the fundamental assumption on which his whole political project was based: that Euskera and, therefore, the Basque people, are completely different from Spanish and Spaniards. To defend his position, he disavows the last scholars who had supported the Basque-Iberist thesis: the chroniclers seem very keen on demonstrating that Basques are "the true Spaniards ... in the same way [that this idea] was later used as solid evidence to defend our so-called fueros.... [These are] conclusions that are completely unsubstantiated.... The truth is that these Basqueologists have demonstrated only that our race once inhabited the entire Peninsula (as it inhabited other lands in Europe and Africa)" (Arana 1980 [1896], 820). Despite his resounding criticism, he undoubtedly made use of the same sort of "reverse imperialism" theories present in myths such as that of the Iberian settlement of ancient Italy.

Determined to deny the existence of any kinship relation between Basques and Spaniards, Arana was willing to give credit to some of the most outlandish theories about the origin of Euskera. In an article published in the magazine *Baserritarra* in 1897 he was inclined to subscribe to D'Abartiague's hypothesis:

> the one that affirms that our race comes from the famous island, or rather archipelago, and perhaps continent, that is known by the name of Atlantis.... Mr. D'Abartiague proves the existence of Atlantis at some time with perhaps incontestable data, but from there it does not follow that our race migrated from it to the European continent but, rather, that it simultaneously inhabited Western and Southern Europe, Northern Africa and that extensive land covered today by the ocean (Arana 1980 [1897], 1342).

What was important for Arana was not the scientific soundness of the theory but its suitability to support his ideology: "the Atlantic hypothesis ... is

recommended mainly because there is no trace of Spanish influence in it" (Arana 1980 [1897], 1342). The influence of the mythography of Chaho, with whom Arana shared an anti-Semitic stance, can be seen in these last words.

The *Orthography Lessons* presented a staunch defense of the unity of Euskera against those who wanted to differentiate between an educated/literary variety and an oral/illiterate one: "It would turn out that peasants speak a kind of rough, uncultured Euskera whereas the educated classes speak a cultured, aristocratic form. This would create, in the realm of culture, a class distinction that in no way can be reconciled with the spirit of equality that characterizes the Basque people" (Arana, 1896 [1980], 821). Language, thus, reflects Arana's social ideology, inherited from the *fueristas* and the myth of *hidalguía universal*: the Basque utopia of a rural society in which economic differences are smoothed over by a common aristocratic ethos. In this rejection to acknowledge the existence of an uncultured Euskera, we can see traces of the old theories that considered it the "most perfect, elegant, substantial and philosophical language" (De Poza 1587; in Juaristi 1992, 81).

Arana's philological studies also let us see his blueprint for the construction of a Basque independent state. Arana's political project was based on an idealized historical template that he takes from *fueristas* such as Aristides de Artiñano (1869), who reinterpreted the historic feudal institutions of the Basque provinces as a sort of democratic confederation of municipal republics. Arana dreamt of the future independence of the seven Basque territories (four in Spain, three in France) in the shape of a confederated state that would respect the alleged idiosyncratic democratic autonomy that each one had had in historical times. This political project has a linguistic correlate, which he deemed otherwise necessary for the construction of the Basque state: "What is appropriate, in my opinion, is to create a general dialect within each Basque region that previously was an autonomous state and has the potential to become so again … and let's not make these dialects exclusive to the upper classes.... In this way we would … achieve in the linguistic realm the formula that in politics has so many and determined supporters: 'unity in diversity'" (Arana 1980 [1896], 822). Arana's refusal to create a single Basque *koiné* is a manifestation, in the linguistic dimension, of his confederal vision for the Basque state. For Arana, the absence of such a *koiné* does not constitute an obstacle to unity, since "dialectal differences do not hinder in the least the relations of some Basques with others" (Arana 1980 [1896], 822), and the same orthographic rules apply to all of them.

Denial of the Spanishness of the Basques, an arcadian utopian democracy, an independent confederal state—one by one, Arana's ideological agenda

underpinned the philological arguments. There is yet a last point worth analyzing: Basque racial supremacism. Arana recruited most of his first followers in the province of Biscay, where changes brought by industrialization were more intense. Because of the massive immigration of Castilian-speaking workers, Biscayan Basques may have had more reasons than others to have a sense that their identity (as it was so psychologically charged with aristocratic hubris) was threatened. Arana's supremacism undoubtedly stems from that fear and pride. Although Arana was never an enthusiastic supporter of industrialization, it was not industrialization itself that worried him the most but its undesired social effects, in particular, the process of "foreignization"—in the words of Elorza and Castells (1985:13)—of Basque culture and "race." Arana's Prologue (very significantly titled *Warnings*) concludes, as a matter of fact, with a fiery call to defend Euskera: "If we do not come to its aid, raise it up, and purify it soon, it will miserably succumb to the foreign language [Spanish] that invades our land from the west and south" (Arana 1980 [1896]: 823). What did Arana mean by "purifying" Euskera? To eliminate from it all Spanish loans, to repristinate its original *limpieza de sangre*.

As a twentieth-century man, Arana could no longer believe that Basque is an "immutable language." He knew that all languages change with time, and he himself had set out to change Euskera in order to carry out his political project. But Arana agreed on one thing with the authors from past centuries: Euskera should be a "pure" language "without any miscegenation with foreign nations," as Moret had put it in 1684. That purity was being threatened by the adoption of many Castilian terms, in the same way that the Basque people were threatened by the "invasion" of Maketo workers, who had already outnumbered local Basques in the industrial estuary of Bilbao. Arana would carry out a systematic attempt to eliminate Castilian terms from Euskera. The very terminology he employs in his philological work is steeped in racist connotations: he speaks of "the laws of legitimacy of Biscayan sounds" (Arana 1980 [1896], 838) and separates "legitimately Basque" phonemes from those that, according to him, come from Spanish. Arana's "linguistic cleansing" runs in parallel to the ethnic one he intended for his people, which led him to condemn mixed marriages between Basques and Spaniards (Douglass 2002; De la Granja 2006; González 2013). That racism is nothing more than the mutant great grandson of the "Old-Christian" and aristocratic *limpieza de sangre*.

Language was fundamental to Arana's racist differentiation between Basques and Spaniards: "How do we know which race a family belongs to?... By their surnames.... If the surnames are Basque, those who bear them are Basques"

(Arana 1980 [1896], 1059). For this same reason, for the sake of ethnic segregation, Arana set about to invent new names for the Basques in his *Basque Sanctoral* (Arana 1980 [1910], 1059) and to "euskerize" the existing ones to differentiate them as much as possible from the Spanish forms, even if he had to resort to other languages: *Luis* became *Koldobika* (from the German *Hlodovich)*; the traditional Basque name *Peru,* too similar to the Spanish *Pedro*, morphed into *Kepa* (from the Aramaic *Cephas)*; *Jorge* became *Gorka* (from the Greek *Georgos*); and so on. In his *Orthography Lessons* (1896) he had previously done the same with toponyms, including the invention of the neologism *Euskadi,* the name with which he baptized the future independent Basque state (Elorza and Castells 1985). As founder of the main Basque nationalist party, the PNV (which has been almost continuously in power in the Spanish autonomous region of the Basque Country since 1978) Arana's influence in the making of modern Basque identity is very significant. Some of this philological creativity would eventually step up far beyond the Ivory Tower of academia: Arana was one of the architects of the Euskera that is taught in schools today, and many Basques (and even non-Basques all across Spain) carry the names he made up, and the historical Basque Country region is now officially known as Euskadi.

Conclusions

This paper has carried out a sort of archaeology of discourse in order to show how philological studies on Euskera, the Basque language, have contributed significantly to the historical process of Basque ethnogenesis. The research reveals the existence of a process of discursive construction that, with uninterrupted continuity, spans from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. A continuity that, stratum upon stratum (that is to say, author upon author), connects the Basque chroniclers from Imperial Spain, the *fuerista* romantic writers of the nineteenth century, and Sabino de Arana-Goiri, the founder of the contemporary Basque Nationalist Party. The sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century authors drank from medieval sources that made Tubal, son of Jafet, the patriarch of Iberians in order to construct a myth about Euskera that gave advantage to the Basques over other Spaniards in the competition for positions within the Imperial administration. By the mere fact of having a Basque surname, the Basques didn't have to further prove their blood purity: they were free from suspicion of having any Jewish, Moorish, Roma s or Black ancestors. They were, therefore, seen as the purest of Spaniards, and all noble by birth. *Fueristas* in the nineteenth century used the theories already constructed by their predecessors, adapting

them to their regionalist and conservative agenda against the centralizing and progressive liberal state. In their view, the defense of Euskera and a differential Basque identity was the defense of the social and political values of the rural, extremely Catholic, but democratic, society they romantically imagined the historical Basque country had been. Sabino de Arana-Goiri received from the *fuerista* literature the influence of that long historical tradition and adapted it according to the prevailing chauvinism of the time in order to make the Basque language and its philological uniqueness the pillar of a Basque-speaking independent nation based on the ideas of purity and supremacy of a Basque race that was completely different from the Spanish one.

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