

Time and Space in the Elaboration of the Present: the Basque Case

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Nazionalismoa giza talde baten adierazpen konplexu, dinamiko eta problematikoa da. Jendea muturreko egoeretara eraman dezake, emaitza tamalgarriekin. Baina bere barruan baditu sormenezko osagaiak ere, bere sorburu diren kultura-sustraien begirunean azaltzen direnak. Nire hausnarketa euskal gizarteko egite modernoen kultura-azterketatik sortua da.

Giltza-Hitzak: Denbora eta espazioa. Tradizioa. Nazionalismoa. Kultura-sustraiak. Muga.

El nacionalismo es una compleja, dinámica y problemática manifestación de un grupo humano, que puede llevar a las personas a adoptar posturas extremistas de lamentables resultados. Pero consta igualmente de otros elementos de índole creativa, como la salvaguarda de las raíces culturales desde las que brota. Mi reflexión parte del análisis cultural de las modernas expresiones que tiene en la sociedad vasca.

Palabras Clave: Tiempo y espacio. Tradición. Nacionalismo. Raíces culturales. Frontera.

Le nationalisme est une manifestation complexe, dynamique et problématique d'un groupe humaine, qui peut mener des personnes à adopter des postures extrémistes aux résultats lamentables. Mais il compte également d'autres éléments de nature créative, tels que la sauvegarde des racines culturelles depuis celles qu'il fait jaillir. Ma réflexion part de l'analyse culturelle des expressions modernes qu'il a dans la société basque.

Mots-Clés : Temps et espace. Tradition. Nationalisme. Racines culturelles. Frontière.

INTRODUCTION¹

Contrasting forces are at work in the Europe of the present. On the one hand, there is an increasing move from above towards the construction of a unified Europe, implying the design of centers and peripheries based on economic and political dominance. On the other, regionalism and nationalism question the nation-state from below.

A review of the past of this present reveals that the history of some nation-states goes back for centuries and on considering the case of Western Europe one finds that some of its nation-states have been involved in a succession of wars from at least mid-seventeenth century.

As Europe moves from the ideal of the nation-state to form a supranational organization, those forces associated with regional and territorial levels of identity emerge in strength. The strong reaffirmation of ethnicity in European nations from the 1970s to the present is not surprising; what is most surprising is the fact that it did not occur sooner. The situation in Europe is highly complex but contains within it indicators of the energy and potential to produce change. From its beginning in 1957, the movement towards a unified Europe is principally a political and economic issue unlikely to arouse emotional attachment. However, the emergent regional and territorial claims are of a different nature, being based mostly on cultural and linguistic variance. It is at this level that both groups and individuals transfer identity to their entities. To speak of nationalism today is a difficult task. More so when opinions in favor or against it are refracted in an array of multiple perspectives and emotions. However, I strongly feel that it is an issue of great interest to European anthropologists: a sign of our time. My position, based in both a theoretical and empirical standpoint deriving from everyday experience, is that nationalism is a complex, dynamic and problematic human group manifestation. It can lead people to extreme positions with regrettable results. But it also contains within it elements of creativity revealed on consideration of the cultural roots from whence it springs.

My reflection arises from the cultural analysis of modern performances in Basque society. The framework is Basque nationalism in its broader sense and especially that representing extreme positions². As Gellner says, we can learn little from the prophets of nationalism (1983: 125). However we can learn much from cultural manifestations which arise within nationalistic frameworks. This is the reason for my choice of ritual and myth.

1. This paper was first presented at the plenary session of the Second conference of EASA (European Association of Social Anthropology) held in Praga in 1992. It has remained unpublished ever since. At this point I think the paper enters within the interests of Joxemartin Apalategi's fields of research.

2. I want to acknowledge ideas received about this paper while writing it: from the writer Mariasun Landa and the expert on language and education Feli Etxebarria. With James Fernandez I spoke of time and space on the mountain side of Asturias. I do appreciate comments made by Edorta Arana and especially Margaret Bullen while preparing its final version.

I argue that certain key characteristics of Basque individual and particularly collective identity are interwoven with references to time and space. Their general assumption by Basques may be explained by their relation to people's fears and expectations regarding cultural oppression and supranational uniformity. They compose a significant field of social memory which, following Connerton's definitions, falls within the scope of habit and performance.

Connerton (1989) develops the performance side of Halbwachs' assertion about the relevance of memory. For him "it is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory. To the extent that the memories of a society's past diverge, to that extent its members can share neither experience nor assumptions" (*Ibid.*: 3). Referring to the relevance attributed to the imprint of the past upon the present he argues that "images of the past and recollected knowledge sic, are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances" (*Ibid.*: 4).

Although Connerton acknowledges the significance of looking at content, form and the re-enactment of prior, prototypical actions (*Ibid.*: 53-71) he takes up an aspect of social memory which has been greatly neglected but which in his opinion, is "absolutely essential: bodily social memory" (*Ibid.*: 71). Bodily practices of a culturally specific kind "entail a combination of cognitive and habit-memory" (*Ibid.*: 88) thus providing a powerful tool for the analysis of that society's self image.

1. THE CREATION OF SECULAR RITUALS

Religious pilgrimages have long existed in Euskalerría, as in other areas of the Spanish State, and have been amply documented (Moreno, 1991: 623-626). However, the last twenty years have seen the emergence of secular pilgrimages, constituting a vehicle for nationalist sentiments with the main goal of reaffirming the value of euskara, the Basque language. These modern-day pilgrimages have the following in common: firstly, they symbolically establish the relationship between language and territory by walking a certain distance; secondly, they evoke a popular response that embraces thousands of people from different walks of life and various economic and social positions. Thirdly, they appeal to the wide spectrum of Basque nationalism which goes beyond the political borders of Spain and France.

This popular activity consists of organizing a walk of over two thousand kilometers once a year, each time in a different locality within the territory of Hegoalde (Spanish Basque Country) and Iparralde (French Basque Country)³. The festive event lasts the entire day and holidays and weekends are chosen to facilitate attendance. Stalls are set up and activities arranged along the length of the walk: these include exhibitions of traditional arts and crafts, cultural informa-

3. Iparralde and Hegoalde are Basque terms used when referring to those locations.

tion services, sports and traditional competitions, games and dances. The funds raised are destined for the *ikastolas* (schools where education is imparted in Basque) of the zone where the event is organized. Within this context, in 1980 a new ritual called *Korrika* emerges. Since its creation there have been seven editions, the last in Spring 1990. The main feature differentiating *Korrika* from other secular pilgrimages is the organizing principle of a united Euskalerría (the name stands for the place where euskara is spoken). *Korrika* may be defined as a colossal foot race divided in relays of one kilometer. Thousands of runners, women and men of all ages, pass through the seven Basque territories (three on the French side and four on the Spanish side) carrying a symbol identified as *el testigo* (the witness). The principal goal of the race is to generate popular support for euskara. Along a route of more than 2,000 kilometers, financial contributions are collected and mass support drawn up for the effort to reeducate the populace in euskara. The "Coordinator of Education and Literacy in the Basque Language", a popular organization that has dedicated more than 25 years to euskara, is in charge of the race.

For nine consecutive days, the run weaves through large and small towns, coastal and rural areas, small cities and territorial capitals and does not stop from beginning to end. The motto of '*Korrika* does not stop' is constantly heard.

The main protagonist of *Korrika* is the 'witness'. Materially, it is a hollow wooden cylinder carved by Remigio Mendiburu, a significant Basque artist and it symbolizes euskara. In each *Korrika* a different message about the relevance of euskara and people's responsibility to preserve and develop it, is carried inside the witness. The reading of the message marks the beginning and the end of the race. The aim of this non-competitive race is to pass the witness from hand to hand until it arrives at the finishing line. *Korrika* is an excellent example of bodily action in Connerton's sense (*Ibid.*: 72-104).

In order to understand *Korrika* it is important to have some knowledge of the social context in which it unfolds. Within this context there exists an important nucleus of people whose frame of reference is euskara and for whom this fact acts as a distinguishing element in relation to nuclei of the broader population. Those in the nucleus, maintain an active, militant relationship with the language, understood not as an archaic heritage but as a part of a present reality that must be developed and transmitted to others. The nucleus possesses some of the characteristics that Turner attributes to the ideological *communitas* (1988: 137-157).

The cohesive element, independent of other factors, is the use of the language and certain shared values. People are identified with the nucleus by speaking euskara or learning it in formal or informal ways. This experience brings together past and present as it contains a series of references and establishes values that combine elements of the traditional Basque world with other elements present in modern industrialized society.

Part of the power of *korrika* then stems from the utilization of elements, symbols, and mechanisms whose messages are easily grasped within the nucleus.

Following Turner's line of thought, *korrika* can be interpreted as a response to new conflicts which arise from a redefinition of power and the unstable situation of *euskara*.

At the political moment at which *korrika* emerged in 1980, the situation in Euskadi was very different from the previous decade. On the one hand, the iron hand of the dictator Franco no longer oppressed Basque language and culture, six years having elapsed since his death. However, opposition to the dictator no longer constituted a basis for the cohesion of the different political forces in Euskadi and their individual interests were directed at the division of power among the nationalistic parties. Generally speaking, the political climate of Euskadi at that time was one of conflict and confrontation within the nationalistic ambience. Given that reality, the only thing with enough charisma and with the power to provoke unitary stands, would be something related with *euskara*, given that in appearance it could present a clear and convincing justification even though later it could be imbued, as was the case, with more political content.

Korrika is thus a powerful example of a secular ritual that emerges at a time of division and change. At that moment, the protagonism of popular groups in the transmission and development of *euskara* during Franco's Dictatorship is uncertain. It is also a ritual in which the multivocality of the symbols and their evocative capacity, such as the power for revelation (Turner, 1988: 37, 52-53), have a metapolitical orientation in the first instance. The ritual centers on the language, one of the most significant symbols of Basque identity as many authors have stressed (Apaolaza, 1990; Clark, 1980: 81-83).

In my analysis of *Korrika* I will first examine it in reference to time, considering the recourse to ancestry to stress continuity and the marking of extremes in the life cycle. Secondly, I will consider it in reference to space, in the resolution of the opposition between *muga* and border.

2. THE PERSONALIZATION OF THE PAST

The fourth edition of *Korrika* started on June first 1995 in Atharratze, a village on the French side. That afternoon, the basic elements which compose a fiesta were contained in the small plaza: sunshine, music, and people of all ages.

The design of the plaza, with an empty central space surrounded by porticos, facilitated the interaction between the people from the Spanish side who had arrived to participate in the start of the race and those gathered from different parts of Iparralde, the French side. The plaza was at the same time an open and closed space. The city hall, the businesses, and the dwellings bore witness to the different functions served by the square in daily life and pointed to the centrality of its function in the town. By contrast, the yellow metal barricades indicated the transformation that had taken place in one area of the plaza, where the activity related to the organization of *Korrika* (tables where people signed up to run, the placards and musical equipment) determined a new temporary designation of

the space. From the shops, buyers and sellers could follow the action on the opposite side while continuing their everyday activity at the same time, thus demonstrating the relationship between the activities of the open and closed spaces.

As the appointed hour approached, the excitement mounted until music announced the first steps of the dance. The dancers entered in a line and performed a traditional dance known as *Xiberoko maskaradak*. The people followed, applauding the skill of each of the five dancers, until the moment they disappeared in single file at the same place where they had entered, leaving behind the rhythm in the air and the impression that they were going to continue dancing through the streets of the small town.

But the key moment in the preparation for the start of *korrika* was created by a strange person who appeared unexpectedly in the corner of the plaza. At first the people heard only his cries; they tried to locate him in the closed space, then moved to observe beyond the barricades. At last, near the shops, a prehistoric character became visible from behind a car. Dressed in skins with long uncombed hair and a wooden lance in his right hand, he manoeuvred with feline movements until he became the central character in the closed space. His pantomime, his shouts, and the movements of his spear led us to imagine his enemy, the animal he was trying to approach. The distant past, scenes from the hunt and life in the caves evoked through his comic mime, were not foreign to those of us who found ourselves in the plaza at that moment. The long history of the occupation of the territory is present in the numerous prehistoric monuments scattered throughout Euskalerrria and in the hunting scenes outlined on the rough walls of several prehistoric caves: Santimamiñe and Arenaza in Bizkaia and Ekain in Gipuzkoa, dating back to at least 20,000 B.C.

To the delight and surprise of the crowd, the actions of the prehistoric man were followed by another character. By his stylized black suit and mysterious leather attache case, the people identified him as the stereotype of the wise man in search of the origins of the enigmatic euskara language. He responded to the cries of the first character with the emotion of one who had found the solution to a problem that had occupied him for years. Triumphant, he announced to all those gathered in the plaza that he had found the first man who spoke euskara. For the wise man, the people's applause constituted the greatest recognition for achieving his scientific discovery. More applause and celebration met the prehistoric man's next gesture: he took the bone amulet (possibly a trophy of a hunting exploit) from around his neck and put it on the young man who would start the *Korrika* by being the first to carry the *testigo*. The symbolic relationship of the present to the past seemed obvious to the audience. His mission accomplished, the prehistoric character disappeared from contemporary time and space, resuming the pursuit of the imaginary animal.

The comic version of the past is proposed as a way of transcending the minority situation of euskara, a regressive situation full of conflict, by defending its universal value as one of the most ancient languages of Europe, and at the

same time proclaiming the local spatial context where it was developed and preserved. The sketch erased chronological time by linking present and past time to emphasize the continuity of the language upon a territory.

While in the representation, euskara appears as the only language of Euskalerrria, euskara today is a minority language within a territory at one time predominantly euskara-speaking. Today the number of Basques over the age of 18 on the Spanish side who know how to speak the language, amount to a total of 355,855 in a population of more than two million inhabitants (Olabuenaga, 1984 1a) even though areas exist where its predominance over Spanish, the dominant language, is clear.

The minority situation of euskara and its decline is likewise apparent in Iparralde. Basque speakers amount to approximately 78,453 in a population of 227,280 (Villán y Población, 1980: 43) although as in Hegoalde, in areas of Zuberoa and Nafarroa Beherea (Low Navarre) it is the dominant language over French.

The language-territory association is especially significant in the study of euskara. The linguistic map of Euskalerrria, indicating Basque-speaking nuclei, together with the experience of travelling through the territory paying particular attention to linguistic variations makes the fragmentation of euskara obvious (Olabuenaga, 1984: 17).

This is the result of a historical process in which the borders have been changing and shrinking due to different causes: contact with other populations; political changes in the Spanish and French States; internal and external migrations; cultural oppression, to mention some.

The discontinuity of contemporary reality differs greatly from the union of past and present enacted in the plaza of Atharratze, introducing us to a non-historical time. Historical reality reveals an ongoing process of interaction between different populations and linguistic influences affecting the structure of the language and its spatial placement (Olabuenaga, 1984: 10-11).

3. EXPRESSIONS OF CONTINUITY

In the *Korrika* ritual a second strategy to express continuity and thus transcend chronological discontinuity operates out through the ritualization of the extremes of the life cycle.

As in many other cultures, the importance of the socializing role of the family, and especially of women, in the transmission of language, values, and ethnic identification is clear in the Basque case (Pérez-Agote, 1984: 88-92; Gurruchaga, 1985: 311-335). Socialization via the family is considered fundamental to cultural continuity since 'more than a personal option, a linguistic phenomenon is based on the dynamic of an irreplaceable process of natural communica-

tion between parents and children' (Euskaltzaindia, 1979: 85). The preservation of euskara is perceived as intimately tied to the domestic environment and to the attitude demonstrated by family members: parents, grandparents, and other relatives (*Ibid.*: 85-101). However, because of the minority status of euskara and the decrease in the number of people who speak it, generational continuity is interrupted and with it, the form of transmission held to be most natural (Sánchez Carrión, 1981: 53-55).

In *Korrika*, this situation is transcended by stressing the existence of natural transmission, in both the real and symbolic plane. The chronological continuity of the language is manifest in time, through the child-adult relationship and the generational tie.

In *Korrika* the children are incorporated into the action at the same time as the adults and they share the same territory with them, assuming the role corresponding to those who carry the *testigo*. Sometimes during the course of the race the children participate in groups with their class mates. It is evident that they enjoy the race both when they carry the witness and when they form part of the crowd. Often they can be seen jumping into the air, impatiently awaiting the arrival of the group of runners. When it falls to them to carry the witness they run with pride, grasping it fiercely and they look ahead, smiling most of the time apparently conscious of the importance of the moment. From time to time they look about, seeking the approval or support of the adults, whether parents, relatives or teachers who either run beside them or follow close behind. It is clear that the children are buoyed up by the engulfing care and attention of the adults.

The choice of day affects family attendance: often whole families participate. Whether it is a working day or holiday has a bearing on the greater presence of mothers on week days and fathers on their days off; at evening time the entire family may attend.

The reaffirmation of the family unit to which I have alluded is manifest along the length of the race. Women may run in their role as mothers, holding one or two children by the hand, smiling and exuding an air of satisfaction. There are times, generally outside work hours or on days off, when the men also join the family group. If the man is to take the *testigo*, the rest of the family remains at his side, holding hands. If the bearer is a little boy or girl, the parents involve themselves in the child's performance, giving them encouragement, urging them on with cheers or exhortations and attentive to any signs of exhaustion. If it is a small child who grows tired, the father or (more rarely) the mother, will carry him or her on their shoulders. At all times, it is evident that the group is performing a joint action which in turn visually portrays the family-language relationship.

The participation of senior citizens, although numerically less significant than that of the children, is equally important in terms of the meaning it acquires in the representation of the two generational extremes. Well-known elders are selected to carry the *testigo*, chosen for their contribution to their work to support the Basque language and the culture: each one's age, relevance and rea-

sons why their presence is so meaningful are frequently mentioned. The press coverage of the anthropologist Barandiaran on the day he ran kilometer 92 in the first *Korrika* of 1980, the fact that he endured the cold and rain of a harsh December morning at the age of 91, is more powerful than many articles on the commitment to take euskara into the public sphere. His presence is also a text about continuity, since different generations could identify with different moments in Barandiaran's life. Some could even remember when they began working with him on the archaeological sites in the caves of Santimamiñe in Bizkaia and in the study of the dolmens in different mountain sites.

These examples of elders carrying the *testigo* project a visual image of the continuity of euskara, and participants in *Korrika* experience the past inserted in the present. The leading role of children points to the future, carried out in the constant movement of *Korrika* and of the witness, symbolizing the move to spread the Basque language through every kilometer of Euskalerría.

4. THE MUGA-BORDER OPPOSITION

One of the main strategies to emphasize spatial continuity resides in the *muga*-border opposition. In *korrika* the word *muga* is used whenever reference is made to the geographic limits of the territory of Iparralde and Hegoalde, and border or frontier when it is necessary to carry out some formalities to ensure crossing or when problems arise.

4.1. The *muga* in tradition

The word *muga* refers to the territorial dividing lines that since ancient times were drawn in Euskalerría to delimit the extension of private and communal property (Barandiaran O.C., 1982, I:173). The most important lines were those delineating the communal lands of a village, those running between two or more communities and those that signaled the division of land where conflicts and disputes had arisen over ownership or use.

The boundary marker is engraved with the name of the village, and small stones are placed besides it in order to help it stand out from its surroundings and to act as witnesses. Documents about these markings date as far back as 1568.

The use of markers takes on particular importance when directed to the drawing of boundaries between communities and all the more when necessary to mediate an agreement about the 'combined usage of pasture by two or more towns or valleys for each of the contracting parties'flocks of sheep.' (Fairén Guillén, 1955: 507). Significant agreements were signed between valleys of the Pyrenees long before the formation of the Spanish and French states. One of the most important is that agreement ritualized every year on July 13, between the local authorities of the Roncal and Baretous valleys, on the Spanish and French sides respectively, and known as the 'Tribute of the three cows'. Detailed docu-

mentation exists for as far back as 1375, although it is popular belief that the agreement goes further back in time.

In popular folklore, the *muga* has achieved legendary status. The use of markers is considered sacred, and moving a boundary marker is held to be a punishable offence. Various stories tell of an individual who, having changed the position of the stones, wanders about unable to find place or rest, even after death. The only way of repairing the damage is to return the marker to its place.

In traditional Basque culture the act of placing a boundary marker was equivalent to the highly valued deed of giving one's word. In this sense, the stone marker came to define an agreement about spatial limitation, implying the recognition of the existence of a property, be it private or communal. Thus, the stone marker is transformed into a symbol of the given word. It is a permanent, visible record both in space and time. A parallel may be drawn between the stone marker (*mugarri*) that defines boundaries on a physical level and the word that does so on a symbolic level. That word, amplifies its meaning according to the particular language in which it is given: in the case of euskara, as emphasized above, the word is not only a signifier but also an identity marker and a symbol of permanence.

4.2. The establishment and evolution of the border

The border on the other hand, product of a recent political agreement in the present, stands in opposition to the *muga* and must be explained through the historical analysis of the evolution of both in the past. W. A. Douglass referring to the case of the French-Spanish border of the Western Pyrenees, states that even though the Pyrenees constitute a natural barrier, the placement of the border line on the crests of the mountain range violates the ethnic and linguistic unity of the border in general but especially in the Basque case (1978: 39-40). Moreover, along a large stretch of the frontier, the border is superimposed on the *mugak* that have existed for centuries although their existence has been problematic and their distribution has been decided through agreements radically different than those of the border.

The 435 kilometer range of mountains running from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean reaches a width of 140 kilometers in the center, separating the Ebro valley on the South side and the Aquitania plain in the North. This natural delimitation of the border continues along almost two thirds of the fluvial trench. Its economic and social organization is based on the utilization of several valleys arising from the geological formation of the area. Throughout history, social and economic transactions and interchanges were carried out within the context of the valley. The borders of the valley delineated the existence of the inhabitants and constituted their principal form of identification.

In spite of their ecological and economic variety, the valleys were not self-sufficient. Consequently, treaties with other valleys, especially those relating to livestock and in that category, to transhumance, form an important part of the

area's history. Moreover, each valley constituted a political unit that, even in the feudal system, was exempt from obligations so that many valleys functioned like autonomous republics. Even today, despite the development of the modern states of France and Spain, they have been able to maintain something of their independence over their property and the administration of the communal lands. The identity of the valley maintains and is reinforced by some institutions linking several valleys together (Gómez-Ibáñez, 1975: 224-27, 32, 44-45).

The treaties also served as commercial and political instruments, protecting the passage of persons and goods with the goal of promoting commerce within the mountain region. In some cases, peace treaties were made independently of the state powers of France and Spain. There were also cases, in which inhabitants of the valleys refused to take up arms in the service of either France or Spain, basing their refusal on the grounds of their obligations to the medieval *facerías* mentioned above. (Gómez Ibáñez, *Ibid.*: 44-45).

Linguistic continuity is another significant aspect of the relationships between the different valleys. It is based on the extension and reach of the various dialects of euskara that do not coincide with current political divisions (*Ibid.*: 20). Poets have proclaimed this linguistic unity in order to affirm the existing contradiction between cultural continuity and imposed border divisions.

The dividing line established by the Spanish and French States dates from 1659 when representatives of both powers signed the Treaty of the Pyrenees. It was directed principally at ending the conflicts between France and Spain. The exact placement of the border was not stated until the Treaty of Baiona (1856-1866) when it was determined with precision (Descheemaeker, 1941-1945: 242-43). In the majority of cases, the division follows the ancient divisions established between the valleys and sanctioned in the traditional treaties, to the extent that many of the border markers have been recognized as traditional stone markers (*mugarriak*) for more than five centuries (Gómez-Ibáñez, *Ibid.*: 47).

Nevertheless, the border represented an imposition over the *mugak*, resulting from the legal recognition of France and Spain, powers whom throughout history the very inhabitants of those valleys had ignored in the signing of economic agreements or peace treaties. The latter, as mentioned above, were intended precisely to demonstrate the independence of the inhabitants of the valleys from the objectives and acts of war proclaimed and executed by the sovereigns of the respective states.

In the present, the tradition by which the border towns on either side serve as places of political exile (Douglass, 1974: 41), continues. During the Civil War (1936-39) and in the years following the Franco regime, the border populations on the French side played an important role in the history of Basque resistance. The *mugalari*, a name that designates the person with expert knowledge of the possibilities of space and time for crossing the border without being seen, was a highly respected key character, in the border crossings of political refugees and members of clandestine organizations. Concurrently, the existence of the border

and the crossing of it brought together a good number of refugees in Iparralde and the flow of these people acted in turn as a catalyst for the emergence and reinforcement of nationalist sentiment in Iparralde.

In more recent years, increasing conflicts between the police and political refugees and ETA militants in Iparralde have contributed to strengthening the significance of the muga-border opposition by ritualizing the crossing of it, as pointed out by Begoña Aretxaga (1989: 23).

The exposition of historical differences between *muga* and border points to the symbolic significance attributed to both in *korrika*. *Korrika* recognizes the *muga* between territories, for example Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia and between the different valleys on either side of the Pyrenees. At the same time the ritual creates its own system of placing markers (in the relation between stonemarker - given word- of euskara as I have explained) to delineate the concept of a united Euskalerrria, establishing the link between language and territory and visually expressing the social memory of the group. However, it is the crossing of the border in each *korrika* which best expresses the constant effort to abolish the border by recognizing the existence of the traditional limits: those of the *mugak*.

4.3. The crossing of the border-*muga*

From the start of the run, the atmosphere is charged with a mixture of anxiety, worry and expectation. Because it is considered one of the 'hot spots' of the race, it is always possible that there could be problems on the border. At the same time, the conflictive character of the crossing augurs meaningful and outstanding participation as was the case in the fourth *Korrika* in 1985 and is reflected in the field diary:

The atmosphere began to intensify during kilometer 205, having passed through Urrugne, ten kilometers from the border on the French side. The crowd was growing as *Korrika* traversed a bucolic landscape of fields and *baserriak* (farms) where animals were intent on their grazing and oblivious to the passage of the race.

The dominant tone was set by fathers and mothers with children, many of them on their parents' shoulders. Groups of children carried placards with slogans about schooling: "*Ikastola*, the school of the people" and "I want to live in euskara". As we ascended the hill, close to the border, the rhythm slowed and the shouts and cries increased. When the group waiting on the other side of the border came into view, the volume of voices rose, as did the emotional charge being transmitted. The festive sounds of traditional music were heard mixed with cries about the current problematic situation of euskara.

The atmosphere was charged with tension as a young woman who was waiting in the so-called "no-man's land" to receive the *testigo*, was taken by the police to verify her documentation (*Egin*, June 2, 1986: 29) before they would

let her cross the border. Only a few seconds passed, and those present made their protests heard in force. Finally, she collected the *testigo*, a woman voiced a traditional cry called *irintzi*, seven firework rockets were launched in the air and *Korrika* crossed the border to a background of shouts and music. On the Spanish side it was received by people with banners and others who joined the race. On the French side, the participants, political exiles among them, watched with nostalgia until the silhouettes of the runners disappeared into the countryside. It was five o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday June 2. Through the ritualization of the existence of the *muga*, a symbolic attempt had been made to abolish the border. For one moment, the metaphor of Basque unity was made reality.

In this paper I have discussed different strategies used in the elaboration of the present identity of Basque society within the framework of ritual, in which the potential of bodily performances to store and express social memory emerges clearly. As I have stated at the beginning, these manifestations appear within the framework of Basque radical nationalism in the midst of conflicting situations about new distributions of political power. The configuration of strategies to erase discontinuity and spatial divisions seems naive when one thinks of the political powers of France and Spain and of the dominance of French and Spanish languages. What then is the purpose of all these efforts?

There is no one answer but several possible interpretations. When facing extremely difficult situations in the attempt to reinstate euskara as the only language of Euskalerría or even to stop its decline, it appears that recurrence to its unknown origins stresses its value and places it on another level of meaning. As a whole, rather than an act of strength, it is a demonstration of powerlessness. It is the recognition of the power of imposed structures and the incapacity to fight against them at the everyday, ordinary level. By ritualizing the utopia, people at least experience the metaphor of Basque unity. However, its real power, in my opinion, lies beyond the aims of the ritual and myth selected. It resides in elaborating a contemporary text about the fear different groups might have concerning the imposition of structures which appear foreign to them and whose far-reaching effects are not well known. As such, it reveals the fear of losing accumulated knowledge stored in the group's social memory which is valued as a contribution to the maintenance of its fragile entity. In this respect, *Korrika* carries a message of relevance beyond the Basque situation where it emerges.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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