

University of Nevada, Reno

**Sport, Nation, Gender: Basque Soccer Madness**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Basque Studies (Anthropology)

by

Mariann Vaczi

Dr. Joseba Zulaika/Dissertation Advisor

May, 2013

Copyright by Mariann Vaczi

All Rights Reserved



University of Nevada, Reno  
Statewide • Worldwide

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the dissertation  
prepared under our supervision by

**Mariann Vaczi**

entitled

**Sport, Nation, Gender: Basque Soccer Madness**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Joseba Zulaika, Advisor

Sandra Ott, Committee Member

Pello Salaburu, Committee Member

Robert Winzeler, Committee Member

Eleanor Nevins, Graduate School Representative

Marsha H. Read, Ph. D., Dean, Graduate School

May, 2013

## Abstract

A centenarian Basque soccer club, Athletic Club (Bilbao) is the ethnographic locus of this dissertation. From a center of the Industrial Revolution, a major European port of capitalism and the birthplace of Basque nationalism and political violence, Bilbao turned into a post-Fordist paradigm of globalization and gentrification. Beyond traditional axes of identification that create social divisions, what unites Basques in Bizkaia province is a soccer team with a philosophy unique in the world of professional sports: Athletic only recruits local Basque players. Playing local becomes an important source of subjectivization and collective identity in one of the best soccer leagues (Spanish) of the most globalized game of the world.

This dissertation takes soccer for a cultural performance that reveals relevant anthropological and sociological information about Bilbao, the province of Bizkaia, and the Basques. Early in the twentieth century, soccer was established as the hegemonic sports culture in Spain and in the Basque Country; it has become a multi-billion business, and it serves as a powerful political apparatus and symbolic capital. This dissertation will explore the social, cultural and political dimensions of soccer in the Spanish Basque area, and explores the interfaces of soccer with globalization, identity construction, discourse, power, political ideologies and gender relations through the specific case of the Basque Athletic Club. Soccer is intimately embedded in Bilbao, and has consequences for macro and micro communities as well as individuals: it represents a people, an ethos, a morality; it structures people's free time, daily interaction and relationships; it affects individual subjectivization. I argue that soccer culture offers fresh insight and new perspectives to the rich social scientific research on the Basques. Key words: soccer culture, ethnography, identity, Basque, Spain

*For my parents*

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Joseba Zulaika of the Center for Basque Studies of the University of Nevada, Reno, for his help, inspiration and enthusiasm about this project. Likewise, I am very grateful to the other members of my Advisory Committee from UNR: Sandra Ott, Robert Winzeler and Eleanor Nevins. Special thanks to my fifth Committee member, Pello Salaburu from the University of the Basque Country, whose help was instrumental to find valuable contacts in Bilbao. Many thanks to the CBS office staff, most notably Kate Camino, and the many visiting scholars with whom I engaged in academic discussions during my stay at the University of Nevada, Reno.

In the Basque Country, I wish to express my gratitude to Athletic Club and its incumbent president Fernando García Macua, who greatly assisted my research by facilitating access to games. I owe special thanks to Athletic Museum director Asier Arrate and Iñaki Azkarraga, who were always most helpful in providing information and contacting informants. I also thank External Relations officer Javier Ucha for his friendly helpfulness. Without being able to mention them all, I wish to extend my greatest gratitude to all Athletic personnel, managers, former presidents and board members, coaches and players who graciously took the time to answer my questions. I especially appreciate the professionalism and seriousness with which they as representatives of Athletic Club treated me. Further thanks to the journalists of the local media who invited me on their shows or otherwise gave my work invaluable publicity.

I think of my friend *Ádám Takács* fondly, who planted the idea of researching Athletic in my head. My fieldwork would have been less productive, and certainly

much less enjoyable, without my *cuadrilla* friends in the old part of town in Bilbao: Mari, Ainhoa, Itzi, Igor and Monica, among others, who made my stay an adventure right from the beginning. And finally but most importantly, I am most grateful to the people of Bilbao and all *Athleticzales* who showed me to their world with great respect, passion and affection; they were truly an anthropologist's pleasure.

## Table of Contents

### Chapter One:

<b>Introduction: Basque Soccer Madness</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Athletic Club and Spanish Soccer	7
1.2 Global Play, Local Desire	10
1.3 “Why Do I Go if All They Do is Lose?”	15
1.4 Basque Soccer Culture: A Road Map	19
1.5 Methodology and Data Analysis	24

### Chapter Two:

<b>“An Englishman Came to Bilbao:” A Social History of Athletic Club</b>	<b>29</b>
2.1 “Alirón, alirón, el Athletic Campeón”	32
2.2 The British-Basque Encounter: Chronicles of a Seduction	38
2.3 Sports, Society and Politics	44
2.4 The Civil War: Athletic in Exile	46
2.5 The Franco Dictatorship	49
2.6 The Post-Franco Era	52
2.7 “Athletic, a Thousand Times Champion”	54

### Chapter Three:

<b>“A Unique Case in the World:” Basque Exceptionalism in Soccer Culture</b>	<b>61</b>
3.1 “We were different. We knew we were different. We were told we were different”	63
3.2 From <i>Bilbainismo</i> to <i>Vasquismo</i> : The Evolution of Identities	70
3.3 “But Can He Play in Athletic?” The Contestation of Identities	76

3.4	From Santimamiñe to San Mamés: The Indigeniety of Bilbao`s Soccer	79
3.5	“To Lose in Order to Win.” The Negative Logic of Subjectivization	81
3.6	Confronting <i>Soccerscape</i> : What is the Future of the Past?	86

#### **Chapter Four:**

	<b>San Mamés: In the Cathedral of Spanish Soccer</b>	<b>88</b>
4.1	San Mamés, a “Quality Space”	92
4.2	The Ritual Cycle of Fandom	99
4.3	Desecration in The Cathedral	112
4.4	San Mamés Barria	118

#### **Chapter Five:**

	<b>Bilbao Catch-22: Passions and Double Binds in Soccer</b>	<b>120</b>
5.1	Apocalyptic Times: the Salvation Game	122
5.2	Bilbao Catch-22: “Protect Me From What I Want”	139
5.3	From Bond to Bind: A Player`s Impasse	135
5.4	Misfits	147
5.5	Million Euro Lesson: Learning to Lose	152

#### **Chapter Six:**

	<b>Magnificent Obsessions: Masculinity, Morality and the Melodramatic Imagination</b>	<b>156</b>
6.1	Cristiano`s Sadness: the Melodramatic Mode of Soccer Narrative	159
6.2	“ <i>Es un Sentimiento</i> .” Soccer as a Lover`s Discourse	162
6.3	Between Good and Evil: Bilbao`s Innocence Neurosis and Moral Occult	175

6.4	The Importance of Being Melodramatic	182
-----	--------------------------------------	-----

### **Chapter Seven:**

#### **Dangerous Liaisons, Fatal Attractions: Erotic Fantasy in Men`s Sports 184**

7.1	The Kiss of Sara Carbonero	185
7.2	“The Face that Launched a Thousand Ships:” Cultural Representations of the <i>Femme Fatale</i>	188
7.3	When in Doubt, Blame the Girlfriend: Sports` Inner Demons	190
7.4	Sexless in Bilbao: The Pichichi Fantasy Model	195
7.5	The Scandal of Seduction	202
7.6	From the “Locked Room” to the “Locker Room” Paradox	210
7.7	The Fantasy and its Disavowal	213

### **Chapter Eight:**

#### **A Matter of Balls: Women and Soccer in the Spanish Basque Context 216**

8.1	<i>Con Dos Cojones</i> , “With Two Balls”: Gendering Action and Initiative in the Spanish Basque Country	219
8.2	Edurne Salsamendi`s Letter: the “Female Apartheid” of Soccer Fandom in Franco`s Spain	220
8.3	“Running Away” in the Spanish Basque Country: Gendered Spaces and Cultural Models	225
8.4	From Membership to Leadership: Ana Urquijo and “the Year of the Apocalypse”	229
8.5	“ <i>Ni Fútbol, ni Femenino</i> .” Hystericising and Othering Women`s Soccer	232
8.6	Privileging Male Success: The Barge Controversy	237

8.7	San Mamés <i>Barria</i> : Kicking Off a New Era?	240
-----	--	-----

### **Chapter Nine:**

	<b>Together and Apart at the Basque Derby: A Prisoner`s Dilemma</b>	<b>242</b>
9.1	Theoretical Approaches to Fan Rivalry	243
9.2	The Basque Rivalry Complex	247
9.3	<i>Burruka, Joko, Jolas</i> : The Performance of Cooperation and Competition	258
9.4	Together and Apart? A Prisoner`s Dilemma	268

### **Chapter Ten:**

	<b>“The Spanish Fury:” A Political Geography of Soccer in Spain</b>	<b>271</b>
10.1	Theory	272
10.2	The Beginnings of the “Spanish Fury:” Race, Ethnicity and National Virility in Spain	276
10.3	Basque and Catalan Nationalists Go to Soccer	279
10.4	“The Dove of Peace is a Ball:” Ideology and Identity Under Franco	282
10.5	“Athletic, Only Spanish Blood:” The Contention Over Purity	285
10.6	Calling Spain “Spain:” When Things Dare Not Speak Their Name	287
10.7	Feeling Spanish: Purity and Danger in <i>la Roja</i>	290
10.8	Schism under the Skin?	292

	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>295</b>
--	-------------------	------------

	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>303</b>
--	---------------------	------------

## Chapter One

### Introduction: Basque Soccer Madness

The May 2009 Cup final was the most spectacular event in Bilbao for twenty-five years—since the last King’s Cup final, when Athletic beat Barcelona, Maradona’s Barcelona. As my plane is taxiing to its parking position, the first thing I see is a giant red-and-white flag covering the façade of Arrivals. As I enter the building in search of a cash machine, I see a big mascot lion in front of a gift shop, dressed in what is the team’s nom de guerre: *rojiblanco*, red and white. Two toddlers hug the lion as their mother takes pictures—both dressed in red and white. By the time the visitor arrives downtown Bilbao, it should be all too obvious where the city’s priorities lie. Thousands of soccer flags and *ikurrinas* (Basque national flags) fly from windows of homes and businesses; fancy boutiques dress their display dolls in red and white, “a color always in fashion;” car saloons cover their luxury vehicles with Athletic flags and scarves; local buses run *Aupa Athletic, Beti Zurekin* (“Let’s go, Athletic, Always with You”) on their front screens; statues in plazas are dressed in *rojiblanco*. Advertisers from Coca Cola through prostitutes to kitchenware stores seem to believe that anything sells with Athletic. Not without reason; in only a few hours, I see Athletic paraphernalia whose revenues would be enough to finance the annual budget of a lower division club.

It was my first day in Bilbao as I came to do preliminary fieldwork for what would become a twenty month long ethnographic project on Basque soccer culture. All I knew about the place was from books and my colleagues at the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, as well as a short stay in San Sebastián-Donostia back in 2004, when I decided to choose the Basque area as the ethnographic

locus of my anthropological fieldwork. After much thinking about what I should focus on for my doctoral research (the education system in the French Basque area? Language policy? Border identities in the European Union? the North American diasporas?), the solution emerged during the winter break of 2008, at 3 am in a sleazy bar in my native Budapest. “Why don’t you research Athletic Bilbao for your dissertation?” a philosopher friend and great sports fan asked. “You know they only play with local Basques, right?” I knew, vaguely; I had never been a soccer fan, but I come from a sport-loving family, and lived a few blocks away from the stadium of the historic Hungarian club that, as Bilbainos would later never fail to tell me, eliminated Athletic on several occasions from European competition: Ferencváros. When a few days later I sheepishly proposed the idea of Athletic to my advisor (strategically co-proposed with one of those more academic sounding projects just in case), I was ready for it to be rejected as frivolous. Why would anyone want to research soccer madness, of all things, in a country with such rich anthropological tradition on “serious” matters as prehistory, traditional culture, language, folklore, and politics? Unexpectedly, my advisor was thrilled. A year later there I was, deployed in Bilbao on its most exuberant day in twenty-five years, elated of course as any first time ethnographer would be, with a research project that now I expected (without knowing much else) was most fascinating.

On the day of a final, soccer fever is truly ubiquitous: around schools, where parents pick up their children dressed in red and white jerseys and in small black berets; in the business district, where professionals wear red and white ties; in bars and cafés, where people greet each other with an “Aupa Athletic!” and sip their coffee from special edition Athletic cups; on means of public transport, where drivers play Athletic anthems at full volume; in the Basilica of Begoña (the Virgin of Bilbao),

where an Athletic coat of arms is displayed on the altar as “alimony for the Virgin,” and where young men in Athletic jerseys pray. At night, the countless bars of Bilbao fill with people of all ages, dressed in the colors, singing Athletic hymns. All conversations conspire to the Event. The city revels in anticipation, in the desire to repeat a King’s Cup victory, and to write another chapter in the “collective encyclopedia” (Sperber 1975) of the community.

At six pm, that is “four hours to go” (a local TV channel had started a countdown to kick-off days earlier), the vicinity of San Mamés stadium is already flooded with people of all ages and both sexes. A sea of red and white bodies floods the streets and the more than seventy bars within the radius of five blocks from the stadium. By “three hours to go,” the *Calle Licenciado Poza* is sticky of the coca cola fans had spilled to make room for *kalimotxo* (coke and cheap red wine) in the bottle, and the street is covered in garbage. Three blocks away from San Mamés, by the *Bar Ziripot*, the crowd is already too thick to pass. No conversation is possible for the blowing of the horns and the chants: “Athleeeeeetic! Athleeeeeetic” “*Barça, entzun, Athletic Txapeldun!*” (“Listen Barça, Athletic is Champion!”). An old man whistles the club anthem on a maple leaf, while a young *cuadrilla*<sup>1</sup> cheers his performance. A man carrying a huge cup made of cellophane assures me of the final score: 1-0. By “one and a half hours to go,” hundred yard long red and white lines are formed in front of the gates to enter San Mamés, a stadium five hundred miles away from where the game is actually played: Valencia’s Mestella stadium. As far as the eye can see, the streets around San Mamés are filled with an exuberant crowd anticipating a victory that would repeat history: the defeat of Barcelona FC twenty-five years ago.

---

<sup>1</sup> Age grade group of friends.

While these images might also apply to other grand fan communities on the eve of an important game, Athletic is reckoned to have a unique feature. It only recruits players of its *cantera*, or “quarry:” Basque-born or locally-trained players. This exclusive policy prompted the French *L'Équipe* to call it “a unique case in the world of football.” Despite such a limited pool of players, Athletic is one of the three teams besides Real Madrid and Barcelona FC that never sank to second division. San Mamés is known as “The Cathedral” of Spanish football for being one of the first ones in Spain; it is considered by visiting teams as a place of “special atmosphere,” a “complicated” stadium, for its fans fill it even for the least consequential friendship games. Basques enjoy and suffer their team in an uninhibited display of generosity and exuberance. No matter how badly they play, and even at the bottom of the league—or rather, especially there—Bilbainos lavish their last resources of time, money and energy on soccer. “If some city experiences financial trouble, all they need to do is invite Athletic Bilbao for a game,” a fan comments, with reference to the moneys Athletic fans spend in order to follow, support and enjoy their team. “Already in the 1950`s” an elderly fan tells me, “we were called *los americanos* [the Americans] because of the money we spent while following Athletic.” Twenty thousand tickets were officially given to Athletic fans in Valencia for the King’s Cup Final in 2009—some fifty thousand made the trip, far outnumbering Barça fans, who traveled only a portion of the distance. Another three to five hundred thousand cheered the game back in the Bilbao stadium and while viewing the numerous public screens in the streets, spending a record 5.5 million Euros just one day.

The first twenty minutes of the sole Athletic goal of the King`s Cup final went down in collective memory as the “best, sweetest moments of our lives,” moments that “allowed a people to dream.” Toquero, an unassuming, quiet boy from Vitoria

scored a goal that summed up Athletic: the local player who worked his way up from second division B, who lacked technique and sophistication but compensated for it with his *garra*, his forceful passion, was beating the most skilled, powerful, and globalized soccer empire, Barcelona FC. Right then, little did I know of course; still hazy with jet lag and barely speaking any Spanish, I was caught in a whirlwind outside of a stadium called San Mamés. Strangers repeatedly hugged and kissed me with tears pouring down their cheeks until the eventual shower of Barcelona goals. Athletic lost 4-1.

But what anthropologists call a “revelatory incident” was still ahead. For the homecoming reception of a losing team Bilbao outdid its very own proclivities to hyperbole: hundreds of thousands flooded the streets. Such celebration of a losing team, as commentators remarked, was a “human puzzle;” it was “incredible,” “beyond words.” Fans celebrated defeat as though it was victory; it hailed its team for being able to “resist the best team of the world” (one that “marks an epoch” and is of “another galaxy”) for 45 minutes; it juxtaposed Athletic “lions” of “one heart and soul” to Barcelona’s soulless “blue-red machinery” and the “industrial production of victories.” Despite the 4-1 loss, it was “the day when Barça applauded us,” the day when Barcelona players, the best in the world, held the *ikurrina* out of respect for “the other champion,” for “the invincible.”<sup>2</sup> Bilbao proved that its soccer team was an “immortal, excessive sentiment,” an “attitude to life,” and the “last romantic fools.” As Bilbao mayor Inaki Azkuna put it, that day “there was nothing more wonderful than to be from Bilbao.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> El Correo 2009 May 14.

<sup>3</sup> El Correo 2009 May 16.

The event connected Bilbao's past and future. The media devoted countless air hours and print pages to reminiscing about the great victories of the 1940's; the mythical "five forwards" and "eleven peasants" of the 1950's; the second golden age of the 1980's. For the new generations, the cup final served as a rite of incorporation into Athletic fandom: "A new era is inaugurated," a commentator wrote. "The youth now knows what it means to participate in a final. They are now a legitimate heir to the red and white sentiment, guardians of the flames of passion."<sup>4</sup> San Mamés was called "the Temple of temples," and "Bilbainismo the new religion."<sup>5</sup>

Cultural performances are "occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others" (MacAloon, 1984: 1). Athletic fandom is intimately linked to Bilbao, to Bizkaian and Basque identity and belonging; it reflects the special ethos of a people. As one sports commentator put it, Athletic is:

the pride of not winning, but fighting. The last refuge of utopias and impossible dreams; the perfect stage for an epic, where 'we are' eclipses 'I am.' (...) There are more comfortable ways that give more happiness; but at times the journey is more interesting than the destination. This is why they called us 'a unique case in the world of soccer.'<sup>6</sup>

Athletic is conceived by *Bilbainos* ("people from Bilbao") as "the only club... that fans don't require to win, but to resist."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> El Correo 2009 May 16.

<sup>5</sup> El Correo 2009 May 14.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.caumetropolitanorugby.com/index.php/foro/10-senior-social/2192-we-are-athletic--we-are-the-football.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2009-05-14/barca-aplaudio-20090514.html>

## 1.1 Athletic Club and Spanish Soccer

Athletic, locals comment, is the only institution in the province of Bizkaia that has not changed substantially during its more than one hundred years of history. The club has survived the turbulences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; its playing style, technologies and finances have changed, but the club has never forgone using Basque players only.

The historic Basque Country consists of seven provinces, three in the south of France (*Iparralde*), and four in the north of Spain (*Hegoalde*).<sup>8</sup> Due to the nationalistic, centralizing impulses of the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789), *Iparralde* lost much of its cultural identity. The four provinces in Spain (Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba, Navarre), have spent most of the last 150 years re-vindicating local political decision-making at various levels. The Basque Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasca, PNV*) was established in 1895 in Bilbao, and became a major actor in Basque re-vindication of rights and liberties. The Civil War (1936-39) and the repressions of the ensuing Francoist dictatorship resulted in dramatic language and culture loss in the Spanish Basque provinces, prompting a group of students to form an underground, Marxist organization in 1959: ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, “Basque Land and Freedom”). Until the death of Franco, ETA was locally and internationally supported as a group of subversive freedom fighters who assassinated fascist police and politicians—among others Luis Carrero Blanco, intended successor of Franco. With the death of Franco and with the democratic transition, ETA gradually lost its popular support as a hindrance to Basque nationalist aspirations.

---

<sup>8</sup> “North” and “south side,” respectively, in the Basque language.

Three Spanish Basque provinces (Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba) were granted a special Statute of Autonomy and formed *Euskadi*, the Basque Autonomous Community in 1979. The political situation remains complex and sensitive: pro-Spain left wing socialist, pro-Spain right wing nationalist, pro-Basque, *abertzale* (“patriot”) left wing nationalist, and pro-Basque center right nationalist parties are at constant disagreement over social-political matters.

Being a Bizkaian, Bilbaino club, Athletic has witnessed the political changes of the century and was influenced, but never completely appropriated, by its actors. The club`s roster routinely featured the sons of local industrialists who, through their commercial contacts with Britain and their sons` academic careers, had brought the game to Bilbao at the end of the nineteenth century. They constituted the social-economic elite of Bilbao, as well as the rank and file of the Basque Nationalist Party. During the dictatorship, soccer thrived in Spain, and presidents of Spanish clubs had to be approved by Franco. The boards of directors of the democratic era have been known to have various political allegiances. Despite stronger or weaker political currents, Athletic has never been ultimately appropriated by either a political party or by a person. On the contrary; the club has been recognized as the only transversal institution in the province of Bizkaia, with which persons of any ideological allegiance can and do identify. To prevent its kidnapping by a single person or organization, Athletic is owned and run by its 35 000 members, whose delegates meet, debate and vote at the General Assemblies of the club.

The club has a special patina in the Spanish *Liga* (“league”). It is not only renowned for its identity and perseverance in the first division, but has also produced several records, sporting heroes and anecdotes for Spanish soccer history. During its uninterrupted perseverance in the first division, Athletic has won a Spanish *Liga* title

eight times; a Cup title twenty-four times (now only superceded by Barcelona FC); a Super Cup title, and a UEFA sub-championship title. It has won a *doblete*, or the double championship titles of the Cup and the League, a record five times. Athletic's sporting heroes are names of reference in Spain. Pichichi, a prolific forward from 1911 until his untimely death in 1921 inspired the Trophy of Pichichi, awarded each year to the greatest goal maker of the *Liga*. The Basque Belauste prompted the name *la Furia Española* ("The Spanish Fury"), as the Spanish national selection has been called. The forward Telmo Zarra of the 1940's and 50's holds many records for scoring. Iribar (1961-80) was one of the greatest goalkeepers of soccer history. His successor in the goal, Zubizarreta (1979-98) played the greatest number of league games (622) in Spanish soccer.<sup>9</sup>

Great soccer nations have features for which they are (in)famous. The British were responsible for the early constitution of the game in the nineteenth century, and produced the most extreme cases of football hooliganism. Argentinean soccer is well known for its populism and its political appropriation. No other nation is so pre-occupied with its neighboring "Other" as Scotland, and Germany was the first to generate a lower-middle class hegemony over the game, as opposed to its lower class ubiquity elsewhere. Spanish soccer is known for its *morbo* (Ball 2003). The word escapes straightforward dictionary definition by alluding to attraction, morbid pleasure, disease, perverse fascination, unhealthy curiosity, risk, hostility and ill-will. All of these *sentimientos* ("feelings") surface in the Spanish *Liga*, and they are played out large; they summarize the heat of regional rivalries in a country that is lacking centralized unity. Spanish soccer is a world of *philiias* and *phobias*. Some are felt

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.athletic-club.net/web/main.asp?a=2&b=1&c=3&d=0&idi=1>

primordial and irrevocable, others remain passing and nebulous. Athletic is no exception: many of its fans are ideologically opposed to Madrid teams like Real Madrid and Atlético de Madrid, as the capital represents the State that refuses to grant rights of self-determination to the Basque people. Athletic fans feel a competitive animosity towards and ideological camaraderie with the Catalan Barcelona FC. They have always considered Barcelona a historic rival, while the two fan communities readily collude in whistling and booing symbols of the Spanish State. The rivalry between Athletic and the other first division Basque teams (the Real Sociedad of San Sebastián-Donostia and the Osasuna of Vitoria-Gasteiz) may be described as a neighborly love and hate relationship; the *morbo* of the Basque derbies is a complicated, ritualized display of sentiments between intimate enemies.

## 1.2 Global Play, Local Desire

According to Žižek, “what ‘holds together’ a community most deeply is not so much identification with the law that regulates the community’s ‘normal’ everyday circuit, but rather identification with a specific form of transgression of the Law, of the Law’s suspension” (1994: 35). From Antigone through Che Guevara to bin Laden, from freemasonry through lynching parties to civil disobedience, the transgression of the “Law” has created—for better or for worse—communities of desire: the desire to engage a different reality altogether.

On any given day, Bilbao’s “‘normal’, everyday circuit” revolves around issues of political violence, immigration, economic crisis, gender inequality, environmentalism, public health, unemployment, general strikes and cultural policy. These are issues of the highest order in the Basque Country—and sources of the deepest social divisions. Athletic Club news patiently await their turn at the back of

the newspapers, but occupy an inordinate amount of space ranging from four to eight pages per daily paper. It is only soccer that is able to halt life in Bizkaia province for days—a specific form of transgression that makes the city of Bilbao cohere beyond any of its traditional axes of identification. As the President of Athletic Club García Macua said, “it has become clear that if there’s any area where we are all Bizkaians, it is Athletic. It has the great advantage that it is absolutely transversal, that in it we are all together, independent of political ideologies, religious beliefs or economic condition.”<sup>10</sup>

The appeal of organized games lies in the enjoyment of subversion, of the seduction of un-reason. Games are guilty of intemperance and immoderateness that makes them a fantastic, hyperbolic non-equivalence of what is at stake, of what may be won or lost. “In ninety minutes, football gives life and takes it away,” as they say in Bilbao; for ninety minutes nothing else matters, while nothing gets seriously changed in real life, either. In that moment of high intensity, the desire to score a goal eclipses all problems of financial insecurity, overbearing colleagues, bossy wives and nagging children. The enchantment derives from giving ground to safety and order so as to give in to the free play of chance and risk.

What “Laws” are suspended? Bernard Suits defines playing a game as “a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (1988: 12). The formal characteristics of a game render it irrational by definition: winning doesn’t happen just by kicking a leather ball through the goal, like a toddler does in the backyard. It happens through the observation of a series of restrictive rules and the outwitting of another set of players, who want just the same—kick the ball in the goal. What makes

---

<sup>10</sup>El Correo 2009 May 14.

perfect sense in a game makes no sense outside of it: who in the right mind would voluntarily accept unnecessary obstacles to, say, striking a business deal, alleviating child poverty, or fighting gender discrimination? If the mere purpose of a game was the goal, one would just pick it up, find the most efficient way to get there (say by bike or a motorcycle) and place it inside. But the point is to voluntarily overcome apparently unnecessary obstacles like the opposing set of players, or the rules that forbid a series of actions. Otherwise, the spell is broken. Otherwise, it's no longer an irrational field of desire but the everyday stuff of cold utilitarian calculation.

Soccer engage cutting edge economics, science and technology with the same naturalness as a sense of tribalism, superstition and ritual. With reference to Chakrabarty (2000), the game sphere of soccer "provincializes" universal, exchangeable analytical histories through filling them with particular, inexchangeable narratives and desires. Soccer becomes a vehicle for such "provincializing" because it intimately knows the local and the global, the universal and the particular. It is the most globalized organized sport assuming distinctly local identifications and ideologies. While participation in leagues and championships requires abidance with hegemonic premises of organized competition, it is still possible to beat the master in his own game.

Peripheral "others" and the subaltern use soccer to "think their own insertion, as subjects, into history" (Emberly in Hargreaves, 2000:128). This insertion, as I will argue through Basque soccer madness, is not merely about winning titles in competitions that favor clubs with the greatest capital and resources. Creating a trademark, that is, becoming "more than a club" requires an extra element. For Athletic Club, that extra element is winning titles with local players only. As the mission statement of the Club says on its official website:

“Athletic Club is (...) characterized by the defense of values that are less and less frequent in soccer and sports of the twenty-first century. Pride in our own, which is best reflected by our youth academy based recruitment policy, becomes a point of unity that transcends all other discrepancies of daily life, and marks a departure from any other philosophy or interpretation of soccer in the world. From the beginning, our sports philosophy has determined that players are eligible in our ranks if they are born or formed in our own youth academy, or in any other club of *Euskal Herria* [Basque Country], which consists of the following territorial demarcations: Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba, Nafarroa, Lapurdi, Zuberoa, and Nafarroa Behera.”<sup>11</sup>

Nothing can be more ambitious and less rational, given the size of the Basque population (2.5 million), and the quality of the Spanish *Liga* (presently reckoned as the best in the world). And yet, Basques retain their philosophy of play as it lends the club an air of exceptionalism, and allows the community to engage its subaltern narratives, and to cope with impasses of identification. The extraordinary enjoyment and suffering of that self-engagement result from putting it all at risk in a precarious play sphere.

The logic of voluntarily overcoming unnecessary obstacles applies doubly to Athletic: first in the field, like it applies to any other team that plays soccer and abides by the rules, and second, through its recruitment philosophy. As if mastering the most technically sophisticated game in the most competitive league of the world was not challenging enough, Athletic voluntarily maintains a perfectly counter-productive

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.athletic-club.net/web/main.asp?a=2&b=1&c=1&d=0&idi=1> (province names are in Basque orthography).

strategy of recruiting only locals in a billion dollar sports environment that thrives on global athlete migration.<sup>12</sup>

Through an ethnicised Basque-only philosophy, the club maintains modernist appellations in the face of two post-modern transformations. First, athlete and coach migration as well as new media technologies have rendered soccer a post-modern sphere of de-centeredness and de-stabilization. The modernist world order of nation, class and locality are destabilized by the game's globalization. Second, Bilbao has undergone major post-Fordist transformations in the last twenty years. The establishment of Guggenheim Museum (1997) catalyzed a series of gentrification projects, and the former industrial "tough city" was tamed into a neat one of tourism and services. By all standards of infrastructure, banking, commerce and international relations, Bilbao is becoming a cosmopolitan, post-modern city.

"A timeless global culture," Anthony Smith writes (1995: 24), "answers to no living needs and conjures no memories. If memory is central to identity, we can discern no global identity in the making." Athletic refuses to make the global, post-modern transition. It highlights values like tradition, ethnicity, locality, and an inter-subjective enjoyment of soccer. Its fan community is unlike the detached, critical, ironic and even hostile, solitary, post-modern "post-fan" (Giulianotti 1999: 148). The fan community of Athletic displays unreserved support even at the bottom of the league, when other teams would be (and have been) abandoned for bad performance. But those players, Athletic fans claim, are mere mercenaries deserving punishment if the job for which they are paid does not get done. "Our players are *us*, are family, friends and neighbors; how could we abandon them?"

---

<sup>12</sup> As of 2012, Athletic Club's annual budget was 61 million Euros. By way of comparison, some of the "giants" of the Spanish *Liga* dispose of a substantially greater budget: Barcelona FC approximately 400 million Euros, Real Madrid approximately 440 million Euros (Soriano 2012).

At times, the “philosophy” becomes a source of infinite suffering. The “unnecessary obstacle” of limiting the pool of available players leads to poor performance, and turns into a cross the city drags along out of some deep sense of obligation. “Why do I bother to come to San Mamés if all they do is lose?” goes the rhetorical question. And yet they bother, abandoning Sunday lunches and family outings in the Pyrenees. “I feel guilty if I skip a game,” laments a fan, marveling at his incapacity to draw limits to irrational sacrifice. Soccer is a cross that has been passed on by generations through red-and-white shirts, club membership cards and Sunday afternoons spent in the “Cathedral”.

### **1.3 “Why Do I go if All They Do is Lose?”**

The question is rhetorical and taken with slight resignation. Bilbainos support their club out of a symbolic obligation to a higher order received from family ties and lifelong friendships. It’s a symbolic obligation whose logic is not unlike ritual sacrifice. Some fans receive their club membership cards upon birth, communion, or at the death bed of a dying father. Others establish a fan club (the *Peña Peio*, “Peio’s Fan Club”) to commemorate a six-year-old who dies of cancer, and whose greatest dream was to become a goalie, which was all his health allowed him to play at school. Some others—like an unofficial “*Peña* of the Divorced, the Angry and the Alienated”—attend Athletic events to forget abusive relations and find healthy ones. Yet some others use a game to make political statements about moving ETA prisoners—perhaps from their *cuadrilla* [age grade group of lifelong friends], or a neighbor—back to the Basque Country so they can be visited more easily. There are thousands of ways to feel the colors, but any way, “being of Athletic” means being absorbed and possessed by the higher order of community bonds.

The weight of Athletic's philosophy was most acutely felt four years ago, when the abominable perspective of sinking into second division almost became a reality—a doomsday scenario Bilbainos define as “catastrophic,” “unimaginable” and “the end of the world.” Never has Athletic sunk to the second division during its history, which makes it unique along with Real Madrid and Barcelona FC. And yet, even then, the idea of changing the “philosophy” and opening up recruitment to the global market did not turn into action, as if changing the centenarian tradition was tantamount to sacrilege.

From the purely functionalist perspective of professional competition, the debilitating effects of the “philosophy” are painfully felt: Athletic hasn't won a thing since 1984. For the younger generations, losing has become a fact of life; but old-timer die hards still remember a glorious past when the team was *Txapeldun* (“Champion”), when it won the Spanish Cups and Leagues in succession, when it produced world class forwards and goal keepers like few other clubs. The fact remains that Athletic was a champion team as long as the traffic of players was at least somewhat contained. The Bosman ruling of 1995 eliminated all restrictions on players' changing clubs and to the naturalization of players, which resulted in an influx of foreigners. While Athletic can maintain a first division status with the philosophy it has (“after all, recruiting foreigners guarantees nothing—it didn't prevent Real Sociedad from dropping to *Segunda!*”), winning a title remains increasingly difficult. If the logic of competition is to win, Athletic is seriously shooting itself in the foot. Not a wise move for a footballer.

But that is not entirely unlike the Bilbaino way of going about one's business. There is an (in)famously *bilbainada* way of behavior. The cocky narcissism Bilbainos are known for by their neighbors has, at its core, an unashamedly masculine character:

“the balls” (*los cojones*). Perhaps nothing compares to “the balls” it took to throw it all away, and invite the Guggenheim Foundation to build, of all things, a museum. What would have been considered anathema at other places—an expensive international museum in a historically industrial city of marked working class propensities—was taken by Bilbao without hesitation. The city went through a series of urban renewal projects that saved it from post-Fordist demise, earning the first Nobel Prize of Cities; all with a naturalness as though success was its birthright. *Somos de Bilbao* (“we are from Bilbao”) is the recurring explanation to engagement in any hyperbolic, extravagant, daring and even reckless behavior, with utter confidence in a favorable outcome.

Bilbainos are thus fond of success, and they are even fonder of it when they win against all odds. To that end, they are quite willing to accumulate odds—that is, increase the volume of “unnecessary obstacles.” The recruiting philosophy, the debilitating limitation of the pool of available players becomes engagement with play that is “deeper” than the play of other clubs. The stakes are raised by the fact that odds to win are lowered. Because the club plays with local resources, it is the city’s own subjectivity that is put to gamble in a losing game.

Play theorists (Huizinga 1950, Bateson 1973, Csikszentmihalyi 1990) agree that the extra-ordinary quality of the play sphere derives from the temporary bracketing, the suspension, of everyday reality. With its spatial and temporal boundaries, its rules, as well as the absorption of player and spectator alike, the play sphere has an autonomy (Gadamer 1975: 94). The ludic is the logic of Bakhtin’s *carnavalesque*: the “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (1968: 6). In the carnivalesque and the ludic, the enchantment

derives from turning the universalized Laws of everyday life upside down, from relegating and substituting them with the temporal Rules of the game.

The philosophy of Athletic is a Rule the club abides by, turning several Laws upside down. By playing only Basque players, it transgresses the multi-ethnic, international character Bilbao is increasingly assuming. Athletic also transgresses the ultimate law of competition: the desire to win at all costs. While elite sports propose fierce competitiveness where winning is the quintessence of the game, Athletic proposes a model in which the manner of winning is just as important, if not more: with Basque players. Bilbao's recruiting philosophy turns the laws of globalized, commercialized sports upside down: while keeping good players is costly, its budget of recruitment is less than those clubs who traffic with adult foreign players. And finally, the Basque-only team subverts violent political means of ethnic self-assertion: it allows Basques to peacefully construct identities and demand recognition through soccer.

The kind of game Athletic plays is subversion of the Law by the Rule; of the universal social Contract by the temporary Pact; of Sociality by Rituality; and of a rational Meaning by non-Sense. The "philosophy" of Athletic creates a play sphere that feeds into what Baudrillard considers the seductive appeal of games: our "[n]ostalgia for a pactual, ritual and contingent sociality... the longing for a crueler if more fascinating destiny for exchange" (1979, 152). According to Huizinga, the play frame facilitates the formation of social groupings which "tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world" (1950, 13). Athletic Bilbao's recruiting philosophy is a process of self-exoticization, a construction of difference; as repeatedly said in Bilbao, "we are neither better, nor worse for our philosophy—we are *different*."

#### **1.4 Basque Soccer Culture: A Road Map**

This manuscript consists of nine chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on a particular theme that characterizes Basque soccer culture, and constitutes a fairly autonomous discussion by employing anthropological and sociological theories, approaches and analytical tools that I find useful for the exploration of the given problem area. Consecutive chapters are loosely related, and they are clustered in wider themes: chapters two to six focus on the social significance of Bilbao`s soccer culture for local identities. Chapters seven and eight explore gender identities around soccer. Chapter nine and ten discuss the geographical extension of Bilbao`s soccer culture in relation to other areas of the Basque Country, as well as Spain. Below is a more detailed road map.

Organized sports are becoming some of the most important vehicles of global flows and processes (Maguire 1999, Bairner 2001), while soccer is the most globally practiced and watched sport (Giulianotti 1999, Giulianotti and Robertson 2009). The cultural, economic and colonial expansion of Great Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought with it the game that was first codified in that country. Chapter Two (“‘An Englishman Came to Bilbao:’ A Social History of Athletic Club”) explores the arrival of soccer in Bilbao and the Iberian Peninsula, and descusses the social history of its early practice and consequent expansion. I discuss the cultural, social, political and economic background that characterized the Basque-British encounter in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and how soccer came to structure that relationship. Special reference will be made to the role of the nationalist industrial elite of Bilbao, which played a pivotal role in the establishment and management of Athletic Club. The chapter will explore the role of the Basque soccer selection in exile during the Civil War (1936-1939), and the effects of the Franco dictatorship (1936-1975) on Bilbao and its soccer culture.

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the social evolution of Athletic Club and the development of the terms of its identity over the twentieth century, as well as to provide insight into major events and historical personages that have shaped the course of Basque and Spanish soccer.

Chapter Three (“‘A Unique Case in the World:’ Basque Exceptionalism in Soccer Culture”) quotes the title of a headline published by the prestigious French sports daily *L'Équipe* in the 1970`s, which has become the credo of Athletic Club`s identity: “we are neither better, nor worse for our ‘philosophy,’” they say in Bilbao; “we are *different*.” This chapter will explore the discursive construction of what I call Basque exceptionalism through soccer. It argues that a Basque sense of difference was constructed by anthropological and political discourses. Anthropology presented the Basques in terms of ethnic, “racial,” linguistic and cultural difference and autochthonous evolution in the Basque Country. Political discourses used this narrative as a means to create political subjects and strategies on the basis of ethno-cultural difference and indigenous belonging. I discuss the ways Athletic`s recruitment philosophy resonates with the Basque imaginary of exceptionalism as established by these two social meta-narratives: insistence on autochthonous development, and subjectivization through emphasizing difference.

Chapter Four (“San Mamés: In the Cathedral of Spanish Soccer”) is built on the anthropological premise that space is meaningful for cultures and communities, and that it is socially constructed and politically contested (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2007). San Mamés, Athletic`s stadium is one of the most historical, most reputed stadia in the Spanish league; this chapter will explore the building`s significance for Bilbainos as a place of meaning, memory and identity. How does a building become “The Cathedral” to some while it is just a stadium to

others? I take a Durkheimian approach that situates the sacred in human practice: nothing is inherently significant but constructed as such through cultural work of consecration. The symbolic labor of sacralization, which Gennep calls “the pivoting of the sacred” (Gennep 1960, 12) consists of the symbolic, human labor of choosing, venerating, protecting sacred places. What are the specifics of this process in Bilbao? This chapter will show how San Mamés is conceptualized as a place pregnant with history, narrative and identity; how ritualized, formalized fan behavior and interpretation lend it “sacred” significance; and how it becomes a contested site in danger of desecration.

Chapters Two, Three and Four identify the ways Athletic is embedded in local culture, community, narrative and history, which creates an obliging mandate to follow the team. Chapter Five (“Bilbao Catch-22: Passions and Double Binds in Soccer”) argues that “hot” forms of fandom may reveal Catch-22 type situations that explain not what *attracts* fans to fandom, but rather what *prevents* them from abandoning their team despite potential psychological violence. By using the logic of Catch-22 and Bateson`s (1973) theory of the double bind, this chapter explores the impasses of the ethnicized recruitment philosophy and identification. The localist philosophy of recruitment, I show here, is not only a source of enjoyment, but also of suffering and anxiety. In 2006/2007, the Club was one game away from descending to the second division. This chapter explores the impasses imposed by the double binds of the club`s two pillars of identification (first division status and localist recruitment) on fans, players, and club leadership. The application of double bind theory as a heuristic device to study sports fandom allows us to discuss not only the values and identities of a soccer club, but also the affliction those values impose on those within the kernel of fandom.

“Attending cockfights,” Geertz writes in his seminal essay, “is for the Balinese a kind of sentimental education” (1973: 449); what the cockfight says about Balinese status relationships may be “matters of life and death” (1973: 447), while “no one’s status really changes” (1973: 443). Chapter Six (“Magnificent Obsessions: Masculinity, Morality and the Melodramatic Imagination”) takes ludic performances for a *melodramatic* impulse to act out a community’s values through the thrill-effecting tools of this genre: exaggeration, hyperbolic preoccupations, intense emotiveness etc. It explores how the mundane episode of a player’s desire to leave Athletic—an episode that is supposed to be prevented by the bonds and double binds discussed in Chapter Five—escalates into a moral parable of values, principles, and emotions. I will capture the emotional pathos of the copious soccer narrative through analyzing it as a lover’s discourse that feminizes the audience, while it constructs the soccer player’s masculinity as that of a cheating Don Juan who goes back on his promise. While it may appear a sentimental affair, Bilbao’s player transfer melodrama constructs a moral community by establishing rights and wrongs, dos and don’ts: besides providing moral and sentimental education, the melodramatic narrative positions Athletic in the world of soccer in moral and sentimental terms.

Chapter Seven (“Dangerous Liaisons, Fatal Attractions: Erotic Fantasy in Men’s Sports”) investigates the construction of sexualities around men’s sports from another angle. Men’s sports are some of the last bulwarks of a homosocial combat culture, and reproduce a symbolic order of hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. This chapter explores how and why wives, girlfriends and female journalists are inserted and eroticized within men’s sports by the media. The presence of these women constitutes an erotic imaginary that interacts with the symbolic order of male production and subjectivization: it both strengthens and challenges male

certainties. Sensuous women in men`s sports are demonized as “dangerous destabilizers” that threaten elite male performance, an image resonating with the cultural iconography of the *femme fatale*. “Dangerous women” create an erotic imaginary where phallic desires and anxieties are acted out; this chapter contextualizes them in men`s sports, and traces them back to Victorian ideas about sports, sexuality, and (re)production.

Chapter Eight (“A Matter of Balls: Women and Soccer in the Spanish Basque Context”) explores gender relations in soccer from the perspective of power. What relationship women have with the game in the country where men`s soccer is the hegemonic sports culture? This chapter discusses the role of women as soccer fans, players and club leaders in the Spanish Basque context. Through select revelatory incidents it will address the following: symbolic and institutional inequalities; female fandom and leadership in a men`s world; the construction of female athletes` bodies through technologies of sexualization and de-feminization; the policing of gender appropriate behavior through soccer; the construction of gendered spaces through soccer in the Spanish Basque context; the differential treatment of male and female sports successes. I will address these issues through three decisive episodes for women in Bilbao`s soccer: the controversy over female club membership and fandom in the still Francoist 1970`s; the reception and experiences of the first woman in leadership position as board member and club president in the 1990`s; and the establishment of the women`s soccer program in the second millenium.

Chapter Nine (“Together and Apart at the Basque Derby: A Prisoner`s Dilemma”) moves towards the territorial conceptualizations of soccer fandom. It explores the Basque rivalry complex in general and the soccer derby between Athletic Club of Bilbao and Real Sociedad of San Sebastián in particular. This chapter takes

the derby for a cultural performance structured by specifically Basque conceptualizations of play, competition and cooperation (*joko, jolas, burruka*), and uses the prisoner's dilemma as an analytical framework: the derby becomes an arena where each party, each club, will necessarily pursue its self-interest, and even "betray" the other by player poaching, which leads to an institutionalized hostility relationship. At the same time, the external meta-consideration that they belong to the same "gang," the same moral community (Basques in Spain), imposes a mandate of cooperation. The result is a history of derbies as an iterated "war-peace game" where interaction oscillates between hostile and cooperative.

Chapter Ten ("The Spanish Fury: A Political Geography of Soccer in Spain") moves beyond the Basque Country and situates Bilbao's soccer culture within the larger social-political matrix of soccer in Spain. This sport functions as a powerful ideological apparatus in Spain. The recent successes (2008, 2012 Euro Cup and 2010 World Cup) of Spanish soccer are considered by centralists as the "normalization of Spain" (Delgado 2010): proof of a modern country that has finally overcome its regional divisions. This chapter will explore the history of Spanish soccer as a contested ideological terrain between Spanish, Basque and Catalan nationalisms, ideologies and identities: as a schismogenic system of integration and disintegration that affect center-periphery relationships.

## **1.5 Methodology and Data Analysis**

I have spent altogether twenty months in the Basque Country conducting ethnographic fieldwork for this dissertation between 2010 and 2012. While I was based in Bilbao, I made various field trips to other ethnographic sites to collect data, most notably Barcelona, Madrid, and the 2010 South African World Cup. I was

conducting field research during major soccer events such as the 2010 World Cup and the 2012 Euro Cup.

I used a wide array of ethnographic fieldwork methods for data collection and analysis. *Participant observation* required living the life of a soccer fan as a researcher. I watched about sixty men`s games and thirty women`s games in Bilbao, Madrid, Barcelona, Gijon, San Sebastián and Pamplona. I watched about the same number of games with fans in various social settings: bars, *peñas* or fan clubs, *txokos* or gastronomical societies, and the street. Participant observation was not limited to games: it included pre- and post-game socializing in the streets and the bars. I participated in and witnessed various soccer-related events: the annual General Assembly of Athletic Club; the congresses, conferences and fiestas organized by the Association of Athletic Fan Clubs; talks, conferences, seminars given by players, coaches, referees and club leadership; the conferences organized by the Athletic Foundation around soccer and society, literature, politics and arts; the various exhibitions organized by the Athletic Museum; the annual award ceremonies organized by the local media, recognizing the athletes of the Basque Country; funerals of former players; masses celebrated in support of Athletic; summer camps, charitable events and language promoting trainings organized by Athletic Foundation in schools. These soccer related events are numerous, averaging about three occasions a week, not counting weekly games. Besides soccer related public events, I participated in cultural performances, most notably local fiestas in various Basque towns and villages, including culturally and politically paradigmatic ones such as the running of the bulls in Pamplona, the *Alarde* processions in Hondarribia, or the *Aste Nagusia* (“Grand Week”) in Bilbao. I also attended numerous street demonstrations and

protests, interest groups meetings, as well as other sports events such as basketball and pelota games, regatta, and rural sports.

The daily *media* was a sizable source of ethnographic data. I followed soccer discourse daily, which meant the monitoring of about five local and three national dailies; five local and five national television channels; five local radio channels; four fan forums, ten blogs, and the social media. My very own participation in the media allowed insight into the construction of soccer discourse, gave my work publicity, and enhanced access to informants. I regularly participated in *tertulias*, round table discussions, as discussant and social commentator in various local television and radio channels.<sup>13</sup> My work was featured in the Basque and a Spanish national channel and about ten print media products, including the dailies of greatest circulation in the Basque Country. I reviewed select years of media discourse at the archives of the Library of the Foral deputy of Bilbao.

One of the greatest sources of personal stories and narratives was the fan forum [aupaathletic.com](http://aupaathletic.com), which has about twenty thousand users. As a registered user I frequently interacted with this fan community with frequency: I posted questions that addressed soccer related events, experiences and interpretations. Each of my posts (eight altogether over the course of fieldwork) elicited about fifty to seventy responses about particular aspects of soccer fandom.

I conducted 200 in-depth interviews with relevant people involved in Bilbao's sport and cultural life. Depending on the situation and the informant, I conducted formal, informal, directive, non-directive, semi-structured and unstructured interviews alike. Interviews lasted an hour on average; they took place in public settings (bars,

---

<sup>13</sup> Telebizkaia, Radio Popular, Tele 7, ETB, Euskal Irrati.

cafes, Athletic training facility), and were recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews revolved around a basic template containing about fifteen questions with regards to the following qualitative information: personal experiences, narratives and conceptualizations of soccer fandom, family environment, gender and soccer, soccer rivalries within the Basque Country; soccer and politics; media consumption habits, specific questions with regards to the identity of the person. The individuals I interviewed included: players and former players, coaches, referees, club officials and managers, board members and club presidents, fans, fan club members and managers, federation officials, journalists and media personnel, politicians, social, political and linguistic activists. Among the interviewees were some of the most important figures of soccer history in Spain. Besides these formal interviews, daily informal bar and street conversations provided a great amount of information.

The following approaches and methods guided data analysis. *Historical genealogical approach*: I used genealogical analysis that portrays how episteme, or system of thought, follows premises that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and determine the boundaries of what can be thought in a given period. Through such genealogy I examined how the same Basque anthropological premises of race and ethnicity surface in politics, sports and gender. *Performance context analysis*: Analytical tools such as the study of the play frame, of carnival, ritual, performance, festival, and spectacle were applied to non-discursive data. *Discourse analysis*: Materials gathered from interviews, bar conversations and media coverage were organized and examined through discourse analysis at three conceptual levels: discourse as constative, or what people and the media actually say and write about soccer; discourse as ideology, focusing on the various ideological underpinnings and power relations; and finally, discourse as performance, exploring

the ritualistic enactment of emotions, power relations and identities. I considered the following questions: who gets to produce discourse, who are its consumers, and why?

What kinds of interaction, interference and antagonism exist between discourses?

*Trope analysis:* Data of expressive culture involve metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole and irony, which abound in sports and political discourse. Athletic players, for example, are “lions” and are frequently portrayed as primordial *aldeanos*, or “rustic peasants,” men (not women) emerging from Basque prehistoric caves; the soccer field is popularly known as “the Cathedral;” the training site of local players is called the *cantera*, or “quarry,” with reference to an extraction of local value. Trope analysis explored the arrangement of different cognitive domains.

## Chapter Two

### “An Englishman Came to Bilbao:” A Social History of Athletic Club

One spring day in 1894, a group of Bilbainos launched a challenge to the British dock workers who would kick around a leather ball by the river through the local paper *El Noticiero Bilbaino*: will the British “*footballmens*” play a friendly “*match*” against the local “*team*” (Terrachet 1998: 23)? Betting being a notorious inter-personal dynamic among the Basques, and in this context the challenge was also a “bilbainada.” It reflected locals` self-confidence against the people who had established the game in its modern form. The British were not only skilful players of physical entrances and long passes, but also organized themselves in the field, and observed rules. They appointed a coach, had football shoes, and knew how to tie them.

Bilbainos possessed none of these assets, and were promptly losing 0-3 at half time. In an act of friendly provocation, the British sent eleven roasted chickens for the local team. The “culinary re-charge,” a contemporary commentator remarks with sarcasm, “and the reorganization of positions in the Bilbaino team bore their fruit, and allowed the English to win only 0-6” (José María Mateos in Alonso 1998: 25). The following day, the first football related media commentary appeared in the daily *El Nervión*, remembering only 0-5: “Yesterday, at ten in the morning, a *foot-ball* game was played in Lamiaco between the English and the Spanish. The former won the game by five points. There was a great turnout for the contest, and the game will be repeated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May between the same teams” (Terrachet 1998: 23). Bilbao lost its first soccer game, but gained a whole new world of passion.

On what is called the *Campa de los Ingleses* (“Field of the Englishmen”) after the late nineteenth century English cemetery, on the Nervión River bank right at the foot of the Guggenheim Museum, there is an iron plate on the pavement. It reads a poem by the Basque poet Kirmen Uribe.

“Field of the Englishmen.  
 This is where the English used to play.  
 Here, on a field by the River.  
 Back then, there was only grass and a small cemetery.  
 Sometimes the ball flew into the water, and they had to go and fetch it.  
 If it flew far, they threw stones at it so it comes nearer the bank.  
 The stones made waves, small waves that became bigger and bigger.  
 And this is how Athletic played in Lamiako, and then Jolaseta.  
 And finally, in San Mamés.  
 A wave, and another wave, and another.”<sup>14</sup>

The current heart of Bilbao, the environs of the Guggenheim Museum and the river bank, served as one of the first football fields in Spain. It was there that, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bilbainos started to watch the British deck workers play their *sport of foot-ball* with longing eyes. Some of those Bilbainos were familiar with the game. As sons of the local industrial elite that had intensive business relations with Britain, they were sent to English boarding schools and became acquainted with it. Amid the hefty traffic of industrial ships and land transportation, the noise and smoke of

---

<sup>14</sup> Campa de los Ingleses/Aquí es donde jugaban los ingleses/Aquí, en una campá junto a la Ría/Entonces sólo había césped y un pequeño cementerio/Algunas veces, el balón caía al agua y había que ir a buscarlo/Si estaba lejos le echaban piedritas para que se acercara a la orilla/Las piedras creaban ondas, pequeñas ondas que se hacía cada vez mayores/Y así, el Athletic jugó en Lamiako, y después en Jolaseta/Y, finalmente, en San Mamés/Una ola, y otra ola, y otra.

riverside factories, the up and downloading of cargo, the exchange of fortunes and striking of new deals, the soccer ball emerged discreetly as a new object of desire.

That is how the first waves of Basque soccer culture started by the Nervión, in the shadows of British industrial ships. In 1898, a group of sport fans established *Athletic Club* with the objective of playing football, and without much bothering about its formalization as an entity. They rented a soccer field in Vega de Santa Eufemia, near what is now the affluent district of Neguri. Athletic Club was formalized as an entity by thirty-three founding members or *socios* in the Café García in June 1901; each month they paid two pesetas and fifty centimes as membership fee, and governed club affairs from an apartment on *La Ribera*, by the river. The club rented a field in Lamiaco, a neighborhood of Bilbao, where they played derbies against the other emerging local club called Bilbao F.C. The popularity of the game soon gained momentum: “the *football sport*,” writes *El Nervión* on March 10, 1902, “which is today in vogue, is growing and expanding prodigiously; it has established itself and taken root in our soil” (in Terrachet 1998, 28). When Athletic and Bilbao FC merged to create a provincial selection called *Bizcaya*, the first international encounter took place against the French Burdigala of Bordeaux in April 1902. *Le Petit Gironde* reported this about the game: “The Spanish *team* is much superior. Their midfielders serve their forwards admirably. The skillful game of Astorquia and Levick was much to applaud on various occasions. The game finished with bravos and yells of *Viva España* and *Viva Francia*” (in Terrachet 1998, 29). Such was the novelty of the game that technical words were written in English: *team, goal-keeper, backs, half-backs, forwards, penalty, corner*.

As early as 1902, soccer sold in Bilbao: it was a rare game day that the field would not fill to its maximum capacity, and they charged the first entrance fees. Some

3000 spectators would show up for the games which, contrary to the sport's early working class hegemony in Britain (Bailey 1978), attracted all social strata, "among them abundantly representing themselves the members of the fairer sex, the distinguished ladies of the courtly society" (Terrachet 1998, 31). *Team Bizcaya* was invited to play the coronation cup organized to honor Alfonso XIII in 1902, and won its first title against the other three historical clubs of Spain: the *Español*, the *New Foot-ball de Madrid* and *Barcelona*. That first championship title was followed by eight Spanish league, twenty-four cup, and one super cup titles for more than a hundred years, turning Athletic into the third most successful club in Spain.

### **2.1 "Alirón, alirón, el Athletic Campeón"**

The birth of organized sports is intimately linked with the Industrial Revolution characterized by a rapidly changing urban environment, congested cities, contracted and specialized labor and individualism. Industrial society came about at the conjunction of capitalistic enterprise with machine production, which yielded profound social changes. Different conceptions of time and space emerged, commercial provision expanded, labor discipline tightened, and a new middle-class mentality developed. Some of the most important changes characterizing the Industrial Revolution include demographic transition, a declining sense of community, and specialized division of labor. The spread of public transport, the reduction in the working week, half-day Saturday off for leisure and increase in real earnings set the stage for the emergence of modern, organized sporting activities (Horne, Tomlinson and Whannel 1999).

The home of modern soccer is Britain, where we find reference to the game as early as the Middle Ages; its 1863 codification in London became a milestone for the

sport. By the middle of the nineteenth century, we see the emergence of the first soccer clubs, and the game's incorporation in high school and university education. The ideology of athleticism found its niche in the British educational system; nineteenth-century public schools endorsed sports and games for their capacity to cultivate values such as physical and moral courage, loyalty and cooperation, the ability to act fairly and take defeat well, to command and obey (Mangan 1981: 2006). Sports also became a vehicle of social control through the surveillance of bodies (Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1987; Vertinsky 1990; Vertinsky and McKay 2004). In the words of Bruce Haley, "the healthy body was an instrument not for understanding the ineffable, but for ritualizing an obedience to the reasonable" (1978: 259). Sports in Britain became a tool of the "rational recreation" movement, which aimed to promote a wholesale alternative to the drinking and gambling of the working classes (Bailey 1978). The game quickly captured the imagination of the working classes. In his 1929 novel *The Good Companion*, J.B. Priestly writes this about working class soccer fandom:

To say that these men paid their shillings to watch twenty-two hirelings kick a ball is merely to say that a violin is wood and catgut, that Hamlet is so much paper and ink. For a shilling the Bruddersford United A.F.C offered you Conflict and Art; it turned you into a critic, happy in your judgment of fine points, ready in a second to estimate the worth of a well-judged pass, a run down the touch line, a lightning shot, a clearance by back or goal keeper; it turned you into a partisan, holding your breath when the ball came sailing into your own goalmouth, ecstatic when your forward raced away towards the opposite goal, elated, down-cast, bitter, triumphant by turns at the fortunes of your side, watching a ball shape Iliads and Odysseys for you; and what is more, it turned you into the member of a new community, all brothers together

for an hour and a half, for not only had you escaped from the clanking machinery of this lesser life, from work, wages, rent, doles, sick pay, insurance cards, nagging wives, ailing children, bad bosses, idle workmen, but you had escaped with most of your mates and your neighbors, with half the town, and there you were, cheering together, thumping one another on the shoulders, swopping judgments like lords of the earth, having pushed your way through a turnstile into another and altogether more splendid kind of life, hurtling with Conflict and yet more passionate and beautiful in its Art. Moreover, it offered you more than a shilling`s worth of material for talk during the rest of the week. A man who missed the last home match of ‘t’United’ had to enter social life on tiptoe in Bruddersford (Priestly 1976: 13-14).

Turner and Durkheim could not put it better; already in its early phase, soccer created *communitas* and “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 2008: 226) which, by suspending social structures, creates a “limbo of statuslessness” (Turner 1969: 97) and represents “the ‘quick’ of human relatedness” (Turner 1969: 127). Fandom, Janet Lever confirms, is “for those who belong” (Lever 1983: 108).

The game entered the Iberian peninsula around the 1880`s, and had to do with the commercial-industrial expansion of Britain. The first game was arguably played in southern Spain, a small mining town called Rio Tinto, whose copper mines were British-owned, and where the *Rio Tinto Soccer Club* gathered to play a game on the local feast day of San Roque in August 1887 (Burns 2012: 10). Rio Tinto was connected to the Andalusian town Huelva, where the first soccer club in Spain was founded in 1889 by British expatriates.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> This date, too, has been disputed.

Much has been written about the role of sports as a vehicle of colonialist domination (James 1963; Bairner 2001; MacAloon 2008; Shihade 2011). In Bilbao, there appears to have been a more reciprocal, equal power relationship between British and Bilbao industrialists as business partners. Bilbao's early soccer culture was part of its general *anglomanía*, a fascination with all things British.

That fascination was sparked by iron. As early as AD 77-79, the *Natural History* of Pliny remarks that “in that part of the Cantabrian coast (...) there rises a high and steep mountain (...) composed entirely of iron” (in Glas 1997: 29). The richness of Bizkaian iron deposits had long been known and exploited. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, swords made in Bilbao were known for the fine temper and elasticity of their blade. Shakespeare used the word *bilbo* for sword in his *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Falstaff says to Ford: “I suffered the pangs of three several deaths; first, an intolerable fright, to be detected ... next, to be compassed, like a good bilbo ... hilt to point, heel to head” (iii:5). Up until the modernization of mining in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the exploitation of iron was chaotic and disorganized: “peasants who didn't have the slightest clue of this activity,” Humboldt remarked, “dig holes haphazardly, strike the mineral at hand with their picks, and after they have worked a certain time and the hole has an uncomfortable depth, or water has become a problem, they abandon the site, and dig a new whole, as haphazardly as before” (in Glas 1997: 35). Such methodological disarray only proved the richness of the area in ore: no matter where the miners dug, they were almost certain to strike iron.

The “iron fever” catalyzed by the British-based Industrial Revolution quickly made Bilbao one of the busiest harbors and iron producing centers. The city came to resemble an “American frontier town” in constant motion: a flow of people, products, money, ideas and technologies (Glas 1997: 29). The last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

witnessed industrial modernization and an explosion of economic activity. Three factories of powerful, modern blast furnaces emerged on the left bank of the Nervión river: San Francisco de Mudela, Altos Hornos de Bilbao, and La Vizcaya. The location of the three factories on the river bank allowed the fast import of British coal to Bilbao, and the export of iron ore to England. By the end of the 1890`s, the blast furnaces of Great Britain were largely smelting Bilbao rather than British ore. Added to this an adjacent and emerging ship building industry, and a thriving banking sector,<sup>16</sup> Bilbao was spectacularly successful. “In 1929,” Glas remarks, “Basque capital constituted 25 percent of Spanish banking resources, 38 percent of the investment in shipyards, 40 percent of the stock in engineering and electrical construction firms, 68 percent of funds dedicated to shipping companies, and 62 percent of the moneys invested in steel factories” (1997: 107). The fact that this wealth was produced by a region that constituted only three percent of the population of Spain made contemporary philosopher Miguel de Unamuno conclude that “Bilbao`s wealth comes from its people” (in Glas 1997: 29).

Athletic Club was founded in this dynamic milieu, and quickly became the plaything of the Basque nationalist and anglophile industrial elite. The opulent Bilbaino bourgeoisie had been fond of tennis, Basque pelota, regatta and cycling; fascinated with everything that came from Europe and especially Britain, they now turned to soccer. The bourgeois origins of Bilbao`s soccer are well illustrated by the Club`s links with the shipping and mining magnate Sota family. Several sons of the Sotas played in Athletic, served as its presidents or board members; Alejandro de la Sota was one of those thirty-three founding members who officially established the

---

<sup>16</sup> The *Banco de Bilbao* and the *Banco de Vizcaya* were among the five largest Spanish banks until their merger, when they became the largest.

club in 1901 at the Café García. His son Ramón de la Sota went on to create the ship building company *Euskalduna*, one of the largest business empires in Spain, and certainly the most emblematic Basque company of the industrial era. During the First World War, the British monarch knighted Ramón de la Sota *Sir*, “Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire” for his support of the British Admiralty against Germany through his ship building empire. The Sotas were Basque nationalists and politicians of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), factors that led the Francoists to confiscate the family’s wealth after the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), from which the Basque nationalist side emerged as losers. When some of the wealth was recuperated after the fall of the Franco regime in 1982, the Sota family donated their down town palace, *Ibaigane*, as a gift for Athletic Club. Located in central Bilbao, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, neo-Basque style palace has served as the Athletic Club headquarters ever since; it overlooks the river (*Ibaigane* meaning “above the river” in Basque), where industrial ships would traffic, and where now stands the ship-shaped Guggenheim Museum.

*Alirón, alirón, el Athletic Campeón!* “Alirón, alirón, Athletic champion.” The 1950’s hymn of Athletic Club is known all over Spain for this line. *Cantar el alirón*, “singing the alirón” has become a wide spread chant of triumph that many Spanish fan communities have tailored to the victories of their teams. The song’s origins are the focus of some debate. Some argue it comes from the cabarets of Madrid, but in Bilbao they claim to know better: *alirón* derives from the English “all iron.” Some say Bilbainos might have seen “all iron” written on the big iron containers of British industrial ships; others argue it was miners who wrote it on newly dug ore mines, shouting “all iron” triumphantly over discovered wealth. In any case, “all iron” meant

success, happiness, prosperity; and though Bilbao's "all iron," its industry is gone by now, the triumphant *alirón* of the era echoes in its soccer culture.

## 2.2 The British-Basque Encounter: Chronicles of a Seduction

The British-Basque encounter was an event of mutual attraction, chronicled in a popular song this way:

<i>Un inglés vino a Bilbao</i>	An Englishman came to Bilbao
<i>A ver la ría y el mar</i>	To see the river and the sea
<i>Pero al ver las bilbainitas</i>	But upon seeing Bilbao's maidens
<i>Ya no se quiso marchar</i>	He no longer wanted to leave.

Bilbainos are fascinated with the stranger who comes and falls in love with their city. Anecdotes abound about the English footballer who came to work, settled down, and never left for his love of the local life style. During the Civil War (1936-39), when British citizens were urged to evacuate Bilbao, the ex-footballer Jorge Langford reportedly denied going back to England: "You are right. If I go to England, I am not threatened by bombs; but I don't have good wines there, either" (Terrachet 1998: 37).

Athletic Club owes a great deal to the British presence in Bilbao at the inception of its soccer culture: players, coaches, know-how. The origin of the red and white colors is deputed: Sunderland or Southampton. The British did not only teach rules, technique and organization in the pitch, but also the simplest things: the Athletic Museum guards a contemporary pair of tough leather shoes with metal sole, displayed by an article that explains how to tie them. The club preserved the British influence in its English name and English playing style now uncharacteristic in the rest of Spain. The English style, *la manera inglesa*, consists of opening the game to

the sides, of long, measured, diagonal and high passes, finished as header goals by a center forward. “They say,” José Manuel Alonso writes (1998: 14), “that this team is so from the north, so English, that its greatest enemy in the stadium is the south wind. Days of south winds are considered extenuating circumstances.” To this day, fans are superstitious about the south wind; it is considered an ill omen for the outcome of the game.

Basques learnt the English style as what Marcel Mauss (1992) would consider a culturally sanctioned and transmitted “body technique.” Their game was simple to the point of unexciting, but honest and un-pretentious, which suited their cultural temperament. In his spiritual quest of Basqueness, the sculptor Jorge Oteiza found that Athletic play style was a perfect expression of the Basque soul: “The long, diagonal pass and the oblique run; that is the essence of the Basque game” (Alonso 1998: 11). The physicality and direct force of the English style fitted well with Basque conceptualizations of strong, tough masculinity. Traditional Basque sports (*deporte rural* or *herri kirolak*) like stone lifting, wood cutting or oxen pulling with a stone block exhibit a strong valorization of direct physical strength. In her ethnography of the indigenous Basque pelota game, Olatz González Abrisketa argues that fans appreciate the direct, forceful and honest play of the back court player “lion,” and distrust the deceitful, indirect, cunning, albeit more spectacular, game of the front court player “fox” (2012, 95-101). The concept of force, of *indarra*, has a special cultural relevance for Basques: as an almost exclusively male attribute, it variously refers to physical strength, political, supernatural or procreative powers, *mana*-like life-force (Ott 1981: 87). The forceful game of the Basques was epitomized by José María Belausteguigoitia, who earned the name “Spanish Fury” for the Spanish selection at the 1920 Olympic Games against Sweden. I will discuss his story

later in this manuscript; for now suffice it to say that his noble, passionate and forceful game was the finest manifestation of Athletic`s northern style. Even today, despite the global fascination with a technique oriented game, Bilbao fans appreciate physical, direct and hard working players, and bear a certain suspicion towards technical ones.

Athletic had British names on its early rosters, and it contracted British coaches. One of the most revered British figures of the club was Mr. Frederick Pentland, who played ten, and coached seven years in Athletic in the 1920`s, which makes him the coach of longest tenure in the club. Mr. Pentland was quite a character, and Bilbainos adored everything about his appearance: his cigars, his attire and mannerisms (he was popularly called *El Bombín*, “The Bowler Hat”), his sayings and broken Spanish. As a contemporary commentator remarks:

Not even the cup title of 1923 through the red-and-white defensive tactic could eclipse the figure of the Englishman. To the contrary; this title praises even more his unmistakably British behavior. Tea at five, umbrellas and a bowler hat made him famous, among other things: the hat was destroyed by laughing and joking players each time they won a title. He brought about a simple and practical revolution: he was a master who taught us everything from how to tie our shoes to how to kick the ball with the instep of the foot instead of the toes (in Alonso 1998: 46).

*Que poco te queda, bombín! Solo tres minutos!* “Little time is left for you, bowler hat! Only three minutes!” This phrase, foreseeing victory and the destruction of the bowler hat at the end of the game, is still widely known in Bilbao. Out of homage to British origins, a coach in Bilbao (and by now in Spain) is called *el míster*. Affection was mutual. “Bilbao is the best city in the world,” Mr. Pentland would declare. He

soon became “a Bilbaino from Atxuri [a district of Bilbao]”—after all, as the local adage goes, “Bilbainos are born wherever they chose.” When Mr. Pentland died in 1962 in England, Athletic Club held a special mass for him in San Mamés stadium. In 2010, the Athletic Museum featured an exhibition on the British trainer, and invited Mr. Pentland’s daughter to inaugurate it.

The beginnings of Athletic’s localist “philosophy” are traced back to 1912: the year when the last British players (Veicht and Smith) left the club. Until 1912, it was not unusual for British players to play in Athletic Club. When people want to find inconsistencies in the philosophy of Athletic, they refer to the many English players and coaches the club had in its formative years. But the early British players were far from the kind of mercenary player migrant we know today; the game was not professionalized until the 1920’s and 30’s, and British players did not come to play football but to work. They settled and had families in Bilbao and, incidentally, played soccer well enough to play for Athletic

Why did Athletic stop contracting foreigners? Why break with the tradition of British players on the roster?

One reason may be that at the 1911 Spanish Championship played in Bizkaia province, Athletic got in trouble for having English players on its roster. The championship took place at the “marvelous” field of Jolaseta in Neguri, where a great fiesta of soccer was in the making. The trains carried hundreds of sports fans from Bilbao, Las Arenas and Plencia to Neguri who, as contemporary commentators remarked, turned “the Jolaseta field into the most impressive spectacle one can ever imagine” (Terrachet 1998: 68). But problems soon emerged. The championship was still in its infancy, and poorly regulated. Several complaints emerged about foreigners in certain clubs, sending the Directors of the Federation into haphazard decision

making about repeating games without foreigners, and about disqualifying teams. Athletic Club ended up winning the championship. A few days later, however, the Spanish Federation revoked the title and expelled Athletic Club. “Imagine to what point passions arose,” a commentator remarks, “if not even the King, whose name the cup bore, could intervene to redress the situation” (in Terrachet 1998: 69). Could it be that Athletic, angered by the revocation and the expulsion, decided the best way to avoid such troubles once and for all was not to contract foreigners?

In January 1913, Athletic Club decided that it was no longer convenient for the increasing number of fans to make the trip to their usual playfield in the neighboring Jolaseta, and made plans for the construction of a stadium right at the end of the downtown *Gran Vía*. San Mamés stadium was inaugurated on August 21, 1913, at an inauguration championship. This is how the local daily *El Porvenir Vasco* reported the event the following:

As part of the festivities, the program yesterday featured the inauguration of the *football*<sup>17</sup> field of *Athletic Club*, and we may say that it was celebrated with the greatest glamour. Athletic Club now may boast with an absolutely magnificent, elegant *football* field, which admirably serves all the necessities that such a playfield requires, and probably it is the best of its kind in Spain. It was a great decision on part of this pleasant *sportive* society to build this field, as it facilitates for the Bilbaino public, among whom fandom of *football* is gaining popularity by the day, the attendance of the *matches* that are organized, and where Athletic`s teams will always make a splendid presence. They did a good job choosing the place, inasmuch as it is in the most picturesque spot of the City. As it was expected, given the great affection that Athletic enjoys, as well as the attraction of the game, the inauguration of the *football* field was

---

<sup>17</sup> Italics are used to highlight the English words as they were used in the Spanish text. This is to emphasize the novelty of the game, as there existed no technical words in Spanish yet.

brilliant. Our fine and elegant society all made their presence. Attendance was really extraordinary, and the field had a cheerful and delightful atmosphere” (Terrachet 1998: 72).

Not for nothing do they call San Mamés *la Catedral*, the Cathedral of Spanish soccer. It is the only stadium that has hosted every single season of the Spanish *Liga* right from its inception in 1929. Its crowd has been considered noble, knowledgeable and respectful. In San Mamés, even opponents were applauded for spectacular games. Visiting teams never miss to remark the “special, historical” atmosphere of the stadium, its “difficulties,” for the supporting home crowds that tightly envelope the field—the distance between the bottom row of seats and the field is about two yards.

Rafael Moreno Aranzadi “Pichichi” was Athletic’s first player of hall of fame caliber. “Pichichi” means something like ungraceful, skinny “little duck” in Euskera, as his build indeed was; he was spotted by a talent scout as he was playing on the *Campa de los Ingleses*. The scout reportedly noted: “who’s this *pichichi* that plays so well?” (Leguineche, Unzueta and Segurola 1998: 45). Pichichi was a Bilbaino through and through, the kind of player epitomized as local: the son of the mayor of Bilbao, he was nephew to the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, cousin to the anthropologist Telesforo Aranzadi, and related to Claudio Aranzadi, the Minister of Industry. Pichichi scored the first goal in San Mamés in 1913. In 1953, the sports daily *Marca* introduced the Trophy of Pichichi, which is awarded every year to the top goal scorer of the Spanish league. As it grew into one of the most competitive leagues of the world, the Pichichi trophy became a prestigious possession, awarded to some of the greatest players in soccer history: Ferenc Puskás, Alfredo di Stéfano, Hugo

Sánchez, Ronaldo, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Messi, among others. It was awarded five times to Athletic's very own forward, Telmo Zarra.

### 2.3 Sports, Society and Politics

By way of concluding Athletic's pre-Civil War social history, we must reiterate two points: the transverse nature of its following in terms of social strata and gender, and its links with the Basque nationalist elite in terms of leadership. As opposed to the British working class base, in Bilbao soccer was not only a working class past time. The terraces and the squad featured the poorest layers of society as well as sons of the industrial-political-intellectual elite. This fits well with the egalitarian ethos Basques like to maintain at the level of interaction despite obvious differences in social-economic status; Athletic was, and still is, a site of encounter between life worlds that otherwise would not have much of a common ground. It was a game for locals and for immigrants, rich and poor, men and women (although women did not attend the games in equal proportions with men). "In Athletic, everybody fits," as a fan put it.

In terms of leadership, Athletic often shared personnel with the emerging Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) founded by Sabino Arana in 1895. In addition to the industrial magnet and Basque nationalist Sota family mentioned before, the President of the First Basque Autonomous Government, José Antonio Aguirre, is another famous example. Forced into exile during the Civil War for his Basque nationalist politics, no biographical note forgets to mention that he was a player in Athletic, where he debuted in 1923.

The youth section of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), the *Juventud Vasca* was the party's most active agent in the merger of football and politics in the 1920's. In the newspaper called *Euzkadi*, the nationalist Daniel de Abechuco attributes the

physical superiority of the “Anglo-Saxon races” to sports. He praises soccer as a convenient and healthy sport “that strengthens the body and creates good conditions for the fight;” he argues that through it Basques, too, “must create emulation between village and village, *batzoki* and *batzoki*” (in Unzueta 1999, 159)—the latter being Basque nationalist bars. In 1934, the Basque Nationalist Party journal *Excelsius* supported the organization of a *Copa Vasca*, or “Basque Cup,” with the participation of six Basque clubs. The non-nationalist press criticized the initiative as they saw it as a manipulative maneuver to create a Basque league. *Excelsius*, however, vindicated the promotion of a political cause through sports: “There are those who say that politics and football can’t be mixed... But won’t we make a nationalist, nationalizing question, eminently patriotic, if sports serve us as a fast means to achieve our aspirations?” (in Gómez 2007: 30).

The Basque Nationalist Party never felt the need to “appropriate” the club for political purposes, and Bilbainos are careful to keep the club below and beyond party politics as the only social sphere that agglutinates all social segments and ideologies. There remains, however, a sense of common origins and purpose. Andoni Ortuzar, a leading politician of the Basque Nationalist Party and member of Athletic Club, told me this: “Fortunately, Athletic has never been openly politicized, but all its signs of identification are *abertzale* [“patriot”] nationalist. The humanistic values of the Basque Nationalist Party are very similar to the ideals of Athletic” (personal communication, February 2011). Several members of the top leadership of the PNV, including Bilbao’s mayor, the parliamentary representative of Bizkaia province, and the current (2013) *Lehendakari* or President of the Basque Government are club members, and can be spotted at the terraces of San Mamés. “To be a real Bilbaino,”

Ortuzar tells me, “you have to be *aficionado* to three things: Athletic, the Virgin of Begoña, and the PNV.”

#### **2.4 The Civil War: Athletic in Exile**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out as a result of a coup d'état affected by a rebel group led by General Francisco Franco. The Civil War divided the country between the Republican and the Nationalist forces. The Republicans fought to defend the established Spanish Republic against the Nationalists, who were led by Franco and supported by various conservative groups including monarchists such as the Catholic conservative Carlists, and the Fascist Falange. The Basque Country, having received a statute of autonomy from the *Cortes* of the Spanish Republic in October 1936, and José Antonio Aguirre having sworn in office as the President of the first Autonomous Government, sided with the Republican forces. President Aguirre set up his headquarters at the Hotel Carlton, from where he directed the Basque armed forces until June 1937, when Franco's forces broke through the city's fortifications renown as “Bilbao's Iron Ring.” Aguirre and his government were exiled to France. Today, his statue stands next to the Hotel Carlton, watching the multitude of red and white players swarm towards the *Calle Licenciado de Poza*, the street leading up to San Mamés. Occasionally, on home game days, fans would put an Athletic scarf around his neck. When in 2010 after the Spanish selection won the World Cup and someone put a Spanish flag on Aguirre's statue, indignation was widespread; the act violated the memory of the victims of the Civil War.

In his novel *El otro árbol de Gernika* (1968), which resonates with George Steer's acclaimed *The Tree of Gernika* (1937) chronicling the siege of Bilbao, Luis de Castresana describes the story of a group of children from Bilbao, who are evacuated

during the war along with some 3000 others from the besieged city to various European countries. The main character Santi and his friends are taken to Belgium, where they learn the hardships of being away from their home, separated from their parents, planted in a foreign country with a foreign tongue. What keeps the children's memory alive of the homeland is a tree in the schoolyard, which they call the "Tree of Gernika" (the old oak in Bizkaia province that symbolizes Basque autonomy)—and Athletic. Santi's only wish is an Athletic jersey, which his Belgian hosts somehow provide for him. The children find refuge in that sole jersey as they take turns wearing it, and reconstruct around it the ludic, enchanted universe of Athletic and soccer competition, which brings them back home, if only for the duration of their matches, to Bilbao.

The soccer league was suspended for three years for the duration of the Civil War (1936-1939). In spite of the suspension, the players tried to stay active and play friendly matches; Patxo Unzueta (1999: 164) remarks that these friendly matches were organized around local teams that sympathized with the Basque Nationalist Party and its ideological environs. The aim was to raise money for an aircraft for the Basque militia that was fighting in the Civil War. Such was the success of these games that the ex-player Aguirre's Basque Government decided to create a Basque selection and send it abroad to raise money. At the end of 1937, the local press put out an advertisement, addressing "all those who consider themselves to be in the first team of Athletic Club of Bilbao" (in Alonso 1998: 61). *Team Euskadi* was created with mostly Athletic players, and went on a three year long tour abroad. The selection played in France, Poland, the Soviet Union, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Mexico, Chile and Cuba.

The squad was captained by Luis Regueiro, who had been several times Spanish international, and a former Real Madrid player. His sympathies lied with the Basque cause, however. Such was his propaganda potential that Francoist forces invented a story that he had been shot by Republicans, and his body disappeared. Reguiero said this about the Basque selection`s tour: “There was a [...] huge need to bring home to the rest of the world that we Basques were different to what some wanted to make us out to be. It was this idea that inspired us both in and outside the stadiums we played in abroad, winning games of the pitches, and generating sympathy and friends beyond them” (Burns 2012: 108). Nevertheless, there was a lot of uncertainty and anxiety about the trip. “We became nomads with our soccer as our only arm,” one of the players, Zubieta, recalled years later. “We had embarked on a new life, without knowing where we were heading, and I think that when we crossed the frontier into France, our hope was that we would return soon” (Burns 2012: 108). After a highly publicized tour in Moscow, which the Soviet propaganda machine promptly used for its own anti-fascist purposes, the squad embarked on a ship to Mexico, where they entered and won the Mexican first division.

With the end of the war, most players never returned; they had contracted with South American clubs, settled and raised families, or feared coming back to Francoist Spain. The Basque selection`s tour still resonates with elderly sports fans in the countries they visited; they are remembered as the persevering squad raising money for a small nation caught in the midst of historical turbulences. Manuel de la Sota, who traveled with the team as its financial provider, wrote this about those three years: “Bad luck had united us, but that luck turned out to be one of the most fortunate thing in my life. Through it, I came to know examples of our race who as well as being artists of a sport which they taught foreigners to play, were also standard

bearers of the dignity of a small people, a nation whose name was Euzkadi” (Burns 2012: 112).

## 2.5 The Franco Dictatorship

The loss of the Civil War was immediately followed by ideological, linguistic and cultural repression, intensive Hispanicization affected by the Franco regime. Franco’s purges were infamous: regional languages were not allowed in public, ethnic symbols were forbidden, even tomb stones had to be erased and written again in Castilian. Jobs of any public significance were ordered to be occupied by persons sympathetic to the regime. Tens of thousands of Republican public workers all over Spain found themselves in the streets humiliated and marginalized, forced to take up jobs much below their qualifications.

Purification was applied to soccer clubs, too. Immediately after the end of the war in 1939, 40% of Athletic’s membership (5000 members) were erased from the records—including the name of President Aguirre and Manuel de la Sota, who was club president in the 1920’s. The yellowish sheets of the Club’s membership list show a conspicuous reduction as people were deemed ideologically suspect—Republicans, communists, Basque nationalists. In 2010, the club organized a commemorative act, where a golden badge was awarded retrospectively to President Aguirre and the rest of the more than two thousand club members who had been banned from club membership in the end of the 1930’s. In 1938, a new board of directors was elected, which was required to send all 145 trophies of Athletic to the military government, with the destination of the National Treasure. In 1942, all soccer clubs in Spain were required to Castilianize their names: Athletic Club became *Atlético de Bilbao*.

The *Liga* resumed in 1939-40. The Basque Country was in disarray, and so was Athletic: it needed to re-compose itself, but the majority of its pre-war players were no longer in Bilbao. It had to go back to its local *cantera*, or “quarry,” to build a team from scratch. The results were spectacular. During the 1940`s, Athletic won one league, four cup, and four sub-championship titles. The 1950`s were similarly successful: a league title, four cup titles, and two sub-championships, once again making the club a participant of the majority of the finals played in Spain during that decade. By this time, Athletic`s philosophy was an established tradition associated with the Basque club, a tradition renowned for its continuity with past generations. When Mr. Pentland returned to San Mamés in 1958 for an homage organized in his honor, he told the players: “You are the grandchildren of the old players, but you are the same as them, and you look the same; happy are the people who know how to preserve a tradition like that” (in Alonso 1998: 96).

As several informants reiterated, the social psychological importance of these successes for Bilbao cannot be overestimated after the disastrous end of the Civil War. There was a deep sense of loss, pain and defeat in the Basque Country: the Basque Government in exile; the Basque Nationalist Party banned; many executed, imprisoned, persecuted or forced to leave; workplaces purged; severe cultural-political repression and economic hardships. As an elderly fan put it, “after the war, there were the winners and the losers; the majority of the San Mamés crowd [those who did not chose to serve the regime], were the defeated ones. The only place where we were winners was the soccer field” (J. C. personal communication: Bilbao 2010 October). Victories against Real Madrid, Franco`s endorsed team, became the only source of pleasure and pride for an otherwise defeated, humiliated nation. “I remember the famous 5-1 victory against Madrid,” a fan tells me. “When we scored

the fifth, I could not contain myself and, despite the dangers, I shouted ‘*Gora Euskadi!*’ [Up with the Basque Country!].” As no public political vindication was possible, Athletic became a site of secret transgression, a wink-and-nod understanding of common consciousness. “*Aupa Athletic*, and you know what I mean” was a euphemism fans recall; what it really meant was the “dangerous” yell, *Gora Euskadi*. It was a classic case of David beating Goliath in a context where sports provided the only level playing field (even if referees and league organization would sometimes collude with Real Madrid’s interests). The Basque Country lost the war but Athletic, the peripheral club and local roster of the Civil War’s losing side, was beating Madrid often and severely, a rich and powerful Madrid that by then contracted the greatest stars of world soccer.

It is against this backdrop that Athletic’s cult of the *once aldeanos*, or “eleven peasants, emerged.”<sup>18</sup> The lineup’s legend started at the Generalissimo’s Cup of 1958, where Athletic qualified to play in the finals against the “white machines” Real Madrid which had, with a little help from Franco, snapped the world’s top forward, Alfredo Di Stéfano, in a dubious machination from Barcelona FC. That year, Real Madrid won the Spanish *Liga* and the European Cup, and went for the *triple*, the triple title including the Generalissimo’s Cup. Athletic, however, beat Real Madrid 0-2 in its home field Bernabéu. As he handed over the trophy to Athletic’s captain, Gainza, General Franco reportedly said: “Here you are again!” to which Gainza replied in a cavalier manner only the “extra-ordinary,” ludic context would allow: “”Yes, and next year we will see each other again!”<sup>19</sup> The following day, Bilbao’s streets were flooded in reception of its champion team. The president Enrique

---

<sup>18</sup> Carmelo, Orue, Garay, Canito, Mauri, Etura, Artetxe, Uribe, Arietal, Koldo Agirre and Gainza.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.deia.com/2012/04/29/athletic/la-leyenda-de-los-39once-aldeanos39>

Guzmán said this on the balcony of the City Hall: “We have humiliated them with *once aldeanos*, [eleven peasants]!”<sup>20</sup> The *once aldeanos* are a morality tale of the simple, honest and grounded Basque rural man who beats sophisticated and powerful opponents—even if Athletic, and much less Bilbao, never quite had a simple, modest and rural identity. But more than reality, Bilbainos defined themselves by the fantasy of “eleven peasants.” Many years later in 1999, when soccer was a million dollar global business and Athletic qualified for the Champions League, star forward Julen Guerrero was hailed as “the one who brought us, *eleven peasants*, to Europe.”

## 2.6 The Post-Franco Era

On November 20, 1975, Arias Navarro, President of the Spanish Government, announced with shaking voice on state owned television ABC: “Spaniards! Franco died (...) Long live Spain!”

The immediate post-Franco era was a difficult time of social-political transition. ETA intensified its campaign during the democratic transition. Before the transition, the organization had considerable public and international support for what was seen a guerilla war on the repressive regime. When in 1973 ETA planted a bomb in the car of Luis Carrero Blanco, Cabinet Minister to Franco and his intended successor in power, the act had considerable international echo. After the death of Franco, ETA prisoners were released in an act of general amnesty. The organization did not dismantle despite the democratic turn. Quite the contrary, its attacks intensified, and peaked in the years 1978-1980, with a record number of assassinations of 93 persons just in 1980.<sup>21</sup> During the 1980`s, the streets of

---

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.miathletic.com/wiki/Los\\_11\\_Aldeanos](http://www.miathletic.com/wiki/Los_11_Aldeanos)

<sup>21</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ETA>

downtown Bilbao would turn into a field of *kale borroka*, or “street fight:” urban guerrilla actions carried out by leftist Basque nationalist youth. The repressive dictatorship left behind a vacuum, which became a contested site of ideologies and identities.

The most turbulent social-political years coincided with the second Golden Age of Basque soccer. Athletic won two league titles in two successive seasons (1982-83, 1983-84), and a *doblete*, the double championship title of cup and league in 1983-84. These titles had a solidifying effect on Athletic`s identity: they proved that the club could champion an increasingly globalized soccer arena with local players. By then, Athletic`s philosophy was conceptualized the same way as the Basque nationalist imaginary: from a province based club it expanded recruitment over the historical Basque Country of four Spanish, and three French Basque provinces. “I think that Athletic has managed to unite us,” the writer Elias Amézaga said on account of the 1982-83 league title, “even if for a limited time. It is really a great impulse for the rising of the Basques” (in Alonso 1998: 170). During the celebration of Athletic successes, Bilbao mayor José Luis Robles said this on the balcony of the city hall: “They say we are different. I will not get into the polemics whether we are better or worse. We are distinct because we are Basque” (in Alonso 1998: 179). Club president Pedro Aurtenetxe put it this way: “Our people have been waiting for this reward, because it means a lot... It means that we are on the right path, that our policy of keeping the *cantera*, the ‘quarry,’ at all cost does not only give spiritual satisfaction, but also produce such important and transcendental sports events like this victory” (in Alonso 1998, 167). Such were the energies of that Golden Age that it still manages to nourish the belief in the localist philosophy.

In 1995, the world of football changed: the Bosman ruling of the European Court lifted the limitations on non-nationals, and allowed the free movement of players. The ruling marked a before and after in the world of football. It led to a rampant capitalism of player traffic and television rights generating grave inequalities among clubs. At the beginning of the 1998-99 season, forty out of a hundred Spanish first division players were on average foreign nationals. As player salaries grew exponentially, most clubs turned into *Sociedades Anónimas Deportivas* (SADs or “Anonymous Sports Societies”), which were no longer maintained by club members but owned by a single person. Athletic, which was not obliged to turn SAD for its favorable financial management,<sup>22</sup> was governed and maintained by its 35 000 members through a system of democratic representation. SADs on the other hand had a mercantile approach at the mercy of a single owner, who often aimed to make money from buying off clubs threatened with bankruptcy in an increasingly competitive market. An informant put the difference between SADs and clubs this way: “Rooting for an SAD is like rooting for the *Corte Ingles* [an upscale department store chain]; it’s like rooting for a business. In turn, fans feel a club belongs to them.” The Bosman ruling ushered football into a post-modern phase where locality was losing its relevance in global capitalism.

## 2.7 “Athletic, a Thousand Times Champion”

A brief overview of the most important hymns of Athletic Club reflects the changing meanings projected on soccer in Bilbao. The 1913 hymn by Aquino and Retana takes football for what it was: a new frivolous past time that brings people together:

---

<sup>22</sup> Along with Real Madrid, Barcelona FC and C. at. Osasuna.

En España entera triunfa	In entire Spain
la canción del ¡Alirón!	Triumphs the song of the Alirón
y no hay chico deportista	There is no sportsman
que no sepa esta canción.	Who would not know this song.
Y las niñas orgullosas	And the proud girls
hoy le dan su corazón	Today give their heart
a cualquiera de los once	To any one of the eleven
del Atlético campeón.	Of the champion Athletic team
¡Alirón! ¡Alirón! ¡El Atlético es campeón!	Alirón, Alirón, Athletic
champion.	
Hoy el fútbol en España	Today, soccer in Spain
es la máxima afición	Has the greatest following
y la gente se emociona	And people are excited
con los ases del balón.	With the aces of the ball
Y lo mismo en Indochina	And the same in Indochina
que en Italia y en Japón	As in Italy and Japan
todos cantan las proezas	All sing the prowess
del Atlético campeón.	Of the champion Athletic
¡Alirón! ¡Alirón! ¡El Atlético es campeón!	Alirón, Alirón, Athletic
champion	

The song of the *Alirón* is a song of triumph, of celebration. It celebrates a champion Athletic, its *alirón* echoing Bilbao's legacy of industrial success. Just as Bilbao's "all iron" made the city well known in Spain and Europe, so does the *alirón*, the successes of its soccer team, spread its fame all over the world. The song captures Spain as it becomes enamored with the new game, and reflects the early advances of what would become the most globalized sport in the world.

Though soccer was not professionalized until the 1920's, it was already an important means of subjectivization for the athlete. Almost immediately, being a

soccer player became a social status: it fixed considerable social capital for the player to whom even “proud girls gave their heart” readily as early as the 1910`s. The most emblematic painting in the history of Athletic Club by the painter Aurelio Arteta features Pichichi, the star player of the 1920`s, not as he scores one of his historic goals, but rather as he chats up his future wife on the side of a soccer field . The empowering potential of soccer is evidenced when scoring on the field translates into scoring off it, which it did soon after the establishment of the sport.

The 1950 hymn by Goyo Nadal and Timoteo Urrengoetxea was born in a politically conflicted milieu: in the middle of the Franco dictatorship. The anthem was called *Himno al Atlético de Bilbao*, but kept “Athletic Club” within the text:

Tiene Bilbao	Bilbao has
un gran tesoro	a great treasure
que adora y mima	which it adores and pampers
con gran pasión	with great passion
su club de fútbol	its football club
de bella historia	of beautiful history
lleno de gloria	full of glory
mil veces campeón	a thousand times champion
Athletic, Athletic Club	Athletic, Athletic Club
de limpia tradición	of a clean tradition
ninguna más que tú	no other except you
lleva mejor blasón	brings greater honor
del fútbol eres rey	of football, you are king
te llaman el león	they call you lion
y la afición es ley	and the fans are rulers
del fútbol español.	of Spanish football.

<p>Cantemos pues los bilbainicos a nuestro club con gran amor</p> <p>para animarle con nuestro himno el canto digno del Alirón ¡Alirón! ¡Alirón! ¡El Atlético es campeón! champion.</p>	<p>Let us <i>bilbainicos</i><sup>23</sup> sing to our club with great love</p> <p>to cheer it with our hymn the honorable chant of the Alirón Alirón, Alirón, Athletic is champion.</p>
---	---

By the 1950`s, Athletic had solidified its character, and became an integral part of Bilbao`s identity; the city could be no longer understood without its Athletic. The club had found its cosmological foundation myth in the story of San Mamés, the early Christian who befriended the lions that later saved his life when he was cast before them in the Roman amphitheater. Noble and strong like a lion, “a thousand times champion.” The club is also featured as an integral part of *Spanish* soccer history through the records, heroes and anecdotes that it had contributed to the state`s sports life. Athletic`s “clean tradition” is a reference to its localist recruiting philosophy, which back then was still province based.

The 1982 anthem was written by Feliciano Beobide, Carmelo Bernaola and Juan Antón Zubikarai a few years after the democratic transformation. In it we see the coming of age of Athletic as a specifically Basque, and not just Bizkaian, club through a mature symbolic identity.

<p>Athletic, Athletic, Athletic eup! Athletic, gorri ta zuria danontzat zara zu geuria Erritik sortu ziñalako</p>	<p>Athletic, Athletic, Athletic eup! Athletic red and white for all of us, you are very ours because you were born from the</p>
---	---

---

<sup>23</sup> Diminutive of Bilbaino.

maite zaitu erriak	people
Gaztedi gorri-zuria	the people love you
	Red and white youth on a green
	field
zelai orlegian	
Euskalerriaren erakusgarria.	Example of the Basque Country
Zabaldu daigun guztiok	Let`s sing
Irrintzi alaia:	The exultant <i>irrintzi</i>
Athletic, Athletic	Athletic, Athletic
zu zara nagusia	You are the best
Altza Gaztiak	Let`s go youth
Athletic, Athletic,	Athletic, Athletic
gogoaren Indarra.	Force of the spirit
Aritz zarraren enborrak	The trunk of the old oak
loratu dau orbel barria.	Has grown new leaves
Aupa mutilak!	Let`s go boys
aurrera gure gaztiak!	Let`s go our youth
Bilbo ta Bizkai guztia	Bilbao and all Bizkaia
goratu bedi munduan	Be praised all over the world
Aupa mutilak!	Let`s go boys
gora beti Euskalerrria!	Long live the Basque Country
Athletic gorri-zuria	Athletic red and white
geuria.	Ours
Bilbo ta Bizkai guztiak gora!	Bilbao and Bizkaia, up everyone!
Euskaldun zintzoak aurrera!	Noble Basques, go forward!

The hymn is replete with Basque nationalist imagery. The lyrics are in Euskera, the Basque language; a Basque person in Basque is *Euskaldun*, “speaker of Euskera or

Basque.” The lyrics show that Athletic’s recruitment philosophy was fully crystallized and became the most important axis of identification for the club. The “red and white youth on the green field” evokes the Basque red-white-green national flag, the *ikurrina*—indeed, as a Basque nationalist Athletic fan told me, “only a green stripe separates the Athletic from the *ikurrina*.” The “exaltant *irrintzi*” is an extended, yodel-like yell used to express happiness or celebration by the Basques. It was also used as a form of mountain communication by Basque smugglers trafficking through the Pyrenees between Spain and France under the Franco dictatorship. Through its player recruitment, Athletic grew from a provincial club into one that represents the entire Basque nation. While previous hymns locate it in Bilbao and Bizkaia, the present one mentions *Euskal Herria* (the historic Basque Country) and “noble Basques” as its pool of players and following. While many Bilbainos and fans beyond the borders of the Basque Country tend to see Athletic as the “Basque national club,” we must add that the surrounding Basque provinces take issue with that appropriation. Fans of the Real Sociedad in Gipuzkoa province, and fans of the Osasuna in Navarre (both being first division clubs) are indignant about Athletic posing as the national club.

The “new leaves” growing from “the trunk of the old Oak” serve as an extended metaphor for historic Basque liberties symbolized by the “Oak of Gernika.” For the world, Gernika summarizes the horrors of the Second World War thanks to Picasso’s painting of its 1937 bombing; for the Basques, it also references their old local customary laws (*fueros*) that Spanish monarchs and feudal lords used to respect until their loss in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was by the old oak tree that they swore their recognition of foral laws and self-governance. It was there that representatives of the Basque areas met once a year to govern their affairs, which is why the tree is revered as a symbol of Basque liberties, which in turn prompted Franco to invite Hitler’s

Luftwaffe to destroy the small town in 1937. As tradition has it, the “Father Tree” was planted in the fourteenth century, followed by the “Old Tree” in 1742, whose trunk is on display in the *Casa de Juntas*, or “Meeting House” of Guernica. It is from this trunk that successive trees were planted. Today, every new president of the Basque Autonomous Government swears in office by the oak that represents liberty, continuity, and a rootedness in tradition. By incorporating the metaphor in its hymn, Athletic adopts a pan-Basquist imaginary.

### Chapter Three

#### “A Unique Case in the World:” Basque Exceptionalism in Soccer Culture

“For me, Athletic symbolizes something that can be barely found in the world any more. It is Resistance par excellence, a symbol that stands against the currents of the world. A club that insists on one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful, traditions of soccer history: it only plays Basques” (G. M. personal communication, 2011 April). This definition by a fan of Athletic Club summarizes what most fans consider the essence of the Athletic brand: a soccer culture defined by *difference*.

The club attracts attention for its unique recruitment philosophy in the first division Spanish *Liga*. A footballer is eligible to play in Athletic if he was born in the territory of the historical Basque Country (consisting of four Spanish Basque and three French-Basque provinces), or he was trained in one of the academies of a Basque soccer club. Commentators note the subversive character of playing only locals in a global “soccerscape” (Guilianotti 1999: 24) that thrives on athlete migration. Athletic’s subversion lies in its rejection of the post-modernization of soccer, and the insistence on its local, intersubjective enjoyment (Vaczi 2011). Playing local, a norm for the larger part of the game’s history, has become so rare that it becomes a refreshing novelty, “fresh play” (Castillo 2007). Athletic has been epitomized as a club that resists the globalization, standardization, rationalization and commercialism of modern football (Groves 2011). Popular media discourse packages Athletic as a “proud,” “romantic” club resisting the currents of the world.

The *L'Équipe*'s front page headline “Athletic, a unique case in the world of football” became the credo of what I call Basque exceptionalism through soccer: a sense of distinction. “We are neither better, nor worse for our philosophy,” they say

repeatedly in Bilbao; “we are *different*.” Better they are certainly not; Athletic is historically the third most successful club of the *Liga*, but it hasn’t won a title since 1984. Worse they aren’t, either; a sense of difference produces a deep enjoyment of, and unwavering loyalty to, local line ups even at the bottom of the league.

What does this localist recruitment “philosophy” tell us about Bilbainos, Bizkaians and the Basques? This chapter takes Athletic’s Basque-only policy for an *ethos* in a sense defined by Geertz: a people’s moral and aesthetic style and mood, the “underlying attitude toward themselves and their world” (1973: 127). A particular Bilbaino and Basque ethos becomes manifest in the performance of identity in the soccer arena, and interacts with other identity constructions of the society that surrounds it. Historically, two meta-narratives have been of special weight in the Basque Country: 1.) anthropological discourse that created a particular image of the Basques as a social, cultural and ethno-racial category, and 2.) political discourse that used Basque identity for its ideological-political purposes. Central to both meta-narratives is the notion of difference, which I take for a discourse of Basque exceptionalism. In this chapter I will first explore the construction of Basque identity by anthropologists and other social scientists, and investigate how this construction resonated in the various discourses of the Basque nationalist movement. Second, I will provide a social history of identity discourse through soccer culture. Third, I identify the ways Athletic’s Basque-only narrative concurs with and digresses from the scientific and political discourses that have defined Basques.

### 3.1 “We were different. We knew we were different. We were told we were different”

The notion of exceptionalism comes from North American historiography, where it was an organizing principle as early as 1831, when Alexis de Toqueville first emphasized the uniqueness of the United States in his *Democracy in America*. In his discussion of American historiography, Ian Tyrrell defines exceptionalism as “a special case ‘outside’ the normal patterns and laws of history” (1991: 1031).

Exceptionalism discourses emphasize difference through “being first” narratives, and are comparative. They define themselves against the categories of others, which may generate essentialist dichotomies. Such discourses also presume a stagist view of development and the existence of historical laws and schemes. They are written from a national point of view, and may have overtones of superiority (Tyrell 1991, Lipset 1996). Basque historiography, social science, political and popular discourse have engaged most of these characteristics to various degrees.

#### 3.1.1 *Basque Exceptionalism in Anthropological Narrative*

As anthropologist Jeremy MacClancy notes, popular media often describe the Basques as an ancient, dour, and mysterious people living in the Pyrenean mountains: “if, as the tourist posters proclaim, ‘Spain is different,’ then the Basques are seen as very different indeed” (MacClancy 1993: 92). A chapter of the popular BBC documentary series “Orson Welles Around the World” (1955) starts out with the camera scanning the Pyrenees of the French-Spanish border. Welles, one of the most well known journalists of his time, describes the Basques in the following terms (emphasis added):

*A fairly out of the way and little-known corner of Europe: the land of the Basques... For these people who have lived here this border has been more of a theory than a fact, a theory of the French and Spanish governments. Now, the people who live here are neither French, nor Spanish; they are Basques. The rise and fall of other kingdoms and republics has never made them forget that they are Basques. And the Basques are what Basques are. But what is a Basque? All we know for sure is what a Basque is not; besides not being French or Spanish, a Basque is not Mediterranean, Alpine, Magyar, Celtic, Germanic, Semitic, Scandinavian, he isn't even Aryan. Nobody knows who his ancestors were, according to him, Adam and Eve were pure Basques. And it's true that his position is something like the red Indians in America; he is an aboriginal. He already was in Europe before the other Europeans came along. To this day he speaks his own weird language; a tongue no expert has ever been able to trace. In General Franco's half of the Basque Country, this language is quite literally out of the law.*

Welles condenses the main discursive elements of Basque exceptionalism. He describes the Basques as insular and distant; mysterious and incomprehensible; defiant and subversive; different, other; indigenous, authentic; and very importantly, as having evolved *in situ* since the beginning of times. Such representations construct the Basques as a unique people whose difference rests on two pillars: first, on a definition in terms of who they are *not*, and second, a claim to ancestral ties to the land anchored in prehistoric heritage. Popular representations of the Basques, as I will argue here, were inspired by anthropological discourse that secured these two pillars of Basque exceptionalism.

By channeling scientific attention to evolution and categorization of species, the Darwinian paradigm shift affected the consolidation of sciences that pursued the categorization and tracing of human races: craniology and physical anthropology. The

Basques quickly became an object of international intellectual curiosity: “European anthropological science discovered a gold mine in Basque skulls” (Zulaika 1996: 51). The first notable to have measured Basque skulls was the Swedish Anders Retzius, anatomy professor and member of the *Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences*. Some linguistic theories maintained that the Basques and the Laplanders’ languages were related, and Retzius set out to study whether a racial-evolutionary connection might prove or disprove that connection. Retzius entertained the possibility that when Europe was invaded by Aryan people, the only autochthonous populations that saved themselves were the Basques, the Finns and the Lapps (Zulaika 1996: 50). The French scholar Paul Broca, anthropologist and founder of the *Société d’Anthropologie de Paris* and the *Revue d’Anthropologie*, studied sixty Basque crania, which had been furtively exhumed from the cemetery of Zarautz (Gipuzkoa province); the founder of modern anthropology considered craniometricity a primary scientific objective. The British A. C. Haddon from the *London Institute of Anthropology* studied Basque pre-history, and contributed considerably to the intellectual discourse on the Basques as it emerged from the laboratories of Stockholm, Paris and London. The local anthropologist who spearheaded research on the Basques was Telesforo de Aranzadi, founder of *Eusko Ikaskuntza* (“Society for Basque Studies”). Aranzadi defended what was the first anthropological doctoral thesis in Spain in 1889, with the title *El Pueblo Euskalduna*, in which he summarized and engaged with European research on Basque evolution and race theory (Zulaika 1996).

Symptomatic of the enthusiasm surrounding research on the Basques is the words of R. Collignon who, after working on cranes from Gipuzkoa in 1893, observed: “Before my eyes a new type of man was revealed, profoundly distinct, not only from all that I had observed in France under the same conditions, but also from

all those I had studied in the north of Africa” (Zulaika 1996: 53). A. C. Haddon concurred with the French findings and suggested that the Basques were direct descendents of the Cro-Magnon. Telesforo de Aranzadi emphasized the hybridity of the Basque race, but nevertheless argued for the intrinsic character of Basque evolution resulting in a “distinct Basque type,” a “typical Basque skull.” Blood type research also concluded that the Basques were hematologically different, having a larger percentage of the blood group O (MacClancy 1993: 99-103).

Following this foundational research, a distinguished line of craniologists, archeologists, linguists, folklorists and cultural anthropologists constructed Basques through prefixes like “non-” “pre-” “un-” and “proto-”: a people who preceded all others in the area; who spoke a non (and pre-)Indo European language (Humboldt 1821); whose customs, traditions (Gallop 1970) and gender relations (Ortiz and Mayr 1980) were unlike those of their neighbors, and whose political structure of local decision-making constituted the first proto-democracy (Caro Baroja 2009). These definitions “imposed” (MacClancy 1993: 117) by the scientific community constructed Basque race and culture as distinct and having emerged locally. Most of these theories of exceptionalism have been discarded or challenged by modern science, including ethno-racial distinctiveness and autochthonous evolution. What matters for our purposes, however, is not as much the truth value of these discourses as their consequences for social, cultural and political identities. True or not, discourse produces a certain reality.

The legitimizing power of scientific discourse is such that it may ascertain or question identities. “How do you know you are an Indian?” a young Mashpee woman was asked at a 1976 Massachusetts trial, where the Mashpee had to prove they were a “tribe” in order to gain possession over land. “My mother told me” (in Clifford 1988,

301). As another tribe member declared, “We were different. We knew we were different. We were told we were different” (in Clifford 1988: 281)—by anthropologists. Scientists are convoked to give “expert testimony,” to tell a people who they are, to legitimize their “tribe.” With the Basques, the question of how they know they are Basques can be answered the same way: “My anthropologist told me.”

The mere scientific interest in a people inadvertently gives them a sense of uniqueness. During my own fieldwork, I was repeatedly asked in the various local media to explain why I came to Bilbao, when as an independent researcher I could have focused on the more fashionable and powerful *grandes*, Barcelona FC or Real Madrid. “Why did you chose us?” they asked. The only possible answer that legitimated my own research for me (and my funding agency), and their own significance for them was: “Because you are *different*.” Historically, Jeremy MacClancy writes (1993: 114), for anthropologists to “bother to spend their time investigating Basque (as opposed to, say, Spanish) pre-history helped, and helps, committed nationalists to justify the high regard in which they hold their own people.” Ethnic, biological, cultural and social difference will become a staple in Basque political discourse as I will now show.

### 2.1.2 *Basque Exceptionalism in Political Narrative*

Long before Basque nationalism would crystallize at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in its modern form, a sense of difference characterized the northern peoples of Spain. This sense of difference had two main sources: the notion of “collective nobility” (*hidalguía colectiva*), and the customary laws called *fueros*.

The roots of collective nobility go back to 1053, when inhabitants of a local valley were given permission to raise their own militia (Conversi 1997: 178).

Subsequent Catholic kings granted the title of collective nobility to the provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa in exchange for border defense: “any Basque able to prove birth of Basque parents,” Davydd Greenwood argues (1977: 86), “was automatically recognized as noble by virtue of purity of blood.” Collective nobility became the “moral core of the Basque sense of uniqueness” (Greenwood 1977: 86). Another sticking point of Basque difference was provided by the *fueros*, or local customary laws, statutes and charters. The *fueros* were a special concession codified in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between the Spanish crown and the Basque regional powers, which exempted locals from military service and taxation, and allowed provincial assemblies to veto royal edicts. This was a considerable concession Basques managed to keep longer than other peripheries such as the Catalan, until 1876. The loss of the *fueros*, symbol and instrument of economic and regional independence, was a decisive factor in the emergence of late nineteenth century nationalism (Payne 1975). Both *hidalguía colectiva* and the *fueros* generated a sense of entitlement to differential treatment in state politics.

Basque nationalist discourse emerged in the authorship of Sabino Arana Goiri at the end of the nineteenth century, and emphasized race and ethnic distinctness as core value. Note how Arana’s discourse resonates with the scientific and popular discourse of difference discussed above: “This extremely original race is neither Celt, nor Phoenician, nor Greek, nor German, nor Arab, nor is it similar to any of those which inhabit the European, African, Asiatic or American continents or the islands of Oceania... the Bizkaian is not racially Spanish” (in MacClancy 1993: 105). The identity discourse of the early nationalist movement—for Arana single handedly created its ideology, symbolism and party, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV)—was based on the dichotomy of us, Bizkaians, vs. the other, *maketo* Spanish, which was a

primordial, essentialist conceptualization of identity based on birth. For Arana, the best proof of pure blooded Basqueness were four parental and grandparental last names. For the first few years, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) did not admit anyone without Basque surnames; the local mining magnet company *Euskalduna*, operated by the nationalist Sota family, had a similar employment strategy.

With the emergence of ETA in 1959, we see a re-definition of the identity bases of Basque nationalism: a shift from primordial, blood-based conceptualizations to action and class based performative ones. First, as it was a Marxist organization with working class sympathies, ETA reached out towards the emigrants who had come from the rest of Spain, were of the working class, and whom Arana had previously demonized as diluting Basque identity: “we consider them and their children rather more Basques than those capitalists with long Basque surnames who dare to call themselves patriots while they do not stop enriching themselves at the cost of their own people” (in MacClancy 1993, 107). Radical *abertzale* nationalism engaged the working classes, and was not ethnically exclusive (Kashmir 2002). Instead of the *raza vasca* (“Basque race”), the Basque nationalist left talked about the *pueblo vasco trabajador* (“Basque working people) (MacClancy 1993, 107), which ETA considered as exploited. ETA saw action as a hallmark of Basque identity, which was a political identity: being Basque was being *abertzale*, pro-independence Basque nationalist activist, a sympathizer and/or militant of the Basque cause. *Abertzale* (“patriot”) is a status not defined by birth but by performance: “You are not born abertzale. You make yourself one” (MacClancy 1993, 107). Marianne Heilberg asserts that ETA redefined the moral community. The us vs. them was no longer Bizkaian vs. *maketo*: “Whoever supported the Basque case was ‘us’ and, regardless of genealogy, those who do not support it were the ‘other’ (Heiberg 1980, 50). And

finally, *abertzale* nationalism defined the moral community as a linguistic community including all the Basque-speaking zones of the Spanish and French states (MacClancy 1993, Urla 1993, 1995).

I have argued that scientific and political discourses have been most influential constructions of Basque identity, and their *sine qua non* was the emphasis of ethnic, linguistic and cultural difference. We also see a shift from primordial conceptualization of identity to performance based conceptualizations.

What kind of identities did Athletic's recruitment philosophy reflect?

### **3.2 From *Bilbainismo* to *Vasquismo*: The Evolution of Identities**

Athletic's philosophy is celebrated as a centenarian tradition whose symbolic and ritual function rests in its invariance: the Bilbao club has never signed foreigners, and has resisted the laws of a rapidly changing soccer world. I now turn to the social-historical evolution of Athletic's identity, which reveals the plasticity of even the most constant-looking traditions. I divide the evolution of Athletic's identity into two main phases: "Bilbaino-provincial phase" and "Basque-national phase." From a Bizkaian-Bilbaino club Athletic has turned into one that engages an ethno-nationalist imaginary: the historical Basque Country of four Spanish and three French Basque provinces. This transition took place gradually with the democratic transition after 1975.

#### *3.2.1 The Bilbaino-Provincial Phase: 1912-1970's*

Since Athletic's recruitment philosophy is not written, it's best to trace its evolution through the demographics of its players. The Bilbao club—along with the rest of the teams of the contemporary championships—stopped playing foreigners as a result of

a general ban by what was becoming the Spanish Football Federation. With the professionalization of soccer in the 1920`s, we see that the norm was to recruit from the province of Bizkaia: 99% of the players were born and raised in Bilbao and its environs. The 1940`s marked Athletic`s first Golden Age: it became extremely competitive, and won several titles almost exclusively with people born and bred 30 miles within Bilbao. The 1943 champion line-up featured ten Bizkaians and Higinio Ortuzar Santamaría, born in Chile but raised and trained as a footballer in Erandio, near Bilbao.<sup>24</sup> The 1950`s were also spectacular: Athletic played the majority of the finals during that decade. A roster of the 1955-1956 league champion Athletic shows all players from Bizkaia.<sup>25</sup> This Golden Age fixed a sensation that came to have overpowering coerciveness for future imaginings of identity: the sensation that one can be champion with a roster of players *de la tierra*, “of the land,” with *once aldeanos* (“eleven peasants”).

Athletic played provincial, but then so did everybody else. Until the 1950`s, when some clubs opened to south American and eastern European players, the normal and only possible way was to play local. Athletic`s philosophy therefore can`t have been conceptualized as exceptional: in the absence of a differentiating factor, there was nothing unique about it except for its extraordinary sports performance. Differentiation starts in the 1950`s as a few signs reveal it: a new club anthem mentions Athletic`s *limpia tradición*, and players start being rejected for birthplaces outside of Bizkaia province. It was only against the backdrop of an internationalizing soccer scene that Athletic`s identity could gain consciousness.

---

<sup>24</sup> Lezama, Mieza, Oveja, Ortuzar, Ortiz, Nando, Elices, Panizo, Zarra, Urra, Gainza.

<sup>25</sup> Carmelo, Orúe, Garay, Canito, Mauri, Maguregui, Lezama, Guillermo, Arteche, Marcaida, Arieta, Uribe, Gainza.

The 1960`s show slow regression in sports performance, with considerable plummeting in the 1970`s, only to return to a second Golden Age in the 1980`s. In the 1960`s Athletic`s line-up was still overwhelmingly from the province of Bizkaia, with the exception of the goal-keeper Iribar, who was from Gipuzkoa.<sup>26</sup> The 1970`s witnessed only one title: the cup of 1972-73, whose line-up<sup>27</sup> featured three players born in Gipuzkoa, and eight in Bizkaia. The 1980`s second Golden Age witnessed an Athletic championing an increasingly modern, sophisticated football and a Spanish league that routinely pursued the purchase of the best players from all over the world. Athletic won two league titles in two successive seasons, and the double championship title of cup and league in 1983-84. The line-up for the final game of the 1983-84 season featured players from the historic Basque Country and even beyond: one from Araba, one from Giupuzkoa, one from the Rioja, two from Navarre, and six from Bizkaia.<sup>28</sup>

What were the specifics of the provincial phase of Athletic`s identity? For old timers, Athletic reflects what they call *Bilbainismo*: the pride and pleasure of belonging to the city and the province, for Bizkaia is often conceived of as an extended Bilbao. *Bilbainismo* is manifested in a character typically described in Spain as *fanfarron*, exaggerating, narcissistic and utterly cocky, a character also sung and praised in the panegyric oral poetry called *Bilbainada*. *Bilbainos* are quick to let you know they are from Bilbao, even if not born there; “us, *Bilbainos*, are born wherever we want,” the local adage goes. They look at their city with dreamy self-absorption and consider it the center of the universe. Bilbao`s *chulería*, “cockiness,” I am told by

---

<sup>26</sup> Iribar, Sáez, Echeberría, Aranguren, Igartua, Larrauri, Argoitia, Uriarte, Arieta II, Clemente and Rojo I.

<sup>27</sup> Iribar, Sáez, Larrauri, Zubiaga, Guisasola, Rojo II, Lasa, Villar, Arieta II, Uriarte, Rojo I.

<sup>28</sup> Zubizarreta, Goikoetxea, De Andrés, De la Fuente, Urkiaga, Liceranzu, Dani, Sola, Noriega, Urtubi, Argote.

economic and industrial actors of the region, is the result of the region's spectacular industrial past: its iron production and ship building turned Bizkaia into a center of the Industrial Revolution and the wealthiest region of Spain. As former Athletic president Ana Urquijo told me, "Bilbainos have a profound feeling of belonging, and we believe Bilbao is different from other Basque cities. It's a liberal city with British influence, an important transit that has always been open to the world, to immigration" (personal communication 2011, May). It is possible to be "very Bilbaino," informants have told me, and not particularly care to self-identify as Basque.

Athletic reflects Bilbao's temperament of self-sufficiency, desire for extraordinariness, and a "can do" attitude that does not get discouraged by risk or failure. With the onset of post-Fordist demise, the city went through a series of urban renewal projects, which gave its residents an even more liberal dose of self-confidence. Athletic is intimately linked to Bizkaia's industrial past, of which it is a survival. Athletic's provincial orientation was further strengthened through a general province-based competition that characterized the Spanish soccer scene, which crystallized in derbies (Walton 2001, 2011), and which inhibited the rallying of the entire Basque territory behind a single team.

### *3.2.2 The Basque-National Phase: 1980's-Present*

Athletic's ethno-national identity as Basque was less marked until the 1980's, which is not to say it was entirely absent. There were a few factors that gradually pushed Athletic towards becoming the "flagship national team" by the late 1930's (Walton 2001, 2011). First, Athletic shared leadership with the industrialist-nationalist elite and the Basque Nationalist Party. Second, the Basque Selection went on a three year

long international tour (1936-39) during the Civil War to raise money for Basque nationalist forces featured mostly Athletic players. And third, when the Civil War was lost by Basque nationalists and the Franco dictatorship established its repressive regime, many thought of Athletic as the only site of superiority, if only symbolic, over Madrid. The club's solidifying localist philosophy allowed nationalists to secretly project the Basque nation on Athletic.

Ramón Llopis Goig (2008:60) calls the post-Franco democratic transition (1975 onwards) the era of “de-nationalization,” or “post-national” soccer in Spain, characterized by emerging nationalist sentiments projected on regional clubs. The “de-nationalization” of the center allowed for nationalization at the peripheries. Athletic gained an increasingly Basque-national character, a process fomented by various contextual factors that characterized the 1980's: a general emergence of nationalist sentiments in the ideological vacuum left behind the Franco regime; the push for a regional Basque selection that would embody a nationalist imaginary in the Basque Country; the emergence of the unofficial *peña* “fan club” Herri Norte, the oldest and largest fan organization that defines itself *abertzale* and anti-fascist, and which has used the terraces to make pro-Basque political statements; a shift from the recruitment of Bizkaia-born players to players from the historical Basque Country. After the removal of the repressive context of the dictatorship, the Basque Country was becoming openly and freely politicized, which affected Athletic.

The 1980's provided all conditions necessary for Athletic to fix its “exceptional” identity: the area of recruitment coincided with the geographical region of the Basque *abertzale* nationalist imaginary (four Spanish and three French Basque provinces); Athletic lived its second Golden Age winning cup and league titles with players from that area, which once again generated a sensation that one can be

champion with locals, now openly defined as Basques; global player transfer was becoming the rule, making Athletic an outlier for its localism.

One must be careful, however, with statements such as the politicization of Athletic. The club has never been overtly appropriated by any party or involved with party politics; it is still the most transversal institution in a politically and socially divided milieu. When it does get politicized, Athletic gains a Basque-national character in a subtle manner, and not to everyone's liking. Subtle measures include the 2011 introduction of the new away game outfit of the team. Its red-white-green colors connote the Basque national flag *ikurrina*; or the 2011 invitation of Celtic Glasgow for a friendly match, which certain segments of the Athletic fan community and the visiting Irish fans used for Basque and Irish separatist vindications.

In terms of recruitment, Athletic gradually drifted away from its Bilbaino-provincial roots. The roster that qualified for the Champion's League at the end of the millennium featured markedly fewer players from Bizkaia than from beyond it.<sup>29</sup> The tendency to include non-Bizkaians continued naturally until the unthinkable happened: on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 2011, the line-up against Real Zaragoza included not a single player from Bizkaia. The absence of local players in the strictest sense caused Bilbao to submerge in soul-searching over how they drifted so far from their original Bizkaia base: "A Line-up for History" (*El Correo*), "The Strange Bizkaian Minority" (*El Correo*), "Historical: No Bizkaian in line-up for the first time in 113 years" (*Deia*) were some of the alarmed headlines. Athletic gained a new identity as

---

<sup>29</sup> I. Etxeberria, Hügün, Zíganda, José Mari, Gaizka Garitano, Oscar Vales, Lafuente, Urzaiz, Roberto Ríos, Valencia, Alkorta, Ferreira, Carlos García, Julen Guerrero, Alkiza, Jorge Pérez, Lasa, Nagore, J. Etxeberria, J.A. Goikoetxea, Larrazabal, Urrutia, Karanka, Tabuenka, Larraínzar, Lacruz, Javi González.

“the Basque team,” but lost much of its Bilbainismo: self-sufficiency in the strictest local terms, the extraction of the Bizkaian “quarry.”

Two observations should be made at this stage: Athletic’s “centenarian tradition” is an unconscious process rather than a conscious strategy for much of its duration (1910’s-1950’s), and it displays flexibility. There is a sense in which Athletic’s centenarian tradition is “invented” retrospectively, to use Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1992) notion, as a ritual whose symbolic function is invariance and the establishment of continuity with a past that is suitable for the present. It is not the tradition *per se* that is invented, for Athletic indeed has not recruited “foreigners” for a hundred years; rather, what is retrospectively projected is a *sensation of continuity*. Such “inventions,” Hobsbawm (1992: 1) argues, are “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations.” Their necessity lies in “the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant” (Hobsbawm 1992, 2). In the face of social, cultural and political changes, Athletic is constructed as the one constant variable that resists them.

### **3.3 “But Can He Play in Athletic?” The Contestation of Identities**

One of the first questions that arise when a potentially new player appears within the orbit of the club is: “But can he play in Athletic?” Player pedigree becomes a major consideration after sufficient play quality. That question may be a contested one, which shows the opacity of identifications.

Until the 1950`s, we see no preoccupation with birth and localism; the immediate post-war team<sup>30</sup> had two outliers: Higinio Ortuzar Santamaría and Cándido Gardoy Martín were born outside of, but raised in Bizkaia, and were trained in Athletic. In the 1960`s, some players were rejected for the same conditions. Chus Pereda, for one, was born in the province of Burgos outside of the Basque Country, lived and played in Bizkaia from an early age, and was captain of the sub-16 selection.<sup>31</sup> Athletic president Enrique Guzmán turned him down, pointing at his birthplace as a factor of disqualification.<sup>32</sup> When he died in September 2011, Bilbao`s press devoted a lot of coverage to “the boy who played in Indautxu [a district team of Bilbao], but who had to go to Barcelona to succeed because a president who interpreted the philosophy of Athletic too strictly did not allow him to play in Athletic.”<sup>33</sup> The case of Miguel Jones is likewise controversial, including the fact that he was the first black man to come close to playing in Athletic. He was born in Guinea, but raised in Bilbao. He too was turned down by Athletic, and went to play for Atlético de Madrid. After his career he returned to Bilbao, and has no bad feelings: “That it was racism? No! In that time, everyone on the roster was from Bizkaia. You had to be born there.”<sup>34</sup> “Was it racism?” a Bilbaino journalist once told me. “Of course it was. The 1950`s were not exactly famous for tolerance. This would be unthinkable today” (personal communication 2011, May). Indeed, as of November 2011, the first black player Jonás Ramalho, born and raised in the vicinity of Bilbao

---

<sup>30</sup> Arqueta, Barrie, Bertol, Gárate, Macala, Gorostiza, Leicea, Oceja, Panizo, Unamuno (Victorio), Unamuno (Vicente), Urra, Viar, Zabala, Santamaría, Elices, Campa, Echevarria, Gainza, Ariznabarreta, Llorente, Tellado, Ortuzar.

<sup>31</sup> Under the age of sixteen.

<sup>32</sup> <http://servicios.elcorreo.com/especiales/eleccionesathletic/noticias/not270501a.html>

<sup>33</sup> <http://servicios.elcorreo.com/especiales/eleccionesathletic/noticias/not270501a.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.deia.com/2011/01/29/athletic/no-pude-jugar-en-el-athletic-porque-en-aquella-epoca-todos-tenian-que-ser-vizcainos>

of local mother and immigrant father, debuted in the first team of Athletic; “Ramalho becomes the first black Basque in Athletic,” ran the headline of *El Correo*.<sup>35</sup> The reaction of fans in the media re-iterated the philosophy of the club: “Why emphasize color when he was born and raised here, when he is obviously Basque?”<sup>36</sup>

What we see in Athletic’s philosophy is the co-existence of two conceptualizations of identity: primordial and performative. One can be “born Basque” if that happens geographically in the Basque Country. Birth place is not particularly something an individual can choose—but parents can and do. “I am a little ashamed to tell you why I was born in the Basque Country,” a life-long resident of Barcelona tells me. “My mother went to give birth to Bilbao so that one day, if I have the talent, I may play in Athletic” (personal communication 2011 February). Another fan from Italy lamented to me that his pregnant wife didn’t want to make the trip. Besides birthplace, a player may also “become Basque” by socialization and enculturation: extended residence in the area.

What we see is that even in its birth-based, primordial conceptualizations, Athletic’s philosophy allows for performative incorporation into the community. In fact, refuting the “racism” that many anti-Athletic sports fans cite, the only way one cannot become an Athletic player is through genetic inheritance: by mere virtue of birth to Basque parents. Children of the diasporas are not eligible. The twentieth century witnessed an exodus of Basques due to political and economic reasons, and immigrants formed sizable diasporas world-wide. Many of them reproduce the home country in terms of customs and language use—and many of them are in South

---

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2011-11-20/ramalho-convierte-primer-negro-201111202021.html>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2011-11-20/ramalho-convierte-primer-negro-201111202021.html>

American countries with great soccer traditions. And yet, diaspora recruitment remains unprecedented. The 2010 World Cup Golden Ball winner, Uruguay born Diego Forlán admitted he had intentions of coming to Athletic in 2004, but it was “economically not viable.”<sup>37</sup> Public reaction to the case shows that it was not viable philosophically, either. Forlán`s only Basque link was blood-based, and that was insufficient: a grandmother emigrating from Hondarribia (Gipuzkoa) to Argentina and then to Uruguay. “The philosophy of Athletic is not a question of blood,” Antonio Basagoiti, Popular Party politician and Athletic member confirms; “It is only logical that someone who lives here should love the colors more” (personal communication, 2011 March).

### **3.4 From Santimamiñe to San Mamés: The Indigeniety of Bilbao`s Soccer**

In 1916, a group of school boys discovered a cave in the vicinity of Basondo in Bizkaia province, with curious wall paintings in it. The cave from the Upper Paleolithic became a cultural icon and a major axis of identification in the Basque cultural imaginary: it evokes local ancestry, uninterrupted evolution, a certain savagery, and the insularity of Basque traditional culture. For the Basques, it was proof of what they were told about their prehistory and identity: the cave was “the tangible context in which their imagination of the past finds its home” (Zulaika 1988: 7).

They named the cave Santimamiñe, the Basque name for a nearby hermitage called, in Spanish, San Mamés. The site became a namesake of Athletic Club`s stadium, whose construction preceded the discovery by only three years. San Mamés,

---

<sup>37</sup> El Correo September 15, 2010.

also popularly called as “The Cathedral,” is the field that convokes forty thousand Bilbainos every other weekend. It is where the echoes of Santimamiñe and the city’s most binding and enduring passions become an Event.

There is a sense in which the stadium San Mamés is the allegorical equivalent of the cave Santimamiñe: both are a field of desire, identification and roots. They are Bilbao’s claim to tribalism: to indigenous belonging to territory, to a kinship network, to a clear consciousness of a kind that distinguishes between “us” and “them.” The soccer tradition of San Mamés, I will argue now, follows two impulses that resonate with the pre-historic Santimamiñe: insistence on local, indigenous development, and ethnic subjectivization through emphasizing difference.

Athletic insists that, through birth and/or upbringing, its players *belong* there. Bilbao fans believe that players are more efficient and committed if they actually love their club, and the best way to secure that is through socialization: the local, long term formation of the player as person and athlete. The reliance on local resources, their maximum exploitation through hard work, and a resulting self-sufficiency are values that come from their historic insularity and indigeneity: they constitute the oft-cited “Basque pride.” My discussion of Athletic line-ups reflects an insistence on local resources: 99% of Athletic players were born and raised within two hours’ drive of Bilbao, and the overwhelming majority within 30 minutes. It is very common that a player should start his career in Athletic, and finish it there, after playing hundreds of games for the only club of his life. There is a primordial sense, therefore, in which the Athletic player embodies Basque indigeneity: he constitutes an uninterrupted link with his beginnings. He was “born” in the community literally or figuratively, and develops *in situ*; he is the product of the land, of the “caves”—or rather, of the *cantera*, the “quarry,” as Athletic’s youth academy is called.

If anthropologists constructed the Basques as the “natives of Europe,” it is little surprising that Athletic should be conceptualized as the “Asterix and Obelix” of Spanish soccer: the indomitable Gauls resisting the Roman occupation. In his book on elite soccer management, former Barcelona FC director Ferrán Soriano distinguishes between various management strategies. There is the *galáctico* model pursued by such giants as Real Madrid and Barcelona FC, striving for the best players of the world and for international championship titles; there are those that reasonably aspire to win national championships, but remain modest in international ones; there are those who aspire to maintain their first division category; and then there is Athletic. Former Athletic player and manager Andoni Zubizarreta put it this way: “We are anti-globalizers. There are many people who don’t like enormous dimensions and the crazy race to make money. The image of the village full of Gauls fighting against a powerful enemy is attractive to us” (in Soriano 2012, 37).

### **3.5 “To Lose in Order to Win:” The Negative Logic of Subjectivization**

At 3 am, standing in line to enter Antzoki, a favorite discotheque of Bilbao, a young man complains about the absence of romance in his life: “This is the country where it is most difficult to hook up.” And then he adds with resignation: “The second is the Vatican.” “How so?” I ask. “It’s that women always say ‘no’ to you.” Another man agrees: “Even if they like you, they will say no for a while. This gives them a lot of integrity and character” (personal communication, December 2011).

The central protagonist of Basque mythology is a woman: Mari, the flying witch. Mari thrives on negation: in her cave in the Bizkaian mountains she surrounds herself with *uts*, “void,” or empty containers, and she would answer most questions with some form of negation. When asked “what is your subsistence?” her reiterated

answer is “*eza*,” the Basque word for “no.” In a tale, she offered a shepherd some cider, and he asked her: “What kind of apples did you make this cider from?” Mari’s response was “With those given to *eza* (‘the no’) by the Lord of Monte Ikaztegieta” (Zulaika 1988: 295).

There are ways in which Basque society is nourished, like its mythological protagonist, by the “no.” Zulaika (1988) argues that the Basque is a “no”-saying culture. He traces that propensity back to the linguistic features of affirmation: *ba*, the Basque prefix of affirmation is also the prefix of questioning and conditionals, depending on the length of the sentence and its position in it. Thus, *bai* is relative, relational, and brings in indeterminacy. Affirmation in the Basque language therefore always carries its own hypothetical, which renders it inadequate to delineate subjectivity: a hypothetical destabilizes rather than confirms. What remains for delineation, for self-assertion, is the negative: “The ‘yes-man,’ who has not mastered *ez*, is not trustworthy” (informant in Zulaika, 1988, 300). The anthropologist Caro Baroja called this type of rural personality “*xelebre*” or “man of contradiction.” He is the person who is “particularly distinguished for his witticisms, his comments, in which he generally defends the opposition (inverse) opinion from that externalized by the majority” (Caro Baroja 2009, 233).

No-saying culture has come to play a role in political violence and Basque positions against Madrid. In political discourse, the process of negotiation may be described as a strategy of “getting to yes” (Fisher and Ury 2011). Rejecting the affirmative requests of political agreement, however, Basques were trapped in “the drama of a double binding closure in which giving in entails political and cultural extinction while resistance implies military defeat and harsh repression” (Zulaika 1988, 299).

Basques often define themselves through what they are not. As early as the nineteenth century, the “father of Basque nationalism” Sabino Arana defined Basques as *not* being *maketo* Spanish. Since then, the Basque nationalist imaginary has defined itself as what the Basque Country is not: it’s not Spain, it’s not France. One may routinely find pamphlets and posters in the bars of the old town of Bilbao explaining to tourists in three languages: “You are in the Basque Country. The Basque Country is neither Spain, nor France. It’s the Basque Country.” The definition of what it means to be Basque often finds itself entangled in the negative: “To be Basque is to feel *different*,” informants would tell me. Basque Nationalist Party politician Andoni Ortuzar defined it for me this way: “Being Basque is belonging to a differentiated community that is neither Spanish, nor French. It may be imagined as more or less tied to these two states, but there is an agreement that it is different” (personal communication February 211). The negative *ez* is a staple at the numerous political manifestations and graffiti. Saying “no” is therefore an important vehicle of political subjectivization.

Saying “no” is tantamount to setting boundaries between persons, to subjectivization, to “*tomar postura*,” or “taking posture.” In the world of pelota, Olatz González Abrisketa (2012: 101) argues, it is not unusual that generations of the same family would support a lineage of pelota players *only because* their neighbors support the rival lineage. By positioning one’s *etxe*, one’s household against the preferences of the neighbor is marking one’s boundaries, one’s integrity. “Taking posture” against the other is also obligatory in the Basque interpersonal dynamics of betting.

Subjectivization, the demarcation of the self through the “no” defines the identity of Athletic Club. An Athletic fan once told me with unconcealed satisfaction: “Look at Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo. They have all the leagues of the world in their

pockets. They can play wherever they like—except in Athletic” (personal communication 2010 April). The rejection of “foreigners” constitutes the boundaries of Athletic as subject.

For Athletic to survive with a pool of players limited to the Basque Country, it is contingent on its stars’ “no:” on their rejection of offers by other clubs. Players who say “yes” to the desires of others are “not trustworthy.” The reason why Bixente Lizarazu, the only French Basque player to have played for Athletic became uncharacteristically unpopular with the Bilbao crowds was his incapacity to say “no” to Bayern Munich. “The story between Lizarazu and Athletic Club is the story of an impossible love between a proud, pan-Basquist club (...) and a handsome surfer from the French Basque Country who sings ‘La Marseillaise’ with the enthusiasm of a tenor in the choir of the French Foreign Legion.”<sup>38</sup> He was soon considered a “mercenary” (often meant “prostitute”) who, upon receiving a phone call from Franz Beckenbauer, “gave the *Kaiser* his immediate ‘*oui*,’”<sup>39</sup> his resounding “yes.” For Athletic fans, Lizarazu was no longer a player with integrity.

In contrast, Bilbao has its favorite no-saying footballers, among whom Julen Guerrero excels. Being from Bilbao, and having played in Athletic all his career, Guerrero was the ultimate symbol and product of the Club. This handsome star player, whom locals saw grow up and develop week by week since he was eight years old, became a great object of desire. European clubs offered him paychecks two and three times as big as Athletic: Barcelona FC, Real Madrid, Atlético de Madrid, Juventus, Manchester United. He turned them all down, and signed a 10 year contract with Athletic—a duration unheard of in the world of ephemeral contracts. It was his

---

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.elcorreo.com/Bizkaia/prensa/20070425/politica/bixente-proscrito\\_20070425.html](http://www.elcorreo.com/Bizkaia/prensa/20070425/politica/bixente-proscrito_20070425.html)

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.elcorreo.com/Bizkaia/prensa/20070425/politica/bixente-proscrito\\_20070425.html](http://www.elcorreo.com/Bizkaia/prensa/20070425/politica/bixente-proscrito_20070425.html)

defiance that made him an iconic player in the Basque club: “Against irresistible songs of the sirens, he prioritized his blood over the color of money.”<sup>40</sup>

There is in the Athletic fan community a painful awareness of sacrifice: “we have to lose in order to win.” For players, this means rejecting the logic of professional, mercenary play. For any player, a professional career in the strict sense of the word means seeking the best-paying, most prestigious clubs. Rejecting those ambitions for a soccer player is the same sacrifice as it is for any professional to forego jobs where they can best develop their potential. Players find themselves in a bind. If they leave, they get punished: they provoke the anger and/or disappointment of a fan community that nurtured them all their career. If they don’t leave, they get punished: they give up full self-realization as an athlete, and possibly greater paychecks. Club directors also find themselves in a dilemma: if they sell players, they invoke the indignation of the city; if they don’t sell them, they are stuck with mediocre players and miss out on the income of player traffic. Either way, one must live with a sacrifice.

The recruiting strategy of Athletic produces fewer goals, fewer victories. A territory of 2.5 million people cannot consistently produce first class players. Turning the logic of competition on its head, Athletic is defined by the sacrifice of the goal: by the goals not scored due to a self-limiting recruiting philosophy. The poignancy of that sacrifice is most visible in the non-goals of Zarra. Zarra was a legendary forward in Athletic in the 1950’s; he still holds several records of the Spanish *Liga*. “At a game against Valencia,” Zarra recalls in an interview, “the goal keeper Alvaro came out really hard on me, and he got injured. I was all by myself in front of the empty

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.fotolog.com/samacrew/33808052>.

goal post. As he was lying on the lawn, I kicked the ball outside of the goal post.”<sup>41</sup>

As a forward, Zarra`s reason to be was scoring goals; and yet, it was his non-goals that became memorable acts of nobleness and sportsmanship. The sacrificial logic of goals not made captures the identity of Athletic Club: one must accept to lose games and goals in order to win tradition and identity.

### 3.6 Confronting *Soccerscape*: What is the Future of the Past?

Following Arjun Appadurai`s (1996) analysis of global cultural flows in terms of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples, Richard Giulianotti introduced the idea of *soccerscape*: the global flow and de-centeredness of sports technology, fandom, coach and athlete migration. Amidst this major shift towards a globalized, post-modern soccer world, Giulianotti notes, we still find at club level “important reflections of the industrial, urban, early modern period in which football emerged as a national sport” (1999: 33). Athletic Club of Bilbao is such a reflection. The Basque-only philosophy resonates with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when commercial ships sailed in downtown Bilbao, and Bilbainos played the British dock workers on the *Campa de los Ingleses* (“Field of the Englishmen”). Athletic and its soccer culture is Bilbao`s most enduring legacy that has survived the city`s major structural and economic transformations. What is the future of its past?

“Exceptionalism,” Seymour M. Lipset writes (1996: 26), “is a two-edged phenomenon; it does not mean better.” Instead, it means you are an outlier, deviant, a state that is not without impasses. Every now and then, Athletic comes close to losing its other major axis of identification: playing in the first division Spanish *Liga*. As I

---

<sup>41</sup>[http://www.berria.info/blogak/imanol/index.php?blog=10&title=zarra\\_espultsatua&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1#comments](http://www.berria.info/blogak/imanol/index.php?blog=10&title=zarra_espultsatua&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1#comments).

will later show in this manuscript, Athletic has spent a few agonizing seasons in the descending zone, barely retaining its first division standing. Its “exceptional,” “unique” recruitment philosophy that brings so much pleasure and pride can easily turn into a heavy burden.

But even from a purely functional perspective, the past-oriented strategy of Athletic is not as dysfunctional and anachronistic as it might seem. Soriano argues that for a club to be a sustainable business, its managers need to carefully assess its circumstances, and tailor its objectives accordingly. Athletic Club, he argues,

seems to have made a correct analysis of its playing field and understands the strengths making up the industry and the market. It has then decided on a very specific strategy, which it has put into practice in a coherent manner. This strategy is so different from that of the majority of clubs that one might think they have failed to understand the field upon which they are playing. They, however, argue that they do in fact understand the playfield and that they are certain as to how they want to play. (Soriano, 2012: 38)

Athletic`s ability to survive and flourish therefore lies in a unique business strategy: the rejection of a business strategy. It rejects the commercialism and globalism of soccer out of the principle of doing soccer differently, which in turns guarantees unwavering, massive local support. Consciously or unconsciously, Athletic understands the social, cultural and political meta-narratives in which it is embedded: the meta-narrative of exceptionalism, of difference. As long as the terraces of San Mamés continue to pulsate with that meta-narrative, Athletic will continue to be a “unique case in the world” of soccer.

## Chapter Four

### San Mamés: In the Cathedral of Spanish Soccer

Late February 2011, with twenty minutes remaining from the game between Atletico Junior and Deportivo Pereira of the Columbian league, a larger raptor landed on the field. The home team's lucky charm, a tame barn owl that lived in the stadium and was allowed to fly over the field during games had been hit by a high flying ball, lost its orientation, and fell. As the game stopped and referees gathered to decide what to do, visiting team player Luis Moreno walked over to the stunned, helpless bird, and gave it a forceful kick to shovel it off the field. The bird went into a state of shock and died in a few days. Fans reacted furiously: Atletico fans cried "murderer," and the player had to be escorted off the field with heavy police protection. Indignation was widespread as video images traveled the global media. Amidst the condemnation of the soccer world and animal rights activists, the player feared for his life and the safety of his family due to the death threats he received.

But besides the general outrage over animal rights' violation, the incident had an additional dimension for Atletico Junior fans. For them, the owl was not just any bird: it was the sacred totem animal of the home team, and the act of kicking was not "just" animal cruelty: it was an act of desecration. As opposed to the profane functions of animals, Durkheim writes, the sacred character of the totemic animal is the fact that it is forbidden to kill and eat them. "Whoever oversteps this rule exposes himself to grave dangers. It is not that the group always intervenes to punish this infraction artificially; it is believed that the sacrilege produces death automatically" (Durkheim 1965: 128). The real death of the bird connoted for fans the metaphoric

death of their team: bad luck, a losing streak, the loss of competitive category, failure and oblivion.

How does a bird, or for that matter anything else, gain sacred quality in the orbit of what is often popularly demeaned as a “vulgar,” “profane,” “unholy” past time soccer (Prebish 1993, Higgs and Braswell 2004)? “Characteristically,” Gennep writes in his classic *Rites of Passage*, “the presence of the sacred (and the performance of appropriate rites) is variable. Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations” (Gennep 1960: 12). Things, persons and places enter the realm of the sacred as they undergo rites and rituals that are believed to affect a transformation of kind. The sacred does not suddenly erupt or manifest, for nothing is inherently sacred; rather, Lévi-Strauss writes, it is a “value of indeterminate signification, in itself empty of meaning and therefore susceptible to the reception of any meaning whatsoever” (in Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 6). Following the situational analysis of the Durkheimian approach that places the sacred in the nexus of human practices and social projects (Winzeler 2008: 10), consecration is viewed interpreted as cultural work. It is the symbolic, human labor of consecration what van Gennep calls “the pivoting of the sacred” (1960: 12): ongoing cultural work that goes into choosing, setting aside, consecrating, venerating, protecting, defending, contesting and redefining sacred things, persons, places and practices.

With the decline of religiosity, there has emerged a modern loss of, and alienation from the sacred. Against a new context of post-modernity that values de-centeredness and mobility, there has arisen a sense of rootlessness, dislocation, displacement; a certain crisis of place. Sports, often likened to religions for structural and practical resemblances (Brody 1979, Price 2001) accommodate nostalgia for

both: they provide places and landscapes for collective memory, narrative and identity, and allow human agency to consecrate them through ritual, interpretive, social, economic and political action. Humans, Philip Sheldrake argues, need a location where they can pass through the stages of life and realize their potential identities; they need a place to belong to a community (Sheldrake 2001, 10). For sports fans, as I will show in this chapter, stadia are the sacred places of post-modern industrial where they find as community their ethos and imaginary, and where they engage reality not as it is, but as it imaginatively is.

“If we define the sacred as a point of encounter with the divine,” a Bilbao-based Catholic priest and Athletic fan once told me, “there is a sense in which a soccer stadium is a sacred place” (C.C. personal communication, 2011 April). San Mamés, as fans put it, “is where God descends for ninety minutes,” “ninety minutes that gives life, and takes life away.” For ninety blazing minutes, the stadium becomes Bilbao’s *axis mundi*, the navel of the world where heaven, earth and the underworld meet. The otherwise always busy streets are deserted, and you hear the buzzing excitement coming from the bars and the stadium; life is halted for ninety minutes. San Mamés stadium is demarcated from the mundane stuff of everyday life through that temporal bracketing, through rituals, ceremonial displays, fan pilgrimage and what Chidester and Linenthal (1995: 4) would call “venerative consumption:” the purchase and display of club paraphernalia as a relic of devotion to the colors.

How does a building become “The Cathedral” to some, while it is just a stadium to others? This chapter takes Bilbao’s stadium for a sacred place, and explores the cultural works of sacralization by which the stadium gains an uncanny, awesome, powerful quality of ultimate significance. The symbolic labor of sacralization, “the pivoting of the sacred” has, I will argue, three main dimensions in

San Mamés: interpretation, ritualization, and contestation. First, I will show through works of interpretation how San Mamés is not only conceptualized as a meaningful place pregnant with history, narrative and identity; it is also seen as a site of miracles that only make sense in a sacred context. Second, sacred space is a ritual space of formalized, repeatable and/or symbolic performances; I will show how the stadium is set apart from the ordinary and carved out for “extra-ordinary” patterns of embodied, spatial, collective practice. And third, I will examine San Mamés as a site of contestation between sacred and profane forces, based on the contention that a place is rendered sacred through its opposite: the frightful possibility that it can be desecrated, appropriated, polluted.

With regards to the question whether modern sports are genuinely liminal rituals (MacAloon 1984; Rowe 2008), or just their functional equivalents, that is, industrial-liminoid leisure phenomena (Gluckman and Gluckman 1877; Turner 1982), this chapter suggests that the cultural works of consecration aligns sports with the former. If liminal genres are, as Turner himself defines them, “dominated by the subjunctive mood of culture, the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjuncture, desire” (1985, 295); if they reflect the collective experience of a community over time; if they connect rhythms and cycles of life, soccer for Bilbao is a liminal experience. As the sacred is conceptualized as strictly delineated from the profane, so does the ludic universe have its spatial and temporal boundaries and special states: a liminal state that the ludic shares with ritual, and which in both cases turn the community into what Victor Turner (1969) calls *communitas*.

#### 4.1 San Mamés, a “Quality Space”

According to Fernandez, a sacred place is “any space in interaction with which individuals find produced in themselves exceptional qualities or feeling states of arousal or pacification (...) A sacred place is a special kind of quality space of special heightening or dampening of emotion or both together” (2003: 202). As Bilbao’s old stadium was living its last season and hundredth year before it was to be demolished and give space to a new one, the Athletic fan community spent the year 2013 exchanging feelings and experiences San Mamés as “quality space” evoked:

I am finally here, and my dream come true; here you are, elegant, great, majestic; a fine rain is falling on you and on my warm tears that wet my cheek, excited and with butterflies in my stomach, I couldn’t believe it... Here I am inside, you smelled of grass, of soccer, of ATHLETIC. This is how I first met you when I just turned three years old. Then another thirty years passed, and many memories inundate me; with you I have laughed, cried, suffered and thrilled. I met people with whom I shared my *bokata* [sandwich] and wine at half time, this can’t be missing when I go see you at nights of cup and league games. Another thing I like about you is that when the team is suffering and needs you, you are always there, you roar until you are out of breath and goooooooooooooo by AHLETIC, you managed it again, you won the game and you hug the stranger next to you, ATHLETIC has won! The game is over and you stay there, preparing for the next battle; only a few are left for you now. You have grown old, this year you’ll turn a hundred and you have to retire. You will pass it on to a new one, which will bear your name, which is gestating next to you and will end up in your heart. A new field that I am sure will further your legend; and yet I’ll never forget the first day I met you and everything I lived with you, my dreams come true. *It wasn’t a soccer field; I am talking of San Mamés.*<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.eldesmarquebizkaia.com/la-firma-invitada/33992-manu-ferreti>

The sacred place, Chidester and Linenthal write, “is a significant space, a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world” (1995: 12). San Mamés is a fateful field pregnant with meaning—a meaning that, Wilhelm Dilthey would say, “is generated by ‘feelingly’ thinking about the interconnections of past and present events” (in Turner 1982: 14). It is San Mamés where, as another commemorative excerpt puts,

... Pichichi first set the scoreboard going, in a scene of 12-1 against Barcelona; where the mythic forward squad of Zarra, Venancio, Gainza, Iriondo y Panizo perforated the nets of the opponents again and again; the snow covered field where Manchester United fell little before its airplane accident in Munich; the lawn where Dino Zoff went through the greatest anxieties of his career; the site where Bryan Robson scored the fastest goal in the history of World Cups; the goal post where Rocky Licranzu scored the goal number 3000, and gave Athletic its eight league title; where coach Bielsa revolutionized our game so we can dream again. *But San Mamés is much more than this.*<sup>43</sup>

Upon entering San Mamés, fans are overtaken by a feeling of *semper maior*, a mysticism that alludes to something always greater, always more, always beyond: countless histories, narratives, feelings and experiences that the place homed for a hundred years, and which now consume the fan as witness and accomplice. San Mamés is Bilbao’s central place of narrative, memory and identity.

---

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.naiz.info/es/blogs/marakanatxikia/posts/la-mudanza-esta-al-caer-pero-los-recuerdos-quedaran-para-siempre>

Individuals, Fernandez writes (2003: 189), “create domains, ritual arenas as it were, in which they can transform, go through a series of transformations in, their identities. In these ritual arenas, or sacred quality places, there is both a convergence and an emergence of qualities.” Emergent qualities are complex feeling states that a particular place evokes. Fans have an altogether religious and Romantic experience of the physical space of a stadium. Personal accounts interpret its aura as sublime, evoking a feeling of reverence. Soccer fans in Bilbao would tell you this: when you emerge from the gates of San Mamés stadium for the first time and look at the green field, you are overtaken by an overwhelming sensation. How much cosmological, legendary, religious and socioeconomic experiences reverberate in San Mamés! By crossing a threshold, the fan leaves a world behind and enters a new one. It is the field where Bilbao’s passions and pathos have exploded into “fateful actions” (Goffman 1967) and “social dramas” (Turner 1974) for a hundred years now. “As I was emerging at the gate and I first saw the terraces and the field,” a fan recalls, “I had to stop for a moment. I started to cry. There I was finally, tears pouring down my face, such was the emotion of being in San Mamés” (G.O. personal communication, 2011 May). The overwhelming sensation of incommensurability is that of the religious person in the presence of God, and the *Romantic* person before nature: because the outcome of a game is never certain, San Mamés evokes “that vast domain of surprise, of terror, of marvel, of miracle, the unknown, as distinguished from the known, or, as I like to express it, the infinite, as distinct from the finite” (Max Müller in Durkheim 1965: 92). For the fan, the stadium is a hypertrophic field; as they emerge from the gates and look at the field, San Mamés offers them an *extra-ordinary* field of vision: one which Lacan would call the scopic field of libidinal investment and fantasy, the site of drives, volitions and desires.

“The meanings of places,” Sheldrake writes (2001: 6), “unfold in stories, myths, rituals and in naming.” San Mamés is collective memory and identity embedded in place, consisting of individual stories as well as deeper narrative currents. The Bilbao stadium is Spain’s most historic stadium that has lived every single season of the Spanish league since its inception in 1929. I’ve been told by elderly fans that it is also a *cathedra*: site of learning soccer and communal belonging or, as Geertz says of religion, of establishing “powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men” (1973: 90). “The Cathedral” has ritually convoked the team’s faithful followers every other weekend for a hundred years now.

The fan has a fetishist’s experience of San Mamés as “a sensuous, super sensuous thing” (Marx in Pietz 1993: 130). A game is an expressive event that Fernandez (2003: 189) would call a “complex system of synesthesia:” the stadium is replete with signs and significances that invade the fan and engage his sensations and superstitious mind. Before he finds his seat on the Tribune of Compassion (opposite to the Tribune of the Capuchines), the fan makes sure he enters gate number two on the left side of the two lane row, as he has been doing for years now, since Athletic qualified for the Cup Final in 2009 against Sevilla. The south wind would not abate, which is ominous; Athletic plays better with the north wind. With *xirimiri*, however, the ubiquitous drizzling rain characteristic of the shores of the Bay of Vizcay, there will be a shower of goals. No pre-game acts are scheduled, which is as it should be; except for the ritual bouquet of flowers first time visiting teams place by the bust of Pichichi, pre-game acts bring bad luck. Other than that rite of ancestor cult, all pre-game rituals are considered polluting. He smells the ubiquitous smoke of the cigar called Reig, the intimate smell of San Mamés that evokes that place even when he smells it somewhere far away. He looks at the players, *los leones* or “the lions”

nervously--the club's foundation myth revolves around the story of Saint Mammes, the Christian child martyr who tamed the lions when he was cast before them. He remembers the miserable win of the last game which, as the coach put it at the press conference after the game, the team won in the 91<sup>st</sup> minute "with the help of the Virgin of Begoña"—the city's patron. Sacred places, Chidester and Linenthal remark (1995: 7), form "a recursive series of metaphoric equivalences;" the fan is immersed in not just a place but a landscape of social relations, activities, meanings, symbols, signs and rituals, all inseparably intertwined.

The name of the stadium and the founding mythology of the club are based on Catholic iconography. As you enter the VIP section of Athletic's San Mamés stadium, by the hall of fame of selection players you see a tremendous stuffed lion: the mascot of Athletic Club. It has been there since 1984, when Juan Arregui, president of the Basque neighbor club Deportivo Alavés gave it as a present to Athletic as they won a *doblete*, the double title of cup and league champions that year. The lion is the faithful companion of San Mamés (Saint Mammes) in Catholic mythology, and it's the name sake of Athletic players: *los leones*. Saint Mammes of Caesaria is a semi-legendary child martyr from the third century. He was born in prison to Christian parents, who died of torture. San Mamés himself was later thrown to the lions, but tamed the animals as he preached to them. A lion remained his companion until he was condemned to death by Duke Alexander and struck in the stomach with a trident. San Mamés stadium was built next to the *Casa de la Misericordia* (House of Mercy), once a convent of San Mamés, whose chapel holds an alleged relic of the saint. When important games come up, fans locate seven candles and pray for success of the team. "The players have to do their best to play well and to fight, and the Saint will protect them" once observed the mother superior of the *Casa de la Misericordia*; "many

people come here to pray for Athletic and for themselves, as San Mamés protects you from intestinal illnesses.”<sup>44</sup>

“I have three loves,” an elderly Athletic fan tells me; “my wife, the Virgin of Begoña, and Athletic. The trouble is, I don’t know in which order!” (V. B. personal communication 2010 April). He shows me an old black-and-white photo that summarizes it all: his wife reading the scriptures in the Basilica of Begoña at the annual Athletic Club mass, with the figure of the Virgin in the background and an Athletic flag displayed on the pulpit. There are various versions of what it means to be a *Bilbaino de pro*, a bona fide local. All versions, however, have two basic staples: you have to be devoted to the Virgin of Begoña, and be an Athletic fan. The *Amatxu* or “little mother” is the patron saint of Athletic, who is frequently convoked for celebration and salvation. When Athletic wins a title, the team and the club delegation takes the cup to the Basilica and offers it to the Virgin before the city would submerge in a three day long celebration. Every year in August before the season starts, the Basilica celebrates an official mass with the presence of Athletic club leadership, fans and players, where the Virgin is asked to help and guide the team during the upcoming season. It is very normal in Bilbao to ask or cite divine intervention in matters of soccer. When Athletic was on the verge of descending to the second division in 2006/2007, the fan club Deusto organized a pilgrimage to the Basilica to pray to the Virgin for the salvation of the team. The mayor Iñaki Azkuna publicly asked the virgin “to push the ball for us a few times;”<sup>45</sup> a man was photographed on the terraces, holding the image of the virgin during what came to be called the “Salvation Game,” with reference to saving first division status. In May 2009, on the

---

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2009-03-01/ellos-dediquen-jugar-mames-20090301.html>

<sup>45</sup> June 12, 2007, El Correo

eve of the King`s Cup final against Barcelona FC, I saw several persons wearing Athletic jerseys and praying in the Basilica. And when all else fails to explain the unfathomable ways of the game, there is always the intervention of the Virgin. When Athletic won a game against Osasuna in 2011 November in the last game of the 91<sup>st</sup> minute, coach Caparrós offered this explanation for the victory at the press conference: “the Virgin of Begoña saved us.”<sup>46</sup>

Soccer prompts sense-making, interpretive activities, the desire to somehow fathom the inexplicable. When in the seasons of 2005-2007 Athletic was continuously in the descending zone, and the centenarian tradition of playing in first division was in danger with each game, the club`s tribulations became allegories for life, death and resurrection. Bilbainos experienced game days with intense anxiety and foreboding:

I remember perfectly that I didn`t sleep at all the night before the game; I got up and went down the streets with my father to buy the newspapers. As we were coming home, we found an elderly man lying on the ground; he had fallen off the motorcycle. We called the ambulance, and I thought, buff, we start the day badly, let`s hope it`s not a premonition (O. F. personal communication 2001 March).

San Mamés is often seen as a site of magical events. At the end of the 2006/2007 season, Athletic was one final game away from its metaphorical death: descending to second division. The following fan story shows how inexplicable events gain meaning in the context of the sacred place. If miracles happen, they are affected by Athletic and San Mamés:

---

<sup>46</sup> [http://www.as.com/futbol/articulo/caparrros-virgen-begona-nos-ha/20101128dasdasftb\\_67/Tes](http://www.as.com/futbol/articulo/caparrros-virgen-begona-nos-ha/20101128dasdasftb_67/Tes)

My story is curious; if I didn't get a heart attack, I was very close to it. I couldn't sleep the night before that final game, and several days afterwards. I was in rather bad health. I had to go to dialysis sessions and I was feeling rather weak. But even so, I decided to go to San Mamés. In spite of everything, I had to be there at the Salvation Game against Levante. I remember the suffocating heat, the people feeling miserable, and my nerves were on edge. But we got it; we saved ourselves 2-0. The next day I remember the conversation about the game with my doctors, the nurses and other dialysis patients. They were pulling my leg all the time. The doctor told me half jokingly and half seriously that it was not very good for me to go through all this anxiety in San Mamés. I told him that I could die, but Athletic is Athletic, and nothing in the world could keep me from going to The Cathedral. And look, the next day on the 19th of June, I received a call from the Hospital of Cruces. They said there was a possible donor and they wanted to do the pre-transplant compatibility exams. Again, I was totally anxious, without a wink of sleep that night... and the following day, Wednesday June 20, the second miracle happened within just a few hours. Ever since, Athletic has no problems on the rankings, and I lead a practically normal life" (personal communication 2011 March).

Miracles, magic and mysteries transfer "the neophyte from the profane to the sacred world and places him in direct and permanent communion with the latter" (Gennep, 1960: 89). Miracles are a sign of divine intervention; San Mamés is interpreted as a sacred place because it offers a framework for fans to experience and make sense of events as miracles and magic.

#### **4.2 The Ritual Cycle of Fandom**

Ritual affects the transformation of the person into a different subject; they are the "passage from one social and magico-religious position to another" (Gennep 1960:

18). In order to make that passage, subjects are separated from their previous environment and kept in a liminal area of transition before their incorporation, as new subjects, in the community. Social existence and subjectivity are based on periodicity and a succession of life stages, a succession that is affected through communally sanctioned, and publicly conducted rites of passages. Rites of passages bring about a change in a person's subjectivity and social position: through birth and baptism one is incorporated into society. Through puberty rites adolescents are incorporated into the adult world of sexuality; through pregnancy rituals a woman is initiated into motherhood; through marriage, one's social status changes; through funerary rituals, one is incorporated in the world of the living. For their lifetime, humans change various social positions, and periodically move from one to another, a transition that is done socially, with public symbols.

#### 4.2.1 *Rites of Initiation and Incorporation*

If you are born in Bilbao, you are quite immediately initiated into Athletic fandom; "I had no choice of *not* rooting for Athletic because I was born here," an informant tells me. As your fan mother takes you home from the hospital, your aunt will have bought you your first gift: red and white pajamas with an Athletic logo. On your first family photos, you will be surrounded by Athletic wear, toys and objects for babies; your father will wear an Athletic jersey and hold you proudly in his arm; your crib will be populated with Athletic toys. The family will take a baby photo of you in Athletic scarf, and send it to the local daily *El Correo* to announce your arrival. Your father will have you signed up on the long waiting list of Athletic so that years from now, when there is a vacancy, you too will be member like him. The sacramental event of birth is surrounded by objects deemed sacred and protective; like that of the man

whose crib, he told me, was made of a wooden chair his construction worker father brought home from San Mamés.

Fandom has two other important rites of incorporation: a person's first time in San Mamés, and the acquisition of club membership. Neither is absolutely necessary to be a fan, nor are they always possible if the person lives far away. They constitute, however, the fan's ultimate dream and definition of belonging.

A rite of initiation with the greatest impact is one's first visit to the stadium. Anthropologists have remarked on the importance of "first times," some of the most frequent rites of transition and initiation, for both traditional and large scale societies: besides childhood rites such cutting the umbilical cords, naming, baptizing or sprinkling water, cultures attach various importance to the first haircut, first meal with the family, first tooth, first walk, first clothes according to the child's sex, first communion etc. In Bilbao, a fan's most memorable "first" is a person's first time in San Mamés.

Fans remember it as an Event in great detail: the score and the scorer; the goalkeeper, the line up and the substitutions; expulsions, cards and referee decisions; the weather; the overwhelming sensation they felt the first time they emerged at the gates and caught sight of the field; the way the terraces gradually fill; the way the terraces explode in celebration of a goal; the ubiquitous smell of cigars; the stranger who shared his or her smuggled wine which, on top of the atmosphere, would intoxicate them. The intimate sensations of the first time in San Mamés would remain indelible.

Every now and then, fans share their first time stories on fan forums: "the best day of your life," one that "you never forget" and "take with yourself to the grave."

It was a day full of emotions, happiness, and a dream come true. I visited the Athletic museum and did a guided tour in the stadium; even now, I get into a fit of trembling when I recall the Pozas street, with the Athletic shield at its end; all the jewels that I saw in the museum and all over the stadium... the sensation of climbing the stairs of the tunnel of the locker rooms and stepping on the lawn is tremendous... that grass, those benches, those terraces, that arch that have seen so much! A magical moment that I will always cherish (K. A. personal communication 2012 May).

The first time in San Mamés sometimes comes with the power of illumination similar to what a pilgrim feels as he or she arrives at their sacred destination after a long journey, and when suddenly everything makes sense as past and present connect:

What really took my breath away and made me cry uncontrollably was the homage to Txopo [Athletic's 1970's star goal keeper Iribar]. My father would tell me marvelous things about him as he was awed by this goal keeper. When The Cathedral just kept thundering his name, that's when I understood everything, and this time I was where I always wanted to be: in San Mamés, The Cathedral of Soccer. (M. O. personal communication May 2012)

San Mamés has a centripetal quality analogous to the calling of religious shrines and sites; many fans come from a distance and make a particular life story of their pilgrimage to Bilbao, which becomes the "eternal city." Fans often prepare for their first trip for years, which will make the event all the more sacrificial. By the time the pilgrim arrives, the exhaustion of anticipation and the overwhelming emotions overtake him or her: "The city is sublime before a game: old ladies wearing Athletic scarves, dogs dressed in red and white, it was incredible; as if I had known everyone before. A game in Bilbao is a social Event. And then there is that city, Bilbao, my

infinite desire” (G. M. personal communication April 2011). The “first time” is therefore the punctuation of an era that had been spent in intense anticipation and desire. Whether a fan is taken by his or her parents at the age of six, or goes with their *cuadrilla* at the age of sixteen, they will have heard innumerable stories by the time they first go to San Mamés. For fans who come from afar, their first time in San Mamés comes with the realization of a flesh-and-blood community that they had thus far only “imagined” through the print and visual media (Anderson 1991).

Local fans are assisted by family members through that rite: children are taken for the first time by (mostly) a male family member, a father, grandfather or uncle—although this role may be just as easily fulfilled by female members--, or maybe a family friend or neighbor: “the first time I was in San Mamés,” a fan tells me, “I was a baby in my father’s arms.” Taking someone to their first game is a powerful act of initiation that will always structure that relationship, and the person will be always remembered as “the one who first took me to San Mamés.” It’s a social endorsement whose importance becomes all the more acute in its absence: “It took a long time before I first went to San Mamés,” a fan says, “because *no one took me*, until my classmates invited me along.” Your first time in San Mamés, and in a sense in the fan community, is thus sanctioned through “being taken,” through the community’s approval, and predicated by the mandate that soccer’s enjoyment is an inter-subjective communion. “Athletic fandom maintains for you many-many social relations,” a fan tells me. “You don’t go to San Mamés alone.” So strong is that mandate that fans invoke those who aren’t, but should be there: “As I entered the stadium, my first thought went to my *aita*, my dad, who is no longer with us...and who had never been in San Mamés.” By going to San Mamés with his father on his mind, this fan

ritualistically fixed a broken universe: the fact that his father never had a “first time,” and that he was not with the son for his “first time.”

Another rite of incorporation is *hacerse socio*, “to become club member.” The 35 000 members maintain and govern the club through a system of representation, elections, and annual membership fees. Being a member means having a season ticket and owning a seat in San Mamés. The ultimate sign of devotion is *hacerse socio*—especially because the process is not without its tribulations. Membership is practically always full in Athletic Club, owing to the high demand and the limitation of seats in the stadium, and can be rarely obtained through vacancy: fans acquire membership cards through “inheriting” it from someone who is too old to go to the stadium, or from the dead. “I received my membership card from my father, at his deathbed,” an informant told me. The following story of an elderly fan shows the significance of this rite as a life event for the subject:

“I became an Athletic member in the 1940`s. They were very hard times after the war; my family was poor, my father dead, and we barely had enough to eat. I was thirteen years old, and all I wanted was to become an Athletic Club member. There was no way my mother could pay the membership fee, but she told me and my brother that if we worked and made our own money, we could spend it on club membership. We started to work all kinds of odd jobs you can imagine kids do after school. After four years of working and saving every single penny, we had the money. It was a beautiful April day. As my brother and I entered the Athletic Club office to purchase our membership, we were bursting with pride, and felt like we were the lords of the world! The office lady said this: ‘Boys, I have a suggestion: why don`t you come back in September and buy your membership then? The season is almost over now anyway, and if you sign up in September, you can save the cost of summer membership fees.’ My brother and I looked at each other; we had been waiting

for this moment all our lives, and worked for four years; we were not willing to wait a day longer. We purchased our membership right then. Later in September, Athletic Club announced that membership filled to the maximum. There were no openings for several years” (F. M. personal communication 2011 March).

The scarcity of membership opportunities, and the sacrificial nature of acquiring it upon special occasions that are themselves considered sacramental (birth, confirmation, death) lends membership status a sacramental quality. For this man, the rite of incorporation as club member lasted four years and cost great sacrifice; difficulties and challenges, in turn, enhance pride and pleasure in the new status. In Bilbao, membership status is conceptualized for life. Even if too old to attend games in San Mamés, many elderly fans won't cancel their membership; I once talked to a 93-year old fan who had lived in the south of Spain for 25 years, hadn't gone to San Mamés for that entire time, and yet kept his membership status, and paid the annual membership fee. “Only death do us part,” he said.

Or sometimes not even death, as I will now show.

#### 4.2.2 *Death in The Cathedral*

“If football is an analogue of religion,” Richard Giulianotti writes, “if each enables its devotees to worship what is sacred about themselves, then moments of greatest existential importance will be marked by special ceremonies within both institutions. Death, and its cultural commemoration, is probably the most significant existential moment” (1999: 21). As Giulianotti remarks, the funerals of players, directors or other important personages in particular soccer cultures become highly public events of collective memory and identity construction. I will now explore a much less

conventional way of coping with death “in the colors:” surreptitious fan burials in playing fields. I reproduce here the unabridged story of my informant Txala as it offers a rare view into the depths and dimensions of soccer fandom:

“We are four brothers and sisters, two boys and two girls. She was the second eldest, and me the little one of the house. Maite was my favorite sister, she took care of me the most; she knew all my secrets, the most profound ones you can imagine. Even today there are things that only she knew. She was blond and beautiful, a very strong personality, fair and a fighter, always helping other people. She loved me a lot, like I loved her. She and I were very similar in our way of being, personality and taste. She gave me my first drum set as a gift, although our father was totally against me becoming a musician, but she bought it for me anyway with her little wage. She took me to my first music concert when I was thirteen to Anoeta to see Jethro Tull. When I was an adolescent and I started to discover the feminine sex, she let me use her home so that her little brother may have some fun... She was that generous with me and everybody else.

One unhappy day she went to see the doctor with a cyst in her armpit that had grown very big...it was as big as a tangerine! After various biopsies I knew I would be left alone without my sister within a short time. But she had a very strong character, and was fighting for four or five years like a champion. First they removed one of her breasts, and then the other one, with chemo and radio sessions that devastated her physically and mentally, and they were not much worth. But we never lost hope at home, and she started a new oncology treatment in San Sebastián. It was a whole new modern treatment; for two and a half years I drove her every Wednesday to San Sebastián. While she was at therapy, I discovered the great *pintxo* [finger food] bars, went for a swim on beaches of this city. The treatment was over, and the results looked miraculous; her defenses started to come back. After six months, and one of the multiple revisions... suddenly and without any warning sign, they said she

had metastasis in the brain, the sternum, the bones. That day I knew that my sister was going to leave us.

She asked to be cremated, and that her ashes would be divided between his siblings. I told her what I thought I would do with my part of her ashes: spread them over the lawn of San Mamés. That way I'd visit her each time I go to the games in The Cathedral. Where else would be best for her? Right next to our mother's house, she lives thirty meters from San Mamés, and this has been our neighborhood all our lives. When we were children we used to sneak in San Mamés and kick penalty shots, until the guards who were charged with maintenance threw us out. The bigger boys in my *cuadrilla* [age grade or neighborhood group of friends] even climbed over the arch of San Mamés! Imagine... so where else would be best for my sister? In San Mamés, her home! I would visit her often, and when the lions need help, she could proportion her support for them!

And that's what she did: she saved Athletic the year that we were going to drop to second division. She died on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2005; in September that tragic season started, which almost led us to second division. Several games passed, Athletic was doing pathetically, and I just kept postponing the execution of my promise to my sister. At first I didn't think there was a connection; but the season was coming to an end, Athletic was one point away from dropping down a division, and I had not fulfilled my promise. It got to the point when there were only three games left: a home game against Zaragoza, an away game against Depor, and a final one against Barça! There was no time left: if I didn't do it in the game against Zaragoza, I would lose the opportunity and for the following one against Barcelona, it would be probably too late. Imagine if we drop to the second division without fulfilling my promise to my sister!

I entered the stadium half an hour before the game so that I could spread her ashes without calling attention to myself, and so that the security guards let me do it; if you ask the Club's permission, it will officially deny it, I knew that. So I told myself: Txala, you either do it now, or you will regret it for the rest of your life. And to carry this thing on my shoulders...! So I went to the field and asked permission from the guard. And the bad luck I had, he

was dumber than a mad bird! He told me no, and that I was crazy. I told him yes, I was completely crazy, and if you don't let me do it now, I will do it during the game, and you and all your colleagues until the other end of this pitch will find yourselves kicked out into the streets, because everybody will see on television that you didn't do your job well by letting me escape and run up to the middle of the field. That prospect made him realize that this would be indeed bad, and he called his superior. This time I had better luck. The son of this boss played soccer in the same youth league as my son, and so we knew each other by sight. He told me no problem, many people ask him the same thing, and he finds this completely normal. He just asked me if it was all right waiting until the end of the game. I said, you are not fooling me around, are you? He repeated his promise, and when the game was over he kept his word like a gentleman. He waved to me, and opened the gate.

I stepped on the sacred lawn of The Cathedral, and fulfilled my promise to my little sister: I spread her ashes on the field. We won that game, and the following one, and even the last one against Barcelona. Athletic was saved! I myself could barely believe it, because it was practically impossible to save ourselves. But there she was finally, my sister Maite, the gardener of San Mamés, and she saved us. I have absolutely no doubt about that. Little Maite saved us” (personal communication 2012 September).

The objective of the funerary rite, Durkheim argues is to destroy the body so that the soul that had inhabited it would be free to become a spirit; events in need of explanation are then attributed to its workings. These spirits, Durkheim writes:

have the needs and passions of men; they seek to concern themselves with the life of their companions of yesterday, either to aid them or to injure them, according to the sentiments which they have kept towards them. According to the circumstances, their nature makes them either very precious auxiliaries or very redoubtable adversaries. (...) Thus comes the habit of attributing to them all those events of life which vary slightly from the ordinary: there are few of

these for which they cannot account. Thus they constitute a sort of ever-ready supply of causes which never leaves one at a loss when in search of explanations. Does a man appear inspired, does he speak with energy, is it as though he were lifted outside of himself and above the ordinary level of men? It is because a good spirit is in him, and animates him. Is he overtaken by an attack or seized by madness? It is because an evil spirit has entered into him and brought him all this trouble. (Durkheim 1965: 68).

The danger of improper burial is, therefore, that the soul may turn into a spirit with a grudge. Proper funerals are a most important ritual obligation: persons for whom funeral rites are not performed are condemned to a pitiable existence, since they are not given the chance to enter the world of the dead and be incorporated in the society established there. These are the most dangerous dead; unhappy spirits may become vengeful and hostile towards the living.

Ritualization “is used to define a particular means of operating on, or influencing, occult powers, for the good of the congregation as a whole or some of its members” (Gluckman and Gluckman 1977: 231). Ritual burials at soccer fields may thus be interpreted along the line of this religious thinking: properly buried, dead fans turn into spirits who, as we saw with the outcome of Txala’s story, favorably influence the world of the living. Misfortunes like a losing streak, in turn, are attributed to the malign mystical influences that result from the improper handling, like the breach of a promise, of the dead.

Soccer stadia are increasingly conceptualized as the proper burial site for fans; “many people ask me the same thing,” Txala quotes the guard in San Mamés. Illegal burial rituals pose a challenge for clubs; at places, players have started to complain that the ashes are visible on the lawn, which is why many stadia have established

memory gardens or columbaria where dead club members may be deposited. The Spanish *Liga* Benito Villamarín stadium of Betis first entertained this option in October 2010, when they realized that they could no longer control the dispersal of ashes over the soccer field. In just four months, forty people were caught depositing the remains of deceased fans. The stadia of the Spanish Espanyol and Atlético de Madrid already accommodate such demands, while others like Barcelona FC are contemplating it. The German Hamburg SV decided to open its own cemetery near its stadium after repeated petitions to spread ashes under the goal post.

It is perhaps the English leagues where gardens of remembrance are a most established practice. Many clubs offer funerary services for their deceased members that variously include spreading the ashes over the field or engraving the name of the deceased in a brick of the stadium. Arsenal's Armoury Square offers granite stones where fans may leave personalized messages; Aston Villa has its memory garden completely full, which is why they have suspended the reception of ashes until they find a solution; Blackpool does not allow the spreading of ashes on the lawn, but one may bury urns on the side of the field. Birmingham City has a separate room for funerals. The Bolton Wanderers do not only allow the deposition of ashes in the field, they also have a chaplain among the fans who performs the ceremony. Everton used to allow the burial of ashes all over the play area in small boxes with a small plate to identify the place—today it no longer offers this service, but it keeps an agreement with the vicar of the neighboring Saint Lucas church to deposit ashes. Stadia are increasingly seen as the most properly “sacred” places for the sacrament of death.

#### 4.2.3 *Marriage in the Colors: "I Do" in The Cathedral*

“The only certain relationships you have in life,” a fan told me, “are with your parents and your soccer club; friends and girlfriends come and go, but my parents will always be my parents, and I will always follow Athletic” (R. O. personal communication 2011 April). Love for the club is considered a fan’s most enduring relationship. Marriage “in the colors,” by extension, hides wishful thinking: a desire for the same security and duration of sentiments in marriage as in fandom. At the same time, San Mamés becomes the only worthy place for the sacrament of marriage. In March 2012, at half time against Sporting, a 33 year old Italian Athletic fan displayed a large banner under the north goal post: “Vale, will you marry me?” Amidst the general stupor and applause of 40 000 fans, she accepted the proposal. “A traditional petition is not my style,” the Italian fan said; “I wanted to share this moment in my second home and the *peña* [fan club] with which I share a very profound brotherhood.”<sup>47</sup>

In October 2010, Naiara and Iñaki choose the “Cathedral” as the setting for their marriage photos. Right after the wedding ceremony—which in the Basque Country is overwhelmingly Catholic and has to be celebrated in a church—the couple went to San Mamés to pose for their wedding pictures: with the shield of Athletic; in the museum, among the cups and historical relics of the club; with a ball on the field; with the lion in the VIP sector; in the locker room; and on the terraces with the bust of Pichichi. “It’s fantastic being here, on the field” the groom said as he kicked around a ball for the photos; “when you are a child you think you’ll be here as a player, but this is a dream come true.”<sup>48</sup> Another fan I knew married his girlfriend in Las Vegas. He

---

<sup>47</sup> <http://panorama.laverdad.es/sociedad/5315-un-si-quiero-en-lacatedral>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.dalealplay.com/informaciondecontenido.php?con=278713>

was wearing an Athletic jersey, while she was wearing the jersey of her home town team, the Basque *Alavés*. It is not uncommon, I am told, that a priest will finish a wedding ceremony by saying this: “Do not forget about your Sunday duties: going to Church and to San Mamés.”

### **4.3 Desecration in the Cathedral**

Sacred places are not just meaningful, they are also powerful places, which turns them into contested sites over whose narratives and what bodies should populate them. “For many years now,” Norbert Peabody argues (1995: 8), “it has been a commonplace observation in history and anthropology that the monopolistic possession of sacred objects, heirlooms, talismans, or regalia helps perpetuate political rule.” Space, Foucault confirms in an interview in 1986, “is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (1980: 252).

Sacred things, places and practices may also be defined through their opposite: they are sacred if they can be defiled, desecrated, “stolen.” I will explore the construction of San Mamés as an extra-ordinary, liminal realm that suspends everyday life and social structure, which lends the stadium a sacred air precisely in light of its opposite: acts that desecrate, defile the stadium and its meaning for the community. There is a sense in which Athletic is conceptualized as Bilbao’s great untouchable: fandom must remain open to everyone, and any attempt of political or ideological appropriation of the place is considered an act of desecration. “In Athletic,” Bilbainos say, “we are all together, and it is only in Athletic where we are all together.” That fellow feeling, which has gained a “sacred,” “untouchable” status against the backdrop of an otherwise much conflicted society, may be only achieved by the suspension of ideological and political life worlds in the liminal, carnivalesque

atmosphere of San Mamés. “There appears to be two modes for human relatedness,”

Victor Turner writes:

the first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less.’ The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals (1969: 96).

We see the same leveling mechanism in Bakhtin’s discussion of the folk genre *carnival*, where the suspension of roles and statuses create “a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (1968, 6). The carnivalesque, Bakhtin argues, is the “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” (1968, 10). For post-modern societies, this is achieved in the play sphere. Play theorists (Huizinga 1950, Bateson 1972, Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson 1999) have established that a similar bracketing of “reality” takes place in the play sphere: within its temporal boundaries, play follows its own rules, creates an initial equality of chances between players, and absorbs them to the point that “real” life ceases for its duration. In the play frame, Bateson writes, “everything is a lie” (1972, 157); the truths and laws of everyday life and social structures are suspended.

For the terraces, this translates into ninety minutes where the otherwise differentiated community is stripped of its hierarchized identities: in San Mamés, everyone has the same status, the same voice, and every opinion is as valid as the next. In the liminal *communitas*, individuals who outside of Athletic are antagonistic

suspend the sources of their antagonism. Pro-Spain Popular Party leader Antonio Basagoiti engages daily in ideological battles with pro-Basque politicians like Basque Nationalist Party leader Andoni Ortuzar; in San Mamés, they are often spotted chatting about Athletic jovially. “I go to San Mamés regularly to keep in touch with people,” Ortuzar tells me. “They talk to you, tell you ‘hey, the other day I saw you and I didn’t like what you said...’ In San Mamés, you are just like anyone else; you go with your scarf and jersey, sit among the people, have a coke and a sandwich at half time. In San Mamés, the barriers between politicians and citizens break down” (personal communication 2011 March). The Basque Country president of the pro-Spanish Popular Party, Antonio Basagoiti goes to San Mamés with the same naturalness as any radical left wing pro-Basque fan or politician. “Here it is not strange at all that I should root for Athletic and be a Popular Party politician. Outside of here perhaps it seems a contradiction because they don’t understand what Athletic is about” (personal communication 2011 March).

What counts as desecration is any attempt to break the liminal statuslessness in San Mamés. Individuals are free to voice and contest any opinion as locals and/or Athletic fans; when external political power and party politics attempts to do the same, it is considered as desecration.

Such efforts cause fierce opposition. In March 2008 before a game, a one minute silence was held in honor of Isaías Carrasco, a socialist party politician assassinated by ETA two days before the game. That was the first and last minute of silence held in San Mamés for a person who was not a former distinguished club personage: it was deemed to break the sacred communion of the city by introducing political controversy in San Mamés. Some segments of San Mamés decided not to respect silence and whistled, arguing that by the same token there should be

observation of silence for the victims of Francoism and those of GAL, the Francoist anti-terrorist elite commando, and for the victims of torture and abuse in Spanish prisons. In turn, those fans in San Mamés who disagreed with the disrespect of the silence whistled the whistling itself. Across Spain, soccer fans projected the whistling episode on Basque society at large, pointing out their radicalism and support of ETA. To create further controversy, the organization Dignity and Justice (*Dignidad y Justicia*) asked the district attorney of the Spanish National Court to identify those persons who did not respect the one minute order for silence—which was seen to violate freedom of expression. That one minute silence was demonstrative of how, in the Basque Country and in Spain, a political statement will never stand in isolation, but provoke an avalanche of reactions, controversies, divisions. Pervasive as they may be in social and political life, such divisions are not tolerated in San Mamés, which is actively constructed as a communion.

No politician representing the Spanish state is welcome as a distinguished guest in the stadium. Local politicians routinely emerge in San Mamés either as invited guests or club members, and always as locals whose “birth right” and symbolic obligation is to be there as Bilbainos. When politicians come from outside, however, they remain suspect: instead of supporting the team, they want to use Athletic for their own political interests. Bilbainos were indignant when Mariano Rajoy, leader of the right wing Spanish nationalist Popular Party posed for photo opportunities with an Athletic jersey in the VIP sector of San Mamés. For most, it was the political act of garnering support for the Basque Country Presidential candidate running under the banner of the Popular Party. Club President Fernando Garcia Macua came under so much criticism that the Club issued an apology: “the president and the board are perfectly aware that an institution like Athletic must unite all

segments of society, conserve and maintain the enriching plurality of its social following and reject any attempt to politically manipulate its activities.”<sup>49</sup>

Objection to the presence of a Popular Party politician in San Mamés had an echo across Spain. The incident was interpreted by the Spanish nationalist journal *ABC* as the ghost of “Sabino Arana in San Mamés.”<sup>50</sup> “the Sabinian exclusion, the nationalist regime that expels all those who do not integrate in the ethnia, the modern version of Sabinian race.”<sup>51</sup> *ABC* deemed that, in order to explain the “Basque problem,” sociologists, polls and analyses were superfluous: “If the Spanish citizen from other regions, the visiting foreigner, the political scientist from the University of Kuala Lumpur or a Martian wants to understand what ethnic nationalism means, suffice it for them to take a little trip to San Mamés.”<sup>52</sup> What Spanish nationalists fail to recognize, however, is that the Athletic crowds are not just opposed to pro-Spanish political presence in San Mamés; in spite of its local power, not even the Basque Nationalist Party has attempted to appropriate Athletic, as any such attempt would backfire politically. “We don’t need to, and don’t want to appropriate Athletic,” PNV politician Ortuzar told me. “We already have a massive presence in society” (personal communication 2011 March).

What does not happen in San Mamés is as revealing as what does: the Spanish national team has not played in a Basque stadium since 1967. Attitudes towards the Spanish selection in the Basque Country are changing slowly; and yet, for most fans, organizing a Spanish selection game, displaying the Spanish flag and playing the

---

<sup>49</sup><http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2008-10-26/athletic-rechaza-utilizacion-politica-20081026.html>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.abc.es/20081029/opinion-firmas/sabino-arana-mames-20081029.html>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.abc.es/20081029/opinion-firmas/sabino-arana-mames-20081029.html>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.abc.es/20081029/opinion-firmas/sabino-arana-mames-20081029.html>

anthem would be an ultimate act of desecration. The memories of the dictatorship, when Spanish symbols were imposed and Basque ones were prohibited, still linger.

In 2009, the Socialist (PSOE) and Popular Party (PP) coalition government deemed that with the imminent disarmament of ETA in 2011, with the apparent easing of radical Basque nationalism, and with the successes of the Spanish selection, it was time to open towards Spain through two symbolic sports events: inviting the *Vuelta Ciclista a España*, the “Tour of Spain,” back to the Basque Country, and inviting the *Roja*, the Spanish selection to play a game in San Mamés.

The Tour was established in 1935 and, through its zigzagging across the country, became a symbol of Spain as a united nation. It was very popular in the Basque Country, as this sport has great following there. Protests, push pins thrown on the road and even a terrorist attempt by ETA in 1965 between the Basque cities of Pamplona and Vitoria led the organizers to conclude that the Basque country was unsafe for the Tour in 1978. In 2011, the PSOE-PP government achieved its objective: after 33 years of absence, the Tour returned to the Basque Country.

Bringing the Spanish selection to San Mamés, however, proved too ambitious. For most Athletic fans and Bilbainos, the sight of Spanish flags in San Mamés is unthinkable and tantamount to desecration. The online forums were buzzing with indignation, and plots of sabotage and protest: Athletic would first have to consult its members about such an invitation, and members were not ready for the spectacle of the Spanish selection in their stadium. The Basque Nationalist Party and the left wing Basque nationalist *Aralar* rejected the invitation of both the Tour and the *Roja*. As PNV representative Peio Iparragirre said, “if they want to mix politics and cycling, we

will not facilitate that.”<sup>53</sup> Aralar made a pun of the situation, and urged both the Spanish and the Basque Football Federation`s work towards “an official game in San Mamés between the Spanish and the Basque selection.”<sup>54</sup>

That San Mamés was not ready to host any celebration that had to do with *españolismo* was well reflected in 2010, when the *Roja* won the World Cup. The proposition that two Athletic players and world champions, Javi Martínez and Fernando Llorente, should be given an award for their participation in the Spanish selection caused so much controversy that the club ended up discarding the idea. The same happened to the cup itself, which was touring Spain in the summer of 2010 as a sacred relic. Not only was it not brought to San Mamés; it was displayed for just one day in the neighboring small town of Basauri (a Spanish Socialist Party power base) on the local soccer field, attracting less media interest than a cadet level soccer game. In Bilbao, people were quite ignorant of the fact that the world cup was in town.

#### 4.4 San Mamés *Barria*

San Mamés turns one hundred years old in August 2013, and will be demolished in 2014; the old building no longer satisfies the regulations of international competition and the growing demand for membership. Right next to it, the constructions of the new stadium San Mamés Barria (“New San Mamés) with 55 000 seats is underway. Arial photos show how, little by little, the new stadium approaches and swallows the old one: a spatial incorporation that will maintain a sensation of continuity. The club

---

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.elconfidencial.com/deportes/parlamento-vasco--seleccion-espanola-jugar-euskadi-20091116.html>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.elconfidencial.com/deportes/parlamento-vasco--seleccion-espanola-jugar-euskadi-20091116.html>

understands the necessity of that sensation for fans, who have spent every other Sunday in San Mamés for five, twenty-five, fifty years.

The May 2010 placement of the first brick of the San Mamés Barria communicated through its symbolism the significance of continuity and community. Besides club leaders, the most important public figures made their presence: the *Lehendakari* or President of the Basque Autonomous Government, the MP Representative of Bizkaia Province, the Mayor of Bilbao, and the President of the Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa bank, among others. The club's greatest living legend, the goal keeper Iribar carved out a piece of earth and grass from the old playfield, and placed it on a glass plate. He passed it on, and the plate traveled from hand to hand through a human chain that included representatives of the Athletic community: male and female players, former players, teenagers and children from the youth academy, club members, fan club members, fans. As the piece of playfield reached the external walls of the stadium, it was joined by a piece of brick carved from the wall. The two items finally arrived at the end of the human chain: the oldest living club member (ninety-plus), and the youngest living club member (a few month old baby in his father's arm), who then placed the brick and the turf at its final position, only twenty meters (60 feet) away from the old San Mamés. The last game in the old building will traumatize many Bilbainos, as a great part of them will go with the building irrevocably. It is informally rumored that fans will take home as relics the ruins and debris that remains after its demolition. The symbolic resonance of the old building in the new one, however, and the cultural labor that fans invest in sacralization, will surely turn San Mamés Barria, too, into "a magical place."

## Chapter Five

### Bilbao Catch-22: Passions and Double Binds in Soccer

More than seventy dead bodies emerged in Egypt's Port Said stadium in February 2012 as a result of a fight that broke out between the ultras of Al-Masry and Al-Ahly. The corpses point at an inexplicable, disturbing extra element in a series of signifiers: how did that happen? They remind us that, once again, soccer has become more than a game, and passions more than enjoyment. A year later in 2013, as a court decision condemned more than twenty supporters to death for their involvement, anti-government protests once again intensified, destabilizing Mohammed Morsi's government for failing to have met the objectives of Egypt's 2011 uprising.

At the heart of fandom there is a compromise: you choose to support a team and never to abandon it. A form of violence is already coded in that compromise: it is *binding*. "Is this going to prevent you from going back to the stadium?" a US reporter asked a young man whose cousin died in Port Said. "No way! We'll keep going back."<sup>55</sup> Why people enjoy sports has been attributed to various factors like communal self-realization, tradition, socialization into values, escape from everyday life (Delaney and Mandigan 2009), or the collective enjoyment of transgression (Vaczi 2011). I am now going to explore yet another factor that may tie fans to their teams: a Catch-22 double bind whose logic is not what *attracts* fans to fandom, but rather what *prevents* them from abandoning it.

For the purposes of exploring the passions and double binds of Bilbao's soccer madness, it is necessary once again to reiterate that the club has two axes of identification. First, it has never sunk to second division from the first class Spanish

---

<sup>55</sup> Radio 77.8, USA, Nevada.

*Liga*. Second, ever since the last British player left the club in 1912, Athletic has not contracted foreign players. A footballer is eligible to play if he was born in the territory of the historical Basque Country, or he was trained in one of the academies of a Basque soccer club. Historically the third most successful team in Spain, Athletic hasn't won a single title since 1984; it is pride in the centenarian tradition of localist recruitment and first division performance that has nourished passions in that title drought. During the 2006/2007 season, however, a ghost emerged in San Mamés stadium: week after week, Athletic was losing. Poor performance came to jeopardize first division status, and the prospect of sinking to second division sent Bilbao fans into an aporetic Catch-22 situation, a double bind over their identities.

What is, in formal terms, a Catch-22? Let's revisit Joseph Heller's war novel, which first defined it: 'There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he were sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to' (Heller 1996). Catch-22, in short, is a circular logic that prevents anyone from avoiding combat missions, which I will apply to the metaphorical combat missions of the soccer field.

Bilbao's Catch-22 is this: if we abandon our recruitment philosophy, we are no longer a "unique case in the world of soccer." But if we keep it, we may sink to second division, where an all-Basque roster ceases to be unique. Either way, an axis of identification is lost, and a centenarian tradition broken. The two primary negative injunctions of Athletic's identity, i.e. "don't recruit foreigners" and "don't lose your

first division status” were at conflict: competing in first division with locals only seemed mutually exclusive. What fixed the double bind, following the logic of Gregory Bateson (1973), was a tertiary negative injunction: you can’t abandon the mission. You cannot abandon a team of homegrown players, “our boys of the land;” neighbors, friends, family. The effects of the double bind were psychologically violent; and still, Athletic fans “kept going back” to the stadium.

It is not only fans, however, that become “victims” of the double bind created by Athletic’s Basque-only philosophy. Because local recruitment creates an intense, familiar relationship between fans and players, the latter have a particularly hard time if they want to leave the club. Beyond the emotional bond, Athletic treats its players better than they would be treated elsewhere. First, because its recruitment is limited to a geographical area, the club offers a Basque born or raised player much greater career opportunities, inasmuch as he only has to compete against other Basque born and raised players instead of a global market. His chances of debuting in elite soccer, therefore, are facilitated by the recruitment philosophy. Second, because of a limited pool of recruitment that makes player purchase difficult, Athletic overpays its players so that they don’t leave the club. Thus indebted to the club and the community that made them footballers, there emerges an affective bind for homegrown players who contemplate leaving. And finally, I will explore in this chapter the double binds the philosophy poses for the club itself, which at times has to make decisions that would be irrational and counter-productive in purely market oriented clubs.

### **5.1 Apocalyptic Times: the Salvation Game**

There is a recurring joke in Bilbao with which Athletic fans like to mock their Basque neighbors in San Sebastián, the fans of the Real Sociedad: “What is the title that the

Real Sociedad has, and Athletic never had and never will have?” and the answer is: “Second division champions!”

Then there came a season when the joke gradually quieted down and was finally no longer heard: the abominable perspective of sinking to second division became real. The 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 2007, is a date most Bilbainos will never forget: it was the day of the “Salvation Game” against Levante FC. Athletic was playing an all or nothing last game of the season to save its first division status. Its self-sufficient philosophy and proud exceptionalism faced an ultimate challenge, and the city’s entire subjectivity was at stake.

The season 2006/07 went down in Athletic history as the “Annus Horribilis.” They were apocalyptic times: Athletic was “only one step away from the abyss,”<sup>56</sup> it played “109 years of history,”<sup>57</sup> and “a myth was in danger.”<sup>58</sup> Bilbainos spent the last few weeks of the season with probability calculations, trying to fathom endless permutations of victories, draws and losses among the four teams in and around the descending zone. Amidst the alarming headlines, discreetly, emerged a troubling New World: “On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, a sixth presidential candidate [Athletic presidential elections were due in a few weeks] will officially introduce himself for the elections of the Club. He is in favor of contracting foreigners.”<sup>59</sup>

The Athletic fan community became what Turner (1969: 14) would call “a community of suffering.” Many told me of psychosomatic reactions: “I had nightmares. I would dream that we sunk to *segunda* [second division], and would wake up crying, my heart racing 200 beats a minute” a young woman tells me

---

<sup>56</sup> Deia 21 May 2007.

<sup>57</sup> El Mundo 17 June 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Deia 17 June 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Gara 16 June 2007.

(personal communication 2011 March). Another fan said he started losing his hair as a result of anxiety, but its affect was overall: “the possibility of sinking to *segunda* had an effect on your work, your relationships, your sex life, everything” (personal communication 2010 November). Another middle aged man tells me, “I remember it was the same week that my cardiovascular tests came out. It said I had a heart murmur. I was convinced it was because of the anxieties of that season, and I cursed the day I got entangled with Athletic. I wished I could get rid of this ‘disease’ of soccer” (personal communication 2010 September). Many of the elderly who had heart problems were advised to skip games lest they should have a heart attack in San Mamés. It was that season that the local health insurance company IMQ, charged with the medical staffing of games, set up resuscitating equipments in the stadium.

Athletic Club External Relations officer Javier Ucha tells me they received thousands of letters and phone calls those months. He let`s me read the archives; angry emails, desperate emails, threatening emails. They hide the same agony over impotence and vulnerability. “Dear Club,” a fourteen-year-old writes, “I want you to know that it is terribly difficult to cheer a team like this (...) you keep promising that next time we`ll win, next time we`ll win, but this moment never comes, and we are becoming deranged.” “This season is pure anxiety, frustration and suffering,” an elderly woman writes in shaky hand writing. “If we sink to *segunda*, we will no longer be a unique case in the world of football.” “Dear Club,” an elderly man writes, “The fans that come to San Mamés are suffering this great impotence. This impotence is sometimes so great that you ask yourself: What can I do?” Another handwritten letter gives twenty pages of advice on how to finally score a goal “for heaven`s sake;” another one calls for stricter curfews and surveillance of the players.

Former baseball player Bill Veeck (2012: 121) writes this in his autobiography about the galvanizing effect of a team on a city:

People who normally wouldn't nod as they pass talk to each other. Involved as they all are in a common experience, they know they can speak to each other without being rebuffed. (...) There is a feeling of common purpose that never fails to remind me of a city after a disaster. Have you ever noticed the camaraderie that comes over a city that is digging itself out of a bad snowstorm?

One of the most poignant public articulations of Bilbao's common purpose, camaraderie and the affective ties to its club was a fan's pep talk, or rather, call to battle, published in *El Correo*, the daily of greatest circulation in the Basque Country, three weeks before the end of the season. The text reportedly inspired fans to come to San Mamés from hundreds of kilometers away to cheer the team in its final moment of truth. I reproduce it in its entirety here because it reflects not only the agonies of that season, but the intimacy and familiarity between players and fans in Bilbao:

I am not quite sure how to start this letter. I am looking at the white page, and all I see is a jostling of images and sensations that are rushing through my head. All I know is that I have been thinking about this for a long time with data, estimations, projections, analysis, rage, disappointment, hope, illusions, requests and pleas... Except for burning a voodoo doll and praying to the Virgin, I have done everything an agnostic can. I simply write this from the smallness of a simple fan to give new energies to the enthusiasm that I see downhearted; to unite the red and white hearts that I see on edge; to have us create a positive current of force that may help us go through these difficult weeks we have before us. I want us to build a snowball that departs today, and arrives at the game against Levante. I want this snow ball to wipe out all our

opponents starting this Sunday against Mallorca; I want it to keep going against Villarreal, and finish on Sunday the 17th of June against Levante. I want this snowball to reach our players, our board of directors, the media, I want it to push them, to carry them, to take them to our opponents so that they see in our face that they have to surpass us, that they are not confronting eleven players but eleven lions.

Aranzubia; I want you to be calm, serene. I'll be there in San Mamés. And like me, many others. I'll be there to push you, to drive you, to protect you. You must know that from today on, you are for me the best goal keeper in the world.

Iraola; I expect a lot from you. I know I am putting a lot of responsibility on your shoulders, but I also know that you won't disappoint me. I am absolutely certain that you will do your best professional minutes during the games that are left.

Luis Prieto; firmness, I ask you firmness, and I know you'll give it to me. A step forward, push your team mates a step forward, and don't be afraid of mistakes. You have 40 000 *liberos* behind you protecting your shoulders.

Sarriegi; you will give us forcefulness. Let them see that in your face; either them or the ball, never both at the same time. I know you will turn out great.

Ustaritz; what can I ask from you that I don't already know you will give me? You are a champion and you know that, let them others know as well.

Amorebieta; I ask you to be calm. I know it will be difficult for you because your red and white heart is all fire, but I ask you to be calm. Look at your veteran team mates, follow their advice, and in the right moment, bang, show your claws and go after them.

Exposito; you probably won't play on Sunday, but three more finals are waiting for us. Contribute through your humility, this special character that has taken the dull and little glamorous work of the left side which us, old-timers, can't thank you enough.

Javi González; show your spark, your rage, your speed and vertical moves. Show us that you still have that something that bedazzled us and made us demand your return.

Murillo; I expect from you more than anybody. Perhaps it is not fair that I do this to your twenty-three years, but I want you to be the heart of this team.

Javi Martínez; I ask you freshness. I know that with your eighteen springs, the legs are not up to it at the end of the season. Show us your youthful self-assurance, and overwhelm them with your force!

Gabilondo; I know your quality, I know you have an exquisite left leg. Show us that you have even more than what we think you have! This something more will turn you into a legendary lion.

Etxebe; our cock. You are now stronger than ever; what great luck that we caught you the moment we needed you most! I hope that until the end of the league, you will crow another three times.

Aduriz; what do you want me to tell you, you LION! Keep going, show your class, your breed, your rage, and infect your team mates with it.

Llorente; I expect a lot from you, boy. I expect your goals, your quality, your technique, your self-confidence. You have three games to rise up to the red and white Olympus.

Urzaiz; oh Captain, my Captain. I expect your headers like a piece of bread. You will do justice in your area, and you will take us to victory.

From the rest of you, Garmendia, Iturriaga, Lafuente, Alba, Zubiaurre, Tiko, Dañobeitia... I ask you total commitment and professionalism. Prepare for this game as though you were staples of the lineup. We all need you. I would give anything to be in your place; to see how it feels to wear the red and white jersey for just five minutes; to hear from the lawn this Athleeeeeeeetic! Mané, Ondarru, I hope you will finally have the luck that abandoned you these days. That you can show again how one can get to the peak from honesty and humility.

But most of all I turn to you, every Athletic fan, from Bilbao to Tudela, from Eibar to Orozco, from Pucela to Cádiz, through Salamanca and Teruel. I

ask you one last push, one last effort, one last sacrifice. Our season starts today, it only lasts three games, and we have four days to prepare. We depend on ourselves. Let`s forget about all the other games that have made us sweat. If we win over ourselves, we will be saved. As simple and as difficult as that. I ask everyone that we lift our spirits; not even God`s help is too much here! Let`s leave the lamentations, the complaints and sorrows, the pending accounts. I want happiness, confidence and pride.

Everyone, join the snow ball! We need everyone a 100% with our team. Only we can do it, only we will do it. For us, for Peio, the angel of Athletic who has prepared the most beautiful storm in the sky [a six-year old fan who died of cancer, and after whom a fan club was named], by Zarra, Belauste, Pitxitxi, Lezama, Carmelo, Iribar, Sarabia, Clemente, Zubizarreta, Guerrero, Argote, Andiruna, Karanka, Garitazo [great historical figures of Athletic history].. everyone.

If we don`t unite for this, we deserve to go down.

On the day of the Salvation Game, an expedition convoked by the *Peña* (“fan club”) of Deusto [a district of Bilbao] made a pilgrimage to the Basilica of the Virgin Begoña, the patron saint of the city. Hundreds gathered to ritualistically climb the stairs from the *Plaza de Unamuno* to the Basilica to pray to the virgin for the salvation of the city`s soul, Athletic. Some thought they couldn`t handle the pressure, and sought isolation: bike riding on the most isolated dirt roads, watching a movie in empty theaters. Others spent the day with their closest friends and family in constant conversation to ease nervousness, or silence to avoid it. It was impossible to flee from Athletic that day. “I realized I was unable to face so much uncertainty and suffering,” a fan tells me:

“I have lived many seasons of all kinds. But this one was too much. I decided to go fishing in the remotest corner of Bizkaia. It all went fine for a while, until an inspector emerged to check my fishing license. ‘How strange that

someone should go fishing today! What, you don't like soccer?' he asked. 'I do,' I sighed. 'That's why I'm here.' On top of it, I instantly realized that the inspector was a former Athletic player. There was no way escaping the topic, and he was perfectly updated on the standing of the game: 0-0. When he was doing his 2<sup>nd</sup> round of inspection, his smile gave him away: 2-0. We were saved at last. It was not 2-0; it was rather 2.000.000 – 0. At least this is how much weight in kilos we discharged that day" (O. P. personal communication 2011 March).

On their part, players were terrified to be the lineup that ruins a centenarian tradition. "The team was literally walking on tiptoes that season," midfielder Gurpegi tells me. "In a city where a footballer lives the same, relatively normal life as any youngster, where we go shopping and run errands and go out like anyone else, that season we avoided the streets so that people don't think we were unprofessional" (personal communication 2010 April). Center back Ustaritz tells me about the team's pre-game moments in the locker room: "There we were, terrified. One of us tried to break the ice and joke: "If we lose this game, we'd better build a tunnel from this locker room all the way to the airport, and disappear from this town forever". It wasn't funny. It was impossible to lose and stay in Bilbao" (personal communication 2011 May). Club directors had the same sensation. "I can't imagine being director of a team that loses its first division qualification and stays in Bilbao. It would be impossible to live with the disappointment of the city" (personal communication 2011 April), a former club director confesses.

San Mamés filled to the last seat as it normally does, but there were more than 40.000 persons in the stadium. In the mind of each fan, it was also populated with a spirit world that raised them in soccer: the aunt that gave them their first Athletic

pajamas as infants; the grandmother who knitted their first red-and-white scarves; the grandfather, the uncle and the father who took them first to the stadium when they were five; the mother who would be all smiles and caresses when Athletic won, and can't be talked to when it lost; the *cuadrilla*, the life-long group of friends with whom a boy became a man, and a girl became a woman. In that state of emergency, people invoked their loved ones, even if they were dead, to carry through:

I remember I changed seats with a friend, as she wanted to sit close to her brother. I didn't mind, because my new seat was close to the one where my father used sit for forty years, until he died. I said fine, I will live the game as though I was living it with him. As we were winning 2-0, I appeared to be talking to myself out loud, or to people around me—but inside of me I was talking to Dad. It never happened to me before. The game was finally over, and I cried shamelessly, and people around me cried also, people I had known from many years of going to San Mamés. And I looked at my father's seat and I saw him crying, too, with fear and happiness (personal communication 2011, March).

It was a day of death and resurrection not only for a soccer team that struggled to maintain its category: it became a dramatic allegory for people's lives. Athletic is so embedded in family and society that it often structures their happiest and the most painful moments. That day, it was a maddening compromise:

The father of my best friend had several health issues, which in two days aggravated. He died the day of the salvation game. During the first half, my friend received a call: his father was dying. He was devastated as these two disasters were happening at the same time, one much graver than the other. And yet he stayed to cheer the team to its salvation, as his father would have wanted him to do. He died during the second half, just when his Athletic saved

itself, his Athletic that he was ready to accompany at the moment of its possible death (personal communication 2011 March).

The double bind of the young man was violent: whether he chooses to witness the symbolic death of Athletic as his father wished, or the real death of the father himself, he is punished either way. The Catch-22 emerged as the boundary between symbolic and real death was blurred. The violent logic of the double bind created for the fan a subjective equivalence between the symbolic death of the team and the real death of the father.

Many comment the “romanticism” of Athletic Club and its philosophy of playing only Basque players, as if that was a sweet and easy thing to do. One has to be from Bilbao to properly appreciate the dark, demonic side of that “romantic” play. For Bilbainos, that hot June afternoon in San Mamés was the monstrosity of what they loved with a passion: soccer. The day Athletic was to descend to second division was going to mark a “before” and “after” in Bilbao. “Depending on how the game was going to end,” a fan tells me, “it could have been the end. The end of what? Of everything, of the world, of life, everything! It looked like the entire city was preparing for collective suicide” (personal communication 2011 March).

#### 5.1.1 *“Are We Different, or Just Crazy?”*

Every now and then, the club goes through a major or minor crisis of performance because of the recruitment philosophy. Each time, it submerges into soul searching: “what is the worth of this?” When in 2012 a crisis over player transfer emerged (two star players desired to leave the club), and the efficiency of the philosophy to keep players at home was questioned, the club’s General Assembly organized a round table

discussion with this title: “Are We Different, or Just Crazy?”<sup>60</sup> Every now and then, the question arises in Bilbao: are we romantic heroes, or just romantic fools?

There is a sense in which Athletic Club is the Prince Myshkin of elite football: a romantic ideal facing a modern world. In Dostoyevsky’s novel *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin represents the “positively good” (Halliwell 2004, 80) naïve and innocent man who, upon his arrival in the corrupt and selfish Saint Petersburg, struggles to retain his goodness in the face of social pressures to the contrary. He is the last of his kind, an oddity who represents an old aristocratic line in the face of modernity. The pathos and suffering of Prince Myshkin in an alien world resonate with the central paradoxes of Athletic fandom: qualities of innocence, humility and weakness that may actually be a source of strength. Athletic continually struggles towards a yet-to-be-realized, divine state: one of local values and excellent performance. And, like Myshkin, it is a contradictory mixture of a certain saintliness and incapacity, constituting what Bakhtin calls a “threshold” (in Halliwell 2004, 83): an interface between reality and an abyss that threatens to annihilate the subject.

The fine line between the romantic hero and the fool is palpable in Bilbao. For many, the atavism of Athletic’s philosophy has often verged on the ridiculous. The 2006/07 season revealed the impasses of the club’s fixation with Basque players in a multi-national soccer world. The urge to find Basque players repeatedly prompted the club to extend, restructure and reformulate what “local,” “Basque” meant; it defined its philosophy in increasingly laxer terms in order to be able to choose from a larger pool of players. After the miseries of the 2006/2007 season, Athletic approached two players: Kepa and Jorge Lopez. Kepa’s only Basque link was a mother from Cruces,

---

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-09-26/somos-distintos-20120926.html>

Jorge Lopez's was a grandparent from Sestao, both being vicinities of Bilbao. They were not born in the Basque Country, and had never lived there. The question emerged: Are they Basques? Can they play in Athletic?

The possibility that Kepa and Jorge Lopez should be eligible looked ridiculous to many fans. The season 2006/07 featured a public debate over Athletic's philosophy, and many pointed at the embarrassment it may bring upon the club. As the former Athletic Club board member Fernando Astorqui wrote, "I am afraid we are making a fool of ourselves with this philosophy... If in order to maintain the philosophy we have to examine if a player from Malaga has a grandmother or a cousin in Cruces, or if one from Logroño has a relative living in Sestao, I think it's better to abandon it because we are becoming ridiculous."<sup>61</sup> Another commentator published a brief history of the evolution of Athletic's philosophy, pointing out that through time, it became more and more open to players who were not born in the Basque Country in order to "overcome the temptation of following ethnicist criteria that only ends up in ridicule."<sup>62</sup> The search for the Basque link, these critics implied, sometimes took ridiculous proportions, as evidenced by the ironic tone of this comment: "We could contract Georgians based on the presumed relationship of Euskera [the Basque language] to Caucasian languages; Moroccans who casually visited Gernika; boys from Newfoundland or Saint Pierre and Miquelon could be our best line of defense, under the museologized umbrella of whale fishing; we could count on Indochinese with French Basque origins, or French Basques with Indochinese origins."<sup>63</sup> For many, the arguments that served to re-structure, redefine

---

<sup>61</sup> El Correo 2 July 2007.

<sup>62</sup> El Correo 7 July 2007.

<sup>63</sup> El Correo 8 July 2007.

who counts as Basque became increasingly “arduous,” “complicated,” or just straight “comical.”

The recruiting philosophy suddenly appeared embarrassing for yet another reason: the presumptuousness of calling it a “philosophy,” when it now seemed a burdensome ideology. A reader’s comment in the local daily *Deia* reminds fans that semantically, philosophy means “the love of knowledge,”<sup>64</sup> and a systematic search for the ultimate reason of things. “With so much philosophy here, there and everywhere, this looks like the Areopagus of Athens, and in the bars of San Mamés, a crowd of metaphysicists discussing soccer.”<sup>65</sup> Another commentator also suggested that this so-called philosophy has elevated Athletic into “metaphysical heights” that have little to do with reality.<sup>66</sup> The current hymn, written in the 1980’s, barely mentions Bilbao. Instead, it enumerates the ingredients of a nationalist Basque imaginary: it is written in Basque, although that is barely spoken in Bilbao; it talks of *Euskal Herria* [Basque Country] and “noble Basques,” while Athletic is a provincial (Bizkaian) club; it invokes a rural identity through its *irrintzi* (traditional Basque yell of mountain communication), while Bilbao is an urban, post-Fordist, post-modern city through and through. Many agreed that the “philosophy” detached Athletic from its realities, and has forced the Club into a world of self-delusion: it became not a solution but a “ridiculous mousetrap.”<sup>67</sup>

The apocalyptic times of Athletic resulted for fans in a painful realization: the recruiting philosophy that yielded them so much pleasure and pride may also yield suffering and ridicule. “It’s like running a marathon with a sack of potatoes on your

---

<sup>64</sup> El Correo 7 July 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Ugarte, El Correo 8 July 2007.

<sup>66</sup> El Pais 8 July 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Ugarte, *El Correo* 8 July 2007.

back,” former Athletic president Fernando Lamikiz tells me, with reference to the club’s self-debilitating burden. “If you win, you have done something extraordinary despite your disadvantage. But if you lose, people laugh at you: who in the right mind thinks they can win a marathon with a sack of potatoes on their back?” (personal communication 2011 February). Having reached a critical point, fans became aware of the dysfunctional incongruities of their sanctimonious “philosophy:” indeed, was it anything but the ideological symptom of a gripping double bind?

## 5.2 Bilbao Catch 22: “Protect Me From What I Want”

Bilbao’s Guggenheim Museum features a light emitting diode (LED) installation by Jenny Holzer. It consists of stripes of electronic words moving upwards in three languages, Spanish, Basque and English. They make me think of one of Holzer’s most famous dictums: “Protect me from what I want.” The sentence sums up the ambiguity, the opacity of desire, and the hysterical position: protect me from what I want, or else my desires will cause my own destruction.

In Bilbao, that means “Protect me from Athletic.” The intensive desires the club provokes, and then the conflict of those desires sometimes causes so much suffering that people pause and ask: “Why do I keep going back?” “Why am I such a masochist?” “Is this *really* what I want?” Soccer fans thus find themselves hystericised by their conflicting desires: by the mandate to stay loyal to their team no matter what, and the suffering that prompts them to somehow “get rid of this *disease*.”

At the heart of the hysterical deadlock, psychoanalysis tells us, there is alienated desire (Žižek 2006, 38). An instance of alienated desire is when in patriarchal society, a woman’s desire is the result of men’s expectations being imposed on her: she wants what her big Other, man, wants her to want. The hysterical

deadlock emerges when the subject is uncomfortable with the symbolic persona imposed on her or him. In 2009, after 25 years without a single title and even on the verge of the second division, Athletic finally made it to a Cup Final. Hopes were soaring, but the team lost 1-4 against Barcelona FC. Nevertheless, the loss was celebrated like a victory, and the players were received as heroes. "But why," players marveled, upon seeing 300 000 people gathered in Bilbao for their reception. "We don't deserve this! We lost!" Players felt hystericised by the crowd's celebration of a 1-4 loss as though it was victory; they were uncomfortable with the symbolic incongruence of losers turned into heroes.

In a similar logic, Athletic fans experience a hysterical impasse when they realize that the symbolic identity and desire the Basquist philosophy imposes on them is perhaps not theirs. As a fan tells me, "I was born in Bilbao, and I had no option of *not following* Athletic. Everybody here follows Athletic, since generations ago" (personal communication 2011 February). A fan wants what his or her family, friends, teachers, priest etc. want. Family, tradition and history become a fan's big Other; it is their desire he or she embodies. At times of intensive suffering, a sense of alienated desire hystericizes the subject: "Do I really want this?" "Do we really want to maintain this old tradition, when traditions can be altered, or erased altogether?" "Does this really represent me?"

The questions, however, are only rhetorical. At the heart of Athletic fandom there is a double bind that does not allow its actors to desert the play field. According to Bateson (1973), a double bind involves a "victim" and an authority figure that imposes the double bind. In the case of Athletic, the victim is the fan who has to go and suffer his team every week. "Why do I go if all they do is lose?" I heard

repeatedly. And yet, they cannot stop going as it would go against the deep enjoyment of parents, grandparents and several other generations' upbringing in Athletic desires.

In a double bind situation, two injunctions are in conflict. There is a *primary negative injunction* in the form of prohibition (Bateson 1973, 178), along with a threat of punishment if it is not obeyed. The primary negative injunction of Athletic is its obligation to say “no” to foreigners. The Basque weekly comedy show *Vaya Semanita* once featured a parody of the religiosity with which Athletic's philosophy is taken, featuring an *Iglesia Rojiblanca* (“Red-and-White Church”), where a young novice goes to confession: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned through impure thoughts. Upon seeing Messi play, I was fantasizing about recruiting foreigners...” “Son,” says the priest, “remember the First Commandment of Clemente” [an emblematic former coach and player of Athletic]: “Under no conditions shall you recruit foreigners!”<sup>68</sup>

Athletic's primary injunction is this commandment: the taboo of recruiting foreigners. If you do so, you will be no longer exceptional, “a unique case in the world of football.” But there is in the double bind a *secondary negative injunction* which conflicts with the first one at a more abstract level. That injunction for Athletic is the mandate of competition: you must win games and may not lose your first division status. The two injunctions are in conflict because mediocre local players might lead to the second division, while the maintenance of the first division might require foreigners. Disobedience to either one of these injunctions threatens with catastrophic disintegration, as we have seen through the apocalyptic doomsday scenarios of the Salvation Game.

---

<sup>68</sup> Video available on Youtube, titled ‘La iglesia rojiblanca’.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JV5hEMnuiw>

In soccer fandom, painfully, there is a *tertiary negative injunction* prohibiting the actor from escaping from the field. Just as Heller's *Catch-22* prevents soldiers from avoiding mission, there is no abandoning Athletic. It is the extreme closure of this third injunction that makes Bilbao's double bind excruciating: for the anthropological and sociological reasons outlined, Bilbainos feel they must keep going back to San Mamés. On the one hand, there is the symbolic obligation to a higher order received from family ties and life-long friendships: "Our players are *us*, a family member, a friend, a neighbor. We have seen them grow up here. How could we abandon them?" On the other hand, they keep going back because the enjoyment of occasional victories becomes hyperbolic. Enjoyment is not strictly contingent on winning: even a 1-4 defeat can send Bilbao into frenzy, as I mentioned above on account of the 2009 King's Cup final. "It was worth waiting 25 years for this moment," many told me. "Even though we lost, it was the sweetest day of my life" (personal communication 2011 February). Whether it is for the symbolic obligation or for the vertigo of enjoyment, deserting the playfield remains impossible.

It is this *Catch-22* double bind that turns Bilbao's soccer from "only a game" to "more than a game." As we know from play theorists, a most important feature of play is that its framework is a matter of agreement: "This is play" (Bateson 1973). By playing, one agrees to abide by the rules and conditions of the game voluntarily. Just as voluntarily, one can stop playing at any time. "I don't understand why people keep complaining about a missed penalty," Barcelona FC coach Pep Guardiola said, "when the unemployment rate in Spain is 20%".<sup>69</sup> It is relatively easy to step out of the play frame, Guardiola's statement suggests: just turn the other way and look at the real

---

<sup>69</sup> *El País*, 4 February 2012.

problems of real life. What the play frame doesn't have and the double bind does have is the tertiary injunction: "you can't abandon the mission." When a community feels it no longer has the option of deserting the play field, as is the case with Athletic and Egyptian fans that "keep going back" despite suffering and even the danger of self-destruction, it is no longer involved in play. It is involved in a Catch-22 whose hystericising double binds might turn violent.

Double binds, however, are not limited to this particular situation; Athletic's philosophy poses impasses for players and club management as well, which I will now explore.

### **5.3 From Bond to Bind: A Player's Impasse**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2012, as he stepped on the field of San Mamés stadium of Bilbao at the Europa League game against Slaven Kopriwnica, forward Fernando Llorente heard the deafening sound of whistling. From behind the north end goal post, a chant became audible: "We are in crisis, Llorente, we are in crisis!" The protest was directed at the player's condition to renew his contract with Athletic Club: instead of the 4.5 million Euros offered by the institution, he wanted 5.5 million. In San Mamés, where whistling local players is anathema even at the bottom of the league, this was a sign that something in Bilbao was amiss. Llorente, a player whom Bilbainos saw grow up in their colors for the last seventeen years since he was a child, was mortified by the verdict of his home crowd. A few days later he announced his decision to leave Athletic.

At the next training in the club facilities Lezama, some fans pulled up a large banner as Llorente stepped on the lawn to practice: "Mercenary!" it said with capital letters in red ink. In Bilbao, this is akin to calling someone a prostitute: footballers

who give their services for money when they should give them out of love and commitment. With an apt metaphor for a city that owes its identity and soccer culture to British industrial ships, president Josu Urrutia said: “This is an institutional failure and a hit under the flotation line of the club (...) Llorente has grown up in our youth academy, and played here for seventeen years. If we haven’t been able to teach him the importance of Athletic, we have done something wrong.”<sup>70</sup>

Because of its geographical limitations of recruitment and the scarcity of players who qualify to play in Athletic, the club needs its players to want to stay. In order to set an example of determent, the board of directors decided not to facilitate Llorente’s departure: it wouldn’t sell the player unless the thirty-six million Euros of his transfer fee were fully paid. A few clubs emerged in the orbit of the player, and the Italian Juventus was rumored to be willing to pay first twenty, then sixteen, then fourteen million Euros. President Urrutia, however, was adamant to teach a lesson: Athletic *no es un club vendedor*,” it is not a selling club;” it’s a club of *cantera* (“quarry” or “youth academy”), and not of *chequera* (“checkbook”). It is a club that believes in the dedication and passion of home grown players instead of the cold ambition of mercenaries. “In Athletic,” the president said at a press conference, “we must consider economic, athletic and philosophical questions.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, financial considerations cannot take precedence over emotional and “philosophical” ones, and all Athletic players must learn one thing: Athletic wants its players to play there out of love of the club, and not love of money. While a professional relationship is predicated on the injunction “you must do your best for us for this is why we pay

---

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-14/fracaso-institucional-golpe-linea-20120814.html>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-11-15/urrutia-insiste-llorente-vende-201211151409.html>

you,” in Athletic it is complemented by a clause at a more abstract level: “you must do your best for us, but do it because you want to.” Otherwise, double bind theory tells us, the consequence is punishment that may include the withdrawal of love, an expression of hate or anger, and abandonment.

With months passing, Juventus was still willing to pay a few million in the winter transfer season—Athletic wouldn't hear of it. As the winter transfer time slot closed, it was becoming clear that the lesson would be rather costly for all parties involved: instead of the possibility of twenty, sixteen or fourteen million Euros, the club was going to make no money as the player would leave free with the termination of his contract at the end of the season. Affected by the conflict, the player was underperforming, relegated to the bench, and dropped from the Spanish selection; the entire team was gravely destabilized and stuck in lamentably poor performance; fans became increasingly frustrated and alienated from their home-grown star player, whom only a season ago they had cited as proof that Athletic, if not winning titles, is still able to produce world class players. The demoralizing effects of the “Llorente-gate,” as the local media would call it, were overall.

Leaving Athletic is not easy; utilitarian calculations and professional ambitions, considered reasonable desires everywhere else, pale beside the emotional implications the “last romantic club” exerts over its players. In Bilbao, there is an unusually familiar bond between players and fans, which is untypical for the glamorous celebrity culture of elite, million Euro sports environments. Bilbainos want to keep their soccer a local, intimate, familiar affair. Most players are born close and if not, they are taken to the youth academy at an early age, and live in dorms or with Bilbaino families. Players are born into or integrated in the community at an early age: they are family, friends, classmates and neighbor. They are intimately linked to

Athletic in many ways: their families have rooted for Athletic for generations, and they were brought up in an environment where becoming an Athletic player was the greatest dream of a child, and pride of a parent. Dani (Ruiz-Bazán), star player of the champion golden era of the 1980`s, said this about the recruitment of a local child by Athletic: “Children are born, they grow, dream, and most won`t make it. But when one does make it and receives the recruitment letter from Athletic, wow, what happiness for his environment! Wherever a boy grows into a player, it gives great pleasure and pride for his people and his village” (personal communication 2011, April). In the bars and cafés, you hear first hand anecdotes—never malicious rumors, for Bilbainos treat their players with the discretion a family deserves—about players who “live next door,” are “brother-in-law,” “uncle,” or “former classmate” of your interlocutor. It is hard to find a fan in Bilbao who wouldn`t personally know current or former Athletic players, a fact they treat as a natural occurrence; while the club limits official access to players, informal networks can lead you to practically anyone. Symptomatic of the fan-player closeness is the “fence-incident” in the training site Lezama, which caused much indignation among fans. The club erected a waist high fence between the locker room exit and the playfield, barring fans from direct contact with the players. While in other clubs practices take place behind closed doors (something unthinkable in Bilbao, as practices draw hundreds, sometimes thousands of people), in Athletic a waist high fence was enough to violate the egalitarian ethos that accords equal importance to fan and player.

Apart from the expensive cars, vacations and their million-euro salaries afford, players would tell you that they live a very normal, ordinary life. They can be easily spotted in local clubs and fiestas, in the streets and businesses, running errands; they date local girls and have their lifelong *cuadrilla* friendships. Unlike players in Madrid

or Barcelona, Athletic players do not live in secluded gated communities; their private lives are of no public interest, because it is presumed to be like that of anybody else. There is in Bilbao a remarkable absence of sensational journalism; “But then,” central Carlos Gurpegi told me “of what could they talk about?” (personal communication 2010 April)—as if there weren’t fifty-some journalists just in Bilbao with the single task of writing about Athletic. “We are not Cristiano Ronaldo... here we are not like that.” Such discretion resonates with that of the family and the *cuadrilla*, which protect their members by keeping personal information private.

When asked about their relationship with Athletic, fans often use kinship metaphors to describe it. “When Athletic is doing well, it is enormous pride,” an elderly woman tells me; “when it is doing badly, it is like having a son who is a little slower than the rest, not so brilliant, but you go on helping him because he is your son” (personal communication 2011 May). It is for this reason that San Mamés fills even at the bottom of the league: “They are *ours*, we have to make do with what we have.” There is a sense in which the perception of family obligations render failure a common responsibility, for a son will perform only as well as the parents who have raised him. It is not unusual that brothers would make the roster, lending the team an even more familiar air: a fan cited Patxi and Julio Salinas from the 1980’s, whom the terraces praised or chided in a familiar tone and language people use with their children.

Players feel the same parental attitude: “The fan community is like a parent,” Dani tells me. “They consider you their son; they love you with madness, and they criticize you with madness” (personal communication 2011 April). “You have 40 000 mothers and fathers in San Mamés,” former player Ritxi Mendiguren tells me. “Sometimes they pamper you, other times they yell at you, but they always love you”

(personal communication 2011 May). Athletic players of all generations would tell you anecdotes of the unwavering loyalty with which the fan community surrounds them. In the 1950`s, when a victory against Real Madrid, Franco`s “national team” was especially gratifying and frequent, people would sell some of their belongings (even furniture) to be able to follow the team to Madrid. In the 1980`s, when Athletic once again lived a golden age, the players were overwhelmed by the reception they were given after a league or cup title. Dani, forward of that glorious line-up, remembers an eighty-some year old woman struggling herself through the crowd: “Dani, Dani,” the player recalled the encounter. “Give me your hand!” Such an old lady was an improbable sight there in that crowd. I looked at her and she had tears in her eyes. I will never forget that; the people are very important for Athletic.” On a game day, downtown Bilbao and in the remotest farmsteads of the province, people greet each other with a question: “How did Athletic do?” Players who retire in Athletic and stay in Bilbao turn into the most honored public citizens whose contribution is beyond dispute; funerals of former players turn into mass events of public remembrance.

Athletic imposes an intense relationship on those within its orbit, which is expressed through abstractions like love, dependency, possessiveness, jealousy. The tighter the bond is, the greater the emotional involvement. “People think of Athletic as something that belongs to them,” former player Andoni Ayarza tells me. “It`s like a family, and this is why it can cause more pain. When the son of someone you know dies, you feel sorry. But when your son dies, it is much more painful” (personal communication 2010 May). The announcement of a player that he wants to leave causes tremendous disappointment for fans; it is the disappointment of the parents

who are baffled by their son`s desire to move out, when they thought they had provided him with everything he needed.

Players, especially home grown ones like Fernando Llorente, are aware of the emotional turbulence they cause. Just how grave that turbulence may be is well illustrated by the change that befell Athletic`s performance as a consequence of just one player`s decision to leave. Just a few months before Llorente`s announcement, during the previous 2011/2012 season as Athletic marched through Europe to the UEFA final, the Bilbao club gained the admiration of the continent with the “fearless,” “stunning,” “energetic” and “aggressive” performance, “youthful exuberance,” “intelligent movement and dynamic pressing” of the “Basque-only roster,” as the international media would put it. As Athletic kept eliminating great notables of Europe such as Manchester United and Schalke 04, it was followed around by a “voracious” and “immensely happy” Bilbao crowd that set records for away game following. Llorente was the main protagonist of these successes. A few months later Llorente announced his desire to leave, followed by Javi Martínez and Fernando Amorebieta; the consequences of what was seen an “unprecedented exodus,” which would be considered just a minor, easily repairable event in other elite clubs, were so grave that Athletic struggled to stay away from demotion to the second division. An impasse in Athletic`s philosophy is its lack resilience: since its pool of recruitment is limited, a single player`s decision may destabilize and even destroy an entire season.

Affective possessiveness achieves that a player, if he wants to leave, finds himself in a bind whereby whatever he does, he is punished. If he follows a professional logic and his personal desire to try a different club, a different culture and country, he is punished: he embarks on a guilt trip resulting from the profound

disappointment of the fan community that raised him and turned him into a person and a footballer, and to which a homegrown player will always feel naturally indebted. After the infamous announcement, it was impossible to have Llorente in the first line-up for weeks: such is the weight of the terraces' judgment that negative reaction, because it is so rare, would have further destabilized team performance. Llorente was punished by the fan community's withdrawal of its *cariño*, love, which he cited as the cause of his decision; the player's performance deteriorated to the point that he no longer made first line ups, and was eventually dropped from the Spanish national team. On the other hand, if he chooses not to leave Athletic, he is punished nevertheless: he gives up his ambitions as a player who strives for maximum self-realization and professional challenges.

One could by now blame the club for acting irrationally and utterly counter-productively: after all, why did it not sell Llorente when Juventus was still ready to pay twenty million Euros? Why insist on the full transfer fee instead of taking advantage of the offer? Once a player announces his desire to leave, the presumption is that his heart is no longer in it. He becomes "dead" from the club's and fans' perspective. No matter what he may tell fans about his "professionalism" and "eagerness to deliver as long as he wears those colors," his allegiances are now elsewhere. What club in its right mind would not try to make as much money out of a "lost" player as it can, even if just a few million euros? Instead, Athletic chose to lose out on everything: on transfer fee, by not selling the player, and on performance, for the presence of Llorente continued to affect team performance.

But there is a sense in which the club had no other option as it, too, is in the binds of its identity. For Athletic, there is never a simple case like a player purchase or sale. The club has to think and strategize with its recruitment philosophy in mind.

On the short run, it might have been advantageous to sell Llorente and earn a few million euros. In the long run, however, that move carried the risk of rearranging the implicit pacts and rules of Athletic's special game. The club's double bind is this: if it doesn't sell Llorente, it is stuck with a demoralizing player and loses out on money. If Athletic sells Llorente, however, it sets a harmful precedence: other players will see that they may ask inordinate amounts of money, and if the club is not willing to give it, they can always leave without consequences. By not selling Llorente, the club communicated this to the players: "keep your financial expectations reasonable. We won't do you the favor of selling you in case of financial disagreement, even if that would be everybody's best interest. We may lose out on money, but you lose out on your career by being stuck on the bench until your contract officially expires." That is certainly a frightful perspective for a player; Llorente, for one, was dropped from the Spanish selection for not having enough playtime. Sell or not, Athletic will be punished for giving priority to philosophical instead of purely economic considerations.

#### **5.4 Misfits**

"For the terraces to start feeling that you are theirs," former player Andoni Zubizarreta told me, "you have to start feeling that you are theirs" (personal communication 2011 February). A hystericising aspect of Llorente's double was the fact that his "Basque-ness" was continuously questioned, and he didn't particularly go out of his way to dispel anxieties over his allegiances. The player's background is a combination of circumstances. He was born in the Basque Country (Pamplona, Navarre), raised in the Rioja region outside of the Basque Country, and came to live in the Bilbao youth academy at the age of twelve. By all accounts of primordial,

birthplace-based metaphors and performative definitions of identity, he could be considered Basque. But for many fans he didn't seem to "feel that he was theirs." Perhaps to avoid controversy, Llorente always said he was "from the Rioja region." He was considered as a "cold" player, and did not embody the robust, forceful, passionate Basque ideal type; most unforgivably for a small but loud minority of the San Mamés terraces, he was a little too eager to play in the Spanish national selection. "*Llorente español!*" it said with red graffiti painted on a downtown shop window after his announcement that he would leave, the terms chosen to mean "traitor."

The hysterical impasses of Fernando Llorente's identity were most visible when he became involved in a political controversy of national proportions. In 2008, the soccer players who were convoked to play the annual Christmas friendly match of the unofficial Basque selection signed a petition: they would only play if the selection was called *Euskal Herria*, and not *Euskadi*. The issue behind the terminology was clearly political: *Euskal Herria* was the preferred designation of left wing Basque nationalists, who envisaged the Basque nation in historical terms of four Spanish, and three French Basque provinces; *Euskadi* in turn was the name of the Basque Autonomous Community consisting of three Spanish Basque provinces, supported by the right wing Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). At the heart of the matter was the question: what are the territorial limits of the Basque national-nationalist imaginary? The players' petition, including the signature of Fernando Llorente, wanted the selection to extend recruitment across *Euskal Herria*, which corresponded with the leftist Basque nationalist imaginary of seven historical provinces.

The case attracted national attention in Spain. The pro-Spanish political right interpreted the petition as a result of coercion on part of *Herri Batasuna*, the illegalized party of ETA: players must have been pressured by the illegalized radical

left. Pro-Spanish, anti-Basque media were quick to point out a contradiction: “Llorente will play with Spain, but wants *Euskal Herria!*”<sup>72</sup> Why would a player, pro-Spanish media asked, who has been raised outside of the Basque Country, considers himself *riojano* (“from the Rioja region”), and who has always publicly dreamed about playing for the Spanish national selection, now sign a petition for a Basque selection conceptualized by radical Basque nationalism? The case shows that Spanish and Basque identities are still often conceived in monolithic, mutually exclusive terms: a player is either Spanish or Basque, and if he supports the Basque selection, he cannot possibly give it all for the Spanish selection, and vice versa.

The desire to play in the Spanish selection thus produces an impasse for the player, which José Angel Iribar, the legendary goal keeper of the 1970`s, felt most acutely. He has been the most important Athletic player to be directly involved with politics. During his career as the best goal keeper of Spain, and one of the best in the world, he was positioned close to *Herri Batasuna*, the left wing *abertzale*, Basque nationalist party affiliated with ETA. His public political involvement gave rise to controversy both in Bilbao and in Spain. Around 1976, by the time he had been convoked in the Spanish selection 49 times, it became untenable for the player to be a Basque nationalist and an international on the squad of Spain. “For me,” he said in an interview in 1980, “there arrived a moment of contradiction. It was no longer possible to ask for the release of Basque ETA prisoners, and then be ambassador of Spain with the Spanish selection” (in Gómez 2007: 66).

Fernando Llorente found his “ambiguous” pedigree caught between two fires in a political culture where ambivalent identities are still inconceivable. From a

---

<sup>72</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xr3qe5\\_lllorente-jugara-con-espana-y-exige-euskal-herria\\_news#.UTj1hjd0jYE](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xr3qe5_lllorente-jugara-con-espana-y-exige-euskal-herria_news#.UTj1hjd0jYE)

Spanish nationalist perspective, how can he sign a pro-Basque selection petition when his convocation by the Spanish selection was the dream of his life? From a Basque nationalist perspective, why is he so eager to play for the Spanish selection, when he signed a petition for the legalization of the Basque one? Little is known of Llorente's perspective itself, besides the double binds in which he keeps finding himself: if he signs the petition, the entire pro-Spanish media is after him, demanding an explanation; if he doesn't sign the petition, he alienates much of his home crowd, and sabotages the dream of his team mates, with whom he grew up as footballer. In this light it is little surprising that the player, if at all, has articulated his identity in the least polemic terms: his childhood village in the *Rioja* region. It would be even less surprising if the real motive behind his desire to leave Bilbao and Spain for a foreign country was neither financial nor professional: he may well have seen it as the only possible breakthrough from his double binds.

Impasses resulting from political imaginaries made tenure short for Bixente Lizarazu in Athletic (1996-1997), the only player thus far recruited from the French-Basque area. It soon turned out he was a misfit. Beyond the accumulative foreignness of his French background, Lizarazu himself didn't feel he was theirs. His contracting had political undertones; the incumbent president was rumored to have nationalist sympathies, and Lizarazu's recruitment was what Valle (1994: 90) would call "the ritualization of territorial integrity:" a symbolic statement that the Basque Country included the French provinces as well. As the player writes in his biography, the president told him before his presentation: "Say that here one cannot be a foreigner,

therefore you are Basque.”<sup>73</sup> Lizarazu felt uncomfortable with what he saw as “so much theater” of identity, which he never felt the need to vindicate.

Lizarazu`s tenure in Athletic produced one of the very few known incidents in which ETA directly interfered with Athletic. One day Lizarazu, who was also regularly convoked by the French national selection, received this letter from ETA:

“We are concerned and angry because you have defended the colors of an Enemy state... You have been generously paid to wear the jersey of an oppressor State with money robbed from the Basques and the Basque people. Considering the advantages you received from the enemy, ETA turns towards you. A lack of response draws with it a response against you and your loved ones.”<sup>74</sup>

The case gained publicity, Lizarazu needed constant security, and was dropped from the French selection for creating “negative attention.” “I am sad, disillusioned and disgusted,” Lizarazu wrote. “I feel I have been manipulated by people who (...) use my fame to give publicity to a cause that is not mine. *I am in a trap.*”<sup>75</sup>

If there is any association Bilbainos want to avoid, it is the mention of ETA and Athletic in the same context: soccer culture is a sacred realm that locals struggle to preserve for social unity, and to keep out political divisions. Many fans told me how ETA “stained,” “smudged” Athletic. ETA gave Athletic, and everything Basque, a bad name in the 1980`s, when the Basques dominated national headlines for two reasons: the particularly violent campaign of the armed group, and the spectacular successes of Basque soccer teams. As rival fans connected those two in their minds,

---

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/227398/0/Lizarazu/amenazas/ETA/>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/227398/0/Lizarazu/amenazas/ETA/>

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/227398/0/Lizarazu/amenazas/ETA/>

Basque teams were greeted in stadia all over Spain with chants and banners that called them “terrorists.” Antonio Basagoiti, Popular Party politician known for his anti-ETA and anti-separatist stance, recalls his middle school years in Madrid as an Athletic fan: “My peers, and sometimes even my teachers would ridicule me for rooting for Athletic. They would even call me *Etarra* [a pro-ETA person]. There was an unjust identification of everything Basque with terrorism” (personal communication 2011 March). It was that time, an elderly fan recalls, “that Athletic lost much of its support outside of the Basque Country. Before, it was very normal all over Spain to root for your local club as your first team, and Athletic as your second team, out of respect for its philosophy. ETA changed that” (personal communication 2011 January).

### **5.5 Million Euro Lesson: Learning to Lose**

There has been much marveling at how the voracity of Athletic fandom has survived almost thirty years of title draught by now. Many of my informants caution that the clock is ticking: Athletic was historically a champion team, and with each generation that does not get to experience a title, the danger of fading passions looms large.

“I have to call my daughter,” my friend J. said as we exited the *Calderón* stadium after losing yet another Spanish Cup final to Barcelona in 2012. “She must be devastated over the loss, and I have to explain to her what Athletic is really about.” Parents all over Bizkaia struggle to keep their children within the kernel of the fandom they have for Athletic; anecdotes of greatness do little to maintain passions only experience can generate. “We are facing a generational problem,” former club president Fernando Lamikiz tells me; “children are winners, they identify with winners.” But how do you convince a child, naturally predisposed to admire heroes and winners like Messi and Ronaldo, to root for a losing team? “Back in the days,”

Lamikiz continues (personal communication 2011 February), “if someone came to school in a Real Madrid jersey they were a total outcast. Today, you see different jerseys. We are losing them.” Many social and cultural programs are directed at children and the youth in order to *fidelizar*, as an organizer put it, to “make them faithful.” summer camps, school and hospital visits, the annual Athletic circus, trips abroad. But nothing works like the experience of a title.

There are two antidotes to this problem: winning, or producing world class players who may serve as idols for younger generations. For Athletic, just one title would secure a whole new generation of fans. Each time the team plays a final, local papers never miss to emphasize its importance for the “sentimental education” of youngsters. Paradoxically, while Bilbainos care little about the Spanish selection and are even hostile to it, the convocation of Athletic players has favorable consequences: it is proof that the club is still capable of producing world class players. It’s a sign of greatness, and Athletic is in desperate need of such signs.

Greatness and victory appear to be a solution to the double binds of Athletic’s philosophy: after all, success should be a reinforcement of the club’s main injunctions (play with locals only, and strive for excellence). While success may seem a good way of coping, it turns out it offers no escape from the double bind. The glorious 2011/2012 season did not produce a title, but it drew attention to the team’s top players; as a result, European clubs started to approach them. Athletic thus finds itself in a double bind where whatever it does in the playfield, it will be punished: if it loses, it gets to keep its players but lose fandom and faith in its philosophy; if it wins, it gets to keep fandom and faith in its philosophy, but loses players, which ultimately dooms the club to failure. The vicious circle closes there.

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,” says Tolstoy’s (1939) famous opening line in *Anna Karenina*. While a goal is celebrated in the same manner all over the world, it might be the impasses, deadlocks and double binds that reveal the idiosyncrasies of each fan community. Athletic Club as a “happy family” much resembles many other clubs: it is an enumeration of records, victories, sporting heroes and anecdotes. A central experience of fandom, however, remains unrecorded as clubs museologize their successes. Perhaps more than splendor, what defines fandom is the way it engages its respective Catch-22s.

Because of its recruitment philosophy, Athletic has what Bateson would call a “trans-contextual syndrome” (1973, 247), where whatever happens, there is always a “double take:” a loss, the prospect of going to second division, or the purchase and sale of a player is never just that and nothing more. The double binds Athletic’s philosophy generate are the result of context: a recruitment policy that worked well and efficiently until the 1980’s, until the containment of player transfer by Spanish league regulations, loses its versatility in a new context: player migration of the post-Bosman era. The formal nature of something is determined by its contextual status, which explains why Athletic’s philosophy has been called an “oxen’s cart in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>76</sup>

“In the Eastern religion, Zen Buddhism,” Bateson writes, “the goal is to achieve enlightenment. The Zen master attempts to bring about enlightenment in his pupils in various ways. One of the things he does is hold a stick over the pupil’s head and say fiercely: ‘If you say this stick is real, I will strike you with it. If you say this

---

<sup>76</sup> Sara Estevez, *El Correo* 3 July 2007.

stick is not real, I will strike you with it. If you don't say anything, I will strike you with it" (Bateson 1973, 179). As the task for the Zen pupil is to find enlightenment even in such a bind, so does the Athletic subject have to find their breakthrough. That breakthrough, for now anyways, is the re-conceptualization of the competitive field. "To root for Athletic with this philosophy is already winning," an informant told me. "It is like an example of life, an ethic: you know that you won't win" (P. S. personal communication 2011 February). Victory, fetishized as the only acceptable outcome in Western competitive contexts, is relegated in a Zen-like fashion to a secondary position: "Instead of the egoism of winning," Basque Nationalist Party politician and Athletic fan Andoni Ortuzar tells me, "we prioritize values" (personal communication 2011 March). The twenty million euro lesson that the Llorente case cost served to produce a special sort of enlightenment: children, fans and players had to learn to lose.

## Chapter Six

### Magnificent Obsessions: Masculinity, Morality and the Melodramatic Imagination

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2012, alarming headlines emerged in Bilbao: Bayern Munich was ready to contract Athletic defender Javi Martínez and dutifully pay the early transfer fee of 40 million Euros. Martínez did not go out of his way to reassure the Bilbao crowds about his intention to stay, which meant only one thing: if the two clubs agree on the finances, he was ready to go. That this should happen only a few days after Fernando Llorente sent shockwaves through the city. At the training site of Athletic, some fans pulled up a large banner as Llorente and Martínez stepped on the field to practice with what was still their team, but which they were ready to abandon: “MERCENARIES!” Bilbao fell into existential disarray over two soccer players’ desire to leave. The club was about passion, nobility, identity, belonging—“things money can’t buy.”

The departure of Javi Martínez was tragic enough for Bilbainos: he left for Germany under a big black umbrella on a private jet one night, without saying as much as goodbye. But it reached tragicomic proportions when, a few Saturdays later after midnight, he returned to Bilbao and attempted to enter the Athletic training facilities by jumping over a fence. “I am Javi Martínez, I am Javi Martínez!” he yelled to the night guard watching over the facilities. Later he explained he wanted to gather his personal belongings from the locker room, and thought the dead of Saturday night would be the right time.

Bilbao spent months reconstructing and fathoming the events, that is, coping with the trauma of the players’ desire to leave. “There are two things the Bilbao

crowds won't understand," a former player told me. "That a player should not want to play in Athletic, or that a player should want to leave" (personal communication 2010 June). Indeed, it is quite rare for players to leave Athletic; the online forums, social media, bars and fan clubs were buzzing with the issue of Llorente and Martínez's departure.

"Dramatic time has replaced routinized social living (...) During social dramas, a group's emotional climate is full of thunder and lightning and choppy air currents!" (Turner 1982: 9, 10). The two players' intention to leave was a public *breach* that occurred in the normal circuit in the club's life, as I will describe in this chapter: they "betrayed" and "undermined" Bilbao's special ethos, the "philosophy" of Athletic. The breach escalated into a *crisis* of values and identity, and required *redressive machinery* (Turner 1982). Kenneth Burke considered ritual drama the "Ur-form" of narrative (in Ochs and Capps 1996: 20). Narrative activity, in turn, "provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present and imagined worlds" (Ochs and Capps 1996: 19). In this chapter I propose that Bilbao's narrative of coping took place through the related genre of *melodrama*.

The 2012 pre-season departure of two players turned into an elaborate melodrama with all its thrill-affecting tropes: hyperbolic preoccupations (this was the most prioritized news item in every local media); exaggerated rise and fall of emotions (from beloved "our boys" the players turned "traitors"); reversals of fortune and chance, and a sublime-to-the-ridiculous movement (from the glories of the previous season to the descending zone of the following one); intense swings between extremes (love-hate attitude towards players); risky escapades and misadventures (surreptitious departures under umbrella and night-time fence jumping); disguising

and de-masking identities (the players finally “showed their true colors”); Manichean struggles of good vs. evil (our romantic innocence vs. the corrupt, mercenary logic of the soccer world). Beyond the tropes that affect excitement, social melodramas have serious social functions: they variously respond to social or national crisis, moral dilemmas, class conflicts and sexual mores (Brooks 1976; Elsaesser 1987; Mulvey 1987). Melodrama is a reaction to fissures and ruptures in the social fabric of experience, and its importance lies in its efforts “to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to ‘prove’ the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question masked by villainy and perversion of judgment, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical forces” (Brooks 1976: 20). The theatricality of the melodramatic impulse is the basic driving force of all drama to *act out*.

What is acted out in Bilbao’s player transfer melodrama? In this chapter I will explore how a seemingly mundane episode grows into a negotiation and re-affirmation of morality and masculinity. Archetti (1999) argues that the Argentine soccer style of imagination, dribbling and wiliness is considered to construct masculinity and morality, to communicate how a moral person (man) is to be. In Wacquant’s (2004) analysis, the boxing gym in the black ghetto of Chicago’s South Side is a “school of morality” designed to transmit a spirit of discipline, group attachment, respect and autonomy. I place the construction of masculine morality in melodramatic soccer discourse. What is a good society? What is the meaning of love, loyalty and integrity? How is a man to behave, and how is he not to behave? What is the worth of a promise, and what should be our basic attitude to it? What are the basic boundaries between good and evil, pure and defiled? What are our oft-cited values? First, I will identify the emotional pathos of soccer melodrama through analyzing it as a lover’s discourse. Emotive, amorous language creates a particular gender order that

feminizes the public, while the masculinity of the player is constructed as the archetype of the cheating Don Juan. Second, I argue that, while it appears to be a hyperbolic, superficial sentimental affair, the melodrama of player transfer engages Bilbao's "moral occult" (Brooks 1976): it constructs a moral community by establishing rights and wrongs, dos and don'ts. By doing so, the melodramatic narrative does not only provide moral and sentimental education for players and fans in Bilbao; it also positions itself in the global world of soccer conceptualized in moral terms.

### **6.1 Cristiano's Sadness: the Melodramatic Mode of Soccer Narrative**

*Estoy triste*, "I'm sad." Two words of Cristiano Ronaldo were enough to send Real Madrid, Spain and the world of soccer into weeks-long turbulence. After he scored against Granada early September 2012, the all time most expensive soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo did not celebrate his goal. "I did not celebrate it because I am sad," he said at the ensuing press conference. As he would not reveal why, his words turned into a riddle. The media and fans spent weeks fathoming Cristiano's sadness. Is it because his relationship with team mates turned sour? Or he might have conflicts with coach Mourinho? Or it's because he wants to leave Real Madrid? Or because he didn't win the Best European Player of the Year title? Or the lack of money? Or the lack of love from fans? Or the seventh anniversary of the death of his father? Will he celebrate his next goal? There was no end of speculation.

Such pressuring of the surface of reality to yield some kind of meaning is precisely the melodramatic mode. Peter Brooks (1972) demonstrates the melodramatic narrative through an excerpt from *The Wild Ass's Skin* by Balzac. Raphaël de Valentin enters a gambling house to play roulette with his last franc. A

shadowy figure rises from his seat in the corner, approaches him and asks for his hat.

The gesture of surrendering one's hat elicits a series of questions from the narrator:

Is this some scriptural and providential parable? Isn't it rather a way of concluding a diabolical contract by exacting from you a sort of security? Or may it be to oblige you to maintain a respectful demeanor toward those who are about to win your money? Is it the police, lurking in the sewers of society, trying to find out your hatter's name, or your own, if you've inscribed it on the headband? Or is it, finally, to measure your skull in order to compile an instructive statistic on the cranial capacity of gamblers?" (Brooks 1976, 1)

The series of interrogations is excessive and hyperbolic for the simple gesture of handing over a hat. That is what defines the melodramatic impulse: it seeks to discover implicit meanings by pressuring an insignificant detail to extract the full story. The narrator applies the same pressure to various actors and objects of the gambling house, including the last penny of the impoverished bettor: "Each of the spectators looked for a *drama* in the fate of this single gold piece, perhaps the final scene of a noble life" (Brooks 1976: 2).

Beyond international and domestic affairs, unemployment and corruption, the Spanish media devoted an inordinate amount of air time and ink to what made Cristiano Ronaldo sad; they were looking for a drama. As watching or listening to any *tertulia* or round table discussion on soccer reveals, it becomes clear that theatricality and the sheer excess of preoccupation with detail is sport discourse's way of extracting meaning. Countless newspaper articles, infinite hours of round table discussions and media reports attempt to fathom goals and non-goals, referee decisions, player and coach comments, tactics, practices—and things like Cristiano's sadness, coach Mourinho's omelet metaphor for creating a champion team, or the

mysterious “*Observer*,” Barcelona FC’s tunnel maintenance person who watched with poker face as the Madrid and Barcelona squads almost get into a fist fight. Soccer discourse is defined by magnificent obsessions.

In Bilbao on a Monday, the local media publishes about eighty pages of soccer news. In the afternoon, five or six local television channels, and the same number of radio channels compete for an audience for their *tertulias*. This volume would abate only somewhat as the week progresses, and increases again before the next game. Games of special significance, like a cup final, inspire hundreds of extra pages in the form of special editions that review histories and anecdotes, constituting a collective memory of soccer fandom. In a city of 350,000, 55 journalists, and the same number of assisting personnel, is devoted to producing soccer discourse full time. “Here, it’s bread and soccer,” a Bilbao journalist told me. “Consuming soccer news is people’s way to re-experience the last game” (personal communication 2011 March). Like melodrama, soccer is the mode of excess: it thrives on exaggeration, hyperbole. The melodramatic mode of soccer narration turns the everyday stuff of sports into a drama of life and death; not for nothing did Liverpool coach Bill Shankly famously say in one blazing melodramatic instance: “Some people think soccer is a matter of life and death. I don’t like that attitude. It’s much more important than that.”

Melodrama’s excitement, film theorist Laura Mulvey writes, “comes from conflict not between enemies, but between people tied by blood or love” (1987: 75). Bilbao’s soccer madness ties its players and fans by both, as I have described in previous chapters. *Es un sentimiento*, “it’s a sentiment,” fans will tell you if you ask them what Athletic means to them. In the following section, I will show that the emotions of soccer madness are articulated through a pathos-filled melodramatic narrative characteristic of amorous relationships, and a particular mode of experience:

that of the lover. In turn, this narrative feminizes the public and constructs elite sports masculinity in terms of the archetypal figure of Don Juan.

## 6.2 “*Es un Sentimiento:*” Soccer as a Lover’s Discourse

Athletic Club External Relations officer J.U. attends declarations of love on a daily basis. “This department alone receives thirty-two, thirty-five thousand phone calls a season,” he tells me. “I receive several thousands of emails and letters a year. I answer all of them within seventy-two hours; it is club policy. Some people write every week” (personal communication 2011 May).

“I am sorry about my shaky handwriting,” a sixty-seven year old fan writes to the Club, as I am browsing the thick folders of archived emotions. “I am very nervous about writing you.” In their letters, fans detail how and when they “first saw and fell in love” with Athletic; swear eternal loyalty despite temptations (“I will be loyal to Athletic until death, even if in my village everyone routes Barcelona and Real Madrid”); assure sacrifice, commitment and determination (“this man shall not pass from this world without seeing his Athletic, even if I have to pay three times more in the re-sales”); declare the intensity of their sentiments (“No one loves Athletic more than I do—the same maybe, but more no”); hope for the “great happiness” of receiving “a few lines in response.” J.U. shows me two elaborately ornamented letters written on pink and blue paper; they contain love poems written to Athletic.

“Pathways of a profound love: It is a drug of love/That overflows my soul/for the fire of heat/that covers me in its flame/I enjoy your happiness/And share your sadness/Because they are mine/All that is yours is richness/I have given you my entire life/My feelings and my word/By delicate, sincere pathways/Of pure, profound loving/I want you never to forget/That you are my reason to be/And while simple and

humble/To you I give my heart.” As I am in his office browsing the archives, J.U. answers a phone call from a fan who had written poems to Athletic, and was wondering if they could be published in the club’s monthly review.

“The demonic life of a lover,” Roland Barthes writes,

is like the surface of a solfatara; huge bubbles (muddy and scorching) burst, one after the other; when one falls back and dies out, returning to the mass, another forms and swells farther on. The bubbles ‘Despair,’ ‘Jealousy,’ ‘Exclusion,’ ‘Desire,’ ‘Uncertainty of Behavior,’ ‘Fear of Losing Face’ (the nastiest of all demons) explode in an indeterminate order, one after the next: the very *disorder* of Nature (1978: 80-81).

Fan discourse verbalizes emotions in ways people reserve for romantic love. When it comes to sports and communication, scholarship tends to focus on strategic communication and management in the sports industry (Pedersen 2013), advertising and promotional culture in the sports media (Jackson 2013), or the growing importance of mediated sports communication in national and global contexts (Rowe 2013). I will now turn to a different language, the language of affect in sports fandom. The narratives around the departure of Fernando Llorente and Javi Martínez show that the *sentimiento* of soccer is expressed through the vocabulary of amorous relationships, which lends soccer discourse a melodramatic air.

### 6.2.1 *Speak to Me of Love*

In Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the handsome but inarticulate Christian seduces Roxane through the words prompted to him by the unhandsome but poetic Cyrano. At one point, Christian decides he no longer needs Cyrano’s words, as he himself can

devise poetically seductive language. But facing Roxane, all he can say is “I love you.” “Vary it!” says Roxane. “Say how love possesses you? [...] Unknot those tangled sentiments!” (Rostand 1897/2008: 105). To no avail; Christian’s best remains an “I adore you.” Disappointed with his inability to elaborate, to produce excessive language, Roxane leaves him.

The soccer world uses the excessive language of amorous pathos. When a club wants a player from another club, seduction starts with what feminism has since Laura Mulvey’s seminal article in *Screen* (1975) considered the erotic look: “Llorente under the gaze,”<sup>77</sup> the Marca headline went in August 2010, airing coach Mourinho’s desire to “*have him this year or the next*”<sup>78</sup> in Real Madrid. The declaration of interest is followed by an elaborate panegyric. “The *Riojano* is capable of shooting through his height, has a wonderful game with his back to the goal post, and he is not too shabby with the ball at his feet, either, contrary to what his height would make one believe. [...] He has become the new Lion King.”<sup>79</sup> There is also a degrading reference to the rival, the player’s current club Athletic, as incompetent and unworthy: “At the age of only twenty-five, Llorente is the most important offensive player in a team that *doesn’t know what it plays* when he is not on the field.” The discourse constructs the object of desire as perfect in every respect: Llorente is not only a splendid player, but “a *heart throb* and a new ideal for girls [...] he is a good footballer, educated, well-prepared and a goal maker [...]”<sup>80</sup> His *breakup* with Athletic would do him good, especially because he is “much *desired* in the noble zones of Bernabéu.” “I

---

<sup>77</sup> Llorente, en el punto de mira. Marca, 17 August 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Llorente, en el punto de mira. Marca, 17 August 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Jose Gimenez, Marca, 17 August 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Jose Gimenez, Marca, 17 August 2010.

emphasize,” a commentator concludes by flashing the prospects of matrimony “in Madrid he would *fit as a ring on the finger*: Spanish, forward and handsome.”<sup>81</sup>

### 6.2.2 *Tell Me I'm the One*

When the prospect of the departure of Martínez and Llorente emerged in Bilbao, Athletic's President Urrutia made it clear: for players, too, Athletic has to be *the one*. “I would like that our players would come and tell me that they want to continue in Athletic in spite of other offers,” President Urrutia said. “What we want to hear is players tell us there is no other team in the world for them.”<sup>82</sup> When Javi Martínez finally signed with Bayer Munich late August 2012, the Club reiterated its proud position: while it is “disappointed” with the decision of Martínez, the Club considers that “it is fundamental and essential [...] that its first team should be the principal aspiration for each and every one of its players.”<sup>83</sup>

The reiterated verbalization of devotion to the club is the only way a player can dispel anxieties. Each time a rival club—a *novia*, or “girlfriend” as the Spanish press puts it—emerges in the orbit of the player, the fan community becomes restless: “Say something, Llorente!” “Tell them ‘No’!” “All these anxieties would be put to rest if only he clarified the situation!” fans implore. Players have to be direct, unmistakable and frequent in their confessions. In January 2011, Llorente was asked in an interview by a non-Basque magazine: Wouldn't he like to play *en un grande*, in a “great” club? Llorente said the only acceptable answer: “I am already playing in a great one.” Fans would never have enough of such confessions. “It seems,” Lorente

---

<sup>81</sup> Roberto Gomez, *Marca*, 17 August 2010.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-14/fracaso-institucional-golpe-linea-20120814.html>

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.athletic-club.net/web/main.asp?a=0&b=1&c=1&d=1000&berria=12406&idi=1>

complained, “that if you don’t say it, people won’t believe it [...] I am tired of repeating it, I have said it a lot of times.”<sup>84</sup> There is nothing that can sooth the jealousies and insecurities of the fan community like this confession by Llorente: “this is the only place for me, I am happy here, and I only think in Athletic.”<sup>85</sup>

### 6.2.3 *Don Juan and the Scandal of the Promise*

“We will work harder, train harder, and focus harder. Next year we will bring you the Cup because you deserve it,” a player said in the microphone in front of the crowd of 300 000 gathered in Bilbao in May 2009, after Athletic lost the King’s Cup final. A main staple of the soccer player’s discourse is the promise: the promise to “give it all,” to “bring the cup home,” to “do their best” for their home crowd.

When a player leaves a club, he provokes the scandal of Don Juan: the scandal of the broken promise. In Shoshana Felman’s analysis based on Austin’s theory of speech acts, the Don Juan myth is a violation not of women but of promises made to them. It is a violation enabled by the performative properties of language: “I promise” is the performative utterance as it does not merely *say* but *does* something. Don Juan exploits and plays on the self-referential property of performative utterances. He escapes the hold of truth, inasmuch as he merely performs the act of promising, which does not bind him to actually live up to them; he is effectively accomplishing the speech act he is naming. The trap of Don Juan’s seduction, Felman argues, thus “consists in producing a *referential illusion* through an utterance that is by its very nature *self-referential*: the illusion of a real or extra linguistic act of commitment

---

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2011-01-22/llorente-insiste-estoy-grande-201101221728.html>

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2011-01-22/llorente-insiste-estoy-grande-201101221728.html>

created by an utterance that refers only to itself” (Felman 1983, 31). While fans see language as a constative that carries meaning and consciousness, Don Juan players use it as a performative, a field of enjoyment rather than knowledge.

The Basques conceive of the promise as a biding constative. *La palabra de vasco*, “the Basque man’s word” weighs heavily in the Basque Country and beyond; in the north American diasporas, Basque sheep herders were a favorite workforce as American employers found them trustworthy “men of their word.” His word—for it is rather situated within the definitions of male honor—is the Basque’s ultimate source of integrity. “If a Basque tells you four apples tomorrow at five o’clock, it’s four apples tomorrow at 5 o’clock,” an informant tells me. “If an Andalucian tells you four apples tomorrow at five o’clock, it is an apple, a pear, a banana and a melon at six o’clock.”

Disappointment with the broken promise emerges because it reveals the myth of the constative and, as an extension, of knowledge: the Don Juan myth, Felman argues, “is the myth of the promise of consciousness falling flat on its face” (Felman 1983: 52). When any player “promises eternal love and loyalty” to the colors, fans take it as a constative, a field of knowledge, consciousness, accountability. When a player “goes back on his promise,” he acts upon the inherent capacity of the performative to miss its goal and fall short of its accomplishment. The bind of the promise is only apparent, which allows Don Juan the anaphora of his escapades, the repetition of beginnings: to guiltlessly move on and hoard further promises. That is exactly what players do.

#### 6.2.4 “*Salt in the Wound*”

The days right after Martínez abandoned Athletic, the media featured his welcome in the German club. The Bilbao crowds had to endure the sight of an all smiling Martínez, signing his contract, shaking hands, and walking around his new stadium. Seeing the player happy and excited in his new life was tormenting and infuriating for his open dismissal of his old “*novia*.” “I still have to talk with Athletic, but I don’t bother much about this at all.”<sup>86</sup>

For Bilbao crowds, seeing the former player enthusiastic about his new life felt like rubbing “salt in the wound.”<sup>87</sup> The more the player talked, the more Athletic fans realized how un-special they were all along to this Don Juan of a player. Martínez told the German press that the situation reminded him of the beginnings of his career in Athletic: when he went to Bilbao from his first club Osasuna, Athletic paid six million euros, which was a great sum of money for a youth player. It, however, “all served not as pressure but as motivation,” which meant that his new transfer fee of forty million will, too, motivate him. The forlorn Bilbao crowds had to suffer their ex player’s declarations of promises to his new club: “I have long dreamt of playing in a great club like this [...] I am very happy to play in a club of so much history. It is a great motivation for me; naturally, I want to win titles here.”<sup>88</sup> Martínez went out of his way to promise the German journalists that he would “do his best” for his new club, including overcoming great challenges, which just shows his absolute commitment to this new relationship: “At first I was a little scared because it’s a new country and a new language. But my family and mother are here. [...] I am now learning German and refreshing my English. There should be no problem with the

---

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.eldesmarquebizkaia.com/athletic-club/32145-j-mtnez-qtengo-que-hablar-con-athletic-pero-no-me-preocupa-en-absolutoq>

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-30/presentacion-javi-201208301108.html>

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-30/presentacion-javi-201208301108.html>

adaptation.”<sup>89</sup> And to prove his eagerness, he greeted the public in German which, as a Bilbao paper remarked, “transcended the populist wink of J.F. Kennedy as he visited Berlin in the era of the Iron Curtain: *Ich freue mich, beim Bayern München zu sein,*” “I am happy to be with Bayern Munich.” The player finished by saying he wanted to “play and fight for this jersey.”<sup>90</sup>

### 6.2.5 *You Were Lying to Me All These Years*

A thrill-affecting tool of melodrama is the employment of disguised identities and their subsequent de-masking. Bilbao felt “tremendous deception” because Llorente and Martínez went back on their words, or even worse: perhaps they never said the truth. Bilbao witnessed as the true character of whom they thought represented the values of the community was gradually uncovered. “I feel cheated. Yes, this is the word, cheated,”<sup>91</sup> a fan echoes the feelings of many. Another person posted a thread at the most popular online forum with this title: “No more cheap displays of love:”

Without knowing what will become of the departure of these two players, who have gone out of their way to say how much they *loved* Athletic and how happy they were in Bilbao, I ask all the players of the current squad and those who may be incorporated in the future that, before they publically *declare their eternal love* to Athletic, they should remember how great and complete the archives are today. You show your true colors. Here are some suggestions to change your discourse. Instead of saying ‘I’ve always dreamt with playing for Athletic,’ just say ‘I am grateful for the economic efforts the club makes

---

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-30/presentacion-javi-201208301108.html>

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.eldesmarquebizkaia.com/athletic-club/32145-j-mtnez-qtengo-que-hablar-con-athletic-pero-no-me-preocupa-en-absolutoq>

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-14/fracaso-institucional-golpe-linea-20120814.html>:

for me.’ And instead of saying ‘I would like to play here a lot of years,’ just say ‘If no one pays me more, I will play here a lot of years.’ Good luck.<sup>92</sup>

### 6.2.6 *Perfect Again, Like Before*

There is a point when the parties think there might still be a chance that the relationship will work out, and things return to normal. In the melodrama of August 2012, that moment was the season opening mass at the Basilica of Begoña. Every year during the fiestas of Bilbao and right before the beginning of the season, a bouquet of flowers and a soccer ball are ritually offered to the patron saint of Bilbao, in petition of a good season. A mass is celebrated with the participation of players, managers, coaches and fans. The 2012 mass transmitted a desire for reconciliation: “Once again, Llorente feels beloved,” a headline went in *El Correo* the following day. “He was smiling and attentive [...] gave many autographs, and posed for pictures with fans.”<sup>93</sup> A very detailed description of the events served to demonstrate that the writer was attentive to every detail, and yet he found nothing abnormal, and the normalization of the relationship was imminent:

The players were received with the hymn, sounded by the church bells. In a spontaneous way, the fans formed an improvised corridor, where the players passed. Words of support, clapping, photos... One of the last players to get off the bus was Llorente and Javi Martínez. They walked the distance calmly, and they listened to words of support. [...] After the mass, Llorente couldn't just leave. They stopped him at each step, they gave him and asked from him kisses, they took photos with him, they gave him a pen to give an autograph. ‘You are really something!’ an elderly man told him. ‘Stay, Fernando!’ others

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786>

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-21/llorente-vuelve-sentirse-querido-20120821.html>

yelled. It was the team responsible that had to come and make way for him to the bus. The forward made sure he attended to everyone and was grateful for the received signs of affection. He didn't say anything, only smiled.

*Everything seemed perfect, like before.*<sup>94</sup>

The relief of episode showed both parties how dependent they are on the other and that, despite their conflicts, it is still better for them together than separately. “Be clever, give a press conference, say you renew your contract, that you were mistaken, and the crowds will forgive it all;”<sup>95</sup> “Athletic will be always with you, we do not keep grudges, all we want is that you love us back the way we love you.”<sup>96</sup>

### 6.2.7 *The Death of Romance*

Fernando Torres had the Liverpool crowds in love with him, who devised various stanzas of the “Torres song:” “His armband proved he was a red, Torres, Torres/You'll never walk alone it said/Torres, Torres/We bought the lad from sunny Spain/He gets the ball and scores again/Fernando Torres is Liverpool's number 9.” When the player contracted Chelsea in 2011, however, the same fans engaged in a ritual burning of jerseys with the name and number of the Spanish player. “We used to love him as a red/Judas, Torres/But now he might as well be dead/Judas, Torres/Your armband was a lie.” Such extreme emotions and the reversal of fortunes is a melodramatic trope. Upon leaving, Torres further disenchanted the universe by

---

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-21/llorente-vuelve-sentirse-querido-20120821.html>

<sup>95</sup> [http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-31/cuenta-atras-llorente-201208311151.html#disqus\\_thread](http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-31/cuenta-atras-llorente-201208311151.html#disqus_thread)

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.elcorreo.com/Bizkaia/20120901/deportes/mas-futbol/llorente-sigue-athletic-201209010021.html>

saying this: “The romance of soccer is dead... When you go to a club, you want to do your best for you and the club, that’s all” (in Carlin 2012: 274).

Jerseys have significance in sports: they metonymically stand for the event of union and common purpose between players and fans. In the paradigmatic love tragedy, Goethe’s *Werther*, a blue garment stands for Werther’s enchanted identity as a lover. “How much it cost me,” says Werther, “to make myself give up the very simple blue coat that I was wearing the first time I danced with Lotte; but it had finally worn out altogether. So I had had another made, absolutely identical to the other...” (in Barthes 1978: 128). Werther wants to be buried in this garment after his suicide for his hopeless love. “This blue garment imprisons him so effectively,” says Barthes, “that the world around him vanishes: *nothing but the two of us*: by this garment” (1978, 128). Wearing the jersey stands for the same *nothing but the two of us* between player and fan; burning the jersey stands for the annihilation of the relationship.

What is the much cited “romanticism” of soccer? As a literary, artistic and intellectual movement, Romanticism placed emotions in the center as the most authentic human experience. It emerged to counter-act desecralization affected by the Enlightenment and the aftermath of the French Revolution, which marked the real and symbolic liquidation of sacred orders (Brooks 1976: 15). Melodrama as a genre emerged in this context, and like Romanticism, adopted the centrality of emotions. When Torres says the romance of soccer has disappeared, he admits that emotions are no longer in the center of experience for the player; the world of soccer has lost a sacred quality against the pretensions of rationalism. Indeed; who in the right mind, Torres suggests, would turn down financially more advantageous offers for some ideals of emotional attachment and community?

### 6.2.8 *Gendered and Gendering Lover`s Discourse*

“We identify love with emotional expression and talking about feelings,” Francesca M. Cancian writes about the feminization of love. These are “aspects of love that women prefer and in which women tend to be more skilled than men (...) A narrower, feminized definition [of love] dominates both contemporary scholarship and public opinion” (2004: 352, 353). In contrast to this feminine form of “expressive” love, masculine definitions include “instrumental” forms such as providing help, sharing activities, and sex. Our definition of love, Cancian argues, favors “expressive” forms considered feminine, which results in the feminization of love.

Since Robin Lakoff`s (1975) seminal work on gender and language use, much of sociolinguistic research has concluded that women are more expressive when it comes to emotions, psychological and social processes (Newman et al. 2008). While research is not conclusive on language use depending on gender, there exists nevertheless the popular stereotype that women produce a copious amount of emotive speech compared to men. While it would be interesting to conduct more systematic, comparative study into emotive soccer language production based on the variable of gender, my preliminary experience is that men are more than capable of producing highly expressive, emotive language about their passions of fandom. Some informants have admitted that they have no troubles displaying and discharging emotional energies in soccer fandom, while they are “too shy to express feelings” in their private lives. Since discourse is overwhelmingly produced by men (especially in the media), what I have described above as “lover`s discourse” in soccer has been mostly produced by men. The feminization of love and of expressive, emotive language results in the feminization of the fan community`s affective sports discourse.

Significant research has been done on the masculinity complex—which Carole Oglesby simply termed “androgen poisoning” (1990)—and gender regimes of sports. Organized sports are a “social institution” (Messner 1992: 9) that has, ever since Thomas Arnold established his sports program at Rugby school in the 1820`s in Britain, served to create ideal masculine behaviors, values and bodies. The construction of masculinity through sports has variously emphasized muscular, tough and moral bodies (Bundgaard 2005); politicized and ideologized bodies (Mangan 2000); heroism, warrior spirit, individuality (Braudy 2003); acceptable male-to-male relationships and compulsory heterosexuality (Ibson 2002); aggression, sexual exploits and violence, and male erotic bravado (Messner 2007, Messner and Sabo 1994). The various angles that have studied projections on the male sporting body have captured masculinity in such wide ranging terms as chivalrous, heroic, moral, individualistic, predatory, exploitative.

The melodramatic narrative constructs yet another manifestation of sport`s masculinities, that of the cheating, scandalous Don Juan. This melodramatic identity construction relies not on monodirectional hegemonic discourses, power regimes and representations, but the dynamic affective relationship between a player and his fan community. A gender order nevertheless is delineable; the athlete`s Don Juan masculinity gains meaning in relation to the fan community, whom he cheats. Because soccer fans use an emotive language attributed by science and stereotype to women, which is a form of female “expressive” love, fan discourse effectively feminizes the fan community. A gender order of masculine player and feminine audience becomes more marked if we consider the content of emotive speech: the construction of players as cheating, lying Don Juans; the reference to clubs as *novias*, “girlfriends,” and the footballer`s much cited reason to be, scoring. Besides the many

tools of public and media discourse and representation that construct gender, affective fan discourse is yet another example for technologies of sexualization in sports. While Don Juan masculinity reinforces rather than challenges the individualism and compulsory heterosexuality of the male athlete, it offers a cultural iconography that situates the processes of identity construction within a relational field of affect and emotion: melodrama.

### **6.3 Between Good and Evil: Bilbao's Innocence Neurosis and Moral Occult**

“The idea that comes most naturally to man, as if from his very nature,” says Albert Camus' narrator in *The Fall*, “is the idea of his innocence” (1991, 80-81). Innocence needs to be preserved even at the cost of positioning oneself against the world: “Each of us insists on being innocent at all costs, even if he has to accuse the whole human race and heaven itself” (1991, 81). The Romantic universe, which shares its emotion-centeredness with melodrama, is based on what Heilman calls “innocence neurosis.” Heilman defines innocence neurosis as the melodramatic sense “that has got away from all the restrictions of reality” (1968, 114). Bilbao's “innocence neurosis,” its escape from the restrictions of reality lies in the philosophy of its player recruitment. The century-long tradition reflects the ideals of a gone-by era of purity and innocence: “we haven't lost our virginity yet,” a fan tells me, with reference to Athletic's resistance to contracting foreigners. There is a sense in which Athletic reflects the “childhood” of soccer: its early formational stages when local recruitment, town and village level loyalties, inter-subjective enjoyment, unmediated spectatorship and an altogether lesser concern for money were the norm. The paradigmatic innocence of childhood is positioned against the egoism and cynicism of global soccer capitalism.

But Athletic's "innocence neurosis" is also an escape from, and answer to, another level of reality: Bilbao's very own industrial and post-modern capitalism. As I have mentioned in chapter two, during the nineteenth century, Bilbao became one of the centers of the Industrial Revolution due to its rich ore mines; for most of the twentieth century, it was the richest commercial and business center of Spain; at the end of the twentieth century, it erected the famous Guggenheim Museum and went through a successful post-Fordist transformation that was cited as the "miracle of Bilbao." Bilbao owes its riches to the unbridled capitalism of both its modern and post-modern globalization, its past and present—very different values than those represented by Athletic. Could it be that Athletic's "innocence neurosis," its rejection of the commercialism, globalism and capitalism of soccer in fact hides Bilbao's "guilt neurosis" of capitalist expansion in other realms? Is Bilbao the unscrupulous capitalist by day that practices western Buddhism (Athletic) by night in order to somehow ease his guilt by striking a balance?

The departure of Llorente and Martínez made Bilbainos realize their naïve innocence of believing in affective bonds in a world that has long been operating by financial considerations:

Yes, I am disappointed with Llorente. What should I do with him now? I was foolishly ingenuous, an idiot, silly. He did say things and do things, he left himself to be loved, and for a while I thought he was falling in love, too. You keep thinking of the great nights you experienced together in San Mamés, the past season, maybe yes, he did fall in love. But no. [...] In the end you are right. I have to wake up. There are much more mercenaries in Athletic than I thought there were.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786>

“We can be innocent to unsuspected limits,”<sup>98</sup> fans realized. What remains disappointing, they say, “is when you think that a player is not a mercenary, and then it turns out that he is.”<sup>99</sup> It is one thing, fans argue, that you are a professional. It is another thing, however, “that you are falser than Judas. It is not at all funny, showing so much love to a club when you know you are a pro and you really don’t care.”<sup>100</sup>

The Llorente and Martínez case made Bilbainos painfully aware of their own idealism, innocence and naïveté in the light of realities. “All are mercenaries, like it or not. Even when they stay they are mercenaries; after all, if they renew their contracts, they do so because the Club gives them the monies they want. The next few days of contract debates should serve to open all those eyes that so far have been closed.”<sup>101</sup>

And yet, despite some bitter awakenings, the majority of fans decided to take refuge in Athletic’s paradigmatic innocence. If the realities of the soccer world no longer have room for the ideals that once defined it, so much the worse for those realities. “With your arguments resonating with a yuppie world you make me feel like those outmoded hippies that deny the fact that the world has changed. What shall I say; I still prefer to be a hippy. I prefer to be a romantic and continue to be an idealist in the world of yuppies. Better this than lose my soul.”<sup>102</sup>

In the face of moral annihilation, Athletic re-established its paradigmatic innocence through a melodramatic technique: turning the player transfer episode into a parable of good fighting evil.

---

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786&Pag=1>

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786&Pag=1>

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786&Pag=2>

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786&Pag=2>

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.aupaathletic.com/foros/replicas.asp?idTema=5634786&Pag=2>

The agonic, binary opposition that structures sports and games lends itself readily to the projection of melodramatic archetypal oppositions. In the Mexican *lucha libre*, moral coding is made explicit by the hyperbolic acting out of qualities of “good guys” (*técnicos*) and “bad guys” (*rudos*). The *rudo* “bad guy” wrestler displays “qualities common to bad guys around the world: sadism, underhandedness, cowardice” (Levi 1997: 63). They use illegal techniques and weapons. The *técnico*, or “good guy,” respects the rules and the referee. In the Basque autochthonous game, the squash-like *pelota*, players are also juxtaposed in moral terms: the back court player *lion*’s honest, direct, masculinized game is contrasted with the front court player *fox*’s feminized propensities for tricks and disguise (González Abrisketa 2012). And while moral preference rests with *lions*, there is a secret fascination with the *fox*’s creative, if dirty, play. Geertz (1973) describes the Balinese cockfights as an enactment of an archetypal struggle: “deep play” where “man and beast, good and evil, ego and id, the creative power of aroused masculinity and the destructive power of loosened animality fuse in a bloody drama of hatred, cruelty, violence, and death” (Geertz 1973: 420-421).

The melodramatic projection of binaries like good vs. evil, right vs. wrong takes place against the backdrop of what Peter Brooks calls the “moral occult” (1976: 5): the domain of operative spiritual values. With melodrama we are, if not in the domain of reality, in that of truth: the “moral occult” is likened to Freud’s unconscious, where desires and interdictions lie. It is not readily available to everyday consciousness, but it hides value and meaning that needs be extracted. Like we said before, melodrama pressures context to yield a meaning: it presumes that quotidian gestures refer us to the hyperbolic world of the unconscious. Behind the frivolous

façade, melodramatic acting out becomes an epistemology of depths as it uncovers invisible but operative values, meanings, desires.

Increasingly, the deserting players of Athletic were portrayed as mercenaries who transgressed to the evil side of commercial soccer. In his seventeen years in Athletic, fans argued, Llorente should have learnt the basic values of the club, or else he wouldn't have asked for a salary that Athletic cannot afford. "Does he not know that Athletic is not a club of *chequera*, of the 'checkbook'?" That Athletic simply does not give the kinds of salaries clubs with a mercantile approach do? And that it does not give those salaries *out of principle*, because here, in Bilbao, there are considerations more important than money? A demarcation line gradually crystallized between good and evil at conflict. On the good side, there was the ideal of sacred, romantic play motivated by the pure emotions of love, commitment and sacrifice to the moral community. On the evil side there was the dirty, calculating world of business, the de-centered and post-modern soccer field of powerful paychecks.

In the melodramatic imagination, a player transit became a cosmic struggle of binaries: good and evil, light and darkness, the sacred and the profane, the pure and the defiled. As coach Bielsa put it at a press conference, "This is a struggle between business and sentiments (...) and this is why Athletic is suffering. This club does not fight with the same weapons as the rest of the clubs. It has no commercial criteria in an industry that is commercial."<sup>103</sup> Athletic reiterated its moral high ground as a "utopia made reality,"<sup>104</sup> where belonging and reciprocal affection transcend financial considerations. "I am not much consoled with twelve, fourteen or sixteen million euros," President Urrutia said, rejecting the prospect of making money by selling

---

<sup>103</sup> <http://m.espn.go.com/deportes/nota?storyId=1593172&wjb>

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-14/fracaso-institucional-golpe-linea-20120814.html>

home grown players; “Our philosophy is of another dimension.”<sup>105</sup> In that dimension, Bilbao’s mayor Iñaki Azkuna qualified Llorente’s petition for 5.5 million euros as “obscene:” “It is bad for Athletic because, when a family gets angry, it is bad.”<sup>106</sup> Iñigo Urkullu, leader of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and member of Athletic Club, also pointed fingers: “Llorente should be honest with fans and give explanations.”<sup>107</sup>

To make the moral dichotomy more marked, the fan community reminisced about the positive examples of players who did stay in Athletic in spite of generous offers from other clubs. Various articles and interviews were published with and about the ultimate moral ideal of loyalty in Bilbao: Julen Guerrero, “Spanish Footballer of the Year 1993.” The blond, handsome star forward was a sociological phenomenon in his own right: if today San Mamés has a surprisingly large number of thirtyish female spectators, it’s because he lured them to the stadium when they were still teenagers. After twenty-four years in Athletic, Guerrero announced his retirement in July 2006. He was able to answer only three questions at the press conference; he broke down crying uncontrollably, and had to leave the room amid the standing ovation of players, club officials and journalists. His *lágrimas de león*, “lion’s tears,” became a benchmark of the genuine love a player is expected to feel for Athletic.

But there was no need to look back on history to display a positive example. Just as Martínez left, team mate lateral Markel Susaeta renewed his contract with Athletic. Rumor had it that Manchester United was interested in the player, who

---

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.deia.com/2012/08/14/athletic/el-peor-final-posible>

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-20/azkuna-califica-obsceno-pedir-201208201304.html>

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.canalathletic.com/noticias/2012-08-20/urkullu-llorente-tiene-honesto-201208201101.html>

quickly declared: he wanted to stay in Athletic. Parallels between Martínez and Susaeta were immediately made, replete with moral qualifiers:

It is not easy to come to terms with the fact that the young man [Martínez] idolized for his abilities on the field, distinguished as the ideal representative of the generosity and indomitable spirit that tradition associates with the club, prototype of nobleness and commitment, is in fact a simpleton. [...] If the summary of the two acts, that Susaeta renews his contract and Martínez makes himself ridiculous, serves to pause for a second and reflect on the human and professional quality of the two players, this is the right time to do so.<sup>108</sup>

Bilbainos were relieved to realize that the crisis was not existential; they simply loved the wrong man. The guilt emerging from the unjust, blind faith in a person who turns out to be the devil in disguise, and the maltreatment of the innocent is a lesson of countless morality tales:

Perhaps the worst part of this story, incredible as the long-legged boy [Martínez] deemed it, is the fact that it coincided in time with the steps another player [Susaeta] took in the opposite direction, a player who was never given that much love and appreciation by the crowds of San Mamés.<sup>109</sup>

The outcome of this particular melodrama conspired towards the expulsion of the “corrupt” elements from the moral order and its subsequent strengthening. Llorente, in the end, did not transfer because no club was willing to pay his full transfer fee. His punishment was severe: fans wished to castigate him to the bench for the entire season, and it took weeks until he played again. Javi Martínez became Bilbao’s fallen

---

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.deia.com/2012/09/12/opinion/columnistas/rojo-sobre-blanco/el-idolo-caido>

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.deia.com/2012/09/12/opinion/columnistas/rojo-sobre-blanco/el-idolo-caido>

angel: fans wanted to hear and see nothing of him, including four *peñas* (fan clubs), which removed him as their namesake.

#### 6.4 The Importance of Being Melodramatic

Melodrama is popularly dismissed as a frivolous literary genre addressing lower class, less sophisticated audiences, and for a long time attracted little academic attention. In her discussion of 1950`s melodramas, however, Laura Mulvey (1987: 79) argues that the genre provides a “safety valve” against, and an outlet for ideological contradictions and inconsistencies, as it works them through the surface by externalizing internal emotions. When Bilbainos “no longer knew what to think of Athletic and of life,”<sup>110</sup> they coped with their crisis through the tools of melodrama.

The melodramatic mode, Mulvey argues, is a central fact of modern sensibility: it is constructed on the void, at the death of the Sacred, where “the necessary center of things has been evacuated and dispersed” (1987: 79). In the face of the abyss, melodrama re-orders not the self, but its relations to others in the world. Its objective is to arrive at what Heilman calls *monopathy* (1968: 85): a unity of feeling that gives the individual a sense of wholeness. It is a metonymic impulse that affects the merger of the part with the whole, whereby the part experiences the pleasure of wholeness: “a sensation of wholeness that is created when one responds with a single impulse or potential which functions as if it were his whole personality” (Heilman 1968: 84).

Athletic is Bilbao`s monopathic function. It is its only institution that, through its melodramas that address its moral occult, achieves the pleasure of wholeness. The melodramas of Bilbao`s soccer insist that moral consciousness become an adventure,

---

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.deia.com/2012/09/12/opinion/columnistas/rojo-sobre-blanco/el-idolo-caido>

the stuff of heightened drama. The melodramatic *mise en scène* of a moral conflict disguised as a banal soccer episode provides thrills: unfathomable mysteries, scandals, masking and de-masking, twists of fortune, nocturnal escapades and misadventures, rival “lovers,” physical combat, risks and threats. All these experiences render the process of negotiating the moral universe and arriving at wholeness exciting, pleasurable, painful--emotional.

“In tragedy,” Heilman writes, “the conflict is within man; in melodrama, it is between men, or between men and things” (1968: 79). Tragedy and melodrama are complementary forms of reality with different functions: melodrama makes the public absolute, but neglects the inner conflict; tragedy focuses on the individual, but reduces the community to innumerable public cells. One must learn to live in both. “To reflect for one moment,” Heilman quotes Herman Hesse, “to examine [oneself] for awhile and ask what share [one] has in the world’s confusion and wickedness (...) look you, nobody wants to do that” (in Heilman 1968: 136). Through the melodramas of soccer, one will not arrive at universal truths about the nature of the human condition they way Hamlet does; but one will witness historically and socially conditioned truths and modes of experiences, as we did in the transfer crisis of an Athletic player.

## Chapter Seven

### Dangerous Liaisons, Fatal Attractions: Erotic Fantasy in Men`s Sports

*“She was a disturbing  
woman with all the  
impulsive madness of her  
sex, opening the gates of the  
unknown world of desire  
(...) still smiling, but with  
the deadly smile of a man-  
eater.”*

*Émile Zola: Nana*

Fantasy, Judith Butler writes, is not equal to the not-real; rather, “it constitutes a dimension of the real” (Butler 1990: 108). The proliferation of erotic fantasies around male athletes, as I will show in this chapter, serves as a “technology of sexualization” (Hargreaves 1994: 164-169), or rather, heterosexualization, for the first gay soccer player is still to be un-closeted. Fantasy transmits a normative image of the athlete as he imaginatively is. Along with the corrective mechanisms in case of deviation from it, fantasy—just like knowledge and practices—becomes a technology of surveillance in a Foucauldian sense: it “disciplines, conditions, reshapes and inscribes the body” (Cole 1993: 86) from a particular perspective of domination. This chapter looks at how fantasy serves to conceptualize and control the sexuality of the male elite athlete, and his relationship with women.

In October 2010 I was invited to appear on the sports night show *Uyyyyy!* broadcast by the Basque public television EITB by its host Oscar Terol. They built that specific program around the 2010 World Cup, and the two Athletic players who

were in South Africa with the Spanish Selection: Fernando Llorente and Javi Martínez. My role was going to be very marginal; the hosts would call upon me in the audience, and have me ask the two players a couple of questions as anthropologist. I asked the question I thought would fit the light, humor oriented tone of the program: “Why is it that the kiss of Sara Carbonero received more hits [five million] on YouTube than the world cup winning goal of the Spanish selection?” I immediately felt I was trespassing on forbidden territory. Instead of taking the question lightly, the players froze, and answered as briefly as possible: “Well, it’s the private life of a team mate... I don’t want to talk about it... It’s their business.”

### **7.1 The Kiss of Sara Carbonero**

*Madre mia* (Oh my god)! she gasped, as her boyfriend finally let go of her. The most spectacular moment of the 2010 Soccer World Cup was a kiss: the kiss of Sara Carbonero. The twenty-six-year-old Spanish journalist was deployed by her employer *Telecinco* to do the post-game instant interviews with players of the Spanish selection. She was also the girlfriend of the darling of the Spanish crowd, selection captain and goal keeper Iker Casillas. After a long stretch of qualifiers and quarter finals, Spain won the World Cup with a single goal in an especially physical game against the Netherlands. That victory made sports history for Spain, but fans’ fascination soon took other directions. Right after the game, millions of spectators saw Sara Carbonero, with the Spanish colors painted on her cheek, interviewing Casillas on live television: “How do you feel?” “Well, what do you want me to tell you...” said Casillas, still hazy with the impossible victory. “I only want to say thanks to the people who have been supporting me, my parents, my siblings, my friends...” At this point, his face expression showed how he struggled to acknowledge her, his

girlfriend, in the most widely broadcast event of the year, which she senses. “It’s all right; let’s talk about the game...” “No, I’ll just kiss you and go.”<sup>111</sup> He grabbed and kissed her, and walked away.

Sports are a field of desire that is not limited to the desire for the goal. That kiss was considered the most authentic moment of the year—as if Spain’s becoming the empire of the most diffused sport of the world was a mere side show to a kiss. The hyperbolic fascination with the kiss was, however, preceded by a sense of anxiety: the fear of the sexuality of the sensuous woman. Before the World Cup victory, Sara Carbonero had been consistently portrayed by the Spanish and international sports media complex as a dangerous, “destabilizing woman” whose sexuality distracts her partner from what should matter most: athletic performance.

In homosocial combat cultures like the warrior cult and men’s sports, Varda Burstyn argues that “women are relegated to a marginal and support position. (...) Sport creates a mother-absent family of patriarchs, brothers and sons” (Burstyn 1999: 181). It is not entirely a female absent landscape, though. The image of a certain type of woman is recurrently inserted in men’s sports by the media, as I will argue through various examples: that of the “dangerous de-stabilizer” whose sensuality, knowledge and enjoyment is seen as threatening the male order of sports performance. Her figure, in line with the general cultural representations of *femme fatales*, is subversive, ambiguous, fearful and fascinating. The “dangerous, destabilizing” women I am going to discuss are powerful, charismatic, and widely recognized in their own professions. In spite or perhaps because of that, they become a target of systematic demonization. The elite sports complex sees them as constituting an autonomous field of desire that

---

<sup>111</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=iker+casillas+kiss+carbonero&aq=f](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=iker+casillas+kiss+carbonero&aq=f)

threatens a potent hallmark of contemporary masculinity: the production of points, goals, victories—sports capital.

“Dangerous women” in sports constitute a perennial site of uncertainty, and cross discursive boundaries. “Man needs women to become conscious of his own masculinity, however rough-hewn it might be, Mosse writes; “but the woman who fulfills this essential function must remain truly feminine” (1996: 74). “Dangerous women” in the orbit of elite sports serve to construct and confirm masculinities by virtue of their relationship. On the one hand, they are objectified; their bodies in the male sports complex merely serve as “strategic absorption (...), without having to significantly alter the underlying masculine structure and value systems” (Skerski 2006: 89). According to this reading, the media presence of attractive, hyper-feminized women serves to maintain hegemonic conceptions of mainstream masculinity and femininity; she is an erotic object that reinforces the patriarchal paradigm, the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1990a) engraved in the male iconography of elite sports.

On the other hand, the “dangerous woman” becomes a fantasy, a psychic reality that constitutes challenge and enjoyment. The *femme fatale* becomes what Butler would call a “semantic excess” (1990b: 109) that “haunts and contests the borders which circumscribe the construction of stable identities” (Rose in Butler 1990, 108). Her figure in men`s sports is seen as excess, as over-presence. Her fantasy constitutes an erotic surplus-enjoyment—and becomes “dangerous” because the enjoyment of her fantasy competes with the enjoyment of the symbolic mandates of the male locker room. *Femme fatales* on the sidelines of men`s sports strike a fissure on the traditional narrative of male performance, production, and sexuality; they “intrude into male certainties” (Disch and Kane 1996: 282). They debunk the

symbolic certainties of the muscular, confident masculinity of the elite sports complex by pointing at its castration anxieties.

Why we like sports has been attributed to various sociological factors like self-realization, collective achievement, tradition, socialization into values, escape from everyday life (Delaney and Madigan 2009). I will now emphasize yet another reason: erotic fantasies. Men`s sports constitute a symbolic order of male domination, production and subjectivization, as well as the construction of hegemonic masculinities and compulsory heterosexuality. This chapter will explore how this last bulwark of male sociality constructs, enjoys and copes with the image of eroticized women in its midst, and their sex with the athlete. Mechanisms include, as I will suggest, denial, demonization, scapegoating, pathologizing, fetishization and the proliferation of sexual fantasies.

## **7.2 “The Face that Launched a Thousand Ships:” Cultural Representations of the *Femme Fatale***

In Christopher Marlowe`s version, Doctor Faustus describes Helen of Troy as having "the face that launched a thousand ships." Literally, her beauty sparked the Trojan war; figuratively, her image is that of the fatal woman who destabilized the masculine world of Greek rationality. Virginia Allen (1983) argues that the *femme fatale* emerged from a dualistic concept of the feminine. In occidental cultures, this dualistic concept revolves around the Mary vs. Eve dichotomy, which juxtaposes the mother figure, the obedient Mary who says “*fiat*” to the patriarchal order, with Eve, who by disobeying the same order leads his male companion into a compromising situation. The first consistent representations of the fatal woman emerged in the visual arts of European decadentism and symbolism, and were inspired by the archetypes of

religion and myth: Judith, Delilah, Lilith, Salome, Circe, Medusa. Those archetypes produced several culturally specific variations of the *femme fatale*: Delacroix's *Medea*, Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, Edward Munch's *Madonna*, Rider Haggard's *She*, Bram Stoker's female vampires, the *divas* of Italian silent cinema, and the *femme fatales* of American *film noir*. What their female protagonists have in common is that they seal the male hero's fate; inexorable fate that, as Žižek says with reference to the *film noir*, "is epitomized by the woman-Thing" (2001: 169).

That "woman-Thing" is the elusive aspect of the dangerous woman that makes her both desirable and fearful. According to Mary Ann Doane, the figure of the *femme fatale* produces "a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma" (1991: 2). She strikes a fissure on what Derrida calls phallogocentrism: phallo-, because she has an agency men can't control, and logo-, as she is present in the world through a lack that constitutes desire. Being ambiguous and crossing discursive boundaries, she represents Otherness: "chaos, darkness, death, all that lies beyond the safe, the known, and the normal" (Scott in Hanson and O'Rawe 2010: 4). "Otherness" in the nineteenth century was the image of an increasingly emancipated woman who did not only start to wear trousers; she also demanded control of her sexuality, her body, her desire. The figure of the *femme fatale* is more a symptom rather than a source of anxieties: the consistent emergence of the dangerous woman coincides with worries over the empowerment and emancipation of women in the nineteenth century (Allen 1983; Scott 2010).

What the male subject perceives as threatening is her engulfing femininity. Rather than "screening *jouissance* [enjoyment], she hoards it" (Copjec 1994: 198). The *femme fatale* is diametrically opposed to the good woman, the good wife who accepts her domestic settings and role as mother, as well as the control of her

sexuality by a patriarchal order. She is reduced to a single signifier, that which is most feared and desired: unrepressed feminine sexuality.

The *femme fatale*'s transgression causes something of a scandal: she becomes too powerful not to be a man. In his analysis of biographies on Marilyn Monroe, Dean MacCannell identifies the unease that she produced in her contemporaries: "She had male virtues, her profession, her craft (and something that is never admitted in these accounts, but always implicit, possession of sexuality), and these were what made her great. But she was not a man. She was absolutely uncompromising on this point" (1987: 123). Our male heroes, MacCannell further argues, "travel alone, have unclear origins and aims, are moody, and freely enter and leave sexual relationships. Not our females. Marilyn asked, 'Why not?'" (1987: 126). What becomes subversive is that the *femme fatale* achieves in the erotic imaginary a male-like agency through the over-determination of a femaleness that is unlike the symbolic femaleness of the mother.

The "dangerous women" of men's sports are the latest chapter in the cultural representation of *femme fatales*. As their predecessors, these women, too, are powerful: their agency, erotic and otherwise, not only defies male control; it even threatens male performance. What they all have in common, however, is that their beauty, sensuality, passion, pride and obstinacy make them appear as did Lola Montez to her contemporaries: "one of those women who are what they want to be" (Allen 1983: 4).

### **7.3 When in Doubt, Blame the Girlfriend: Sports' Inner Demons**

Studies of witch hunts tell us that demonization is a result of crisis within the community. According to René Girard, crisis emerges when the differences that define cultural divisions disappear, evidencing an extreme loss of the social order, of

the status quo (1986: 12). It is in such crises that scapegoats are singled out, and witchcraft accusations are made. Something similar happens to male dominated cultural orders like the elite sports complex when they see themselves threatened.

### 7.3.1 *Spanish Soccer: The Bull, the Cow, the She-wolf and the Tigress*

When Spain started its 2010 World Cup performance with an unexpected defeat against Switzerland, an image started to circulate on the Internet: that of the purple, Swiss Milka chocolate cow mounting the emblematic black Spanish bull. “How did that happen?” the image insinuated, mockingly. For fans, it summed up a narrative anomaly: how can a country known for such “girly” things as chocolate “score” against the potent World Cup favorite and European Champion?

The media thought it knew the answer: Spanish goal keeper Casillas` mind may have been on other things. Reiterating what the Spanish *El Mundo* had already insinuated two weeks before, namely that Sara Carbonero`s presence might “destabilize” the national selection, *The Times* claimed that the Spanish goalie Casillas “appeared dumbfounded (...). Carbonero has been voted sexiest journalist in the world. It was her, the fans insisted, who had sapped the strength of the Spanish goalkeeper and caused him to fluff what seemed an easy shot.”<sup>112</sup> English-language media packaged the post-defeat instant interview of Carbonero with Casillas as “Goalie`s girlfriend starts the Spanish Inquisition,”<sup>113</sup> and as “Spanish Inquisition blames WAG [“wife-and-girlfriend”] after Swiss vanquish the favorites.”<sup>114</sup> The idea that a 26-year-old journalist may destabilize the World Cup performance of the

---

<sup>112</sup> London Times. <http://209.157.64.200/focus/chat/2536295/posts>

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1287280/World-Cup-2010-Sara-Carbonera-asks-boyfriend-Iker-Casillas-did-muck-up.html>

<sup>114</sup> London Times. <http://209.157.64.200/focus/chat/2536295/posts>

Spanish selection was variously deemed absurd and sexist, but that did not prevent even respectable dailies from making headlines of the story.<sup>115</sup> The image of Carbonero, standing by the sideline just behind the goal post of Casillas with a microphone in hand and looking at her boyfriend, became one of the trademark images of the World Cup.

There for 2010, the Carbonero-Casillas couple seemed as perfect as it could get—until the Colombian singer Shakira entered the Spanish soccer scene a few months later. She met Barcelona FC and Spanish selection defender Gerard Piqué at the shooting of her *Waka Waka* song for the World Cup, and the “*waka rumor*” started.

The title of her 2010 album, *She-Wolf*, reflects how she soon came to be seen in Spain: a man-eating predator. On my way to *Camp Nou* before a 2011 February game in Barcelona, the taxi driver was quick to diagnose the problem in Shakira’s relationship with Piqué. “This is not normal. She is 34, he is 24, and she is a *tigress*. Of course she *dries him out!*” “You really mean to say,” I ask him, “that a woman is capable of destabilizing the best soccer team of the world?” “Of course they can! They have destabilized entire nations!” The belief in that capacity was manifested on the terraces of stadiums wherever Barcelona FC played: the fans of opponent teams would sing Shakira songs, and displayed boards in the hope of distracting the defender’s attention.

The anticipation of failure due to a woman’s influence became a self-fulfilling prophecy: Piqué wasn’t indeed at his best. “Too much *waka waka*” was the widely believed reason for his inferior performance, and the player felt obliged to speak out

---

<sup>115</sup> For example *El Correo*, *ABC*, *BBC*.

in a press conference: “Performance does not depend on one`s private life.”<sup>116</sup> His statement provoked thousands of comments from those convinced otherwise: “It is obvious that all this distraction will take its toll on Barça. We have seen that the performance of *culés* has dropped in an undeniable manner lately.”<sup>117</sup> “The fact is that since you have been with Shakira, you have not even kicked an air ball.”<sup>118</sup> The few more sober comments were quickly dismissed: “You are talking about Shakira as though she was so innocent; with those cock tease songs she is always singing?”<sup>119</sup>

### 7.3.2 “I need to speak with my wife:” *The English WAG Culture*

Anxieties over women`s influence on British footballers have mounted since the 1950`s, when the first seeds of the WAG culture were planted by the marriage of the English captain Billy Wright to the singer Joy Beverly. The 1960`s saw the captain Bobby Moore and his wife as “the golden couple.” It was at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico that coach Sir Alf Ramsey raised the first explicit concerns about distracting significant others. At the elimination of England in the quarter finals by West Germany, the goal keeping lapses of Peter Bonetti were attributed to a turbulent relationship with his wife Francis.

The female protagonists of the 2006 World Cup were “the Baden-Baden WAGs” of the English team, whose infamous reputation as shoppers and socializers reached its zenith during the Germany-based championship. What came down in collective English memory as “the circus of Baden-Baden”<sup>120</sup> was a swarm of

---

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/3197813/Rio-Ferdinand-England-were-like-a-circus-under-former-manager-Sven-Goran-Eriksson-Football.html>

escorting wives and girlfriends “with an appetite for distraction.”<sup>121</sup> Their partying and shopping sprees had reportedly boosted the economy of the sleepy German town: “They came, they saw, they shopped, drank champagne and danced on tables. The German spa town of Baden-Baden was once famous for the restorative power of its waters and a funicular railway. Now it will always be synonymous with the WAGs of England's 2006 World Cup squad”.<sup>122</sup> Their performance, commentators noted with slight resignation, was more noteworthy than that of the English selection, which got disqualified in the quarterfinals. The acronym WAG has become part of popular culture in its own right in Britain: it has become a benchmark for behavior and lifestyle.

Coaches wish that the power of wives-and-girlfriends was restricted to popular culture. The sentence recruiters most fear upon the first interview with a potential new player is: “I need to speak with my wife.” When Roy Keane, manager of Sunderland (2007) detected a conspicuous reluctance by footballers to come to the north, he put the blame on wives that might find shopping opportunities too precarious there. “If a player doesn't want to come to Sunderland, then all well and good. But if he decides he doesn't want to come because his wife wants to go shopping in London, then it's a sad state of affairs. It tells me the player is weak and his wife runs his life.”<sup>123</sup> Keane's remarks echo the crisis of a traditional masculinity at large: the replacement of the tough, assertive athlete with the effeminate metrosexual celebrity.

---

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/international/capello-leave-the-wags-at-home-this-time-1785298.html>

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/international/capello-leave-the-wags-at-home-this-time-1785298.html>

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/aug/15/football.britishidentity>

#### 7.4 Sexless in Bilbao: The Pichichi Fantasy Model

We see a rather different way of coping with wives-and-girlfriends in the Basque Country. It is quite revealing that the most, and only well known, “WAG” in Bilbao is the wife of Pichichi, Athletic’s emblematic player from the 1920’s. One of the most famous paintings of the Basque artist Aurelio Arteta is titled *Idilio en los Campos de Sport* (1920) “Idyll in a Sports Field,” which features a sunburnt, athletic, handsome Pichichi chatting on the side of a playfield with Avelina Rodríguez Miguel, who later became his wife. Among all artistic representations related to soccer in Bilbao, of which there are many, this particular painting became most emblematic; it is displayed in a privileged spot in the club headquarters *Ibaigane* palace. It is perhaps the only image that features a player passive and outside of the playfield. Other representations show them at play, in dynamic action fighting for the ball, or lined up with their team mates. Arteta’s painting is also singular in a sense that it features a woman—as if only the transcendental genre of art was abstract enough to safely handle a reality that fans otherwise choose to ignore: beyond the field, players are surrounded by women. What the singularity of her presence in an artistic image signifies is the general absence of women in the Basque fantasy model around athletes.

In Bilbao and the Basque Country, there is a remarkable absence of eroticized fantasy around players. There is no *prensa rosa*, sensational press hunting down information about the private lives of players. Indeed, very little if anything is known, and certainly much less talked about the girlfriends and wives of football players. During my fieldwork, I saw not a single media image or photo of any woman in players’ lives (except for one exceptional case that I will discuss later); nor would people engage in the discussion of players’ private lives. Women around Athletic

players are perfectly invisible. Fans find out, if at all, about such life events as the birth of a footballer's child at games, when he dedicates his goal to the new born baby by pulling out a dummy. Weddings go unnoticed in the quiet of the summer break. When in the summer of 2010 Athletic player Fran Yeste went on vacation, the local *el Correo* published of him a photo as he was sunbathing on top of his yacht, lying naked on his stomach. The image was distant, blurred, suggestive rather than visible. Nevertheless, Bilbao was indignant and found the mere intention to take such a photo vulgar, lowly, disgraceful. Athletic players put a collective boycott on *el Correo*; they wouldn't give its journalists any interviews for several months.

There are about a hundred people in Bilbao, I am told by a journalist, who report on Athletic full time. About half of them are employed by the print media, and the other half are local radio or television talk show hosts and their assistants. "You have to fill many print pages and air hours, and your material is limited" he tells me. First, the localist philosophy creates a shortage of news. Player transfer is very rare due to recruitment that works from the club's youth academy, which makes club operation more monotonous. In spite of the news shortage and the pressure to report, there is an implicit agreement that beyond sports, players should not be covered. While they participate in various public events like the opening of fan clubs, restaurants or village fiestas—a gold mine for sports paparazzi everywhere else—they don't make the news. "It's a way of protecting them, for in Bilbao everyone wins if a player is happy." The player-journalist relationship is one of checks and balances based on mutual trust and/or inter-dependence: a player depends on the good intention of the journalists in his coverage, while the journalist's interest is not to alienate the player. Should a journalist transgress over to the side of sensationalism, they run the risk of castigation and isolation on part of players.

Just how markedly the Basque fantasy model differs from the ones I described above, suffice it to consider the player Fernando Llorente mentioned before. During his tenure in Athletic, people were remotely aware that he “had a girlfriend from San Sebastián,” that she “worked in the hospital of that town,” and that she was his long time girlfriend *de toda la vida*, “all his life.” During the 2010 world cup, Llorente’s fine contribution to the selection, and the nation-wide recognition that he was *el guapo de la selección*, “the handsome of the selection,” his girlfriend María Lorente, as we learnt her name, captured the imagination of the Spanish press, which had been busy cataloguing *las novias de la Roja*, the “girlfriends of the Red One.” She immediately became “a breath of fresh air,” the “untypical player’s girlfriend” who was professional, and “did not seek media attention.”<sup>124</sup> The fact is that in Bilbao, media attention did not seek her, either.

#### 7.4.1 *Tabooed Gazes*

“One of the things I really envy about men,” Richard Dyer quotes a friend in a now classic, 1982 article in *Screen*, “is the right to look” (1982: 61). That men could look at women freely in public places and women could look back only surreptitiously started to change in the 1980’s. It’s been twenty-five years, Rosalind Gill argues (2010), that Nick Kamen emerged on TV screens all over the UK in a retro-looking launderette, and suggestively removed his clothes to clean his Levis jeans; this move signaled a shift in visual culture whereby not only women’s, but also men’s bodies become “objects of the gaze,” rather than “bearers of the look” (Mulvey 1973). Not that men and women were looked at for the same reasons: instead of “ritualized

---

<sup>124</sup> <http://dvocion.diariovasco.com/famosos/novia-fernando-llorente-201207041307.php>

subordination” (Goffman 1979) as applied to female models (canting, knee bends, face touching, lying down etc.), the male sexual object became a “celebration of phallic power” (Gill 2010: 16).

While they may have different messages and consequences for male and female athletes, technologies of sexualization are no longer limited to women; soccer players champion the genre of “six-pack advertising,” most notably David Beckham in 2008 and Cristiano Ronaldo in 2010, who gained notoriety for their traffic-stopping Armani underwear street posters. The erotic fantasy emerging around male athletes and their wives-and-girlfriends is, too, a technology of sexualization—or “technology of heterosexualization.” Both Beckham and Ronaldo may become an icon in gay communities for the feminine postures of the Armani commercials, the erotic fantasies around their private lives as nourished by the media makes sure they never cross a line, and remain within the boundaries of what Adrienne Rich called “compulsory heterosexuality” (1986). As athletes turn into global celebrities, sports become the most common source of contemporary male imagery, and what Giardina calls “stylish hybridity:” “performative representations of hyphenated persons and cultures occupying leading spaces in mainstream media” (2003: 67).

Not in the Basque Country. There is considerable unease or mere amusement with footballers subjected to the erotic gaze. In February 2013 before the Basque derby between Athletic Club and Real Sociedad, a San Sebastián based photographer opened an exhibition of eroticized images of soccer players from the two clubs in order to “heat up” the atmosphere before the game. Public reaction and interest were quite lukewarm. The black and white professional photography showed the players with erotic body language, seductive or amorous gaze, half-naked, underwear flashing, and beach wet. Bilbainos` reaction was dismissive; the meticulously

“manscaped,” shaven bodies, the strategically positioned lights and camera foci, and the mere fact that footballers should engage in modeling transmitted a metrosexual narcissism that was incongruent with the fantasy of what a Basque soccer player should be: simple, honest, unassuming, humble *aldeano* [peasant].

In the painting “Idyll in a Sport Fields,” Pichichi transmits the fantasy of the soccer player as *aldeano*. Informants of mine described his image as “typically Basque,” featuring a large nose and ears, thin lips, protruding head, muscular neck and a robust constitution. But more importantly, the footballer was set in a rural setting, against the backdrop of the rolling green hills typical of Gipuzkoa, the province where most farming takes place. And while his girlfriend’s clothes and shoes reveal her middle or upper class background, the background situates them within a romantic rural imaginary.

Despite the fact that Bilbao has historically been an urban, industrial capitalist center open to considerable global flows; that Pichichi was from an urban bourgeois-intellectual family, and many of the 1950’s *once aldeanos* [“eleven peasants”] lived in the grand boulevard of Bilbao; and that players today cash in million euro salaries, there reigns a fantasy that the Athletic player is the modest, reserved, down-to-earth boy next door; that Athletic is just a simple, local club; and that Bilbao is just a *villa*, a small town. The perpetuation of the myth of the *once aldeanos*, crystallized in the 1950’s, shows that fantasy ignores temporality. Even today, a fan tells me, “whenever Athletic wins against Madrid, I tell my friends, see, this is how eleven berets win against eleven internationals!” The fantasy of smallness, of modesty is just as “real” as the reality of Bilbao’s excesses, even if they stand in apparent contradiction: rural simplicity against rampant capitalism, global embeddedness and Bilbaino ambitions.

Elevating the players to the level of celebrities violates the fantasy of simplicity. A reader's comment reminisced about soccer players of the past who by all accounts better fitted *aldeano* masculinity through their robust, forceful, noble play and the fact that they never posed for photographers other than during the pre-game line up. What the images transmitted was not just a foreign ideal of masculinity. The glamorization of the players violated an egalitarian ethos. It reminded fans that their footballers are becoming increasingly distant from them not only in terms of financial and social status, but erotic capital as well.

The erotic gaze may feel improper for yet another reason: the application of technologies of sexualization to Athletic players takes place in a context that is conceptualized as a kinship relation. *Athletic, gorri ta zuria*/ "Red and white Athletic," *Danontzat zara zu geuria*"/ For all of us you are very ours/ *Erritik sortu zĩnalako*/ "You were born from the people" / *Maitte zaitu erriak* / "The people love you." Athletic is a framework of symbolic familiar relationships. Footballers are considered, and consider themselves "sons" of a larger "red and white family." Fans have seen their players grow up and go through phases of childhood and adolescence; they have seen their happiest and most vulnerable moments; they have seen them cry like babies. We could argue that there exists a loose structure of what anthropologists call a classificatory kinship system of relationships, whereby the terms "father," "mother" and "son" refer not just to actual fathers, mothers and sons, but to all those who could have been, in theory, fathers, mothers and sons without violation of relationship rules. Given that symbolic consanguinity, the un-interest, and even annoyance with seeing their "sons" in erotic, sexualized poses is that of the parent's aversion to the sexualization of their children. For a parent, the child is perpetually infantile—a comment to the "sixpack" photography remarked that "all Munian's [one

of the players] photo was missing was a dummy.” Sons should not be the objects of parents’ erotic gaze, or else there emerges a semblance of what Freud calls “the horror of incest” (1950/1999).

Different cultural models have different fantasies about the sexuality of cultural protagonists. In the Basque fantasy model, Begoña Aretxaga (2005) argues that ETA militancy was incongruous with parenthood: in the framework of symbolic familiar relationships, the militant is son of *amaberria* or *aberria*, Basque motherland, and becomes a brother in the ritual context. Misfits are punished. Yoyes, the first woman to rise to leadership position in the organization, was assassinated by ETA itself after leaving it. “Yoyes was everything that,” Aretxaga writes, “from the cultural premises embedded in nationalist practice, a woman could not be. Moreover, Yoyes was a mother. In the nationalist context, the models of hero, traitor or martyr and the model of the mother are usually exclusive” (2005: 158). Motherhood implies erotic life and allegiances that exclude total devotion to the cause; the ETA militant is not supposed to be an eroticized subject, a logic that generally characterizes military combat cultures.

“What do you think when you look at a player’s body?” I ask a friend as we are watching a game in *Bar Madariaga* of the old part of Bilbao. “Do you find them aesthetic?” And the answer, pointing at Fernando Llorente: “What do I think when I look at his body? I think that this son-of-a-\* wears the Spanish selection jersey every other month.” The denial of the footballer’s sex life, the aversion to his body as object of the erotic gaze, and the reduction of that body to the representation of ideas reveals a fantasy of him as a liminal subject. The footballer is divorced from society through a rite of separation: he is trained and educated in the homosocial culture of the youth academy, which structures his everyday life. Within the ritual framework, the player

is stripped from his identity as parent, boyfriend, husband or lover. He is reduced to a transcendental task: to defend and represent ideals and values.

#### 7.4.2 *The Passion for Ignorance*

One day as we were watching a game in a bar, I asked an Athletic fan: “Why aren’t people interested here in the lives of soccer players? They are so much part of the society, they are friends, family, neighbor, and yet no one is interested in their lives.” I felt this was a legitimate question as people take great interest in the lives of their friends, family and acquaintances. As it is typical of close knit micro-communities with a high level of social control, information travels freely especially within the most familiar cycles such as the family or the *cuadrilla*. To my question about interest in players’ life, my friend responded: “I don’t want to know! I worry enough because of them, I certainly don’t need to know more about how they spend their time” (J. U. personal communication 2011 March).

Besides love and hate, Lacan suggests, there is a passion for ignorance. The passion for ignorance is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information: it is a “psychic power which urges patients to prefer the deleterious status quo of their symptomatic condition over the even more painful encounter with that which caused it” (Nobus 2002: 24). The passion for ignorance in turn allows the subject to unconsciously enjoy his syndrome, or to suffer it less than they would otherwise. What is exactly being “risked” by knowing?

### **7.5 The Scandal of Seduction**

The demonization of women as “dangerous” and “destabilizing” reflects anxieties over the loss of what Michael Kimmel would call a “masculinist” cultural order. Such

orders, he argues, serve “to restore manly vigor (...) by prompting separate homosocial preserves where men can be men without female interference” (2005: 21). For the longest time of its history, sports have been a sphere where “men were men, and women were trespassers” (Griffin 1998: 15).

Sports are an economy of production: the production of goals, of points, of victories, which in turn translate into real capital. The multi-billion business of men`s sports is predicated on the score. The productive, competitive aspect of organized sports has to do with the socio-economic context in which they were born: nineteenth century capitalism. In Victorian England, play was not considered an autotelic activity: rather than playing for play`s sake, games were used as a device of socialization, as a tool of implanting values. The Victorian values of the gentleman, the Darwinist undertones of capitalism and industrial mass production produced an ideal type of the male that still resonates in male athletes today: he is physical, courageous, cooperative, aggressive, competitive and, most importantly, focused on scoring, on winning—on production.

Industrial capitalism was fascinated with machinery and anxious over the limits of fuel, of energy that moves it. This mechanistic view was reflected in Victorian conceptions of the body: in the “spermatic economy,” or the “conservation of energy” principle (Mangan and Parks 1987; Burstyn 1999, Messner 1992). According to these related views, the body possessed a limited, finite pool of energies which were not to be wasted on trivial pursuits. What was considered as trivial pursuit, however, differed for men and for women: for men, it was masturbation, for women, it was education. The mandate of the “spermatic economy” was that men were to preserve their sexual energies for reproduction, and not to waste it through masturbation. Women were to put their energies in the service of reproduction as

well, albeit differently: they had to restrain from excessive education as it subtracted energies from the development of their reproductive organs. Sports were believed to expand one`s pools of energy: Victorian England included exercise in its curriculum for its regenerative powers for both sexes.

Potency and production therefore came to occupy the same cognitive domain: the Victorian body economy and capitalism secured an intimate link between sports, sex, production and re-production. That link remains strong today, while their relation has changed. Sports are no longer put in the service of (re-)production; they *are* production—the production of victories, of capital. Sex, in turn, is no longer the ultimate goal that sports serve; on the contrary, sex is the “trivial pursuit” that drains energies from the production of goals.

The danger of women lies in their presumed capacity to drain male energies through sex. For the male subject, the sex act with the *femme fatale* becomes a “moment of abandon (...), a loss of self-awareness (...) in the *petite morte* of orgasm” (Allen 1983: 2). Praz in his *Romantic Agony* referred to the “cannibalistic” aspect of the *femme fatale* who “devours in the morning the lovers who have spent the night with her” (Allen 1983: 9). Through the sex act, she drains men of their semen; through the allegorical sex act, she drains them of vital powers associated with the phallogocentric universe. In psychoanalytic terms, the *femme fatale* poses castration anxiety: she is “an articulation of fears surrounding the loss of stability and centrality of the self, the “I,” the ego” (Doane 1991: 2). She de-centers the certainties of the ego and thrives on the elusive drives of the id. The image of the New Testament *femme fatale*, Salome, holding the head of John the Baptist, whose death was attributed to her eroticism, is one of the most widely reproduced testimonies of the preoccupation with the castrating woman. Dozens of visual arts representations depict her as owning

the “centrality of the self, the ‘I,’ the ego” of John the Baptist, symbolized by his head.

The sex of woman is therefore tantamount to the loss of vital energies—to symbolic castration. Anxieties over the weakening effects of sex abound in the world of men`s sports, and they resonate with the Victorian spermatic economy. “If you love your champion, go easy on the love-making” manager Loucien Roupp told the French singer Edith Piaf, who was lover of the *pied noir* boxer Marcel Cerdan. “It slows him up, and [he needs to be] very quick on his feet... When he eats with you, watch his diet. And he (...) has to sleep like a child, ten hours a night” (Berteaut 1970: 266). Roupp juxtaposed sex as a source of energy loss to eating and sleeping, the main sources of energy gain for the athlete. More recently, a Barcelona soccer fan expressed his worries over Piqué having sex with Shakira in terms of the same economy: “Instead of burning his energies on the football field, he burns them with her...”<sup>125</sup> When Sara Carbonero had breast implants in November 2010, Madrid fans got concerned that the goalie “Casillas has now two more balls to take care of.”<sup>126</sup> When the Brazilian selection was eliminated in the quarter-finals of the 2006 Soccer World Cup, star player Ronaldhino was deemed to be “too busy scoring on her girlfriend to score for Brazil.”<sup>127</sup> Castration anxieties over the female gaze were remarkable in the Lisa Olson sexual harassment case in the Patriots` locker room in 1990. Six months after the locker room incident, Miami Dolphins wide receiver Mark Clayton invoked her presence, saying to male reporters in the locker room: “Close the door and keep Lisa Olson outside! Keep that dick-watching bitch outside” (Disch and Kane 1996: 279), as if watching was tantamount to possessing the penis.

<sup>125</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/883060/2/sara/carbonero/pecho/>

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20060725/1653232.shtml>

Her sex is deemed so powerful that it needs to be pathologized. In Baudrillard's analysis, seduction is juxtaposed with "truth" because it connotes a deviation from truth, a strategy of displacement: the Latin *se-ducere* means to "take aside," to "divert from one's path" (Baudrillard 1979: 21). That a woman should divert a footballer from his path, from his "truth" of producing goals, causes a scandal. "Me de-stabilizing the World Cup?" said Sara Carbonero incredulously. "I don't think I have such powers."<sup>128</sup> The thought of such powers scandalizes the homosocial combat culture of sports because it implies the triumph of her "surface" over his "depth," the power of her "non-sense" over his "meaning." Seduction is a self-professed play of surfaces, a triumphant parody of depth; it's a solution by excess. Men's sports are taken with portentous seriousness; "deep play" (Geertz 1973) is now threatened by the "empty" sign, the surface of the *femme fatale*. Compared to the "serious" business of goal making, she offers no "truth" whatsoever. And yet, she is seen as having the power to threaten to dissemble, to render invisible the visibility of production. She challenges the "natural" order: she replaces the order of production, of male sociality, for the order of seduction, an erotic universe. Seduction, Baudrillard argues, "is never an investment, but a risk; never a contract but a pact; never natural but artificial. It is no one's strategy, but a destiny" (Baudrillard 1979: 83). *Femme fatales* are seen to embody that destiny through their pact with the devil, canceling the productive investments, the contracts and strategies of elite male competition.

---

<sup>128</sup> <http://blogcommon.com/the-times-points-to-sara-carbonero-as-guilty-of-suicidio-by-the-red>

### 7.5.1 *A Little Learning is a Dangerous Thing: Excessive Pillow Talk*

The *femme fatale* is considered to pose a special danger if *she knows too much*, if she subtracts male knowledge—or if she *contaminates* it with her own. A cultural archetype of the woman who leads man into destruction is Eve who, by flashing the prospect of knowledge, of self-awareness, causes Adam to fall from grace. The *cortigiane oneste*, or “honest courtesan” of the Renaissance relied on the combined power of her sensuality and knowledge of politics, economics, music, literature and the fine arts. By becoming the confidant to powerful men, she often had a direct influence on politics. Women of knowledge in the orbit of male power, however, have been suspect at best, and persecuted at worst, as the stories of Madame de Pompadour, Veronica Franco or Marilyn Monroe attest. The fatality of “dangerous woman” is further pathologized through her possession of knowledge she acquires through (self)education—and pillow talk.

That women should know too much is seen as dangerous for the camaraderie and the fraternity of combat sports. Only a month after the 2010 soccer world cup, Sara Carbonero “once again showed great Yoko Ono potential.”<sup>129</sup> She called Cristiano Ronaldo—one of the most prolific forwards of the Spanish *Liga* and companion to Carbonero’s boyfriend, Iker Casillas in Real Madrid—“selfish and individualist” on the popular day time chat show *Ana Rosa*. Her remarks were reported to have aggravated the relationship between the goalkeeper and the forward to the point of barely talking to each other—a hostility that was considered to affect performance on the soccer field. Carbonero went out of her way to straighten the record, claiming that she meant her remarks “in a good way,” and that Ronaldo’s

---

<sup>129</sup><http://www.theoffside.com/leagues/spain-la-liga/sara-carbonero-showing-great-yoko-ono-potential.html>

egoism “is a good quality in him, not a bad one.”<sup>130</sup> Later on, when questions over Ronaldo’s psychological condition emerged, she hurried to dispel anxieties: “Nothing is happening to him, he is not depressed, he has not consulted a psychologist as has been said in recent days.”<sup>131</sup> Her comments, however, added insult to injury: such insiders’ knowledge can only have resulted from “pillow talk,” fans concluded, which might just “prove too dangerous” for Real Madrid.<sup>132</sup> Once the relationship between the Real Madrid locker room and coach Mourinho deteriorated by early 2013, Sara Carbonero announced under accumulating pressure that she was going to retire from journalism.

#### 7.5.2 “*Women Stay Out!*” *Gender Trouble in the Locker Room*

The men’s locker room epitomizes the last “sacred” place where a man is to find his manhood, which is why the 1978 Federal Court ruling allowing female reporters to enter the locker room still provokes vicious conflicts. The female journalist deployed in the male sports is seen as a special danger: her job is to elicit information. She is trained, certified and endowed with the right to do just that: to enter the locker room and penetrate the secrets of male performance. That is seen as threatening. When Lisa Olson of the *Boston Herald* was sexually assaulted in the locker room of the New England Patriots football team, she was variously portrayed as a “looker,” a classic “bitch” (Kiam in Disch and Kane 1996: 278) who posed a threat to the integrity of the locker room.

---

<sup>130</sup> <http://www.realmadridzone.com/sara-carbonero-cristiano-ronaldo-context/4175>

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.theoffside.com/leagues/spain-la-liga/sara-carbonero-showing-great-yoko-ono-potential.html>

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.theoffside.com/leagues/spain-la-liga/sara-carbonero-showing-great-yoko-ono-potential.html>

A 2010 gender trouble in the locker room concerned Inez Sainz of *TV Azteca*. Sainz routinely makes lists of “Ten sexiest journalists ever” or “most distracting side line reporters.” The white top and tight blue jeans that she wore provoked cat calls in the Jets locker room—an attire millions of young women wear on a night out and even at school. Her eroticized surfaces were deemed inappropriate. “You have to dress the part,” *Daily Beast* reporter Lauren Streib commented. “I think when it becomes distracting, then you question, ‘Is she dressed appropriately?’”<sup>133</sup> Arizona Cardinals defensive player Darnell Dockett offered the following remarks on twitter: “She walks into a locker room full of men and thinks someone not gonna say nothing (...) you just have to know you are going into a TEAM LOCKEROOM, and it`s that serious, WOMEN STAY OUT!” He posted a picture of Sainz, and asked: “Now why would you wear this!!!”<sup>134</sup>

Sainz, on her part, insisted on Marilyn Monroe`s defiance: “Why not?” If society conceptualizes a locker room in terms of hyper-masculinity (Messner and Sabo 1994), what is wrong with her hyper-femininity as defined by the same society? “I don`t pay attention,” she responded, “It`s my style for all my life.”<sup>135</sup> For Sainz, like for Monroe, her eroticism was not a problem, while it was for everybody else: “It wouldn`t be as big of a deal if she wasn`t so beautiful,” a CBS News commentator remarked.<sup>136</sup> Sainz debunked the sexism of sports broadcasting by implying that if it wasn`t for her eroticized surfaces, she wouldn`t be able to do the job she is doing to

---

<sup>133</sup> [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083\\_162-20016527-504083.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-20016527-504083.html)

<sup>134</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/15/darnell-dockett-inez-sainz\\_n\\_716793.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/15/darnell-dockett-inez-sainz_n_716793.html)

<sup>135</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinehoward/2010/09/15/inez-sainz-isnt-upset-so-why-is-everyone-else/>

<sup>136</sup> [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083\\_162-20016527-504083.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-20016527-504083.html)

begin with: “My feeling is that if you are a sexy, attractive female that can use your looks, figure, attire or sexy attitude to do your job better, *do what you need to do*.”<sup>137</sup>

Despite anxieties, female journalists are a desired asset in the male sports watching ritual. “As men, we don't ask for a lot. We want our beers to be cold, our seats to be comfortable, our wings to be hot, and our sports brought to us by beautiful women.”<sup>138</sup> The figure of the attractive female newscaster in the locker room is a sharp condensation of women in male sports into a single image: she is excess, a surplus in the closed, deep space of men`s sports.

## 7.6 From the “*Locked Room*” to the “*Locker Room*” Paradox

In her discussion of the logic of detective stories, Jean Copjec quotes an interview with Francois Truffaut, where Alfred Hitchcock describes a scene he planned to include in *North by Northwest*:

I wanted to have a long dialogue between Cary Grant and one of the factory workers [at a Ford automobile plant] as they walk along the assembly line. They might, for instance, be talking about one of the foremen. Behind them a car is being assembled, piece by piece. Finally, the car they`ve seen being put together from a single nut and bolt is complete, with gas and oil, and all ready to drive off the line. The two men look at each other and say, ‘Isn`t it wonderful!’ They open the door to the car and out drops a corpse” (in Copjec 1994: 170).

The dead body dropping from a car that has just rolled off the conveyor belt is what Copjec calls the “locked-room paradox.” What`s that corpse doing there? Where did it

---

<sup>137</sup> My cursive. <http://mediarow.com/2010/09/ines-sainz-statuesque-and-intelligent/>

<sup>138</sup> <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/221621-the-15-sexiest-sports-reporters-of-2009>

come from? If the entire process of car production is transparent and its space is sealed, how is it possible for a corpse to be extracted from it? The corpse points at a surplus element in the set of signifiers: a surplus element that allows the corpse to be extracted from a sealed space.

“Dangerous women” in men’s sports, embody the surplus, the “dead corpse” that haunts the symbolic structure. They emerge in the deep space of male locker rooms, press conference rooms, chat rooms and television studios, and prompt the same question as the corpse in the detective story: how did she get there? They turn the “*locked*-room” into a “*locker*-room” paradox: What is she doing there? Where has she come from? “What now?” For the purposes of the detective story, the surplus of the dead body comes to constitute the narrated world and the group of suspects; without the surplus, they would cease to exist. Women in men’s sports have the same paradoxical function: they are a supplementary element that is added to the series of signifiers in order for the series to gain meaning.<sup>139</sup>

That series of signifiers, the iconography of athleticism and masculinity condenses traits that, at one or several points of history, have defined man. The athlete-man is the chivalrous knight, the Victorian man of principles, the exemplary leader, the defender of the Cause. He is the hunter seeking the weak points of his prey in an attempt to shoot and devour it. He is the warrior who defends his flag, who gives it all for his country. He is the sailor, the vagabond, the playboy and the rugged individual whose freedom and adventures we savor vicariously. He is the gambler

---

<sup>139</sup> In formal terms the paradox is the one studied by Frege regarding set theory (the categories of counting create the very objects in the sets). For counting to be possible in such theory, the set of “not-identical-to-itself,” under which zero objects are subsumed, must be registered. Copjec shows that the detective paradox of the locked room is formally the equivalent of this Fregean principle of zero as a condition for counting. The female journalist’s “crime”—her zero and her “appearance” out of nowhere—is registered in the ground zero of desire of an all-male locker room.

who has the luxury to obsess over luck, to put everything at risk, to play with his own and his community's subjectivity without real consequences. Male athlete subjectivity has been translated in terms of these metaphors; to secure itself, this narrative needs a female "Other" who interacts with it. She thus becomes the destabilizing Helen of Troy, with a capacity to distract the male subject from his Cause; the muse and high priestess that inspires and seals the Cause with a kiss; the prey, the ultimate score of the hunter; the prostitute, the illicit pleasure of the sailor and the warrior in ports and posts away from home; she is Chance, unfathomable fatefulness for the gambler. Her presence in the male symbolic narrative serves to let him reposition himself again "within the texture of his symbolic fate" (Žižek 2001, 169), within the mandates of male combat sociality. At the level of the symbolic, therefore, it is only apparent that women should destabilize the heterosexual matrix; rather, they serve to strengthen it.

Woman's sub-narrative in what psychoanalysis calls the Symbolic order becomes the protagonist in the order of the Real: the order of trauma, anxiety and impossibility. Sara Carbonero, the English WAGs and Shakira become part of a "production of a couple" (Žižek 2008, xvii) motif that frames Hollywood narratives about wars or natural catastrophes. In these movies, the sub-narrative of the "production of the couple" provides surplus-enjoyment even more than the main narrative. It even overshadows the main narrative: as if in *Reds*, the grand historic event of October Revolution served to reunite the lovers. Similarly, the male sports media complex features the "production of the couple" motif as a sub-narrative to the grand narrative of sports production. But at the order of fantasy, the kiss of the "dangerous woman" is celebrated as the most important score of the athlete, as if winning world cup titles was a mere footnote to the main Event: "Without a doubt, this is the kiss of patience and fair play, of team work and sportsmanship. Two

persons that had to face a battalion of abrasive gazes, stupid and hurtful comments, have won the most beautiful of battles: that of maturity, humility and love,”<sup>140</sup> so goes a comment on the Casillas-Carbonero kiss. Pique`s conquest of Shakira was celebrated as the culmination of his career: “What else is left for you, Pique? World Champion, League, Champions League, King`s Cup, Super Cup champion, and SHAKIRA... what a record!”<sup>141</sup> Others argued that “this is more important than the World Cup,”<sup>142</sup> and “the *waka waka* is the best thing that can happen to anyone.”<sup>143</sup>

### 7.7 The Fantasy and its Disavowal

“Dangerous women” disturb the system of symbolic representation of men`s sports by generating an elusive fantasy world of drives and desires. Any system of representation, Rose Jacqueline argues, is a “not all;” they have a point of impossibility. That impossibility is its other face that the system seeks to refuse, to the point that the system becomes a function of what it is attempting to evade. Woman, Rose (1986: 219) argues, finds herself placed in this process. She becomes the impossibility that the system seeks to refuse through which she guarantees the system. Woman around elite male athletes is presented “precisely as what he is not, that is, sexual difference, and [...] what he has to renounce, that is, *jouissance*” (Lacan quoted by Rose, 1996: 219). In sports as a masculinist system of representation, woman means two things: what he is not (difference), and what he has to give up (sexual excess).

---

<sup>140</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl7WDe9KGSw>

<sup>141</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.marca.com/2011/03/03/futbol/equipos/barcelona/1299158366.html>

That the system seeks to refute its impossible other face (woman) is evidenced by an economy of what Henry Krips calls the “fetishistic disavowal” (1999: 29). It is very much aware of its priorities, of its object of desire—goals and victories—but it can’t seem to get around another object of desire--woman. The fantasy of woman is repeatedly disavowed, but never abandoned: “I know it’s only a woman, a kiss... and *yet...* I know... but *even so...*” This economy is detectable in the way fans and the media handle the over-presence of women. Whenever a “dangerous woman” appears, a certain dynamics follows: the denial of her importance, and a concomitant incapacity to reject her fantasy. “Why do I have to read about Shakira on the front page of *Marca*?<sup>144</sup> I thought this was a sports daily,” sports fans would complain. At the same time, news on Shakira and Sara Carbonero rank among the top three most read news items—beating politics, economics and other serious topics. “While the news still reverberate around the world, I will say the following:” and online commentator states: “*It is not my business. Shakira and Piqué (...) do not need the prying eyes of certain journalists and writers who write about relationships.*”<sup>145</sup> The same commentator then keeps the thread of his article open and obsesses over the story for another seven months.

Fans *know* this news is too sensational for the serious business of scoring goals; and *yet, even so*, they cannot withdraw from the excess of her imaginary. As Judith Butler argues on account of the prohibition of pornography, “certain kinds of efforts to (...) reign the imaginary, control the phantasmatic, end up reproducing and proliferating the phantasmatic in inadvertent ways (...) always and only leading to its production” (1990b: 108). The economy of fetishistic disavowal is just such an effort,

---

<sup>144</sup> A Spanish sports daily mostly covering soccer.

<sup>145</sup> <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/575477-gerard-pique-and-shakira-are-they-crazy-about-each-other>

causing the symbolic structure to produce an erotic imaginary to fill its own lack. There is a sense in which the football fan, like MacCannell's tourist, is "suspended between the unconscious and the symbolic" (2011: 58): the unconscious drives and desires eroticism implies, and the obliging symbolic edifice of sports embodiment and production. It is almost impossible to move outside of the symbolic; and yet there are moments where some event like a kiss, unexpectedly and shockingly, forces us to see through the symbolic and get a glimpse of its beyond.

## Chapter Eight

### A Matter of Balls: Women and Soccer in the Spanish Basque Context

It was expected that there would be more than usual turnout to cheer the *neskak*, “the girls” to their first title as Athletic Club’s women’s team. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2003, Bilbao’s citizens dressed in *rojiblanco*, red and white, with its centenarian routine of cheering soccer: bars, shop windows and balconies displayed their Athletic flags, people wore their Athletic jerseys. The stadium maintenance facilities calculated that opening the principal and the side tribunes for the spectators would be sufficient. But as the hour of kickoff approached, the lines by the ticket counters were only growing. They had to open one more gate, and then another, and finally the whole stadium—a field where only men had played since it was built in 1913. With each red-and white body emerging at the gates, Athletic fans were opening the deep space of a centenarian male ritual to women.

By the time the Athletic hymn started, San Mamés—one of Spain’s most historic stadiums—had filled. Thirty five-thousand Basques were singing and absorbing the historic spectacle of female footballers emerging from the tunnel. The lyrics of the hymn was slightly out of touch (“*Aupa mutilak! aurrera gure gaztiak!/Let’s go boys/Let’s go our youth*”), and the names on fan jerseys matched none of the ones the loudspeaker announced; women were given a male footballer’s welcome. Stupefaction reigned among the visiting team members of Híspalis as they stepped on the playfield: the terraces were bursting with desire for goals scored by women.

“Twenty-first century Spain. You are born a woman, and you can become whatever you want: you can be a hunter pilot, a marine captain, a minister—but can

you become a soccer player?”<sup>146</sup> The question of a 2010 documentary on women’s soccer titled *Cuestión de Pelotas* (“A Question of Balls”) is rhetorical. That year, the film argues, women were still not granted professional status by the Spanish Football Federation: they were unable by decree to make a living as a footballer even if their clubs were willing to pay them. In Spain, where men’s soccer constitutes the “hegemonic sports culture” (Markovits and Hellerman 2004: 14), and male players make on average 600.000 euros a season in the first division, women’s soccer is thwarted with institutional inequalities, social stigmatization and financial humiliation. As of 2012, the *best* female players earn semi-legal minimum wage-like benefits of about 10.000 euros a season—sixty times less than the *average* male footballer.

The Bilbao game was celebrated as making sports history: it was “a milestone for Basque women’s soccer,”<sup>147</sup> it turned women’s play “into a sport of mass spectatorship,”<sup>148</sup> it “conquered fans.”<sup>149</sup> The prospect that women’s soccer can do the impossible sent new energies through the frustrated ranks of this sport. Athletic coach Iñigo Juaristi said that the turnout in Bilbao “should be a wakeup call for the Spanish Football Federation to take women’s soccer seriously.”<sup>150</sup> La Puebla coach Isidro Galiot said that *Bilbainos* “set the standards very high,” and contributed to the overall development of women’s soccer in Spain.<sup>151</sup> Híspalis coach Sebastián Borrás hoped that this was just the beginning of a new epoch in women’s sport: “I would like everyone in Europe to see what Athletic has achieved. I would like this not to stop

---

<sup>146</sup> Documentary *Cuestión de Pelotas* 2010. <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20101014/documentos-tv-cuestion-pelotas/361944.shtml>.

<sup>147</sup> El Correo, March 25, 2003.

<sup>148</sup> El Correo, March 31, 2003.

<sup>149</sup> EL Correo, April 28, 2003.

<sup>150</sup> El Correo, March 31, 2003.

<sup>151</sup> El Correo, March 31, 2003.

here.”<sup>152</sup> Athletic Club women`s soccer responsible Fermín Palomar spent that month responding to a flood of phone calls and messages. “They want to know how we managed to attract 35 000 persons for women`s soccer. I myself had to breathe deep not to break out in tears.”<sup>153</sup>

Bilbao turned women`s soccer into an Event. But how did they get there, what happened afterwards, and what are the everyday realities of this sport in the reigning empire of men`s soccer, Spain? How have women penetrated this last bulwark of male sociality? This chapter provides a case study of female leadership and initiative against the masculine backdrop of Spanish soccer. Through select revelatory incidents I will address symbolic and institutional inequalities; female protagonism and agency in a men`s world; the construction of female athletes` bodies through technologies of sexualization (Hargreaves 1994) and de-feminization (Griffin 1998, Roth and Basow 2004); the policing of gender and gender appropriate behavior (Wolf 1991, Messner 1992); the construction of gendered spaces in the Spanish Basque context (Valle 1998, Bullen 2003), and the public performance of masculinities in the Spanish context (Brandes 1985, Gilmore 1990); the privileging of male success, and the hystericisation of the female footballer. I will address these issues through three decisive periods for women in Bilbao`s soccer: the controversy over a decree that excluded women from Athletic Club membership until the 1970`s; the reception and experiences of the first woman in leadership position as board member and Club President in the 1990`s; and the establishment of the women`s soccer program in the 2000`s.

---

<sup>152</sup> El Correo, April 28, 2003.

<sup>153</sup> El Correo, April 29, 2003.

### 8.1 *Con Dos Cojones*, “With Two Balls”: Gendering Action and Initiative in the Spanish Basque Country

There is in Spain an unabashedly masculine metaphor for courageous behavior: acting *con dos cojones*, “with two balls.” Basques take great delight in casting stereotypes by birth place: Bilbainos are known for their *bilbainada*: a narcissism that is versed and sung to praise the greatness of Bilbao and its residents. Occasionally, you can see all-male groups in front of the bars of the *Casco Viejo*, the old part of town, forming circles and singing *bilbainadas* with glasses of wine in their hands. The *bilbainada* is verse, song, and attitude; it is a celebration of Bilbainos` hyperbolic ambitions and larger-than-life goals, nourished by self-confidence and boldness.

Historically, Bilbao thrived on a spirit of adventure and risk taking, on engaging in extravagant projects. Its deep-sea fishermen venturing to Newfoundland, its capitalists making Bilbao a center of the Industrial Revolution reflect a deeply entrepreneurial spirit—a spirit that also brought the first soccer balls to the peninsula on board of British commercial ships. But perhaps nothing compares to the boldness it took to throw the industry away, and invite the Guggenheim Foundation to erect a museum. Bilbao went through a series of urban renewal projects that saved it from post-Fordist demise. “Did anyone doubt we would win?” Bilbainos commented. *Con dos cojones, que somos de Bilbao*, “With two balls, because we are from Bilbao” is a recurrent phrase they use as they launch extravagant, daring, risky ambitions.

Balls as a metaphor for masculine initiative is reinforced by soccer discourse: “scoring” is believed to be a masculine affair, as is suggested by the Spanish expression *casarse por penalti*, “to get married by a penalty kick.” Two persons are said to get married by a penalty kick when they do so because the man impregnated

the woman, whereby the sure score of the penalty kick stands for the male act of impregnation.

Another linguistic manifestation of risk-taking masculinity is the call for betting: *que no hay cojones!* “There are no balls!” is a challenge that no one who is “good at being a man” (Gilmore 1990, 36) turns down. Among the Basques, betting was traditionally a male practice in competitive contexts: male sports such as Basque pelota, rowing, and rural sports like stone-lifting, wood cutting and cattle herding thrived on male audiences` fondness for betting.

“Balls” have been a central metaphor for initiative, success, adventure and agency in Spain and in Bilbao, and soccer remains a homosocial realm that equates “scoring” with male action. Women`s entrance in soccer is a dislocating experience: it confounds that equation. I will now turn more specifically to how women entered and affected the world of soccer as three kinds of agents: club members, leaders and players.

## **8.2 Edurne Salsamendi`s Letter: the “Female Apartheid” of Soccer Fandom in Franco`s Spain**

“In 1972 there were openings for club membership. Since there were a lot of applicants, they set up an order of priority. Your chances depended on how long your father had been a member—and you had to be male. I had no chance. That`s when I wrote that letter” (personal communication February 2011). Edurne Salsamendi, a young and fervent supporter of Athletic, challenged Article 17 of the Statutes of Athletic Club: the article stipulating that only the male descendents of male members

can gain membership and voting rights. Her letter published in the local *Gaceta del Norte* provoked a noisy debate on the “female apartheid” of soccer fandom.<sup>154</sup>

As mere spectators, women have always been present on the terraces of Spanish stadiums; there was a sense in which the female gaze was desirable. The press description of early twentieth century games often ended like this: “The turnout was great, including elegant dames from the courtly society” (Terrachet 1998, 31). Women’s presence at soccer games, while it lagged behind that of men, has not been particularly subversive. This is not to say that women were welcome in a participatory capacity. They could be *abonadas*, “subscribers,” which meant they paid a fee and had a seat reserved in San Mamés. Women could not, however, be members with voting privileges and the right to run for office. Athletic Bilbao is a club “owned” and governed by its 35, 000 members who debate at the general assemblies, vote at the presidential elections, and run for office. In 1972, all 35 000 members were male by institutional legislation.

For four or five weeks after the publication of Edurne Salsamendi’s letter, the *Gaceta del Norte* received hundreds of letters in response. While the majority agreed with women’s membership, many took conservative positions. Opponents proposed two major arguments: tradition, and gender specific proper behavior. “Tradition is the most important thing in a country,” they argued, and saw no reason why it should be changed “when it works and has worked for so long.”<sup>155</sup> The argument of tradition is a popular one in the Basque Country where stylized, ritualized interaction and performance abound. When local pride and identity is defined through the

---

<sup>154</sup> El Gaceta del Norte April 23, 1972.

<sup>155</sup> El Gaceta del Norte, April 23, 1972.

maintenance of traditional practices for hundred-plus years, the smallest change to those practices meets staunch opposition (Del Valle 1998, Bullen 2003). For many, male-only membership in Athletic was a sacred centenarian tradition.

But more than the maintenance of tradition, what worried opponents was the “derangement of woman:” the transgression of gendered roles and behavior.

These *mujeres lanzadas* [‘forward women’] (...), revolutionaries, want to enter everywhere, smoke and debate and swear in the assemblies and board meetings of Athletic Club... to what end? Men`s things for men, and women`s things for women. These ‘forward women’ want to get out of place: they don`t like sacrifice to the hearth and ... they are looking for an easy way out.<sup>156</sup>

Another woman also argued for the compartmentalization of male and female space and behavior, which Michael Messner (1992) would call the policing of gender, and Naomi Wolf (1991) the control of woman through prescribing behavior:

Have you seen, dear woman fans, a more unpleasant sight than women yelling like lunatics at a game, swearing left and right, lose composure and argue over a play or referee decision? You ask, this is what men do and why don`t us, if we have the same rights? But ... is the effect the same? No, definitely no! What would your boyfriend or husband say, or your children, if they were next to you? Don`t you think that we are much better off at home during these two hours, waiting for our men to return, and then go out with them, neat, tidy and pretty, to take a stroll in our beloved Bilbao? Think it over; give to Ceasar what is Ceasar`s, and to God what is God`s.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Gaceta del Norte April 23, 1972.

<sup>157</sup> Gaceta del Norte May 2, 1972.

On their part, men arguing against women`s rights to full membership was motivated by a sense of fear: the “invasion of woman.”<sup>158</sup>

The truth is that I have become very nervous. ... What a country! But can we please know what women want? ... Little by little female spectators came, and no one said anything. And now, what an invasion! If we continue like this, even the teams will be female, and you and me, they will kick us out onto the street and shut us up! Have you seen a greater derangement of woman than this? ... Today they want to become members and board members, and come to the assemblies... Tomorrow, no man will get to decide anything.<sup>159</sup>

If women want to watch football and cheer Iribar, well then, but do not complicate life for us. Or is that now even in football they are going to lead?<sup>160</sup>

The disenfranchisement of women in Athletic Club was also relevant in other soccer clubs in the country, as it was the product of a socio-political context that normalized that lack: the Franco dictatorship (1936-1975). The reduction of female agency to domestic roles was an integral condition for Franco`s National-Catholic agenda to achieve its purpose: national, political and religious homogeneity in Spain. Women`s agency for that project lay in their “active political withdrawal” (Morcillo 2000: 5). Their sole legitimate public purpose was maternity, the raising of patriotic and religious children. Throughout the dictatorship, the legal status of women was practically that of a minor whose guardian was her husband. A woman had to have her husband`s permission if they wanted to travel, buy property, open a bank account, take up a job or get a divorce. Despite the softening of the regime from the 1950`s on

---

<sup>158</sup> Gaceta del Norte April 23, 1972.

<sup>159</sup> Gaceta del Norte April 23, 1972.

<sup>160</sup> Gaceta del Norte April 22, 1972.

and the general modernization of the country, the 1937 injunction of a charter issued by the Women`s Section of Falange (the Francoist fascist party) continued to resonate with generations of women: “Action is not yours; encourage others to act” (in Morcillo 2000: 25).

That woman could only act through the patronizing consent of man was reflected in the membership controversy. In Athletic Club, the statutes can be changed by a vote of simple majority: a club member needs to prepare and propose change at the general assembly, which will vote on the issue. But since the general assembly convoked only club members who were male by definition, female initiative was effectively frozen. There was only one way: through men. “Changes of the Statute must be proposed by a member,” the *Gacete del Norte* quotes an anonymous board member. “Señora Salsamendi can`t do that, but her husband can.”<sup>161</sup>

The debate over club membership is a struggle over space (stadiums and assembly meeting rooms), landscapes (the masculinist imaginary of soccer), and behavior (gender specific proper actions). In the words of Pritchard and Morgan, “there are no politically neutral spaces” (Pritchard and Morgan 2000: 892); space serves to socially construct gender, and it becomes a site of power. The fear of woman overtaking the spaces and powers of male ritual is palpable in the letters protesting against women`s membership in Athletic Club. “The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football,” Mariah Burton Nelson (1994) argues, suggesting that men escape from their increasingly powerful women to this last female-absent homosocial realm. Michael Kimmel argues that American manhood has been historically defined by an impulse to run away from the feminizing influence of women: “off to the

---

<sup>161</sup> *Gaceta del Norte*, May 2, 1972.

frontier, the mountains, the forests, the high seas, the battlegrounds, outer space” (2005: 20)—and ultimately to football and baseball stadiums. There are several Basque cultural models that fomented Basque men’s “escape” from their women; the reinforcement of male power in Athletic Club had its culturally sanctioned equivalents.

### **8.3 “Running Away” in the Spanish Basque Country: Gendered Spaces and Cultural Models**

Feminist geographers have theorized about the private-public dimension of gendered spaces in capitalist societies, whereby the public is a masculine space of production, and the private is a feminine space of reproduction (McDowell 1983; Del Valle et al. 1985). Public space privileges the male: his performance and construction of masculinity (Gilmore 1990), his gaze as an adventure-seeking tourist (Pritchard and Morgan 2000), his symbolic embodiment of community (Valle 1998, Bullen 2003, González 2012). Public space is heterosexually dominated (Valentine 1993), and lends itself to displays of masculinity: in Mediterranean cultures, manhood is a ritual public performance in the streets, cafes, bars, village fiestas (Brandes 1985). There are various cultural orders in the Basque Country that serve to construct Basque masculinity: the *txoko* or gastronomical society; the Basque improvisational poetry contests or *bertsolari*; the 17<sup>th</sup> century military parade called *Alarde*; the Basque indigenous ball game called *pelota*, and bullfighting.

The *txoko* or gastronomical society was traditionally a space and institution of male fraternity: a group of men gathering weekly or biweekly in a kitchen facility to cook, eat and socialize. Traditionally, women were not allowed to enter the *txoko*; it was a space of male solidarity (Arpal 1985). In the *txoko*, men fulfilled female roles

such as cooking, as it happened in Basque sheepherding communities where men took turns doing women`s chores and taking on feminine roles during their summer stay in the mountains (Ott, 1981). Today, the number of male-only *txokos* is decreasing. The *bertsolari*, improvisational poetry, is one of the most emblematic Basque cultural practices: it`s a contest where men improvise a poem in the Basque language based on a concept provided by the audience, and following set standards of rhyme and meter (Armistead and Zulaika 2005). The *bertsolari* is celebrated as the finest manifestation of the Basque language—and it wasn`t until 2009 that the first woman won a competition. The military parade *Alarde* is an annual tradition maintained since 1638 in certain Basque towns, where only men were allowed to participate in the procession—until a group of women broke in the rows and claimed participation in the late 1990`s. Ever since, this fiesta has been a major source of contention between men-only traditionalists (including the majority of women themselves) and those who want the incorporation of women.

Bullfighting, this cultural icon of Spain with considerable following in Bilbao, women have been discouraged as performers. Only very rarely has a woman become *torera*, “bullfighter,” challenging dominant conceptions of femininity and the traditional, passive role of woman at the bullfight as the “beautiful spectator” (Pink 1997, 61). The Basque indigenous ball game, the *pelota* is perhaps the cultural performance most resistant to the entrance of women: it`s a game whereby two or four players hit a solid leather ball against a wall with their hands. The harshness of the ball on the hand has turned the *pelota* into a symbol of tough Basque masculinity (González 2012). There are no championships for women.

“How do you remember your great jump into the town square?”<sup>162</sup> Maialen Lujanbio, the first ever female champion of the Basque improvisational poetry competition (*bertsolari*) was asked in an interview in 2009. That most emblematic Basque cultural practice, thus far all-male, is traditionally held at the fronton, the pelota court of village plazas. “I started to be known by everyone,” she answered. “Because they put us on a level where *we didn’t belong*.” Bodies at the plaza fronton turn into subjects of public recognition. Women’s “great jump into the plaza,” into frontons, sports halls and stadia, is a powerful metaphor for access: a qualitative leap towards a subjectivity that has been, and often still is, a male preserve. Discrepancies between male and female visibility in the media are naturalized and attributed to spectator preferences: “We have tried featuring women’s soccer more often,” a show host of a Bilbao TV station tells me. “Anything other than the men’s team makes audiences plummet. It doesn’t work. Not even women want to watch women’s soccer” (personal communication 2011 April). The roots of these perceived “natural” preferences, however, lie in traditional conceptualizations of gendered agency and space, tacitly nurtured by the deep structures of patriarchal power perpetuated, among other places, in frontons, plazas and playfields.

Some of the most emblematic Basque cultural practices have been, therefore, exclusively male and public. Like the *txoko*, the *bertsolari*, the *alarde*, the bullfight or the *pelota*, the landscape of soccer has had its separate male preserves. The consequences of separation go beyond psycho-social male bonding and solidarity: the gendered spaces and practices separate women “from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege” (Spain 1992, 3). In Spain and in the

---

<sup>162</sup> [http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/22ii/13\\_eizagirre.pdf](http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/22ii/13_eizagirre.pdf)

Basque Country, few things are comparable to the power and privilege soccer may grant an individual. My interviews with ex-presidents and board members attest that serving in Athletic gave them a public standing they had never imagined: the presidency was a “more prestigious position than that of the mayor of Bilbao or the MP Representative of Bizkaia province.”<sup>163</sup> As another former board member put it as he was sipping his coffee in a spacious *Gran Vía* business office, “the impact of being a board member in Athletic is much greater than the impact of being president or vice president of the Basque Country Chamber of Commerce. It is enormous” (personal communication 2011 March). A former President of the University of the Basque Country also confirmed that his service on the Athletic Board of Directors between 2004-2006 gave him far greater public recognition than his academic position.

To properly appreciate Edurne Salsamendi’s indignation, one has to understand the symbolic significance of Athletic Club membership for micro-communities. In Bilbao, club membership is the greatest gift a parent can give his or her child; it is a baton of belonging passed down through generations. It is quite impossible that a Bilbaino would just walk in the headquarters of the Club and sign up for membership: waiting lists are thousands of names long, and *enchufismo* or “string-pulling” is notorious.

Receiving your membership card becomes a rite of passage; now you belong. As a fan put it, “you have done your duties of citizenship.” Bilbainos don’t even bother to do the paperwork of changing the names and personal data on cards they receive from family: “There are a lot of dead people in San Mamés,” they say, referring to the fact that fans go to games with the cards of their deceased relatives.

---

<sup>163</sup> Ex-president Ana Urquijo, personal communication, May 2011.

Membership anchors the individual in the community. People either wait years to obtain it, or get it through the death or generosity of a family member. Both have their own sacrificial logic that will always structure relationships and affections. The lack of full Athletic membership for women was depriving parents of the pleasure of including their daughters, maybe their only child, in the full circuit of family and community.

#### **8.4 From Membership to Leadership: Ana Urquijo and “the Year of the Apocalypse”**

One such daughter was Ana Urquijo, an eight-year old who took his father`s hand every other weekend, and went to San Mamés with him. She would never forget the smell of the *Pozas*, a long street of sixty-plus bars that leads to the stadium, and where Bilbainos ritualistically gather before every game to meet friends, have a beer and a *pintxo* (finger food); the rhythm of the chants, the electrifying explosion of goals would remain indelible. Soccer games were the most intimate moments shared by father and daughter. Nothing would make Señor Urquijo happier than teaching her daughter the values, the histories and the line-ups of the club. There was only one thing he could not share with her: club membership.

Eduarne Salsamendi wrote her letter of protest in 1972, but it wasn`t until 1979 that the statutes were changed. The sociological fact of gender discrimination was apparently not enough to grant women membership; deep personal motivations were needed. Those motivations came in 1979 with the new vice president, who had a daughter called Ana. The statutes were changed under his vice presidency, and Ana Urquijo would become not only member, but also the first woman president of Athletic Club, and second in Spain.

Ana Urquijo's story as leader in Athletic Club began in 1990, but it wasn't her that was first invited in the election race; it was Edurne Salsamendi. She received a phone call from a group of men who were running for Athletic presidency: considering her activism in women's integration as members, would she consider being member of the team? Edurne Salsamendi hesitated: her schedules would not allow her to maximally fulfill the responsibility of being the first female board member of Athletic. "Don't worry," came the reassuring answer. "*You won't have to do anything.*" She realized how little things had changed since 1972: "All they wanted was a woman's face so they would look modern. I said, come on. Be there and not have a voice? That's what I was fighting against in 1972. I said no, and that's when they asked Ana" (personal communication, February 2011).

Ana Urquijo started her work with great enthusiasm as the first female board member. But she was soon disappointed; the board wanted her to do nothing. The President didn't like the idea that she would go for lunches with the other board members, including those of the visiting team; they would not allow her to travel with the men's team on the bus. They let her partake in some events, while marginalized her for others. The President even admitted that they invited her on the team *con un motivo figurativo*, "for symbolic reasons." Ana Urquijo often felt out of place:

One of the countless situations I remember was in Zaragoza, as we played against that team. I as a board member was going to take a seat in the VIP section, like all board members do. They let me pass the entrance of the stadium as I showed the guard my VIP card. But as we were walking with my colleagues (all men, of course) toward the VIP section, we hear someone shouting: '*Señora! Señora!*' It wasn't hard to figure who he meant. 'You can't enter there, *Señora!*' the guard said with a desperate face. 'Why not?'

‘Because you are a woman!’ ‘I am. And?’ ‘Only Board Members may enter there.’ ‘Then you are lucky because I am a board member of the visiting team.’ His face dropped and apologized a dozen times. But his presumption was that a woman cannot be a board member (personal communication, May 2011).

It would be Ana Urquijo who would step up in the most challenging moment of the history of the club. In 2007, Athletic was one game away from descending to second division. Bilbainos, who are stereotyped for a carefree and cavalier attitude that despairs at nothing, had their “balls ascended to their throat” that season, as they put it repeatedly: they had *cojones de corbata*, “balls for a neck tie,” for fear of losing the elite division.

The incumbent president was dismissed; the club was demoralized and only “one step away from the abyss.” The question arose: would Ana Urquijo, then vice-president, step up as president, as the statutes stipulate in case of dismissal? Or would the club have to call general elections, which would further destabilize the sports performance that was already lamentable enough? “It was a very difficult situation,” Ana Urquijo says:

Anger, frustration and dissatisfaction everywhere, the club on the verge of descending to second division, and me the possibly first woman president. I had very little to gain and a lot to lose. Being the president with whom Athletic goes to second division, and that president being a woman, my entire extended family [well-known in the province of Bizkaia] would have been gravely affected (personal communication, May 2011).

She accepted the presidency, which became a sensation featured in the national and international media including CNN, BBC and Al-Jazeera. She was the second female president of an elite club in Spain. “But what local people most appreciated,” Ana Urquijo recalls, “was my courage. After all those years, they still stop me in the street and tell me that I helped save the club in its most vulnerable moment.”

The stories of Edurne Salsamendi and Ana Urquijo show how difficult it was to appropriate agency as members and leaders in the world of soccer. But the greatest challenge was yet ahead: establishing soccer as a women`s sport. In 1979, when the prohibition of women`s membership was finally lifted, a cartoon published in the *Gaceta del Norte* foreshadowed how difficult it would be. It showed three women dressed in Athletic jerseys, and two men in business suits. Looking at the women, one of the men says “How audacious!” The other man tells the women: “You are very much mistaken! The authorization is to enter Athletic as members! Only as members!”<sup>164</sup>

The first women`s team of Athletic Club made its debut in the season 2002/03.

### **8.5 “Ni Fútbol, ni Femenino:” Hystericising and Othering Women`s Soccer**

When I asked a well known (male) sports journalist in Bilbao, sitting in a café on the *Plaza Nueva*, about *fútbol femenino* or “women`s soccer,” the answer was damning: “*Fútbol femenino?* It`s the sport of two lies: it is *neither football, nor feminine*” (personal communication 2011 March). The expression in Spanish lends itself easily to turning women`s soccer into an oxymoron, and is used all over Spain. Another person in position of power, a former board member qualified women`s soccer as “an

---

<sup>164</sup> *Gaceta del Norte* November 1, 1979.

anecdote” (personal communication 2011 March), and many have emphasized that it was “a different, other game.”

The female athlete and her body is a “contested ideological terrain” (Messner 1994). As the nineteenth century ideal of female delicacy and fragility had deemed the female body unsuited for strenuous exercise (Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1987, Vertinsky 1990), the muscular, active female body has posed a conundrum for the phallogocentric sports world. There have been two ways of coping with the female athlete: de-emphasizing her power by focusing on her femininity, or admitting her power, and claiming that its very existence implies she is not a real woman. Female athletes have been strongly ushered towards the “feminine apologetic” (Theberge 2000): ever since Babe Dirdikson, they know that the road to “normalizing” their image as women leads through shampoo commercials and nude calendars.

Technologies of sexualization also include sexist commentaries, camera foci lingering on feminine body parts, and selective focus on feminine athletes by the media (Hargreaves 1994: 164-169). If female athletes are not sexualized, they are denied their femininity. Female athleticism has been treated as a pathology of woman: “bicycle face syndrome,” “damaged mothers,” “muscle molls,” “mannish lesbians,” “gender anomalies,” “nymphomaniacs,” “predatory dykes” have served to effectively scare women out of sports for the last hundred years (Griffin 1998). Both her feminization and the denial of her femininity serve to prescribe behavior, and keep woman powerless.

*Ni fútbol, ni femenino.* “If we did a nude calendar,” an Athletic Club female player tells me, “people would pay more attention to us” (personal communication 2011 March). Why such visual displeasure with the same body in a soccer jersey?

Film scholars have argued that spectatorship is structured around the male gaze: pleasurable watching in the patriarchal order plays to and signifies male desire (Mulvey 1975). Visual pleasures are predicated on an active/male vs. passive/female dichotomy, whereby woman is tied to her place as “bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey 1975). In this sense, for female spectacles to sell and provide visual pleasure, they need to be eroticized. And they have been. From arts through cinema to tourism, spectatorship has privileged the male gaze, which got accustomed to its birth right. The spectator who is socialized into phallogocentric viewership practices primarily expects to see women who are incidentally athletes, rather than athletes who are incidentally women.

In the Basque context, the spectator’s apparent inability to identify with women’s soccer is further aggravated by traditional conceptions of woman as non-competitive. There exists a linguistic and cognitive distinction between bipolar, competitive games and non-competitive games: *joko* and *jolas* in the Basque language, respectively. The competitive, agonistic, bipolar *joko* play is “a men’s affair” (Zulaika 1988, 172) in the Basque Country: men gambling, playing *mus* (Basque card game), *pelota*, *bertsolari*, rural sports like wood cutting, stone lifting, oxen herding. These competitions have taken place in public: in bars, plazas, stadiums. Women are conceived as outside of the *joko* model; competition in these traditional games by women is an oddity, just as it is unnatural to call a woman *jokolari*, “player” in the Basque language. Instead, woman is traditionally closer to the *jolas*: the non-competitive children’s games that take place in and around the home.

Pleasurable watching has a narcissistic aspect: fascination with likeness and recognition (Mulvey 1975). *Ni fútbol, ni femenino* suggests that spectators can’t identify with the woman who plays soccer as *joko*: she is a woman so she can’t be

good at *joko*, but if she still takes to *joko*, she is no longer a woman because she goes against her designated cultural model. In the Basque context, women are defeminized not only because of their strong, muscular bodies, but also because they occupy traditionally male spaces (public), and male attitudes of play (competitiveness).

The competitive *joko* aspect of women's soccer is "tamed" by provincializing it: by organizing women's games at the club's training facilities in the small village of Lezama, some fifteen miles outside of Bilbao. The training site is surrounded by mountains, grazing cows and sheep, and *baserriak* or traditional farmsteads—farmsteads that are culturally conceived as the power base of Basque women. A visit to a women's game reveals that *fútbol femenino* is embedded in a feminized rural context as opposed to the tough, individualistic masculinity of city soccer: the Bilbao stadium San Mamés is called "The Cathedral" in the Basque Country, where churches paradigmatically occupy the urban centers of localities. Since women's games are always scheduled at midday, they much resemble a Sunday picnic family event. The terraces typically fill with children and their escorting parents and grandparents who teach them the hymn, the chants, the line-ups; they initiate them into soccer fandom that will come of age at their first visit to San Mamés. There is a sense, therefore, whereby Basque women's role as transmitters of culture comes full circle here: the rural setting and family context lends their play an air of *jolas*, non-competitive children's games in a private setting.

"Women's football is a sport of two lies: it is *ni futbol, ni femenino*" is the hystericisation of women's soccer, whereby both spectator and player feel alienated from their desires. From the perspective of viewership, it is the indignation of the phallogocentric spectator who has lost their privileges of erotic gazing on two counts.

First, the unmediated spectacle of live games (which is the rule in Spain, given the sparse attention the media pays to this sport) cannot employ technologies of sexualization to please the surreptitious male gaze. Symptomatic of this indignation are the remarks of Patxi Izco, president of another first division Basque club, Osasuna: “Women`s soccer seems anti-aesthetic to me. I don`t like it (...). There are sports that are much more appropriate to women. Soccer is much more masculine.”<sup>165</sup> This perspective is all the more problematic because it comes from a man in position of power in the world of soccer. Second, live games are not distant watching; they are participation. Fans are not mere spectators; they conceive of themselves as ‘the twelfth player’, and now they have to play with women. The spectator feels alienated from both his ordinary practices of watching, and his ordinary practices of fandom: he has to “play with” women when he is used to “playing with” men, and he has to practice engaged watching when he is used to gazing.

From the perspective of the female player, the hysterical impasse is this: she has to choose between the engaged look and the enjoying gaze of the spectator. Either way, she will be punished. If she wants the spectator`s engagement, i.e. she wants him to look at her as an athlete, she suffers: she is denied her womanhood and her athletic performance is continually compared to men, where she fares poorly. Some informants in Bilbao have argued that women`s soccer is “another, different sport,” “slower, less forceful,” and “need to improve significantly to attract crowds,” re-affirming an essentialist discourse that fixes “real” differences between the sexes, and which orders men`s and women`s sport in a hierarchy (Pfister 2010). If she chooses to please the gaze through technologies of sexualization, she suffers: she loses her

---

<sup>165</sup>[http://www.diariodenavarra.es/noticias/deportes/futbol/osasuna/2012/05/28/pachi\\_izco\\_futbol\\_femenino\\_antiestetico\\_81762\\_1027.html](http://www.diariodenavarra.es/noticias/deportes/futbol/osasuna/2012/05/28/pachi_izco_futbol_femenino_antiestetico_81762_1027.html)

subjectivity as a player. This impasse is her punishment for her “synecdochic irresponsibility,” to twist Goffman’s phrase (1959): her transgression as woman-athlete of traditional gender roles.

Her double bind becomes complete when she realizes she can’t even protest against her debilitating impasse: should she do so, the hysterical label becomes an excuse for dismissing her as unable to cope. “I could have left my baggage, and leave because of all those difficulties,” Ana Urquijo recalls her first time as a board member, “but they were waiting for me to lose it so they could say, ‘See, they are hysterical!’” (personal communication 2011 May).

### **8.6 Privileging Male Success: The Barge Controversy**

Everybody is headed toward the Nervión river. Schools, businesses, factories close; the day is declared a holiday so that no one is missing. From the *puente colgante*, the “suspension bridge” of Portugaleta that marks the river’s entrance at the sea, to the San Anton bridge of downtown Bilbao, ten miles of uninterrupted red-and-white crowd singing, chanting, flying flags; more than a million, the largest concentration of people ever to be seen in the province of Bizkaia. Very slowly, a rusty, dark blue barge appears moving slowly in the murky, yellow river, surrounded by dozens of ships, boats, and anything that floats. The crowds explode in waves as the barge comes nearer and they catch sight of the men on board—their champions. “By the Nervión river/there came a barge rumba-la-rumba-la-rum/With eleven players from Atxuri [a district of Bilbao] rumba-la-rumba-la-rum, la rumba of Bilbao...” The entire province of Bizkaia gathers to receive their champions as they enter Bilbao on top of what they call the *Gabarra*, the rusty barge: Athletic has won a *doblete*, the double titles of the King’s Cup and the Spanish *Liga*. The barge passes by stationary ships,

the factories, mills and warehouses of the left bank, the workers in blue overalls. The final destination is the Basilica of Begoña, where the champions will offer their titles to the *Amatxu* “Mother Virgin” Begoña, the city’s patron. The team will be received by the Bishop of Bilbao, the *Lehendakari* or President of the Basque Autonomous Government, the MP Representative of Bizkaia province, the Mayor of Bilbao, and the city will plunge into a three-day-long celebration.

These are the images of the 1983 and 1984 celebrations, the last time Athletic Club’s men’s team won a title; the *Gabarra*, the rusty barge became a symbol of victory. If anything, it is a ship that stands for the city’s identity; it is on board of ships that Bilbao forged its spirit of adventure. The *Gabarra* condenses an era: iron production, industrial commerce, deep sea fishing and ship building that made Bilbao prosperous. The images of these celebrations are the last snapshots of the city’s industrial past: the murky, yellow river that fish had long abandoned; the hefty traffic of fishing boats, barges and industrial ships; the warehouses, factories and mills stretching along the left bank; the ubiquitous smog that painted the facades black.

Today, some ruins on the left bank are the only reminder of Bilbao of its past, and the rusty *Gabarra*. Its ten-mile cruise now would bring Bilbao’s history to full circle: evoking the British industrial ships that brought soccer to Bilbao, it would pass by the industrial ruins and set anchor in the heart of Bilbao right by the glamorous curves of the ship-shaped Guggenheim Museum. *Sacar la Gabarra*, or “getting the barge” has become Bilbao’s “waiting for Godot,” for an Athletic title.

That the title should arrive from the women’s team created somewhat of a confusion: what now? The season of their debut in Athletic and the Superliga (2002/03), the women’s team won their first league title, and went on to win three

more since its inception. With each title, the question emerged: shall we get the barge?

They never have. “We get the Gabarra when the first team wins a title,” the incumbent president said in 2011 on a TV appearance. “Athletic has one first team.” Women players themselves decided they did not want to enter the city on the old ship: “We feel that celebration has to be proportionate to the social mass that we attract,” the women’s team captain explains. “Imagine that we come home with a title on the Gabarra, and only a few thousand people show up” (personal communication 2011 February).

The Gabarra thus remains a celebration of male achievement, success and desire: for the risk taking spirit of deep sea fishermen in Newfoundland; for the industrial ships that carried iron to Britain; for the sons of the industrial elite who traveled to English boarding schools, and became leaders; for the working class male who immigrated to the north in search of a better life; and for the footballer, who embodies the community’s passions. Rarely are gender relations so acutely mapped by a cultural image: the female vessel, the ship, assisting and celebrating male subjectivization. In the cultural consciousness, woman is ship navigated by man. That women can’t celebrate their successes on the Gabarra is yet another privileging of male writings of history—even if it is Bilbao’s most glorious female vessel, the ship-shaped Guggenheim Museum likened to Marilyn Monroe<sup>166</sup> that brought the city back from its (male) industrial ruins.

---

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/07/magazine/the-miracle-in-bilbao.html>

### 8.7 San Mamés *Barria*: Kicking Off a New Era?

The year 2014 will mark a before and after in Bilbao: San Mamés will be pulled down. The building that is most engraved in the hearts and minds of Bilbainos will be replaced by a modern, state of the art stadium, San Mamés *Barria* (“New” San Mamés). Given the social and economic significance of soccer, considerable amounts of public moneys of (male and female) taxpayers are inserted in the construction of Bilbao’s new Cathedral: 5, 002000 euros by the Foral Council of Bizkaia Province; 5,000000 euros by the Basque Government; 2,002000 euros by the Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa (local savings bank); 60.103 euros by the Bilbao City Council. Another 18,802000 Euros will be invested by Athletic Club itself, maintained by its sponsors and the 35,000 men and women who pay their membership fees.<sup>167</sup>

The question remains: will San Mamés *Barria* kick off a new era in women’s soccer? I arise from my investigations with a proposition: playing not only finals but all women’s games in San Mamés would give this sport unprecedented boom and prestige. Placing it within the sacred texture of the male ritual, within the urban space of competitive *joko* would be a qualitative leap into the metaphorical town square: the realm of public protagonism. The magic of San Mamés is such that it would turn women’s play into a more serious adventure in the eyes of those who dismiss it as neither soccer, nor feminine.

But am I aware, I hear objections, how little money women’s soccer generates, that it is already a financial deficit for the club? And how much it would cost to maintain the field and the facilities for so many games? First, I’d like to answer with Señora Salsamendi: “Why don’t they ask us, Club members, to pay a few Euros more

---

<sup>167</sup> <http://www.athletic-club.net/web/main.asp?a=2&b=10&c=0&d=1000&berria=10237&idi=1>

for women`s soccer? I am confident most Bilbainos would be willing to do that.”

Second, with the words of a women`s soccer manager, “it is increased visibility that attracts sponsors” (personal communication 2011 March); playing in San Mamés would certainly increase visibility. But most of all, the insertion of public moneys into the Athletic stadium creates an obligation to include women in its benefits; or would it be that only men could enjoy playing in a stadium built on, in large part, the moneys of taxpaying men and women? San Mamés *Berria* opens the opportunity and creates the mandate to re-configure women`s soccer as a social mission.

“*Eskerrik asko*, Thank you!” said Athletic Club women`s coach Iñigo Juaristi when he finally emerged in the press conference room, panting and dripping with water; his players had thrown him in the jacuzzi to celebrate their first *Superliga* victory in May 2003. “This can only happen in Bilbao.”<sup>168</sup> When Bilbainos turned up by the tens of thousands to cheer their women players in San Mamés, the Rubicon was crossed: arguments that women`s soccer can`t move masses in Spain no longer count. Bilbainos, who had always thrived on challenges, sent a powerful message. They were ready to launch into their greatest *bilbainada* yet: turning women`s soccer into a mass spectator sport in a country where men monopolize it. If anywhere in Spain, it could happen in Bilbao. And we would have yet another reason to call Athletic Club, like the *L`Équipe* did in the 1970`s on its front page, “a unique case in the world of soccer.”

---

<sup>168</sup> El Correo 28 April 2003.

## Chapter Nine

### Together and Apart at the Basque Derby: A Prisoner's Dilemma

“They are very nervous,” says my friend J., looking at his colleagues, members of the “ultra” fan group *Herri Norte*, pacing up and down in the small square in downtown of San Sebastián, Basque Country. “They are in *foreign territory* here.” I see dozens of men gather, most wearing black jackets. They are standing in small groups or nervously walking the square. Among the *rojiblanco* (red-and-white) or *txuriurdin* (blue-and-white) crowd of fans who come and go and amicably socialize, the combat fan group is silent and vigilant. Their tension is palpable. A group of teenagers pass by, pull out a soccer ball and start kicking it around. They lose control, and the ball flies around the square, bouncing on the walls, the roofs, the tables of the sidewalk café, threatening to break cups and windows. It is bouncing ominously: as it may break a window or hit the wrong person on the head, so may a brawl break out at any moment.

Suddenly I lose sight of my two companions, J. from Athletic fan group *Herri Norte*, and K. from the Real Sociedad fan group *Mujika*. I see the two groups concentrated in a narrow street, each one consisting of some seventy people, facing each other. There are no ordinary fans mixed among them, and the street turns into a specter of impending violence. Between the two groups there is a narrow demarcation line, a neutral zone where four persons are gesticulating wildly. I recognize J. and K. among them; they are negotiating. Bodies become a field that betrays intention, for the wrong gesture may escalate into a brawl involving a hundred and fifty people in a narrow downtown street.

At the high point of tension when I look for an escape route as a fight seems unavoidable, somebody starts yelling *Independentzia! Independentzia!*

(“Independence!”) and then a name *Aitor, Aitor, Aitor Zabaleta!*, and finally *Español el que no bote eh, eh!* (“Those who are not jumping are Spaniards, hey, hey!”). The two groups, which were on the verge of viciously beating up each other only a minute ago, are now jumping, chanting and singing in unison: *Hain ederra, hain polita da ta*, “How beautiful how pretty” *Gora, gora Euskal Herria, a, a, a*, “Let’s go Basque Country, let’s go” *Gu euskaldunak gara, Euskal Herrikoak* “We are Basques/From the Basque Country.” And finally, as the two groups disperse towards the stadium, the streets of San Sebastián echo the tune of the Soviet national anthem.

This episode at the 2010 Basque derby between Athletic Club and Real Sociedad fans is illustrative of the complexity of fan identification and performances in the Basque Country. Group rivalry violence was suspended by the evocation of common desires (Basque national independence); common heroes (Aitor Zabaleta, a Real Sociedad fan murdered by fans of the ideological foe *Atlético de Madrid*); common enemy (the Spanish State); common cultural and language community (*Euskaldun*, Basque) and common ideological beliefs (Marxist-Leninist, “red skin” anti-fascism). Leaders of the two rival groups, my companions J. from Bizkaia province, and K. from Gipuzkoa became friends while having a beer after a fight. “One day our groups were fighting; I looked at K. and said, ‘let’s rather have a beer.’ And we did.” Since then, these two leaders of their respective combat groups spend every Basque derby together with all their obliging rituals: the pre-game quest for entrance tickets, eating, drinking and, if necessary, fighting.

### **9.1 Theoretical Approaches to Fan Rivalry**

As a result of violence in the 1980`s in British soccer stadia, fan rivalry became a staple in sport sociological research. Figurational sociology attributed fan violence to

segregation in terms of class, age and gender (Dunning 1999, 139-161).

Anthropological research later rejected the class-based definition, arguing that many fans come from respectably middle class backgrounds, and that antagonism is often symbolic (Armstrong 1998). Interpretations for the reasons of soccer fan violence include pleasurable arousal, a “quest for excitement” (Dunning 1999: 147); the enjoyment of “flow” (Finn 1994: 108); and a “euphoric hyped-up sensation” (Hobbs and Robins 1991); an expression of proud, tough masculinities and a status as “hard men” (Dunning 1999: 148); the construction of *communitas*, a liminal, undifferentiated community of equal individuals (Finn 1994: 108); an aesthetic marking of territory through symbolic violence (Dal Lago and De Biasi 1994: 85-86); a ritual that creates solidarity and a code of honor for the expression of dominant masculinity (King 2001: 582); a ritualized pattern of social hostility contained within a stylized framework (Marsh 1979: 30). According to Richard Giulianotti (1999: 9-14), the construction of meaning around soccer identities happens in terms of semantic or syntactic forms by establishing in-group and out-group boundaries, the former defining who fans are, and the latter who they are not; opposition between fan communities emerges because soccer tends to privilege the syntactic logic of external opposition. From an anthropological-structuralist perspective, Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001: 269-78) identify seven basic relations of football opposition: the construction of conflicting identities, contesting power inequalities, resistance by submerged nationhood, the construction of local and minority identity, symbolic violence of exclusion, aesthetic codes and the negotiation of capitalism. In their many shapes, soccer rivalries are intimately linked to social, religious, class, ethnic and national divisions.

As mentioned before, Spanish soccer rivalry is known for what Phil Ball (2003) calls *morbo*. From the global, politicized spectacle of the *el Clásico* between Real Madrid FC and Barcelona FC, the *morbo* of soccer trickles down to the most inconsequential inter-village games and is ritually reproduced at the many derbies crystallized through a centenarian competition. Derbies in Spain emerge along two basic lines: geographical proximity (intra- and inter-city, provincial) and/or political-ideological stance. Regional-territorial rivalry has defined Spanish soccer right from its inception, while ideological and political antagonism intensified with the democratic transition after the death of Franco (Llopis-Goig 2008). The permutations of identifications may result in culturally specific cases such as the Athletic-Real derby: provincial, inter-city rivalry within a region (Basque Country) that positions itself strongly against the Spanish state. Historical-diachronic analysis has shown that the Basque derbies are variously characterized by unification and antagonism, the former revolving around a common Basque identity, and the latter around the provincial basis of local fandom (Walton 2001). With history in mind, this chapter takes an ethnographic, synchronic approach to the particular derby of 2010, and takes it for an “interaction ritual” (Goffman 1967), a face-to-face cultural performance where individuals enact the ways they belong to the moral community.

Belonging, however, is not necessarily a smooth affair, for internal contradictions between identities may emerge. I propose that the historical-cultural specificities of Basque soccer in Spain make the derby a site of a dilemma: how to be together as Basques, and apart as rivals? The dilemma between cooperation as Basques and competition as Athletic vs. Real Sociedad fans is not unlike the prisoner’s dilemma, whose basic structure I will adopt as an analytical framework here to study derby interaction. In the classic prisoner’s dilemma, two individuals—

members of the same gang—are accused of a crime, and presented an option to confess or remain silent. The harshness of their punishment depends on their own as well as their accomplice's decision to cooperate (stay silent), or betray (defect) the other. I will go into the specifics of the prisoner's dilemma later on in this chapter. For now, suffice it to emphasize the relevance of its basic structure for the Basque derby: an arena where each party, each club, will necessarily pursue its self-interest (winning), and even “betray” the other by poaching players and trespass on their youth academy. The external meta-consideration that they belong to the same “gang,” the same moral, political and language community (Basques in Spain), however, imposes a mandate of cooperation. The result is a history of derbies where interaction switches back and forth between friendly and hostile, united and antagonistic—a dilemma visualized by the street episode between the fan clubs *Herri Norte* and *Mujika*.

The vacillation between cooperation and conflict, I argue, is evidenced by an oscillation between three Basque performative models: *joko*, *jolas*, and *burruka* (Zulaika 1988). *Joko* refers to binary competition between two parties, typically males in a public setting, whose outcome is winning or losing. This performance model characterizes some of the most popular public contests in the Basque Country: soccer, the squash-like indigenous game *pelota*, rural sports, the poker-like game *mus*, and the improvisational poetry contest *bertsolaria*. *Jolas* refers to non-competitive children's games that take place in a domestic setting, where there is no winner or loser, and which is performed in the intimacy of the home. *Jolas* may also refer to a festive, carnivalesque mode of social togetherness; it is the ludic genre of “what matters is not winning, but participation.” And finally, *burruka* variously means wrestling, a brawl or street fight between male individuals. *Burruka*, *joko* and *jolas*

are socially, culturally and politically sanctioned performative models of rivalry, competition and cooperation; because of their Basque idiosyncrasy, they are suitable analytical tools for my exploration of the derby oscillation between competition and cooperation.

By way of a roadmap, this chapter has three main parts. First, I will explore the levels of what I call the Basque rivalry complex: interpersonal, kin group and neighbor, town and village, province and nation level rivalry, with reference to how these levels of competition are manifest in Basque sports and everyday interaction. Second, I will identify the performative models of *burruka*, *joko* and *jolas* at the Basque derby, and how they create spheres of competition and cooperation. Third, I will seek to explain the Basque derby's oscillations between competition and cooperation as a prisoner's dilemma.

## **9.2 The Basque Rivalry Complex**

Basques have a marked, if under-researched, propensity for rivalry and competition. They serve two important purposes: subjectivization, for rivalry demarcates the subject and his or her stance taken against the other; and interaction, for competition keeps the competing parties within the kernel of a relationship. Rivalry and competition takes place at various levels, as I will show now: interpersonal, kin group, town/village, provincial and national. While some rivalries have their paradigmatic genres and actors, others agglutinate several of these levels in one event.

### *9.2.1 Interpersonal Rivalry*

“The janitors at the university,” a young Real Sociedad fan, and professor at the University of the Basque Country (Bilbao), tells me, “are rabid Athletic fans. They

have a huge Athletic Club flag in their office, right by the entrance. Last year, each morning as I entered the building I jokingly said something demeaning about the performance of their team. They ended up challenging me into a bet about whose team will close the season better” (personal communication 2011 March). Betting is one of the most pervasive interpersonal dynamics in the Basque Country. Basques would bet just about anything, and its language is ubiquitous in everyday conversations: mothers challenge their children into finishing their meals first; *cuadrilla* (age grade groups of friends) arguments often end with a bet to finally decide who was right; people of all ages and gender bet to stress their point of view.

This particular bet between the professor and the janitors structures their relationship for the rest of the season: each morning they would engage in a discussion over the standing of their bet and their teams, playfully teasing one another until a final outcome. Moreover, a bet is likely to become a cycle of bets, for the loser is obliged to challenge, or accept the challenge of the winner the following season to vindicate their honor. Once in motion, it is almost impossible to step out of the ritual obligation to bet. As staying within the circuit of the bet becomes a question of integrity, no one steps out of it, especially when it is formulated as *que no hay cojones...* or “I bet you don’t have the balls to...” The following year, when the professor’s team was doing badly and he wanted to avoid the bet, he started to use the emergency exit instead of the front door. What the bet achieved was keeping janitor and professor within the kernel of interaction by suspending social, economic and age differences, and situating them in a level play field where the result was equally beyond their control.

As I mentioned earlier, Bilbao’s soccer culture started with a bet. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bilbainos jealously watched the English dockworkers kick around a leather ball downtown by the river Nervión, on the *Campa de los Ingleses*, where the

Guggenheim Museum stands today. “Perhaps annoyed with the superiority that the English manifested,” Terrachet writes, “one fine day the Bilbaino *footballmens* publically challenged them to a game” (1998, 23). On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May in 1894, Bilbainos played, and promptly lost 0-5, their first soccer game against the English.

### 9.2.2 *Kin Group and Neighbor Rivalry*

*Ni hilen naiz,/Nire arima galduko da,/Nire askazia galduko da,/Baina nire aitaren\ etxeak/Iraunen du/Zutik.* “I will die,/My soul shall be lost,/My descendants will be lost,/But my father`s house/Will remain/Standing.” The 1963 poem by the Basque Gabriel Aresti reveals that the Basque household, the farmstead or *etxe*, is an important metaphor of continuity, stability and unity. Historically, the *etxe-baserri* (house-farmstead) constituted an autonomous social, political and economic unit: it provided subsistence for a kin group or family, and granted juridical and political status in terms of inheritance and voting rights. In the Basque cultural imaginary, the house *etxe*, and the relationship between *etxeak* as neighbors, is one of the richest reservoirs of identification, and the symbol of traditional Basque culture. Neighborhood (*auzo*) relationships between houses consisted of ritualized cooperation and reciprocal obligations in the way of subsistence, funerary services and road construction (Douglass 1969, Ott 1981). Such was the identification of a family lineage with the *etxe* that the former was named after the latter: in the rare occurrence of moving, the family took the last name of the house they moved into. The integrity of the *etxe* was a major concern, for it metonymically stood for the integrity of the family lineage: single inheritance (male or female) ensured that the *etxe* will not be divided, and sold only with difficulty.

Besides reciprocal neighborly obligations, what characterized the relationship between *etxeak* and their kin groups was competitive rivalry. In his 1992 movie *Vacas* (“Cows”), Julio Medem explores the eerie relationship and lingering animosity between two neighboring families that starts with the 1875 Carlist war, and lasts over three generations. Kin group hostility is visually dramatized in an *aizkolaritza*, or wood chopping contest between the two strongest sons. Basque traditional games were inspired by competition between farmsteads: wood chopping, hay mowing, stone lifting, cattle herding were agricultural activities turned into competition (Walton 2011). These traditional sports paradigmatically took place between two individuals, behind whom entire lineages rallied to bet at village fiestas. Rural sports did not become commercialized; intimately linked to the *etxe*, competition was often fierce to the point that contestants were “willing to risk the animals’ health and their own family fortunes” (Walton 2011: 459) in the quest of honor.

Olatz González Abrisketa (2012) finds a similar antagonistic disposition along kin group lines in the Basque indigenous game *pelota*. Town and village belonging structure player preferences in general. In case of farmsteads, it often occurs that a family would root for one particular player only because the neighboring family rooted for the player’s main rival. Such an almost obligatory “display of autonomy through an antagonistic positioning against friend, neighbor, colleague and even brother” (González Abrisketa 2012: 102) has often no motivation other than subjectivization through setting boundaries. Family lineage rivalry prompted the emergence of the *pelota* to begin with; González traces the game back to a perpetual series of blood feuds among antagonistic clans or factions as early as the Middle Ages (2012, 39). The *pelota*, whose primordial modality is the singles hand game, is particularly apt to transmit the binary of what Roger Caillois (1961) calls *agôn*, competitive combat: in a

documentary on Basque political violence, the director Julio Medem chose the *pelota* game as a master metaphor for the antagonistic struggle between Basque political entities.

“When you play a regular soccer game,” a Real Sociedad fan tells me, “You are like the cow that only has to pay attention to the grass. When you play a derby, you are like the bull that has to pay attention to his surrounding.” This metaphor conceptualizes the derby through the rural world of the *baserri* farmsteads, where cows and bulls are a basic asset of subsistence. It also implicitly distinguishes between what Geertz would call the difference between “deep play” and “shallow play” (1973, 441) in his analysis of the Balinese cockfights: the more a match is between near status individuals and/or high status individuals, the deeper the match. The derby is “deep play:” the bull represents a higher status game, while it retains allusion to the farmstead and the rural, egalitarian world of kinship competition.

The best analogy for the Basque soccer derby, John Walton remarks, is that of “the family at war within itself” (2011: 119). In light of group rivalry based on neighboring *etxeak*, we may also see it as two allied kin groups being at war. The relationship between the kin groups in fact depends on the context of competition. Geertz observes that in the cockfights of Bali, members of the same kin group feel obliged to bet on their player no matter how poor their chances. If their kin group is not involved, however, they will support an allied kin group against an unallied one (Geertz 1973: 437). Similarly, soccer competition is a network of shifting alliances, and the kinship analogy becomes apparent when Athletic and Real are not involved in direct competition. In such a case, Basque clubs often behave as allied kin groups against unallied ones. In 1984, when Athletic’s championship title depended on the outcome of the derby, the Real’s goalkeeper, “who normally cleared the ball with a powerful kick

upfield, began to throw it out with unerring inaccuracy, regularly finding the Athletic forward Dani” (Walton 2001, 132). When the winning ball went in, “it seemed as if [the goal keeper] had a sudden attack of lumbago” (Walton 2001, 132). A reverse scenario is also well documented: the Real needed the derby victory for its second championship title in the early 1980`s; with 2-1 and ten minutes left, Athletic player Goikoetxea went up to striker Sarabia, “gave him a friendly shake by the neck, said something in his ear and after that they strolled around quietly in midfield. The contest was over” (Leguineche et al, in Walton 2001, 132). On the soccer field, therefore, both competition and neighborly or allied kin group solidarity influence club relations.

### 9.2.3 *Town and Village Rivalry*

Identity in the Basque Country is intimately linked to place. When two people meet, one of the first questions they ask is where the other is from: birthplace. The answer will have a certain determination for the subject, as if a local essence was assigned by birthright: you are put in a category, and your interlocutor now feels privy to your character. Localities have stereotyped identities, which are playfully reproduced in the most diverse social interactions. Locals are quick to remind you that “Urretxu is Urretxu, and Zumarraga is Zumarraga” (Gipuzkoa province), even if the two villages grew together in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and there is no visible physical sign of demarcation. Two villages only a few kilometers apart may be conceptualized as different worlds. “I can recognize a person from Getaria [Gipuzkoa province] the second he opens his mouth,” a man from Zarautz tells me (I. M. personal communication 2011 October), with reference to a different accent; the two sea shore villages are separated by a two-mile walk. In order to demarcate identity in close geographical proximity and hundreds of years of co-existence, Basque villages, towns and cities elaborate on stereotyped

character features which, in turn, have nourished long standing rivalries between towns and villages. These rivalries are acted out in sports that are increasingly organized and commercialized: regatta, pelota, basketball and soccer.

The rivalry between Bilbao and San Sebastián, Donosti is a most elaborated one; it is an “all out war,” as the media likes to present it. In popular media representations, a Bilbaino needs serious life adjustment skills to survive the “culture shock” presented by life in San Sebastián, only an hour`s drive away. And vice versa: for a *Donostiarra* (a person from San Sebastián), Bilbao is *otro mundo*, “another world.”

The rivalry between Bilbao and San Sebastián is based on their cultural and economic roles as capitals of their provinces. San Sebastián is a beautiful sea shore resort with a population of a hundred and eighty thousand, with a strong Francophile and past aristocratic touch. It is the closest big city to the French border (fifteen miles), and enjoyed considerable influence in terms of sophisticated tastes and life styles with the north. French architecture, *haute couture*, *haute cuisine* and sophistication cultivated by visiting celebrities, royalties and political notables gave San Sebastián a markedly posh character. The city`s glamour is epitomized by its category “A” cinema festival, the San Sebastián International Film Festival; since 1953, the Basque town has welcomed the greatest stars of north American and European cinema. Added to this the highest concentration of Michelin stars in Europe. There remains little doubt why San Sebastián-Donosti has been chosen to be European Cultural Capital 2016. Its residents are characterized as posh and fashion conscious as they exhibit their taste at daily strolls on the *Concha*, one of the most spectacular beach promenades of Europe. Bilbao, in turn, was a paradigmatic industrial center for most of its history. Until the 1990`s tourists only stopped by, if at all, en route to San Sebastián: it was a heavily

industrialized, working class city with a murky, yellow river, cranes and ship decks in its down town, an ubiquitous smoke that coated the facades of buildings black, and a decadent night life in its *Palanca* district. Bilbao was an industrial city through and through, with iron production and ship building at its core.

Why Frank Ghery's Guggenheim Museum is in Bilbao and not in San Sebastián, the fashionable arts center of the Basque Country, is illustrative of differences in entrepreneurial mentality and financial resources between the two cities. When the idea of a Museum of Contemporary Arts came up in San Sebastián in the 1980's, the Cultural Ministry of Gipuzkoa Province found the approximately twenty million US dollars necessary for the project too much to spend on arts, even if arts were a hallmark of San Sebastián's identity. A few years later, Bilbao bought the Guggenheim project for about ten times more (approximately two hundred million US dollars). The nonchalant readiness, and the lack thereof, to risk exorbitant amounts of money on a project of unforeseeable consequences is symptomatic of the stereotyped difference between *Bilbainos* and *Donostiarras* and, as an extension, Bizkaians and Gipuzkoans: the former are said to exude a "cocky," larger-than-life image, the latter are more sober and realistic.

#### 9.2.4 *Provincial Rivalry*

The Basque Country displays a great variety of terrain, climate, minerals, flora and fauna, which has produced distinct life styles and subsistence methods. Localities delineate themselves through various lines: "each province has its own personality which is made up of a variety of 'micro-worlds' along rural/urban, nationalist/non-nationalist, Basque speaking/Spanish-speaking lines" (Raento 1996: 214). Stereotypes thrive around the provinces: the loud, boisterous "city slickers" of urban Bizkaia; the

shrewd, introspective *aldeano* “peasants” of Gipuzkoa; the *patatero* “potato growers” of Araba. One must emphasize, as Raento does, that geographical differences do not translate into substantial ones in terms of welfare and quality of living; their main purpose is symbolic boundary making.

Sports reflect and perpetuate a narcissism of small differences. In her ethnography on the *pelota*, González Abrisketa quotes Retegi II, one of the most well-known players of this Basque sport, describing fan communities as “a reserve of the exclusive ethos” of their province: “I would say that [spectators from] from *la Rioja* region are very passionate; Gipuzkoans are more serious and demanding; the Navarrans assimilate well, they are happy and not aggressive; the Bizkaians are very Bizkaians, they love everything” (2012: 247). Javier Clemente, a most emblematic former coach of Athletic and the Spanish national selection, presented to me a similar description in an interview: “A Bizkaian footballer is cocky, and takes risks; Gipuzkoans are more sober and realistic; the Navarrans are tough brutes” (personal communication 2011 May). The difference between the Bizkaian and Gipuzkoan fan communities, a fan points out, shows in their interpretation of league ranking: “With only three points apart in the ranking, fans of Real Sociedad talk about how to avoid dropping to second division, and fans of Athletic talk about winning the Champions League.” As long as it is mathematically possible, Bilbainos will maintain a can-do attitude: “Athletic is *a priori* in the finals as long as it is not eliminated.” The belief in success is manifested by Athletic fans` habit to reserve hotel rooms and make travel arrangements for finals, as they did for the UEFA 2012 in Bucharest, when their team was still only in the octofinal qualifying rounds.

Provincial consciousness and identity is nourished by the different daily press Basques consume in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, which is why Benedict Anderson`s thesis

on imagined communities is relevant. Communities are “imagined,” Anderson argues, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006: 6). Print capitalism and the daily ritual of consuming the same news, Anderson argues, creates an imagined linkage in the readers` mind. The Basque daily press creates this linkage through provincial editions: two major dailies, the Bizkaian *El Correo* and the Gipuzkoan *El Diaro Vasco* are run by the same news agency, but feature province based news, which becomes extremely exclusive when it comes to sports. The former features only Athletic, and the latter only Real Sociedad, while both do their fair share of creating *morbo*: controversy and competitive animosity before derbies. For Basque nationalists, these hegemonic pro-Spanish news anchors use the derby to divide the Basque community along provincial lines.

#### 9.2.5 *National Competition*

Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001) argue that Basque soccer serves to construct what Benedict Anderson calls “submerged nationhood:” resistant national identities in centripetal political contexts. While indeed Athletic tends to be seen as the “national team” (Walton 2001, MacClancy 1996, 2007) for its recruitment philosophy and past connections with the Basque nationalist elite, fans in the provinces of Gipuzkoa, Alava and Navarre certainly disagree. Strictly speaking, the “national team” of the Basque “submerged nationhood” is the unofficial soccer selection: *Euskal Selekzioa*.

The Basque selection was one of the first in Spain years before the Spanish selection (1920), and had as its purpose the representation of the Basque people. In 1911, the Basque Nationalist Party youth organization *Juventud Vasca* initiated a

championship called *Copa de Euzkadi*, or “Cup of the Basque Country.” The purpose of this cup was to create support among fans, clubs and directors for a Basque Selection. This is what the paper *Euzkadi* had to say on the necessity of a selection in 1915:

For a while now there is talk about the constitution of a Basque team selected from the best of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa with the objective of competing far away from the fatherland, in France, in England... Those who are knowledgeable in these matters argue that this team, formed with no other purpose than the glory of Basque land, would achieve this splendidly, for the talents of agility, dexterity and resistance of the race manifested in the Basque teams.[...]" (in Gómez, 29).

The most noted attempt to lend Basques visibility through soccer was the 1936-39 selection convoked by the ex-player, later president of the first Basque Government José Antonio Aguirre during the Spanish Civil War. The Basque selection went on a three-year tour in Europe and South America with the purpose of raising money for the Republican Basque forces, including money for an aircraft, and aid for the hundreds of children evacuated from the war zone. Many of that selection never returned. During the repressive Franco regime (1936-1975), the idea of a regional soccer selection was unthinkable.

The Basque soccer selection has been a much contested ideological terrain. The Spanish sports federations do not allow the formation of official Basque selections, but even the unofficial Basque soccer selection is thwarted with controversy. For its history, the selection has been variously called *Vasconia*, *Northern Selection*, *Euskadi*, *Euskal Herria*, *Euskal Selekzioa*—the name of the entity

has been subject to spectacular debates and social divisions along political-ideological lines. Each name designates a different imaginary of what the Basque Country is, or should be, in terms of its geographical and ideological boundaries. A disagreement over whether the team should be called selection of *Euskadi* (the political entity of the Basque Autonomous Government of three Spanish provinces) or *Euskal Herria* (the larger historical Basque Country of four Spanish and three French provinces) resulted in such a political storm that the annual Christmas game was cancelled in 2009. The game is to symbolically stand for the Basque nation, but any attempt to pin down the boundaries of that nation conjures up historical-ideological antagonisms. The debate over the name of the Basque soccer selection is symptomatic of the fractures within Basque society, whereby it becomes very difficult to arrive at self-definition at a collective level. This, in turn, hinders efforts in the struggle for officialdom, and Basque representation at nation level.

### **9.3 *Burruka, Joko, Jolas: The Performance of Cooperation and Competition***

The street episode with which I start this chapter demonstrates that fans shift from one performative model to another: one moment they might be preparing for *burruka* fight, the next they engage in carnivalesque *jolas*, and finally they enter in competitive *joko* projected on the teams they support. In each phase, particular relationships and identities gain prominence over the rest: combat group loyalty and masculine honor, city and provincial belonging, nationalist ideologies and ethno-cultural values are variously activated: they motivate action in one moment, and remain suspended in another. Because they highlight a particular social relation from among the many, *joko*, *jolas* and *burruka* become ritual occurrences in Rappaport's sense: they "impose sharp, unambiguous, qualitative distinctions upon continuous,

ambiguous quantitative differences” (Rappaport 1999: 95). The performative models of *joko*, *jolas* and *burruka* of the derby oscillate between various Basque life worlds, organizing them into competitive or cooperative relations.

### 9.3.1 *Burruka: An “Echo of Lost Dignities”*

The climactic moment I described in the introduction between the two combat fan groups Herri Norte and Mujika did not result in casualties just then. The situation, however, remained tense; a few hours later I see three red-and-white jerseys chasing down a blue-and-white one by the Café Barandiaran; customers flee in the bars, shades are lowered in haste to prevent flying chairs from breaking shop windows. A few minutes later a Real Sociedad fan emerges, with his face bleeding. “What happened?” I ask a member of Herri Norte. “He insulted us! He said ‘Fuck Bilbao, f\* Marijaia,’” Marijaia being a female cloth mascot symbolizing the week-long fiestas of Bilbao, the *Aste Nagusia*.

In the Basque Country, a fight or wrestling match between males is called *burruka*, a “culturally sanctioned institution” (Zulaika 1988). The male character of *burruka* was associated with other male domains such as bars, taverns and competition at the plaza. The purpose of these fights is to harm the other not more than necessary to show off dominance, force, and honor. “In traditional Basque society, the notion of violence itself is largely translated into and controlled through the *burruka* cultural institution. Involvement in a *burruka* does not necessarily imply a violent character” (Zulaika 1988: 172). What it implies is a spirit of struggle over honor, dignity and integrity, which must be defended. This performative model has gained a political meaning: ETA’s activities were called *burruka harmatuta*, “armed struggle,” and the Basque nationalist youth was for years involved in *kale borroka* or

“street fighting” guerilla war of various intensity over decades, including rioting at demonstrations, throwing Molotov cocktails, burning trash containers, attacking anti-Basque nationalist party offices.

For rival combat groups, every derby encounter potentially becomes a *burruka* over honor and integrity, for as Jennifer Low writes, “there can be no honor that is ever untested [and] no test is definitive” (2003: 52). A socio-historically sanctioned, ritually more elaborate equivalent of the *burruka* model is the duel of honor—*Herri Norte* fans told me about fights that had rules and were supervised by a referee of sort. *Burruka* and duel share two features: both are “echoes of lost dignities” (Low 2003, 5) for they aim to restore honor and integrity, and both enter into an economy of non-equivalences—the readiness to sacrifice physical well-being for an abstract idea. The *burruka* of the derby, like a duel, is predicated on a certain intimacy between the parties; the insult is all the more exacerbated as it comes from the neighbor.

*Herri Norte* and *Mujika* are admittedly *abertzale* Marxist Basque nationalist, red skin anti-fascist fan clubs. Their most dangerous adventures take place in Madrid against fan groups that they consider radical right wing Spanish nationalist and fascist. “If it hadn’t been for us,” a fan says, “these fascists would run amok with their harmful ideologies.” There is a sense in which the combat fan group conceives of itself as the last line of defense and its *burruka* as necessary, if little understood, struggle.

### 9.3.2 *Joko: Athletic vs. Real*

Geertz argues that the individuals who compete and bet in the illegal cockfights in Bali are in an “institutionalized hostility relationship” called *puik* (1973, 438). The parties involved will not speak or have anything to do with each other; they will fiercely, “even

manically,” compete. The causes of *puik*, Geertz writes, may be inheritance arguments, political differences, or wife capture.

A similar “institutionalized hostility relationship” exists between Athletic and Real Sociedad over player capture. In the 1980`s, Athletic`s localist, province based (Bizkaia) philosophy could no longer keep the club competitive in a globalizing league, which is why it expanded its recruitment over the entire Basque Country. Consequent player poaching, and the snapping of the under-21 world cup golden ball winner Joseba Etxeberria from Real Sociedad aggravated club relationships to the point of freezing them. Each time an Athletic talent scout is spotted in Gipuzkoan youth games, the papers voice indignation over the “dirty exploits” of the *merengue vasca*, the “Basque Real Madrid,” which is an unflattering comparison with reference to Athletic`s symbolic and financial superiority. Gipuzkoan fans never miss to remark what they see as predatory behavior, and a derby is always a good occasion: “Basque football is what it is. Some create footballers. Others try, and if they don`t manage, they can always pass by Zubieta [the youth academy of Real Sociedad] and resolve our economic problems.”<sup>169</sup> In order to fend off the neighbor, Real Sociedad players have a special transfer fee clause attached to their contracts: for Athletic, they cost more than for any other team.

The competitive relationship between Athletic and Real Sociedad, on and off the field, corresponds to the Basque concept of binary, competitive play: *joko*. *Joko* is a pervasive competitive framework in the Basque Country: betting, rural sports like wood chopping, stone lifting and oxen challenge, ram fights, *pelota*, regatta, and soccer fall in this category. Even *bertsolaria*, the paradigmatic Basque cultural performance of

---

<sup>169</sup> Diario Vasco, 2010 December 6.

improvised poetry, is practiced in a competitive form as a winner is profusely celebrated. The interpersonal dynamics of challenging the other into a bet is in fact challenging to *joko*, binary competition. *Joko* is strictly a man's affair: woman as *jokolari*, "player," is a cultural "oddity" that makes her "conspicuously abnormal, an evidently mannish woman" (Zulaika 1988, 180). In Chapter Seven I argue that one reason why women's soccer has particular challenges in the Basque Country is because women are not conceptualized as competitive *jokolari*: traditionally, theirs is the domestic *jolas*, non-competitive play model. *Joko* is male public performance, whose paradigmatic cultural forms are men competing in *mus* in bars, *bertsolaria* and *pelota* in the plaza, and *soccer* in the stadium.

Zulaika notes the potentially pernicious, dysfunctional effects of competitive, bipolar *joko*. It can disrupt family life if a husband frequents the bars too much, given to *joko*. Money wager may threaten the well-being of a family: "people would *jokatu* everything they had, houses included, and even their wife if you didn't keep watch" (in Zulaika 1988, 175). *Joko* is also a political metaphor: as opposed to the street fight *burruka*, ordinary political strategizing is considered *joko*, whose paradigmatic visualization is the informal game of *sokatira* or tug-of-war, a favorite staple of Basque inter-village competition between teams consisting of the strongest of local youth.

*Joko* is a characteristic mode in the Athletic-Real derby ever since the first game in 1905, whose *morbo* was already so anticipated that "it was necessary to send three special trains" (Mateos quoted in Terrachet 1998, 44) to bring the people from Gipuzkoa to Lamiako, Athletic's first playfield. In 1908 there was talk of a combined team, but the plan did not come through. Instead, the derby was increasingly characterized by insults, rudeness, fights and police intervention (Walton 2001). The "institutionalized hostility relation" was already thriving under an accumulation of

grievances. In 1909 Athletic officially complained that Real's Atocha stadium was unfit for its "anti-regulation conditions;" in 1912, Real Sociedad reported on Athletic for playing British players, as a result of which Athletic was stripped of its title. In the 1920's, the rivalry was somewhat more sanitized (Walton 2001). During the repressive decades of the Franco regime, with the ban on ethnic symbols in soccer as elsewhere, the derby was conceptualized as any other derby between two "Spanish" provinces. With the end of the repressive Franco regime in the 1970's, which Llopis Goig (2208) calls the "post-national" era of soccer in Spain, regional clubs were increasingly free to assume politicized-peripheral identities. The 1976 Basque derby was one of the first politically subversive events of the post-Franco era: the players displayed the still banned Basque national flag, the *ikurrina*. The derby became a site of not just competition but cooperation as well: an event where Basques could finally insert themselves, as Basques, in Spain.

### 9.3.3 *Jolas: the Great Basque Fiesta*

The Athletic-Real derby is in any case one of the most anticipated sports events of the year. Competition for entrance tickets for the 2010 derby broke records: the first person to buy one had stood in line for thirty-seven hours. Six hundred tickets were given for Athletic fans by the Real Sociedad, way under the demands of a province with 1 million inhabitants. For the day and night before the ticket windows opened, a shanty town of tents, tables and outdoor cooking supplies emerged around the ticket windows of San Mamés stadium. Young people in Athletic paraphernalia formed a line that grew by the hour, ready to spend almost two days playing cards, drinking and socializing in the cold December weather. Neighboring bars prepared extra portions of *tortilla patata* (potato omelet) and *bocadillos* (sandwiches), and stayed open late in

case someone needed a warm space. Every few hours, the local Red Cross passed by to distribute hot tea and check if someone needed medical assistance. The scene was reminiscent of refugee camps one would see on television—only that it emerged not for political violence or persecution, but for a soccer derby.

Buying a ticket turned into test of endurance, perseverance and dedication to “being there” at the Basque derby: thirty-seven hours in the street, in sub-zero weather. Journalists of every media gathered for the moment when the first person finally emerged from the ticket booth, bundled up in several layers of winter clothes, seemingly sleepless and numb with cold. Her frozen knuckles held on to the two tickets which she raised triumphantly, smiling faintly as the cold would allow her face to move. Ticket purchase for the derby became a red-carpet photo opportunity event: people who emerged from the windows were posing with their tickets, smiling triumphantly, with scores of journalists taking pictures and interviewing them about the vicissitudes of the night. They were privileged citizens: they will be there for the derby.

In an age of hyper-digitalization, easy access and the commodification of spectacle, Dennis Kennedy argues, we develop a new relationship to the live event: “Like tourists photographed in front of famous monuments, live sports spectators wish to claim a trace of originary authenticity in a world of manufactured experience” (Kennedy 2009: 162). Basque fans used all their resources to be there at the derby: time (thirty-plus hours), money (individual sales online for as much as 300 Euros, six times the average price), effort (last resort machinations to get around gate entrance). My friends J. and K. and I spent the last two hours before kick-off trying to sneak in the stadium: find an unguarded spot, or persuade the guard to let us in with the excuse of changing banners on the terraces. By the time we were finally smuggled in at a back door by the arriving Real Sociedad vice president, whom K. knew, days of anticipation

have turned our entrance in a soccer stadium into a feat and an event of bonding, even if we supported opposing teams.

The most memorable Athletic-Real derby was played in 1976, only a few months after the death of Franco:

Atotxa soccer stadium, San Sebastián, December 5, 1976. The Athletic Club of Bilbao and the Real Sociedad of San Sebastián are soon to emerge on the field. The terraces are on the verge of explosion. You can hear the alternating yells of ‘Athletic!—Real!’ Mixed with those words, you can also hear, loudly, *Presoak Kalera!* ‘Prisoners to the street!’ *Askatasuna!* ‘Freedom!’ and *Amnistia!* ‘Amnesty!’ The fanfare band *Los Anastasios* is playing beautiful Basque songs; there is a great Basque fiesta going on. It is 4.30, and the players of both teams, lead by the captains Iribar and Kortabarria, enter the field while the fanfare is playing *Batasuna* ‘Unity.’ The applause and the chanting are deafening. Suddenly, a bearded young man emerges between the two lines of players. He walks over to Iribar and Kortabarria, pulls out a piece of cloth from under his shirt, and displays an *ikurrina* [Basque national flag]. Iribar and Kortabarria hold it and raise it, and the three of them walk to the center. Both teams align on the two sides of the flag. Madness overcomes the terraces. The applauding and yelling are ten times louder, and tears flood from our eyes.<sup>170</sup>

The 1976 derby, which a Madrid paper called “Separatist orgy in Atocha” (MacClancy 1996: 193) the following day, has over the years turned into a “Basque fiesta” of political and cultural vindication. The 1976 absolute unanimity of both Athletic and Real locker rooms in their decision of displaying the still banned symbol became symbolic itself: it was an act of cooperation that transcended institutional competition and provincial rivalry. The mandate to cooperate still resonates with the

---

<sup>170</sup> Kirolak, December 7, 1976.

derbies. Thirty-four years later in 2010, as the Spanish *Liga* game scheduling would have it, the Basque derby fell on the same historic date: the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. After the captains Gurpegi and Aranburu emerged on the lawn followed by the two teams, they lined up by the side line. A small girl dressed in *rojiblanco* (red-and-white), the colors of Athletic, and a boy in *txuriurdin* (blue-and-white), the colors of Real Sociedad appear, holding the historic cloth, amidst deafening cheers and applause. They hand it to the captains who, like their colleagues 30 years hold it high. The terraces go overboard with emotion as the present connects with the past through the weather-beaten spectacle of the ikurrina.

The derbies are surrounded with an air of fraternal unity and a display of Basque identity. The streets of the old town of San Sebastián become one sea of red, blue and white. The streets are full of posters vindicating political aspirations: *Euskal Presoak Etxera*, “Basque Prisoners Home,” a desire to bring ETA prisoners back to the Basque Country so they may be visited more easily. The organization ESAIT (*Euskal Selekzioaren Aldeko Iritzi Taldea*), an advocacy group fighting for the officialdom of Basque sports selections and their participation in international championships, planted a *kalejira*, a demonstration in favor of Basque selections: *Euskera eta Euskal Herriko Selekzioa Ofizialtasuna Lortu Behar Dugu eta Lortuko Dugu!* “We Have to and We Will Achieve the Officialdom of the Basque Language and Basque Selections.”

Basque unity and collective remembering was the major theme of the 2010 derby. After the display of the ikurrina, the pre-game program proceeded with the promotion of the Basque language: only two days before, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, the Basque Country celebrated the “International day of Euskera [Basque].” First, homage was paid to the recently deceased poet Xabier Lete—he was one of those artists whose concerts would flash the first clandestine ikurrinas in the mid-1970`s. After the one-

minute silence in his honor, his signature song *Izarren hautsa*, “Stardust” echoed from the loudspeaker and in the terraces, evoking the Tree of Gernika, the symbol of Basque freedom, still nurtured in the town Hitler famously bombarded in 1937:

*Gu sortu ginen enbor beretik  
 sortuko dira bestek,  
 burruka hortan iraungo duten  
 zuhaitz-ardaska gazteak*

From the same trunk we were born  
 others will sprout  
 new young branches  
 who will keep fighting

After the homage to Lete, the Basque singer Etxe appeared the field to sing Urko's famous song that he wrote to re-vindicate the use of the Basque language, and whose paradigmatic performer is Mikel Laboa. Finally, the entire crowd in the Atocha stadium sang together the song *Txoria Txori*, “Bird,” a song often sung by political prisoners, and which metaphorically presents the nation as a bird whose wing is broken and thus cannot fly.

The fiesta of brotherhood takes place in the *jolas* performative mode: cooperative play in the intimacy of the family where men, women and children equally participate. *Jolas* neutralizes the competitive, violent, disruptive edge of *joko* and *burruka*, just as the festival element celebrating common Basqueness neutralizes the violent-competitive aspects of the derby. The pre-game event was *jolas*, a fiesta of being Basque, where the themes of independence, cultural and linguistic continuity, suffering and sacrifice were celebrated through the most relevant Basque symbolism.

With kick-off, however, “the fiesta was over and the hostilities started.”<sup>171</sup> We enter the sphere of *joko*.

#### 9.4 Together and Apart? A Prisoner`s Dilemma

Bateson based his play theory on a visit to the San Francisco zoo, where he saw two chimpanzees playing. The animals were engaged in combative behavior (biting, chasing, wrestling), while it was clear to both parties that they were not fighting but playing. This, Bateson argues, is only possible if there exists an act of meta-communication: “this is play.” In other words, the players agreed that “these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote” (Bateson 1973, 152). For the Basque derby to become play and not fight, a similar act of meta-communication has to take place.

Arriving at that meta-communicative agreement, however, is not easy because of conflicting interests, which turns derby interaction into a prisoner`s dilemma. In the classic prisoner`s dilemma, a Faustian bargain is presented to two members of the same gang: cooperate or defect. The authorities lack evidence for a crime, and offer the two gang members the option to confess or remain silent. If they confess and their accomplice remains silent, they will drop charges against them, and the accomplice will do serious prison time; likewise, if their accomplice confesses while they remain silent, the accomplice goes free and the silent party to prison; if both confess, both get early parole; if both remain silent, there will be a settlement for a lighter sentence. In short, the prisoner`s dilemma is this: in the consideration that both parties understand the structure of the game and both belong to the same gang, would the prisoners radically

---

<sup>171</sup> Diario Vasco December 6, 2010.

seek to optimize their own, if more precarious, very best interest with no regard for the other, or would they cooperate and settle with a less ideal outcome for the individual, but more ideal for both parties? What is important for our purposes here is that the puzzle illustrates a conflict between individual and group rationality: a group whose individual members pursue rational self-interest may end up worse-off than a group whose individual members act contrary to rational self-interest.

The Athletic-Real Sociedad relationship may be seen as an *iterated* prisoner's dilemma where actors play not just once but in succession; they remember their and their opponents' previous actions and decisions, favors and grievances, and strategize accordingly. The iterated prisoner's dilemma is also called a "peace-war game," which captures the centenarian Athletic-Real Sociedad derby relationship. It has been a tug-of-war between cooperation and betrayal, shaped by the pursuit of self-interest and its relaxation in the light of the other's decision. We have seen examples of cooperation: when one club had nothing or minimal at stake, they were ready to cooperate and lose games so that the other party may maximize their benefit and win the league. Player poaching, on the other hand, is conceptualized as betrayal precisely because it comes from the neighbor, which is why it provokes retorsions like exorbitant player transfer fees. The prisoner's dilemma becomes an intimate affair, for there is no dilemma if it's just another competitive relationship: neither Athletic nor Real Sociedad expects another team, say Sevilla FC, to lose games for them so they may win the league; nor are they particularly disturbed when Sevilla FC approaches their players. If it is just another competitive relationship, self-interest seeking is shamelessly maximized as the laws of competition dictate.

The dilemma is therefore this: to cooperate or to betray? To play or to fight? The Basque derby is a dilemma between individual (club) rationality and group

rationality (Basques community), between antagonistic fight (*joko*) and cooperative play (*jolas*). If both parties (Athletic and Real Sociedad) aggressively, if rationally, pursue their self-interest in terms of winning and player purchase, they might be worse off as a group: vicious competition in sports may adversely affect cooperation and unity in social political matters. It is this concern that lies behind the complaints of those who see the artificial generation of inter-province competition as a harmful aggravation of rivalry (*burruka*), and the curbing of cooperation (*jolas*) among fans. The declaration of the Basque derby as “a game of high risk” by the Spanish Liga’s Anti-Violence Commission is considered to exacerbate the situation by creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But because it is a *Basque* derby, there exists a meta-communicative act external to the competitive arena: we belong to the same “gang,” the same moral community. The repeated display of the ikurrina is such an act of meta-communication; so is the chanting of anti-Madrid and pro-Basque songs by *Herri Norte* and *Mujika*. At the moment of possible fight, fans remind themselves with Bateson: “this is play.” Despite all apparent hostility, these meta-communicative acts render the Basque derby qualitatively different than other playfields where they are absent: at games against Madrid teams, for example. Even if occasional betrayal produces zero-sum games, the iterated “peace-war game” has to maintain, in the long run, a balance of win-win situations for the community to survive the antagonistic, divisive tendencies of competition. Beyond individual self-interest, there must remain a collective meta-communicative agreement that “this is play,” whereby “everybody wins (...), and the final result is merely a prize granted to one side of the street or the other.”<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Diario Vasco December 6, 2010.

## Chapter Ten

### “The Spanish Fury:” A Political Geography of Soccer in Spain

“Our country counts with a king, a prime minister,  
and eleven gods. The eleven gods wear  
a red-fury jersey—Spanish, of course.”

Rosa Montero, *El País* 1983

In 2010, a highlight of Spanish nation building through the South African soccer World Cup was an Adidas commercial promoting the Spanish selection jersey. The commercial is titled *Nace de dentro*, “It is born within.” It features two Basque players and an Asturian as they stand with naked upper bodies, handsome, muscular and sweaty. The players start stripping their own skin digitally, from under which emerge the national symbol of Spain, and the colors red and yellow: the Spanish selection jersey. Against the backdrop of slow motion soccer field images and dramatic music, a voiceover says: “This jersey is history. It is everything that we suffer for, that we fight for, that we feel and live for. That which unites us is born within.” Rarely is the embodiment of a nation rendered so literal: the athlete’s body is used as a primordial metonymy for a Spain where all are Spanish “under their skin,” in essence, while they may be Basque, Asturian, Catalan etc. on the surface.

In its splendors and miseries, the Spanish soccer selection has been considered a political allegory. Historically, the under-performance of the national team, also known as *la Furia Española* and *La Roja* (“the Spanish Fury” or the “Red One”) was attributed to a lack of patriotism on the part of players from ethno-regional peripheries. Championing the 2008 and 2012 Eurocups and the 2010 World Cup,

however, bespoke of a different country. The spectacular performance of *la Roja* was believed to reflect a new unity in diversity: a modern country that is politically and socially united at last, and has overcome its regional divisions.

Or has it? For the last two years, various anti-government street fights in Madrid and pro-independence protests in Catalonia and the Basque Country have erupted. As the economic crisis deepens, regional separatist aspirations gain new energies. While the selection's successes are hailed by Spanish nationalists as uniting the nation, it generates unease at the Basque and Catalan peripheries. Whose desires are really written on the athletes' body? Whose state is embodied? Historically, the peripheries have been instrumental in the development of Spanish soccer and the "Spanish Fury," as I will show in this chapter, while they remain at odds with the idea of a central "Spain." This chapter will explore how soccer and the Spanish selection become what Michael Messner (1988) would call a "contested ideological terrain" in a Spain that struggles to normalize its center-periphery relationships.

## 10.1 Theory

This chapter takes elite soccer as a "field" in Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) sense: a system of social positions and agents whose interaction is determined by power relations and the specific character of the field, and who struggle over the appropriation of capital. Spanish, Basque and Catalan nationalists are agents of this field who, by way of their varying historical trajectory, have aligned in a competitive-antagonistic relationship over the symbolic and political capital of mobilizing power through soccer. A specificity of both the ludic and the political field is what Roger Caillois calls *agôn*: competitive combat. In the words of John Hargreaves (2000: 13), "the contest element in sport is especially significant because it allows opposition, conflict and struggle to

be experienced and represented in extremely dramatic and spectacular ways, whereby sports can be made to map national struggles.” Richard Giulianotti (1999: 10) points out that, despite its diffusion as a global game, soccer remains a “dyadic drama” that counter poses identities at town, regional, national and international levels. Sports turn into a favorite political allegory because, unlike in politics, their *agôn* takes place under more ideal conditions: an “artificially created equality of chances,” which is another specificity of the playfield (Caillois, 1961: 14). This premise drives peripheral minorities to compete through soccer as subjects against larger, centripetal political environments. Some of the most notorious regional soccer rivalries exist within the UK (Bairner, 2001), Italy, Israel (Giulianotti, 1999) and the former Yugoslavia (Armstrong and Vest, 2013), mapping political, religious or ethnic divisions.

Regional rivalry has been particularly relevant in the history of soccer in Spain. In a 2008 article sociologist Ramón Llopis Goig identifies the 20<sup>th</sup>-century development of nationalist sentiments tied to regional soccer clubs, calling the post-Franco democratic era the “de-nationalization” of soccer for two main reasons: the strengthening of regional identities through local clubs, and the weakening interest in the underperforming national selection. The 2008, 2012 EuroCup, the 2010 World Cup victories brought a resurgence of nation-building through *la Roja*, prompting the reconsideration of center-periphery antagonisms through soccer.

The Spanish center-periphery struggle is concerned with a basic question about the unity of Spain, and is characterized by two contrary impulses: the impulse of unification, espoused by Spanish centralist nationalists who argue that Spain is one and indivisible, and the impulse of diversification, espoused by peripheral nationalities driven by various degrees of secessionist or Republican nationalism. This tension between unification and diversification—also palpable in the very phrasing of

the Spanish Constitution—has fueled Spanish, Basque and Catalan nationalism. After the death of Franco, the 1978 draft of the constitution set as its priority the democratization of Spain rather than the resolution of regional problems. In an attempt to reconcile unity and diversity, the document struck a compromise between the supporters of a unitary state and the proponents of a federal state. The compromise led to an ambiguous definition of center-periphery relations: “The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible country of all Spaniards; it recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed, and solidarity among them all” (Article 2, cited in Comas 2003: 39). This Article lies down three basic principles: unity, autonomy, solidarity. It, however, remains ambiguous about wherein lies *sovereignty*: in the Spanish nation or in the peripheral nationalities? While the Constitution’s ambiguity allows for both readings, it is in practice the Spanish nation that is made exclusive holder of sovereignty.

While the Constitution promises a balance of central unity and peripheral autonomy, it results in asymmetrical arrangements in practice. Peripheries’ autonomy is respected—as long as it does not clash with central interests, in which case the latter overrule the former. The country’s linguistic pluralism is another example for asymmetry: while the co-officiality of regional languages is recognized, a legal pre-eminence is given to Castilian: every citizen has the right to use it and the *obligation* to know it, while this obligation does not extend to regional languages like Euskera (Basque) and Catalan. There is a sense in which the Spanish Constitution, by flashing the prospect of equal diversity but then giving pre-eminence to centralist unity, resonates with what Bruno Latour calls the Constitution of modern epistemology: an essential paradox that “allows the expanded proliferation of the hybrids whose

existence, whose very possibility, it denies” (1993: 34). The paradoxical impulses of the Spanish constitution reminds peripheral nationalities of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, where the Seventh Commandment stipulates that “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (2003: 80).

*Agôn*ic tension between unity and diversity, center and periphery is acted out between Basque and Catalan soccer cultures and the national selection. To explore that tension, I will use as analytical tools two concepts that affect processes of unification and diversification: “works of purification” and “works of hybridization” as discussed by Bruno Latour (1993) and Bauman and Briggs (2003). The hegemonic emergence of western modernity, they argue, has taken place through the antagonistic interplay of these works of ideology and identity construction. Works of purification disregard alternative affective histories and life worlds, and/or reduce them to a single essence by imposing a single authorial consciousness. Works of hybridization, in contrast, allow for the proliferation of heterogeneous life worlds and recognize their interconnectedness. Modernity was defined by a purifying scientific method (Latour) and by purifying discursive practices (Bauman and Briggs) seeking to describe the “nature of things” from a particular perspective of domination, resulting in the normalized and normative hegemony of western epistemology.

We see similar impulses towards purification in what is a hybrid soccer scene in Spain. Elena L. Delgado (2010: 266) argued that the 2010 soccer World Cup successes were discursively constructed as “a much delayed, ‘normal’ enjoyment of Spanishness”, by which the “fantasy of a ‘Normal’ state” was finally consummated: Spain became a modern state that has finally “defeated its ghosts” (2010: 270). By “defeating ghosts” and becoming “modern,” do centralists celebrate what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) would call the “de-provincializing” of the Spanish soccer

selection—the negation of regional loyalties and affective histories? *Normal, modern, and de-provincialized* become euphemisms for works of purification whose aim is to establish the selection as a meta-discursive regime representing one culture, one language, one territory, one people—Spanish. I argue that the antagonistic impulses of unity vs. diversity, purification vs. hybridization have constituted a process that Gregory Bateson (1958, 1972) calls “schismogenesis:” a dialectic process of differentiation between center and periphery which might be contained under repressive or hegemonic regimes but, once those restraints are removed, increasing symmetry of power between the parties threaten with a breakaway situation.

I will investigate the schismogenic tendencies of the Spanish soccer scene for integration and disintegration as manifested through antagonistic works of purification and hybridization. These works had as their objective the construction of ethnic, racial and national essences, and fixed a rivalry along ethno-regional lines that map political divisions: pro-Spanish center vs. Basque and Catalan peripheries. I will explore three epochs: the pre-Franco era, when soccer was established as the hegemonic sports culture in Spain; the Franco dictatorship of intensive cultural-ideological homogenization; and the current democratic era in a supra-national Europe, where the peripheries emerge with renewed energies of nation building.

## **10.2 The Beginnings of the “Spanish Fury:” Race, Ethnicity and National Virility in Spain**

When play resumed after half-time, Spain seemed to rally behind a call to battle and launched an attack of such ferocity that within two minutes it had secured a free-kick just outside the penalty spot. Sabino was about to take the kick when Jose Mari [Belauste], in a predatory advanced position amidst the

Swedes, with his back to the goal screams: ‘Sabino, give me the ball and I’ll wipe them out!’ And that’s what happened. Sabino kicked the ball upwards, a Swede tried to reach it but only to find Belauste head the ball with such strength that he and various Swedes tumbled together into the goal. It was a herculean goal!” (Manolo de Castro in Burns, 2012: 58).

*Sabino, give me the ball, I’ll wipe them out!* This phrase by the Basque José Mari Belausteguigoitia “Belauste” gained transcendence in the history of Spanish soccer. In 1920, the first Spanish selection played an especially physical game against Sweden at the Olympic Games in Amberes, Belgium. Such was the physicality, passion and force of the squad that the following day the Italian press called it *Furia Rossa*, “Red Rage,” after the color of the players’ jersey; they soon were called “Spanish Fury.”

In reality, there was little “Spanish” about the event that came to identify Spanish soccer. The Spanish Fury of the 1920’s Olympic Games consisted of thirteen Basque, four Catalan, and four Galician players, headed by coach Paco Bru of undisguised Barcelona sympathies. The physical soccer that inspired the word “fury” reflected the dominant style of the squad: *la manera inglesa*, “the English style” of the Basques, inherited from early British players and coaches. It was a physical, forceful game that suited well the more robust and taller constitution of the northern peoples of Spain—the Basques. Belauste was himself a veritable force of nature: 6.3 foot tall and 210 pounds of muscle.

The man who inspired the identity of the Spanish selection was an anti-Spain Basque nationalist. Belauste was member of the youth section of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), where he was responsible for the organization of a series of sports events. He was forced into exile to France and Mexico for his nationalist involvement. “It is quite ironic,” his daughter Lorea Belausteguigoitia writes, “that the

‘Spanish Fury’ should come from this Basque nationalist, director of the soccer selection of the Basque Nationalist Party youth” (in Bacigalupe, 2005, 29).

Nevertheless, Belauste was presented as the “soul of the Spanish team” (Noci, 2000, 5) in a 1921 publication on the great figures of Spanish sports. The Basque player’s game provided the adjectives that came to describe the “Spanish Fury” for several decades to come: his “nobility,” “courage,” “pressure, enthusiasm and vigor,” “energy and spirit” (Noci, 2000: 5). The discursive conception of the Spanish Fury reveals an impulse of purification despite the apparent ideological and ethnic hybridity of the team.

While the selection was mobilized in the service of a Spanish national character, Basques mobilized soccer for the construction of their own. The contemporary nationalist press devoted particular efforts to promote soccer. The youth section of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) was a most active agent in the merger of football, politics, and racial health. *Bizkaitarra* wrote in March 1910: “The Basque race, by conviction of its positive physical superiority, is one of the most saturated with this healthy fighting spirit and competence, synthesized by the Saxons with the word *struggle*” (in Unzueta, 1999, 157)—its Basque equivalent being *burruka*. In an article titled “Art and Sport” by *Euzkadi* in 1915, the author welcomes soccer for its regenerative powers of force against “the mortal enemy (...), the destruction of the Basque soul, of our pure and national idiosyncrasy” (in Unzueta, 1999: 160). The cultural journal *Hermes* dedicated a supplementary volume to soccer in 1921, where the game was praised for “the identification of our people with sports,” and the “conservation of health and the vigor of the races” (Noci 2000: 6).

If we take *episteme* in a Foucauldian (1989) sense as a power-knowledge system, as an epistemological “unconscious,” it is little surprising that sports and

ethno-racial, national virility came to occupy the same conceptual domain. Sports became an answer to contemporary fears of racial and moral degeneration and reproductive exhaustion: Thomas Arnold and the muscular Christianity movement (Mangan and James, 1987; Putney, 2001), Pierre Coubertin and the Olympic movement (MacAloon, 1981) were two massive efforts to restore manly, moral and imperial vigor through muscular bodies. Sports proved an excellent terrain for the construction of race and national virility, as they easily lend themselves to turning features necessary for physical survival (speed, strength, endurance etc) into moral qualities necessary for national survival (courage, aggression, leadership, willpower etc.) (Hargreaves, 2000). Peripheral nationalist ideologies in Spain crystallized at the same time the first soccer clubs were institutionalized: at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their interference was unavoidable.

### **10.3 Basque and Catalan Nationalists Go to Soccer**

The Basque and the Catalan nationalist movements crystallized around the end of the nineteenth century, and represented progressive Republican ideas vis-à-vis the Spanish monarchy. In both the Basque and the Catalan cases, the emerging industrial bourgeoisie espoused a position against Madrid, with which economic dialogue was increasingly difficult. Both nationalisms derived their early ideological compass from “founding fathers:” Prat de la Riba in the Catalan, and Sabino Arana in the Basque case. The first challenge for both movements was to establish in-group and out-group boundaries: separating Basque and Catalan identities from Spanish. The two nationalist movements eventually diverged in terms of core values. Catalonia mobilized around what Daniele Conversi (1997, 42) calls “cultural Catalanism” affected by the flourishing, cosmopolitan cultural life and renaissance of fin-de-siècle

Barcelona, as well as language as a community marking factor. Basque nationalism was nourished by a sense of racial-linguistic difference and economic-administrative autonomy, historically reinforced by such state-granted privileges as local statutes and charters (*fueros*), and the concept of *hidalguía colectiva* (“collective nobility”), a title and concessions collectively given to all Basques in exchange for border control (Conversi, 1997, 178). Historians also point out the relatively unified character of Catalan nationalism, while the Basque movement was more fragmented ideologically—one instance of that fragmentation is the 1959 emergence of ETA, a Marxist, armed organization.

In terms of ideological landscapes and imaginaries, Basque and Catalan nationalisms have aligned with two major clubs of the Spanish *Liga*: the Basque Athletic Club of Bilbao, and the Catalan Barcelona FC (Giulianotti, 1999). Athletic became “the flagship football club of the Basque Country” (Walton, 2011: 458) through its ties with the nationalist elite, and a special recruitment philosophy (MacClancy 1996, 2007): it only recruits players that were born or trained in the Basque Country. What Barcelona FC means for Catalans was articulated by Jordi Pujol, president of the first post-Franco Catalan Government, in these terms: “Barça is like other folkloric manifestations of our people—a reserve we can draw on when other sources dry out, when the doors of normality are closed to us” (in Burns, 2012: 245). It is important to note that not all fans of these teams are necessarily nationalists; the terraces however tend to reflect the ideological constitution of the society that surrounds them, which in these cases means a varying degree of nationalist sentiment. While they reject direct engagement with party politics, both clubs reflect the nationalist currents of their environment: Barça has consolidated a “cosmopolitan,” “bourgeois” character (Foer, 2004) that strikes a balance between

globalization through player transfer, and localization through emphasizing the club as a major Catalan symbol (Llopis Goig, 2008). Athletic's identity rests in its insularity and closure to internationalization through an ethnicized player recruitment policy limited to the Basque Country.

Both clubs had shared leadership with the economic-nationalist local elite. I already explored the ways Athletic shared leadership with the Basque nationalist elite. We see similar personages in Barcelona FC as well, most notably Josep Sunyol, the club's emblematic president. As President of Federation of Associated Catalan Football Clubs in the 1930's, he openly linked soccer with pro-Catalan ideology. In his newspaper *La Rambla*, he published an article titled "Sport and Citizenship," where he declares: "To speak of sport is to speak of race, enthusiasm, and the optimistic struggle of youth. To speak of citizenship is to speak of the Catalan civilization, liberalism, democracy, and spiritual Endeavor" (in Burns, 2012: 88). Before he became President of Barça, he had been a nationalist politician in the left wing Republican party (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*). He supported in 1933 the unilateral proclamation of a Catalan Government: a Catalan State within a federal republic of Spain. Sunyol was detained and shot by Francoist forces in 1936.

For some fifty years between the appearance of soccer on the peninsula and the emergence of the Franco dictatorship in 1936, we see works of both purification and hybridization in Spanish soccer. While the story of the "Spanish Fury" indicates impulses of centralist unification and Hispanicization, the peripheries—in a general fervor of growing nationalist sentiment—added diversity to the overall soccer arena by their own, local works of purification. The result was a hybrid meta-narrative of soccer in Spain, one that Bakhtin (1981) would call *heteroglossia*: the co-existence of various tones and voices within a single arena.

In 1936 enter the Franco regime and its aggressive Hispanicization as part of a national-Catholic agenda.

#### **10.4 “The Dove of Peace is a Ball:” Ideology and Identity Under Franco**

The Franco dictatorship endorsed soccer for two related purposes: first, to construct a unified national character; second, to opiate regional-political discontent (Shaw 1987). These objectives resulted in the purification not only of the “Spanish Fury,” but the entire soccer scene as exclusively Spanish.

The Basque Belauste and his war cry *Pass me the ball, I'll wipe them out!* continued to be the embodiment of a Spanish style that celebrated masculine Hispanic values: virility, impetuosity, fury. A few months after Franco emerged triumphantly from the Civil War, the Falangist (Fascist) journal *Arriba* wrote in 1939: “The *Furia Española* is present in all aspects of Spanish life, to a greater extent than ever (... ) In sport, the Fury best manifests itself in soccer, a game in which the virility of the Spanish race can find full expression, usually imposing itself in international contests over the more technical but less aggressive foreign teams” (in Burns, 2012: 3). As journalist Evaristo Acevedo wrote in 1939, “We need soccer in our search for Hispanic and Catholic civilization. It is football that serves to create a spiritual climate of knowledge of the great and eternal values of our race” (in Gómez, 2007: 49).

The “Spanish Fury” connoted Spain’s imperial past of conquest and glory; the name itself was first inspired by the 1576 Spanish pillage of Antwerp. At the 1950 World Cup group stage against England, the winning goal by Telmo Zarra—a Basque forward who set several records for the history of the *Liga*—Spanish soccer’s top official Armando Muñoz Calero told Franco: “Excellency: we have vanquished the

perfidious Albion” (in Burns, 2012: 4), as if the victory finally served historical justice for Britain’s 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada. For Franco, Spanish soccer was the latest manifestation of imperial power, propagandized through such conquests as a victory against the Soviet Union, or the accommodation of eastern European players fleeing from communist political establishments.

Again, the Spanish Fury was embodied by a tall and forceful Basque, Zarra: “Zarra scored the goal of the most glorious Spanish victory... a splendid demonstration to the whole world that the traditional Hispanic virtues of passion, aggression, fury, virility and impetuosity have been completely recovered in the ‘New Spain’ born out of that bloody conflict—the Civil War” (*Marca* in Burns, 2012: 139). The swan song of the Spanish Fury was the 1964 victory against the Soviet Union. For Franco, winning was imperative: he could not possibly be photographed and televised all over Europe handing a trophy to a communist country. The winning goals were authored by a Basque: Txus Pereda, who scored the first goal, and delivered an assist for the second one. The final 2-1 victory was celebrated as the return of the Spanish Fury: of passion, aggression, courage and virility. Then the Fury quieted down for the next 40 years.

Besides the Spanish Fury, Franco set out to purify the entire soccer arena as Hispanic. By the 1930’s, the game had been professionalized and established as the hegemonic sport in Spain. Such was the identification with clubs at the peripheries, that regional-provincial fandom started to pose a challenge for the dictatorship. As Bilbao-based Falangist commentator Jacinto Miquelarena put it in the 1930’s,

the State must appropriate sports. Sports have the capacity to found a nationality, and to reduce an old Empire to microscopic segments. There is the

‘love for the club,’ a poor feminine love, an attraction to colors and ribbons; and there is or there can be the ‘love of the great patriotic idea.’ (...) A state that exploits the great torrent of sport will be a powerful State (in Gómez, 2007, 30).

He also launched a warning in 1933 on the pages of the weekly paper of the Spanish Falange under the title “Soccer as a Separatist Agent:” soccer “has a great defect, which is the bad thing about it: it stimulates regionalism” (in Gómez, 2007: 131). The challenge was therefore to establish soccer as an agent of nationalism for the center, but a non-agent for the peripheries.

Franco achieved that by expanding total state control over sports life, too. As part of his Hispanicizing agenda—which resulted in the almost complete eradication of minority languages—he ordered all clubs to Castilianize their names in 1942. Athletic Club, which had assumed the English name out of homage to its British roots, was now called *Atlético de Bilbao*. Franco also controlled club leadership and made sure club presidents were close to the regime. Prime example of such presidents were Santiago Bernabéu, a Civil War veteran who, under the dictator’s tutelage, turned Real Madrid into Europe’s most successful club, and Spain’s “national team.” It was Bernabéu who famously said: “The dove of peace is a ball,” a euphemism for soccer being the opium of the people.

In the words of the Basque poet Esteban Urkiaga Lauaxeta, soccer was deployed as “a de-nationalizing instrument by the state” (in Unzueta, 1999: 162). Franco purged stadia of ethnic symbols—like they were forbidden in all walks of life. Elderly sports fans in Bilbao told me that any display of regional identity would have meant years of prison. The story of an eighty-some year old fan shows how political control efficiently erased cultural memory of ethnic symbols:

I remember a game in 1953 in San Mamés [Bilbao]. We were waiting for the gates to open. Suddenly we see a large crowd of people running, with terror on their faces. What happened? My friend pointed towards the ramps of the first floor of the stadium. There was some cloth hanging there, red, white and green. Someone had thrown it up there, and it got stuck. I didn't know what it was, but my friend turned pale: 'That's an *ikurrina* [Basque national flag], run!' I started to run, too, away from it, as any association with it could have meant years in prison (personal communication April 2010).

The absence of open ethno-political vindications in San Mamés was confirmed by a very short phone interview I conducted with the last Athletic president serving under the end of the Franco regime, who cut the conversation short: "politics was in no way present in the direction of the club during those years" (personal communication 2011 February).

### **10.5 "Athletic, Only Spanish Blood:" The Contention Over Purity**

In January 2002, the following text appeared on the front page of the daily *La Razón* under the title "Athletic, Only Spanish Blood:"

Athletic, the only team of eleven Spanish players ... [the club that has] always preferred the national purity, the national product. And it seems they have not been mistaken if we judge it by the accumulated successes of its history. (...) Athletic presumes to achieve something no one else can... It will continue its politics of Spanish players that have given it such good results, and it will make everyone envious of its youth academy (in Gómez, 2007: 122).

Spanish nationalist journalist Luis María Ansón would make a particular ritual of repeating this argument during his tenure at *ABC* and later *La Razón*: “Athletic, the only team of eleven Spanish players.”

Looking at Athletic as “the only team of eleven Spaniards,” as many do, goes back to the Hispanicizing Franco agenda. Franco tolerated, and even respected the localist philosophy of Athletic. During many of my interviews with elderly fans I inquired about what first seemed a conundrum: Franco criminalized all manifestations of Basque identity, while he never touched Athletic’s philosophy of recruiting from Basque land. The Bilbao club was acceptable for Franco’s Hispanicizing agenda because, like it is today, it could always be conveniently called “Spanish.” Spain could always turn to Athletic for local heroes for the construction of the “Spanish Fury,” which was not always the case with Real Madrid or Barcelona. These two giant clubs have foreigners as their most paradigmatic historical personages: Puskás and DiStéfano for the former, Kubala and Cruyff for the latter. These players changed the course of soccer in Spain; what they couldn’t do as Hungarian, Argentine or Dutch, however, was serving as an embodiment of “Spanish Fury.”

This was an acute problem; as *Marca* wrote in 1962 after Spain was yet again eliminated from the World Cup, “(...) the national team is now so full of foreigners and so conditioned by foreign tactics that it no longer plays like a team of real Spaniards, with passion, with aggression, with courage, with virility, and above all with fury” (in Burns, 2012: 181). Athletic Bilbao, in turn, reliably produced world class players, who in Madrid were seen as “real Spaniards” due to the club’s localist recruitment.

Few things demonstrate better centralist purifying impulses than the appropriation of a Basquist purifying recruitment philosophy as “Spanish.” Limiting

their player pool to the Basque Country, Basques are recreating their own version of purity: “we haven’t lost our virginity yet,” as an elderly fan put it, with reference to the absence of “foreign” players. In the 1950’s, the club hymn already exalted Bilbao’s soccer as *limpia tradición*, a “clean tradition.” Through Athletic Bilbao, Basques managed to reproduce the ideal of purity that Spanish nationalists dreamt for the “Spanish Fury.”

### 10.6 Calling Spain “Spain:” When Things Dare Not Speak Their Name

In 2012 November, the Basque Markel Susaeta was convoked by the Spanish selection. At his first press conference he said this: “I am very happy and proud to be here, the dream of my life... Here we are representing... *a thing* ... that we have to respect.”<sup>173</sup> Susaeta provoked nation-wide indignation among centralists: he had troubles calling Spain “Spain.”

Naming and de-naming, anthropologists tell us, have the capacity to fix, steal, trade, suspend and erase identities; naming practices are a performance that “do” as well as “say” things, a privilege that perpetuates power (Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2007). During Franco, that privilege lied with the regime. With the democratic transition, a new challenge of naming and de-naming catalyzed spectacular debates over how to insert phenomena into the emerging social-political matrix (Mees 2012; Raento and Watson 2000).

In the Basque Country, the new nationalist media faced this challenge acutely. Some of the first Basque nationalist dailies like *Egin* and *Deia* avoided the use of the

---

<sup>173</sup> El Mundo (2012) Susaeta: “Representamos a... una cosa.” Available at: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundodeporte/2012/11/13/futbol/1352795447.html> (accessed 13 November 2012).

word “Spain,” and chose to use “Spanish State” instead. The idea behind that strategy was the contention that Spain is not a nation but a political category. The initial desire of these news anchors was to give news of the “Spanish State” in a limited fashion, and possibly avoid it altogether.

In case of sports news, however, a special conundrum arose. With the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, pro-Basque papers had to recognize that people wanted to read more extensively about Spanish athletes. On the one hand, they had been socialized into state level sports; on the other, there were always a few Basque athletes on the Spanish delegation. “This was a situation that caught Basque nationalists off guard as if in self-contradiction,” a journalist told me. “There we were rejecting Spain even in its name, while many of our readers followed Spanish sports and selections” (I. M. personal communication 2012 December). Basque nationalist news portals expanded their coverage, but continued to call Spain the “Spanish State” even in the rankings of nations.

In soccer, another revealing naming practice emerged: dropping reference to Spain altogether. Instead of “Spanish selection” or even the “selection of the Spanish State,” euphemisms were introduced: “the selection of Kubala,” “the selection of Suárez” etc., with reference to coaches. This practice suggests that for Basque nationalists, following the Spanish selection was impossible under that name. They were at the horns of a dilemma: stop following the selection, or drop the name. Euphemisms like the “selection of Kubala” are a coping mechanism to somehow reconcile contradictory mandates: the hybridizing mandate to follow the “Spanish” team as well (where many Basques, and even Basque nationalists continued to play), and the purifying mandate to taboo everything “Spanish.”

Naming was a problem not just for the periphery, but for the center as well. After the Franco regime, when the idea of “Spain” became increasingly problematic as a result of re-invigorated peripheral nationalisms, the designation “Spanish selection” became problematic. The Basque and Catalan peripheries continued to delegate a substantial number of players to the selection, while they were increasingly antagonistic to the idea of “Spain. The term “national selection” had been used during Franco regime. The *Furia* character, while variously connoted by such formations as the *Quinta del Buitre* “Vulture Squad” and *Quinta de los Machos* “Virile Squad” in the 1980`s, became increasingly obsolete in the light of a new soccer style that thrived on technique and imagination rather than pure force—a shift from the Basque roots towards a Catalan style. When selection captain Luis Aragonés started to call his squad *la Roja*, the “Red One,” a loud radical right wing minority opposed the name as for them it was the color of communism, the major enemy under Francoism; another minority suggested this was Aragonés` way of warming up to the newly elected socialist government of José Luis Zapatero. But overall, *la Roja* became a designation that was abstract enough not to conjure up major historical-ideological antagonisms, while it retained an allusion to live-giving vitality in its resemblance to wine or blood. De-naming the “Spanish Fury” was what Bodenhorn and Bruck (2006: 1) would call “a form of political annihilation:” a break with earlier impulses of purifying Hispanicization.

As the oppressive constraints of the Franco regime were removed, we see an increasing symmetry of power relations. The result is open confrontation and antagonism. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009, Valencia`s Mestalla stadium filled to the last of its 55,000 seats for the King`s Cup final between Barcelona FC. and Athletic Bilbao. Following the protocol, the Spanish national anthem would be played as the

teams lined up. The hymn was played but was not to be heard: 55,000 Basques and Catalans were standing, holding innumerable Basque and Catalan national flags high, whistling the anthem. On the terraces, a giant billboard said “We are nations of Europe, Good Bye Spain.” The state-owned *Radio Televisión Española* chose to eliminate the noise of the whistling and amplified the national anthem to audible levels in its broadcast. Cutting the sound of whistling stirred a political controversy, and TVE was widely criticized for censoring an act of free expression. A Barça-Athletic King’s Cup final has become a paradigmatic spectacle that condenses the antagonistic impulses of purification and hybridization.

### 10.7 Feeling Spanish: Purity and Danger in *la Roja*

In January 2013, the Catalan player Xavi received criticism implying he might not be entirely devoted to the Spanish team for his unconcealed Catalan sympathies. Selection captain Vicente Del Bosque stepped up to defend him: “Xavi’s devotion to the Spanish selection is unquestionable. The numbers are there. We cannot cite his Catalan condition, either. This would mean having a *dirty mind*.”<sup>174</sup>

A history of purification reminds us of the anthropologist’s argument (Douglas 1966): where there is purification there is also dirt (or at least a perceived threat of it), for the concepts of cleanness and pollution constitute a binary system that reflects a culture’s basic idea of order and disorder. *La Roja* is such a reflection: unity in diversity is the Spanish “Fantasy of Normalcy,” of order, while the prioritization of

---

<sup>174</sup> Mundo Deportivo (2013) Del Bosque alucina con Messi: “Es la hostia y punto.” Available at [http://www.mundodeportivo.com/20130115/fc-barcelona/espana-seleccion-la-roja-del-bosque-messi-xavi-iniesta\\_54360890808.html](http://www.mundodeportivo.com/20130115/fc-barcelona/espana-seleccion-la-roja-del-bosque-messi-xavi-iniesta_54360890808.html) (accessed 15 January 2013).

ethno-regional sentiments at the expense of Spanish-ness is by extension contamination and disorder. By shoveling dirt back on them, Del Bosque's is a riposte to those who consider Xavi's "Catalan condition" as possibly contaminating.

That a player should not feel Spanish is perceived as a source of danger. As I have mentioned, anti-Spanish sentiments on part of periphery players were believed to have caused the Fury's eighty years of underperformance. Anxiety over whether a player "feels the Spanish colors" leads to a constant policing of allegiances. When Susaeta had troubles calling Spain Spain, public reaction was overwhelming: it was proof that he didn't "feel the colors," and therefore he should not play in the selection. The Spanish national anthem has no lyrics, which disables an infinite opportunity to debate which players, and with how much conviction, sing it. Instead, other destabilizing demons such as stockings emerge: in April 2007, the pro-Spanish media was shocked to see that the Catalan players Xavi concealed the Spanish colors of his stockings, and Puyol somehow fabricated a Catalan flag (*senyera*) out of it.<sup>175</sup> Feelings, comments, stockings and flags become elements of potential contamination, a threat to order as conceived from a particular perspective.

*La Roja* remains a site of tension. On the one hand, there is almost no way the Basque and Catalan peripheries can feel comfortable with it. An impasse of identification emerges because the fan/player subject is uncomfortable with the symbolic persona the selection imposes. "Do I feel Spanish?" "Does this really represent me?" "Why can't we have our own regional-national selection?" When the game is over, Basques and Catalans are declared Spanish world champions, and are

---

<sup>175</sup> 20 Minutos (2007) Por qué la bandera española no está en las medias de Puyol y Xavi? Available at: <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/243094/0/Espana/bandera/polemica/> (accessed 15 October 2012).

celebrated as the finest Spaniards amidst cries of *Viva España!* and the chant “*Yo soy español, español, español*” (“I am Spanish”). On the other hand, centralist pro-selection fans also feel the vulnerability of their situation: the contingency of the country’s greatest national brand, *la Roja*, on periphery players that are often openly anti-Spanish. On the eve of the 2010 soccer World Cup final, 1,5 million Catalans protested against a constitutional court decision to curtail regional autonomy, and in favor of independence. That particular night before the historic game, the question of what would become of Spain without one of its economic motors, Catalonia, gained another frightful dimension: what would become of the Spanish selection without its Catalan players?

### **10.8 Schism under the Skin?**

The commercial “It is born within” that sets the tone for this chapter, and where the soccer players digitally strip their skin, connotes a Spanish expression often used in sports: *dejarse la piel*, “leaving the skin,” or doing one’s best for the nation. Skin is a particular symbol in Spain: the country is also called *piel de toro*, “bull’s skin,” for the shape of the skin cut off from the animal after the bullfight is similar to the shape of Spain. The color red of blood and furious passion is loaded with significance for the bullfight. Skin is an imaginary link between the two ludic spectacles that constitute a temporal axis of Spanish identity: the bullfight of the past, and soccer of the future.

Skin, however, also brings awareness that something may be brewing under the surface: an alarming sense of potential division and schism. In this political geography of soccer we see a process whose logic was analyzed by Gregory Bateson (1958: 175) as “schismogenesis:” a “process of differentiation in the norms of

individual behavior resulting from the cumulative interaction between individuals.” Soccer and politics in Spain have been a historically accumulating *agôn* dialectic. As each party reacts to the reaction of the other in the process of progressive differentiation, and unless there are restraining factors, the end result will be a schism. Historically, the equilibrium of both the political system between center vs. periphery, as well as the sports system of Madrid vs. Barcelona and Bilbao, have been restrained by state domination and purifying discourses. The system did not disintegrate because there was a situation of “complementary schismogenesis:” a competitive relationship between categorical unequals as was the center and the periphery. Both politics and sports have been part of a system with clear tendencies for schism, but the parties remained in complementary antagonism held together by submission to a national hierarchy.

The current possibility of disintegration lies in a shift from complementary towards “symmetrical schismogenesis:” a shift towards a competitive relationship between categorical equals which, in the absence of restraining factors, may lead to a breakaway situation. Indeed, we see an unprecedented constellation of circumstances: in a supra-national democratic Europe, centralist constraints on regional self-determination are increasingly untenable; Catalan players define a new play style and dominate the Spanish selection more markedly than ever; Spanish soccer receives more media scrutiny than ever. These factors create increasing symmetry: the growing symbolic capital of Catalan soccer turns the periphery into a categorical equal.

Catalans make no secret of how they wish to use that capital: at the 2012 October *el Clásico*, the derby between Real Madrid and Barcelona FC broadcast by 680 journalists from 30 countries and viewed by 400 million television spectators, the Camp Nou terraces displayed this message on a giant board: “Catalonia, Europe’s

Next State.” As the “Madrid-Barça” is increasingly conceptualized as a “Spain-Catalonia,”<sup>176</sup> it becomes an event that stimulates latent potential for disintegration in politics and in sports, as the rivalry is feared to negatively affect the Spanish selection. In the face of Spain’s divisions, the “Spanish Fury” has been actively constructed to inhibit disintegration. However, with recent pro-independence proclamations, the Catalan dominance of the selection, and the politicized spectacle of the Barcelona-Real Madrid rivalry, the question arises: will soccer and *la Roja* inhibit the nation’s schismogenic tendencies, or will they further fuel it?

---

<sup>176</sup> El Confidencial (2012). Piqué se desmarca: “El Clásico no debería ser un Cataluña-España, sólo es un partido.” Available at: <http://www.elconfidencial.com/deportes/liga-bbva/2012/10/06/pique-se-desmarca-ldquoel-clasico-no-deberia-ser-un-catalunaespana-solo-es-un-partidordquo-106830/> (accessed 6 October 2012).

### Conclusion

Various accounts exist of the anecdote about the 1920`s *Independiente* players of the Argentine league: Lalin, an imaginative juggler, and the forceful center forward Seoane. The episode happened at a game against *Estudiantes de la Plata*. Lalin would keep the ball for himself, dribble and dance with it as long as he could possess it, postponing the moment of gratification. Seoane didn`t like it; his job was to score goals and win. In the break, Seoane insisted on getting the ball:

“Lalin, if you give me the ball, just one cross-ball, and that is what we need. I give you my guarantee, one cross-ball, one goal.’ (...) Lalin sent a cross-ball, a perfect cross-ball, and Seoane, like the goal machine he was, volleyed it into the goal (...). Very happy, he ran to embrace and to thank Lalin and said: ‘You see, if we play like this we shall win; we shall always win.’ Lalin answered laconically: ‘Yes, I am sure we can always win, but *if we play in this way I do not enjoy the game*’” (my emphasis, in Archetti 1999, 164).

Soccer communities have their special ways of enjoying their game. The aim of this dissertation was to analyze an elite soccer club that defines the enjoyment of its soccer culture in ways that resonate with the earliest stages of the most globalized game. In a billion dollar elite sports milieu, against the backdrop of athlete and coach migration, Athletic maintains a tradition that challenges the most coveted objective of competition: to win at all cost. Symptomatic of the machinery of elite sports recruitment is the omelet metaphor of José Mourinho, Real Madrid`s celebrity coach: “It is omelettes and eggs. No eggs - no omelettes! It depends on the quality of the eggs. In the supermarket you have class one, two or class three eggs and some are

more expensive than others and some give you better omelettes.”<sup>177</sup> In its fantastic frugality, Mourinho summarizes the basic law of success in organized sports: a club will be victorious if they have the money to buy the best players.

There are few clubs in Spain that could afford this attitude like Athletic does. Intimately embedded in a milieu that made Bizkaia and Bilbao one of the richest industrial centers, Athletic could have certainly afforded to launch the same win-at-all-cost strategy and buy expensive star players. They would score more goals, and they would win many more games and even titles; but like Lalin, if they played that way, they would not enjoy the game. The enjoyment of Athletic is predicated on its difference, its otherness; *somos muy de lo nuestro*, “we belong much to our own,” fans say in Bilbao, with reference to a definition of success that is not strictly outcome oriented. For achievement and success to be enjoyable, they have to take place in terms that reflect the values, desires, moralities and the ethos of Bilbao, Bizkaia, and the Basque Country. If Athletic ever changed its “philosophy” as some suggest it should, if it started to recruit top players and win titles, victories would only be bittersweet: fans would look back at their intimate title drought with romantic nostalgia as the only possible way of enjoying the game. “If I cut her wings,” the popular song *Txoria Txori* “Bird” goes, standing metaphorically for a Basque nation aspiring for freedom, “She wouldn’t fly away/She would be mine (...) But then, she would no longer be a bird/And it’s the bird I love.” Athletic would no longer be understandable without its “philosophy” even if victorious, and Bilbao without its Athletic.

---

<sup>177</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgGE3VH\\_LpE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgGE3VH_LpE)

After twenty-eight years of title-drought, Athletic qualified for the UEFA finals in 2012 against a rival that was beatable: *Atlético de Madrid*. It was the octo-final elimination of Sir Alex Ferguson`s Manchester United, one of the most authoritative clubs of Europe that ultimately unbound desires and anticipation: “Yes we can!” ran a headline of the roughly eighty pages of the local Bilbao press after the first round 2-3 victory in Manchester`s Old Trafford, “the cradle of soccer,” “the Theater of Dreams.” It meant that Athletic *can* win a title with an all-Basque roster. The Bilbao club gained the admiration of Europe with “fearless,” “stunning,” “energetic” and “aggressive” performance, with its “youthful exuberance,” “intelligent movement and dynamic pressing,” as the British press variously put it. For the second round, San Mamés became not the Theater, but “the Cathedral of Dreams;” Manchester was “comprehensibly beaten, eliminated and outclassed”<sup>178</sup> by a final score of 5-3. *The Guardian* put it this way:

San Mamés was rocking come the final whistle as the home supporters cherished the sight of one of the great clubs in European football being vanquished. Marcelo Bielsa's [Athletic`s coach] side are a joy to behold. As well as playing with attacking adventure they possess an indefatigable spirit and work ethic that was epitomized by the sight of Iker Muniain, one of their most creative players, chasing back to rob Rooney of the ball in the left-back spot in the second half.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2012/mar/15/athletic-bilbao-manchester-united-europa-league>

<sup>179</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2012/mar/15/athletic-bilbao-manchester-united-europa-league>

The media, fan forums and social media vibrated with personal accounts and anecdotes of the game that reconnected Bilbao's soccer with its much respected British origins, that first game in 1894 at the *Campa de los Ingleses*. That “imperial overhaul,” “total apotheosis” as the Bilbao press put it, was the start of a liminal period that put the city in “union with eternity” as its team marched through the quarter and semi-finals to the final in Bucharest.

There were only 7,650 tickets available for the 35,000 Athletic club members (members have priority in access to tickets) and entire Bizkaia province (roughly one million), and about 15,000 fans traveled to Bucharest to cheer the team in the streets and the bars. At home in San Mamés, another 40,000 watched the game on big screens set up on the field, besides the million Basques who watched it in the streets or in bars. There was no hotel room left in Bucharest as dozens of charter flights deployed thousands of fans. Some fan clubs made the trip by bus, traveling for practically a whole week. The sacrifice of financial and geographical inconvenience connected fans with their parents and grandparents who did the same in trucks, sitting on mattresses (the ones they didn't sell to be able to make the trip), following their champion team all over Spain.

The game was an anti-climactic end to months of accumulated expectations; it was quickly decided in favor of Atlético de Madrid. After the humiliating 3-0 loss, Athletic players collapsed on the field; it took several men in black suits to pull them somehow together for the award ceremony. As the game was whistled off, the fans were handing flags and scarves high, thundering *Athleeetic!* all through the closing ceremony as if Athletic had not just lost, as if they had not just gone through the greatest disappointment of their fandom.

After a certain number of Athletic games, you start distinguishing between the various tones of the extended yell *Athleeeeeetic!*: confident cockiness, exuberant happiness, angry defiance, impotent desperation. There is the triumphant *Athleeeeeetic!* of the happy-go-lucky, self-aggrandizing Bizkaian who thrives on chance and risk, and who is disheartened by nothing; there is the last cry of the shipwrecked before submerging in the sea. This time it sounded like a final surrender to an inglorious *amor fati*: *Beti Zurekin*, “Always With You,” fans chanted in the stadium, tears pouring down their faces. Just before exiting the field of the National Arena of Bucharest, forward Ander Herrera turned back one last time to see the red-and-white terraces, and paused. Overwhelmed, he sunk his face into his hands and broke down sobbing.

In Greek tragedy, it is in climactic catharsis where the hero encounters his truth and attains sublime greatness in his fall. Bilbao strived to find its greatness in its fall. “Now is the time to Rise!” local papers announced the necessity to resurrect. “A step back, but only to gain momentum. Glory turned its back on us last night, but it’s still in front of us, waiting for a fan crowd and team that are unique in the world” (El Correo). “Broken Dream, Intact Pride” (El Correo); “You can lose a final, but never grandeur” (Deia); “Victory starts with defeat...and identity” (Gara) were some of the headlines. “Athletic already has won a lot,” the daily Gara wrote, “it has discovered another footballing identity that it had carried for decades under its skin, and did so without losing its social identity of a team deeply rooted in its country.”

In this dissertation I have addressed various social and political facets of Bilbao’s sports culture clustered around three broad themes: sports, community, gender. I have explored the global-local dimensions of early soccer expansion through its late

nineteenth-century entrance in Spain and the Basque Country. I have situated the identity of the club within the broader discursive and performative constructions of Basque identity and exceptionalism through a localist recruitment philosophy that rejects the global flows of elite soccer. Recruiting only locals grants Athletic its subjectivity which, however, is not without its impasses; the pride and pleasure of belonging and identity may become a burdensome, limiting ideology. The importance of place for identity, memory and narrative surfaces in the discussion of San Mamés, The Cathedral that undergoes ritual sacralization on part of fans, and becomes the sacred place of a post-modern urban city. I have addressed the nuanced relationship of Bilbao's soccer culture with the Basque nationalist imaginary, as well as its role in shaping Spanish soccer history. I have addressed inter-ethnic, provincial relations through the Basque soccer derby, and Bilbao's place in the conflicted political geography of soccer in Spain. I paid special attention to the gender order Bilbao's soccer culture reflects in terms of symbolic and institutional inequalities, sexuality, and masculine morality. The diversity of themes and approaches an ethnography of soccer culture offers highlights the social embeddedness of this sport as it structures inter-personal interaction, micro-communities, habits, desires, ideologies and knowledge.

This dissertation aims to fill a lacuna in anthropological and sociological research in the Basque Country and in Spain. In the 1970's, a handful of sports anthropologists lamented the absence of anthropological attention to sports, calling it "the last frontier" of a discipline that considers itself the flagship authority in the study of culture and society. Spain has attracted much anthropological and sociological attention for its ritualized public life, the paradigmatic fiestas and bullfights, as well as ethno-political complexities; surprisingly little, albeit increasing,

systematic work is published on soccer, Spain`s most popular, locally and globally engaged past-time. Similarly, while Basque anthropology has produced excellent and exceptionally rich literature on Basque pre-history, language, folklore, culture, subsistence, political violence, social and gender relations, very little attention has been devoted to games and sports. In a country of great anthropological tradition, my presence researching soccer culture still struck many as an oddity. “Study Athletic?” a militant feminist asked me incredulously, even scandalized. “And there are universities that give you money for that?”

Ironically, feminism is precisely one of the movements in the Basque Country that I hope will find my work helpful. Again, feminism and gender studies thrive in this country of strong leftist, progressive and liberal-democratic ideologies and egalitarian ethos; and yet, almost nothing has been written on sports as a terrain of gender ideologies, inequalities, exclusion and marginalization. Gender differences and roles naturalized under the Franco dictatorship have resulted in that women`s sports in Spain and in the Basque Country lag way behind that of men`s sports in terms of finances, social respectability, access and visibility. Though my work touches only the surface as far as the research potential of sports and feminism is concerned in Spain and the Basque Country, the richness of the data opens a new window on the relevance of gender for this arena. Sports and soccer are often seen as a “frivolous” past time. With this work I hope to show that soccer`s implications for power, for financial, symbolic and cultural capital creates an imperative to reconsider it as a crucial arena of social and gender justice.

And finally, I hope this work calls attention to soccer as an important reflection and catalyst of ongoing political processes. Past connections between soccer and nationalist imaginaries are certainly well documented. Interesting times,

however, are ahead. Spain is going through various challenges; its financial situation is on the verge of bankruptcy, there emerges yet another impetus (economic) for the peripheries to demand self-determination. Soccer stadia will continue to be the loudest, most visible arenas of the contestation for political powers, ideologies and identities.

## Bibliography

- Allen, Virginia M. 1983. *The Femme Fatale. Erotic Icon*. Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O. 1991. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Archetti, Eduardo P. 1999. *Masculinities. Football, Polo and Tango in Argentina*. Oxford: Berg.
- Aretxaga, Begoña. 2005. *States of terror: Begoña Aretxaga's essays*. University of Nevada Press.
- Armistead, Samuel G., and Joseba Zulaika. 2005. *Voicing the Moment: Improvised Oral Poetry and Basque Tradition*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies.
- Armstrong, G. and Vest E. 2013. "Bridging Practice and Desire: Football Rivalry in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina." In *Power, Practice and Passion in Sports*, edited by Mariann Vaczi. Reno, Nevada: Center For Basque Studies.
- Armstrong, Gary and Richard Giulianotti. 2001. "Constructing Social Identities: Exploring the Structured Relations of Football Rivalries." In *Fear and Loathing in World Football*, edited by Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti, 267-280. Oxford: Berg.
- Armstrong, Gary. 1998. *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score*. Oxford: Berg.

- Arpal, Jesús. 1985. "Solidaridades elementales y organizaciones colectivas en el País Vasco (cuadrillas, txokos, asociaciones)." *Ibilbide sozialak, ideologiak eta ekintza kulturalak Euskal Herrian*: 129-154.
- Bacigalupe A. 2005. *Belauste: el caballero de la furia*. Bilbao: Muelle de Uribitarte.
- Bailey, Peter. 1978. *Leisure and class in Victorian England: rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.
- Bairner A. 2001. *Sport, nationalism, and globalization: European and North American perspectives*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M. 1968. *Rabelais and his World*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Bakhtin, MM. 1981. *The dialogic imagination: four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ball, Phil. 2003. *Morbo: The Story of Spanish Football*. London, WSC Books.
- Barandiarán, J.M. 1972. "Diccionario ilustrado de mitología vasca." In *Obras Completas*, 12:166. Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca.
- Barthes, Roland. 1978. *A Lover's Discourse*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1958. *Naven, a survey of the problems suggested by a composite picture of the culture of a New Guinea tribe drawn from three points of view*. Stanford, California.: Stanford University Press.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1973. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Frogmore: Paladin, Granada

Publishing Limited.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1979. *Seduction*. New York: St. Martin`s Press.

Bauman, R and Briggs CL. 2003. *Voices of modernity: language ideologies and the politics of inequality*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Berteaut, Simone. 1970. *Piaf*. London: W. H. Allen.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Brandes, Stanley. 1985. *Metaphors of Masculinity. Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Braudy, Leo. 2003. *From chivalry to terrorism: war and the changing nature of masculinity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Brooks, Peter. 1976. *The Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Bruck, G. and Bodenhorn B. 2006. *The anthropology of names and naming*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bullen, Margaret. 2003. *Basque Gender Studies*. Nevada, Reno: Center for Basque Studies.

Bundgaard, Axel. 2005. *Muscle and manliness: the rise of sport in American boarding schools*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

- Burns, Jimmy. 2012. *La Roja: how soccer conquered Spain and how Spanish Soccer conquered the world*. New York: Nation Books.
- Burstyn, Varda. 1999. *The Rites of Men. Manhood, Politics and the Culture of Sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Burton, Mariah Nelson. 1994. *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Butler, Judith. 1990a. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1990b. "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 2(2): 1990b. 105-125.
- Caillois, Roger. 1961. *Man, Play, and Games*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Camus, Albert. 1991. *The Fall*. USA: Vintage Books.
- Cancian, M. Francesca. 2004. "The Feminization of Love." In *The Gendered Society Reader*, edited by Michael S. Kimmel, 352-364. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carlin, John. 2012. *La Tribu. El fútbol visto desde el córner inglés*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Caro Baroja, J. 2009. *The Basques*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies.
- Castillo, J. C. 2007. "Play Fresh, Play Local: The Case of Athletic de Bilbao" *Sport in*

*Society* 10(4): 680-97.

Castresana, Luis. 1968. *El otro arbol de Guernica*. Madrid: Editorial Prensa Española.

Chakrabarty, D. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Chidester, David and Edward T. Linenthal. 1995. "Introduction." In *The American Sacred Place*, edited by David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, 1-43. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, Harvard University Press.

Cole, Cheryl L. 1999. "Resisting the canon: Feminist cultural studies, sport, and technologies of the body." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 17(2): 77-97.

Comas, JM. 2003. "Spain: The 1978 Constitution and centre-periphery tensions." In *Europe's old states in the new world order: the politics of transition in Britain, France and Spain*, edited by Ruane J et al., 38-61. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Conversi, Daniele. 1997. *The Basques, the Catalans, and Spain: alternative routes to nationalist mobilization*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.

Copjec, Jean. 1994. *Read My Desire*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1990. *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

- Dal Lago, Alessandro and Rocco De Biasi. 1994. "Italian Football Fans: Culture and Organization." In *Football, Violence and Social Identity*, edited by Richard Giulianotti, Norman Bonney and Mike Hepworth, 73-89. London, New York: Routledge.
- Del Valle, Teresa, Joxemartin Apalategi Begiristain. 1985. *Mujer vasca: imagen y realidad*. Anthropos.
- Del Valle, Teresa. 1998. "At the Crossroads of Gender, Time and Space: Discovering the Basis for Inequality." Unpublished paper presented at the 1998 conference on Basques in the Contemporary World, Reno, Nevada.
- Delaney, Tim and Tim Madigan. 2009. *Sports: Why People Love Them!* New York: University Press of America.
- Delgado, LE. 2010. "The Sound and the Red Fury: The Sticking Points of Spanish Nationalism." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 11(3-4): 263-276.
- Disch, Lisa and Mary Jo Kane. 1996. "When a Looker is Really a Bitch: Lisa Olson, Sports, and the Heterosexual Matrix." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 21(21):278-308.
- Doane, Mary Ann. 1991. *Femmes Fatales. Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Ark.

- Douglass, William A. *Death in Murélagá: Funerary Ritual in a Spanish Basque Village*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1969.
- Dunning, Eric. 1999. *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilization*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Durkheim, Émile. 1965. *The elementary forms of the religious life*. New York: Free Press.
- Dyer, Richard. 1982. "Don't look now." *Screen* 23(3-4): 61-73.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1959. *The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. 1972. "Tales of Sound and Fury. Observations on the Family Melodrama." In *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman`s Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 2-15. London: BFI Publishing.
- Felman, Shoshana. 1983. *The Literary Speech Act. Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Fernandez, James. 2003. "Emergence and Convergence in Some African Sacred Places." In *The Anthropology of Space and Place*, edited by Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, 187-203. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fernandez, James. 1986. *Persuasions and performances: the play of tropes in culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

- Finn, Gerry P.T. 1994. "Football Violence: A Societal Psychological Perspective." In *Football, Violence and Social Identity*, edited by Richard Giulianotti, Norman Bonney and Mike Hepworth, 90-127. London, New York: Routledge.
- Fisher, Roger and William Ury. 2011. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Foer, F. 2004. *How soccer explains the world: an unlikely theory of globalization*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Foucault, M. 1989. *The Archeology of knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1999. *Totem and Taboo*. London: Routledge.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. *Truth and Method*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Gallop, Rodney. 1970. *The Book of the Basques*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gennep, Arnold van. 1960. *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Giardina, Michael D. 2003. "Bending it like Beckham" in the global popular: stylish hybridity, performativity, and the politics of representation." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 27(1): 65-82.

- Gill, Rosalind. (2011) "Bend it like Beckham? The challenges of reading visual culture." In *Visual Psychologies*, edited by P. Reavey, London & New York: Routledge.
- Gilmore, David D. 1990. *Manhood in the Making. Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Girard, René. 1986. *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Giulianotti, R. 1999. *Football: a sociology of the global game*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giulianotti, Richard, and Roland Robertson. 2009. *Globalization & football a critical sociology*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2009.
- Giulianotti, Richard. 1999. *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game*. Oxford: Oxford Blackwell Publishers.
- Glas, Eduardo Jorge. 1997. *Bilbao's modern business elite*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Gluckman, Max and Mary Gluckman. 1977. "On Drama, and Games and Athletic Contests." In *Secular ritual*, edited by Moore, Sally Falk, and Barbara G. Myerhoff, 227-244. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction ritual: essays on face-to-face behavior*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday.
- Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. Macmillan.
- Gómez, Daniel. 2007. *La patria del gol: fútbol y política en el Estado español*. San Sebastián: Almed.
- González Abrisketa, Olatz. 2012. *Basque Pelota: A Ritual, an Aesthetic*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies.
- Greenwood, Davydd. 1977. "Continuity in Change: Spanish Basque Ethnicity as a Historical Process." In *Ethnic Conflicts in the Western World*, edited by Milton J Esman, 81-103. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Griffin, Pat. 1998. *Strong Women, Deep Closets. Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Groves, M. 2011. "Resisting the globalization, standardization and rationalization of football: my journey to Bilbao." *Soccer & Society* 12(2): 265-78.
- Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J. 1992. "Beyond 'culture:' Space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural anthropology*, 7(1), 6-23.
- Haley, Bruce. 1978. *The healthy body and Victorian culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Halliwell, M. 2004. *Images of Idiocy. The Idiot Figure in Modern Fiction and Film*. Burlington: Ashgate.

- Hanson, Helen and Catherine O`Rawe, Eds. 2010 *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*. Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
- Hargreaves, John. 2000. *Freedom for Catalonia? Catalan nationalism, Spanish identity and the Barcelona Olympic Games*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hargreaves, Jennifer. 1994. *Sporting Females. Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women`s Sport*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, Jennifer. *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity*. Routledge. 2000.
- Heiberg, Marianne. 1980. "Basques, Anti-Basques and the Moral Community." In "Nation" and "State" in Europe, edited by R. Grillo, 45-60. New York: Academic Press.
- Heilman, Robert Bechtold. 1968. *Tragedy and Melodrama. Versions of Experience*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Heller, J. 1996. *Catch-22*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Higgs, Robert J. and Michael Braswell. 2004. *An unholy alliance: the sacred and modern sports*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press.
- Hobbs, Dick and David Robins. 1991. "The Boy Done Good: Football Violence, Changes and Continuities." *Sociological Review* 39(3): 551-579.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1992. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of*

*Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, 1-15.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric. and Terence O. Ranger. 1992. *The Invention of Tradition*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horne, John, Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel. 1999. *Understanding sport: an*

*introduction to the sociological and cultural analysis of sport*. London:

Routledge.

Huizinga, J. 1950. *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. New York:

Roy Publishers.

Humboldt, Wilhelm. 1821. *Researches into the Early Inhabitants of Spain by the help*

*of the Basque language*.

Ibson, John. 2002. *Picturing men: a century of male relationships in everyday*

*American photography*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Jackson, Steven. 2013. "Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Advertising

and Promotional Culture." *Communication & Sport* 1(1/2):100-112.

Jackson, Susan A., and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. 1999. *Flow in sports*. Champaign,

IL: Human Kinetics.

James, C. L. R. 1963 (1983). *Beyond a boundary*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Johnson, Don. 2004. *The Sporting Muse: a Critical Study of Poetry About Athletes*

*and Athletics*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

- José Manuel Alonso. 1998. *Athletic for ever! 1898-1998*. Bilbao: Bizkaiko gaiak.
- Kasmir, Sharryn. 2002. "More Basque Than You!" Class, Youth and Identity in an Industrial Basque Town." *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9: 39-69.
- Kennedy, Dennis. 2009. *The spectator and the spectacle: audiences in modernity and postmodernity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kimmel, Michael S. 2005. *The History of Men*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- King, Anthony. 2001. "Violent Pasts: Collective Memory and Football Hooliganism." *Sociological Review*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Krips, Henry. 1999. *Fetis: An Erotics of Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University.
- Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. 1975. *Language and woman's place*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Latour, B. 1993. *We have never been modern*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Leguineche, Manuel, Santiago Segurola and Patxo Unzueta. 1998. *Athletic 100: conversaciones en La Catedral*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Lever, Janet. 1983. *Soccer madness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levi, Heather. 1997. "Sport and Melodrama: The Case of Mexican Professional Wrestling." *Social Text* 50: 57-68.

- Lipset, Seymour M. 1996. *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. New York: Norton&Company.
- Llopis-Goig, R. 2008. Identity, nation state and football in Spain. The evolution of nationalist feelings in Spanish football. *Soccer&Society* 9(1): 56-63.
- Llopis-Goig, R. 2008. National orientation, universal outlook—the symbolic capital of FC Barcelona in the global era. *European Journal for Sport and Society* 5(1): 63-71.
- Low, Jennifer. 2003. *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture*. New York, Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Low, Setha M., and Denise Zúñiga. 2003. *The anthropology of space and place: locating culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003.
- MacAloon, John J. 1981. *This great symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the origins of the modern Olympic Games*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MacAloon, John J. 1984. *Rite, drama, festival, spectacle: rehearsals toward a theory of cultural performance*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984.
- MacAloon, John J. 2008. *Muscular Christianity in colonial and post-colonial worlds*. London: Routledge.
- MacCannell, Dean. 1987. "Marilyn Monroe Was not a Man." *Diacritics*. Summer: 114-127.

- MacCannell, Dean. 2011. *The Ethics of Sightseeing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MacClancy, Jeremy. 1993. "Biological Basques, Sociologically Speaking." In *Social and Biological Aspects of Ethnicity*, edited by Malcolm Chapman, 92-129. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacClancy, Jeremy. 1996. "Nationalism at Play: The Basques of Bizkaia and Athletic Club de Bilbao." In *Sport, Identity, and Ethnicity*, edited by Jeremy MacClancy, 181-199. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- MacClancy, Jeremy. 1996. *Sport, identity, and ethnicity*. Oxford: UK, Berg.
- MacClancy, Jeremy. 2007. *Expressing identities in the Basque arena*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Maguire, Joseph A. 1999. *Global sport: identities, societies, civilizations*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Mangan, J. A. 1981. *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian public school: the emergence and consolidation of an educational ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mangan, J. A. 2000. *Superman supreme: fascist body as political icon: global fascism*. London: Frank Cass.
- Mangan, J. A. 2006. *A sport-loving society Victorian and Edwardian middle-class England at play*. London: Routledge.

- Mangan, J.A. and Roberta J. Parks, eds. 1987. *Sport and Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*. Great Britain: Frank Cass and Company Limited.
- Mangan, JA. and James, W. 1987. *Manliness and morality: middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Markovits, Andrei S. and Steven L. Hellerman. 2004. "Women`s Soccer in the United States: Yet Another American Exceptionalism." In *Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation. Kicking Off a New Era*, edited by Fan Hong and J.A. Mangan, 14-30. Great Britain: Frank Class Publishers.
- Marsh, Peter. 1978. *Aggro: The Illusion of Violence*. London, Melbourne, Toronto: J.M. Dent&Sons Ltd.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1992. "Body Techniques." In *Incorporations*, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, 455-477. New York, NY: Zone.
- McDowell, Linda. "City and Home: Urban Housing and the Sexual Division of Space." In *Sexual Divisions, Patterns and Processes*, edited by Mary Evans and Claire Ungerson. London: Tavistock Publications, 1983.
- Mees, L. 2012. "A Nation in Search of a Name: Cultural Realities, Political Projects, and Terminological Struggles in the Basque Country." In *The Challenges of A Bilingual Society in the Basque Country*, edited by Salaburu, .P and Alberdi X., 11-33. Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Messner, M. 1988. *Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested*

Ideological Terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5(3): 197-211.

Messner, Michael A. 1992. *Power at Play. Sports and the Problem of Masculinity.*

Boston: Beacon Press.

Messner, Michael A. 1994. "Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as

Contested Ideological Terrain." In *Women, Sport, and Culture*, edited by

Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994.

Messner, Michael A. 2007. *Out of play: critical essays on gender and sport.* Albany:

State University of New York Press.

Messner, Michael A. and Donald F. Sabo. 1994. *Sex, Violence & Power in Sports.*

*Rethinking Masculinity.* California: The Crossing Press, Freedom.

Morcillo, Aurora G. 2000. *True Catholic Womanhood: Gender Ideology in Franco`s*

*Spain.* Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press Dekalb.

G.L. Mosse. 1996. *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity.* New

York: Oxford University Press.

Mulvey, Laura. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16(3): 6-18.

<http://www.jahsonic.com/VPNC.html>

Mulvey, Laura. 1987. "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama." In *Home is Where the Heart*

*Is. Studies in Melodrama and the Woman`s Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill,

75-79. London: BFI Publishing.

- Nelson, Mariah Burton. 1994. *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Newman, Matthew L., Carla J. Groom, Lori D. Handelman, and James W. Pennebaker. 2008. "Gender differences in language use: An analysis of 14,000 text samples." *Discourse Processes* 45(3): 211-236.
- Nobus, Dany. 2000. *Jacques Lacan, and the Freudian Practice of Psychoanalysis*. PA Philadelphia: Routledge.
- Noci, JD. 2000. Los nacionalistas van al fútbol: Deporte, ideología y periodismo en los años 20 y 30. *Revista de estudios de comunicación = Komunikazio ikasketen aldizkaria*, ISSN 1137-1102, 9. Available at <http://www.ehu.es/zer/hemeroteca/pdfs/zer09-13-diaz.pdf>.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps. 1996. "Narrating the self." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25:19-43.
- Ortiz-Osés, Andres. and F.K. Mayr. 1980. *El matriarcalismo vasco: reinterpretación de la cultura vasca*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto.
- Orwell, G. 2003. *Animal farm; 1984*. Orlando: Harcourt.
- Ott, Sandra. 1981. *The circle of mountains: a Basque shepherding community*. Oxford [Eng.: Clarendon Press.
- Payne, S.G. 1975. *Basque Nationalism*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.

- Pedersen, Paul M. 2013. "Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Strategic Communication and Management." *Communication & Sport* 1(1/2): 55-67.
- Pfister, Gertrud. 2010. "Women in sport—gender relations and future perspectives 1." *Sport in Society* 13(2): 234-248.
- Pietz, William. 1993. Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx. In *Fetishism as cultural discourse*, edited by Apter, Emily S., and William Pietz, 119-152. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Pink, Sarah. 1997. *Women and Bullfighting: Gender, Sex and the Consumption of Tradition*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Prebish, Charles S. 1993. *Religion and sport: the meeting of sacred and profane*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Price, Joseph L. 2001. *From season to season: sports as American religion*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press.
- Priestley, J.B. 1929 (1976). *The Good Companions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Pritchard, Anette and Nigel J. Morgan. 2000. "Privileging the Male Gaze. Gendered Tourism Landscapes." *Annals of Tourism Research* 27(4): 884-905.
- Putney, C. 2001. *Muscular Christianity: manhood and sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Raento, P. and Watson, C.J. 2000. "Gernika, Guernica, *Guernica*? Contested meanings

of a Basque place.” *Political Geography* 19: 707-736.

Raento, Pauliina. 1996. *Territory, Pluralism, and Nationalism in the Basque Country of Spain*. Doctoral dissertation. Reno: Center for Basque Studies.

Rappaport, Roy A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rich, Adrienne. 1986. “Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” In *Blood, Bread and Poetry*, W.W. Norton Limited.

Rose, Jacqueline. 1986. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. London: Verso.

Rostand, Edmund E. A. (1897/2008). *Cyrano de Bergerac, A Play in Five Acts*. Forgotten Books.

Roth, Amanda and Susan A. Basow. 2004. “Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a Theory of Physical Liberation.” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. 28:245-265.

Rowe, David. 2013. “Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Nation and Globalization.” *Communication & Sport* 1(1/2) 18-29.

Rowe, Sharon. 2008. “Modern Sports: Liminal Ritual or Liminoid Leisure?” In *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance*, edited by Graham St. John, 127-148. USA: Berghahn Books.

Shakespeare William. 1991. *The merry wives of Windsor*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Shaw, D. 1987. *Fútbol y Franquismo*. Madrid: Alianza.

- Sheldrake, Philip. 2001. *Spaces for the sacred: place, memory, and identity*.  
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.
- Shihade, Magid. 2011. *Not just a soccer game: colonialism and conflict among  
Palestinians in Israel*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Skerski, Jamie. 2006. "From Sideline to Centerfold: The Sexual Commodification of  
Female Sportscasters" in *Sex in Consumer Culture. The Erotic Content of  
Media and Marketing*. Eds. Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambaise. New  
Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1995. *Nations and nationalism in a global era*. Cambridge, UK:  
Polity Press.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll and Charles Rosenberg. 1987. "The Female Animal:  
Medical and Biological Views of Women and their Role in Nineteenth-  
century America." In *From "Fair Sex" to Feminism. Sport and the  
Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, edited by  
J.A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park. Great Britain: Frank Cass and Company  
Limited.
- Soriano, Ferran. 2012. *Goal: The Ball Doesn't Go In By Chance*. UK: Palgrave  
MacMillan.
- Spain, Daphne. 1992. *Gendered Spaces*. Chapel Hill and London: University of  
California Press.

- Sperberg, Dan. 1975. *Rethinking Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Suits, Bernard. 1988. "The Elements of Sport." In *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, edited by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc.
- Terrachet, Enrique. 1998. *100 años de historia del Athletic de Bilbao: "caso único en el fútbol mundial" (L'Equipe)*. Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca.
- Theberge, N. 2000. *Higher Goals: Women's Ice Hockey and the Politics of Gender*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Tocqueville, Alexis. 1969. *Democracy in America*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Tolstoy, Leo. 1939. *Anna Karenina*. New York: Random House.
- Turner, Victor Witter. 1982. *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play*. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- Turner, Victor Witter. 1969. *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.
- Turner, Victor Witter. 1974. *Dramas, fields, and metaphors; symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, Victor Witter. 1985. "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual and Drama?" In *On The Edge of the Bush: The Anthropology of Experience*, edited by E. Turner, 291-301. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Tyrell, Ian. 1991. "American Exceptionalism in the Age of International History." *The American Historical Review* 96(4): 1031-1055.
- Unzueta, Patxo. 1999. Fútbol y nacionalismo vasco. In: Seguro S (ed) *Fútbol y pasiones políticas*. Madrid: Editorial Debate, pp.147-169.
- Unzueta, Patxo. 1999. *Fútbol y nacionalismo vasco*. In *Fútbol y pasiones políticas*, edited by Santiago Seguro S, 147-169. Madrid: Editorial Debate.
- Urla, Jacqueline. 1993. "Cultural politics in an age of statistics: Numbers, nations, and the making of Basque identity." *American Ethnologist* 20(4): 818-843.
- Urla, Jacqueline. 1995. "Outlaw language: Creating alternative public spheres in Basque free radio." *Pragmatics* 5(2): 245-261.
- Vaczi, M. 'Subversive Pleasures, Losing Games: Basque Soccer Madness'. *South African Review of Sociology*. 42, no. 1. (2011): 21-37.
- Valentine, G. 1993. "Hetero(sexing) Space: Lesbian Perceptions and Experiences of Everyday Spaces." *Society and Space*, 11:395-413.
- Valle, Teresa. 1994. *Korrika. Basque Ritual for Ethnic Identity*. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.
- Veeck, Bill. 2012. *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Vertinsky, Patricia Anne, and Sherry McKay. 2004. *Disciplining bodies in the gymnasium: memory, monument, modernism*. London: Routledge.

- Vertinsky, Patricia Anne. 1990. *The eternally wounded woman: women, doctors, and exercise in the late nineteenth century*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2004. *Body & Soul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walton J.K. 2011. "Sport and the Basques: Constructed and Contested Identities, 1876-1936." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24(4): 451-47.
- Walton, John K. 2001. "Basque Football Rivalries in the Twentieth Century." In *Fear and Loathing in World Football*, edited by Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti, 119-136. Oxford: Berg.
- Winzeler, Robert L. 2008. *Anthropology and religion: what we know, think, and question*. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Wolf, Naomi. 1991. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York: Doubleday.
- Žižek, S. 2006. *How to Read Lacan*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 1994. *The Metastases of Enjoyment. Six Essays of Woman and Causality*. London, New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2001. *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso.

Zulaika, Joseba. 1988. *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.

Zulaika, Joseba. 1996. *Del cromañon al carnaval : los vascos como museo antropológico*. San Sebastian Donostia: Erein.