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**Title:** Erronka(s) and a Transdisciplinary Approach for Basque Studies

**Abstract:** This article analyses the social praxis of 'erronka' aiming to contribute to the promotion of a transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies. In the Basque setting erronkas are typically understood as challenges and defies leading to betting and gambling, associated with games, sports, and physical and ingenious endeavors. Drawing from my long-term ethnography of Basque contemporary grass-root mobilizations for rights to self-determination, I inquire about the transdisciplinary approach in the search for answers about the role erronkas play in prefiguring political projects. The article proceeds in three steps. the opening section offers a brief theoretical framework of the broader issue of Basque studies and the transdisciplinary approach. The second and third sections are oriented to adopt such an approach to organize the analytics of erronkas examining respectively erronkas in general and a particular case of political erronka by focusing on Korrika, a popular and massive footrace to promote Basque language. Finally, it argues that a transdisciplinary perspective is needed to shed some light onto the collective role of erronkas, particularly those attached to sovereigntists claims and the realizations of political imagination.

**Keywords:** Basque Country, Basque Studies, Transdisciplinarity, Social Praxis, Korrika

**Wordcount:** 8844

## Introduction

Since 2017, I have been carrying ethnographic research with the members of a Basque social movement launched in 2013, building on a long history of local grass-root mobilizations for rights to self-determination. Amid these years, while tracing their everyday political works for producing awareness and gaining visibility aiming to materialize peaceful and democratic claims of independence, I noticed that a festive symbolism and a joyful approach impregnated their sovereignty project, contrasting with the previous decades dominated by a rejection of the term and the sufferings of haunting violence and armed struggle. Since 2014, they organized more than two hundred local popular consultations (*herri galdeketak*) aimed “to train the democratic muscle” for a future official referendum in the Basque Country. At the same time, they produced a series of massive public events, starting with a 123 kilometers *giza katea* or human chain made by people hand in hand from Durango to Iruña/Pamplona. A year later, in June 2015, they attained massive and simultaneous performances consisting of sewing fabrics with messages into huge ballot boxes in the main Basque football stadiums. In 2018, a larger human chain of 202 kilometers linking the three capital cities of Euskadi was seconded by the collection of 2019 people’s reasons to decide their political future into a document (*Herri-ituna* or The People/Citizens’ Pact)<sup>1</sup> that was delivered to the Basque Parliament and the Parliament of Navarre. Finally, in 2022, they launched the *Vía Pirenaica*, consisting of simultaneously lighting more than 300 summits throughout the entire Pyrenees, which was the first action jointly organized by Basque and Catalan independentist entities. All these initiatives –consultations included– required great logistics and the presence of hundred-thousands of attendees; they also need creativity, courage, ingenious, intuition, and specialized knowledges –whether certain doing are possible, feasible, legal, legitimate, traditional, innovative, just crazy or foolish, etc. Organizers call these initiatives *erronka(k)*.

*Erronka* is a Basque term associated with challenges that usually lead to betting and gambling. Erronkas are associated with the competitive spirit that infuses games, sports, and physical and ingenious endeavors by which one party challenges or defies the other in the pursuit and accomplishment of a certain undertaking. To take part in an *erronka* means placing one’s honor, pride, and reputation into play because, besides looking forward to winning or nor failing, there is a moral obligation of participate and thus, to not surrender. *Erronka* comes from *ronca*, a disused Spanish voice for ‘threat’ (as in boasting one’s self-worth in a competition with another, or someone’s threat or boasting of worth), anger (as in ruction or reprimand), and roar (as in the roar of the deer to attract females during rutting season). Telling enough, ‘Gasconade’ —to aggrandize, congratulate oneself similarly to braggadocio, rodomontade, and fanfaronade— is amongst of its synonyms in English.<sup>2</sup>

The extensive use of the term *erronka* is noteworthy amongst Basque speakers. This doesn’t mean that any enunciation of *erronkas* has the same “context of situation” (Malinowski 1946). An anthropological approach based on ethnographic participant observation seemed a decisive foundation to build up a comprehension of *erronkas*. Likewise decisive seemed to shift from ethnography understood as a word driven endeavor, towards one concerned with peoples’ actions, including an understanding of language as mode of action.<sup>3</sup> With these precautions, I looked

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<sup>1</sup> In Euskara *herri* means “pueblo”, which conveys at least three meanings: territoriality (as in village), social (as in people) and political (as in popular)

<sup>2</sup> For instance, to meet a challenge is *erronka bati aurre egin*. See <https://hiztegiak.elhuyar.eus/eu/erronka#>, <https://dle.rae.es/ronca?m=form>. For the Latin etymology, see <https://dle.rae.es/ronca#Wflv3Kr>. I must note that a comprehensive examination of the voice 'erronka' would need a deeper analysis in Basque contemporary society as well as a deeper etymological analysis by comparing the definitions offered by the Orotariko Euskal Hiztegia and the Egungo Euskararen Hiztegia.

<sup>3</sup> The pragmatic sense of symbolic life allows to distinguish between the operational and communicative content of symbols (Leach 1967) plus the structure of utterance upon the momentary situation in which words are spoken (Wolf 1989).

forward to examining the contextual uses of the term *erronkas*. But anthropological based ethnography was not enough to reach out the social praxis of *erronkas*. Soon it was clear that an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach was mandatory to begin with. I had to conduct interviews, check historical and statistical data, scan personal and institutional records, examine social networks, read news and biographies, political essays, poetry, systematize anthropological observations about everyday commentaries, and deep into the exegesis of anecdotes and informal chatting. However, in the search of disciplinary wisdom there were no pathways to consider systematic interplays of various material capable to piece them together into a creative dialogue not despite but because of their different epistemic and analytical statuses. For instance, a long-term historical look and a broader comparative gaze were needed to grasp the pragmatic meaning of *erronka* as a term, but particularly as a Basque term. The challenge of the article became apparent: how to articulate the heuristics of the concept of *erronka* with a proper examination of transdisciplinarity within Basque Studies.

This article analyses the social praxis of *erronka* aiming to contribute to the promotion of a transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies. This aim is developed in three steps. The first section acts as a brief theoretical framework of the broader issue of Basque Studies and transdisciplinarity, by exploring some aspects that could encompass my analytical proposal about *erronka*. Departing from the benefits of a transdisciplinary approach, the second section is devoted to the specificities and scope of *erronkas*. To do so, I offer a brief historical account of the social practice of *erronka* looking forward to organizing a broad distinction: on the one hand, *erronkas* associated with games, sports, and physical and ingenious endeavors; on the other, collective *erronkas* attached to the realizations of political imagination. Thirdly, I focus on the case of *Korrika*, a popular and massive footrace in favor of Basque language, by making a case for ‘political *erronkas*,’ in the sense of collective challenges attached to the achievements of political imagination. The conclusion sums-up the article and retrieves to the benefits of a transdisciplinary approach to appreciate the role of *erronkas* in prefiguring political projects

### **Basque Studies and Transdisciplinarity**

Basque Studies are often considered a field that encompasses diverse disciplines whose common denominator is to delve into objects/ subjects of study related to ‘Basqueness’ or ‘The Basque’. It seems that behind that common thread a rather static container focus bestrides all efforts: Basque Studies are to be found in *Euskal Herria* and the diaspora.<sup>4</sup> As for the concerns, orientations, and scopes of Basque Studies they are –at its best– defined by each researcher on the grounds of its subject of research, or –at its worse– by a contingent accumulation of arbitrary localized data. While such somehow substantialist approaches may favor intradisciplinary and multidisciplinary endeavors, Basque Studies end up being but a *sui generis* juxtaposition of various disciplines, methodologies, and epistemes with little coherence. Basque Studies are thus stagnated in a crossroad. One easy way out is to say that they do not exist. A less Nihilist but harder way out is to examine what transdisciplinarity has to offer. This task is inseparable of another twofold task: “instituting, not renouncing, Basque Studies as a subject of study; defining, not stereotyping, Basque Studies as an object of study” (Anduaga 2017:1).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Euskal Herria* is often used as a synonym of Basque Country, Pays Basque, Euzkadi and Vascongadas. However, it translates closes to the Basque Peoples’ Country as an ethnolinguistic and territorial unit consisting of three provinces of the Autonomous Basque Community (Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa), the Chartered Community of Navarre, and three provinces in the French Department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques (Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea and Zuberoa).

<sup>5</sup> Since the public and institutional configuration of Basque Studies a century ago, their practitioners have configured *an object of study* instead of considering such field of knowledge as a subject or an agent. This is interesting because Basque Studies have many merits of their own as agents performing action; particularly by embodying the resistance against the Franco dictatorship and the dissemination and furtherance of the Basque culture in its broadest sense (Anduaga 2017:7)

Unlike Basque Studies, where transdisciplinarity is barely noticeable, various types of transdisciplinary perspectives have been developed in recent years connecting many social sciences and humanities. A basic definition of transdisciplinarity refers to broadening the scope of science (Gibbons et al. 1994) and the possibilities of integrating different epistemics or branches of disciplines when interdisciplinary is not possible (Scholz and Steiner 2015a).<sup>6</sup> Another conventional interpretation concerns to the role of transdisciplinarity in providing answers and solutions to societal changes, crises, or transformations. Interdisciplinary research and methods are thus called to overcome the conundrums posed by rapid economic and technological development in the face of the incompleteness of different epistemics. Its goal is to enhance research agendas with more complex interaction between knowledges, such as the education/innovation system (Jantsch 1970), and to develop ideal types of processes to integrate solutions from science and practice (Scholz and Steiner 2015b). Finally, there is an operational dimension of transdisciplinary that looks forward to integrating theory and practice, such as architecture and design (Doucet and Janssens 2011), or fields of study such as international relations, peace and conflict studies, sociolinguistics, and anthropology (Mc Cluskey and Charalambous 2022). At this point, it seems that transdisciplinarity is but a magical solution for all scholarly challenges. Of course, this is not the case. The inputs of transdisciplinarity depend on how and where we a particular research agenda or topic positions towards its need. Please, allow me to organize this point chiefly and then to take it into the field of Basque Studies.

First, the association between transdisciplinarity and solution-making, triggers some problematic outcomes. A research process should not pivot around an instrumental logic. Second, when transdisciplinary knowledge is based on objectives intended not only to obtain a knowledge result but also an action-solution, a functionalist perspective prevails. This logic also tends to privileges research methods that help decision-making such as statistics, simulation models, network analysis, etc. In consequence, and thirdly, there are certain disciplines that shall benefit from being epistemologically closer to these methods and will enjoy a privileged position with respect to disciplines based on comprehensive and hermeneutic approaches (Fossa Riglos and Hernández 2015). If the strengthening of the uneven historically developed separation of academic disciplines combines with a reduction of transdisciplinarity to a matter of means and ends, the value of methodology gets closer to a “methodologism” (Moore 2004) that limits the scope of theories. In other words, utilitarian solving problem approaches displace reflections about knowledge production, by making of transdisciplinarity a strategy and an end itself.

To avoid regarding transdisciplinarity in a utilitarian fashion or as analytical bags of resources, one should draw upon an epistemic that deems no pure disciplinary knowledge is possible. By adopting such undertake the conceptual tools and heuristics of research transform the main axes, focuses and questions of inquiry, and vice versa. A perspective not defined by a bounded disciplinary epistemics is able to produce plural, creative and rigorous knowledge within a tradition and at the same time motivating new networks of efforts. In our case, considering Basque Studies as a subject of study should be the first step. In this regard, postcolonial and feminist criticisms have shown that scientific knowledge and social imagination are overlapped in transdisciplinary knowledge production (Perez and Fruzzetti 2021). Thus, breaking with the limitations of rigid disciplinary boundaries is only one step of a wider process of being cognizant of the dialectics between human experiences and epistemic imaginations. A notorious example is Gayatri Spivak’s (2003) proposal of closer links between the humanities and social sciences, such as mutual fertilization between comparative literature and area studies to mitigate the arrogance of the latter and to transcend the traditional textual focus of the former.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jean Piaget (1972) was amongst the first scholars in recognizing that interdisciplinarity was only possible among neighbouring disciplines. However, his search of a unity of knowledge led him to a certain metaphysics (Nicolescu 2006).

For the purposes of our discussion about *erronkas*, the need to develop a transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies as a subject does not mean to disregard the disciplinary specificities that tell something particular about the Basque society, nor about case studies, empirical regularities, sociohistorical dynamics, and even ideological implications delving from specific fields of studies. On the contrary, it means to thinking it as a relational, constructivist and innovative field. It responds to the imperative of studying intertwined spaces and histories, while consolidating a critique of methodological nationalism and the focus container thinking. Two different movements are at play. On the one hand, to bear in mind that the links between transdisciplinarity and Basque Studies include calling the attention to various topics that need to be specified each time and within each research such as definitions, characterizations, purposes and goals, risks and jeopardies, scope and limitations, etc. On the other hand, to speak of transdisciplinarity within a subject of study as Basque Studies conveys several risks, namely, to introducing an analytics or heuristics that flies in the face of standard conceptual constellation, or to producing an argument that could be interpreted from an alien theoretical frame.

There is a need within Basque Studies to have a vocabulary of shared terms, categories and concepts that are specific to the discipline. To contribute to this task, the concept of *erronka* could be illuminating since it is a social practice that manifests itself in many of the areas of knowledge that Basque Studies comprise (history, anthropology, diaspora, politics, sports, free time, work studies). As I will show below, the *erronka* is precisely a concept that acquires its own shape and voice—in addition to a shared meaning—only if these aspects and studies are considered from a transdisciplinary approach that transcends the barriers of said studies. In other words, because from a multidisciplinary and even interdisciplinary approach, the conceptual scope of the *erronka* would be much more limited and fragmented, its potential for promoting a transdisciplinary approach to Basque Studies seems of worth.

In the next sections I will convey these arguments through a detailed examination of the social praxis of *erronkas*.

### **Erronka(s) in Euskal Herria**

In Euskal Herria there is an intimate link between *erronkas* and betting. A complex system of games and proofs of strength, skill and dexterity, with money or without it, insofar as in public and preferable with eyewitnesses, a judge or a referee, configures a “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977) as a lived sense of the past which nurtures affective aspects of the present. Likewise, it seems that any kind of productive work—whether in the mountains, valleys or coasts—would create the conditions for games resulting in betting. The Basque Country is “eminently *apostolari*” states Auñamendi Encyclopedia.<sup>8</sup> In this vein, Azpiazu (2018) notes that although many studies acknowledge the prominent place of these practices for the Basque collective imagination, they tend to focus only on the 20th century and are devoted to sports and compulsive gambling. By contrast, the scholarly literature has given very little attention to the persistent presence of gambling and betting in the Basque society. Drawing from 16<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> century Basque *judicial* funds and notarial documents concerning contracts and lawsuits, Azpiazu shows the remarkable weight that conflicts on money betting had in shaping Basque morality and everyday landscapes all over Euskal Herria.

As social praxis, *erronkas* have a betting structure although they do not necessarily come down to money betting. They are indeed about special achievements: who does this or do that in the lesser time, with certain extreme conditions (blindfolded or on one foot, for instance), in particular (smallest or greatest) spaces, etc. As in games and sports, people bet on chances of

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<sup>7</sup> See Mielke and Hornidge (2017) on Area Studies and transnationalism, transregionalism, transculturalism and translocality, and Milutinovic (2019: 29) on Area Studies as a meta-discipline and a field of theoretical innovation and experimentation.

<sup>8</sup> See: Auñamendi eusko entziklopedia <https://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/en/apuesta/ar-1611-904/> Retrieves September 11 2022.

accomplishments (for good or bad). Some *erronkas* seem absurd, even ridiculous, to the point of competing on speaking without interruption (with short breaks for lunch and dinner) until one of the contestants loses, or to play an *erremonte* match (a modality of pelota) by hitting the ball only if one passes the *xistera* or basket-glove under the leg. Some *erronkas* are about using instruments, wearing something, and even about humans (usually men) against animals. There is even a popular song that tells a quite common tragedy because of engaging in *erronkas*: the fatality of the revenge and anger. The popular song *Goizean Parisen* narrates the story of a musician who bet he could play the *alboka* throughout Paris on a mule without breathing. When the opponent realised the former reached his goal without opening his mouth, and therefore he had lost his beautiful red mule, he squeezed the instrument against the winner's mouth until suffocation (de Azkue 1922). I was told that in Oñati, two friends made a bet on a race consisting of climbing a mount near Arantzazu on their bicycles but in reverse. A week ago, a friend told me he bet for his daughter and won part of a dinner because his brother lost an *erronka* to his niece consisting of running four kilometres straight uphill near Hernani.

In what today are called *herri kirolak* or rural sports, *erronkas* were all the rage (Iriarte 1985). Wood chopping (*aizkolaritza*), ox trials (*idi demak*), stone lifting (*harri jasotzea*), harvesting corn cobs (*koxkol-apostua*), stone drilling (*arrizulatzalea*), human-animal tests (*giza-abere probak*), dragging heavy weights by horse (*zaldi probak*), oxen (*idi probak*), and donkey (*asto probak*), goose or chicken games (*antzar-oilar jokoa*), etc., were opportunities for *erronkas*. Another privileged setting to engage in *erronkas* were sports, and particularly the prototypical Basque public game, played in the fronton of villages and towns: pelota.<sup>9</sup> This field has been historically associated with money betting, whether the usual bet on a player, a mutual bet between players, or a general bet (*quiniela* style). Another important scenario for developing *erronkas* was *bertsolaritza* – the art of singing in Euskera improvised lyrics according to certain melodies and rhyming patterns. Skillful improvisers sang in turns until one of the two is exhausted, while the public became engaged in money betting, whether in cider houses, village taverns or plazas (*Gorosábel cited in Azpiazu 2018: n11*).

Estornés Lasa and Estornés Zubirreta (2022) describe historical examples of *erronkas* without the mediation of money. In 1935, two men, Ikar and Errekartetxo, contended to lift a cubic stone; the winner lifted the stone thirty-one times in ten minutes. In Elgoibar, a sister and a brother bet on raising bushels of wheat from the ground up to their necks; the brother won because he raised four and a half while the sister only three and a half. It was and still is frequent that people engaged in *erronkas* train seriously in order to win. Historically in the Basque setting this seemed to apply for more or less formalized *erronkas* between neighboring villages, amongst whale hunter groups, fishers and farmers clusters, households, and various ad hoc groupings. A historical example is the regatta challenge between Donostia and Ondarroa cities in December 1890, the most powerful *traineras* (rowing boats) of the time (Macías, 2003).

*Erronkas* were taken by Basque immigrants to The Americas. In Argentina, the most famous case is starred by Guillermo Isidoro Larregui Ugarte, known as *El vasco de la carretilla*, ‘The Basque of the wheelbarrow’ or ‘The Quixote of a single wheel’.<sup>10</sup> This case is at the fore of an example of *erronka* due to the magnitude of the achievement involved. This man from Pamplona was defied to undertaking a “raid” (as he wrote on the wheelbarrow) consisting of going by foot from the Patagonian city of Comandante Luis Piedrabuena to the Argentine Capital City, Buenos Aires. He was 49 years old and had to cover 3,400 kilometers pushing a 130 kg wheelbarrow with supplies for the journey. He accepted the challenge. There are various versions concerning the betting matter: the winner would win an asado (the typical Argentine barbecue) or a one-month salary (which is unlikely, considering the structure of temporary jobs of the time). In any case, he

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<sup>9</sup> The *frontón* (pelota court) is the space where Basque communities hold significant events and a venue for public rituals, celebrations, and games (González Abrisketa 2013).

<sup>10</sup> ‘Quijotada’ (doing or behaving like Quixote) is a Spanish expression associated with prowess *erronka*-like projects.

walked from Santa Cruz province to Buenos Aires, endured extreme weather, snowfalls, and terrible winds, and experienced all kinds of situations such as being hospitalized and almost losing his frozen feet. He walked on canvas shoes 2,700 kilometers through gravel pits and dirt trails — only in Bahía Blanca, circa 700 kilometers to the finish he rolled on a paved road for the first time. He arrived at the Argentine Capital City the 24<sup>th</sup> of May of 1936, fourteen months after the bet.

The case of Larregui aptly illustrates how *erronkas* relate to charisma, the public display of symbolism and the “active centers of the social order” (Geertz 1983). ‘El Vasco’ arrived one day before May Revolution Day, which commemorates the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1810, a historical hallmark of the process that led to the independence of Argentina from Spain. That very festive day, he went to the iconic Plaza de Mayo, located at the end of the homonymous boulevard —originally named ‘*De los Españoles*’— where the finest architecture at the time of the golden days of the city still can be found. Mayo Avenue is also the symbolic axis of power of Argentina because it connects the presidential palace and the National Congress along a straight line. Any popular demonstration, official event or public action of high value shall pass through this artery that reaches the two seats of power. Consistent with this symbolism, Larregui was welcomed by the main authorities of the country and a multitude gave him flowers upon his arrival —his journey was constantly in the news both local and national. The 25<sup>th</sup> of May he left those flowers as an offering in Plaza de Mayo. On top of that, he then donated his wheelbarrow to the local museum of Lujan, a city famous for having the most populous religious pilgrimage of the country. At the end, the life of this Basque Quixote who was so intimately involved with the arenas and momentous of Argentina became a prowess *erronka*-like: he made three journeys more by foot, completing a total of 22,300 km.

There are all kinds of *erronkas*. These challenges can be about almost everything that is meaningful for their participants: feats and achievements in jobs, games, sports, cards, billiards, dice, arts, food, physical, mental and spiritual endeavors, and so on. Usually antagonistic, they create opportunities for betting and gambling but also for entertaining, enjoying public competitions, showing off prowess, and celebrating extraordinary achievements. *Erronkas* can be personal, interpersonal, and even intergroup. Some *erronkas* present the shape of two parts competing for a price, some others are just competitive challenges without any result other than aggrandizing one’s or ones’ group esteem. There are *erronkas* for the sake of having fun above apparent utility or function. Others consist of heroic actions and the realization of transcendental projects beyond calculated instrumentality. These *erronkas* put individual and collective peoples’ honor, cleverness, strength, and alike qualities into public competitive play and display.

However, not all *erronkas* are the same, for they are configured upon different time-space structures, performing conditions, dynamics of setting up challenges, and the accounting for accomplishments. There are collective and participatory *erronkas* which do not cast antagonistic competition although keep an agonistic shape; some are not about winning a bet despite keeping similar features associated with the practice of betting. In Euskal Herria, examples of these latter collective *erronkas* are usually attached to the challenges and realizations of political imagination, local and communal selves, solidarity and cooperation, social justice and rights claims, and similar social issues. These collective *erronkas* speak of national identity and celebrate cultural features, but at the same time transcend national frontiers and question them. Despite of being expressed in the idioms of nationalism, *erronkas* of this kind are practiced in the Basque diaspora where people do not identify exclusively as Basque. In such cases, they usually configure opportunities to reflect on local collective aims and infuse collective enterprises with the challenging and exciting spirit of a competition for the sake of a more transcendental aim in which everybody wins.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, the North American Basque Organizations (NABO) Facilitator Report to Delegates (July 2009, Reno) uses the expression *Euskaltasunaren Erronka* to describe the activity of ‘Basque Continuity Challenge,’ about increasing ethnic awareness and fostering participation in local Basque communities. [https://nabasque.eus/facilitator\\_reports/2009%20Reno.pdf](https://nabasque.eus/facilitator_reports/2009%20Reno.pdf)

In sum, *erronkas* are competitive but entertaining, playful, and informal but carefully organized, and of course attached to a concrete result that usually goes beyond one party challenging or defying the other. People engage in the whole dynamics: the pursuit of a given undertaking brings the winning party certain glory and recognition, sometimes a material reward, and always a sense of fulfillment. In theoretical terms, *erronkas* partake on the ambiguity and polysemic nature of the Basque concepts of *joko* and *jolas*. According to Zulaika these terms account for ‘games’ of different nature. While the first one is characterized by competition, bipolarity, measured time, precise location, and a clear definition of a winner, the second applies to games without bet, embedded in joking and partying, in which players win and lose at the same time, without unequivocal result and sometimes even related with age differentiation (i.e., children versus adults). There is also a contrast in terms of the manners of playing: formal and seriously – with or without money– or for fun, amusement, recreation, and pastime. Against common sense Zulaika (1985) argues that *Bertsolarism* is not *joko* but *jolas*. Zulaika (1988) develops further his analysis of the cultural models of performance *jokoa/jolasa* and proposes new readings with political consequences when he examines the social implications of violence, peoples’ perceptions of history and the tension between metaphor and sacrament

A distinction between two broad social practices of *erronkas* –on the one hand, *erronkas* associated with games, sports, and physical and ingenious endeavors; on the other, collective *erronkas* attached to the realizations of collective imaginations— stems from and at the same time retrieves to an analytical perspective that calls into scene the transdisciplinary approach. As I’ve mentioned in the first section, transdisciplinarity is richer than inter and multidisciplinary approaches because it allows a dialectical transit between plural, unequal, and dislocated knowledges, but most of because provides a global, relational, and integrative research strategy. One of the less recognized aspects of transdisciplinarity is how theoretical and methodologically creative approaches help to produce innovative insights instead of securing definitions. In brief, instead of adding bits and pieces of disciplinary tools, it is about engaging in a fruitful, creative, and productive dialogue, capable of providing an original synthesis or at least some points of responsible agreement. It follows that studying ‘*erronka*’ as a social praxis is not only a legitimate task but one of a great importance for promoting a transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies.

There is undoubtedly a powerful collective imagination generated by games and betting embedded in Basque society. Gambling with honor, large sums of money and even the most basic household assets, such as tools, animals and even the farmhouse itself, has caused an enormous cultural influence (Azpiazu 2018).<sup>12</sup> People not only treasure memories of the overwhelming impact generated by axe betting, ram trials, stone dragging by oxen, and similar competitions, but still perform many of those games. At the same time, such occasions are not necessarily grounded in wealth desire nor in hoarding money, but mostly in entertainment, in adding spice to life, and in having fun with others. Is this about the ability to imagine gambling opportunities or is it that *erronkas* foster certain imaginations that sometimes are expressed as bets? To deepen understanding of the complexities of *erronka* as a social praxis, I propose to explore a particular case of collective *erronka* bearing in mind the benefits of assuming a transdisciplinary approach for Basque Studies. The following section offers some insights about how this could happen.

### **Collective, Participatory... Political *Erronkas*?**

In the previous section I wondered whether an *apostalari* quality of the Basque world would be related to the ability to imagine gambling opportunities or, rather, if engaging in *erronkas* could foster certain imaginations that sometimes are expressed as bets. A paradigmatic case to check upon non-betting collective *erronkas* in the Basque setting is *Korrika*. Usually held in spring every

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<sup>12</sup> This does not mean to consider *erronka* as a substantial feature of the otherwise diverse and culturally rich Basque world. On the contrary, it is likely that similar dispositions are all the rage in other places, particularly in Mediterranean societies where “honor” is a crucial value (Pitt Rivers 1954; Boissevain 2013).

second year, Korrika consists of running day and night without interruption for ten or eleven days throughout the seven provinces of Euskal Herria. The term means race, but this is not a conventional race because there are neither rivals nor winners and losers. An uncompetitive spirit is accompanied by music and general fanfare, with roads thronged with spectators. Korrika participants carry a hollow wooden baton (*lekuko*) that they pass hand to hand, kilometer upon kilometer, as they run an approximate total of 2,500 — it varies a little on each edition. The baton has a small *ikurriña* or Basque flag attached to it, and inside carries a message that is revealed only at the very end of the event —the read is public and usually by a representative of the Basque cultural scene.

Korrika was born once Franco's dictatorship was over and guided by the challenge of how to overcome the weakening of Euskara after decades of prohibitions, censorship, repression, and centuries of stigmatization. Its main organizer is Alfabetatze Euskalduntze Koordinakundea (AEK), a language planning organization devoted to reviving Euskara focused on adults teaching and alphabetization, with the support of the Etxepare Basque Cultural Institute and Euskaltzaindia (the Royal Academy of the Basque Language). Korrika has a twofold aim: it seeks “to promote awareness of the need to speak Basque” and “to raise funds that will enable the AEK Basque language schools to continue their teaching work”;<sup>13</sup> and it purports to normalize Basque language in terms of knowledge, everyday use, respect, and pride. Since the first Korrika by the end of 1980, twenty-two races have been held: the first one from Oñati to Bilbao; the last one from Amurrio to Donostia.<sup>14</sup>

Korrika has been analyzed as a ritual and a sporting event, in both cases related with Basque identity and Basque nationalism. Teresa del Valle (1993) has produced the most brilliant and detailed ethnographic account of Korrika as a secular ritual. Drawing from Victor Turner's work on ritual process, her analysis focuses on Korrika as an invented tradition that recreates ritually a sense of belonging to a unified Basque nation by recreating the Basque world. Hers is a double approach: on the one hand social movements mobilize cultural symbols with mass appeal in imaginative ways; on the other, Korrika temporarily concentrates the energies and attention of a community, and makes all its participants move symbolically, mentally, affectively, and physically. Ultimately, Korrika gives shape to a sense of community and of its continuity recreated through the memories of its past editions, anecdotes and stories that travel with it, but also through the illusion of participating in the next edition. As for Korrika and sports, an interesting analysis is provided by Valentyna Kotenko (2019). She focuses on the connections between Korrika's methods of physical realization in space and the multidimensional cultural events taking place along its celebration. There are two main axes in her analysis. First, by mobilizing support to a linguistic cause through overcoming landscape obstacles and physical exertion people demonstrate bonds with territory. Second, just as the Tour de France allows French people to know their landscapes, Korrika builds the Basque Country's unity. Both points remind of the community's unity secured by rituality —an aspect that was examined by del Valle.

The ritual approach is a well established anthropological analytical interest. Some secular rituals are deeply infused with religious imagery and sentiments, while others have more in common with the rituality of games and entertaining. In this regard, Korrika can be seen as a public ritualized event that displays features familiar to the rituality of sports. Rituality has to do with what they do to the participants: they evoke meanings and sentiments, and symbolically solve the contradictions and multivocality of public symbols (e.g., its origins in Basque local associations and autonomous dynamics).<sup>15</sup> However, a ritual approach may obscure the various levels and processes implicated, particularly the risk of falling into primordial interpretations of language and identity,

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.korrika.eus/en/korrika-en> Korrika is also held around the world, organized by Basque Clubs, Basque Schools, Euskara enthusiasts, and Institutions related with the Basque Country,

<sup>14</sup> A main antecedent for this race is Kilometroak (kilometers), an annual festival organized since 1977, held the first Sunday of October, to reach funds for *ikastolas* (Basque language schools) in Gipuzkoa province.

due to the way rituality shapes and displaces conflicts. The mentioned scholars are fully aware of the politics behind the event —disagreements between language militants, organizers of the event, government representatives, etc.— but the ritual hermeneutics obscures how Korrika is backed up and made up by many simultaneous events where a cheerful atmosphere and a colossal footrace merge a celebration with various local levels of politics beyond demonstration gatherings. The Korrika processes is the loci of various interplays between language and politics but is not to be reduced to them: it merges identity, history, linguistics, sports, rules and material conditions, money and its management, physical strength, social memory, playfulness, entertainment, pedagogy, various temporalities, affection, local level politics, morality, communal actions, hope and dreams, and so on. As such, Korrika seems rather closer to the Trobriand Islands' Kula ring, first described by Malinowski (1922) and defined by Marcel Mauss (1968) as a *phénomène social total* because it is more than a ceremonial exchange between eighteen communities of the Massim archipelago but a phenomenon with implications throughout society, interpenetrating its economic, legal, political, and religious spheres.

Through ethnographic research, I witnessed the rituality of Korrika both as a vivid symbol of Basqueness and the sportive and culture/nature links aspects. People value the role of trained *korrikalaris* (runners, professional or amateur) in keeping Korrika alive: they usually are those who run at night, in the cold, and cover the longest distances that common villagers cannot. Thus, Korrika also highlights the importance of outdoors sports for certain sectors of Basque society – visible in the way people dress up, their choices to spend leisure and spare time, and the abundant landscape metaphors and metonyms they choose when speaking (e.g., this like a base camp, we are sailing in the perfect storm, the goal is an eight-thousander, etc.). In this regard, the value of Euskera and linguistic identity merges with the value of Basque community despite its contradictory and fragmentary realizations. However, I'd like to point out the possibilities of a supplementary analysis for Korrika that could be of value for a transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies.

I suggest that Korrika has the full imprint of *erronkas*. In the first place, because Korrika is and poses challenges in many ways. The race doesn't stop (*Korrika ez da gelditzen*); it covers a huge territory by running day and night regardless of the weather; it is public and popular; it has rules but also delves on informal conditions; enacts a local-national level dynamics of participation and produces a sense of integrated totality both imagined and material by the motto of not leaving any stretch empty. Korrika also aims to increase people' participation in every edition; must secure a vast network of volunteers and should provide hundreds of cultural activities along its way including local concerts, popular meals, and *txoznas* or temporary bars. Like *erronkas*, Korrika deals with pride and honor both personal and collective. Money and betting are also present, but this does not mean that Korrika has a gambling money driven base. Of course, people might engage in betting along its way, but such occasions totally exceed the race. Raising funds is centralized by AEK, and money dynamic is voluntary and altruistic. People donate their times and energies, buy merchandising, and pay certain amount by 'buying one kilometer.' This is not a property act. Usually *koadrillak* (groups of friends), private companies, cooperatives, neighbors' societies, trade unionists, political representatives, etc., buy one kilometer or more in each edition in a gesture of monetary helping for the promotion of Euskara. Last but not least, Korrika even holds another salient aspect of *erronkas*: a playful even absurd approach to performance and inhabiting public space shapes the nature and scope of the challenge. AEK delegates have told that when the first edition set off, there was criticism on its foolishness.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Although enticing, this approach doesn't grasp in full the kind of imaginative action conveyed by collective and participatory *erronkas*. Besides, rituals not only highlight the unity of people, and between people and the cosmos, but also produce social stances of domestication of potentially threatening forces; their integrating power makes the mandatory acceptable and even desirable (Durkheim and Mauss 1996)

<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.berria.eus/paperekoa/1823/004/001/2017-03-29/korrikaren\\_hazia\\_erein\\_zutenei\\_uzta\\_eskaini.htm](http://www.berria.eus/paperekoa/1823/004/001/2017-03-29/korrikaren_hazia_erein_zutenei_uzta_eskaini.htm) Berria newspaper, Retrieved 11 August 2022.

By calling the attention to “political *erronkas*,” in the sense of collective challenges attached to the achievements of political imagination, the urge to achieve a great goal, almost crazy, irrational or absurd, is an important aspect of achieving a political goal and not a mere anecdote. This aspect has political efficacy because the territory renders visible and experienced as something else: treated with affection but also a particular joyful disposition. The joy of participating in an *erronka* is a crucial step toward creating not only visibility of national identity claims but also of testing what people are capable to do in common when—or besides—fighting for legally independent territoriality. The purpose of conveying sociolinguistic claims across territory instead of concentrating people in one place is a conscious move of an *erronka*. As Urla (1988, 2012) pointed out in her study of the Basque language movement, new subjectivities are as much a product of strategies of resistance as it is of domination. They are, like *Korrika*, created on the move. This is another telling aspect of *erronkas*: unlike rituals and ritualized events, *erronkas* are open ended. *Korrika* entails a complex process of realization that nurtures and widens the affective and imaginative dispositions required to successfully achieving a collective challenge.

When people demand their country to be recognized as an independent nation-state, territorial performances are coherent with their claims. For instance, a human chain linking the capital cities, or an action simultaneously performed at different locations means literally acting as a political community. I propose to speak of political *Erronkas* according to how a challenge is infused with a particular taste towards territorial aims and scaling scopes.<sup>17</sup> These are prefigurative challenges: they open-up the scale of imaginations as if the project was already achieved (Gaztañaga 2021a). Actually, del Valle (1993:292-4) shows that *Korrika* occurs in both present and historical times; in the territory, both in the sense of people and specific ecological and economic spaces; in private and public space including the mass media; in idealized and imagined worlds of the archaic and ancestral past and the generational transmission projected towards the future. Participatory *erronkas* of this sort are a social “technology of political imagination” whose design and attainment infuse both with affection and strength the collective organization in the pursue of common and participatory goal (Gaztañaga 2021b). *Erronka* dynamics add something special: they encourage something extraordinary, entertaining, and memorable within contexts, legal issues and political themes that are ordinary and not particularly fun or joyful. Lastly, *erronkas* ‘do’ something both to the organizers and the mere participants. A transformation of the personal and interpersonal challenge/betting dynamic into a political project seems to entail collective transformations of the scales of imagination. These *political erronkas* are both ends in and means because enact and prefigure regimes of action and imagination.

## Conclusions

In this paper I examined *erronkas* as pathway to promote a transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies. By identifying *erronkas* as a complex dynamic whereby a challenge becomes a defy, I first spoke about the benefits of adopting a transdisciplinary approach to Basque Studies to address them because their prevalent but heterogeneous presence in the Basque settings deserve to be approached through many angles but above of all by new framing questions, imaginative conceptual vocabularies, and creative angles. Then I offered some insights of how such transdisciplinary endeavor could materialize by addressing the concept of *erronka* as a social praxis. I proposed an analytical distinction on the scope and limits between agonistic and competitive challenges, or challenges *between* people and collective challenges of *the* people. Finally, by examining *Korrika* as an *erronka*, I called the attention on the scales of political imagination compromised by the very definition of *erronka* as a social praxis. While certain *erronkas* associated with gambling are agonistic in terms of interpersonal or intergroup dynamics, collective and participatory *erronkas* are attached to the achievements of political imagination. Although not

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<sup>17</sup> In a way they resemble religious like doing 5 kms on ones’ knees after a promise to a Saint, or secular pilgrimages like Presidents and other important political figures do (see Abeles 1988).

explicitly oriented to rivalry, the latter do not remove agonistic aspects but displace them; sometimes they are manifestly like a ritual; sometimes they have a less evident ritualized shape; they symbolize, represent, and perform scales of imagination that speak of territoriality in diverse manners, and nurture and widen the kind of dispositions required for prefiguring political projects.

Erronkas have different meanings according to their organizational and performative contexts. As poetics of political aims, they concrete projects both space and temporally bounded, shape values and condense heterogeneous social imaginations through a different but complementary way to those attaches to nations as political imagined communities. Following David Graeber's (2012) distinction between transcendent and immanent forms of imagination, erronkas belong to the latter kind although they can speak the language of the former. While the transcendent form is namely fictional and make-believe of imaginary creatures, places and friends, immanent imagination is caught up in projects of action that aim to have real effects on the material world. In other words, unlike the 'utopian ideal', imagination works through the mediation of unfinished things that can prefigure realities to come. This imagination is social and dialogic and works through the mediation of objects (Graeber 2015: xv-xxi). In sum, erronkas imprint dispositions and procedures that produce both a political value and the value attached to such valorization; in fact, various architectures in terms of scales of imagination are possible because at the same time they represent, speak of, and concrete the prefiguration of projects.

Let me conclude this paper by summing up three reasons for furthering a transdisciplinarity approach for Basque Studies. First, it allows us to break up with sterile separations of disciplinary language and container focuses (e.g., located and dislocated, individuality and society, personal and collective, poetics and politics, rational and irrational, competitive and playful, etc.). Second, it favors the study of multidimensional dynamics (that like erronkas are physical, mental, affective, transcendental, ritualistic, symbolic, material, ideological, etc.) and multi-layered (temporal and territorial, infused by expectations, attached to rules, conditioned by logistics, casted with various collective goals, etc.). Third, the ultimate task is not to examine an object/subject, but to shed light on a transversal vision of social processes related with the emergent nature or not predetermined nature of social life, such as the question about the scales of imagination. And last but not least, the advocacy for transculturality in Basque Studies not only broadens investigative possibilities about the social order but also addresses the questions of encompassing and analyzing realities such as collaborative research (as in collaborative anthropology), the role of stakeholders (protagonists, agents, promoters, interlocutors, etc), the outcomes of the academic interactions including funding and rankings (and its putative dichotomy in/out academia, as it were), and the various dilemmas these issues pose.<sup>18</sup>

Transdisciplinarity is a processual approach seeking to produce consistent relationships between sciences and disciplines; it also aims to breaking through hegemonic cross-cultural ties too often narrowed as emic/etic principles. A transdisciplinary perspective for Basque Studies is crucial to enhance this scholarly field but also to prevent assertions concerning cultural identity and ethos that fossilize instead of critically engage with social processes. A transdisciplinary approach does not seek to define what is an erronka in Basque terms, nor its pure Basqueness, but to shed light onto a particular aspect of the complex dynamics that produces and reproduces the Basque worlds for Basque people. By moving across and through various epistemics and materials, this approach not only favors to question and interrogate disciplinary approaches, but also to keep the kind of broad and creative gaze that Basque Studies as a subject of study needs. Maybe transdisciplinary Basque Studies are akin to political erronkas: a transformative research imagination for producing new questions, enhancing research agendas and unfold generous praxis.

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<sup>18</sup> I want to thank to the anonymous reviewer who generously called the attention about such aspects.

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