

**Ludger Mees**

**CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING**

**NATIONAL HEROES**

**A BASQUE CASE STUDY\***

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**Introduction: heroes and heroism in the social sciences**

Andrea: Unhappy the land that has no heroes!

Galileo: No, unhappy the land that needs heroes.

(Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*)

Heroism is a state of emergency and mostly a product of a plight.

(Theodor Fontane, *The Stechlin*)

Research on national heroes is still a desideratum of the scholarly interest that social scientists, and especially historians, have developed in recent decades regarding the history and theory of nationalism. Within the framework of structuralism and social history, after 1945 the dominant paradigm for most of them, historians tended to place focus on the relationship between socioeconomic evolution and the rise of nationalist

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<http://snm.nise.eu/index.php/studies/article/view/0304a>

movements or on the relationship between class and nation. Furthermore, the dramatic experience of fascism and war posed a significant obstacle to the study of nationalist heroism, since, as Linas Eriksonas puts it, 'the subject of heroes had been subverted by the extreme nationalist propaganda compromising a great deal of historical material upon which national heroes stood and fell.'<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, classical approaches towards heroes and hero worship such as that which was published by Thomas Carlyle in 1841, were buried. Yet, the funeral was not only for Carlyle's specific approach and his unrealistic theoretical groundwork, according to which 'Universal History [...] is at the bottom of the History of the Great Men who have worked here.'<sup>2</sup> Along with these ideas, the issue of heroes and heroism in general as a subject that may matter for the explanation of nationalism was also interred.

The resurrection of scholarly interest in national heroism can be understood as a result of the *cultural turn* and the reassessment of the importance of human agency in the historical process. A glance at a couple of path-breaking publications may suffice to indicate this new scholarly interest in the relevance of heroes and their celebration. One of the pioneers of this new approach was Pierre Nora with his monumental work about the French 'lieux de mémoire'.<sup>3</sup> Across different volumes of this publication several articles are related to 'real' historical heroic personalities like Joan of Arc, Descartes or Charlemagne, in addition to contributions about collective heroism such as the 'fallen for the fatherland' ('Les monuments aux morts') and about fictitious heroes like the soldier Nicolas Chauvin, a great patriotic hero during the Revolution and afterwards, a brave soldier in the *Grande Armée*. Following Nora's example, a decade later Étienne François and Hagen Schulze coordinated a similar voluminous publication about German *Erinnerungsorte* or 'memory sites'.<sup>4</sup> Again we find the categorisation of 'real' personalities with a heroic image (Frederic the Great, Bismarck, Goethe, the Humboldt brothers, Charlemagne) and fictitious heroes like *Germania*, the personification of the German nation, or *Arminius*, the Cherusci chieftain who defeated the Roman army in the battle of the Teutoburg Forest. A further three articles are dedicated to different (individual and collective) anti-heroes such as the Jew, the Bolshevik and Napoleon.

These new perspectives in the studies of nationalism and the forging of national identities have been applied and deepened in a number of important case studies carried out by historians and other researchers of the international scientific community. A special mention is warranted for books like those of Sudhir Hazareesingh and Annie Jourdan regarding the hero Napoleon and his legend; the one by Robert Gerwarth about 'the myth of Bismarck'; the books of Ian Kershaw and Ludolf Herbst about 'Hitler's myth' and the 'invention of the German Messiah'; the study published by Barry Schwartz about George Washington and the 'making of an American symbol'; the book of Merrill D. Peterson about Abraham Lincoln and his presence in the American collective memory; and finally the voluminous study presented by Lucy Riall about Garibaldi and the 'invention of a hero'.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to this growing international interest in heroes and heroism that scholars have shown during the last two or three decades, the Spanish historiography remains in a very initial phase of the debate. With a few exceptions, the topic of heroes as national symbols and their celebration as a constitutive element in the shaping of a national (Spanish, Catalan, Basque or Galician) identity is usually dealt with in books dedicated to other, broader issues. In the Spanish historiography of the last decades, heroes do exist, but not yet really as a specific research object. The historian José Álvarez Junco has been one of the first to analyse the function of national heroes in the discourse of nineteenth-century Spanish liberalism in his bestseller about 'the idea of Spain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>6</sup> Along the line of Anderson's, Hobsbawm's and Ranger's famous theories regarding the 'invention of tradition' and the 'imagined community', Tomás Pérez Vejo has recently picked up some of the ideas forwarded by Álvarez Junco and has presented a study about 'the invention' of the Spanish nation, highlighting the creation of a national imagery via a bulk of historical paintings that presented 'heroic' events and personalities as core elements or stepping stones in the history of the Spanish nation.<sup>7</sup>

Besides these more general publications about the process of Spanish nation-building, it has been in the genre of biographies where the issue of heroes and heroism has gained a certain presence in Spanish historiography. Among these publications of unmatched quality, the

following more recent studies deserve a brief mention: the book about the anarchist intellectual Mateo Morral; the military ‘heroes’ of Imperial Spain (Hernán Cortés, Charles V, The Duque of Alba, among others); another ‘military hero’, in this case of the Catholic Monarchs, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (‘El Gran Capitán’), who was crucial in the Granada War (1482-1492) and for the subsequent end of Islamic rule in the Iberian peninsula; Martín Zurbano, the liberal guerrilla hero in the Spanish ‘War of Independence’ against the French occupiers; the hagiographic work concerning the Francoist general Agustín Muñoz Grandes who, according to the author, became a hero as a result of his leading role in the War of Morocco and as a commander of the Spanish ‘Blue Division’ fighting under the control of the *Wehrmacht* on the Russian front during World War II; Martínez Laínez’s biographical sketches of ‘heroes’, understood here as persons who have shaped the history of Spain. And finally, the interesting collective biography of republican national heroes in contemporary Catalan history.<sup>8</sup> Other publications have studied the function of the public hero cult for the establishment and consolidation of the Francoist regime in the southern Spanish town of Cáceres or those ‘heroes’ on both sides of the Spanish Civil War who gained their status by practicing moral heroism in saving the lives of people associated with the opposite side in the war.<sup>9</sup>

Although the research on heroes and hero cults has produced a number of publications in Spain, in most of these works the concept of ‘hero’ is used without any theoretical or methodological preoccupation. Lacking any attempt of outlining which characteristics classify a hero, most of the authors handle a volatile and fuzzy hero concept that could easily be applied to any person with – for whatever reason – special or outstanding exploits in history. Furthermore, most of the studies dealing with heroes are mere case studies carried out without an attempt of placing them in a broader historical context, comparing them with other cases and, in doing so, contributing to the necessary design of a hero typology. It is in this sense that I have described the Spanish historiography of heroes as being still in its infancy.<sup>10</sup>

This article aims to make a contribution to this scholarly debate, inserting the empirical findings of a particular case study into a broader context and analysing it in the light of different theoretical approaches in the fields of



studies on nationalism and leadership. Among these approaches, the issue of heroism has been particularly highlighted by the so-called ethno-symbolists. Anthony D. Smith makes the point that

every nationalism requires a touchstone of virtue and heroism, to guide and give meaning to the tasks of regeneration. The future of the ethnic community can only derive and achieve its form from the pristine 'golden age' when men were 'heroes'. Heroes provide models of virtuous conduct, their deeds of valour inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants.<sup>11</sup>

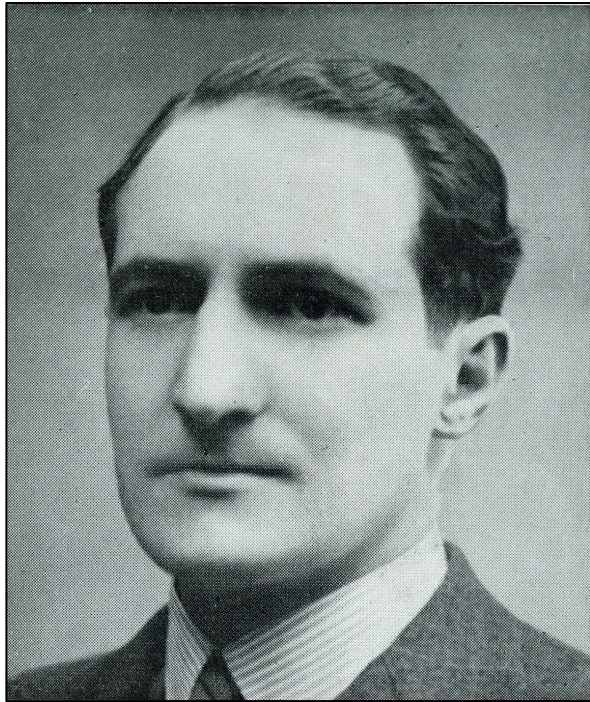
So it seems that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the debate is no longer normative, as it was in the dialogue between Andrea and Galileo. Today's interest in heroes is not about whether they are good or bad, whether we like or need them or not. Instead, what is now at stake is an understanding of heroes and their function for the national community. Responses to this question oscillate between two extremes that reflect the general theoretical dispute between constructivists and primordialists. The first believe that heroes are pure inventions of an elite who manufacture these symbols in order to consolidate and legitimise a certain power structure. The second contend that heroes are real historical individuals who, thanks to very special personal faculties and qualities, become heroes because they appear at the right moment and place. The theoretical premise of this paper is an attempt to bring together both positions. In this sense, I argue, first, that heroes, heroism and hero worship are crucial to any nationalist movement. Thus, they are relevant and necessary topics for research on the dynamics of nationalist movements. Second, I hold that national heroes are normally an amalgam of personal skills and political engineering. And third, I share the classic argument forwarded in 1946 by the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who placed special emphasis on the relationship between situations of acute political and cultural crises and the proliferation of heroism and hero cults.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Fontane put it in his novel, heroism has a lot to do with emergency and plight.

But what exactly is a national hero? So far, as already mentioned, we do not have any comprehensive typology of heroes that includes the many

and very different examples we find in history. Completing the original proposal presented by Carlyle, Gerwarth mentions a list of at least eight different categories of heroes and hero cults: personalised foundation myths, savior myths, hero cults in societies torn by ethnic-religious civil conflicts; everyday heroes involved in armed resistance against foreign occupation; heroes of Christianisation; heroic losers; poetic heroes and anti-heroes.<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that the life and work of a *national* hero will be understood by his (or her) following in terms of dedication to the nation, and not to a religion, sport or dynasty, although there may be cases of overlapping. A national hero is always an outstanding charismatic leader, who, according to Weber's classic typology, is invested with a personality that is considered extraordinary, due to which he (or she) is assessed as a bearer of special, exceptional and superhuman powers that are not available to normal human beings. Consequently, the followers frequently consider this charismatic hero as exemplary and/or sent from God. Weber concludes his definition by adding that it is not relevant to determine to what extent this extraordinary quality of the charismatic leader is indeed an objective fact. What matters is only that his or her followers feel and appreciate this quality as outstanding and extraordinary.<sup>14</sup> This usually occurs in a context of a 'charismatic situation' triggered by a process of change and transformation, during which a feeling of threat and anxiety provokes a desire of safety and of a strong leader with the capacity to find a way out of the trouble.<sup>15</sup> Yet, it should be remembered that Weber's typology is on 'charismatic authority' and not on heroes. This means that, unless we take the terms of 'charismatic leader' and 'hero' as synonyms, there must be an element by virtue of which a charismatic leader achieves the status of a hero in the eyes of his or her followers.<sup>16</sup> My hypothesis is that this element is the (real or fictitious) experience of personal tragedy, frequently suffered in situations of war. In other words: a charismatic leader without a tragic experience during the exercise of his/her leadership at the head of his/her people will hardly ascend to the status of a national hero.

The case chosen for this article is that of José Antonio Aguirre Lekube (1904-1960), the first Basque president. As the authors of a recent biography have underlined, Aguirre was a leader who, during his three

decades of political activity, developed a number of personal and political features that, *a priori*, were not exactly helpful to qualify him as a person likely to become a national hero.<sup>17</sup> First of all, Aguirre was not a successful leader. Nearly all his political projects failed, except the fight for regional autonomy, granted eventually, after many years of frustration, in 1936. Secondly, his congenital and indestructible optimism caused a severe limitation to his political intelligence, provoking in many occasions a remarkable incapacity to analyse certain situations with the realism needed to take the appropriate decisions. And thirdly, the impact of radical nationalist thinking during a certain period of his life (1939-1945/46) and the attempt of converting the rival Basque Socialist Party into a nationalist satellite, were important episodes that might have harmed his image and reduced his appeal as a leader, who seemed to be much more a *nationalist* sectarian than a *national* president defending the interests of the whole Basque nation and not only those of his party fellows.



*José Antonio Aguirre Lekube in 1937 |*  
FUNDACIÓN SANCHO EL SABIO

Despite all these obstacles, Aguirre made his way to become a national hero, as will be shown in this article. His political biography allows for a broader discussion of some of the problems at stake in the scholarly debate on nationalism and heroic leadership. Hence, in what follows, the

more empirical accounts of the case study will be connected to broader theoretical and conceptual problems. In particular, four of these problems will be addressed. The first is the relationship between the personal skills, the seizing of opportunities and the *manufacturing* of the hero and his (or her) charisma by the elite. The second point to be discussed here involves Weber's triad of types of domination (legal-rational, traditional and charismatic).<sup>18</sup> Aguirre's case study will corroborate the thesis that charismatic domination can also be found in modern societies. It can actually be considered a classical example of fusion between legal-rational and charismatic domination in a modern society. A third issue is the continued absence of a hero typology. Whereas most of the heroes dealt with in the scholarly literature are historical (real or invented) persons, Aguirre became a hero within his own lifetime. And finally, a fourth issue to be discussed in the last part of this article is the relationship between the hero, the collective memory and politics.

## **From football to politics: the shape of a leader**

José Antonio Aguirre was born in 1904 in a well-off, catholic and nationalist family in Bilbao.<sup>19</sup> He was part of the second generation of Basque nationalists, who had not known Sabino Arana, the founder of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) in 1895. Arana died one year before Aguirre was born, at the young age of thirty-eight. Aguirre, who was educated in schools and a university run by the Jesuits, appeared for the first time in public life during the 1920s. It was then that, in addition to being a member of Bilbao's famous soccer team Athletic Bilbao, he became the president of Juventud Católica de Vizcaya, a Catholic youth organisation in the Basque province of Bizkaia. After the disintegration of the dictatorship in 1930 and in the new scenario created by the establishment of the Second Republic in 1931, young Aguirre decided to abandon his career as a lawyer, as well as the management of his family business in order to get involved in politics.

At the age of only twenty-seven, Aguirre became one of the new shooting stars in Basque politics: in 1931, he was elected mayor of Getxo, a small

town near Bilbao, and not long after, deputy to the Spanish parliament. He was young, a sportsman and good-looking (although quite short), successful and already an excellent orator and communicator. Furthermore, throughout his entire political career until his death in 1960, he cultivated a very personal style of policymaking, combining a tough defense of his political aims with great people skills: even his political rivals used to feel comfortable and respected in his presence. This assertion, which might be considered a hagiographic exaggeration, is confirmed by a bulk of coetaneous sources displayed in detail in the works on Basque nationalism and in Aguirre's political biography quoted above. Three testimonies may be sufficient to show how politicians, even of other political parties, experienced these special people skills. In 1947, Diego Martínez Barrio, the president of the Spanish Republic-in-exile, invited Aguirre to preside over the aforementioned government. Martínez Barrio was an Andalusian republican, twenty years older than the Basque leader, and not at all sensitive to the political claims of the Basque and Catalan nationalists. His nation was the Spanish one, and everything else was an invention. With this background, it was more than surprising that the Spanish president's ideal candidate to lead the Spanish republican government-in-exile was Aguirre, who was a Basque nationalist and president of the Basque government-in-exile. Yet, Martínez Barrio had a very good personal relationship with Aguirre and was convinced that the Basque was probably the only person able to bring together all the different sectors of the Spanish exiles, which at that time were seriously at loggerheads. In his private diary, using his characteristic baroque prose, the Spanish president described the typical atmosphere of a meeting with Aguirre as follows:

Aguirre retains the optimism of a happy young man, for whom life has always had a nice smile [...]. José Antonio Aguirre [...] takes pleasure in everything. To listen to him is delighting and comforting. Perhaps his hands reach to the region of dreams, where the unreal takes a deceitful character. But, even on those roads the cheerful and relieved spirit searches for, and sometimes also finds, the reason for what must and can be.<sup>20</sup>

According to Gonzalo Nárdiz, councilor in Aguirre's government and member of the nationalist party *Acción Nacionalista Vasca*, the president had a 'warm affective capacity'.<sup>21</sup> His colleague in the government, the communist Juan Astigarrabía held that the president had 'the virtue of bringing together wills, to smooth things, reduce difficulties'.<sup>22</sup>



*Aguirre addressing the audience on the 1933 Basque 'National Day' (Aberri Eguna) | WIKIMEDIA COMMONS*

Thanks to these personal skills and qualities, Aguirre became the leading personality within Basque nationalism during the years of the Second Republic. Even though he was never a part of the Basque Nationalist Party's executive committee and only held public office as a deputy in parliament, when the military uprising began in the summer of 1936, he was already the most popular charismatic nationalist leader and had broad appeal across the political spectrum. His popularity stemmed from his personable character, but also from the fact that Aguirre was the unquestioned leader of Basque society's struggle to recover self-government, a struggle

that had been unsuccessful since the abolition of the *fueros* (the Basque charter and institutions of traditional self-government) in the nineteenth century. First as mayor of Getxo, and then as a deputy, Aguirre became the leader of the Basque Mayors' Movement for Autonomy during the Republic and was one of the main promoters of the PNV's shift from the right to the center-left, which in 1936 facilitated the *entente cordial* with the leftist Popular Front's government, the passing of the Statute of Autonomy and the establishment of the first Basque government in October 1936.<sup>23</sup> At that moment, about three months after the outbreak of the Civil War, Aguirre was the most prominent and magnetic Basque politician and he and his party worked hard to consolidate this image in the public arena: no other policy maker led as many rallies as Aguirre did.

Other facts prove this great popularity at a very young age: during the six years of the Republic, he was three times elected deputy to the Spanish parliament, with little relevance as to which electoral district he ran for office. In 1931, he was elected in Navarra, the least nationalist Basque territory, while being mayor of the Bizkaian town of Getxo. Then, in 1933 and 1936, he was deputy for Bizkaia. In the Spanish Cortes, it was Aguirre who negotiated the Basque Statute of Autonomy with the socialist leader Indalecio Prieto. When in October 1936 the councilors of the Basque towns that had not yet been occupied by the Francoist troops had to vote the president of the regional government, there was no discussion about Aguirre as the only candidate. All the democratic parties from the left to the right, nationalist and non-nationalist, agreed upon voting for Aguirre. These facts indicate that, when he became president of the first government, he was already a very popular leader, but not yet a hero: people adored him, but there was nothing heroic in his leadership. Things started to change after October 1936.

## **War and the fusion of charismatic and legal-rational leadership**

On 7 October 1936 Aguirre was appointed president of the first Basque government in the town of Gernika. There were two reasons why this was important. Although the Basque nationalists had always considered regional autonomy as a first step towards the ulterior objective of self-determination, the Statute of Autonomy was the fulfilment of an extremely popular political demand shared not only by the nationalists, but also by most republicans, socialists and even parts of the rightist Basque parties. And Aguirre was the popular protagonist who had struggled to bring about this great success. It is not necessary to go as far as Helva Ben-Israel does and state that 'the charismatic national leader – in this case president Aguirre – is believed to embody his nation's national character.'<sup>24</sup> Due to the, in my opinion, enormous empirical difficulty to define any 'national character', it is sufficient to hold that Aguirre was believed to embody better than anybody else the long and hard struggle for the most important political aim shared and pursued by at least two generations of Basques. The aforementioned fact that there was no discussion at all about his candidature for the presidency and that even the parties of the Popular Front supported this candidature demonstrated this very specific image.

The second reason to emphasise the importance of the event on 7 October 1936 was its symbolic value. On this day, Aguirre left behind his status as a great, popular leader with charismatic authority, because at the moment he took the oath of office he merged these personal attributes with a new legal-rational authority. This derived from his presidency of a government, which was looked upon as the institutional resurrection of the legendary and mythical Basque self-government of the Middle Ages, abolished after two wars in the nineteenth century. Thus, politics became linked to a kind of Basque 'foundation myth' (the Golden Age of the 'Fueros') and Aguirre was the one who embodied this successful attempt to restore, at least partly, the lost Arcadia.<sup>25</sup>

The decision to celebrate the solemn act of forming the government in the town of Gernika also purposely connected 1936 politics with the memory



of a glorious past, when the Basques were believed to live in freedom and independence. In 1936, Gernika was already the most famous *lieu de mémoire* in the Basque Country. It was the place of the Liberty Tree, the *Tree of Guernica*, an oak around which the members of the medieval assembly of Bizkaia used to meet and do politics. The Spanish monarch used to swear his oath under the oak, assuring his will to respect the Basque self-government granted by the *fueros* as long as the Basques remained loyal to the Crown. During the nineteenth century, and in the context of civil war, Spanish state-building and – ultimately successful – attempts to abolish the *fueros* and to convert the Basque territories into mere provinces of the Spanish nation state, Gernika had become the symbol of Basque freedom. The popular ode to the oak tree composed by the poet José María Iparraguirre in the 1850s soon became a substantial part of Basque folk culture and, incidentally, a national anthem *avant la lettre*. When Aguirre swore his oath under the tree, he was well aware of the symbolic, and nearly religious significance of the act: ‘Bowing my head in front of God, with my feet on Basque soil, remembering the ancestors, under the tree of Gernika, I swear to fulfill my mandate faithfully.’

When the *lehendakari*, the Basque president, pronounced these words, a large part of the Basque Country had already been defeated by the troops of Francisco Franco and Emilio Mola. The front had come dangerously close to Bilbao and Gernika. In these dramatic circumstances of desperation and fear, the formation of Aguirre’s government was looked upon as a heroic act of resistance against the fascist aggressors. And Aguirre, who was able to spread his characteristic mood of optimism wherever he went, was the one who would continue the long Basque fight for freedom and democracy. If, after so many years of frustration, he had managed to negotiate the Statute of Autonomy with the central government, there was a broad consensus across political parties that he was the appropriate leader who would be able to find a way out of warfare and chaos. In fact, Aguirre himself assumed the Department of Defence together with the presidency, and the government’s first programme fixed as its ‘immediate priority and supreme objective to achieve the victory and establish and organise definitive peace’.<sup>26</sup> The careful staging of his oath and formation of government at the *lieu de mémoire* in Gernika, as well as

the fact that he combined charismatic with legal-rational authority as the new Basque government's first president, gave him an aura of superiority and extraordinariness.<sup>27</sup> Aguirre himself seemed to believe this new role. In his private correspondence from those years of civil war and exile there are frequent mentions of the mission he was willing to fulfill in leading his people to a new and better situation of peace and freedom. But probably the most prominent concept in his writings is that of 'Providence'. In the opinion of Aguirre, a faithful Catholic, Providence had chosen him to guide the Basque people and Providence also protected him from danger and evil:

God wanted to choose me to reestablish that tradition [of Basque self-government], which had been interrupted for 100 years. I had the honour to swear allegiance to my people at the moment of their greatest suffering.<sup>28</sup>

By 1936, the boundaries in his leadership between politics and religion had begun to vanish. The door to his elevation to the status of a national hero during his own lifetime had been opened. He would pass through it only a few years later, in dramatic circumstances.

## **From leader to living hero: the appeal of chosenness**

Aguirre and his government were not able to impede the conquest of Bilbao in June 1937. In April of that year, the bombs of the German Condor Legion had reduced Gernika, the symbol of Basque self-government, to ash and rubble. The Basque government had escaped into exile, first to Barcelona and then, after the conquest of Catalonia, in February 1939 to Paris. In May 1940, the *lehendakari* decided to go on a journey together with his wife and his two children. The destiny was Belgium, where the family wanted to visit the exiled mothers of the president and his wife. After the family's arrival in Belgium and a few days of happiness and joy on the beach near the town of De Panne, the Basque group was caught by surprise by the German invasion of Belgium and France. After suffering

several air raids by the Luftwaffe, Aguirre's sister died due to the impact of a shell. When trying to cross the border and return to France, the group was forced to remain in Belgian territory since, as citizens of a neutral country, the French police considered them non-belligerents. Everybody was aware that the life of Aguirre was in extreme danger if he was captured by the Germans. The *lehendakari*, however, did not want to abandon his family and tried to escape by sea after finding himself surrounded, along with 380,000 soldiers and refugees, by the German troops on the beaches of Dunkirk. This plan failed, as did the idea of sending a car from the Basque government in Paris to rescue the Basque president and his family.

In the meantime, far away from the Belgian and French battlefields, other initiatives were launched in the United States to save Aguirre's life. Manuel Ynchausti, a businessman of Basque-Filipino origin and Aguirre's personal friend and sponsor, was well-connected to different members of president Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, including the president himself and the first lady. When Aguirre was still trapped in Dunkirk, Ynchausti wrote a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, explaining the Basque president's grave situation and requesting the intervention of the White House or the State Department to get Aguirre out of Dunkirk. This was, of course, a letter written in a situation of desperation and without any possibility of getting a positive response. Yet, more than a year later, it was the United States, thanks largely to Ynchausti's tireless work, that helped Aguirre escape Europe and save his life.<sup>29</sup>

After becoming aware that none of the different escape routes were open to him, Aguirre decided to go underground. With the German troops about to enter Dunkirk, he was offered a chance to join a Catalan couple and a Basque priest for a hectic dash in car from Dunkirk to Brussels. He seized upon this final opportunity to escape to the Belgian capital, where he hid in a college run by the Jesuits, while his friend, the Basque priest, established contact with different Latin American diplomats. The Basque president decided to change his look, starting to wear glasses and a moustache. After receiving a new passport from the consulate of Panama, José Antonio Aguirre became the Panamanian citizen José Andrés Álvarez Lastra. With this new identity and guise he took an extremely risky

decision: 'I thought that the best way of escaping from the Nazi danger was by going into it.'<sup>30</sup> And so he travelled to Germany and spent several months at the very core of the Nazi empire, in Berlin, from where he was able to maintain contact with the members of his government in France and with Ynchausti in the United States.

During all these months underground in Germany, Aguirre believed to be protected by Divine Providence, as he used to express it, since neither the Spanish government nor the Gestapo were able to localise and identify him.<sup>31</sup> The Spanish ambassador in Brussels sent a report to Juan Beigbeder, the government's Minister of Foreign Affairs, informing him that 'Aguirre is not in Brussels, nor – as it seems – in Belgium.' And the Spanish ambassador in Berlin held, in another report for the Minister, that 'according to all information, José Antonio Aguirre is and has been out of Belgium since before the war started in that country.' But this confusion and lack of information also affected the American government. Before being informed by Ynchausti about Aguirre's real situation, Secretary of State Cordell Hull told the ambassador in Chile that 'Aguirre has been arrested by the Germans in Belgium and he is now retained in the Spanish Embassy of Brussels'.<sup>32</sup>

Lluís Companys, Aguirre's Catalan friend and president of the *Generalitat*, the Catalan government, was not so lucky: in 1940, Companys was captured by the Gestapo in France, delivered to the Spanish police and shot to death. The same happened to Julián Zugazagoitia, the Basque socialist deputy and former minister during the Civil War. Aguirre was not discovered and managed to escape via Sweden in July 1941. This was possible because Ynchausti's constant pressure on the US government finally paved the way for a more active involvement in Aguirre's salvation, which had been extremely difficult for two reasons: first, in the summer of 1941 the US had not yet formally entered the war and was thus officially a non-belligerent state, and second, the Roosevelt administration was reluctant to intervene in favor of a person who was travelling with a fake identity. But in the end, after receiving several requests from various American politicians and artists demanding help for the Basque president, Hull contacted different Latin American embassies and the US ambassador in Berlin to ask that the Panamanian citizen Álvarez Lastra be provided

with a transit visa for his sea trip to the United States via Latin America. Thanks to these interventions, Aguirre could meet his family – who had remained underground in Belgium with fake identities of their own – in Berlin, leave for Sweden and at the end of July 1941 board a steamer in the harbour of Göteborg that would take the family to Brazil. Once in Latin America, Aguirre recovered his true identity, shaved his moustache and, after a triumphal reception by the Basque diaspora in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, continued to New York where he was hired as a lecturer in history at Columbia University. This job was once again the result of Ynchausti's help, since he was secretly paying Aguirre's salary. After settling in White Plains, a town near New York, Aguirre resumed his political activity from the new headquarters of the Basque government located in an elegant flat on Fifth Avenue.

As many contemporary sources suggest, this dangerous odyssey through Nazi Europe, his survival and the last-minute escape to freedom definitively provided the Basque president with a semi-religious aura in the eyes of his followers. While Companys and Zugazagoitia had been captured and killed, Aguirre had challenged the fascists from Berlin. In the very heart of the almighty Third Reich, he had been within fifty metres of Hitler.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, he had met and even dined with journalists, politicians and diplomats who in earlier years had got to know him and might have discovered or denounced him.<sup>34</sup> Even without knowing all these details, which were disclosed in his already mentioned 1943 book, the Basque communities at home and in exile elevated the Basque president to the category of a civil prophet: Aguirre became a national hero while he was alive. He was looked upon as the savior of his people. He seemed to be endowed with special attributes, protected by Divine Providence and capable of guiding his people out of misery and hardship. Wherever Aguirre appeared in public, he was celebrated as a hero. Emotions overflowed and an atmosphere of ecstasy emerged.

In the contemporary sources, there is plenty of documentary evidence for this process of 'heroisation'. Here, three different examples may suffice. The first source is a personal testimony of Aguirre's reappearance in public in Argentina after his odyssey through Nazi Europe:

All of us were so very excited that we had tears in our eyes. There are no words to reflect such a marvelous reality. [...] The emotion was that great that we were all weeping when we saw our *lehendakari* greeting us from the bridge of the ship, with his wife – also with tears in her eyes – at his side and his two kids in his arms. After all, it has been an unforgettable event. We could never have imagined that we once might have the fortune to witness it. And not only our people, but without exception absolutely everybody has had the same feeling like we had when seeing that providential man who represents our race and our rights with such dignity.<sup>35</sup>

A ‘providential man’: the presence of the *lehendakari* was no longer interpreted in merely civic categories. Instead, his persona was enveloped in an aura of transcendence. Another Basque nationalist noted this same phenomenon of sacralisation when he described his feelings and thoughts as Aguirre’s ship was leaving the harbour:

The boat left and here we stayed, much like the faithful of religions, that is to say, with ambitions to be, if not ever more righteous, then at least ever less mean.<sup>36</sup>

The author of the third document is the only woman who dared to express her sentiments in public in 1960, a few weeks after the *lehendakari*’s sudden and unexpected death. Cecilia G. de Guilarte was an anarchist journalist who got to know the Basque president during the Civil War, when she used to write chronicles for the journal *CNT del Norte*. In her Mexican exile, Guilarte was about to abandon her anarchist conviction and recover the Catholic faith of her childhood. In her opinion, Aguirre was a ‘man of miracle’:

He was [...] the man of miracle. For becoming it, in his existence all the historical, material and spiritual circumstances came together. Aguirre does not enter the dominion of legend, like others do, when completing the parable of his life. He entered it in the very moment [in which he took the oath of office in Gernika]. But the miracle had started to move. And since its origin was in

higher regions, it was like sacramental bread, a dispenser of hope and faith.<sup>37</sup>

**¡EUSKAL AGUR!**

Por S. ZABALA, Pbro.

**J**OSE Antonio de Aguirre era de todos ustedes su hermano conocido para que me delonga a traer los rasgos de su temperamento, su formidable dinamismo, su nobleza de carácter, su infatigable tenacidad, su optimismo legionario, su don de gentes, que le permitía hacerse amar de todos y hacerse respetar incluso de sus enemigos.

En plena guerra nos dimos cuenta de una capacidad de vida que habíamos señalado en el error de diputado.

Presidente d'el Gobierno Vasco. Fue siempre el mismo en la guerra como en el exilio, en el tiempo favorable como en los momentos del dolor de nuestra Patria, víctima de la coalición de amoniciones militares fascistas.

Fue uno de los pocos jefes de nación que guardara contacto con el pueblo y que vivió en todo momento la vitalidad dramática de sus necesidades y de su sufrimiento.

Ya no vendrá más a visitarnos, procurándonos a la vez, de sus convicciones y de su fe, de su esperanza, atraído a los reencuentros, a los desenlaces. Sin poder suscribirnos a sus principios, nos fuimos a entrar en la mente de ideas, acreditadas a la vez, del Bien Común de Patria.

Ya no lo veremos más entre nosotros. Primero fue un indio, víctima de ese tirano de Santo Domingo que tiene el cinismo de llamarse cristiano. Y ahora José Antonio, víctima de su actividad intensa, de su holocausto diario, de su consagración total a la Patria.

Ya no oiremos más a sus mensajes navideños... Pero hoy aquí, en este momento, nos deja su testamento, su dulce mensaje.

Vasco —no dice—, permanecí unido. Unidos como en la guerra. No una unión de fachada, de compromiso, sino una unión sincera, fuerte, que renuncia al malentendido, al odio, a la violencia. Unidos forjados en el mismo amor que nos exige actitudes concretas, en espíritu, como hermanos. El tiempo desecha a quienes esta unión, ya que, a través de toda su vida, nos recordamos lo que es la medida del patriotismo, esa cualidad profunda, ancestral, biológica, de sentimiento, de carácter y de ideal que funda la unidad de la Nación Vasca. Y el sentido de esta comunidad, la voluntad de salvarla y de consolidarla. Ante el cadáver del Lendakari Vasco que nos escuchaba, aquí, debemos avivar el alma y renunciar para darnos el albray fiertero que el leñador da en el cielo.

El segundo mensaje reza: Vasco, guarda intacta la fe de cristiano. Ha sido providencial que los dos jefes de nuestro pueblo, Salbino de Arana y Goñi, si que desparecieron la conciencia nacional, y José Antonio, el Lendakari, hayan sido auténticos cristianos. Por eso nos exigamos un cristianismo, formulado, como esa misma fe en Cristo que ellos vivieron, tan lejos del certidumbre como de una religión de folklore. Una fe que cuando que no espolea todas las actitudes de su vida, su dedicación totalmente interesada, la educación que da en su alegría de vivir, el consorcio con el mundo de acuerdo con la vocación que el fue designado.

Guardad intacta la fe de cristiano en medio de las tentaciones de egoísmo en medio de ese ambiente destructivo de materialismo práctico que respiramos por doquier.

Que esta sea nuestra promesa: Tomar la antorcha de este dulce mensaje como un relieve en el que estamos todos los comprometidos.

Jose Antonio de Aguirre, Alcaide de Euzkadi en el Asanblea, preside por la gratitud de nuestro dolor a la memoria de un hombre que se despertó a la vida por el dolor de la patria, de la libertad, de nuestra libertad, de nuestro dolor.

Que sea nuestro anhelo otro deseo que ver a Euzkadi libre de la dictadura, forzando su porvenir en una democracia auténtica... Tu vida no tenía otra razón de ser; presente, te dije, que la nación de mañana. Todo tu ser contraindicado en perpetua tensión hacia la meta vislumbrada, una consigna en el amor hacia la Patria que se perpetúa en sus exilios, en tus idealizaciones del futuro, en el orden político, económico y social. Toda una vida consagrada a ese trabajo mismo, un pie sobre la historia que tan bien conocías, la mirada fija en el porvenir que camina de una patria en fin libre.

Y de pronto, la muerte. Ya no verás tu Patria libre. No podrás arregar a tu pueblo, la sombra del roble de Gernika. No podrás vivir el sueño de toda tu vida, el ideal que era más íntimo que tu misma respiración.

Mejor dicho, lo será dentro el Cielo. Ese Cielo que merece por tu fidelidad a la misión que Dios te confió.

Lo ves, porque nosotros vamos dispuestos a vivir tu ejemplo y continuar la obra que te prometimos todos. Hemos como tú no se vanaceron jamás, ni de la memoria ni del corazón de la verdadera patria. Desde el cielo, ayúdanos a cumplir nuestra misión, nuestra responsabilidad hacia la Patria.

Y después de esta promesa, amigos, podemos decir que cuando en Paz, en la albray a la actividad del destino.

Palabros del Sr. Zabala en el funeral celebrado en la Iglesia de San José de Parí, en Caracas, por el alma del Lendakari.



**Eusko Gaztedi**

ORRAILLA
CARACAS VENEZUELA
ABRIL 1960

## LA MUERTE DE AGUIRRE A TRAVÉS DEL CABLE

• En el lenguaje taquígrafico de las Agencias Internacionales, tres palabras que sembraron el dolor: **AGUIRRE HA MUERTO**

PARIS, marzo 26. (I.P.) — El ma Vasco, José Antonio de Aguirre, murió al pararse de una antorcha en la noche de la libertad de la República Vasca. El presidente de la República Internacional, el señor Aguirre delgado de cuerpo, se hallaba en el momento de salir a la calle cuando se produjo el accidente. El presidente de la República Internacional, el señor Aguirre delgado de cuerpo, se hallaba en el momento de salir a la calle cuando se produjo el accidente. El presidente de la República Internacional, el señor Aguirre delgado de cuerpo, se hallaba en el momento de salir a la calle cuando se produjo el accidente.

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**SAN JUAN DE LUZ, 20 AÑOS DESPUÉS, LA PRIMERA ASAMBLEA DEL PUERLO VASCO ANTE EL CADAVER DE AGUIRRE, EL JURAMENTO DE LA EUZKADI PEREGRINA Y DE LA EUZKADI SOJUZGADA: LUCHAR HASTA EL FIN**

(Ver información en págs. 45.)

Article announcing Aguirre's death for the Basque diaspora | EUSKO GAZTEDI (CARACAS, APRIL 1960)

Aguirre himself became aware of this process and he did not really feel comfortable with it:

There exists a kind of Messianism forged by a legend that consists in believing that I have in my pocket the Philosopher's Stone capable of producing all the solutions. This, in essence, reflects a spirit of comfort which is not appropriate for these circumstances.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, the Basque president also took advantage of this new reputation and authority when negotiating an agreement of cooperation against fascism with the American government in 1942, mediating successfully for the restoration of the Spanish government-in-exile in the summer of 1945, emerging as a serious candidate for the presidency of this government in 1947, or when supporting the socialist leader Indalecio Prieto's plan of forging an anti-Francoist entente with the Spanish monarchists in 1948/49. Even though, in terms of political payoff, this process of *heroisation* during lifetime turned out to be futile, it continued to accompany Aguirre during the rest of his years in exile. The groundwork was already laid in 1936 by the fusion of charismatic and legal-rational authority when, under the *holy tree* of Gernika, Aguirre had received the baton from his ancestors in the fight for Basque freedom. Afterwards, during the war, as head of the government and minister of defense, he acted as the supreme political and military guide of his people. In exile, he survived miraculously in the very heart of the National Socialist Empire, before resuming the fight against Francoism and for Basque freedom. This experience of drama and tragedy triggered his elevation from being a charismatic leader to becoming a national hero. His death in 1960 at the age of fifty-six, when he suffered a fatal heart attack, reinforced his image even more, adding another extraordinary dramatic turn. Aguirre was the 'man of miracle'. For many, he was part of the 'legend', or, as his friend, the former nationalist Deputy and Minister Manuel Irujo put it, after his death, he would be remembered as a 'symbol, a banner, a myth. José Antonio entered history.'<sup>39</sup>





*Aguirre's funeral in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, March 1960 | KONTXA INTXAUSTI*

## **Aguirre and hero worship in the twenty-first century**

National heroes do not usually raise criticism. Instead, what they receive is devotion and worship after death. When a leader becomes a hero during his or her lifetime, as it was in the case of the Basque president, things are a little different. The solidity and continuity of his charismatic leadership depend, first, on the capacity to satisfy the expectations followers have deposited in him and, second, on the ability to prevent the *routinisation* of authority and a return to the pre-charismatic normality.<sup>40</sup> Aguirre's example fits well into this theory, since during the last couple of years of his life he was confronted with these threats to his charisma as a national hero. Despite his frenetic activity, none of his political initiatives were crowned by success: Franco continued in power and, thanks to the Cold War, had become a new ally of the Western democracies in their fight

against communism. Aguirre's charismatic domination was about to be transformed into legal-rational authority, because the daily experience of frustration was undermining the faith of his people, who wanted to see him doing miracles instead of issuing dull manifestos as head of the government. This was the context in which the PNV split in 1959, when radical nationalists founded the underground organisation ETA; and it was in this context that the first public criticism of Aguirre, his government and his political strategy surfaced. Yet, those voices were still very much in the minority, and mostly limited to the nationalist youth, who blamed Aguirre for not being nationalist enough, for collaborating with the Spaniards and for heading a government that was little more than a political cadaver.<sup>41</sup>

However, the sudden death of the president interrupted this process of charisma-degrading. After 1960, nearly all the critical voices were silenced and Aguirre recovered his status as a national hero. It is interesting to observe that this was, in general, also true for the nationalist sector close to ETA. Significantly, in his famous book *Vasconia*, which later became the official 'bible' of ETA's new nationalism, Federico Krutwig treated Aguirre with a certain critical respect, mentioning his 'regionalist' deviation from the political aim of Basque independence, whereas Jesús María Leizaola, Aguirre's successor in the presidency, was presented as a traitor to his fatherland who should have been executed by the Basque patriots.<sup>42</sup> Other historical leaders with a PNV background, but later icons of the radical nationalists close to ETA, such as Telesforo Monzón or Elías Gallastegui, shared this more or less positive and in any case non-belligerent attitude towards the first *lehendakari*.<sup>43</sup> Even intellectuals of Ezker Abertzalea (the Patriotic Left), recognised Aguirre's personal legacy as a freedom fighter, adding that his only problem as a spokesman of the bourgeoisie was that the dynamic of the class struggle had placed his government politically offside, while the radical pro-independence movement of the masses led by the armed vanguard had taken centre stage.<sup>44</sup> Not even the growing confrontation between ETA and its political wing on the one hand and the PNV on the other since the 1980s, when the underground group escalated its violence dramatically, changed anything in this respectful and empathic attitude shown by radical Basque nationalism towards the first president.

While Aguirre was accepted – with more or less criticism – as a symbol and a national hero by mostly everyone, there was a great deal of dispute about the interpretation and appropriation of the symbol's meaning. As already mentioned, even many years after Aguirre's death and despite the political confrontation with Aguirre's party the PNV, the Patriotic Left continued highlighting his role as a fighter for independence. Significantly, his image was shown on placards together with those of other fighters for independence, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Simón Bolívar or José Martí, at the large demonstration organised for the Basque Day of the Fatherland (*Aberrri Eguna*) in 2010.<sup>45</sup> For the PNV, on the other hand, Aguirre had a very particular resurrection. From the end of the 1990s, the party had carried out a process of strategic radicalisation motivated by a double political aim: first, to bring ETA's terrorism to an end through political rapprochement with the underground group's political wing; and second, to progress towards sovereignty through an accumulation of nationalist power. This strategy failed and, as a consequence, ETA's violence returned with more vigour, the PNV became politically isolated and in danger of splitting, and Basque society was more fractured than ever by cleavages of identity and ideology.<sup>46</sup> In this context, and after a very contentious election, a spokesman for the moderate PNV sector, Josu Jon Imaz became the new president of the party in January 2004. From the very beginning, Imaz was keen to legitimise and consolidate his leadership by evoking the memory of moderate leaders like Aguirre. In none of the new leader's more important public interventions was a venerating reference to the party's glorious past and to its hero Aguirre missing. On these occasions the emphasis was not so much on the first *lehendakari's* fight for Basque independence, but rather on his particular manner of understanding and doing politics: politics as a democratic tool for forging agreements among different and, frequently, opposed sectors of society.<sup>47</sup> This was, of course, a criticism of the party's radical strategy, which only seemed to be interested in achieving a consensus with the Patriotic Left close to ETA, while deliberately sidelining the non-nationalist (or Spanish nationalist) sectors.

Aguirre's spectacular revival since the mid-2000s was not only a consequence of creative management carried out by a new PNV leadership

aiming to legitimise and consolidate its authority. It was more than a simple act of political engineering from above to the party grassroots, because it was also, and once again, the expression of a deep crisis that affected Basque society. The revival of Aguirre's memory can also be interpreted as a protest against the political parties' incapacity to articulate any kind of consensus in tackling the great problems, especially that of terrorism and political confrontation, with vigour and unity. In this situation of discontent and protest, the reference to Aguirre evoked a Utopian past, but was simultaneously a plea grounded in the reality of the present. The message was that even in extremely dramatic and painful circumstances, like those experienced by president Aguirre, dialogue and compromise among contenders had been possible. In 2010, precisely the year in which the fiftieth anniversary of the first *lehendakari's* death was memorialised, this general feeling of uneasiness motivated a very particular initiative carried out by different institutions, organisations and personalities who set up a commission called 'Aguirre lehendakari 50'.<sup>48</sup> This commission, which included the Basque government, the three province-governments, the town councils of Bilbao and Getxo, the public and private universities, the Athletic Football Club and the descendants of Aguirre and all his ministers, was created to organise different kinds of events in commemoration of the first Basque president. Its composition was politically pluralistic, since it comprised not only nationalists, but also socialist and conservative members.

After years of great confrontation, in which all the bridges between nationalists and non-nationalists seemed to have been burned, this cooperation in memorialising the first Basque president was surprising news. During his lifetime Aguirre had a great reputation as a champion of consensus. Half a century after his death, this distinction continued to hold sway. The memory of no other politician would have been strong enough and inclusive enough to bring together political actors who for years had been living in a situation of extreme confrontation with each other. In the background of this remarkable feat was the desire of Basque society to overcome permanent confrontation, fostered by terrorist violence, and to explore new modes of dialogue and agreement, in order to normalise politics and everyday life in the Basque Country. In conclusion, the

example of this cross-party commission strengthens the argument forwarded by Lucy Riall in her excellent study on Garibaldi concerning the double-sided nature of hero cults: even though ‘there was a great deal about Garibaldi’s appeal which was planned by political leaders, his definition and creation as a political hero was still a largely collaborative effort, involving audience participation as well as directions from the stage.’<sup>49</sup> The same argument is valid in the case of Aguirre.



*Monument in Bilbao |*  
IÑAKI ELEZCANO

## Conclusions

After outlining the essential empirical features of this case study about the first Basque president's shape as a national hero, it is necessary to link it to some issues raised in the theoretical and conceptual debate about national heroes, their shape and their function mentioned at the beginning of this article. It goes without saying that one single case study cannot pretend to categorically confirm or refuse any general hypothesis and that further investigations are needed to check the points raised in this article. Yet, the following eight conclusions that surface in the light of the case of Aguirre may hopefully contribute both to give an impulse to a scholarly debate that in Spain is still in its infancy and enrich the international discussion about heroes and hero cults in the social sciences and humanities by introducing an example of a country (Spain, Basque Country) that too frequently is left aside.

1) In relation to the different categories of national heroes, Aguirre was somewhere in between a savior myth and a heroic loser. He was regarded as the leader who would be able to save the Basque nation by restoring democracy and self-government. But his success was very limited: Basque autonomy was abolished about eight months after its implementation in October 1936, and Aguirre's government was forced into exile. In 1960 he died without meeting the high expectations of his followers. In short, Aguirre was a frustrated savior myth.

2) The first Basque president was a perfect personification of a national hero in that he was a product of both very special personal communication skills and political engineering from above. Both ingredients (personal-natural skills and political manufacturing) were indispensable in his trajectory to become a national hero, and he would not have become one had either of the two elements been missing.

3) In this sense, his heroism was the invention of a political elite, but it was also a product of a special sociopolitical context. Or, as John Breuilly puts it, his heroism was the result of a double projection 'from both below and above'.<sup>50</sup>

4) Aguirre's case proves once again the close relationship between the emergence of national heroes and situations of acute crisis. His was a heroism of war, repression and exile.

5) Aguirre became a hero during his lifetime. It was the traumatic experience of war that triggered his evolution from a popular nationalist leader to a charismatic hero when, first, he was appointed the first Basque president amidst a Francoist military offensive; and, second, when in the summer of 1941 he returned to the political stage after miraculously surviving fifteen months in Nazi Germany. In the eyes of his (not only nationalist) followers, it was these war experiences that made him truly extraordinary and that conferred him the aureole of a savior whose deeds inspired 'faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants' – to recall the words of A.D. Smith quoted in the introduction. Ever since, his followers attributed to him a charisma in which the borders between politics and religion became permeable.

6) The public staging of his appointment as Basque president in a *lieu de mémoire* with a highly symbolic significance like Gernika was a deliberate act of hero manufacturing. By associating the 1936 ceremony with the glorious past of Basque self-government, Aguirre was legitimised because he was linked to all the acclaimed and anonymous heroes of the past who had dedicated their lives to the fight for Basque sovereignty. As head of the first Basque autonomous government, Aguirre's authority was no longer based only on his personal charisma. Starting in 1936 he also possessed a legal-rational legitimation of his authority.

7) Like all charismatic leaders, the Basque president also had to face the challenge of *routinisation* and failure. When at the end of the 1950s it became more and more evident that none of his political strategies and initiatives had been successful in the fight against the Franco regime or for Basque self-government, the first appearance of critical voices showed the fragility of his charisma. Yet, his sudden and unexpected death silenced all these criticisms and Aguirre continued being a national hero, respected and worshiped by nearly all Basques and many Spaniards.

8) The revival of his memory in the twenty-first century is a good example of the relationship between heroes as national symbols, collective memory

and politics. The memory of a national hero is not at all unambiguous and fixed. On the contrary, it is fluid, subject to the reinterpretation of each generation, and contingent on particular circumstances and concrete political interests. Half a century after the first president's death, the evocation of his memory demonstrates the double-sided nature of hero cults: Aguirre's memory helped the PNV leadership to consolidate and legitimise the party's strategic shift away from radical nationalism towards more moderate and pragmatic claims ('projection from above'). It simultaneously resurrected Utopian visions of an era that served to counter the permanent presence of terrorist violence and extreme political polarisation ('projection from below'). It would be no exaggeration to understand the permanent and definite ceasefire announced by ETA in October 2011 both as a consequence of this popular counter-utopia and the desire of peace and consensus on the one hand, and as a confirmation of ETA's political wing's failure in using Aguirre's memory as a (politically misguided) freedom fighter for Basque independence against Spanish oppression, in order to legitimise its own politico-military strategy, on the other.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> L. Eriksonas, *National heroes and national identities. Scotland, Norway and Lithuania* (Brussels, 2004) 34.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted according to the new edition of Carlyle's book in D.R. Sorensen and B.E. Kinser (eds.), *On heroes, hero-worship, and the heroic in history. Thomas Carlyle* (New Haven - London, 2013) 21.

<sup>3</sup> P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1997) 3 vol. [1<sup>st</sup> ed.: 1984-1992].

<sup>4</sup> E. François & H. Schulze (eds.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* (Munich, 2009) 3 vol. [1<sup>st</sup> ed.: 2001-2002].



<sup>5</sup> S. Hazareesingh, *The legend of Napoleon* (London, 2005); A. Jourdan, *Napoléon. Héros, imperator, mécène* (Paris, 1998); R. Gerwarth, *The Bismarck myth. Weimar Germany and the legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford, 2007) [1st ed.: 2005]; I. Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': image and reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 2001) [1st ed.: 1987]; L. Herbst, *Hitler's Charisma. Die Erfindung eines deutschen Messias* (Frankfurt, 2010); B. Schwartz, *George Washington. The making of an American symbol* (Ithaca, 1990) [1st ed.: 1987]; M.D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American memory* (Oxford, 1994); L. Riall, *Garibaldi. Invention of a hero* (New Haven - London, 2008) [1st ed.: 2007].

<sup>6</sup> J. Álvarez Junco, *Mater Dolorosa. La idea de España en el siglo XIX* (Madrid, 2003) [1st ed.: 2001]. See especially the section 'La nacionalización de la cultura', 187-302.

<sup>7</sup> T. Pérez Vejo, *España imaginada: historia de la invención de una nación* (Madrid, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Respectively E. Majuan, *Un héroe trágico del anarquismo español. Mateo Morral, 1879-1906* (Barcelona, 2009); H. Kamen, *Poder y gloria, los héroes de la España imperial* (Barcelona, 2012); J.L. Villacañas, *El Gran Capitán, el héroe militar de los Reyes Católicos* (Barcelona, 2015); P. Sáez Miguel e.a., *Zurbano. Vida y mito de un héroe del liberalismo español* (Logroño, 2007); L.E. Toyores, *Muñoz Grandes, héroe de Marruecos, General de la División Azul* (Madrid, 2014); F. Martínez Laínez, *Aceros rotos. El ocaso de los héroes*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 2013); Idem, *Roncos tambores. El ocaso de los héroes*, vol. 2 (Madrid, 2015); A. Duarte, *Héroes de la nación, apóstoles de la República: vidas de nacionalistas catalanes* (Barcelona, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> C. Rina Simón, *La construcción de la memoria franquista en Cáceres. Héroes, espacio y tiempo para un nuevo Estado (1936-1941)* (Cáceres, 2012); F. Berlín, *Héroes de los dos bandos. Gestos anónimos de solidaridad en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> One of the few exceptions is the brief article published by A.I. González Manso, 'Héroes nacionales como vehículos emocionales de conceptos políticos', in: *Historiografías*, 10 (julio-diciembre 2015) 12-30.

<sup>11</sup> A.D. Smith, *Myths and memories of the nation* (Oxford, 1999) 65.

<sup>12</sup> Cassirer analysed this relationship in his last publication *The myth of the state*, (New Haven - London, 1946).

<sup>13</sup> R. Gerwarth, 'Introduction', in: *European History Quarterly*, 39/3 (2009) 381-387 (383-384).

<sup>14</sup> In the German original, the definition goes as follows: "Charisma" soll eine als ausseralltaglich [...] geltende Qualitat einer Personlichkeit heissen, um derentwillen sie als mit ubernaturlichen und ubermenschlichen oder mindestens spezifisch ausseralltaglichen, nicht jedem anderen zuganglichen Kraften oder Eigenschaften [begabt] oder als gottgesandt oder als vorbildlich und deshalb als 'Fuhrer' gewertet wird. Wie die betreffende Qualitat von irgendeinem ethischen, astetischen oder sonstigen Standpunkt aus 'objektiv' richtig zu bewerten sein wurde, ist naturlich dabei begrifflich vollig gleichgultig: darauf allein, wie sie tatsachlich von den charismatisch Beherrschten, den 'Anhangern' bewertet wird, kommt es an.' See M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundrisse der verstehenden Soziologie* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.: Tubingen, 1980) 140.

<sup>15</sup> The relation between the rise of charismatic leadership and situations of transformation is explained by A. Schweitzer, *The age of charisma* (Chicago, 1984). I have taken the notion of the 'charismatic situation' from Herbst, *Hitler's charisma*, 260. A similar argument can be found in A.R. Willner, *The spellbinders: charismatic political leadership* (New Haven, 1984). For an overview of the multiple significations of the concept of charisma, see J. Potts, *A history of charisma* (Basingstoke - New York, 2009). For a discussion of the charismatic leadership as one of the different patterns of leadership in politics, see H.-J. Puhle, 'El liderazgo en la polıtica. Una vision desde la historia', in: L. Mees & X.M. Nunez Seixas (eds.), *Nacidos para mandar. Liderazgo, polıtica y poder. Perspectivas comparadas* (Madrid, 2012) 23-43.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, most national heroes are men. The reason for this male bias in the shape of national heroes is another point that has not yet been sufficiently addressed by social scientists. An exception might be the study of the 'heroes of war' and their 'heroic masculinity' shaped in a context of military excitation and warfare. See R. Schilling, *Kriegshelden: Deutungsmuster heroischer Mannlichkeit in Deutschland 1813-1945* (Paderborn, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> The empirical details of these particular features in Aguirre's political biography can be found in L. Mees, J.L. de la Granja, S. de Pablo e.a., *La polıtica como pasion. El lehendakari Jose Antonio Aguirre (1904-1960)* (Madrid, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 122-176.

<sup>19</sup> For the following, see J. Corcuera, *La patria de los vascos* (Madrid, 2001); A. Elorza, *Un pueblo escogido* (Barcelona, 2001); S. de Pablo & L. Mees, *El péndulo patriótico. Historia del Partido Nacionalista Vasco, 1895-2005* (Barcelona, 2005). The period of Aguirre's exile is studied in L. Mees, *El profeta pragmático. Aguirre, el primer lehendakari (1939-1960)* (Irun, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Fondo Martínez Barrio, 22-102: *Diario de Diego Martínez Barrio*, 2/1/1946.

<sup>21</sup> *Alderdi*, 25/3/1983.

<sup>22</sup> *Muga*, 21 (1982) 42.

<sup>23</sup> On the struggle for Basque autonomy during the Second Republic, see J.L. de la Granja, *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco* (Madrid, 2008); Idem, *El oasis vasco. El nacimiento de Euskadi en la República y la Guerra Civil* (Madrid, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> H. Ben-Israel, 'Leadership, national character and charisma', in: V. Ibrahim and M. Wunsch (eds.), *Political leadership, nations and charisma* (New York, 2012) 52-62 (54).

<sup>25</sup> On the symbolic and mythical significance of the *fueros*, see C. Rubio, 'Fueros', in: S. de Pablo, J.L. de la Granja, L. Mees & J. Casquete (eds.), *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco* (Madrid, 2012) 357-372.

<sup>26</sup> The programme is published in *Documentos para la historia del nacionalismo vasco. De los Fueros a nuestros días*, ed. S. de Pablo, J.L. de la Granja & L. Mees (Barcelona, 1998) 118-121.

<sup>27</sup> For Gernika as a *lieu de mémoire*, see F. Luego & A. Delgado, 'El árbol de Gernika. Vicisitudes del símbolo foral de los vascos', in: *Historia y Política*, 15 (2006) 23-44; L. Mees, 'Guernica/Gernika como símbolo', in: *Historia Contemporánea*, 35 (2007) 529-557.

<sup>28</sup> J.A. Aguirre Lekube, *De Guernica a Nueva York pasando por Berlín* (Saint-Jean-de-Luz, 1976) 18. These memoirs of the *lehendakari* were first published in Buenos Aires in 1943. One year later an English edition was published as *Escape via Berlin* (New York, 1944).

<sup>29</sup> For more details and sources about these negotiations of Ynchausti and the Basque delegation in New York, see J.C. Jiménez de Aberásturi & R. Moreno, *Al*

*servicio del extranjero. Historia del Servicio Vasco de Información (1936-43)* (Madrid, 2009) 369-443.

<sup>30</sup> Aguirre, *Guernica*, 128.

<sup>31</sup> Shortly after escaping from Europe and arriving in the United States, Aguirre wrote to the delegate of his government in Mexico that 'Divine Providence wanted me to arrive to the United States in special circumstances and conditions.' At the same time, he informed the delegate in Argentine that 'Divine Providence has wished to put me in a privileged situation in order to appreciate perhaps better than anybody else what can and has to be done.' See Bilbao, Archivo del Nacionalismo [AN], EBB 304-8: letters from Aguirre to Francisco Belaustiguitia, 21/11/1941 and to Ramón María Aldasoro, 27/11/1941.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Jiménez de Aberásturi & Moreno, *Servicio*, 374; Madrid, Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, R 1268, 27: report by Felipe Ximénez de Sandoval to Minister, 6/6/1940 and by Antonio Magaz to Minister, 12/8/1940.

<sup>33</sup> Aguirre recorded all the details of his odyssey in a diary. He saw Hitler during a visit of the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs to the *Führer*: 'I was at a distance of about 50 metres. I witnessed the famous appearance at the balcony of the chancellery. In my hands I had some Japanese and Nazi streamers which members of the SS had "courteously" distributed. I had a lot of fun' (*Diario 1941-1942*, ed. Sabino Arana Fundazioa (Bilbao, 2010) 44).

<sup>34</sup> Before escaping to Berlin, in Antwerp during a dinner Aguirre met by chance a journalist (Betty Lagarde) who worked for the *Standard* daily and had interviewed him one year previously. Fortunately, she did not recognise him (see his testimony in Aguirre, *Guernica*, 143-146). During the months he spent underground in Berlin he happened to meet or come across people who knew him, like the former rightist deputy to the Cortes Espinosa de los Monteros or the Basque journalist Miquelarena, who at that time was working for the *Falange*. None of these people recognised him. At the end, and thanks to the fortune he had in these encounters, Aguirre seemed to have lost his fear of being discovered. He even accepted an invitation to have dinner in the Panamanian Embassy with a diplomat of the Spanish legation and talk, protected by his fake identity, about the Basque President Aguirre in the following terms:

‘Méndez [Spanish diplomat]: Aguirre [...] is a crook, but he has been cleverer [than Companys].

Ambassador of Panama: Why?

Méndez: Because he escaped in time.

Ambassador: And where is he now?

Méndez: I do not exactly know it, but I think he is in Mexico or in the United States, that is where all those undesirables have found refuge. But, by the way, I believe that Aguirre is living quite splendidly with all he stole.

Ambassador: But what did he steal?

Méndez: He took with him drawers full of gold and silver, everything stolen, of course. [...]

Aguirre: That means, Mister Méndez, that Aguirre is a perfect crook.

Méndez: In fact, that’s what he is; you do not know him well ...

Aguirre: And as it seems he even took with him wagons of gold and silver ...

Méndez: Exactly, wagons and wagons ... you don’t know these people. What we had to suffer with them!’

(The reconstruction of the dialogue: Aguirre, *Guernica*, 265-267; a summary in his *Diario*, 4/5/1941, 66.)

<sup>35</sup> AN, EBB 122-6: letter by Ixaka [López Mendizabal] to Eli Etxeberria, 20/10/1941.

<sup>36</sup> AN, EBB 304-13: letter without signature to José Garmendia, 20/10/1941.

<sup>37</sup> See Guilarte’s article in the review *Tierra Vasca*, 15/5/1960.

<sup>38</sup> AN, EBB 117-2: letter from J.A. Aguirre to J. Jauregui, 7/10/1943.

<sup>39</sup> See Irujo’s article in the journal *Alderdi*, 157 (1960).

<sup>40</sup> See Weber’s explanation of the nature of charisma and the ‘transmutation of charismatic authority’ (Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 654-661).

<sup>41</sup> For instance, in an article published in the journal of the Basque nationalist youth in Caracas, Aguirre was charged with being president of a 'Spanish institution' and committing 'genocide': 'Genocide – and a Basque nationalist should not fall into genocide – consists of making the effort of proving that the Basque government is not clearly and absolutely Spanish and part of the Spanish Republican Constitution [...]’ (*Irrintzi* [Caracas], 1 (1958)).

<sup>42</sup> Sarrailh de Ihartza [Federico Krutwig], *Vasconia. Estudio dialéctico de una nacionalidad*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.: Buenos Aires, 1973) 12. According to Krutwig, Leizaola committed the 'mortal sin' of not educating his children in the Basque language.

<sup>43</sup> Even admitting political discrepancies, Elías Gallastegui stated that 'we continue faithful to his convictions' (see *Gudari* [Caracas], 10/5/1962). And it was in Telesforo Monzón's private house in Saint-Jean-de-Luz where Aguirre's wake was held.

<sup>44</sup> For this interpretation of Aguirre as a freedom fighter, but representing the 'petit bourgeoisie and the pro-oligarchic middle classes' who had been sidelined by the ETA in representation of the 'popular classes' and the 'popular revolutionary bourgeoisie', see J. Apalategi, *Los vascos, de la nación al estado. PNV, ETA, Enbata* (San Sebastián, 1979) 158 and 194.

<sup>45</sup> See the photograph published by *El País*, 5/4/2010.

<sup>46</sup> J.L. de la Granja & S. de Pablo: 'La encrucijada vasca: entre Ermua y Estella', in J. Tusell (ed.), *El Gobierno de Aznar. Balance de una gestión, 1996-2000* (Barcelona, 1999) 153-179; S. Morán, *PNV-ETA: Historia de una relación imposible* (Madrid, 2004); L. Mees, 'Visión y gestión. El nacionalismo vasco democrático 1998-2009', in: W.L. Bernecker, D. Íñiguez Hernández & G. Maihold (eds.), *¿Crisis? ¿Qué crisis? España en busca de su camino* (Frankfurt - Madrid, 2009) 161-205; L. Mees, 'Nationalist politics at the crossroads: the Basque Nationalist Party and the challenge of sovereignty (1998-2014)', in: *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 21/1 (2015) 44-62.

<sup>47</sup> As an example, see his article in the daily paper *Deia*, 22/3/2010, in which he wrote the following: 'His leadership exceeded the frontiers of Euskadi and for two decades he was the most courageous and significant leader of the Republic. He even had the possibility of being appointed president of the republican

government, if he had wanted.' Many of Imaz's public manifestos and addresses are documented on the PNV website <<http://www.eaj-pnv.eus>>.

<sup>48</sup> See the commission's website <<http://www.lehendakariagirre.eu/ppal.php>> [accessed 13/7/2015].

<sup>49</sup> Riall, *Garibaldi*, 18. Another illustration of Aguirre's continuing appeal and influence is the fact that in 2015 the Basque government declared 7 October 2016 official holiday in the Autonomous Community of Euskadi. See *El Correo*, 1/7/2015. The holiday's formal reason is the celebration of Aguirre's first government's eightieth anniversary, but, since Euskadi is still lacking an official holiday agreed upon by all or most of the political parties ('Day of Euskadi'), a future proposal to declare 7 October the 'Day of Euskadi' might not be a surprise.

<sup>50</sup> J. Breuilly, 'Introduction. Weber's concept of charismatic domination', in: Ibrahim & Wunsch (eds.), *Political leadership*, 1-22 (14).