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Title: Beyond Multidisciplinarity . . . and Interdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity and the history of Basque Studies

Abstract: This article traces the historical evolution of two disciplinary trends in the field of Basque Studies in a global context. While the scholars who promoted the multidisciplinary approach espoused an ethno-historicist vision, committed to the study of Basque language and culture, they nevertheless failed to provide the field with internal coherence and defended its putative homeland roots. The Sociedad de Estudios Vascos adopted since the 1990s a more interdisciplinary vision, imposing on the field a purpose of practical application for Basque society, but paying little attention to the Basque diaspora. This article proposes a transdisciplinary approach—and “trans” perspectives in general—cultivated by social scientists in area studies, ethnic studies, and other fields that, without compromising the concerns of either trend, can help build a shared and internally coherent conceptual framework that transcends the specific perspectives of the constitutive disciplines of Basque Studies.

Keywords: Transdisciplinarity, Multidisciplinarity, Interdisciplinarity, Basque Studies, Area Studies, Basque Studies Society

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Introduction

Since the inception of the institutionalization of Basque studies at the early twentieth century, Bascologists and scholars of whatever school have been unanimous about its plural and heterogeneous nature. However, the analysis of the concomitant disciplinarity in and the appropriate approach to Basque studies has received virtually no scholarly attention to date. In fact, the traditional historiography of Basque studies almost never raised the question of "perspective" in the practice of these studies. Basque studies was universal knowledge, originally founded on a cluster of traditional and long-established disciplines. Their perspective was not considered to be worthy of scrutiny, by virtue of the simple fact that the growth of Basque studies over time was fragmented and amorphous.

However, there were some authoritative voices that influenced the widespread adoption of the multidisciplinary approach to Basque studies. Three are particularly notable for the influence of their thought in the global context of the spread of Basque studies: Julio de Urquijo, José Miguel de Barandiaran and Luis Michelena. Since this approach has largely determined thinking among Bascologists and scholars who dealt with Basque studies in the Basque Country and the rest of the world, I shall briefly present their arguments. Next, I shall show how the critical scholarship that emerged around Eusko Ikaskuntza / Sociedad de Estudios Vascos (Basque Studies Society, hereafter EI-SEV) and its generalist congresses developed, since the 1990s, a less ethnic and ethnohistorical and more practical and applied vision of Basque studies. These scholars proposed in their congresses an interdisciplinary approach that, without compromising the concerns of each specialty, could promote joint work and the search for shared elements around general issues.¹ I shall argue that this scholarship almost exclusively promoted reflection—rather than interdisciplinary research—on general issues of great importance to Basque society, remaining almost totally oblivious to contributions to the field in Basque diasporas and non-Western countries. I shall then address the question of the global spread of Basque studies, paying heed to the binary “homeland” and “diaspora” as traditionally discerned. Finally, I will propose a transdisciplinary approach that, transcending the specific disciplinary perspectives, might help to build a shared conceptual framework for understanding these studies *hic et ubique*. As will be shown, this approach and the different sorts of “trans” perspectives—cultivated by social scientists in area studies, ethnic studies, and other fields—have the advantage that they could provide an internal coherence to Basque studies (Szanton 2004, Mielke and Hornidge 2017:3–26, Milutinović 2019:1–18).

Multidisciplinary approach

Let us then start with the bibliophile and xenophile Julio de Urquijo. Convinced of the intrinsic value of the particularity of Basque culture and language—paradigms of an extraordinary historical survival for universal science—and intrigued by the existentialist enigmas of the origins and language of the Basque people, Urquijo wondered how Basque studies could gain scientific rigor and authority as a field of

¹ For interdisciplinarity as a concept denoting a process of unifying interaction, see: Klein (2000). For a history of the evolution of interdisciplinarity as a problem of knowledge across a diversity of fields, including area studies, see: Klein (2001).

academic knowledge. The answer, according to him, lay in the foundation of a specialized journal based in the Basque Country, which would demand order, method and rigor (that is, science) from Basque investigations, especially philology, a *sine qua non* in his view for their institutionalization, the bedrock of all established discipline. The *Revista Internacional de Estudios Vascos* (RIEV), founded under his direction in 1907, encapsulated all of this (Urquijo 1911–1912, Arocena 1949). His achievement, according to Michelena and Urquijo himself, lies in how he was able to integrate two traditions that were then at a crossroads: the local one, concerned above all with the antiquity and universality of the Basque language; and the foreign one, linked in certain regards to the former, and interested in the description, analysis and varieties of *euskera* (Michelena 2011[1973]:284–285). Yet, despite the predominance of linguistics, Basque studies was *terrae antiquae*. In fact, they subsumed the old multidisciplinary knowledge of the local and the foreign, from linguistics and philology to history and literature, like rivers flowing into the ocean of Basque studies. For Urquijo (1918), then, while Basque studies deserved to be an object of inquiry *per se*, it was essentially multidisciplinary.²

Attracted more to the search for the original and authentic Basque culture, the anthropologist José Miguel de Barandiaran took for granted this multidisciplinary nature of Basque studies and was, instead, concerned with the constitutive and objective elements of Basque culture. Through his participation in Etniker and the foundation of journals such as *Eusko-Folklore* and *Eusko-Jakintza*, he strove to establish *stricto sensu* the traces of continuity between prehistoric inhabitants of the country and contemporary Basques (Altuna 2007). Inspired by the theoreticians of the Historical School of Vienna, led by Father Wilhelm Schmidt, he believed he had found some—own and constant—constitutive elements in what he called the “authentic Basque humanism,” a humanism in which religiosity inheres. This humanism with autochthonous roots, he claimed, ‘has come for centuries endorsed, strengthened and even enriched by Christianity’ (Barandiaran 1980:16). It is a fundamental element of the culture of the Basque people and an objective reality that defines Basqueness and the Basques. For Barandiaran, then, physical anthropology, ethnography, archeology and prehistory are distinct disciplines that converge in Basque studies in their primary goal of discovering the authentic and original Basque culture (Barandiaran 1977a, 1977b and 1979).³

Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that Barandiaran, despite this multidisciplinary conception and especially in the way in which he addressed methodological issues, contributed at least two aspects to an interdisciplinary and especially transdisciplinary look at Basque studies which are of more than purely historical interest. The first of these involves the combination of different techniques—or perhaps one should say the adoption of interdisciplinary visions—of folklore and ethnography. This combination stems from his determination to subject the study of Basque popular mentality (beliefs, customs, legends, and myths) to a systematic investigation—of gathering and recording of facts. This meant a methodological break with respect to romantic folklore. Where folklorists’ main concern was with

² For an analysis of the process of disciplinization of Basque studies, or their constitution as a subject of academic inquiry, from the integration of two traditions—one “local”, linked to Basque homeland, and the other “foreign”, related to European Bascology—in the journal *Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos*, see Anduaga (2022a).

³ On the influence of W. Schmidt and the Vienna School of Ethnology on Basque anthropology, see: Azcona (1984).

decontextualized literary recreation, Barandiaran's interest was focused on analyzing facts in their own contexts. His path was truly unique insofar as he promoted fieldwork based on participant observation, as well as on Wilhelm Wundt's principle that cultures are adequately intelligible only to those who live them. The second aspect involves his effort to transcend the cognitive frameworks of individual disciplines. Barandiaran's goal was to rescue both material culture and spiritual culture—or what he called the Basque people's mental universe—to form a heritage ensemble. This vision denoted a holistic understanding of complex cultural forms that could not be explained by a single discipline.⁴

Let us conclude this retrospective review with the linguist Luis Michelena. Convinced of the exceptionality of the Basque language as an academic paradigm and extremely concerned about the lack of a Basque university during the post-war period, he wondered what Basque studies were, the challenges in the discipline and what made it so appealing to academia.⁵ By Basque studies, he understood it as 'studies related mainly to Basque language and literature, prehistory, ethnology and history (Michelena 1994)'. Among all of these, he claimed, the study of the origins and kinship relations of the Basque people has always attracted preferential attention. Regardless of the interesting aspects offered by the other peculiarities of the Basque people, he remarked, there is one that has aroused more world interest and the reason is completely clear: the Basque language is 'the only non-Indo-European language that has been preserved in the Western Europe'. This fact, therefore, makes it 'an absolutely exceptional current phenomenon' (Michelena 1994:95). For Michelena, therefore, while Basque studies has a permanent nucleus of world exceptional interest, it is constitutively multidisciplinary.

Basque studies has historically been considered as a cluster of traditional disciplines and research fields whose common denominator is an exclusively conceptual link: that is, *those objects of study that are related to the Basque*. In fact, ever since they adopted it a century ago, the multidisciplinary approach of Urquijo, Michelena, and (to a lesser extent) Barandiaran has constituted one of the main determinants in shaping globally contextualized discourses for the promotion and institutionalization of Basque studies, both in Europe and America. This perspective is at the very core of the "multidisciplinarity" approaches to Basque studies of a good number of prominent scholars, including those of the centenary Sociedad de Estudios Vascos (EI-SEV, 1918). Indeed, Urquijo himself had enormous influence in giving an institutional form to his vision, allowing RIEV to become the main organ of dissemination of EI-SEV, and thereby shaping the themes, topics and contents of the field of Basque studies.⁶ Barandiaran's influence was not less so; together with Angel Apraiz, he advocated for EI-SEV a corporate model (that of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans) that would go beyond studies on traditional Basque culture and, without leaving these aside, focus on solving the challenges and problems of contemporary Basque society, such as political

⁴ On the influence of the German psychologist and philosopher Wilhelm Wundt on Barandiaran's thought and the way in which the latter stamped Basque anthropology with a unique defining quality in Europe, see: Anduaga (2023).

⁵ Michelena addresses these questions in many writings of his prolific literary production. See, e.g., Michelena (1994, 2011).

⁶ EI-SEV's permanent Board stated when incorporating RIEV in 1922: 'the authority and scientific criteria of Mr. Urquijo, its founder and director, as well as Vice President of the Society since it was constituted, will now be applied with doubled fervor'. Monreal (2001:26).

autonomy and education. Its high number of sections (up to fifteen) and research groups reflect that EI-SEV was established not so much as an association of ethnic studies but as a scientific academy. Hence, it is not surprising that many of the multidisciplinary projects promoted by EI-SEV contained a very marked political, and cultural, dimension (Goirienea de Gandarias 1999).

In the context of Latin America, a number of institutions and projects on Basque studies were undertaken in the second half of the twentieth century, almost all striving to adopt the multidisciplinary perspective of these three predecessors. Their promoters appeared to advocate gathering various disciplines in the pursuit of an objective but staying within their disciplinary boundaries. The Instituto Americano de Estudios Vascos (IAEV), a Basque-Argentine entity founded in 1943, illustrates this influence well. In the words of one of its founders, ‘in the distribution of research work, it had to imitate the rules followed in Europe by the glorious Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, which was divided into sections diversified by subject’.⁷ It is therefore not surprising that its statutes assert that IAEV aims at uniting those lovers of the Basque Country who specialized in some aspect of its prehistory, history, anthropology, folklore, language, literature, law, economics, art and other sciences. In short, IAEV presented *ab ovo* a great external coherence, driven by intensifying and disseminating these studies, on the one hand, and denouncing from exile the Basque linguistic and cultural persecution by the Franco regime, on the other (Beramendi 2012, Iribar 2003).

Let us inquire, to put another example, into the origins of the disciplinary status of the Reno Basque Studies Program. The foundation of this program at the University of Nevada in 1968 is a well-known landmark in the history of Basque studies, as it represents what was called ‘the most elaborate and serious Basque-culture-centric scholarly effort outside of the Basque Country’ (Douglass 1993a:190). Less known, because it belongs, so to speak, “to intrahistory”, is that its conceptualization was the result of a balancing act by the triumvirate of its founders—William Douglass, Jon Bilbao and Robert Laxalt.⁸ For J. Bilbao, an exiled political activist who became involved in his monumental *Eusko-Bibliographia*, the program should aim at preserving the Basque language in the US and thus enlivening the American spirit for the Basque nationalist cause. For W. Douglas (1993a:195), an anthropologist and the program's first director, this view entailed great risk, since ‘a blurring of the line between advocacy and objectivity would undermine [their] academic respectability’. The advocacy, he warned, ‘posed the danger of confounding our analytical gaze by becoming enmeshed in the maze of Basque affairs’. At this point, its founders considered their domains not as *hortus conclusus* but as complementary prospectuses. The major enigmas posed by the Basques of Europe for linguistics, physical anthropology, prehistory and ethnology were simultaneously viewed as preferential objects of inquiry in the contexts of homeland and diaspora (in the latter, together with the study of immigration and of the formation of the Basque-American ethnic identity). The three founders were well aware of the favorable conditions of legitimation that could arise in such a situation. A review of the history of Basque studies has to look attentively for this type of discursive linkage in

⁷ According to Doctor Francisco Basterrechea, 21 October 1945, in: ‘Instituto Americano de Estudios Vascos’. *Boletín del Instituto Americano de Estudios Vascos*, 1950, 1(1):2–5, p. 4.

⁸ For accounts of this intrahistory, see: Douglass (1987, 1993a, 1993b) and Oiarzabal (2007).

order to produce a non-anachronistic account of the parallel discourses on the homeland and diasporic programs.

Not least, all these scholars and projects shared with Urquijo, Michelena, and (to a lesser extent) Barandiaran the belief that Basque studies denote the sum of several traditional disciplines with a common mission but with no integration of concepts, epistemologies or methodologies.⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that Basque studies became a cluster of traditional disciplines and research fields, with scholars working not necessarily in an integrated or coordinated way, nor sharing the same epistemological perspective. In the hands of specialists in different fields, it became a sum and juxtaposition of disciplines, with external consistency but scarcely any internal coherence.

We are then presented with the following dilemma. Should we understand Basque studies as a cluster of established disciplines spreading as an emanation from the homeland, with the major enigmas posed by the Basques of Europe constituting their core and *vera causa* (linguistics, physical anthropology, prehistory and ethnology)? Or should we rather think in terms of fields of application and issues and challenges of current society that would imply a generic definition of Basque studies—that is, as those studies that bear some relation to the Basque?

One way of joining this second predicament has been to question the space and scope of Basque studies. Indeed, some EI-SEV scholars espoused this line of argument in the 1980s, seeking to turn EI-SEV and its best-known dissemination organ—the RIEV—into ‘the expression of the highest level of conscience in the country’ (Caro Baroja 1983:17–19), and, incidentally, to open up overarching visions of what Basque studies could be. Inspired in part by the critical vision of the historian Julio Caro Baroja, who replaced Barandiaran as the director of RIEV in 1983, these scholars saw Basque studies as the scholarly expression of the local and foreign Basque intelligentsia, a multidisciplinary area of knowledge that was capable of addressing the problems and challenges that affect current Basque society.¹⁰ That RIEV, asserted Caro Baroja (1983), gathers ‘articles on disciplines such as Economics, Sociology, Psychiatry, etc., seems as necessary as continuing to cultivate the old themes of Linguistics, Anthropology and Prehistory’ (see also Apalategi 1994). These scholars also advocated that RIEV be a generalist—therefore, not monographic—journal of research and high culture that would periodically publish summaries of the state of knowledge in these disciplines. Their social appeal notwithstanding, these approaches tell us nothing about the very indefiniteness of Basque studies that, due to the ethereal nature of their common denominator (“everything that bear some relation to the Basque”), runs the risk of being turn them into a disciplinary miscellany, or, at least, into a panoply of unconnected investigations. Not least, they share with the earlier positions the widely accepted idea that there is a common denominator called Basque studies that, *quad anima motrix*, is radiated from the homeland to diasporas—hence their emphasis on the internationalization of these studies.

⁹ On Barandiaran’s efforts to combine methodologies and concepts in Basque ethnography, folklore, prehistory, and collective psychology, see: Anduaga (2023).

¹⁰ On the relaunch of RIEV and the role played by Caro Baroja, who accepted the position of director of RIEV ‘not without great scruples’ and driven by ‘a feeling of obedience to Barandiaran’, as the historian himself confessed, see: Monreal (2001:28–36).

Interdisciplinary approach

Since the 1990s, historians, social scientists and Bascophiles have gradually undermined this academist and nuclear conception of Basque studies. In many respects, this pace was set by EI-SEV. Moving away from an ethnic conception of the field as the study of the Basque man and traditional culture, the organizers of EI-SEV generalist congresses understood it as the construction and integration of spaces for debate and reflection with the purpose of practical application, on topics of great importance for Basque society—economic, social, cognitive, political, etc. Periodically establishing programs structured into large sections and identifying transversal axes through the EI-SEV's fifteen scientific sections, these congresses have promoted interdisciplinary and joint work and the search for shared elements. This new current of thought has always held that Basque studies are not an exclusive enterprise of universities or research centers, but also concern civil organizations, and, consequently, are intrinsically open to interdisciplinarity (Agirreazkuenaga 1995: xv-xxv). In concert with the dynamism and vitality of today's societies, and to a large extent instigated by the country's great challenges, such as innovation, sustainable development, education and science, contingencies of place (homeland) have thus come to acquire key importance in EI-SEV generalist congresses since the 1990s.¹¹

EI-SEV's renewal process on the occasion of its first centenary in 2018 illustrates well the weight of homeland contingencies. The relationship between the social and cultural challenges of Basque society and specific solutions that those challenges posed were conceived by EI-SEV's organizers in a clearly interdisciplinary and localist fashion. Thus, the topics and fields of knowledge that were identified by EI-SEV as 'thematic areas to be developed' in Vasconia were seen in themselves as areas proper to Basque studies. Placing the 'sustainable human society in Vasconia in the twenty-first century' at the center of debate and with a projection of the future, its organizers identified several areas to discuss: 'socio-political structuring, socio-economic models, the future of the Basque language, and the socio-cultural reality'.¹² Issues such as the construction of a shared identity and the development of an economic model of social and sustainable protection were constitutive of Basque studies insofar as they embodied challenges for Basque society, although they were not viewed with the same concern and interest in Basque diasporas.¹³ Diasporas' or other Basque collectivities' issues were not considered as thematic areas, and EI-SEV did not include them in its discussions and spaces for reflection.¹⁴ The debate on issues as diverse as sustainability, climate change, and technology, was led from an interdisciplinary

¹¹ EI-SEV generalist congresses selected current issues with a future perspective for the Basque Country: New cultural formulations (1991); Basque studies in the educational system (1993); science, technology and social change in Euskal Herria (1995); information society (1997); Basque science and culture, telematic networks (2001); sustainable development (2005); innovation for sustainable social progress (2009); the future that (re)unites us, Centennial Congress (2018).

¹² Eusko Ikaskuntza. *El Libro Blanco de (los) territorio(s) de Vasconia*. In: <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus>, p. 83.

¹³ Eusko Ikaskuntza. 'Declaración de Eusko Ikaskuntza en su centenario', Oñati, November 24, 2018. In: <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus>. See also: Eusko Ikaskuntza. *Construyendo cohesión y solidaridad: Libro verde del (de los) Territorio(s) de Vasconia. Mapa conceptual y diagnosis participativa 2016-2018*. In: <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus>

¹⁴ The mentioned *Libro Blanco* on Vasconia, which gathers the reflections of this debate, mentions only three times the 'Basque global community' or diaspora (p. 96, 122, and 124).

perspective by experts and professionals from different fields, as well as from civil society. However, this thematic miscellany became blurred in its relation to Basque studies. This inevitably led to generalizations unrelated to Basque studies and to a localist image of these studies that could not accommodate the interactions and tensions that arise from its multilayered structure.

Accounting for the flows and mobility of people, goods and ideas in today's complex societies has become an object of inquiry for recent Basque studies. It has been shown that the forces of globalization that tend to unify and homogenize everything did not make the study of specific spaces superfluous. Quite the contrary, global processes are developed only in place-specific ways, where links of interdependence and interaction are formed. Some scholars have identified these links in the formation of Basque-American ethnic identities, others in migratory movements or in the intellectual production of exiles, while for many others the investigation of these links requires interdisciplinary teams with researchers from different fields working together in a common problem.¹⁵ At this point, the old adage that one has to pursue the ideal and understand the reality is almost always true.

The renewed image of these studies notwithstanding, they still share with multidisciplinary approaches the dogma of homeland-centrism. EI-SEV's *Jakitez* course for university specialists in Basque Studies illustrates this bias well, as its contents provide a historical and current view of Basque culture in, above all, the Basque Country. An even more significant indicator is the absence of references to Basque studies from the diaspora and non-Western countries in the EI-SEV congresses. Practically all the papers presented and read in these congresses have a Christian cultural and religious background. Conducting comparative studies of the external image of the Basque Country, as perceived by non-Christian intellectuals, will contribute to overcoming the dogma of homeland-centrism and, therefore, to resituating the image of the Basque people in a broader historical and cultural context.¹⁶

Interdisciplinary scholars also implicitly share with multidisciplinary scholars the use of the dichotomous terms "homeland versus diasporic studies", as well as the belief in what could be called the center-periphery model for the spread of Basque studies, although they do recognize the bidirectionality of the mechanisms involved, instead of simply taking the phenomenon for granted. The idea that underlies this dogma, so widespread in Basque studies, is the Eurocentric postulate that these studies are of unequivocally homeland nature in their inception (but not in their implantation and evolution).

¹⁵ Valuable bibliographical sources that include recent studies are: Álvarez Gila (2005), Auza (2013), Aduriz, Ascunce, and Zabala (1998). See also the book collections of the Center for Basque Studies Press from the University of Nevada, Reno, the world's primary English-language source for publishing on Basque topics.

¹⁶ An example of overcoming this Eurocentric approach is Sho Hagio's study on the travelogue of Yaeko Nogami, an example of a non-Christian intellectual who was barely influenced by Orientalist preconceptions in Europe, and which is published below in this issue of the journal. See also Hagio's study on the formation of the Basque image in Japan and Basque studies in that country in Hagio (2014).

Transdisciplinary approach

In the remainder of this article, I will propose a way of promoting a constructive dialogue between these two trends, stimulated by recent revisions formulated by social scientists who focus on area studies and ethnic studies (Mielke and Hornidge 2017:3–26, Milutinović 2019). These revisions could be relevant in studies related to stateless nations. I suggest carrying it out by bearing in mind the recent reinterpretations and reconceptions of area studies. Now, instead of conceiving of these areas as geographically fixed units and unmistakably delimited spaces, I will pay attention to the movement of ideas, objects, practices and methods and their interaction between—and also beyond—the various established disciplines that actually counted as conventional Basque studies until the end of the twentieth century (Basque history, linguistics, ethnology, anthropology, literature, etc.). I shall contend that the consequent interactions are themselves not only a space for knowledge conformation and construction but also transcend the limits of the very constitutive disciplines.

To be more precise, I shall pay special attention to the transdisciplinary approach, and “trans” perspectives in general, as useful tools to be applied to Basque studies and their history on a global scale. I shall show that many of the inadequacies of interdisciplinary and especially multidisciplinary approaches mentioned above can be duly overcome. To this end, we will have to pay a double toll. Firstly, by Basque studies one will understand not permanent states delimited by previously established disciplinary and physical boundaries, but highly mobile and dynamic research fields that interact with each other and with others. The goal is the understanding of social and cultural processes rather than permanent states. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2000:5) suggests in his essay on ‘Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination’, ‘the shift from so-called “trait” geographies to process geographies to capture flows and motions of ideas, ideologies, discourses, people, goods, images, messages, technologies and techniques’ is a good means to understand globalization’s local impacts. And secondly, the proposed approach is not the addition, juxtaposition or even the synthesis of disciplines but the integration, assimilation, unification and subsequent transcension of the constitutive disciplines. All these processes entail the pursuit of a new shared framework of concepts, terms and practices.

It is precisely this *transformative* function of transdisciplinarity that I want to formulate, expose, and theorize here. Transdisciplinarity is quite different from multidisciplinary and even from its progenitor, interdisciplinarity, inasmuch as it implies the construction of a shared conceptual framework that goes beyond disciplinary perspectives. By adopting “trans” perspectives, Basque studies gain a shared conceptual framework and vocabulary, thereby acquiring another dimension. Transdisciplinarity implies, therefore, a holistic and transcendental aspect and not the simple addition of notions and methodologies of already established disciplines.

Happily, the attempts presented in this monographic issue to conceptualize commonalities in areas such as Basque anthropology, history, and diaspora have produced *artifacts* that serve well to understand the kaleidoscope of Basque studies. Its authors seek to replace the multidisciplinary clusters of material, social or cultural facts that tended to dominate the last decades of the discipline of Basque studies, with results of dynamic and interacting processes, focusing first on identifying characteristics

common to several areas of that discipline and then forming concepts that configure a shared conceptual framework. It is hoped this will bring in its wake Basque studies of artifacts rather than of facts, which will manage to transcend disciplinary containers and thereby enable their transition from trait to process geographies. They and many others concerned with the transdisciplinary approach would prefer us to see Basque studies not as a series of formal polygons but as a series of interconnected flexible and porous spaces, criss-crossed from the Basque Country to the diasporas by irregular geometries, without dogmatically approved centralisms, in which artifacts constitute basic components in the development of a shared conceptual framework.

What is interesting about this transdisciplinary practice, as clearly distinguished from the multidisciplinary one and somewhat from the interdisciplinary one, is its inherent exhortation to forge a new dialogue, one which replaces a sequential conception of area studies as an accumulation of facts, with a creative task of production of artifacts that perform integrative and relational functions. In practical terms, this requires scholars in Basque studies to lift their eyes from their traditional fixation on the material and historical facts of their specific disciplines (such as history, anthropology, literature or philology), and to look at the hermeneutic narratives of heterogeneous elements that are common to the areas of knowledge of Basque studies. Such is the case of Julieta Gaztañaga's contribution (see below), who follows a three-step process in her transdisciplinary proposal: first, the identification of a feature common to several areas of knowledge, then the choice or creation of the concept (*erronka*) that defines that feature, and finally the distinction between the individual sense and the collective one in this concept.

No less importantly, however, the term transdisciplinarity serves as a strong counterpoint to the "fragility" of multidisciplinary, which barely provides internal coherence to Basque studies. Transdisciplinarity denotes an internally coherent integration and especially the possibility of producing and reconfiguring knowledge through a shared conceptual framework. The transdisciplinary perspective confers freedom on the researcher to analyze, synthesize and harmonize ties between disciplines into a coherent and coordinated whole. This does not necessarily mean that the researcher attains consistent methods across the whole field or that they achieve a single central locus of thought, inquiry, methodology, or topic. Yet it does open the door for them to create a critical vocabulary of concepts and terms that allows for cross-referencing between the various constitutive disciplines of Basque studies. In these studies, as in area and ethnic studies, being multidisciplinary and building shared frameworks are not antithetical.

Of course, not everything is analyzable by a transdisciplinary approach, and our proposal could reflect an exaggerated optimism, an idea of shared methodologies, approaches, theories and concepts that unproblematically serve different academic disciplines and geographical spaces. Certain states and circumstances are required for "trans" perspectives to be fruitful. These conditions sometimes imply economic and political processes that extend beyond the control and boundaries of nation-states, with global mobility and high interconnectivity between people ("transnationalism"); other times, processes and phenomena that involve, encompass and combine aspects of more than one culture ("transculturalism"); or other times, relations that connect different

peoples and localities at the same time and that occur in geographic areas characterized by ethnically diverse or highly mobile populations (“translocalism”) (Mintz 1998, Freitag and von Oppen 2010:1–24).

The focus on transdisciplinary perspective itself as a means of building a shared conceptual framework constitutes an important change in approach with respect to Basque studies orthodoxy—and area studies *in genere*. For, as described earlier, Basque studies have so far housed two approaches, albeit much more the former than the latter, in the making of knowledge: the multidisciplinary approach, which seeks to solve a shared problem but without conceptual integration; and the interdisciplinary approach, which seeks to integrate some aspects of scholars’ specialties but maintaining their own disciplinary bases. Yet, it is precisely the *transformative* nature of “trans” perspective itself, as well as its ability to build holistic and integrative frameworks that transcend each of the separate disciplinary perspectives, that the focus on transdisciplinarity serves to highlight.

Conclusion

The transdisciplinary perspective allows specialists from heterogeneous disciplines of diverse schools to endow Basque studies with a shared conceptual framework. It allows us to endue them with a tool that seeks not to add, juxtapose or synthesize these disciplines but rather to integrate, incorporate and unify a theoretical framework that transcends the perspectives of their specific disciplines. It is not about dominating the constitutive disciplines but about opening them up to share and go beyond themselves. Their scholars do not work with and between, but across and beyond, different disciplines. They cross “traditional” territorial disciplinary formations by forging interdependencies with other fields of knowledge, build their own conceptual frameworks, function through networks, and cultivate solutions of internal coherence.

Adopting “trans” perspectives offers fresh methodological solutions to “homeland/diaspora” narratives, which color the global histories of Basque studies as they do area studies and ethnic studies. For they not only consider the migration flows and mobility of ideas that make it inappropriate to analyze Basque studies through geographically fixed entities, they also allow us to configure and conform “process” cartographies—rather than “trait” cartographies—by observing Basque studies in some spaces far more intertwined and complex than those suggested by these traditional dichotomies (see, e.g., Anduaga 2022b). Furthermore, they open prospects for fertile collaboration between scholars from different disciplines and those Bascophiles from diasporic Basque collectivities and non-academic institutions that investigate the interaction between Basque culture and that of their own country. When the history of Basque studies is written, it may well demonstrate how seductive, yet how constructive, these “trans” perspectives can be.

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