

‘Everybody’s gotta be somewhere’. Northernness and Southernness in the European Imagination, and in the Basque Country

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Egilea, artikulua honen bidez, irakurleari “iparraldea” eta “heg oaldea” estereotipoei heldu ahal izateko bide emango dioten ideia orokor batzuetan orientatzen saiatzen da, hala era generikoan nola espezifikoki Euskal Herriko kasuari dagokionez. Epe luzerako ikuspuntu diakroniko bat planteatzen du eta antzinako literaturaren adibideak zein literatura modernoari dagozkienak biltzen ditu. Era berean, egileak arazo mota hau aztertzen dutenei tokiko gizarte errealtateei behar den arreta jartzea gomendatzen die, bai eta nortasun geokulturalaren inguruko baieztapen guztietan antzeman litezkeen berezitasun erretorikoei erreparatzea ere.

Giltza-Hitzak: Nortasun geokulturala. Bidaia literatura. Iparraldea eta hegoaldea.

El artículo trata de orientar al lector en unas ideas generales que le permitan abordar los estereotipos de “norte” y “sur” tanto de modo genérico como con referencia específica a lo vasco. Plantea una perspectiva diacrónica a largo plazo y se recogen ejemplos de la literatura antigua y moderna, así como de la estética, la ciencia política y la literatura de viajes. A la vez el autor alienta a los estudiosos de este tipo de problemas a prestar la debida atención a las realidades sociales locales y a las peculiaridades retóricas detectables en toda aseveración acerca de la identidad geocultural.

Palabras Clave: Identidad geocultural. Literatura de viajes. Norte y sur.

L'article tente d'orienter le lecteur vers des idées générales qui lui permettent d'aborder les stéréotypes de «nord» et de «sud» aussi bien de façon générique qu'en tant que référence spécifique au basque. Il expose une perspective diachronique à long terme et recueille des exemples de la littérature ancienne et moderne, ainsi que de l'esthétique, de la science politique et de la littérature de voyages. L'auteur encourage également les spécialistes de ce type de problèmes à se soucier des réalités sociales locales et des particularités rhétoriques décelables dans toute assertion concernant l'identité géoculturelle.

Mots Clés: Identité géoculturelle. Littérature de voyages. Nord et sud.

1. INTRODUCTION

Orientation is important to people. The historian of religions Mircea Eliade argued that, verticality and equilibrium being fundamental features of *homo erectus* that differentiated the species from its historical predecessors, the tendency of humans to situate themselves in terms of sky and earth, or left and right, follow instinctively, and constitute primary elements of belief and religiosity (Eliade, 1979: vol. I, part 1, *Orientalio*). The concepts of 'left' and 'right', the spatial distribution of this world and others in such terms, and the beliefs and practices attached to them in Antiquity and Medieval times, have been studied by Jacques le Goff and by Soviet folklorists (Le Goff, 1982: 48-56; Needham: 1973).

The concepts of 'North', 'South', 'East' and 'West' – and the series of climatic, ethnographic, political, ideological and religious significations attached to these concepts – have received more desultory attention. We have a stimulating and now famous critique of theories of Eastness – Edward Said's *Orientalism* – which developed out of and also fuelled conceptualisations of world history in terms of centre and periphery, but nevertheless served to reinforce existing pre-conceptions of Westness. Despite his insistence that the creation of the idea of the Orient was a product of particular relations between knowledge and power in the service of particular interests at a particular time, Said considered Eastness as a perennial construct of 'the West' since Sophocles. And because of his insistence on the relationship between modernity, knowledge and the rational, he ignored the role of the religions or the irrational as possible foundation stones for geographically-ordered beliefs about the other. The non-specificity that *Orientalism* borrows from the Orientalists it seeks to criticise and label nevertheless made his theory interesting to students of other parts of the world: we now have books about *Celticism*, *Balkanism*, *Occidentalism* and other *-isms*. (Brown, 1996; Carrier, 1995; Todorova, 1997) As one of these regional 'ism-ists', Terence Brown, has remarked, studying theories of geographical essentialism in terms of hegemony and cultural power imbalance has advantages but also disadvantages:

It would bring out the parallel with other such cultural confrontations elsewhere in the world but by the same token it would leave little room for the question to which extent these relations were specifically determined by the perceived *Celtic* nature of the peripheries involved (Brown, 1996: 17).

Very much the same caveats must apply to any attempts to document and evaluate theories of *Northness* and *Southness*. They will seek out and privilege the general affirmation, as if it were part of a general and probably sinister trend. They will offer 'schismatic moments' in European thought, handy for teaching purposes but difficult to sustain over more than a handful of texts; and while they criticise earlier conceptions of geographical or climatic difference, they may not leave enough room for the difference between differences.

I nevertheless believe that a long-term diachronic perspective is useful, if only because in thinking about Northernness and Southernness in history and

anthropology we need to be aware of frames of reference other than our own in time as well as space.¹ But also we must be careful in overrating these conceptions' own claims to universality, and absolutising the generalisation of past writers and thinkers: Historical phenomena do not emerge from the past like a child from the belly of its mother. Societies and ages select from their heritages (Le Goff, 1982: 59-60).

The categories of North and South may be considered as subject to the following paradoxical status. On the one hand, they are both clearly *relative* – in the sense of needing to be defined according to the other points of the compass and according to the position of the observer. Consider, for instance, the Oxford English Dictionary definitions of the terms: “the point or direction to the left of a person facing east”; and “The point or direction opposite north”. It is rare to find relativism in such bare-faced a form in reference works (*Oxford Paperback*, 1990: 553, 780).

On the other hand, they can be ranged equally clearly among the *oldest* and most *basic* categories according to which identity and character have been conferred. What follows is barely the beginning of a history of these conceptions – such a work would take years of research – but a short orientative introduction to ideas about orientation and character which I believe to have been especially influential, at least in European history. The focus is on a few key thinkers of Antiquity and the Enlightenment, and should be understood in the context of the disclaimers I have already put forward. I will then turn to trace and consider some echoes of these changing conceptions in the context of Europeanness and more particularly of Basqueness positioned within European symbolic geography.

2. THE EUROPEAN TRADITION

For Herodotus and most ancient Greek writers who followed him (e.g. Aristotle), Europe is associated with the North and it is cold, wet and infertile, in stark contrast to Egypt which is the opposite of all these things. Its geography is indeterminate: ‘accurate information is available up to the bald people, but no one knows enough about what lies to the north of them to speak with confidence, because the mountains are so tall that they form an insurmountable barrier’ (IV:25), ‘the land beyond the Ister seems to be vast and desolate’ (V:9) according to the Scythians the air ‘is filled with feathers, ‘which stop them either seeing or travelling over more of the continent.’ (IV:31). As Scythia is treeless, you have to make a fire using the victim’s bones when you conduct sacrifices. (IV:61). The Scythians drink the blood of their victims (IV:64) and smoke cannabis (IV:75-6). They are ‘absolutely set against adopting customs imported from anyone else, especially Greeks.’

The Thracians are nearer to Greece than the Scythians, but they uphold manifestly non-Greek values. They

1. Jahoda (1999) offers some powerful demonstrations in favour of this approach.

(...) consider it best not to work, and working the land is regarded as the most dishonourable profession. The best way to make a living, in their judgement, is off the sparks of war (V:6).

According to the Thracians, the land beyond the Ister is infested by bees, and that is why it is impossible to travel further inland. Personally, I find this story implausible, because bees appear to be intolerant of the cold. In fact I think it is the cold that has stopped people from inhabiting these northern regions (V:10).²

As François Hartog has shown, this conception of the North fits into a symmetrical pattern of thinking: the world is organised symmetrically on either side of an equator dividing the Mediterranean. Not only is it cold in the north and warm in the south, but antiquity, wisdom and customs are distributed according to this divide: Egypt is rich in agriculture, history and arcane knowledge; Scythia is young, wild and ignorant, Scythia is naturally irrigated by rivers; Egypt by human engineering and royal power (Hartog, 1988: 18-19). It is important to bear in mind that Herodotus did not offer as a result a 'physical' approach to human character. In other words people in the North are not born that way, but rather the *nomoi* (that is, the constituted practices) of peoples are affected by climate (Thomas, 2000: 102-134).

Herodotus's Scythians, together with the Celts (who appear slightly later in Greek historiography, in the works of Ephorus of Cyme, Diodorus Siculus), form for the later Roman geographers and historians what J.B. Rives has termed 'conceptual predecessors' in their descriptions of Northern peoples. The Germans for the Romans, just as the Scythians for the Greeks, 'represented the antithesis of civilisation as they saw it'; but at the same time their simplicity is subject to idealisation. One should be careful not to exaggerate the continuity, but at the same time it is that a number of elements characteristic of the latter were ascribed to the former by Julius Caesar and then by Tacitus (1999:18-27).

Caesar wrote this about the Germans: they 'are not agriculturalists, and live principally on milk, cheese and meat'; they 'regard it as their greatest glory to lay waste as much as possible of the land around them and to keep it uninhabited' (I.2). 'The Germans still endure the same life of poverty and privation as before, without any change in their diet or clothing' in contrast to the Gauls, who

(...) through living near the Roman province and becoming acquainted with sea-borne products, are abundantly supplied with various commodities. Gradually accustomed to inferiority and defeated in many battles, they do not even pretend to compete with the Germans in bravery (I.2).

Caesar's comparison of the Gauls with the Germans is understood in terms of North and South, not East and West; commerce with the South had made them degenerate.³ A hundred and fifty years later, Tacitus took up a number of these

2. I have used the translation by Robin Waterfield: Herodotus, *The Histories*. Oxford, 1998.

3. Hitler was to lean on this trope, when, in *Mein Kampf*, he was to number the French among 'the degenerate peoples of the South'.

Scythian-Celtic-German stereotypes when composing his *Germania* in 98 AD: the Germans are warlike, disdainful of agriculture and individual property; they are now also alcoholics, or at least unable to hold their drink; however, they are also monogamous (like the Scythians, but unlike the Thracians) and not much interested in money. Tacitus was partly taking over older stereotypes; partly explaining why the Germans were not only able to be conquered by the Romans but deserved to be so; and also partly attributing to these newer Northernners characteristics which he believed to have belonged formerly to the Romans (simplicity, hardiness, honesty in sexual mores) but at which luxury and corruption were eating away.

It is through an understanding of such patterns in classical geography that we can also interpret Strabo's famous description of Iberia, and his intriguing mention of the Vasconians. Strabo was relatively confident that 'the first part of Europe is the Western, namely Iberia'. First, but not necessarily best. For

(...) Northern Iberia, in addition to its ruggedness, is not only extremely cold, but lies next to the ocean, and thus has acquired its characteristic of inhospitality and aversion to intercourse with other countries; consequently, it is an exceedingly wretched place to live in. Such, then, is the character of the northern parts; but almost the whole of Southern Iberia is fertile [3.I.2].⁴

The southernmost inhabitants, the Turdetanians, 'are ranked as the wisest of the Iberians'; the northernners, among whom the Vasconians are only one, are savages:

(...) The quality of intractability and wildness in these peoples has not resulted solely from their engaging in warfare, but also from their remoteness; ... they are difficult to communicate with, they have lost the instinct of sociability and humanity. They have this feeling of intractability and wildness to a less extent now, however, because of the peace and of the sojourns of the Romans among them. But wherever such sojourns are rare the people are harder to deal with and more brutish; and if some are so disagreeable merely as a result of the remoteness of their regions, it is likely that those who live in the mountains are still more outlandish [3.III.8].

That Strabo attributes characteristics to the Vascones on the basis of their northernness has been argued convincingly by Juan José Sayas Abengochea (1999: 158-159). That he uses tropes of barbarism and civilisation is also true. But 'northernness' is a relative concept: the same tropes could be and were applied to completely different peoples. Here is Diodorus of Sicily on the Bretons: they are simple in customs and completely alien to the duplicity and misbehaviour of our contemporaries: their lifestyle is modest and not comparable with the luxury engendered by riches (*Histories*, V, 21); according to Strabo they are so simple that, despite having an abundance of milk, they have no knowledge of cheese-making (IV.5.2); they are ignorant in matters of gardening or other agricultural tasks (ibid.) (cf. Thollard, 1987).

4. *The Geography of Strabo*, with an English translation by Horace Leonard Jones, 8 vols. London - New York, 1923, II, 3. Note that in Strabo's conception the Pyrenees form the eastern side of Iberia and run north-south (3.I.3).

The remarks of these ancient authors are not unimportant for modern European ethnography. The manuscript of Tacitus's *Germania* was rediscovered in the fifteenth century, and used by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, soon to be elected Pope as Pius II, to 'prove' to the recalcitrant chancellor of the archbishop of Mainz that the Germans were poor and barbarous. A few years later, another Italian, keen to rouse German support for a crusade against the Turks, cited passages showing the Germans' innate valour (Rives, 1999: 71). Herodotus, although criticised already by reputed Latin authors, was valued by sixteenth-century historiographers whose enquiries into the strange peoples of the New World benefited from his comparative method.⁵ And the idea of Northernness equating with barbarity appears in all kinds of writings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1670, Francesco Severini published a life of a Venerable Monk Jeremiah, originating from Wallachia (the southern province of today's Romania):

It would not be astonishing to find gold amidst the hot sands of Africa, baked and baked again by the sun; but it is almost unimaginable that it should be formed in the north where the ice and winds are terrible (Severini, 1670: 1).

Northernness is associated not just with coldness but with wildness and – what was the most important mark of otherness for this author – non-Catholicism. The lands north of the Danube were seen in the same way by an eighteenth-century poet of Istanbul, for whom the cold weather was proof for him of 'the permanent inferiority of the provinces'. In France in the same period, the Abbé du Bos, the author of what Tzvetan Todorov has called a pioneering 'project for a semiotic typology of the arts', wrote that

The art of Pantomime would be more difficult to introduce successfully among the Northern nations of Europe, for their national actions are not especially eloquent, nor sufficiently marked to be easily recognised, when seen without hearing the discourse to which it must needs form the natural accompaniment (Du Bos, 1746: III, 284; cf. Todorov, 1982: 130).

Du Bos's remarks were picked up and cited by Etienne, Abbé de Condillac (1715-1780), a philosopher interested in studying language as but one of a number of forms of human signification to show that they are all related and inherent to man: but also that mankind has progressed from using physical gesture to precise speech acts. Condillac argued that the passion of the ancients for spectacle is being replaced by our own precision in discourse. Stylistic precision developed much earlier among the peoples of the North. On account of their cold and phlegmatic temperament, they abandon the more easily anything related to the language of action. Elsewhere the influence of this [gestural] manner of communicating one's thoughts is conserved longer (Condillac, 1746: 309-310). Condillac's ideas on Northernness as a factor in contributing to linguistic and literary development were taken up by Mme de Staël, who (following also Montesquieu's favourable remarks about the North) wrote that

5. Momigliano 1958. More generally on the way European ethnographers could not describe peoples without reference to classical frameworks, see Pagden 1993.

The northern nations, while they caused to disappear for a time the arts and letters which reigned in the South, acquired nonetheless some of the knowledge possessed by the vanquished; and the inhabitants of more than half of Europe, hitherto strangers to civilised society, began to enjoy its benefits. [...] The enervated inhabitants of the South, mixing with the men of the North, borrowed from them a sort of energy, and gave to them a sort of suppleness which could serve to complete the intellectual faculties (De Staël, 1800: 189-190).

According to de Staël, Northern literature was characterised by 'a certain proudness of spirit, a detachment from life, arising from the harshness of the soil and the sadness of the sky, which rendered slavery unbearable'. Other causes included a disinclination to allegory; 'the baleful sentiment of the incompleteness of their destiny'; 'a sort of uniformity' 'which its critics confound with monotony'; 'a respect for women unknown to the people of the South'; Protestantism and the possibilities of human perfectibility it offers; a rejection of superstition (ibid: ch. IX – "De la littérature du Nord", 255-259). Vices were being transformed into virtues, but and at the same time the classical model still had to be referred back to as a framework for understanding ethnographic and literary difference.

It has been argued by several writers that the use of the North-South distinction as *the* major dichotomy in European symbolic geography gradually waned through the eighteenth century, in favour of an East-West dichotomy which incorporated some new elements but essentially took over many concrete images of the differentiation between barbarism and civilisation or primitive virtue versus corrupt sophistication (Lemberg, 1985; Wolff, 1994). There are certainly attempts to define an East-West divide in this period which have no roots in antiquity. Russia, which as late as the 1760s and 1770s was being treated in histories of 'the North' was now part of something called 'the East', or even sometimes Eastern Europe (Lacombe, 1762; Schlözer, 1771-1785; Thunmann, 1774). But we should not exaggerate the speed with which intellectual investigation corrodes stereotypes. Obscure philosophers, linguists and historians worried about the East of Europe – but 'Eastern Europe' did not even appear in a geography manual published for the use of pupils at Eton school in England in 1830s (Arrowsmith, 1831). The idea of a literature of Southern Europe, on the other hand, was advanced by Sismondi in his influential work of 1813 on that topic (Sismondi, 1813; translated into English by Roscoe 1823). As late as 1880, the Russian critic P.V. Anekov referred to Russian visitors to Paris as 'travellers from the North' (cited in Kramer, 1988: 16).

Particularly important for the development not just of an increasingly positive series of images of the North, but also for the reinforcement of the North-South dichotomy as a whole, was the transplantation of these conceptions to a different cultural environment, namely that of America. In 1785, in a letter to the Marquis de Chastellux, Thomas Jefferson listed what he saw as the principal distinctions between North and South (O'Brien, 1979: 3, cited in Stadius, "Southern Perspectives"):

North:	South:
Cool	Fiery
Sober	Voluptuary
Laborious	Indolent
Independent	Unsteady
Jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others	Zealous for their own liberties, but trampling on those of others
Interested	Generous
Chicaning	Candid
Superstitious and hypocritical in their religion	Without attachment or pretensions to any religion but that of the heart

Although the American political and cultural contexts gave different kinds of meaning to these stereotypes, their substantive content and their underpinning through a psychological reading of theories of climate operated in the same way, and possibly even served to reinforce the credibility of thinking in such broad geographical terms. Put more simply, if northerners were still northerners and southerners still southerners across the Atlantic too, then Northernness and Southernness seemed all the more valid as general concepts.

Northernness and Southernness can be traced through the nineteenth century in the works of a series of writers. For example, the division of Europe into north and south provides a basic referential framework for the most important British and French historians of the century, Thomas Carlyle and Jules Michelet. Carlyle opened his best-selling series of 1840 lectures *On heroes and hero worship* with a lecture on 'the Hero as Divinity' in Scandinavian mythology. His admiring vision of the latter involved a recasting, in a much more favourable light, of the aesthetic and psychological traits outlined by the thinkers of the previous century whose work we have already touched upon: elemental responses to nature, sincerity, lack of artifice or deviousness:

The primary characteristic of this old Northland Mythology I find to be Impersonation of the visible workings of Nature. Earnest simple recognition of the workings of Physical Nature, as a thing wholly miraculous, stupendous and divine. What we now lecture of as Science, they wondered at, and fell down in awe before, as Religion (Carlyle, 1840: 69).

And in 1854, during the Crimean War, in other words when the peoples of Eastern Europe had once more been put in the forefront of public attention in the West as the dissolution of European Turkey became a serious political possibility, Jules Michelet began writing a series of *légendes*, examples of heroic figures from different European countries. He conceived his project as a kind of modern, popular Book of Instruction, with Plutarch and other humanist models in mind. His focus turned particularly to Poles and Romanians: in the latter case,

he seized upon the Danube as a symbol. "Seeking the *unity* of the Danube, its *genius* and its soul, I wanted to catch in these divers melodies the plaint and the sigh of the great captive river" (Cadot, 1980: 100-117). Michelet depicted it in the rich romantic colours of picturesque, deserted melancholy:

The harsh softness of the songs of the Serbian shepherd, the ferryman's monotone rhythm, the refrain of the Romanian and the *raia* of Bulgaria, all is confounded in a vast plain, this is your sigh, o river of captivity! ... The tide varies ceaselessly, the deep never varies. Romania, from Trajan to the present day, stays true to herself, fixed in her primitive genius (Michelet, 1853: 250).

Moreover, Michelet explicitly uses the sufferings of the inhabitants of the Danubian region as a reproach to the indifferent West, who has apparently cynically failed to come to their aid: 'They call you barbarian. It is they who made you so. There is nothing inhuman in your genius.' And he called his series of portraits of these emerging nations, whom we usually think of today as inhabiting the East, *Democratic Legends of the North*.

Two generations later, D.H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy* (1916) is a complete mediation on a difference which was still emblematic for the way he and his generation thought: "The imperial procession no longer crosses the mountains, going South. That is almost forgotten, the road has almost passed out of mind. But it is still there, and its signs are standing" (Lawrence, 1985: 3). In this passage, Lawrence treats the idea of the North and the South as some kind of vestigial tradition, which Westerners are no longer consciously constructing but which nevertheless affects their outlook and their essence. The comparative neglect of the subject in the theoretical literature contrasts surprisingly with the proliferation of notions of North and South in the informal public arena, in many types of discourse produced in many kinds of place and circumstance. Moreover, the production of a series of academic treatises laying bare the constructed nature of the North-South identity axis is unlikely to dispel the ubiquity of these conceptions with any great speed.

It is equally unlikely that UEFA officials read Herodotus and Strabo in training college. Yet they handle Meridionalist language with great ease, as could be seen in the altercations between responsible parties following incidents of street violence between British fans and Turkish kebab vendors during the European Championships in Belgium in 2000. Gerhard Auger, the chief executive of UEFA, told British Home Secretary Jack Straw in no uncertain terms that

(...) you mustn't provoke the Turks. I don't have to explain to you the mentality of the people of southern Europe. If you behave in a certain way to people in Turkey or Greece, then they will react in a very different way from people in other countries (Goodboy, Lister & Harvey, 2000: 1).

Straw's views on the mentality of southern Europeans were not reported. But that such conceptions of mentality proliferate among the British police force then under his control, is witnessed by a curious article in a publication entitled *Street Action Bulletin*, edited in collaboration with Westminster City Council. The article,

entitled "Return to Devil's Acre?", questions the wisdom of the imminent introduction of twenty-four-hour drinking licences in Britain. Historical evidence is cited to show that Britons, being northerners, have never been able to hold their alcohol in a relaxed manner, and therefore that the liberalisation measure will have a negative effect on public behaviour:

Most northern European countries have an historical fascination with alcohol at odds with the psychology of our southern cousins. They opt for alfresco dining and cappuccino, whilst we eat fast food and drink standing up. [...] London's history is peppered with situations where relaxed control over drinking has resulted in the deterioration of its environment ("Return", 2003: 5).

These two examples in fact illustrate quite well how a single idea (in this case Southernness) can be interpreted in completely different ways – the UEFA official is trying to argue that southerners are naturally prone to violence and easily provoked, and that a northerner like Straw is behaving irresponsibly by ignoring this fundamental trait; whereas the bulletin author believes that it is northerners who are dangerously anti-social, in contrast to relaxed and tasteful southerners. But both statements explicitly claim that contemporary social behaviour patterns can be explained by reference to essential, enduring, trans-historical values, ignorance of which is not only foolish but positively dangerous.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR BASQUE IDENTITY

To demonstrate that surprisingly ancient conceptions of northernness and southernness are alive and well in surprisingly mundane discursive locations is not, then, an impossible task. To understand how these generalised ideas influence and impact upon conceptions of Basque identity through the ages is rather more difficult, particularly for someone who claims no expertise in the subject.⁶ In a field such as classical geography, where relatively strict rules of description and correspondence to norms operate, we can relate particular observations such as those of Strabo cited above and trace them to a source. In other cases this can prove considerably more elusive. We know that the French revolutionaries considered that the Basques are

(...) a new people, although ancient, a people of pastors and navigators who have never been either slave or master, whom Caesar was never able to conquer in the course of his revolutions, and whom the despotism of our despots was unable to submit to the yoke of the Intendants: ... A sonorous and richly figurative language is considered to be the seal confirming their origin and the heritage transmitted by their ancestors. But they have their priests, and the priests use their idiom to fanatise them.⁷

This text contains elements common to descriptions of exotic peoples in the late Enlightenment age, but nothing at all indicating that such a descrip-

6. See Martínez Salazar 1995; for the nineteenth century there is the much more detailed work of Sánchez-Prieto, 1993.

7. Extrait du rapport du comité de Salut Public sur les idiomes, An. II [1794], in Bidart 1991: 156.

tion is a slave to historical conceptions of Basque geography. On the other hand, the contemporaneous British officer who described the Basque provinces as "free and prosperous" and the Basque people as 'these northern Spaniards, ever active, hardy, generous and free, and the best soldiers and sailors of the peninsula', clearly is working with some kind of prior geocultural framework in which he can place the Basques (Jardine, 1789: II, 7). In other texts, such as Peyron's *Nouveau voyage en Espagne fait en 1777 et 1778*, the attempt to identify dichotomies and opposing elements is applied to the entire Spanish nation.

They received from the Goths and their ancestors frankness, probity and courage, virtues characteristic of the former. From the Romans and also from the Goths, they have their patriotic fanaticism, their love of grand things, and their superstition (Peyron, 1782: II, 140).

What is particularly interesting about this text for our purposes is not any particular focus on Basque identity. (Incidentally, the attribute of hard-workingness commonly assigned to the Basques, especially after it came to be consecrated by Humboldt, is here ascribed to the Catalans – *ibid*: II, 141). It is rather the way in which the alleged characteristics of the nation in question are divided into two, but this division is not imagined spatially, but rather genealogically. Contradictory elements in the way they are can be put down to mixed ancestry, rather than the effect of location or climate.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, in his much better-known *Diary of his Basque journey from 1801*, seemed to have a pretty clear idea about who the Basques were, and explained this way of being by reference to their Southernness:

The men and women of Biscay are an infinitely work-happy, nimble and active people. In Spain they are remarked upon rather for their strong and earnest industriousness than for their agility. The Basque character must be considered distinctly, as they are to be found in much fewer numbers and in individual groups among the Gascons, and live in permanent conflict with them. Here and above all in northern Spain the feminine sex performs a much greater attentiveness than in Castile and in the South, because it is more useful, and if deep and heartfelt empathy ever appears in Spain, it arises therefrom (Humboldt, 1918: 381).

In contrast, perhaps the next most famous writer to portray the Basques after Humboldt, Pierre Loti, used the opposite set of characteristics, the 'southern' ones, when he looked southwards from France towards the Euskalleria in the 1890s:

The sea, in the distance, gleams like a band of blue mother of pearl. There are southern, almost African, tinges to the mountains, with their outline absolutely clear against the sky.

[To the north] some heavy sound, blackening, noisily discordant, idiotically hurried, passes fast, fast, shakes the ground, troubles this delicious calm with a shrill whistling and an iron clanking: the railway! ... The railway, a greater leveller than time, propagating the base ideal of industry and modern ideas (Loti, 1930: 2-3; 5-6).

Here the Basques are southern with reference not to ethnographic observation, but in terms of meridional landscape features and in contrast to vile northern mechanised industry. Yet another example of how within the same general network of stereotypes, different writers make room for their own agendas and their own scripts. Meanwhile, the fact the railways had made possible a greater degree of contact between North and South did not lead to a disappearance of these generalised images: Loti of course overlooked the irony that it was precisely the development of the railway that enabled not only the Basque country to become better known to French authors, but for the latter's books about it to sell better across France. It is relevant, for instance, that Taine's *Voyage aux eaux des Pyrénées* (Paris, 1855) was one of the first books in the publisher Hachette's series *Bibliothèque du chemin de fer*. A discourse about the undiscoveredness of the Basque country (or of the less populated South generally) could only really function in the railway age.

I have so far taken little account of the literary, and more specifically rhetorical, dimensions of the analysis of representations of North and South. But these can also play a role, both in the degree to which such representations are considered absolute or relative, and in terms of the more general hermeneutic frameworks that narrative techniques and other rhetorical devices lend to such representations. To discuss the example most immediately at hand, Humboldt's famous remarks about the Basques were made in a private diary. This, as well as the reputation of their author, has lent them prestige and an air of authenticity.

But when, on the other hand, ideas of North and South appear in a complex and polished travel narrative such as Théophile Gautier's consummately-composed *Voyage en Espagne* (1845), their function begins to change. Here is Gautier writing about Bordeaux on his way south:

[T]he inhabitants find it hard to fill their city: they do all they can to appear numerous, but all their southern turbulence is insufficient in peopling these disproportionate buildings; and the lofty windows seldom have curtains, and the grass grows desolately in these great courtyards.

Gautier here treats the imputed meridionality of the inhabitants of Bordeaux as a physical quality akin to the density, hue and saturation of colours, which may be applied in the composition and circumscription of an intentionally-controlled *tableau*. At the same time, the alleged inadequacy of the southerners in performing their authorially prescribed role – their failure to people the urban landscape with sufficient gestural activity – itself becomes part of the farce of aesthetic functionalism which Gautier had criticised from a theoretical point of view in the preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* several years earlier.⁸

8. "No, imbeciles! No! Fools and cretins, a book will not make a plate of soup; a novel is not a pair of boots; a sonnet is not a syringe; a drama is not a railway - those forms of civilisation which have caused humanity to march on the road to progress.

By all the bowels of the Popes, past present and future, no! Ten thousand times no!

You cannot make a hat out of a metonymy, and you cannot make a simile in the form of a bedroom slipper, and you cannot use an antithesis as an umbrella ... an ode is, I have a feeling, too light a garment for the winter...", Gautier 1835: preface, cited in Berlin 1996: 200-201.

Just as he was sceptical about the possibility of establishing a clear causal relationship between forms of expression and social function, so Gautier here implicitly questions the idea of southernness as an absolute value precisely by taking literally the notion of 'southern attributes' as adding 'local colour' to an allegedly neutral backdrop.

When Gautier is writing about entering Spain, the *apparent* usage of the oppositions we have been discussing is straightforward:

[H]alf the bridge across the Bidassoa belongs to France, the other half to Spain; you may have a foot in each country, which is highly majestic: on the one hand a gendarme grave, a worthy and serious, and beaming at his rehabilitation by Eduard Orliac in Curmer's *Français*; on the other hand, the Spanish soldier, dressed in green, enjoying the soft indolence of repose with a beatific nonchalance on the green grass (Gautier, 2001: 9, 17).

But what Gautier is surely doing here is exploring one of the key tensions present in nearly all travel writing, that between the empirical observation and the generalisation produced from it and rhetorically justified by it. Standing on bridges and attempting to describe fundamental (behavioural, but also here explicitly political) differences on the basis of the view is not really particularly majestic: from a cognitive point of view, it is in fact ridiculous. Gautier, knowing this, seeks to illustrate this difference by using that favoured mid-nineteenth century figure of ridicule, the customs soldier, as the emblem of national identity, and the synecdoche to represent the difference between North and South. The comedy of the soldiers, thereby becomes a serious comment on the empirical method.

This point about Gautier's aesthetic relativisation of the idea of South may become clearer if we contrast it with one of the boldest general statements about the role of geographical location in determining historical destiny to be found in the corpus of nineteenth-century writings about the Basques. Charles Henry Brigham (1820-1879), a puritan minister from New England who published an article on the Basque country in the *North American Review* in 1858, drew the following conclusions after a short *passe en revue* of the Basque history and culture:

The south-western corner of every land seems to retain the longest its original rudeness, and to keep a rough and subdued people when the other races have been incorporated and accustomed to civilised habits (Brigham, 1858: 211; Spanish version in Sánchez-Prieto, 1993: 627).

In order to prove his point, he develops a series of analogies between the Basques and the peoples of Canaan, Calabria, Cornwall and Texas. Brigham, who served as Minister of Taunton, Massachusetts in the 1860s and 1870s, is like many of his Protestant contemporaries in that he did not seek to relate his own understanding of otherness to a theory of representation, but rather appeals to the history of a series of places which, although geographically distant from one another, may be strung together on a providential chronological line running from biblical times to the contemporary transformation of the United States, and

from east to west. In short: whereas Gautier entertains a comedy of scepticism about the possibility of empirically observed phenomena (whose richness in generating sense-perception he continually emphasises) to produce meaning, then Brigham comes with a very strong series of ideas about the way destiny may be read from historical geography, which it is the role of the Basques merely to confirm, and not to act against.

A more systematic gathering of information on the Basques than that attempted here by a non-specialist would, I believe, reveal similar manoeuvres at work within a variety of different contexts. It would be stereotyping the stereotypes themselves to assume that the grip they exercise on the imaginations of observers is always iron hard, leaving individuals with neither choice and responsibility for their utterances. The antiquity of the concepts of North and South is matched only by their versatility. Some final questions in conclusion: it would be particularly interesting in the context of Basque Studies to consider a) to what extent can the persistence of stereotypes from classical discourse be read not as the unconscious inheritance of a still dominant tradition, but as a strategy for obtaining authority in a world still tempted by universal explanations? And b) How strongly of are the concepts of North and South specifically related to other sets of opposing pairs (eg industrial – agrarian, mountainous – maritime, traditional – modern, etc), or does their variation and persistence operate independently of these? And this will help us to formulate a third question: if North and South are generally understood not in terms of some abstract values but as metaphors for other cultural practices placed in binary opposition to each other, what are the specific aspects of local spatial imaginings and local discursive elaborations which determine this distribution of metaphoric value? That famous dictum, 'everybody's gotta be somewhere', may be one of the few things that is true both in the North and in the South. But is it true in the Basque country? For if I have been attempting to apprehend understandings of Basqueness by starting out from the more general symbolic geographical concepts of the North and the South, I hope the point I started out with remains valid, namely that such an apprehension may well be useless without a situated historical object, in this case considering the specific predicaments of the Basques. Equal attention must be given to literary form: as the examples of Gautier and Brigham illustrate in particular, we have to understand not only why people continue to appeal to these poles of meaning, but also the rhetorical devices which frame and complicate their statements.

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