



Kafe Antzokia : The Global meets the Local in Basque Cultural Politics

Jacqueline Urla

Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts Amherst

E-mail : jurla@anthro.umass.edu

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Resumen Kafe Antzokia: lo global se encuentra con lo local en la política cultural vasca	Abstract Kafe Antzokia: The Global meets the Local in Basque Cultural Politics
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Por medio del análisis de un caso, el del proyecto que se esconde tras el nacimiento y la gestión de un espacio cultural contemporáneo, el Kafe Antzoki de Bilbao, el texto procura profundizar en las conexiones que se establecen entre la cultura local y la percepción cierta de que ésta se desarrolla actualmente en un mundo altamente globalizado. Los cambios que los propios actores sociales implicados perciben en la idea de lo local y en otras que, el caso del País Vasco, iban indisolublemente asociados a ella (la lengua vasca, el territorio propio, la nación, las comunidades que a habitan...) son analizados a la luz de la percepción que algunos de esos actores tienen de la cultura, de su ámbito de referencia y sus tensiones (local/ global, centro/periferia, cosmopolitismo, hibridación cultural...) y de sus condiciones actuales de posibilidad.

By means of a case analysis, the project supporting the genesis and management of a contemporary cultural space –Kafe Antzokia, in Bilbao–, the article tries to emphasize the connection between the local culture and the very perception that in these times this culture is practiced in a highly globalized world. Changes that the social agents involved perceive in the idea of ‘the local’ and in other issues which in the Basque Country were engaged to this idea (the Basque language, the own territory, the nation, the communities that live in it...), are analysed according to their perception of culture, of its domain of reference and its tensions (local/global, centre/periphery, cosmopolitanism, cultural hybridization...) and of its contemporary conditions of possibility.

Palabras clave local/global, cultura vasca, cosmopolitismo, hibridación cultural	Key words local/global, Basque culture, cosmopolitanism, hybridization
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1 DESTINATION BILBAO

“We hope to be the second stop tourists make when they visit Bilbao: first the Guggenheim, then Kafe Antzokia.” With these words Joxe Angel Irigaray ushered me out of his office above the performance space of Kafe Antzokia, a Basque café-theatre that had recently opened in the heart of this predominantly Spanish-speaking city. We had just concluded a lengthy interview on the goals behind this project which had rapidly gained much attention in the world of Basque language revival. As I transcribe the cassette tape back in the United States, the frequent interruption of the telephone, Joxe Angel’s seamless transition among various languages, an incoming fax, salsa music and church bells evoke the busy and interconnected world this writer, doctor and advocate of the Basque language inhabits.

It was the spring of 1998, a moment of hope in the Basque Autonomous Community, just before ETA announced its cease fire. I was on my own circuitous path, tracking activists¹, a language movement, and, as I’ll suggest, a concept of culture on the move. In fact, the Guggenheim *had* been my first stop that morning, as I too had wanted to see for myself the glinting titanium structure, visible testament to the seduction of Basque ministers to the wiles of Thomas Krens and the allure of world-class art (Zulaika 1997). At first glance, Kafe Antzokia and Guggenheim Bilbao would appear to be very different kinds of endeavors: the first is an effort by concerned Basques to create a haven for a “local” language and culture. The second is a project of national elites who dug deep into public monies to gamble on an as-yet-untried transnational museum franchise. But before we rush to proclaim one project *local* (rooted, bounded) and the other *global* (deracinated, cosmopolitan), indeed, before we even accept the terms of this contrast, we need to look more closely. Both are in fact cultural projects that engage global cultural currents but of very different sorts and with very different goals. While Guggenheim Bilbao imports, virtually unchanged, a North American vision of “universal” art into Basque society, Kafe Antzokia tries to bring the global and the local together attempting to create a

¹ I use the term activist here in a generic way to refer to people who take part in language revival activities or associations. In the Basque Country, however, the preferred term is *euskalzale*, which might be best translated as Basque language loyalist or language advocate. The term activist, by contrast, tends to have a narrower usage referring to people who are militants in political organizations. Language loyalism, as we will see, is regarded as very distinct from conventional forms of political activism.



space of transcultural encounter that asserts, to use James Clifford's phrase, both roots and routes (Clifford 1997).²

2 URBAN COSMOPOLITANISM

Bilbao's Kafe Antzokia is an example, probably the most notable, of a new kind of cultural space and a new mode of activism in the landscape of Basque language revival of the post-Franco era. With the creation of the regional Basque government in 1979, Basque language revival, once a clandestine activity under Franco, began to receive governmental support. Though far from fully normalized, Basque, like Catalan and Galician, is now being taught in the public schools, it has some media usage on television and radio, and subsidies are allocated to support Basque-medium cultural activities. Kafe Antzokia, however, is explicitly non-governmental. It was created by Zenbat Gara, one of a number of grass roots community language associations that have been appearing in the Basque Country in the course of the last decade.

Zenbat Gara and its many other sister associations are testament to the continued vitality of popular, nongovernmental activism in Basque language politics and speaks to a keen sense among its members that language revival cannot be abandoned to government planners and schools. As Irigaray tells it, Zenbat Gara was formed by a group of self denominated *euskaltzaleak* (Basque language advocates) teaching at or associated with one of the largest adult Basque language schools of Bilbao. As is well known, these adult language schools, known as *euskaltegiak*, and have been key instruments of the language revival movement, teaching not only the Basque language, but in more radical days, also campaigning to challenge the marginalization of Basque in public life. By the nineties, however, language teachers and advocates were despairing over the effectiveness of the movement and the future of Basque revival. They saw themselves in a losing battle: limited to teaching Basque grammar, trying to motivate speakers to use it, and having to depend on the ups and downs of electoral politics that control the largesse of government subsidies. They were also frustrated over the political divisions amongst

² This analysis focuses on Kafe Antzokia's mode of globalism. For a penetrating analysis of the nature of the Guggenheim's ways of linking the global with the local, see Martín (in press).



Basque nationalists that blocked coalitions and were searching for ways to disassociate from the more contentious and divisive effects of nationalist politics.

Zenbat Gara is one of many community-based associations that formed in the nineties with the goal of finding new ways of promoting Basque language use by creating a new kind of space and operating according to a new set of strategies. As the discussion below will hopefully make apparent, their spatial and cultural politics redefine normalization, as Basque language revival is typically called by language advocates. Normalization is generally seen as the making of Basque into the “normal”, habitual, or customary language of life. For all intents and purposes normalization was understood as the making of Basque into the language of a modern nation-state and this goal has been pursued in large part via normativization—the creation of standardized Basque, and regulations for its teaching and use in the public sphere. As we will see, normalization as pursued by this new generation involves putting Basque onto a global stage, in affinity with the cultural productions of other minoritized groups and social movements.³ It is this expansion of the Basque cultural universe that is key to their distinctive sense of what it means to have a normal language and culture.

The group’s method hinged from the beginning on creating a new kind of physical space for cultural activities. The group raised funds to purchase an old theatre and renovated it to accommodate multiple uses. At the core is the performance space of the theatre with a stage and tables. In addition to viewing nightly musical or theatrical performances, patrons come for mid-day meals and drinks at the bar. These activities bring in a clientele from throughout the city and generate the bulk of the income for the association. In the upstairs space the association has its offices, offers adult language classes, organizes activities for youth, runs a low-power radio station, a small publishing house, and had plans for creating a travel agency.

³ The terminology used to refer to non-state languages has been a frequent topic of political commentary. Basque language loyalists prefer to speak of theirs as a ‘minoritized’ language, rather than a *minority* language. In this way, they seek to underscore that the marginalized status of the language is the result not just of low numbers of speakers, but of specific policies of exclusion and discrimination on the part of the state, elites, and cultural institutions. Irigaray also explicitly rejects the term “minority language speaker” as a subjectivity. “We do not think of ourselves as a minority”, he explained in a post-interview commentary.



When I visited, there was very little about the physical place that would identify it as “Basque.” Absent were any of the ubiquitous political insignia that have tended to mark a space as militant or radical Basque: there were no posters of political prisoners and no Basque flag (*ikurrina*). Nor were there any of the usual slogans *Euskalerrian Euskaraz* (Basque in the Basqueland), *Euskaraz badakigu* [we speak Basque], *Euskaraz eta Kitto!*, [Basque is enough] by which *euskalzales* literally inscribe their pro-Basque politics onto the physical environment. Absent as well were any emblems of Basque folklore that might be found in tourist shops marketing Basque culture (no nostalgic images of farmhouses, rustic furniture, busts of farmers, or traditional costume). The aesthetic of the furniture and design is a kind of modernism and the acoustic environment is nothing if not eclectic.⁴ There is nothing to mark this as Basque, except of course, that all the staff speak Basque as well as one or two other languages.

Joxe Angel Irigaray is in charge of programming at the theatre, lining up music groups, theatre performances, debates and events. He is no stranger to this world, having been a founding member of the legendary *Ez Dok Amairu*, an innovative performance collective of artists, writers and musicians that launched the Basque New Song Movement of the sixties. A chalkboard located at the entrance to Kafe Antzokia contained a list of the month’s events ranging from theatre, live bands, to political/cultural debates. Book parties are held, press conferences, round table discussions and lectures. In contrast to the *Guggeheim*, Kafe Antzokia gives prominence to *euskaldun* (Basque-speaking) artists, but their stage is also host to groups that don’t sing in Basque and are from elsewhere. The musical selections as noted above are eclectic, varying widely from any number of Basque musical varieties (balladeers, rock, heavy metal, Basque accordion, *trikitixa*, and its many new fusion styles), to the sounds of Kid Frost, Bill Evans, the indie Mexican bands Tijuana No and Molotov, as well as representatives of alternative “rock en español” from elsewhere on the peninsula or Latin America. Kafe Antzokia had also recently hosted, said Irigaray, a musical group from France whose members were of Berber, African and Caribbean descent. And what was perhaps an even more dramatic

⁴ Other important cultural antecedents to this aesthetic and cultural politics include the novels of Bernardo Atxaga, the music of Mikel Laboa, or the poetry of Joxe Antonio Artze. A fuller treatment of cosmopolitanism in Basque cultural discourse would need to examine this longer genealogy as a counter mode of expression to the ruralist, nostalgic notion of Basque culture.



indicator of a new cultural politics: the night before I arrived, a band playing flamenco fusion from Andalucía had performed.

Ten years ago the presence of a flamenco band or the sounds of *sevillanas* in a space of Basque cultural activism would have been almost inconceivable – requiring at the very least a bit of satire– so identified was this music with the Spanish state and its cultural hegemony. Within Basque cultural activism, affirming Basque identity has been premised on defending oneself from the hegemony of Spanish and French language and culture through their exclusion and denial. The identities and languages have been posed by both the state and its resisters as oppositional and mutually exclusive. The slogan *Euskaraz eta Kitto!* [Basque is enough!] frequently used in the Basque revival movement, succinctly conveys the essence of what has been until recently the prevalent strategy of grassroots cultural/linguistic resistance in the Basque Country and indeed in many other language revival movements. This strategy obeys what we might call a protectionist logic which aims to save the minoritized language by sheltering it, creating spaces which can serve as a refuge away from the majority languages and culture. It is a strategy common in many liberation movements. One thinks, for example, of the woman-only spaces and collectives in the feminist movement that developed as a means of cultivating a sense of empowerment. Separate, woman-only space was seen as essential to a part of the struggle aimed, not only at attaining legal rights, but overcoming a dominated subjectivity. In the Basque case, “Euskaraz eta Kitto!” [Basque is enough] is aimed at asserting the “completeness” or capacity of Euskara as a medium for all aspects of life. As a slogan, “Euskaraz eta Kitto!” indexes the accusation of inadequacy that is leveled against speakers of minoritized languages. In this respect, it has played an important role in deliberately refusing the still quite pervasive belief that minority languages are deficient, supplementary at best, but ultimately inadequate to performing all the tasks of a real “Language.” Zenbat Gara and the strategies of cultural associations seem in many ways to be calling for something new. While giving prominence to the Basque language and culture, Kafe Antzokia rejects the deleterious effects of a fortress mentality and plunges ahead creating a new soundscape and cultural imaginary of Basque participation in transnational cultural flows, crossing even that most politically problematic of boundaries: the one between Basques and Spain.

Most of my interview with Irigaray that afternoon revolved around a discussion of Zenbat Gara’s strategy, goals and methods. What follows is a synthesis



of that original conversation and as well as a few follow up exchanges in 2003 in which we discussed further the context of political strife that has motivated this innovative project. Readers should be aware that the Spanish state's position toward Basque cultural activities has become increasingly hostile since the original interview, marked in particular by the government ordered closing of the Basque language newspaper, *Egunkaria* in February of 2003 and arrests of key figures in Basque journalism and publishing. The account I provide here does not address the impact of this shift in climate nor does it try to account for the evolution of the project in the subsequent years. How and to what degree language loyalists have been able to realize the goals professed here in this new context remains a topic for future ethnographic investigation.

3 ECCENTRIC THEORY AND SPACES OF LANGUAGE

Kafe Antzokia, announced Irigaray, represents a qualitatively new approach to language normalization oriented not towards drawing boundaries and confrontation, but rather towards expanding the *euskaldun* (Basque-speaking) cultural universe and attracting people to it. He explained:

In the past, our activist groups like Basque in the Basqueland and others have practiced a certain kind of militancy, demanding rights, laws, and subsidies to teach Basque. These are all important, but we should be working not just for the survival of Euskara, –of course we want that. But we also want to create a language for *living*.

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The people who came up with the idea saw that there was a need for something else beside schools, rights, and planning. We wanted to make a place here in Bilbao that would not feel like a ghetto, but rather a place for living in Basque; a place where there is cultural development, performances, humor. Open to everyone: Basque speakers, semi speakers, people who want to get closer to this



world...everyone. People who come here know that they come to a place that is a kind of temple of Basque, but not closed. They begin to have respect. They see that there is life here –that interesting things happen here. And they start to have a new attitude.

In a recent exploration of new forms of civic participation and associational life in the Basque Country, a team of Basque sociologists point to Kafe Antzokia as one of the most innovative recent attempts to create a new kind of pluralist civil society in Basque. Their analysis summarizes the results of a focus group interview with founding members of the Kafé, many of whom, like Irigaray, have had long histories of involvement in the Basque language and cultural movement extending, in some cases, to the Franco era. In the words of one of the Kafé's board of directors: "Kafe Antzokia is an attempt to create a *gune* [space] to live Basque and also to live the ludic and the cultural in a different way, and for us to grow in our own internal relations as a collective and as individuals" (quoted in CEIC, 1999: 7). Key to the project is this sense of the urgent need for new spaces of usage –spaces that are less associated with the political community and more linked to the quotidian and intimate relations of everyday life. The Basque term *gune* appeared frequently in the vocabulary of these activists to refer specifically to the creation of new kinds of non-institutional spaces of Basque usage.

Irigaray, like most of the members in the community language associations, including the interviewees in the aforementioned study, traced the inspiration for the new strategy to the work of Jose María Sanchez Carrión and his influential book, *Un Futuro para Nuestro Pasado* [A Future for our Past] (1987). Born in Cartagena, Sanchez Carrión, affectionately nicknamed "Txepetx," has lived the life of a nomadic scholar residing in Britain, the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands. He is neither a permanent resident of the Basque Country nor ethnically Basque. Yet he has become one of the foremost scholars of Basque sociolinguistics.⁵ His works were widely read and interviews and short articles by him regularly appeared in the press in the eighties and nineties. In the world of Basque language studies his work is

⁵ Sanchez Carrión's biography and concept of language revival are elaborated on in an extended interview with him by the Basque poet and activist Jon Sarasua (1997) This interview was one of the first books to be published by Zenbat Gara's publishing house, Gara. On the reception of Txepetx, see also the special issue of *Bat: Soziolinguistika Aldizkaria* No. 18 (June 1996) commemorating the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Un Futuro Para Nuestro Pasado*.



respected and at the same time he occupies a position of geographic and political ex-centricity. This has afforded him a kind of neutrality that few native intellectuals are able to enjoy in the current political climate of the Basque Country.⁶

Written as his doctoral thesis, *A Future for our Past* is a huge and eclectic tome about the nature of language and identity, language acquisition, and a blueprint for reversing Basque language shift. Central to the book is the notion of ecology as an ethical framework for grounding the value of language diversity. Sanchez Carrión thus legitimates Basque and other language revival struggles not principally in terms of national sovereignty claims, but rather in terms of the planetary good of biodiversity as the principle on which one should defend linguistic diversity. Related to this, it presents an elaborate theory of the factors that govern linguistic reproduction which places emphasis on the maintenance, as he calls it, of natural habitats or spaces of usage. Each “language” must have its spheres of hegemonic usage in order to develop and survive. In Joxe Angel’s words:

A Future for our Past offers a framework that is valid for human language –for all languages and it also provides for us the ethical principles for relations between nations and languages of the world (...) based on equality, mutual respect, and a recognition of our common humanity, but not uniformity.

The appeal was enormous and speaks to the shifting discursive positionings in which Basque language advocates found themselves by the nineties. Txepetx’s ecological discourse is an example of a growing trend in popular and scientific literature to link linguistic and biological diversity as signaled by the increasing use of the term “endangered languages”.⁷ No doubt part of the appeal comes from the fact that ecology is a movement that historically has had great appeal in the Basque Country. But perhaps more significantly, I would argue, is that the discourse of ‘nature’ it mobilizes (natural habitats, discrete language communities) leaves intact bounded ways of thinking about language, territory, and

⁶ Not to be underestimated according to one long-time sociologist/activist was the fact that Txepetx’s work provided them with a “theory” to guide language revival. Theory provided a kind of symbolic capital that the social movement lacked. Here in Euskal Herria, he said, we have a lot of will and energy, but very little theory.

⁷ For an example of the marriage of biodiversity and language endangerment see the web site of Terralingua, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to the preservation of language diversity (www.terralingua.org).



identity that are deeply rooted in European language ideology and entirely consistent with the national imaginary that underwrites it (Dorian 1998). It leaves these fundamental imaginings comfortably intact, but it accomplishes other discursive tasks and strategic reorientations to language revival that were tremendously exciting and useful to Basque advocates.

For many of the long-time language advocates I spoke with, including Irigaray, one of the most important aspects of *A Future for our Past* is the way it rescued language revival from the alienated state into which it had fallen and invested it with a more noble purpose. In the context of tremendous polarization and political impasse that colors all forms of cultural politics in the southern Basque Country today, this shift in discursive footing is of no small significance.

In my discussions with grassroots language activists about the past two decades, they frequently described a sense that their movement had become paralyzed. This paralysis was attributed not solely to antagonism from the Spanish state, but rather to the hardening oppositions among nationalists of different stripes that took shape at the time of the referendum for autonomy. The end of authoritarian rule in Spain signaled an end to the unity that had characterized language revival efforts and indeed much of Basque nationalism during and immediately after Franco's death. The deep and still unresolved split amongst Basque nationalists between those who supported the 1979 Statute of Autonomy and its limited form of autonomy and those who rejected it as inadequate pervades Basque civil society and cultural initiatives.⁸

This split reverberated throughout the language movement. As one long time member of AEK, the largest adult language teaching organization told me in an interview, for the better part of a decade virtually all language revival initiatives became caught up in the polarization and categorized as belonging to one particular

⁸ The sector that has been willing to work within the terms of the existing Statute of Autonomy is largely identified with the Partido Nacionalista Vasco, PNV. The main dissenting nationalists, commonly referred to as the radical nationalist left, (*izquierda abertzale*), reject the autonomy statute and also advocate a more working-class and non-ethnic definition of Basque identity (see Kasmir 2002). Throughout the eighties and nineties the *izquierda abertzale* was represented by the political coalition Herri Batasuna. However, whether and who will represent the nationalist left is currently very much in question as the Spanish legislature and courts have disbanded Herri Batasuna and are seeking to declare its subsequent incarnations Euskal Herriarrok and Batasuna, illegal on grounds of collaboration with the armed organization, ETA.



party or another. Those initiatives not specifically promoted by the Basque Government's Department of Language Policy were frequently suspected or outright accused of belonging to the oppositional nationalist left and consequently marginalized.⁹ During the eighties and nineties, it was quite apparent in daily newspapers that relations between grassroots language organizations like AEK or EKB (Euskal Kultur Batzarra/ the Basque Cultural Association) and the Basque Autonomous Government had become strained and often antagonistic. Many of the extra-institutional language advocates I spoke with in the spring of 1998 made reference to the damaging effects of this climate of paralysis and polarization for the progress of language normalization. A situation of crisis had developed.

For Irigaray and other representatives of community-based language associations, Txepetx's work was the catalyst to something new: new attitudes and new methods. Txepetx's work, as Irigaray explained, turned their attention from "saving the life of the language" to creating "a language of life" [*biziaren hizkuntza*]. Indeed, this terminology comes directly from Txepetx and signaled for euskaltzales (Basque language advocates) a new imaginary. *A Future for our Past* offered a distinct ethics, practice, and focus. The discourse of ecological diversity and balance, as we noted, provided what Erving Goffman might call a new "footing" on which to argue for language revival. For language revival to succeed, Txepetx argued, it required unity and an ethics of mutual respect and individual responsibility. The agent of linguistic revival could not be any single political party or group, but rather what he called "the linguistic community" in all its political and ideological diversity. Basques had to come together. Firstly, this would require tolerance for ideological pluralism and differences amongst Basques. Secondly, language revival could not be left up to

⁹ At the time of these interviews, when language loyalists were referring to accusations of affinities between grassroots language organizations and the nationalist left, they were referring to the perceived political ideology or sympathies of the organization. Today, however, an accusation of linkage to the political organizations of the nationalist left means something quite else and can carry very serious consequences that can result in incarceration and the dissolution of an organization. This shift can be traced to the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón, Head of the Central Criminal Court, who has been chiefly responsible for reorienting the anti-terrorist campaign in the Basque Country. Since approximately 1997, Garzón has argued that grassroots radical nationalist social movements constitute part of the social and financial infrastructure of ETA. His theory has resulted in the arrest of members of various legal organizations, including AEK, and the freezing of the organization's bank accounts while investigations are pursued. Whether or not charges are filed – and in the majority of cases they are not – the effects can be devastating. As I have noted, this is not what interviewees were referring to in 1998, however, it is now a factor that deeply colors the political climate of grassroots cultural activism today.



institutions, experts, or planners. Every individual has a role to play in it, as speaker, learner, or advocate. Thirdly, and very importantly, it directed concerned language advocates to focus their efforts on cultivating the motivation to learn and speak Basque by increasing the spaces of usage beyond the classroom or government office.

It was clear to me, having read the book and talked to participants in the grassroots language movement, that Kafe Antzokia and other community-based activities were not simply following the instructions of *A Future for our Past*. The idea of Kafe Antzokia as a space of pluralist coexistence was their own bold creation, based in part on concepts derived from the book. But it was also drawing lessons from recent history, like the community-based language association in Arrasate, AED (Arrasate Euskaldun Dezagun), which had been experimenting for some time with creating more neutral community-wide social activities in Basque –cooking classes, weekend excursions, after-school play groups, local media. Working at a community-level, AED had been having some success at disengaging language revival from the polarization that beset party politics and the hitherto routine modes of language advocacy via slogans, media campaigns, and demonstrations.

Notable in my interview with Joxe Angel was his insistence on the break this represented with the more confrontational forms of language advocacy of the past.

...with these language associations, AED, and so on, the change is qualitative because there is a completely different attitude. There is (...) an attitude of wanting to draw together, to integrate, to develop a more integrative policy. Because there is a broader, clearer idea of reality and how complex it is, and the factors that are at work in languages. (...) [there is a desire] to create cultural activities that reinforce all the creativity of living in Euskara but not by closing the door, but opening it, trying to integrate.

While grassroots language advocates of the past might have used images of the barricade to describe their form of militancy, Zenbat Gara uses the image of Bilbao's *jaiak*, (holidays, festivities) –such as mid-winter carnival and the *aste nagusia* (the ‘big week’ or annual patron saint celebrations) of August– and the *comparsa*¹⁰, as metaphors for the kind of cultural politics the group seeks to advance.

¹⁰ The *comparsa* is a group formed usually by an association, club or religious group, to specifically represent that association in *jaiak*. The *comparsa* typically will dance, wear costumes, and often plays



Zenbat Gara, for example, has formed its own comparsa for these festivities. Sounding very much like the anthropologist, Joxe Angel described jaiak, and carnival in particular, as populist, democratic modes of communal celebration that have a long tradition in the Basque Country. Jaiak, he explained, are based on the ludic principle, chaos, reversals; they equalize and unify, serving thereby as counterpoint to what he called the divisive, masculine, hierarchizing tendencies of political and social life.¹¹ Our own traditions, Joxe Angel, suggested, provide us with alternate values and kinds of associational life that can be profoundly therapeutic. It is our goal, he said to insert this feeling of jaiak into everyday life. Thus, in the symbolism of the comparsa, one finds yet another example of the attempt of this generation of language loyalists to reorient their methods and metaphors. Comparsa celebrants perform a re-inscription of space, inserting the ludic principle of *jolas* (play) into to the street, the archetypical space of public expression that has for so long been identified with politics and dominated by the rubber bullet, the barricade and *borroka* (conflict)¹².

In addition to new metaphors, members of Kafe Antzokia also introduce a distinctive chronotope. In focus group discussions with members of Zenbat Gara, CEIC (1999) found participants describing their strategy as committed to the principle of “*orain eta hemen*”, here and now. This presentist practice and ethics contrast with the temporality implied in so many narratives of national liberation or language revival, for that matter. Such narratives, like parallel narratives of catholic redemption (an equally important influence on the Basque nationalist imaginary), promise the full realization of freedom, the wholeness of the nation, and the salvation of the language, as something that is always on the horizon, that will come into being *after* the battle has been won. For Zenbat Gara, however, the euskaldun community is made in the here and now. Thus, we find Kafe Antzokia attempting to break not only with some features that had previously characterized Basque nationalist rhetoric and imagery, but also the nationalist temporality of promised utopias.

some musical instruments as it moves through the streets. For a fuller discussion of the linkages of urban space and festivities that brings gender into the analysis, see del Valle (1997)

¹¹ On the significance of *borroka* as a model of political conflict see the seminal work by Zulaika (1988). The idea of *jaiak* or play (*jolas*) as a contrasting strategy of resistance to *borroka* is further developed in my analysis of radical youth comic books (Urla 1999).

¹² See CEIC (1999) on the symbolic significance of the street in Basque politics.



4 LOCAL LANGUAGES IN A GLOBAL WORLD

Kafe Antzokia represents a new strategy of cultural politics, a new scripting of space by Basque activists in post-Franco Spain. The pluralist ludic space crafted through eclectic programming unsettles the implicit notion that majority languages – English in particular – are the inevitable vehicle of global flows, while minority language groups appear hermetically closed –claustrophobic even. The space imagined is not a battlefield, not a fortress or a place of retrenchment, but rather of experimentation and engagement with other cultural currents and social issues. But it is an engagement attentive to power and inequality. “We carry out our lives in Euskara”, says Joxe Angel. “If you feel secure in Basque, you are open to exchange. You aren’t worried about other languages. There aren’t problems as long as it is clear that like all human relationships whether these be relations of love, friendship, or among peoples/communities, you have to have reciprocity or else it becomes a situation of domination.”

Kafe Antzokia is no postmodern celebration of hybridity for hybridity’s sake. Nor is it only a site of the passive consumption of entertainment, though it is entertaining. For Joxe Angel, the larger project of Kafe Antzokia is to create a space of encounter between Basques and cultural/musical others, but also a space of encounter of Basques with other Basques. This encounter is quite urgently needed in the current climate of division. It is a site of communication and partial coalition building with other struggles for social justice. As Joxe Angel recounted:

We just had a visit from a woman from Ecuador talking to us about a foundation for Amerindians that she works for. It was incredible (...) She described the situation there for indigenous people (...) the sub-human conditions that we the western world have subjected more than one hundred million people. It is painful. We raised money for schools and sent some books. We gave her a copy of Txepetx’s book to take back. He has been there for a conference. I, myself, just came back from a conference in Bosnia. (...) When you are rooted it is not difficult to be open. On the contrary. The more a tree has solid roots, the more it opens upward. And the more it rises, the more it opens itself to the four winds.

Kafe Antzokia, as a cultural project is about much more than language revival. We might say it is a site for the creation of alternate routes to roots: routes that engage other social movements and incorporate a diverse array of cultural and musical expressions into this project’s affirmation of a distinctive euskaldun cultural life. In it we find a site for thinking “beyond the nation” (Appadurai 1996) without



surrendering the specificities of place, language and identity. Its guiding treatise, *A Future for our Past*, is itself an example of how ‘the global’ is mobilized in defense of ‘the local’ for the theoretical toolkit Txepetx uses draws from European philosophy, linguistics, Native American traditions, psychology, and anti-colonial theory, and its overarching framework –ecology– is itself planetary in scope.

As Anna Tsing (2000) has recently argued, interconnection is everything in the new globalisms. Some of what makes Kafe Antzokia a different kind of globalism than Guggenheim Bilbao is precisely the kinds of interconnections that it seeks to create: respectful interconnections among Basques and between Basques and other “Others”. As a particular instance of globalism, Kafe Antzokia bears some resemblance to the phenomenon Brecher *et al.* (1993) have called “globalization from below”. If globalization from above can be taken to refer to the processes, technologies and organizations through which capital is being consolidated by elites world wide, globalization from below refers to non-aligned transnational formations, social movements, or alliances that make use of global technologies and resources. Such social movements, writes Evelina Dagnino, have the potential to give rise to new conceptions of citizenship, democracy, and an enlarged understanding of multiple forms of inequality –economic, social, and cultural– that curtail the formation of a truly democratic society (Brecher, 1993: xvii). As Dagnino and others have argued, locally based social movements grounded in cultural specificity are not necessarily the enemy of planetary community as is so often asserted; rather they may in fact offer us some of the most promising examples of how such a community might work.

In a phrase echoing the sentiment of so many sexual, cultural and gendered minorities, Joxe Angel said to me at the close of our interview: “I refuse to choose. I am both Basque and a citizen of the world”. The project to which he dedicates his time, Kafe Antzokia is an experiment in expanding notions of global citizenship, of pluralist coexistence, and reanimating a language movement paralyzed by political conflict. It is a reminder that language diversity is and must be a key part of any democratic project of global community. As an example of cultural expression, Kafe Antzokia provides us with insight into some of the changing ways in which locality and local languages are produced under conditions of globalization as well as national strife.



It is somehow fitting that this experiment in euskaldun cosmopolitanism should have emerged here, in Bilbao, once the industrial heart of the Basque financial and industrial elite and the birthplace of Basque nationalism. This early nationalism –like so many others of the early twentieth century– denied its urban roots and castigated specifically Bilbao as resolutely liberal and *españolista*. This early nationalism located the authentic Basque nation, Euskal Herria, in the rural lifeways of farmers, the *baserritarra*, and fishing villages, while life in the cities, and especially *this* port city, teeming with immigrant labor, was seen as lost to Euskara, if not an enemy. Not only did such an opposition seem to doom Basque culture to a fading past, it also seemed to imply that Basque language and culture could not be reconciled with or be a part of the ethnic and cultural mixing that inevitably characterizes urban life. Kafe Antzokia is one of a number of cultural projects that are disrupting this long-standing opposition between the rural and the urban and at the same time trying to carve out a more pluralist understanding of Basque culture and identity.¹³ To borrow a play on words by the writer Bernardo Atxaga, it is project in rethinking Euskal *Herria*, as Euskal *Hiria* (the Basque City) (Martín in press). It is a project of not only finding Basque a place in the city, but more importantly, making Basque culture and language its own form of crossroads and encounter with difference. This is an ongoing project. In the words of Joxe Angel, “We are trying not to repeat old schemas or illusory utopias, but rather to build something real and coherent first of all with our lives and consequently with life. We know it is never perfect. It is something that can always be improved.” It remains to be seen how Kafe Antzokia will fare and what its impact it and projects like it will have. It will be especially interesting to see whether it will be able to foster alliances with other emerging spaces of alterity in Bilbao where the new immigrants to Spain, North Africans and others, are attempting to forge cultural projects of their own.¹⁴

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¹³ See Urla (2001; 1997) for further discussions of cultural crossing in music and radio.

¹⁴ One example is the North African bar/cultural center Bere-Bar.



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