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# “It Broadens Your View of Being Basque”: Identity Through History, Branding and Cultural Policy

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# “It Broadens Your View of Being Basque”: Identity through History, Branding and Cultural Policy

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“It was like a rock star was coming” commented one Boisean as she remembered waiting on the tarmac of the Boise airport with hundreds of others to welcome the President of the Basque Country in May of 1988. “This was a whole new chapter for Basques in Boise, nothing like this had ever happened. We had never met with a president of the Basque Country. A lot of people didn’t even know there was one.” Over the ensuing days, the President held meetings with state and local dignitaries, planted a sapling of the tree of Gernika<sup>1</sup> outside the Basque Museum and Cultural Center and met with leaders of Basque organizations in the area. Lehendakari (President) Ardanza’s stop in Boise was one of a number of visits he made on trips to meet with Basques throughout the global Basque Diaspora.

These trips powerfully impacted the Lehendakari and he returned to the Basque Country with renewed vigor to strengthen the ties between Basques in the Diaspora and the homeland. For nearly a decade the diverse political parties worked to craft legislation that all could agree would act as a “stimulator for social, cultural, economic and political relations” (Ley 8/1994, Totoricaquena 2005). In the introduction to the legislation, President Ardanza noted that the commitment of this piece of legislation “begins with the recognition and gratitude towards the Basque Communities for their efforts and labors in the interest of the Basque cause” (Ley 8/1994).

The passage of this legislation twenty years ago marks a significant change in the relations between the Basque Government and the Diaspora. What had been initiated and maintained informally through personal relationships and largely volunteer associations took on more formal and sustained initiatives with the legal and financial backing of the Basque Government. It marked a new chapter. However, it is also simply that – one epoch in a centuries old process of Basques creating and maintaining their identity. Prior to formal governmental relations, Basques in the homeland and throughout the Diaspora formed their identity through their history and the cultural and economic brands they created. This paper traces that process of cultural identity formation through each of these aspects – history, brands and the cultural policy of Law 8/1994. The authors conclude that the Basques built upon their history and brands to establish their identity in the homeland and throughout the world. However, with emigration largely ending by the 1970’s, the cultural policy of 8/1994, along with the energy surrounding the “roots” movement coincided to re-energize and formalize increasingly distant relationships. In short, Boise Basques may not have known much about the president when he came to visit in 1988 but they knew a lot more when he visited for the Jaialdi Basque Festival in 2010.

## Objectives and Methodology

What is the impact of the synthesis between Basque history, branding and Law 8/1994 on Basque identity in the homeland and Diaspora?

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<sup>1</sup> The Tree represents Basque independence. Traditionally, the kings of Castile came to the Basque Country and under the tree swore allegiance to uphold the ancient *Lege Zaharrak* (Old Laws) under which Basques governed themselves. When future U.S. President John Adams traveled through the Basque Country, he noted the significance of this democracy and its reliance on participation of the “citizen farmers”.

The individual objectives of this paper are to (1) explain the history of Basques, a population and Diaspora with no nation state, as a basis for the formation of Basque identity through history, branding and the impact of 8/1994, (2) explore how Basques have branded themselves up to the modern day, (3) compare this community branding to others (some nation-states such as Ireland, some non nation-states such as Scotland, some nearby neighbors such as Galicia and Cataluña), (4) report findings from interviews with Basque Government officials responsible for implementing the Diaspora cultural policy and leaders of the North American Basque Organization (NABO) on its effects, and (5) highlight one Diaspora Basque community, Boise Idaho in the United States, as a major case study to determine Law 8/1994's impact on the Basque identity.

For the definition of *Diaspora* for this paper the authors draw from Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997) and the work of Aikins, Sands, and White (2009) in "The Global Irish Making a Difference Together: A Comparative Review of International Diaspora Strategies." They define both the historic and current use of the word *Diaspora* as coming "from the Greek *dia* meaning 'through' or 'over' and *speiro* meaning 'dispersal' or 'to sow'. *Diaspora* traditionally referred to a very specific situation: the exile of the Jews from the Holy Land and their dispersal throughout the globe. Later, the term was applied to other groups such as Africans and Armenians and continued to carry negative connotations of banishment into exile and a longing to return to the homeland. Elements of this application of the term certainly apply to the Basques, however the more modern and common use of the term to describe the ongoing and generally positive relationship between migrants' homelands and their places of work and settlement applies here as well.

Like the term *Diaspora*, the definition of *ethnicity* reveals a rich literature from diverse disciplines. In particular, anthropologists Raoul Naroll and Fredrik Barth's efforts provide the working definition for this study. Barth built upon Naroll's definition of ethnicity and characterized an ethnic group as: biologically self-perpetuating; sharing fundamental cultural values realized in overt cultural unity in cultural forms; making up a field of communication and interaction; and a membership that identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969, 10).

This paper employs descriptive, comparative and qualitative methodologies. As did Ireland (2013) with his "Cracker Craic" discussion of U.S. Scots-Irish identity, this paper contains a brief description of the ethnic group being discussed (here, the Basques) and their role throughout history and modern day world affairs, to form the foundation of identity established through history and branding as related to Law 8/1994 and its cultural policy. The comparison of Basques and their Diaspora cultural policy to other communities, nations and events (Cataluña and Galicia in Spain, Scots-Irish in the U.S. and 2014 Scotland's referendum for independence, among others) is presented. Some qualitative data gathering is reported, as oral histories archived by the Basque community are consulted and personal interviews with high-level Basque officials were conducted. The selection of these officials for interviewing was based on their responsibility for implementation of Law 8/1994, the focus of this paper on cultural policy, and their thorough knowledge of the case study location, Boise Idaho. Those with equivalent positions of these Basque Government officials, but in NABO were also interviewed for perspectives on the impact of Law 8 of 1994 on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its passing.

This is one case study, using one organization (NABO) and highlighting one community (Boise, Idaho) to analyze the impact of 8/1994. Boise, Idaho in the United States represents one of the highest concentrations of Basques in North America, and is commonly recognized as one of the most significant Basque communities in the Diaspora. Studies of other Basque communities such as those in Argentina present further opportunities for research.

### **Hidden in Plain Sight**

Sadly, little is commonly known about the Basques. History books regularly identify individuals such as Juan Sebastian de Elcano who completed the circumnavigation voyage for Magellan or Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order as either Spanish or French, however both harkened from this region and spoke *Euskera* (the Basque language) as their native tongue. Above all it is *Euskera*, which linguists have not linked with any other Indo-European language, which defines Basques. They refer to themselves as *Euskaldunak* (those who have the Basque language).

One of the most common words found in the language is *harri* (rock) which coincides with evidence that points to continuous human occupation in this area that straddles the Pyrenees Mountains from at least the Cro-Magnon era. Even the most conservative estimate places the Basques in this region of northern Spain and southwestern France from 5,000 to 3,000 B.C.E. - making them the oldest permanent residents of western Europe. This historical identification as 'Native Europeans' frames much of the current debate over establishing a nation state.

Traditionally, this area has been comprised of four historical territories on the southern (Spanish) side and three on the northern (French) side. Basque anthropologists found human skulls in area caves that they claim to have Basque features, and blood type studies revealed an unusually high proportion of Rh-negative blood type found in Basques which points towards a lengthy, continuous occupation in the region. (Douglass and Bilbao, 1975, pp. 10-11)

In the 1800s, Basques became involved in the Latin American sheep industry, especially in its earliest developments in the pampas of Argentina. Indeed, it was a secondary migration for Basques from this region that brought the earliest Basques to California after the discovery of gold. While few had success mining, their efforts in the booming livestock industry provided an opportunity. From this region, they fanned throughout the American West trailing sheep in the open range and providing further opportunity for family and friends from the Basque Country.

Core themes emerge from this brief synopsis of Basque history. First, Basques clearly identified themselves within this region of Europe and used language as the self-identifier. Second, while Basques have been involved throughout pivotal episodes of world history, they rarely were identified as such. Finally, and no doubt related to the first two points, Basques built networks wherever they went. They established business partnerships, formed religious organizations and maintained ties to their homeland, forming the historical context for Law 8/1994.

### **Early Formation of Basque Identity in the Basque Country and American West**

For centuries, the "baserriak," Basque chalet-like farmhouses, formed the heart of the rural Basque identity and in many cases provided the names for individual Basque families. The adage remains, 'you don't name your farm, it names you'. The surnames that Basques carried to the New World often came from the location of a family farm, for example:

- Goikoetxea—"upper house"
- Etxebarria—"new house"
- Uberuaga—"by the warm spring"
- Elizondo—"by the church"

First built in the late Middle Ages and still common today, these baserriak formed to the geographical surroundings and offered subsistence living for farmers struggling to grow a variety of crops in the wet maritime climate. Through the centuries, Basques in rural areas developed a practical, yet ingenious, system of self-sufficiency. Traditionally, the "baserriarrak," peasant farmers, were easy to identify, with their "abarketak," heavy-soled leather shoes that laced up almost to the knees. This identity formed an iconic image in Basque culture: one of the founders of Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana, identified in the Basque farmer the essence of Basqueness. (Douglass, "Serving Girls", p. 48)

It was precisely from these baserriak that many came to the American West. Since Basques traditionally had large families, many children not fortunate enough to be the heir to the baserri were left with few choices for their future. (Douglass, *Serving Girls*, 49)

One choice, for rural Basques, was to leave the country to work temporarily. Emigration had been an alternative for young Basques since Spain began building its empire; for centuries thousands had left to make fortunes overseas, especially in South America. So, ironically, while Basque industries were forced to draw workers from distant corners of Spain, young Basque men from nearby farms emigrated to work thousands of miles away. While Sabino Arana and other early Basque nationalists labored to block the infusion of Spanish culture into Euskadi, thousands of young "baserriarrak" -- in Arana's eyes, the "purest" Basques -- left to find success overseas. "They were indifferent about nationalism and Sabino Arana and all that. They were just Basque -- and they were proud to be Basque -- but they didn't know why they were proud." Most were not concerned with the survival of Basque culture; they were preoccupied with their own survival. (Eiguren interview, BMCC).

This baserri identity branded by Arana in the midst of the Basque Country's segue to modernity deeply engrained notions of "Basqueness" both in the Basque Country and throughout the Diaspora. For many in the Basque Country it served as the litmus test of authentic Basque identity. For Basques in the American West, the baserri world view was simply part of the "invisible cargo" they brought with them; the values, traditions and beliefs that formed their identity and expressed culture. These characteristics included: a work ethic that often defined self-worth, frugality, loyalty to family in the Basque Country, the Catholic faith and a persistence to survive, and cultural expression of traditions in dance, language, music and sports. As second and third generations assimilated, they had to decide how much to maintain and how to do it. As a resurgence of "roots" identity took hold in the 1960's and 70's in the United States, they had to negotiate the inheritance of these past cultural characteristics with the realities of the post-modern world. It is within this context that the Basque Government established Law 8/1994.

### **Establishment of Law 8/1994**

The Statute of Autonomy which passed in Gernika on December 29, 1978 established the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country as envisioned by the Spanish Constitution of 1978. However, it only included the provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa since the province of Nafarroa voted to establish its own autonomous region and the three Basque provinces on the north side (Zuberoa, Lapurdi and Benafarroa) remained under French rule. Neither Nafarroa or Iparralde established their own separate offices to maintain formal relations with the diaspora.

Beginning in the 1980's government officials began traveling to the Basque Centers around the world to develop relationships and familiarize themselves with Basques in the Diaspora. In 1984, the Basque Government established the Service for Relations with the Basque Centers and in 1988 the Lehendakari visited many locations. Two years later, the General Secretariat of Foreign Action and the Program for Relations with the Basque Centers moved under the Office of the Presidency which underscores their significance. Finally, the law<sup>2</sup> passed after nearly all parts agreed to a general plan that would "promote and intensify the relations of Euskadi, the Basque society and its institutions with the Basque communities and centers abroad" (Zubiri, nd).

Basque Centers were each required to collect the names, birthplaces, ancestral homeland town names, languages spoken, and citizenships of its members. The Law also stipulated that once every four years a World Congress of Basque Collectivities would be held as a "forum for social, cultural and economic relations among the Diaspora communities themselves and between the Diaspora communities and the Basque Government." One of the objectives of the Congresses was to establish a Four Year Plan for Institutional Action and it also created an Advisory Council for Relations with the Basque Communities. Perhaps most significantly, the law established "a legal framework and infrastructure for the grants and subsidies already provided to the Diaspora since 1987 and established the permanence of budgetary categories." Of the many programs and activities that this legislation established and formalized, Gaztemundu (Youth in the World), a program designed to bring together Basque youth from throughout the Diaspora to return to the Basque Country and spend time studying the culture of their ancestors enjoyed some of the greatest success.

### **The Roots Revival and Ethnic Maintenance**

Being easily identified by the exotic language upon immigration and labeled "black Bascos," it seems interesting that only half a century later, predictions were made that the Basque Diaspora identity would die out. One series of articles written in 1937 wrote about the Basque culture that it was inevitable that it would be "covered in dust, obsolete, . . . unremembered." It was the common fate of immigrants, the author implied (*Idaho Statesman*, 28 June-2 July 1937). However, attitudes for many Americans changed in the later third of the twentieth century; they began to re-discover their roots.

There was an awakened interest by Americans in the culture and history of their ancestors, especially those several generations from the original immigrants. Sociologist Marcus Lee Hansen was one of the first to theorize on generational resurgence, explaining it this way: "What the son [of immigrants] chose to forget, the grandson wishes to remember." For many the solution to fulfill both the need for a unique identity and the simultaneous desire to be a part of a community was to return to the ethnicity of one's ancestors. However, the ethnicity they returned to took a

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<sup>2</sup> While an English version of the law is not readily available, a Spanish translation can be found ("Ley 8/1994 de 27 de Mayo")



new form, a “symbolic ethnicity,” which offered individuals the opportunity to pick and choose the most appealing aspects of the immigrant culture -- the music, the dancing, the food -- without suffering the ostracism of the stranger and the constant obstacles of language. It was a period of searching for roots and forming new ethnic identities. This “symbolic ethnicity” could provide the best of both worlds. (Gans, 1970, p. 1)

Largely assimilated into American culture, ethnicity for the third generation was most evident in formal associations where the Basque Diaspora could “be Basque”. Besides the Oinkari Dancers, dozens of organizations, clubs and institutions came to being after 1960: in 1972, Anaiak Danok, the first organization with a political orientation; in 1973, the North American Basque Organization (NABO), a federation of Basque Centers throughout the United States; in 1974 a Boise State University year-long program set in the Basque Country; in the early 1980s, Aiztan Artean, a Basque women’s organization; in 1986, the Biotzetik Basque Choir; and, dedicated in 1987, the Basque Museum and Cultural Center in Boise.

Law 8/1994 formalized this identity maintenance and the already-in-progress “roots” movement gave the law more impact and built on this history. Ironically, the assimilation disadvantages for Basques upon immigration (dark complexion, Catholicism and western European roots) became an advantage as later generation Basques emphasized their ethnic background. They had more to return to. Other groups may have more successfully assimilated, yet this very melting made it challenging during the era of ethnic revival.

### **Comparison and Contrast to Fellow Diaspora Identities**

The historian, Linda Colley (1992, p. 6) said it well, “Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time.” The following provides examples of how this played out for various groups. Ireland (2013), in his “Cracker craic: the politics and economics of Scots-Irish cultural promotion in the USA” mentions the lack of “brand identity” (p. 8) of descendants of Ulster Scots. Often their identity is seen as belonging to an Appalachian, not Scots-Irish culture. These mostly non-Celts regularly are confused with the Scottish Diaspora or the Irish-Catholic Diaspora, their Celtic neighbors.

Bieter and Ray (2013), compared Scots-Irish and Basque assimilation. The apparent contrasting “racial profile” of the Scotch-Irish and Basques provides an example of their differences. Scotch-Irish came in as ‘white’ but many commonly referred to the Basques as ‘Black Bascos’ and questioned their “whiteness”. In short, the Scotch-Irish more closely fit the dominant WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) profile than did the Basques which allowed for an easier process of assimilation. The “return” to their roots for the Basques meant there was more to return to and that makes 8/1994 more possible to have an impact.

Even when an identity has been maintained, “Sub-national identities have not been immune” from exaggeration of “cultural coherence, stability, and homogeneity” (Ireland, 2013, p. 17). Of course, Basques do not always have “cultural coherence, stability, and homogeneity” either as can be seen by anyone following politics out of the Basque Country. There is a joke that says “if you have four Basques in a room, you will have at least five opinions.” According to Vallejo (2014), the only unanimous (at least almost unanimous, with a few abstentions) vote to ever occur in the Basque Parliament was when Law 8 was passed in 1994 to formalize and strengthen ties with the Diaspora. But, each political party had different reasons for supporting it.

During an interview with Vallejo and Oregi (2014), they reminded the authors of another diaspora example from Spain. Galicia, nearby to the Basque Country, was the first in Spain to reach out to its Diaspora, beginning in 1983, as they had even more emigration than the Basques. Their Diaspora cultural policy is a bit different however. In Galicia, Diaspora links are based more on local communities than some regional cultural policy (e.g., Pontevedra having ties to the Diaspora versus some broader policy from all of Galicia).

Comparisons to other groups is valuable so that historical similarities and present day cultural policy strategies might be shared, such as at the annual meeting of the Association of European Migration Institutions. Delegates work with colleagues, not only from Europe, but also those in the diaspora such as Australia and the United States to share ideas. Diaspora cultural policy does not operate in a vacuum.

In the particular discussion above regarding the Basques, one learns that assimilation is often the goal of immigrant groups, certainly exemplified by the U.S. Scotch-Irish. However, with resurgence of the return-to roots movement, the maintenance of group identity became valuable and facilitated this return. The Basques simply had more identifiable places, symbols, and cultural practices to return to. All of this provided the environment for Law 8/1994.

### **Maintenance and Resurgence of Identity: Branding and History**

The previous discussion emphasized the informally-maintained Basque identity throughout history and the formalization through Law 8/1994. While the idea of “brand” is always under the surface in any discussion of identity, this section clarifies how community groups, specifically the Basques, brand themselves. History and tradition provide the link to the past, modern day commercial globalization, with its advantages and disadvantages, and the linking of the two by brand identity provide the background and momentum for Law 8/1994.

The Basques, as are other communities, are brands. Wright-Isak (2012) discussed communities forming NOBs (naturally occurring brands), combining anthropology, sociology and marketing to explain the phenomenon. Some characteristics of NOBs are the following.

They are not commercially created and their imagery is not deliberately managed by a corporate actor. . . . They are widely recognized to the point of being understood as more than a one-dimensional taxonomy applied to a geographic type of place. As symbols each has visual characteristics and stands for a cluster of specific human norms and enacted values. These sets of meanings . . . shape the behavior of the individuals who dwell in or visit them . . . Thus, they are brands (p.134).

Basque enactment of Law 8/1994 moved the discussion to a level more formalized than “naturally occurring brands.”

Numerous writers in fields other than business, but relying on business writers, have analyzed the value of branding for governments, communities, and cultural entities. Referring to Kotler and Bertner (2002, “Country as brand . . .”) Ulldemolins and Zamorana (2014) state “nation branding may be used to disseminate a nation’s heritage and national history in ways that preserve national complexity” (p. 15). Some criticize this use of branding as a “simplification of culture” and “elitist brand management” (Ulldemolins and Zamorano 2014, p. 15). Basque formalization, took them beyond simply “naturally occurring brands” with its identity-enhancing Diaspora Law 8/1994.

Marketers have long known that brand identity is often said to be an entity’s most valuable asset. The “brand” can go a long way in promoting a community’s image, both at home and abroad. Branding is important, but not a cure-all, of course, for lagging economic development. “If economic development in a country is like completing a gigantic jigsaw, nation branding is probably the last piece” (Fan, 2006).

Ulldemolins and Zamorano (2014) in Barcelona, also nearby neighbors to the Basque Country, and their perspective on branding, is perhaps most relevant. They discuss Spain’s *Marca España*, branding issues by government and regional communities and how they can be effective and yet contentious. Certainly, the “Basque brand” in addition to various Basque branded products has been effective and contentious throughout history.

“The notion of the importance of image or territorial brand for products and product export was initially associated with cities and led to the practices of local branding, but was later extended to the debate about the image of a state abroad and provided the basis for nation branding” (Ulldemolins and Zamorano, p. 13). The authors argue that promoting the image of bullfighting and flamenco has actually somewhat harmed Spain in the international arena, hence the need for rebranding. Since all of this is “against the Backdrop of Spain’s financial crisis” (p. 12) world branding efforts are relevant as “it is clear how branding has been used as a process to legitimize the economic shift in projecting identity” (Ulldemolins and Zamorano, p. 13).

The *Marca España* home page mentions no diversity within Spain (for example, the Catalans and the Basque). “The interest in cultural diversity and ‘hybrid’ branding is limited to the core of Spanish cultural nationalism: the Spanish language” (Ulldemolins and Zamorano, p. 12), and ignores the Catalan and Basque languages.

Since maintaining the Basque language is so important for the Basques, it is easy to understand why many Basques would rather not be branded by this *marca España*. Oregi and Vallejo (2014), the Basque Government representatives, stated that there was more discussion about *marca España* (and opposition to it) in Cataluña, than in the Basque Country, but certainly the Basques are no fan of some brand identity imposed by the Madrid central Spanish government, hence they continue to informally and formally maintain their own brand.

*Becoming a Global Basque Brand.* Other lessons can be learned from Ireland too as Aikins, Sands, and White (2009), in their “Global Irish” report state that “more and more national governments are introducing Diaspora strategies and recognizing the role that key members of the Diaspora can play in developing their home economies . . .” (p. 3) and consider the Diaspora as a “national asset” (p. 5). This “national asset” based on ethnicity can be a partner in branding.

Some of the explanation for this is simply globalization as diaspora networks are facilitated by and are becoming “increasingly significant because of communications and technology development” (Aikins, Sands, and White, 2009, p. 4). They also suggest that “government should be a facilitator rather than an implementer of initiatives” (p. 4). Lessons are reported from India, Israel, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, Chile and others.

Of course, the Basques do not represent a “national government,” therefore they must develop their own unique branding policy toward the Diaspora. Perhaps in the Basque case, the government really does need to be one of the implementation partners and to take the advice of a speaker at The Global Diaspora Forum in Ireland in 2013 and “diasporize.” According to representatives of the Basque Government who are responsible for Law 8’s implementation, that is exactly what the Basques plan on doing (Oregi 2014, Vallejo 2014).

It is this Law 8/1994 that moves the “naturally occurring” Basque brand to a more formalized and global one, a brand actively debated and supported by Diaspora help.

There are modern day and traditional branded products and services marketed from the Basque Country which are built on its traditions. Many of the traditional and artisanal products of the *baserriak*, and the farms themselves further branded Basque identity. For example, Idiazabal sheep cheese earned the world’s highest awards designation at a competition in 2007 (“A Total of 46 Medals . . .”, nd) and this cheese actively engages in the international protection of its name. Basque farmhouses also serve as rural guesthouses that offer accommodations to tourists (“Rural guesthouse and Farmhouse accommodation in Euskadi”, nd). The internationally known cooperative, Mondragón, represents the historic Basque spirit of neighborhood in a successful modern day capitalistic entity. The energy company, Iberdrola, is internationally known especially for renewable energy and has investments around the world.

While American Basques may be “hidden in plain sight,” historically occasionally they have come out of hiding to be portrayed in American culture. Ernest Hemingway wrote extensively about Basques and often visited the Basque region in both Spain and France. In 1955 the BBC asked Orson Welles to complete a “quaint series of documentaries which were labeled ‘Around the World with Orson Welles’” (see Orson Welles on the Basque Country, 1955). So, to some degree the wider world has been exposed to the “Basque Brand” for some time.

However, often the connections to Spain and France overshadowed the Basque brand, particularly regarding the terrorist organization ETA an acronym for “Euskadi ‘ta Askatasuna,” [The Basque Country and Freedom]. Originally founded to preserve Basque culture, a splinter group radicalized and formed a retaliatory response to Fascist dictator Francisco Franco’s oppression; “a clandestine revolutionary organization with three fronts: cultural, political and military” (Douglass and Bilbao, 1975, p. 150). The first ETA-related death was actually the killing of one of its own members by Spanish Civil Guards in 1968, initiating a cycle of violence that took hundreds of lives over the next decades. Spain’s establishment of a democracy coupled with increasing autonomy in the Basque Country gradually weakened support for a violent response to negotiate freedom. With a peace settlement in Ireland and the post 9/11 War on Terrorism, pressure grew for a cease fire agreement in the Basque Country which ETA declared and maintained since January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Nevertheless sadly, this brand remains one of the identifying



trademarks of this region. Important here however is the fact that with all of the varying political views in the Basque Country, Law 8/1994 represented the only time that such divergent politicians unanimously supported formalizing the Diaspora cultural policy, showing that even those with polarized political views can join together to “diasporize,” (even if for their own individual political aspirations).

Kurlansky (1999, p. 337) described it as follows, “It is what has always been on their minds: nation building. The leadership is well aware that if Euskadi is a nation, it is a tiny nation, and while half the struggle is building the nation, the other half is getting it recognized in the world. The size of their land and their population never seems to moderate Basque ambitions.” In other words, in spite of some tarnished images, Basques recognize and are good at the importance of branding their small nation.

Some hope someday for their own nation-state, and as mentioned earlier, are looking to Scotland to see the results of its September 2014 referendum. Public sentiment can shift and recent reports of April 2014 report that “Spain’s Basques stall on self-rule” even as supports of the Catalán referendum in November 2014 are “pressing ahead” (Román 2014). Both regions claim that they send more money to Madrid than they get in benefits from the capital. The Spanish government does not want to see these two major industrial regions break off from the whole of Spain. Madrid tries to put a national (i.e., *marca España*) campaign together to encourage tourism and investment, but the autonomous Basque Government continues its own identity branding; a metaphor of the larger story of the mingling of history, branding and identity.

*Basque Identity, not Spanish Identity.* Today, the port of Bilbao once again plays a significant role. Unimaginable during the height of pollution connected to this industrial past, today cruise ships offer stays in Bilbao. For example, Bilbao Cruises offers dozens of options with departures from all around the world with port stops in Bilbao. Many come to enjoy the latest engine of economic development – the 1997 opening of the Guggenheim Museum and the renovation it brought.

“Hailed as an ‘instant landmark,’ Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim brought a new sense of relevance to architecture. . . . amid Bilbao’s post-industrial ruin [it] has become an icon of what architecture can do for a city in decline” (Guash, 2005). This success means many cities have “dreamed of its own Guggenheim effect.” This “Guggenheim effect” is also referred to as the “Bilbao effect” (2007) hence once again empowering the Bilbao part of the Basque brand.

The Director of the only Basque Museum in the United States often tells the story to museum patrons of how visitors from the Basque Country, specifically the city of Bilbao, have changed dramatically in pride of their homeland. She relates that in the past when someone from Bilbao would admit where s(he) was from, that person did so grudgingly, with not much pride in the city. All of that changed, the Director says after the Guggenheim opened in Bilbao. Now natives of Bilbao brag about their city and definitely display their hometown pride. She is not imagining things; many authors and researchers, and even airlines<sup>3</sup> have noticed this resurgence in pride of the Basque brand identity too. Taking pride in a region, while not identifying with the modern day nation is not new, but with the Scottish referendum on independence in September of 2014 and one scheduled in Cataluña, regional pride and identity take on more urgency.

*Boise’s Basque Block—The Synthesis of History, Branding and Cultural Policy.* Just after the turn of the last century, on a small plot on Grove Street in Boise, a Basque boarding house owner planted a vegetable garden to help supply food for the hungry crowd filling his tables. On the same site in the late 1940s, some first- and second-generation Basques constructed a no-frills building, the Basque Center, for cultural activities originally carried out in the boarding houses. By 1972, Basques gave the building a facelift, a stucco, beamed farmhouse facade resembling an old world baserri (farm house). In conjunction with Jaialdi 2000 (an international Basque festival held once every five years) and with the financial assistance of the Basque Government made possible through the passage of Law 8/1994, Boise inaugurated the Basque Block, with the Basque Center, a Basque Museum and Cultural Center, a renovated handball court and a Basque Pub and later a Basque restaurant and an accompanying streetscape filled

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<sup>3</sup> As recent as of April as of 2014, the airline KLM (Bilbao, Basque Country 2014) offers a sweepstakes where one can win a trip to Bilbao and its magazine states “considered an industrial center for many years, everything changed with the completion of the Guggenheim Museum in 1997.”

with Basque symbols. (Bieter and Bieter, 2000, pp. 153-155) Perhaps no street in the North American Basque Diaspora provides a better example of the synthesis of Basque history, branding and cultural policy than the Basque Block in heart of downtown Boise.

The movement outward, the opening up of the Basque culture to the broader community and the parallel architectural, organizational and branding change began with the makeover of the Basque Center in 1972 and culminated with the symbol filled streetscape dedicated in 2000. Planners branded the full street as an ethnic landmark and designed it to invite pedestrians, tourists and all kinds of activities. This shift paralleled the ethnic revival and the symbols draw upon this resurgence in ethnic identity through a mixture of old and new branding. Most of the buildings on the Basque Block exhibit historical markers that remind tourists of the boardinghouse era for Basques. One exhibit in the Basque Museum and Cultural Center shows some of the "brands" left by Basque shepherders they carved into aspen trees during idle time while in the hills.

In the mid-1980s, the Museum's founder acquired a red-brick house, built in 1864 and operated for decades as a Basque boarding house, as a spot to preserve information about Basques' immigration to Idaho. In 1987, Idaho and Basque Government officials dedicated the building, and planted an oak sapling from the Tree of Gernika in the Basque Country (Gernika is also Boise's sister city). Older Basques volunteered to assist visitors in the main exhibition, which featured photographs of early immigrants and an actual sheep wagon as part of a display of the herding life. Countless tourists along with schoolchildren from around the state are offered presentations on Basque history and culture. Basque language courses for adults also continue to be taught.

Continuing down the block past the Museum, the old Anduiza boarding house building, sports a Basque handball court, a *fronton*. Today, three leagues play throughout the year. This building, in the very heart of downtown Boise serves as another symbol of Basque identity that few know about. One student in the author's Basque Global Migration class represents numerous Boiseans; when touring the Basque Block upon entering the downstairs court he remarked with surprise, 'I've lived here my whole life and had no idea that this was here.'

At the corner of a major intersection stands Bar Gernika, founded in 1991 by a third-generation Basque. In the town of Gernika there was a Bar Boise, so it "seemed logical" he said, "that there should be a Bar Gernika in Boise." (Ansotegui, 1992) The Block hosts countless Basque and broader community events throughout the year. From lamb dinners and wine fests to university homecomings and ski season shindigs the Block brings together a broad array to this space. However, no event draws more people to this Basque core than the Jaialdi Basque Festivals. These gatherings include exhibitions of traditional Basque sports, dancing, singing with some of the best athletes and performers brought over from the Basque Country. An estimated 35,000 participants from all over the world converge on Boise to celebrate this festival and the state of Idaho prominently promotes the Basque presence and the every five-year Jaialdi on its [visitidaho.org](http://visitidaho.org) page.

McClinchey (2008) investigated the marketing strategy behind and the economic impact of urban ethnic festivals. "Heritage of cultural groups and migrant communities increasingly jostle to be recognized" (p. 261). "Place marketing that includes festival promotion should be able to answer questions pertaining to image, political influences and agendas, authenticity, social identity and cultural representation." McClinchey also notes that ethnic festivals can bring positive economic and social impact to local communities. However, Ireland (2013), claims that many fall into the trap of "festivalization." This can be avoided by focusing on a sense of place and historical authenticity to "bolster efforts at image branding, and sustain ethnic cultures and traditions" (Ireland, p. 13). The Basques and Idaho certainly strive to bolster image branding by building on the history and ethnic culture. A walk down this Basque Block in Boise recounts the image branding and impact of Law 8/1994's cultural policy.

From the Jaialdi Festivals to the Basque Museum and Cultural Center, from the Basque Center and all the other affiliated groups that work under these organizations' umbrellas, each one benefits from the funds made available by the Basque Government through the cultural policy that began with Ley 8. This landmark legislation builds on the history and branding of the past to augment the Basque and Basque-American identity manifested on this Block and through gatherings such as Jaialdi.

## Using the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Law 8 to Reflect on Basque Cultural Policy

*Gizaldietan Euskal Herriari Euskal Etxeek nazioartean izateko eman dioten aukera gaurkotu eta sendotu egin du Euskal Autonomi Elkarteaz Kanpoko EuskalGizatalde eta Etxeekiko Harremanetarako Maiatzaren 27ko 8/1994 Legeak (Zubiri, nd)*

*The Basque Autonomous Region's Foreign Relations Department's May 27<sup>th</sup> 8/1994 Law in societies to the Basque Country between nations gave the opportunity to modernize and strengthen.*

The twentieth anniversary of the passage of Law 8/1994 provides an opportunity to determine what the Law offers and assess the economic, social and political impact

The Law provides for a registry of Basque Centers and each center is required to collect the names, birthplaces, ancestral homeland town names, languages spoken, and citizenships help by its members (Issue of privacy Decree 106/1996 made this private rather than a public record). In addition, the laws provided members of registered centers that are also registered with the Basque Government with material benefits as well as psychological empowerment. These registered members have the ability to attend a university in the Basque Country, with degrees on equal footing with homeland residents. They may also receive health benefits and social assistance and can qualify for public housing in Euskadi, (although only in the three autonomous provinces in Spain) (Tortoricaguena 2004).

All of these strategies were discussed by Basque Government delegates at a recent meeting of the Association of European Migration Institutions conference held September 2013 in Karlstad, Sweden. Interestingly, a good portion of this presentation centered around the Diaspora strategy in the focus of this current paper, the important case study of Boise, Idaho.

Because of a specific collaboration agreement between the Basque Country and the State of Idaho, there is a Delegation of the Basque Country in the United States of America and office in Idaho. This new trade and culture representative has been working on increasing commercial relationships between Idaho and Basque Country companies, especially in the industries of wine and renewable energy. When interviewed six months later during an official visit to counterparts in the state of Idaho, Vallejo and Oregi elaborated. Law 8 is “one step” that provides a mechanism for developing a strategy to help guide Basque congresses every four years. They reminded the interviewers that the law took time to implement and that individual citizens, more than the overall government, are the most enthusiastic supporters.

Because of the law, Diaspora matters come directly under the President of the Basque Government. While there have always been informal (and in the case under the Franco regime, underground) ties between the Diaspora and Basques at home, Law 8 formalized the process. If the ties with various Diaspora groups were loose in the past, the law allowed the Diaspora to recognize that there really exists a government with set programs and a legal framework. It also allowed the government to reach out to the French side of the Basque Country and to Navarra (a region in Spain with many Basques but not part of the Basque Autonomous Region). The Diaspora now feels that the Basque Country is their government. The Basque Country (or “Basque brand”) now has “value” and serves as “a new reference” that someone is “taking care” of the diaspora’s needs (Oregi 2014; Vallejo 2014). Vallejo and Oregi continued, “we are the best” with “memory of immigration” and “we are in the first line” and are well respected when attending meetings with others in Europe (e.g., Association of European Migration Institutions).

But, because “we were together outside of the Basque Country but not inside our borders” it is time to revisit the law and to “diasporize” more at home (Oregi 2014; Vallejo 2014). When asked how do Basques in the Basque Country feel about the law, Oregi responded that sometimes the Diaspora is very politicized. Politicians may go abroad to use the Diaspora as a “platform back home” (Oregi, 2014) or a prop, not necessarily to get votes but to tout their political voice and to be in the newspapers back home. On a less cynical note, there are “huge lessons to learn from the Basques abroad” and links with them “changes your mind in regard to how you can live your ‘Basqueness’” (Oregi, 2014). This statement certainly agrees with

*Euskal Etxeak Euskal Herriaren erakusgarri dira. Beraiei esker, egun, munduak hobeto ezagutzen du Euskal Herria, eta gero eta onartuagoa da nazioarteko alor askotan.*

*The Basque Centers demonstrate what the Basque Country is. Thanks to them, today the world knows more about it (the Basque Country) and is increasingly better received in many nations. (Zubiri, nd).*

In terms of revisiting the law and “going forward,” the government representatives say that expanding the economic and business liaisons and “personal communication is key” (Oregi 2014; Vallejo 2014). *Gaztemundu* (“young world”) is important for the future, there is the need to involve the next generation. Basque representatives should spend more time visiting the Diaspora in order to expand a network to better economies at home and abroad. Some are still “not aware of the potential of the Basques we have abroad” and “we have to diasporize our own institutions” whether the Basque ever achieve their own nation state or not (Oregi 2014; Vallejo 2014). (Interestingly, Oregi and Vallejo say there is more consensus in the Diaspora for a nation-state than back home in the Basque Country.) These ties are crucial as the Basque Government has no embassies or consulates or diplomatic core. Basque communities see the Basque Government as a partner. When Oregi and Vallejo were asked what is the most important thing they have learned in their jobs, responses were “I believe in what I do” and “the potential.”

In order to analyze the impact of Law 8/1994 from the Diaspora’s point of view, questions were put to a couple of U.S. Basques influential in Basque organizations. The current NABO (North American Basque Organizations) Educational Committee chairperson comments on Law 8/1994, (Ysursa, 2014)

It helps to ground or affirm what it is that we are trying to accomplish together: the perpetuation of Basque identity. And what better resource than the Basque Government which has shown a consistent commitment in not only financial terms, but in providing moral support as well.

The involvement of the Basque Government with the Diaspora has also opened up new vistas, facilitating greater contacts with other Basques living abroad.

There is no doubt that NABO generally, and most all Basque clubs specifically, have benefitted from the outreach of the Basque Government.

According to Ysursa, the financial support from the Basque Government has allowed the World Basque Congress that assembles delegations from various nations with Basque communities.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Throughout periods of emigration Basques often relied on networks to maintain ties to each other and the Basque Country. Largely informal, these connections helped them create hyphenated identities (self-identifying as American and Basque for example) as they made their way in the new settings. They regularly sent back money, goods and ideas that heavily impacted those at home and often spurred them to migrate as well. These transnational exchanges influenced the histories of both regions and helped create the cultural brands that further delineated identities. For centuries this process continued, sped up by advances in communication and transportation.

By the 1980s, Basques reached an unprecedented stage in the development of this globalization process. The ability to gain regional autonomy allowed them to legislate for the first time a cultural policy meant to formally, financially and legally connect the global Basque Diaspora with the Basque Country. Those forced from the Basque Country due to political persecution and economic depravity could reconnect with their homeland in unprecedented ways. Also, and perhaps most significantly, the policy programs helped later generations of hyphenated Basques connect with their ancestors’ homeland and recharge their ethnic batteries. Many traveled to the Basque Country for the first time and experienced a modern expression of Basque identity far different from the ones their ancestors left. Additionally, many Basques traveled to the Diaspora for their first time as well. Some startling results occurred from these trips. Hyphenated Basques linked back to their ancestry and more clearly understood their roots: they often also realized their “Americanness”. Meanwhile, many Basques from the homeland traveled to these new locations and came to more deeply understand and appreciate their Basque identity as well. “I learned to Basque



dance in America,” recalled one Basque student. “Everyone in the Basque Country should come and visit the Diaspora” said a Basque Government official speaking at Jaialdi 2005. “It will make them so much more proud to be Basque. There we take it for granted.”

These comments are the result of the synergy between Basque globalization history, branding and the effects of Law 8/1994. The Law formalized government cultural policy and rejuvenated relationships for many in the Basque community and connected parts of the Diaspora with other Centers in unprecedented ways. Additionally, these Basque Centers scattered throughout the world, created a Basque network that can somewhat function like quasi embassies since the Basque Government cannot formally establish them. They are places through which the Basque Government can make political, economic, social connections and enact cultural policy. Coupled with their own delegations in Brussels, New York, Mexico City and in South America, they can effectively connect with the global community.

Within the millennia of Basque history, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Law 8/1994 is a chapter only beginning to be written. However, as this new chapter develops, an insight from Benan Oregi, the Basque Government facilitator of programs throughout the Diaspora guides one of the central experiences of this effect on both Basques in the Basque Country and those in the Diaspora. “It broadens your view of being Basque” Oregi stated. No longer routed just in the farmhouse, today’s Basque identity in the homeland and the Diaspora brings together history and branding that is adapted to the globalized community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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