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A “Para-University” on the Road toward Self-Governance: The Basque Studies Society and Autonomy, 1918–1936

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Abstract

In the United States and Europe, *para-university* institutions have often been viewed as postsecondary institutions that satisfy some needs not addressed by universities. Such para-universities might be technical institutes or research centers affiliated with a parent university and/or a nation-state. In stateless nations, however, para-universities have acquired certain characteristics that, compared with nation-states, distinguish them in their rationale and development. In the Basque Country of Spain, the Basque Studies Society—an institution not born from, or linked to, any parent university—sought to unite the promotion of science and indigenous culture with a demand for educational and political autonomy. The Basque case reveals instructive contrasts that separate para-university practice from that of its European and American counterparts. This article analyzes para-university practice and activities during the first two decades of the Basque Studies Society (1918–1936). With its emphasis upon political autonomy as well as the absence of an established nation-state and the lack of a university that served as a base, this case study challenges traditional conceptions of the para-university in its essence and praxis.

Keywords: Higher education; para-university; self-government; Basque Studies Society; nationalism and education

Introduction

Few aspects of modern politics are more closely studied than those concerned with the conceptualization, rise, and development of movements for autonomy, self-government, and independence. The First World War became a laboratory for the constitution of new nation-states, which, in central-eastern Europe, was fueled by the principle of self-determination of the peoples defended by Russian revolutionaries and, later, by US president Woodrow Wilson. The contribution of the Great War and those other events to shaping the “new Europe” is well known.¹ By contrast, few scholars have

¹See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Stefano Bianchini, ed., *Self-Determination and*

placed the focus on para-university institutions linked to ethnic studies and looked at western Europe—a space for vindication and mobilization in places like Ireland, Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Flanders—to trace the sources of the emergence of nationalities and autonomy demands during and after the war.² However, when one does employ this focus, as shown in the pages below, one discovers practices and forms that challenge current knowledge and exhibit the notion of the *para-university* in a new light.

Conventional historiography has tended to portray the para-university system as a part of higher education whose mission was to meet the needs that were not addressed by universities. Many historical accounts of universities in Europe describe the activities and challenges of this type of system, and a para-university is often referred to as an institution linked to a parent university with which it shared a mission, but whose activities were conceived outside the university's entrenched practices.³ Others have described research infrastructures outside the university sector, distinguishing para-university institutes from non-university research institutes and colleges.⁴ In contrast, the para-universities created in Latin America have been defined as a “kind of postsecondary institution.”⁵ Unlike their European counterparts, whose state funding systems lent themselves well to research activities, Latin American para-universities, according to these sources, tended to offer technical

Sovereignty in Europe: From Historical Legacies to the EU External Role (Ravenna, Italy: Longo, 2013); Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, ed., *The First World War and the Nationality Question in Europe: Global Impact and Local Dynamics* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2021). On the contribution of Woodrow Wilson to the self-determination question, see Derek Heater, *National Self-Determination: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

²Examples of this political mobilization are the limited autonomy achieved in the Mancomunitat de Catalunya (1913), the statute of autonomy for Ireland (1914–1915), and the proclamation of independence by the Raad van Vlaanderen, or Council of Flanders (1917). See Albert Balcells, Enric Pujol, and Jordi Sabater, *La Mancomunitat de Catalunya i l'autonomia* (Barcelona: Proa / IEC, 2006); Alain Dénél, *Le Mouvement Breton, 1919–1945* (Paris: François Maspero, 1976); Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880–1980* (New York: Oxford University Press and University of Wales Press, 1981); Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, “Catalonia and the ‘War of Nations’: Catalan Nationalism and the First World War,” *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 3 (Aug. 2018), 379–98; and for Europe in general, Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³Para-university seminars, along with laboratories and institutes, have been considered as evidence of the transformation of the university system in German-speaking countries in the 1830s. See Walter Rüegg, “Chapter 1: Themes,” in *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 3, *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Walter Rüegg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–32. See also Wouter van Rossum, *The Organization and Financing of (Para)-University Research in Western Europe: A Comparative View* (The Hague: Netherlands Government Document, 1979).

⁴In the 1990s, there were twenty-two para-university institutes in the Netherlands, often located on university campuses, and administered by either the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research or the Royal Dutch Academy of Science. See S. W. F. Omta, *Critical Success Factors in Biomedical Research and Pharmaceutical Innovation* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1995).

⁵Isa Vincenzi-Gang, “Parauniversity Education: Its Role in Higher Education in Costa Rica” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1992), 3. For para-university research in Western Europe, see van Rossum, *The Organization and Financing of (Para)-University Research in Western Europe*.

and professional programs and courses that would transfer to universities.⁶ Other scholars have examined how the public University of Guadalajara created para-university companies with their own legal personalities in Mexico, highlighting the importance of these administratively independent centers as alternatives for financing and generating additional resources to supplement those coming from public subsidies.⁷

Despite their meritorious historical contribution, all these studies focus on institutions linked to parent universities, omitting significant developments in the expansion of para-university institutions of an ethno-territorial nature in stateless nations such as Catalonia and the Basque Country.⁸

In the stateless nations of Europe, there arose ethno-territorial para-university institutions that united science and culture with a nationalitarian mission, thereby promoting intense circulation of cultural practices, models, and ideological stimuli among the small stateless nations and among Europe's ethnic peripheries.⁹ Para-university institutions such as the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (established in 1907) in Spain introduced a new way of articulating autonomist demands, promoting sociopolitical mobilization under the invocation of the defense of the indigenous language and culture in stateless nations.¹⁰ Their success came to depend on a variety of factors: the capacity, on the one hand, to promote cultural and scientific rearmament, and, on the other, to lead demands for self-government.¹¹ In the Basque Country, the provincial councils of Álava, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Navarre, together with a group of Bascologists and intellectuals, founded the Basque Studies Society (BSS, Eusko

⁶In "Parauniversity Education," viii, Vincenzi-Gang holds that a good number of para-universities, "loosely modeled on the American community college," were established in Costa Rica in the 1970s "in response to community demand for increased access to higher education."

⁷Elia Marúm, Vicente X. Molina, Alejandro Aguilar, "Las empresas parauniversitarias de la Universidad de Guadalajara. Alternativa de financiamiento y de desarrollo institucional," *Gestión y estrategia*, nos. 11-12 (Dec. 1997), 138-50.

⁸A *stateless nation* refers to a cultural, linguistic, or ethnic group that shares a distinct national identity and aspires to have self-governance but does not have a recognized sovereign state. An example of a stateless nation is the Kurds, an ethnic group spread across several countries.

⁹Here I employ the term "nationalitarian" in the sense given by the Egyptian historian Anouar Abdel-Malek, who understands it as a "process of autonomous growth, a true and profound assumption of identity bearing no comparison with the early struggles to achieve sovereignty or sort out petty grievances," a process that has much to do with self-affirmation rather than the exclusion of others or with imperialist aspirations. See Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypte, société militaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), 9.

¹⁰For the early history of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, see Albert Balcells, Enric Pujol, and Santiago Izquierdo, *Historia de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans. Volum I. 1907-1942* (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2002); and Carles Miralles, "El Institut d'Estudis Catalans," *Arbor* 163, no. 641 (1999), 47-59.

¹¹The Irmandades da Fala in Galicia, Spain, is another para-university institution that had success with mobilization. See Uxío-Breogán Diéguez, *As Irmandades da Fala (1916-1931)* (Compostela, Spain: Edicións Laiovento, 2016); R. Villares, X. M. Núñez Seixas, and R. Máiz Suárez, eds., *As Irmandades da Fala no seu tempo: perspectivas cruzadas* (Santiago de Compostela, Spain: Consello da Cultura Galega, 2021). For a work on the parallels between these sociopolitical mobilization movements in Galicia and Ireland, see Josep Leerssen, "Cultural Mobility and Political Mobilization: Transnational Dynamics, National Action," in Núñez Seixas, *First World War and the Nationality Question in Europe*, 38-43. A counterpoint to the Irmandades da Fala (an institution inspired by nationalism) was the Instituto de Estudios Gallegos, a regionalist cultural institution established in 1918, whose objective was to promote science and regional studies rather than demand political autonomy.

Ikaskuntza in Basque or Sociedad de Estudios Vascos in Spanish) in 1918, at once a scientific-cultural entity and a supra-party, nondenominational and open to Basque society. With its founding came a driving interest in self-government and demand for autonomy in the fields of education, science, culture, and politics. The BSS became, in this sense, not only an entity for cultural and scientific promotion, but also a platform demanding political autonomy.¹²

When we speak of “para-university institutions,” whether linked to stateless nations or nation-states, it is useful to explore parallels between the rise of these institutions and the development of different nationalisms in contemporary Spain.¹³ The period between the end of the reign of Isabel II (1868) and the Civil War (1936-1939) is remembered for the rise of, and confrontation between, Spanish nationalism and peripheral nationalism (Catalan, Galician, and Basque). Between 1868 and 1898, as traditional agrarian societies became mass societies, Spanish nationalism gained increasing strength under the impetus of the state. Influenced by European Romanticism and liberalism, it drew upon literature, historiography, art, and culture to recreate the essence of Spanish national mythology. However, factors such as the state’s financial weakness, regional economic imbalances, and the loss of international leadership after the independence of the Spanish colonies in the Americas and Southeast Asia undermined the nationalization process.¹⁴ In this context, alternative national identities to the Spanish one emerged. With the loss of Cuba and the Philippines came the crisis of 1898, and with it, a radical change. The crisis catalyzed a Spanish nationalism that revived the supposedly eternal essences of Castilian identity and was opposed, with unusual force, by the Catalan and later the Basque nationalist movements. Castile and Castilian identity became the essence and source of patriotic pride for the former, and imposition and oppression for the latter. Spain, which lost its imperial status, became a nation questioned from within. Overall, the issue of nationalism dominated

¹²The literature on the early history of Eusko Ikaskuntza, or the Basque Studies Society, is abundant and mature. The main sources consulted for this article are Juan I. Aguirre Sorondo, “Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1918-2018,” in *Eusko Ikaskuntza 100 urte. Euskaldunon Mendea / El Siglo Vasco. 100 Años de Eusko Ikaskuntza* (Donostia, Spain: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2018), 9–123, 328–71; Itziar Alkorta, “La universidad vasca,” in *Eusko Ikaskuntza 100 urte*, 373–87; Idoia Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca* (San Sebastián, Spain: Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, 1983); Idoia Estornés, “Euskadi y la universidad: El caso de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos (1918-1931),” in *Actas del III Congreso de la Sociedad Española de Historia de las Ciencias: San Sebastián, 1 al 6 de octubre de 1984*, ed. Javier Echeverría and Marisol de Mora (San Sebastián, Spain: Editorial Guipuzcoana, 1986), 2: 87–92; Idoia Estornés, “Génesis del Estatuto General de Estado Vasco de Eusko-Ikaskuntza,” *Cuadernos de Sección. Derecho* (Eusko Ikaskuntza), 4 (1989), 87–104; Idoia Estornés, *La construcción de una nacionalidad vasca. El autonomismo de Eusko-Ikaskuntza (1918-1931)* (San Sebastián: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1990); Gregorio Monreal, “El Primer Estatuto Vasco o Vasco-Navarro. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1931,” in *Eusko Ikaskuntza 100 urte*, 387–99; Manuel Montero, *La forja de una nación: estudios sobre el nacionalismo y el País Vasco durante la II República, la transición y la democracia* (Granada, Spain: Universidad de Granada, 2011), 1–22; and José Luis de Orella, “La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos y la Universidad Vasca (1917-1936),” *Azpilcueta: Cuadernos de Derecho* 4 (1989), 9–86.

¹³For an overview of nationalist historiographies, see Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón, “Evolución y rasgos de las historiografías de los nacionalismos en España,” *Bulletin d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Espagne* 52 (2017), 97–113.

¹⁴Borja de Riquer, “La débil nacionalización española del siglo XIX,” *Historia Social* 20 (Autumn 1994), 97–114.

the landscape and conditioned the demands imposed by the environment and culture upon ethno-territorial para-university institutions in the twentieth century.¹⁵

According to conventional wisdom, the term *para-university*, in contrast to *formal university*, implies any teaching and/or research program that is developed alongside its parent university's mission but outside its university's established presuppositions. Its meaning is not accidental.¹⁶ Actually, the prefix *para-* comes from the ancient Greek *παρά*-, which, in one of its many senses, means "next to" or "side by side." Historically, particularly in Europe, the institutionalization process of higher education over centuries gradually established the absolute authority of the university over territory and curricula, conditioning the education and culture of the communities living in its district.¹⁷ This helped the university—and the state, when the former was public—to arrogate to itself the attribute of supreme authority with the exclusive power to configure, and act in, the disciplines and academic activities developed in its district in any field of scientific and humanistic knowledge. However, in another sense, the prefix *para-* also means "similar to" and even "moving or going beyond," and this is precisely the sense that I propose for defining the BSS's para-university practice from 1918 until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Inasmuch as the Basque Country did not have its own public university and university district until well into the twentieth century, the BSS had to fill that void, sometimes operating on the sidelines or against the established order. As shown in this article, the BSS's para-university essence and praxis reveal a non-university entity in a stateless nation not only interacting independently in the academic world but also channeling demands for political autonomy. It therefore calls for a rethinking of the notion of the para-university in general, and a full revision of para-university practice in particular.

Analysis of ethno-territorial para-university institutionalization also tends to undermine another basic tenet of conventional historiography: that historical studies on para-universities should limit their focus to universities and their interactions.¹⁸ Today scholars tend to analyze the shortcomings of such interactions. The creation throughout Latin America of centers and structures belonging to public universities

¹⁵José Álvarez Junco et al., *Las historias de España. Visiones del pasado y construcción de identidad* (Madrid-Barcelona: Marcial Pons-Crítica, 2013); José Álvarez Junco, *Mater dolorosa. La idea de España en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Taurus, 2001).

¹⁶Vincenzi-Gang, "Parauniversity Education"; Marúm, Molina, and Aguilar, "Las empresas parauniversitarias de la Universidad de Guadalajara."

¹⁷Normally all public universities in Europe were referenced by their geographic district. On European higher education's institutionalization, see, among others, Robert D. Anderson, *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Claudia A. Zonta, "The History of European Universities: Overview and Background," in *The Heritage of European Universities*, ed. Nuria Sanz and Sjur Bergan (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe Publishing, 2006), 27–40; Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 2, *Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jeroen Huisman and Frans van Vught, "Diversity in European Higher Education: Historical Trends and Current Policies," in *Mapping the Higher Education Landscape: Higher Education Dynamics*, ed. Frans van Vught (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2009), 17–38.

¹⁸See van Rossum, *The Organization and Financing of (Para)-University Research in Western Europe*; Vincenzi-Gang "Parauniversity Education," and Marúm, Molina, and Aguilar, "Las empresas parauniversitarias de la Universidad de Guadalajara."

but with their own legal character has been the object of criticism, because they often not only lack the intellectual autonomy of their parent universities but also waste resources and duplicate functions, and they are also subjected to processes of commercialization.¹⁹ This tenet, however, is not valid for our case, since there was no parent university behind the creation of the BSS. The BSS's members and scholars forged a set of relationships, configured not so much in terms of academic interest, but in terms of shared interests in advancing knowledge and searching for solutions to problems generated by the lack of autonomy and self-government in the Basque Country. The members focused on elevating Basque studies and internationalizing native culture, while the scholars focused on advancing two goals according to the well-known principle of *in necessariis unitas*—the creation of a Basque university of the district's own and a statute recognizing Basque autonomy. The BSS was a creation of the moment. It was ambitious in sights and goals, its activities were extremely varied, and its achievements were partial and at times unsuccessful. However, it was an entity that would leave significant legacies, not only for Basque culture and politics but also for the conceptualization and characterization of para-university institutions in the twentieth century.

My central argument is that the BSS case study illustrates an important but unexplored aspect of para-university institutions: their ability to empower and give voice to a stateless nation in a climate of civil discourse. The academic legitimization of Basque studies, achieved on the basis of scientific credibility, created in the Basque Country—and consequently, in the BSS—a climate that was favorable to civil discourse and the search for consensus.²⁰ This scientific credibility of Basque studies provided the BSS a kind of academic cover and legitimacy that transcended politics. Thus, the BSS could build consensus, engage in civil discourse, and be permitted to flourish in ways that would have been problematic or unfeasible if the society had been created as a purely political organization. As a result, the para-university could safely support and champion autonomist and political claims on the basis of this scientific (rather than ideological) credibility.

This paper first describes the social legitimization of Basque studies as an academic discipline and outlines the most important consequences of this legitimization for the creation of the BSS and for the emergence of a climate that favored the development of civil discourse and the search for consensus. Next, it pays attention to two key claims involving processes that would oppose the established university order and state policies in Spain: on the one hand, the demand for educational autonomy for the

¹⁹On the negative consequences of the rise of para-university systems for the development of social sciences in Latin America, see Alfredo Andrade, "Trayectoria de las ciencias sociales en América Latina," *Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas y sociales* 36, no. 139–42 (1990), 89–105. Vincenzi-Gang concludes that Costa Rica's para-university system did not materialize successfully because para-universities neither coordinated messaging with the universities nor offered programs that met community demand. See Vincenzi-Gang, "Parauniversity Education," viii.

²⁰For the legitimization of Basque studies as a subject of academic inquiry during the decade preceding the BSS's founding, 1907–1917, see Aitor Anduaga, "Les études basques comme sujet d'enquête. Les traditions locale et externe et la production de connaissances," *Historiographia Linguistica* 49, no 1 (Dec. 2023), 39–70; Aitor Anduaga, "Forging a 'Civil Discourse': Basque Studies, Ideology, and Science in the Standardisation of the Basque Language, 1900–1936," *Language Problems and Language Planning*, Oct. 3, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.22022.and>.

Basque-Navarrese provinces, manifested in the request for a Basque public university of the district's own; and, on the other, the demand for political autonomy, expressed in the elaboration of the General Statute of the Basque State. Finally, it examines in detail the nature of the academic activities and the para-university practice promoted by the BSS in its dual capacity as a cultural entity and a political forum.

Civil Discourse and Science: Basque Studies as a Subject of Inquiry

During the First World War and the immediate aftermath, Europe experienced a series of intense ethno-nationalist movements in favor of autonomy, self-government, and independence. In this context, the history of a para-university institution organized around Basque studies is a transnational story, insofar as it was born from four distinct but (in some regards) complementary factors, which fall into two general tendencies: on the one hand, it responded to exogenous stimuli (both foreign and international) concerning the transfer and adaptation of cultural models; and on the other, it was the concrete result of endogenous factors that favored this process of institutionalization. Interestingly, the BSS's founding was in itself a process closely linked to the constitution of Basque studies as an academic discipline. In this process, science and civil discourse as a generator of consensus played a fundamental role.

The new reconfiguration of the European map on the principle of nationalities was determined first by the First World War and the resulting collapse of the old multi-ethnic empires, and then by the appearance of the principle of national self-determination in international politics. On the one hand, with the end of the Great War, the old Austro-Hungarian empire collapsed, giving rise to several national states, while in Ireland nationalist claims gained strength after the Easter Rebellion of 1916. On the other hand, with the Bolshevik revolution first and, above all, US president Woodrow Wilson's proposals in 1917 advocating for the right of minority nations to form a state, the principle of self-determination spread throughout Europe.²¹ Consequently, a series of ethno-nationalist movements gained momentum in western Europe, not only as an immediate effect of the Great War, but also as a chain-reaction process.²²

A second factor that prompted the founding of the BSS came from the larger political demands for autonomy based upon decentralization and reform of the Spanish state that emerged in Catalonia in the 1910s. Under the leadership of Francesc Cambó, this policy purported to reform and transform Spain through the driving force of peripheral nationalisms. Thus, on a trip to the Basque Country in 1917, Cambó urged the Basque Provincial Councils to join the autonomy movement, shortly after which the joint Basque-Catalan petition for political-cultural autonomy was presented to the national courts.²³ This policy had its echo in Madrid. The government of the Count

²¹Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, "Wilson's Unexpected Friends: On the Transnational Impact of the First World War on Western European Nationalist Movements," in Núñez Seixas, *First World War and the Nationality Question in Europe*, 37–60.

²²On direct transnationalism or chain-reaction nationalisms (or the process whereby a national movement in one place provokes a similar movement in another place), see Leerssen, "Cultural Mobility and Political Mobilization."

²³Borja de Riquer, "El proyecto de una España grande y regional de Francesc Cambó," in Villares, Núñez Seixas, and Máiz Suárez, *As Irmandades da Fala no seu tempo*, 249–72.

of Romanones was aware of the critical importance of the autonomy issue for Spain. At the end of 1918, it submitted to Congress a bill regarding the autonomous regime, drawn up by an extra-parliamentary commission. A few days later, a study commission was created for Catalonia and the four Basque provinces. Although these projects did not come to fruition, the regenerationist impulse of peripheral nationalism became a prevalent public issue.²⁴

In the Basque Country, the desire to preserve and cultivate the Basque language and culture gave weight to the belief that the autochthonous provincial councils (led by that of Bizkaia) could emulate institutional initiatives of Catalan autonomism that converged with the political program of Basque nationalism. A very influential event in this regard was the talk delivered by Josep Puig i Cadafalch, second president of the Mancomunitat de Catalunya (Commonwealth of Catalonia) in 1917, during his visit to Bilbao in the company of Cambó.²⁵ According to Puig, there are three axes on which the long historical process of Catalan national reconstruction was articulated: (1) language, since “the linguistic step is the great weight that must be hurried by all the peoples who wish to reconstitute their internal life”; (2) institutionalization, exemplified by the Institut d’Estudis Catalans—founded in 1907 as “an institution of high culture that would investigate science, order scientific production,” and nationalize foreign scientific centers “to assimilate them into Catalonia”; and (3) teaching in the native language.²⁶ Puig concluded his talk by exhorting the attendees (among others, two of the promoters of the future BSS, Luis de Eleizalde and the president of the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, Ramón de la Sota) to promote among the Basques “the same efforts that began and developed” the action in Catalonia.²⁷

It would be wrong to suggest that this influence of the Catalanist response, let alone the solidarity with ethno-nationalist movements in western Europe, was the result of a movement unconnected with or independent of the burgeoning Spanish nationalism in the rest of the state. Nationalism in its historiographic form was a scholarly enterprise in which the aim was the search for the traits that defined the exceptionality and the spirit proper to each nation or each culture, always on the basis (if possible) of a self-proclaimed scientific methodology; it was a platform of convenience, on which the Spanish nationalist sought to justify the establishment of the nation-state as the bastion of regional specificities and singularities, while the peripheral nationalist sought to highlight the differential facts with respect to Castile. Spanish nationalism had a major influence. In fact, the Centro de Estudios Históricos, founded in 1910 under state sponsorship and within the Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios, was born as a distinctly Spanish research platform, in which scholars such as Ramón

²⁴ Estornés, *La construcción de una nacionalidad vasca*, 92–113, 134–43.

²⁵ As regards Cambó and Puig’s visit to Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, see Estornés, *La construcción de una nacionalidad vasca*, 94–6.

²⁶ The talk was reproduced in the daily *Euzkadi*, January 28, 1917, 8. The importance of Puig’s talk as an influential event in the institutionalization of Basque language and culture has been discussed by Andrés Urrutia, “Sota, Puig i Cadafalch y la Institucionalización del euskera (1917),” *Hermes* 55 (May 2017), 52–61.

²⁷ *Euzkadi*, January 28, 1917, 8. Organized by the nationalist association Juventud Vasca, “the ideas that would later bear fruit in the Basque Country in the establishment” of the BSS (1918) and the Academy of the Basque Language-Euskaltzaindia (1919) were present in the talk. See Urrutia, “Sota, Puig i Cadafalch y la Institucionalización del euskera (1917),” 57.

Menéndez Pidal, Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, and Américo Castro conducted studies on the “Spanish”—rather than Spain’s—history and culture.²⁸ Although it created sections of Semitic studies and institutions of Muslim Spain, the Centro disregarded the other nationalist cultures—Catalan, Basque, and Galician.²⁹

A third factor behind the founding of the BSS was the piecemeal expansion of a series of Basque cultural associations on both sides of the Pyrenees within the Basque Country—a movement currently known as *Pizkunde* (or Revival).³⁰ Many of the early Bascophiles who had organized the Floral Games in the Basque language since 1851 under the leadership of Antonie d’Abbadie took up the preservation of the Basque language as a mission and, later, associations such as *Eskualzaleen Biltzarra* and the weekly *Eskualduna* advocated the *defence à outrance* of the Basque language and traditions.³¹ Many Bascologues from peninsular Vasconia who participated in associations such as the Asociación Euskara de Navarra, the Sociedad Euskalerrria from Bilbao, the Euskal-Esnalea from San Sebastián, and the journal *Euskalerrriaren-Alde* stressed the utility of *fueros* for the preservation of Basque identity.³² (The *fueros* were a body of customary laws that regulated community life in each of the Basque territories, as well as the relations of these territories with the king of Castile.) All of this had important implications for the Basque Country as well as for Basque studies. First, it increased awareness of the cultural and identity revival in the Basque provinces. But it was equally important in an organizational sense. These initiatives gave Bascophiles and Bascologists unparalleled experience in the areas of cultural organization and cooperation. When the BSS’s founders organized the first congresses on Basque studies, they often brought to those events the testimonies and experiences of those predecessors and their diverse perspectives on the political and cultural future of the country and its language.

The fourth, the most intrinsic, and perhaps the most immediate impulse for the founding and development of the BSS was the legitimation (first academic and then social) of Basque studies during the decade preceding its creation. Its legitimation as a subject of academic inquiry had a direct impact on the institutionalization of Basque

²⁸José María López Sánchez, *Heterodoxos españoles: el Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1910-1936* (Madrid: Marcial Pons-CSIC, 2006).

²⁹Pérez Garzón, “Evolución y rasgos de las historiografías de los nacionalismos en España,” 100–101.

³⁰*Pizkunde* refers to a social movement that organized festivals and cultural events in Basque towns to promote the literary genre in Basque and the dissemination of the works of Basque authors. Basque political nationalism autonomously emerged from the cultural or literary *Pizkunde*. Historians have traditionally linked this movement to the reaction caused by the abolition of Basque *fueros*, or customary laws, in 1876. However, its concept and chronology have recently been questioned by Xabier Zabaltza, in “*Pizkunde*: los «renacimientos» de la lengua vasca,” *Scripta: Revista Internacional de Literatura i Cultura Medieval i Moderna* 11 (2018), 86–107. Zabaltza distinguishes between two different revivals: a cultural revival in Continental Vasconia (starting in 1851) and a political revival in Peninsular Vasconia, which in turn includes a fuerist *pizkunde* (starting in 1876) and a nationalist *pizkunde* (starting in 1896).

³¹Paulí Dávila and Ana Eizaguirre, “Las Fiestas Euskaras en el País Vasco (1879-1936),” in *Lengua, escuela y cultura. El proceso de alfabetización en Euskal Herria (siglos XIX y XX)*, ed. Paulí Dávila (Bilbao, Spain: Universidad del País Vasco, 1995), 257–311. On the essentialist conception of Basque culture held by the members of *Eskualzaleen Biltzarra*, see Jean Goyhenetche, “Les origines sociales et historiques de l’association *Eskualzaleen Biltzarra* (1893-1913),” *Bulletin du Musée Basque* 135 (1993), 1–68.

³²Javier Díaz Noci, *Historia del periodismo vasco (1600-2010)* (San Sebastián: Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, 2012), 143–46.

studies: it created a climate that was propitious to the development of civil discourse among political elites, and at the same time favorable to the search for consensus regarding the establishment of a higher cultural entity that would promote a Basque university and a cross-border cultural milieu.³³

The introduction of standards of scientific quality was a key step in the process of constituting Basque studies as an academic discipline. These standards were introduced by the *Revista Internacional de Estudios Vascos* (RIEV), founded in 1907 by Julio de Urquijo, the journal's first director and owner.³⁴ RIEV welded the aspirations of Bascology to the *modus operandi* in science, by applying rigor and the inductive method to Basque studies. The objective was to introduce the rigor and scientific criteria of the most authoritative foreign Bascolological tradition to these studies. By doing so, RIEV managed to integrate two traditions that were confluent in certain regards: one "foreign," linked to European Bascology, and the other "local," related to Basque homeland.³⁵ While external tradition helped lend Basque linguistics scientific method, order, and rigor, local tradition ensured the methodical and systematic collection of linguistic, ethnographic, and folkloric materials. As Urquijo stated in the opening speech of the first congress of Basque studies in 1918:

Given the lack of a treatise on Basque linguistic methodology and our natural incompetence in a discipline that we only cultivate as amateurs, we thought that the only way of giving unity to the Bascolological movement and making the methods that had given such productive results in other countries similarly fruitful in our country, would be to found a publication in which the most prestigious Bascolologists from Euskalerrria [the Basque Country] collaborated, in addition to those foreign Bascolologists who enjoyed recognised authority in other branches of linguistics.³⁶

With the stimulus of academic legitimation came a powerful impulse to produce linguistic research. From 1907 until the founding of the BSS in 1918, RIEV actively engaged in the production and circulation of scientific knowledge. Production focused on studies on linguistics, philology, and, to a lesser extent, history—the three core concerns of the journal.³⁷ Science and rigor, suffused with the inductive method,

³³ Anduaga, "Les études basques comme sujet d'enquête."

³⁴ For the history of RIEV during its early period (1907-1936), see Gregorio Monreal, "Una historia de la Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos / Nazioarteko Eusko Ikaskuntzen Aldizkaria / Revue Internationale des Etudes Basques [RIEV] (1907-2000)," *Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos* 46, no. 1 (2001), 11-46; 18-23.

³⁵ These two traditions were first identified by Julio de Urquijo, "Estado actual de los estudios relativos a la lengua vasca," in *Primer Congreso de Estudios Vascos* (Bilbao, Spain: Bilbaina de Artes Gráficas Juan J. Rochelt, 1919), 403-27; 418-19, and later highlighted by other scholars, including Luis Michelena, "Don Julio de Urquijo y los Estudios Vascos," in *Homenaje a la Memoria de D. Julio de Urquijo e Ibarra al cumplirse el centenario de su nacimiento, celebrado en Bilbao el día 12 de Mayo de 1972* (Bilbao, Spain: Publicaciones de la Junta de Cultura de Vizcaya, 1973), 9-21. For further details, see Anduaga, "Les études basques comme sujet d'enquête," 42-57.

³⁶ Urquijo, "Estado actual de los estudios relativos a la lengua vasca," 419.

³⁷ For an extensive review of RIEV contributions to Basque linguistics and philology, see Ricardo Cierbide, "Consideraciones a los trabajos de lingüística en la RIEV (1907-2007)," *El esfuerzo de tres épocas*.

resounded through the pages of the journal and informed the latest advances in Basque linguistics. At a time when there were no Basque language chairs in any European university, philological-linguistic journals with a wide circulation, such as the accredited *Literarisches Zentralblatt für Deutschland* (specializing in reviews), began to publish news and reviews about *RIEV*.³⁸ This attention was, in large part, because *RIEV* published articles by the greatest authorities in international Bascology, including French linguists and historians, as well as Germanic (German, Swiss, and Dutch) and Russian philologists—a total of sixteen foreign collaborators from 1907 to 1918.³⁹ *RIEV*'s editors selected research topics and articles based on their quality and rigor. It could therefore be claimed that *RIEV* introduced a “system of quality control” to Basque studies production—small in size, certainly, in relation to the immensity of linguistics, but of capital importance for its academic legitimation.⁴⁰

Other contemporary attractive currents joined this academic legitimation, such as the shared feeling that the Institut d'Estudis Catalans's experience could be a model for Basque cultural revival. All of this contributed to creating a climate that was favorable to a unitary demand for Basque cultural and educational products, without their premeditatedly being appropriated for ideological purposes. Groups linked to Basque nationalism (both moderate and radical) and Basque foralist conservatism (or conservatives who were defenders of the Fueros, such as Carlists, fundamentalists, traditionalists) might well have appropriated certain causes, such as the defense of the Basque language and historical self-government.⁴¹ From 1918 to the Civil War (except in the years of Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship), civil discourse prevailed in the arena of Basque studies, creating an environment in which issues such as the demand for a Basque university and political autonomy became a general goal of the elite. The tool for this end was the BSS—a non-partisan, though not apolitical, cultural association open to all Basques and multilingual (with Basque, Spanish, and French as official languages), nondenominational but respectful of the religion of most members (Catholic), self-managed though financially supported by the Basque provincial councils (including the Navarre one), and reformist but not radical in social demands.⁴²

When it was established at the end of 1918, the BSS appeared before Basque society with a mission to play three types of functions: as a cross-border platform to elevate

Centenario de la RIEV 1907-2007, ed. Javier Retegui et al. (Donostia, Spain: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2007), 29–47; 33–45. See also Monreal, “Una historia de la Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos,” 18–23.

³⁸See, e.g., “Revue Internationale des Études Basques,” *Literarisches Zentralblatt für Deutschland* 58 (1907), 651.

³⁹The German linguist Bernhard Schädel acknowledged that the importance of its published works and the authority of its collaborators rendered *RIEV* “the indispensable assistant for anyone who wishes to study the Basque domain.” See Schädel, *Bulletin de dialectologie romane* (Brussels: Société internationale de dialectologie romane, 1914), 4–6, 20. The quote is on p. 20.

⁴⁰Anduaga, “Les études basques comme sujet d'enquête,” 57–61.

⁴¹Carlists were the supporters of Don Carlos, brother of Fernando VII (died 1833), as having rightful title to the Spanish throne.

⁴²On the apolitical, non-confessional, and reformist nature of the BSS, see Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 20. See also Aguirre Sorondo, “Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1918-2018,” 335–36.

Bascology and cultivate the relationship between foreign and local scholars, as a tool to launch an official Basque university in the future, and as an instrument for the claim of self-government in the four Basque historical territories. As shown below, unlike universities, this para-university institution promoted extra-jurisdictional activities, such as making demands for political and educational autonomy, that went beyond the *de jure* university jurisdiction and expanded its *de facto* power.

Educational Autonomy: In favor of a Basque University

The founding period of the BSS (circa 1918-1919) coincided with the rise of the autonomist movement in Spain after the Great War and the approval of the university autonomy law by Minister César Silió. During this period, many similarities appeared in the experiences of nationalitarian approaches in Spain.⁴³ Important nationalitarian initiatives, such as the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, the Irmandades da Fala in Galicia, and the journal *El Ebro*, radiated influence from the periphery and made a staunch defense of the native language and culture and their teaching. Those from Catalonia and Galicia championed the cause of language—that is, the idea that autochthonous languages were not only languages for literature, philology, and the recovery of historical memory, but also languages of teaching and research in science and other knowledges—something that the Catalan and Galician universities did not do.⁴⁴ For its part, the journal *El Ebro* urged (unsuccessfully) the Aragonese councils to establish an Institute of Aragonese Studies to complement the University of Zaragoza. However, BSS's aspirations differed from those of its counterparts in certain respects. The main reason for these differences rested on an unequivocal historical fact: in all the peninsular regions there were major universities, except in Vasconia.⁴⁵ For centuries, while Navarrese had to attend mainly French universities, those from the so-called *provincias vascongadas* went to Castilian universities (Salamanca, Valladolid, and later, Alcalá). With the General Studies Plan of 1845, dubbed the "Pidal Plan," came the official division: while Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Álava were assigned to the new university district of Valladolid, Navarre became dependent on that of Zaragoza. With the Law of Claudio Moyano of 1857 came the confirmation of this system, uniform and centralized. As scholar Itziar Alkorta states, "Vasconia constituted the most important expatriate community of university students."⁴⁶ All of this had an unequivocal effect: in the BSS,

⁴³Here I employ the term "nationalitarian" in the sense given by the Egyptian historian Anouar Abdel-Malek, who understands it as a "process of autonomous growth, a true and profound assumption of identity bearing no comparison with the early struggles to achieve sovereignty or sort out petty grievances," a process that has much to do with self-affirmation rather than the exclusion of others or with imperialist aspirations. See Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypte, société militaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), 9.

⁴⁴Balcells, Pujol, and Izquierdo, *Historia de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans. Volum I*; Miralles, "El Institut d'Estudis Catalans"; Diéguez, *As Irmandades da Fala*; and Villares, Núñez Seixas, and Máiz Suárez, *As Irmandades da Fala no seu tempo*.

⁴⁵The only exception was two private universities in Oñati and Iratxe, which with difficulty survived until the nineteenth century, with incomplete curricula and a limited number of students. On the historical antecedents of the Basque university, see José Estornés, *Los vascos y la universidad. Vol. II* (San Sebastián, Spain: Editorial Auñamendi, 1970), 171–212; Orella, "La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos y la Universidad Vasca (1917-1936)," 11–16; Alkorta, "La universidad vasca," 373–76.

⁴⁶Alkorta, "La universidad vasca," 374.

political-educational concerns were more pronounced than in its counterparts, which were more focused on political-linguistic issues.

BSS's founding members indeed developed their own para-university model. Within this institution, the request to the Spanish government for a Basque university came from scholars and university professors, rather than from public institutions (as had been the case until then).⁴⁷ Perhaps the most notable—certainly, the most quotable—expression of this interest among Basque scholars came with the epochal lecture of 1918 by Ángel Apraiz on “Basque University.”⁴⁸ Apraiz's speech and the strong response it evoked are today considered to be the BSS's founding manifesto. A professor of literature and art history at the University of Salamanca, Apraiz knew firsthand some of the most prestigious universities in Europe and the United States thanks to scholarship granted by the Spanish Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios. Apraiz advocated educational autonomy, suggesting several benefits in obtaining university competencies such as decision making and a district of its own for the Basque Country. A Basque university would bring with it the revival of native cultural values; it would also benefit from the Bascology that was then being built on scientific foundations; and finally, it would entail considerable economic savings.⁴⁹ The personality of a people is based on its own culture, and a people with its own culture must have its own university.

What is interesting about this academic discourse and others around 1918, flowing from the autonomist debate and literary scholarship, was their inherent appeal to a new Basque educational autonomism, one which replaced the traditional university demands by politicians and public institutions with a para-university platform from which professors, Bascologists, and intellectuals elucidated the benefits of the Basque Country having its own university (See [Figure 1](#)).⁵⁰ In practical terms, this required its promoters to go beyond the constraints of other similar institutions focused on ethnic studies and to be able to reach a consensus on a nationalitarian project for a fragmented country. This is precisely what happened at the 1918 congress, in which the nascent BSS declared the “need to create a Basque university for social, scientific and economic reasons.”⁵¹

University competency and educational autonomy reflected shared objectives, but competing perspectives also emerged in some of the implementation of these objectives. BSS's founders reached consensus on the issues regarding the parameters of the

⁴⁷Orella, “La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos y la Universidad Vasca (1917-1936),” 16–42; Alkorta, “La universidad vasca,” 376–77.

⁴⁸Ángel Apraiz, *Universidad Vasca (Conferencia)* (Bilbao, Spain: Bilbaína de Artes Gráficas, 1919).

⁴⁹According to Apraiz's estimates, the Basque Country exported more than a thousand students a year to universities in Madrid, Zaragoza, Valladolid, and Salamanca, which meant spending one million pesetas per academic year. Apraiz, *Universidad Vasca (Conferencia)*, 16.

⁵⁰For example, the anthropologist and archaeologist Enrique de Eguren made a staunch defense of a Basque university with an autonomous regime, in *Régimen autónomo económico-administrativo de la Universidad Vasca* (San Sebastián, Spain: Editorial y Prensa S.A., 1921). Similarly, Agustín Murua, a chemist and professor at the University of Barcelona, pointed out the importance of the Basque university to enhancing the personality and industry of the Basque people. According to Murua, the Spanish government behaved like “that famous dog in the manger which neither ate cabbages nor let others eat them, since it neither established universities in the richest and most needed regions nor did it grant the necessary autonomy so that [the latter can] establish them.” See Murua, “La Universidad Vasca ... como organismo necesario para nuestra



Figure 1. Celebration of the International Congress on Basque Studies by the Basque Studies Society in Oñati, Gipuzkoa, February 11, 2017. Photo courtesy of the Kutxa Foundation Fototeka.

university district and where education centers would be located: there would be a single university with faculties distributed throughout the four provincial districts of Vasconia—in other words, the BSS took up the proposal for a Basque-Navarrese university that had been requested by the Provincial Council of Navarre in 1866.⁵² Other issues, such as whether the university would be secular or confessional in nature, were eluded because they entailed the risk of ideological division. Concerning this point, professor Gregorio Monreal states that this debate was the “only one of importance that took place in the twentieth century” in the Basque Country.⁵³ And while such debate was enriching, collective commitment and constructive consensus on the challenges were confused by a cross-fire of differing university models.

Without doubt, the thorniest and longest-running debate had to do with the university model on which the BSS would ultimately settle, which featured, broadly speaking, three competing visions within the BSS. First, there was the preference for a free, Catholic education system for the Basque university (free in terms of academic

personalidad regional y para el sólido fundamento de nuestra industria,” *Idearium* (Bilbao, Spain) 2 (1917), 5–17, 63–66. The quote is on p. 13.

⁵¹“Conclusiones,” in *Primer Congreso de Estudios Vascos* (Bilbao, Spain: Bilbaína de Artes Gráficas, 1919), 940–47. The quote is on p. 947.

⁵²The Basque-Navarrese university plan of 1866 included the establishment of the Faculties of Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences, Philosophy and Letters. For further details, see Florencio Idoate, “Un intento frustrado de universidad vasco-navarra en 1866,” *Letras de Deusto* 1 (1971), 531–44.

⁵³Gregorio Monreal, “Pasado y presente de la institución universitaria,” in *La UPV/EHU a debate*, ed. Lontxohiartzabal (Donostia, Spain: Erein, 1998), 13–53. The quote is on p. 24.

freedom, such as the University of Leuven model) that would escape the contaminating, pernicious effects of bureaucratization and mediocrity common to the official universities. Supporters of this option proposed the Jesuit University of Deusto as *anima mater* of the future Basque university.⁵⁴ Second, some intellectuals advocated an autonomous (rather than free) model that would not be dictated by the central government. This option ended up triumphing at the Third Congress of Basque Studies in 1922.⁵⁵ And third, there was an alternative view offered by several influential professors (such as Apraiz and Telesforo de Aranzadi) who preferred an official state model (such as that of Catalonia) that could be initially implemented in existing Basque educational centers and later officially recognized by the Spanish government.⁵⁶ Ultimately, in the proposal sent to the government in 1924, the BSS opted for a Solomonic solution: a university “subject to current legislation” and devoted “to the attainment of its ideals” (namely, academic freedom).⁵⁷

Echoes of the BSS debates about competing university models during this early period can be found in reports published in Basque newspapers of all ideological ranges, from the nationalist daily *Euzkadi* (1913–1937) and the Catholic ideological organ *La Gaceta del Norte* (established in 1901) to the monarchist *El Pueblo Vasco* (established in 1910) and the voice of liberalism and socialism *El Liberal* (established in 1901). *El Liberal*, for example, reported that the leftist mayor of Bilbao, Justo Somonte, called for an assembly of the most influential people of the city to ask for a university for Bilbao that was “devoid of the Biscayan or Jesuit influences” of the BSS’s “utopian” project.⁵⁸ The concern of the republicans, socialists, and monarchists gathered in the assembly was the unitary conception of the Basque university, which they considered as nationalist.⁵⁹ The monarchist right wing strongly attacked the BSS project, raising its collective voice at the “pro-metropolitan culture” rally held in Bilbao in 1923. José Félix de Lequerica, leader of the Monarchist League of Biscay, stated that the BSS university only sought “to prepare a sour and violent intellectual bureaucracy formed by separatism,” and only committed to “the work of dividing Spain.”⁶⁰ Among the BSS’s

⁵⁴This position was defended by Basque nationalist sympathizers, such as Eduardo de Landeta and the Count of Vilallonga. See Eduardo de Landeta to Julián Elorza, September 24, 1923, folder 2, box 12, Basque Studies Society Historical Archive, Donostia-San Sebastián, Basque Country (hereafter BSSA).

⁵⁵The autonomous model included a project for the organization of a Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in the Basque university; for the draft proposal of this project, see “Universidad vasca: Proyecto de organización de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras,” folder 13, box 34, BSSA.

⁵⁶On the different university models advocated by BSS commission members, see “Relación de componentes del Comité de realización de la Universidad vasca,” n.d., folder 116, box 34, BSSA; “Carta de la Comisión ejecutiva en torno a las facultades de la Universidad vasca,” Barcelona, March 13, 1922, folder 126, box 34, BSSA. For the details of this debate, see Estornés, “Euskadi y la universidad,” 89–90; and Alkorta, “La universidad vasca,” 377–78.

⁵⁷The proposal was elaborated by the Count of Vilallonga, linked to the University of Deusto. *Memorias y Bases para la resolución del problema universitario en el País Vasco* (San Sebastián, Spain: Imprenta de la Diputación de Guipúzcoa, 1923), 5. See also “Bases para el Estatuto de la Universidad vasca por Enrique de Eguen,” folder 128, box 34, BSSA; “Bases para el Estatuto de la Universidad vasca por Juan Zaragüeta,” July 1923, folder 129, box 34, BSSA; and “Bases para el Estatuto de la Universidad vasca por Joaquín Fuentes,” Pamplona-Iruña, July, 1923, folder 159, box 34, BSSA.

⁵⁸Interview with Justo Somonte,” *El Liberal*, Nov. 21, 1923, 1.

⁵⁹Count of Vilallonga to Julián Elorza, Bilbao, Nov. 26, 1923, folder 101, box 34, BSSA.

⁶⁰Quoted in *El Pueblo Vasco*, Dec. 11, 1923, 3.

most vocal detractors was the philosopher and former professor and rector of the University of Salamanca, Miguel de Unamuno. In his speech at the Arriaga Theatre, he argued that the BSS project would become a “Basque separatist university” rather than a Spanish national university.⁶¹ One of the few republican members of the BSS, Dr. José Madinabeitia, proposed the atypical formulation of an “itinerant university,” but, as expected, it did not attract much attention.⁶² The writer Pío Baroja, for his part, defended the libertarian position of a free university against the Catholic views of the freedom of education favoring the Catholic hegemony.⁶³ The concurrence of alternative university visions was a sign of the pluri-ideological development of interwar Basque civil society, of which the BSS was but a mirror.⁶⁴

It was the Basque demand for an autonomous university, however, that spurred the reaction of the affected Castilian universities; subsequently, the hopes harbored by the BSS for a Basque university evaporated into thin air. The Silió university autonomy law of 1919 motivated BSS to make a request for a Basque university, which in turned prompted the Universities of Zaragoza and Valladolid to request that autonomy be applied only to existing universities. This opposition is exemplified in the statute of the University of Valladolid, which expressly prohibited the establishment of another university within its district. As the Basque senator José Horn confessed to Apraiz, “This fact is clearly against the Basque University project and against the possibility that Deusto might want something similar.”⁶⁵ That these conditions found acceptance from the government speaks to the dissuasive power of the old universities. This became evident when the conservative minister of public instruction, José Prado y Palacio, known for his hostility to the Basque language, informed several Basque senators that his decree on university autonomy would not “allow the creation of a University in any of the Basque provinces or Navarre”⁶⁶—and not by chance, the preliminary draft of this decree had been written, according to Professor Enrique de Eiguren, by the minister’s “right arm,” a professor of law at the University of Valladolid.⁶⁷ During the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923–1930), Basque demands and BSS’s activity itself were severely curtailed by the new regime. The new government suspended the Basque

⁶¹“Un emocionante discurso de Unamuno en el teatro Arriaga,” *El Liberal*, Jan. 2, 1924.

⁶²J. de Posse, “Orientación de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos. Ante el Congreso de Guernica,” *La Gaceta del Norte*, July 1922, 2.

⁶³R. de J., “Pío Baroja y la Universidad Vasca,” *Euzkadi*, Dec. 16, 1923, 4.

⁶⁴Santiago de Pablo and Coro Rubio, *Eman ta zabal zazu. Historia de la UPV/EHU, 1980–2005* (Bilbao, Spain: Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 2006), 31–35.

⁶⁵José Horn to Ángel Apraiz, Nov. 1, 1919, folder 165, box 34, BSSA. In José Horn’s words: “The people of Valladolid, for their own benefit, put in their Statute that only by a law can a new University be created or a private one be given the status of an official University.”

⁶⁶José Prado y Palacio to José Horn and Pedro Chalbaud, Aug. 7, 1919, folder 163, box 34, BSSA. The following anecdote, described in a letter written by Julián Elorza, illustrates well the animosity—if not aversion—of the Spanish minister toward the Basque language: during a visit made by the BSS’s president to request the authorization of a Basque language chair at the Ateneo (Athenaeum) of Vitoria, the minister denied it, arguing that “if Basque is spoken, there is no need to teach it, and if it is not spoken, the teaching would be useless.” When the BSS’s president answered that Spanish is spoken and “it is also taught,” the minister “brought up [the mantra of] nationalism.” See Julián Elorza to Ángel Apraiz, October 1919, folder 2 (428), box 8, BSSA.

⁶⁷Enrique de Eiguren to Ángel de Apraiz, Oviedo, Dec. 2, 1919, folder 72, box 34, BSSA.

chairs created by the BSS in Vitoria and Madrid; and it also denied the BSS's formal request to the University of Valladolid for the division of the district, under the pretext that there already existed "a sufficient number of faculties to fulfil such purpose."⁶⁸ The Military Directorate argued, shamelessly, that "since the Basque region is surrounded by university centres (Oviedo, Valladolid, and Zaragoza), with great ease of communications, there would be no reason, from an administrative point of view, to establish a new one."⁶⁹

With the Second Republic (1931-1936), university autonomy became an aspiration par excellence of Basque political autonomy, although the demand was not explicitly expressed in the 1931 project of the General Statute of the Basque State, as will be shown below. The approval of the Statute of Basque Autonomy, to which the university question was inexorably linked, came in the autumn of 1936, when the Civil War, which had broken out in July, truncated everything.⁷⁰

This unsuccessful undertaking of a project for a Basque university had interesting counterparts in the field of science and its research. Considering the context, one could argue that the BSS's construction of para-university substructures for scientific-technical activities was more feasible—or less unattainable—than that of its own comprehensive university. Thus, in 1932 the BSS accepted the suggestion of the renowned Spanish mathematician Julio Rey Pastor to create a "center of higher scientific culture" by founding the Centro de Estudios Científicos in San Sebastián (CEC).⁷¹ The new center was born with a twofold mission. First, it sought to promote science studies and their application to fields such as agriculture, mining, industry, transportation, medicine, pharmacy, and the arts. This endeavor subsequently would help to create a research institute. The CEC also aimed to set up in the medium term a commission that would draw up the plan for a faculty of sciences.⁷² With the CEC, the BSS sought to intensify the application of the scientific method to the country's productive activities, thereby intensifying the application of empirical rigor, exemplified in research, to industrial efficiency. It would take, however, more than forty years for this collective dream to be forged, with the founding of the University of the Basque Country in 1980, which, significantly, was established as a separate entity from the public university of Navarre.⁷³

⁶⁸Royal Order of January 19, 1924, of the Ministry of Public Instruction. See "R. O. del Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes. 19 Enero 1924," *Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos* (First Quarter 1924), 25.

⁶⁹*Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos* 21 (1924), 28–31. See also De Pablo and Rubio, *Eman ta zabal zazu*, 35–36.

⁷⁰On the responses of the affected universities, the reactionary policy of Primo de Rivera and the university affair during the Second Republic, see Alkorta, "La universidad vasca," 378–81; Orella, "La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos y la Universidad Vasca (1917-1936)," 22–62; Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 220–34.

⁷¹For the BSS report on the creation of scientific research institutes, see "Informe relativo a la creación de Institutos de Investigación Científica," folder 13, box 29.1, BSSA. See also *Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos* 55 (1932), 16–17.

⁷²In addition to organizing courses, conferences, and its own journal, CEC established a scientific-technical library and an industrial analysis and testing laboratory. See José Llobart, *El "Centro de Estudios Científicos" de San Sebastián* (Donostia, Spain: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1995).

⁷³De Pablo and Rubio, *Eman ta zabal zazu*, 59–82.



Figure 2. Logo of the Basque Studies Society; “Asmoz ta jakitez” (translation: Though ingenuity and wisdom). Courtesy of Eusko Ikaskuntza.

Political Autonomy: Integration of Vasconia

The BSS demonstrated a notable capacity for promoting Basque self-government through common consensus between parties of different ideologies (see [Figure 2](#)). The preparation of the General Statute of the Basque State of 1931 (also known as BSS’s Statute) epitomizes this capacity. It is also clear that, regarding the 1931 Basque statute, the BSS acted as an unofficial platform for the four Basque provincial councils in driving the political integration of a Basque state. This leads to the following claim: If the BSS’s para-university practices indeed involved processes that conflicted with the policies of the sovereign state, it would demand a rethinking of the idea of a para-university in many regards. In this section, I will detail the political space that the BSS treaded and the options for political articulation and integration it held out for the Basque Country.

During the founding period itself, extending from 1918 to 1923, BSS’s para-university practice already displayed some features that can be eponymously described as “political.” Dictated by an interlocking system of provincial councils in the four Basque capitals and by men who defended the historical prerogatives of the *fueros*, policy radiated from the halls of provincial and local councils. The treatment of issues related to the claim for political autonomy was born with BSS’s first sessions and included, among other questions, territoriality, legal diversity among Basque territories, and the appointment of civil servants in the administration.⁷⁴ Concerned about the latter, for example, in 1918 the BSS convened a Basque Municipal Administration Assembly with the aim of stimulating the study of municipal problems and seeking solutions to the most urgent ones.⁷⁵ From the start, the BSS also faced the challenge of how to achieve the political-administrative articulation of a fragmented country, as well as the dilemma of whether to emulate the commonwealth model of Catalonia or develop its own confederal model. The advent of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship,

⁷⁴While territoriality issues implied forms of appropriation, organization, and control of the different Basque territories through various strategies and instruments, legal diversity issues involved the reconciliation of different legal systems among these territories.

⁷⁵Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 236. See also the contributions to the proceedings of the assembly edited by Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, *Asamblea de la Administración Municipal Vasca. Recopilación de trabajos* (San Sebastián, Spain: Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, 1920).

however, disrupted plans for a congress on autonomy that the BSS intended to hold in Vitoria in 1924.⁷⁶

The end of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the rise of republicanism resumed this process of nationalitarian autonomy.⁷⁷ By the early 1930s, alarmed by the disorganization of the political parties, the BSS began a process of analysis and a search for political consensus by forming a Commission on Autonomy. In an effort to reach compromise between nationalists and non-nationalists and between monarchists and republicans, as well as to achieve the unity and confederation of the Basque-Navarrese provinces and the organization of the new Basque State, its judicial system, its finances, and its relations with the Republic and the Vatican, the BSS developed a promising strategic political vision—conceiving, outlining, and suggesting to all involved parties a confederal model that replaced the reestablishment of the *fueros* with nationalitarian autonomy.⁷⁸

By the spring of 1931, the BSS Commission, advised by jurists from four other provincial subcommissions who were highly regarded in academic circles, had drawn up the project for the General Statute of the Basque State, distilling the statute's vision in the language of "confederation." The confederation would have two forms, each operating at its own level: Within its borders, there would be a plural, secular and four-province state, and each province would be governed autonomously; and outside its borders, there would be "an autonomous state within the entirety of the Spanish State," with which it would live articulated in accordance with current laws.⁷⁹

BSS's Statute, once retouched and amended by almost all the parties, was approved at the 1931 Assembly of Basque Municipalities, held in Estella. In its twenty-two articles and various additional provisions, the statute delineated the responsibilities and powers of the governments of the Basque and Spanish states. There was unanimity on issues such as the defense of the Basque language, culture, and *fueros*, and on the administration of justice and other responsibilities within its borders (including police and armed forces or Basque militias). The central government would have authority over international politics, currency, commercial and criminal law, and communications, among other issues. In addition, the Basque language was declared national and co-official, with instruction in Basque compulsory in Basque-speaking areas. Among the issues for which there was less unanimous consensus but that were still ultimately settled were those related to the right to a "Basque nature" (for people with legal residence

⁷⁶ Monreal, "El Primer Estatuto Vasco o Vasco-Navarro. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1931," 388–89.

⁷⁷ There is an extensive bibliography on the BSS and Basque autonomy during the Spanish Second Republic. For a list of sources, see José Luis de la Granja, *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco: Estatutos de autonomía, partidos y elecciones, historia de Acción Nacionalista Vasca, 1930–1936* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 2008), 144–45; Monreal, "El Primer Estatuto Vasco o Vasco-Navarro. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1931," 398–99. See also the monographic issue published by the Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, "La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos y el Estatuto de Estado Vasco de 1936 [1931]," *Cuadernos de Sección. Derecho* (Eusko Ikaskuntza) 4 (1989), 7–230.

⁷⁸ Estornés, "Génesis del Estatuto General de Estado Vasco de Eusko-Ikaskuntza," 95–104; De la Granja, *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco*, 146–48; Montero, *La forja de una nación*, 19–22; Monreal, "El Primer Estatuto Vasco o Vasco-Navarro. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1931," 389–95.

⁷⁹ Eusko Ikaskuntza / Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, *Estatuto General del Estado Vasco: Anteproyecto de la Sociedad* (San Sebastián, Spain: Imprenta de Ricardo de Leizaola, 1931), 5.

status), certain social laws, and the name of the Basque state—an issue on which non-nationalist Navarrese disagreed.⁸⁰ However, one of the amendments introduced to the BSS statute—the one that included in the Basque state's powers the right to establish a concordat with the Vatican—was to collide head-on with the Second Republic's Constitution, which limited relations with the Holy See to the Spanish state. The confessional spirit of the Estella Statue was incompatible with the republican secular spirit, and the BSS's Statute thus foundered in subsequent revisions.⁸¹

Through the 1931 statute, the BSS recognized the right of the Basque people to self-government and the Basque state's constituent status without compromising its loyalty to Spain. Ultimately, the Basque statute was subordinate to what was stipulated in the Spanish Constitution and Courts. Nonetheless, the BSS—and Basque studies in particular—provided a tantalizing precedent for nationalitarian autonomy and a glimpse of “self-government.”

Para-University Activities: Nature and Scope

Now that we have seen the orientation of the BSS toward autonomist claims, let us return to the academic world and examine in more detail the character of its academic activities and the knowledge that was gained in the different stages (foundational, dictatorial, and republican periods) during the years 1918 to 1936. Since the BSS's founders conceived para-university practice as different in many respects from the teaching and research practice promoted by official universities, and since they conceived the BSS itself as both a cultural entity and a political forum, what result should we expect from the combination of these two functions? What was the character of the knowledge that emerged from that hybrid? As shown below, para-university practice actually assumed a variety of forms, becoming an effective formula for the BSS not only to channel and articulate internal demands for autonomy or self-government but also to fill the cultural gap in the Basque Country, especially in regard to higher and university studies.

From the outset, the BSS made challenging demands concerning the executive management and internal structure of the organization. The ethos of political pluralism and Basqueness (or Basque identity) should be among the features of the executive members, and the profile of the “average executive” would be that of a Basque man with no fixed affiliation, halfway between nationalism and Carlism.⁸² The internal organization was structured according to academic sections: the first eight were founded at the BSS founding congress in Oñate (1918) and encompassed the basic fields of the humanities and social sciences—“social and political sciences,” “race,” “medicine,” “language,” “history,” “art,” “teaching,” and “Basque studies.” In 1922, another sixteen sections were added, including basic, applied, and philosophical sciences.⁸³ Their stated

⁸⁰ Estornés, “Génesis,” 100-01; Monreal, “El Primer Estatuto Vasco o Vasco-Navarro. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1931,” 394-95.

⁸¹ Fernando de Meer, *La cuestión religiosa en las Cortes Constituyentes de la II República Española* (Pamplona, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1975), 197-208; Monreal, “El Primer Estatuto Vasco o Vasco-Navarro. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1931,” 395-97; Montero, *La forja de una nación*, 20-22.

⁸² Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 61.

⁸³ Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 38-40.

aims were to facilitate the conduct of study and research, to encourage scholarship through competitions and prizes, and, if resources were available, to promote investigations through grants and fellowships. Academic activities could take many forms, ranging from exhibitions (both national and foreign) and monographic congresses on topics specific to each section, to commemorations (a total of ten) on significant Basque figures and historical events. It is clear that in the interwar years, the BSS presented an unparalleled framework for any section to produce new knowledge while asserting its usefulness to Basque society, and many sections, having seen themselves represented in the BSS's general congresses and publications, seized the opportunity to produce that knowledge. Particularly noteworthy in this respect are, besides the six general congresses (described below), the four periodicals published by the BSS—*RIEV* (1922-), *Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos* (1919-1936), *Anuario de la Sociedad de Eusko-Folklore* (1921-1935), and *Memoria de la Sociedad* (biannual, 1918-1934)—and the twenty-nine occasional publications, covering a wide range of published topics including history, teaching, law, anthropology, archaeology, and, especially, Basque language and literature.⁸⁴

Plainly, despite its name, the BSS was not exclusively or even, in most of its sections, primarily a vehicle for the advancement of Basque studies. While some sections gained international recognition for their work in Basque ethnography, anthropology, and linguistics, their contributions to knowledge were vaster and more diverse. On the various ways in which the BSS's activities differed from those of the para-university institutions of nation-states, I will mention just five.

First, the BSS viewed Basque studies, an emerging academic discipline in the early twentieth century, as the bridge to modern culture and science. Although modern culture and science arrived with difficulty to a country that had no official university or university district of its own, it, of course, became an end in itself in that it became identified with the BSS's program of autonomism, nationalism, and modernity. These two fields, modern culture and science, were core topics in the different congresses on Basque studies. In fact, if one follows the themes of the six congresses held up to 1936—on Basque studies (Oñati, 1918), teaching and socio-economic issues (Pamplona, 1920), language and teaching (Gernika, 1922), vocational education and guidance (Vitoria, 1926), Basque popular art (Bergara, 1930) and medicine and natural sciences (Bilbao, 1934), in addition to the aborted one on historical studies (to be held in Estella in 1936), they reveal that the cultivation of science and the cultivation of modern culture had a common forum in the BSS.⁸⁵ Within this framework, however, the recovery and updating of traditional culture were manifestations of modernity and not expressions of obsolescence or fear of cultural disappearance. Proof of this were the BSS courses on "Methodology and High Culture," delivered by European authorities in areas such as anthropology, linguistics, history, and archaeology, where

⁸⁴ For a thematic classification of BSS publications, see *Memoria de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, 1932-1934* (San Sebastián: Sociedad de Estudios Vascos). See also Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 95-97.

⁸⁵ For an overview of these early congresses, see Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 73-82; Aguirre Sorondo, "Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1918-2018," 337.

modern methods in those areas were explained.⁸⁶ This point helps us understand the composition of the BSS congresses.

Second, within BSS's para-university thought emerged a discourse of transmission and expansion of knowledge, redolent of academia, that was reflected in the organization of summer courses and numerous exhibitions and commemorations. For the BSS, summer courses (held annually from 1927 to 1935) served to cultivate not general studies, but those peculiar to the country.⁸⁷ They were aimed at citizens seeking to learn research methods in human sciences fields, such as Basque grammar and language; history and prehistory; art and architecture; and anthropology, ethnography, and folklore. In some courses, students had the opportunity to take exams and proficiency certificates in the Basque language, a (free) accreditation that qualified them for the teaching profession and civil service. Yet, the BSS also organized occasional courses with thematic programs, some on health and hygiene, others on mathematics and natural sciences, as well as on traditional law and psychology. In short, it promoted a discourse advancing the transmission of scientific culture.⁸⁸ Thus, Basque studies became identified not only with local needs and ethnic culture, but also with scientific culture, and that connection was sustained over time, as if it were inherent from the beginning.

Third, in its publishing policy, the BSS established ownership claims to the Bascology market, both national and foreign. *RIEV*, founded and promoted by Urquijo, became the BSS's flagship (starting in 1922), an intellectual space of order and method in Basque linguistics and philology, but also in history and anthropology. *RIEV*'s incorporation brought with it quality standards—"methods of science"—but also, more visibly, the leading authorities of the foreign Bascology community. Recognized linguists such as Hugo Schuchardt and C. C. Uhlenbeck became arbiters of those standards, not perhaps of local Bascology, but of its scientific quality. European Bascologists became reference scholars in *RIEV*, publishing research works and popular linguistic articles.⁸⁹ For its part, the Eusko-Folklore Society, founded and directed by Father José Miguel de Barandiarán at the Diocesan Seminary of Vitoria, joined the BSS in 1921. The society began to publish its *Anuario* (Yearbook), which soon became the organ par excellence of Basque religious ethnology and ethnography. Although the Eusko-Folklore Society was questioned for its confessional nature, established ethnologists such as Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer and Fritz Krüger helped validate the quality of its research.⁹⁰ The collaboration with European Bascology helped legitimize Basque studies as a scientific discipline, while Basque ethnography and

⁸⁶Eusko Ikaskuntza, *Cursos de metodología y alta cultura. Curso de Lingüística* (San Sebastián, Spain: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1921).

⁸⁷Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 85–94.

⁸⁸The thematic courses included, among others, medical and socio-health issues (Bilbao, 1931), traditional law (Pamplona, 1932) and the Eusko-Folklore Laboratory (Vitoria, 1933). For the BSS's activities related to sciences and social and human sciences, see Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 103–88, 238–43.

⁸⁹Monreal, "Una historia de la Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos," 18–23; Cierbide, "Consideraciones a los trabajos de lingüística en la RIEV (1907–2007)."

⁹⁰Jesús Altuna, introduction to *Selected Writings of José Miguel de Barandiarán: Basque Prehistory and Ethnography*, ed. Jesús Altuna (Reno, NV: University of Nevada, Center for Basque Studies, 2007), 15–56.

ethnology became academically recognized by world authorities in anthropology. Inevitably, the BSS was reluctant to let its publications fall into the hands of others and sought to consolidate scientific production. Only abruptly, and violently, did this change, with the outbreak of the Civil War and the BSS's exile during the Franco dictatorship.⁹¹

Fourth, looking back at BSS's activities, one could observe the diffusion of Basque studies at home, the diffusion in Europe, and diffusion in the diaspora. In the interwar years, the nature of Basque studies abroad became distinct, and in some cases quite so, from Basque studies at home. The world of Basque studies abroad was a world of light and reason; its culture was that of scholarship, genealogy, and community association; sometimes its motives were driven by the preservation of the Basque language and culture, as would be expected of a diaspora community; other times, by the purely academic search for universal knowledge. This diversity led the BSS to adopt a polychromatic view of that world. It cultivated relations abroad through a network of delegations in Spain and the US, and of members and collaborators all over the world. The BSS established corresponding delegations in Barcelona (1925), Madrid (1926), Argentina (1931) and Mexico (1934), and tried to open one in Manila (led by Manuel de Ynchausti). The delegation in Barcelona promoted a university chair specialized in Basque language studies and focused on natural sciences. In the diaspora, the goal was to awaken "everyone's conscience" and "join the efforts, until then dispersed, in favour of the cultural progress of the Basque race," as stated in meetings leading up to the creation of the Buenos Aires delegation.⁹² Among non-Basque foreign members, the leitmotif was the pursuit of knowledge about the Basque language and culture.⁹³ In terms of the delegations' activities, they differed by location and provenance: in Spain, activities took place in specific locations ("Hogar vasco"); in the diaspora, in associations ("Euskal etxeak") with newspapers reporting the events; and elsewhere, primarily in universities and colleges.

Finally, the legitimization of Basque studies created a favorable climate for the emergence of a civil discourse, characterized by the search for consensus and reflected in the creation of the Academy of the Basque Language—also known as Euskaltzaindia.⁹⁴ The Academy was born as an autonomous subsidiary of the BSS in 1919. For its founding members, the standardization of the Basque language was not an aspiration, but a mission. The accomplishment of this mission was the subject of open discussion at BSS's 1918 Congress.⁹⁵ Faced with the gradual decline of the Basque language, academics set

⁹¹In addition to *RIEV* and the *Anuario de la Sociedad de Eusko-Folklore*, the BSS periodically published the *Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos/Eusko Ikaskuntzaren Deia* (quarterly, from 1919 to 1936) and *Memoria de la Sociedad* (biannually, from 1918 to 1934).

⁹²*Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos* 42 (1929), 6–7 and 47–48.

⁹³The list includes, among others, the Universities of Columbia, Strasbourg, Hamburg, Cologne and Bonn, and renowned linguists such as C. C. Uhlenbeck, Norbert Tauer, and Rodney Gallop. Estornés, *La Sociedad de Estudios Vascos Contribución de Eusko Ikaskuntza a la cultura vasca*, 55–59.

⁹⁴Anduaga, "Forging a 'Civil Discourse.'"

⁹⁵For the early history of the process of standardization of the Basque language, see Patxi Goenaga, "Real Academia de la Lengua Vasca/Euskaltzaindia: 80 años de trabajo por la normalización del vasco," *Arbor* 163, no. 641 (1999), 82–83; José Ignacio Hualde and Koldo Zuazo, "The Standardization of the Basque Language," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 31, no. 2 (2007), 143–68.

for themselves the goal of “lexical, phonetic and graphic unification of the language,” as a preliminary step in the “subsequent and definitive unification of the literary dialect, an aspiration of all Basques.”⁹⁶ From the first sessions, academics addressed three far-reaching priorities: a unified orthography, neologisms, and a common literary language. In the spirit of consensus, they achieved the adoption of a unified orthographic system. However, that consensual spirit degenerated by the mid-1920s into a period of stagnation with regard to selecting a common literary language—undoubtedly the most thorny and controversial issue, owing to its political and sociolinguistic connotations. The advent of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship hindered civil discourse and stimulated ideological repolarization within the Basque Academy. With the Second Republic came a new climate, characterized by ideological skepticism and the questioning of the Basque Academy’s leadership. The prospect of establishing a common literary language through consensus was never farther from reality.

Conclusion

Culture and language have no nation; but nations have culture and language. In the era of the rise of nationalitarian claims and the irruption of the principle of self-determination in international politics during and after the First World War, there arose an interest in making ethnic studies serve stateless nations in their need to affirm their own culture and identity. The interest was great but hardly new, as for several decades Europe’s stateless nations, and at that time those of Spain, led by Catalonia, had claimed the empowerment of autochthonous language and cultural and scientific rearmament. Whatever the differences in resources and the status of their languages—whether minority, minoritized, or endangered—institutions such as the BSS, the Institut d’Estudis Catalans, and Irmandades da Fala were not only united on the principle that the peoples should promote their autochthonous culture and language; they were also heirs to the regenerationist movement in political life that emerged after the Spanish crisis of 1898.⁹⁷

However, the lack of a public university in Vasconia pushed the BSS to become engaged in political-educational claims, and it distanced itself somewhat from the Catalan and Galician institutions, since they were more focused on political-linguistic issues and endowed with their own universities and government agencies. Within this context, the BSS promoted a diverse range of social initiatives, all of which are collectively labeled “para-university activities,” and which reached their most distinctive forms in the demand for a Basque university and the General Statute of the Basque State. These initiatives persisted, albeit with great obstacles and important modifications, until the Civil War and the beginning of Franco’s dictatorship.

The BSS was shaped by the social legitimization of Basque studies as an academic discipline. Legitimation quickened the tempo of institutionalization and created a favorable climate for consensus among ideologically fragmented political elites. Activities

⁹⁶The objectives were stated in a document, presented by the BSS to the provincial councils, requesting the establishment of the Academy. See *Boletín de la Sociedad de Estudios Vascos* 2 (1919), 11–12.

⁹⁷Balcells, Pujol, and Izquierdo, *Historia de l’Institut d’Estudis Catalans. Volum I*; Miralles, “El Institut d’Estudis Catalans,” 47–9; Villares, Núñez Seixas, and Máiz Suárez, *As Irmandades da Fala no seu tempo*.

and projects were in turn conducted much more easily in circumstances fostered by this consensus. For Bascologists, as well as for many politicians and intellectuals, legitimization led to a wider view of Basque studies and its potential.

Concerning the Basque language, interest quickly grew in orthographic unification and the common literary language (although progress was only made in the former), and the BSS even went so far as to establish the Academy of the Basque Language as a subsidiary. This legitimization also helped politically vindicate the BSS, positioning it as not just a purely academic instrument indifferent to the daily problems of Basque society, but as a major political platform, as established by the demand for a Basque university—following the BSS's motto, “*Asmoz ta jakitez*” (through ingenuity and wisdom)—and for a statute of political autonomy. In comparative terms, its character was remarkable.

In other places and institutions, the term *para-university* connotes a teaching and/or research university program that has evolved in line with its institution's mission. However, such a connotation does not apply to the BSS's case, as there was no such university to which the para-university program could be attached and anchored; it was, instead, the legitimization of Basque studies that provided the moral justification for the institution. Therefore, as the BSS case shows, the nature of a given para-university could vary from society to society depending on the challenges faced by the stateless nation from state and regional forces.

The BSS's para-university practice is also of no less interest for the discussion of stateness—understood as the extent to which the state is able to exercise its authority throughout its territory. In fact, some of the BSS's claims involved processes that ran counter to state policies. To what extent this practice contributed to eroding the sovereign authority of the Spanish state and turned out to be a threat to it is a question on which different governments differed. The threat perception of this practice varied from government to government depending on the challenge it posed to the thinking of the political regime in power. While the Count of Romanones government was sensitive to the search for solutions to the autonomous issue, the dictator Primo de Rivera was reluctant to entertain nationalitarian demands and forced the BSS to withdraw its strategy.⁹⁸ The very existence of para-university practice meant not so much that the state shared its authority with sub-state units subordinate to it, but rather that the state—in certain political periods—was receptive to negotiating internal demands for autonomy under conditions that did not jeopardize sovereign authority. The BSS claimed the right of self-government for the Basque people without compromising its loyalty to the state.

The detailed structure of the BSS activities has much to reveal, in its formation of collective strategies and social networks, in its courses and chairs, in its publications, and in its interaction with international communities, including the Basque diaspora and foreign universities. Owing to both its conception and its action, the BSS became not only an entity for cultural promotion but also a platform for autonomy claims.

⁹⁸ During the *primorriverista* regime, the BSS maintained only those activities that were inoffensive to the totalitarian regime. Moreover, the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, the one-time promoter of Basque studies that was now controlled by the Liga de Acción Monárquica (created as a counteragent to Basque nationalism), broke relations with the BSS. See Estornés, *La construcción de una nacionalidad vasca*, 173–203.

That a para-university institution could serve as an instrument for political purposes but, in this case, was justified by the lack of a public university and an institutional political unit, leads us to our initial proposal in the introduction—that is, the need, in certain respects, for a rethinking of the idea of a *para-university*. As nation-states were constituted and tensions with stateless nations and sub-state homelands arose, new forms of para-university practice began to emerge—in science, the humanities, and the social sciences—that took into consideration the intertwining and intimacy of the relations between culture and politics, between the cultural and linguistic elevation of a people and its self-government. After all, the BSS did nothing but follow the precepts given by Apraiz in his 1918 lecture on “Basque University,” when he stated that the personality of a people “is based upon the awareness that the latter has of itself, namely, in its own culture.” In this process of awareness-raising, the university is “not an end, but a means for culture.”⁹⁹ Here was the germ of the BSS’s para-university world.

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⁹⁹ Apraiz, *Universidad Vasca (Conferencia)*, 5 and 6, respectively.