# WESTERN GYPSIES OR EASTERN MEXICANS? EXOTICISM AND IGNORANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IMAGE OF BASQUE IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICAN CINEMA, 1913–1980

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This article analyzes how cinematic and TV industries in the United States ("Hollywood" for short) attempted and managed to create a very specific stereotype of Basque immigrants, based on several elements from different sources such as the local stereotypes created in the places Basque immigrants had settled, based on their monopolistic relationship with sheepherding, the influence and misunderstandings derived from being Basque immigrant citizens from two European states (France and Spain) with strong, recognizable national stereotypes, and the mistaken identification that Hollywood has historically made between the Spanish and Latin Americans.

**Keywords**: Immigration, Cinema, Basques, Stereotypes, United States

## INTRODUCTION: ARE BASQUES A BRANCH OF THE GYPSIES?[1]

Aired from 1965 to 1971, "Hogan's Heroes" (Bing Crosby Productions / CBS Television Network) was a popular American TV serial that depicted the life and activities of a group of Allied prisoners in a German detention camp

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during World War II, with a humoristic point of view. Led by the fictional Col. Robert E. Hogan (Bob Crane), these POWs were involved in espionage activities and sabotage against the Nazis, taking advantage of the ineptitude of the directing staff of Stalag 13 (the name of the camp). The show "became one of CBS's biggest mid-sixties hits."[2] Right after the release of the first episodes, a controversy arose over the convenience of the use of comedy to refer to such traumatic historical events.[3] Reactions ranged from those who considered the program a series of "disparate aberrations,"[4] to those that highlighted its adequate timing: "There is a saying that tragedy plus time equals comedy. Hitler was not the best subject for comedy right after the Second World War, but the Third Reich eventually became the subject of the movie and stage comedy, The Producers, and an American TV sit-com, Hogan's Heroes."[5] Nevertheless, because of its success, it can be said that "the picture most Americans have of life in the stalag system is probably formed in some part by the television series 'Hogan's Heroes.'"[6]

One of the recurrent characters in the series was a Frenchman, Corporal Louis LeBeau, played by the actor Robert Clary.[7] Born Robert Max Widerman in Paris, Clary was a French Jew who had suffered some of the events depicted in the fictitious portrayal of the series: he was deported in 1942 to several concentration camps, where most of his close relatives were murdered, and after his freedom he opted to migrate to America, where he returned to his early career in entertainment.[8] The presence of a French character, along with other non-white American ones like the African-American James Kinchloe, was introduced with the intention of targeting a more multiethnic, diverse audience. They were also used as a way to introduce "frequent cultural disputes" and, moreover, to develop a clash of stereotypes between the different national characters involved

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[2] H. Lebo, *The Godfather Legacy: The Untold Story of the Making of the Classic Godfather Trilogy*, New York 2005, p. 9.

[3] B.S. Royce, *Hogan's Heroes: A Comprehensive Reference to the 1965–1971 television comedy series with cast biographies and an episode guide*, Jefferson NC 1993, p. 6. Also R.R. Shandley, *Hogan's Heroes*, Detroit 2011, p. 3.

[4] P.D. Beidler, '*South Pacific* and American Remembering; or "Josh, We're Going to Buy this Son of a Bitch!"', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1993), pp. 207–222.

[5] S. Shatenstein, S. Champan, 'The Banality of Tobacco Deaths', *Tobacco Control*, Vol. 11, No. 1–2 (2002), doi:10.1136/tc.11.1.1, p. 3.

[6] T. Wolter, *POW Baseball in World War II: The National Pastime Behind Barbed Wire*, Jefferson NC 2001, p. 10.

[7] B.S. Royce, *Hogan's Heroes: A Comprehensive...*, p. 235.

[8] R. Clary, *From the Holocaust to Hogan's Heroes: The Autobiography of Robert Clary*, Boulder CO 2007, pp. 20–32.

in both sides of the war.[9] In episode 157 (6th season, aired December 13, 1970, "The Gypsy") some new elements were revealed about the ethnic, regional background of LeBeau. With the aim of deceiving the director of the camp into believing his supposed psychic powers, LeBeau presents himself during every morning's roll call wearing an outfit that immediately attracted the attention of the Germans (Image 1):

> SCHULTZ: Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.
> KLINK: What's going on here?
> SCHULTZ: Sorry, Herr Kommandant. All present and accounted for.
> KLINK: Then what's the difficulty?
> SCHULTZ: There's no difficulty.
> KLINK: (*approaching Col. Hogan after noticing the look of LeBeau*) Hogan, would you please tell Rudolf Valentino here he's out of uniform?
> HOGAN: Crazy thing, Colonel. He's been that way ever since last night. He was up fixing the roof, got hit by a bolt of lightning.
> KLINK: Lightning?
> HOGAN: Seems to have stirred something in him. **He's Basque, you know. Great-grandfather was a full-blooded Gypsy.** He seems to have reverted.

Image 1.

Col. Klink has just noticed the peculiar clothes LeBeau is wearing

[9] R.R. Shandley, *Hogan's Heroes...*, p. 60.

Are Basques and Gypsies, by any chance, members of the same ethnic family, as Al Rudy and Bernie Fine, the scriptwriters of the series,[10] seemed to believe (and make us believe)? No literature has ever presented any kind of connection between the Gypsies, whose arrival to European lands is quite accurately dated to the Early Modern Age, and the Basques, who according to the first written, historical references to their presence in their homeland date back to the time of the Roman Empire. But as strange as it sounds, this identification between Basques and Gypsies in the cinema and television – and even earlier in other artistic productions- was not as unusual as it would be presumed. Moreover, it could also be considered, to a certain extent, one of the possible logical outcomes derived from the way the American film industry had been representing Basques, and more specifically Basque immigrants, on the screen since its first productions in the early decades of the 20th century. Basque-Americans were successively presented as sheepherders, winemakers, terrorists and gourmets, and included among Europeans, Latin Americans and even Gypsies. This article will try to describe the main lines of this process.

## BASQUE IMMIGRATION TO THE USA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IMAGE

The presence of immigrants from the Basque Country in the lands that today comprise the United States has a long-standing history. Emigration to the Americas had been, to a certain extent, a customary practice in the Basque lands for centuries.[11] As subjects of Spain and France, two of the main colonizing powers that conquered and established their imperial rule in parts of North America, some Basques took a prominent role in the process of colonization and European settlement in areas like Florida, the Mississippi Valley (the colonial Louisiana) and, later on in the 18th century, in the South-Western regions of Arizona and California. After the end of both the Spanish and French empires in continental America, a new current of Basque immigration arrived to the United States from the second third of the 19th century onwards, some settling

[10] H. Lebo, *The Godfather Legacy...*, p. 9.

[11] N.M. Ray, J.P. Bieter, '"It Broadens Your View of Being Basque": Identity through History, Branding and Cultural Policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, (2014), doi:10.1080/10286632.2014.923416, cit in p. 5.

in Eastern ports and cities,[12] but the vast majority of them to the Western states of California, Nevada, Idaho, Oregon and Wyoming.[13] Even though there were neither "rural communities or ranching districts dominated by Basques comparable to the Scandinavian settlements of Minnesota or the German colonies of Texas," nor "examples of 'Basque towns' in cities such as Boise, Reno and San Francisco,"[14] the entry of new waves of immigrants up to the 1970s, forming part of a system of chain migration, led to the cementation of sufficiently large ethnic subcommunities, numerous enough to make them visible from the outside by the rest of local societies they were living in.

The process of creation of a distinguishable, socially separate Basque identity from the perspective of their new American neighbors passed through two stages. First of all, the name of the group had to be known and recognized. After their arrival to America, Basque immigrants were somehow "hidden" behind other more widely recognized ethnic and/or national identities.[15] At the beginning, there were no Basques in the West, but French or Spanish:

> The physical presence of Basque immigrants in the United States preceded several decades to the emergence of a Basque identity. During this time, Basques identified themselves (and were identified) as Spanish or French. French Basques were dominant in California and Western Nevada, while Spanish Basques concentrated in Northern Nevada and Idaho. The shift from these Spanish or French national identities to the development of a new Basque one happened quicker and sooner with the Basques from Spain, accelerated by the Spanish-American War of 1898: in a context of strong anti-Spanish sentiments in public opinion, it made to hide their political citizenship and highlight their ethnic identity. This was helped by

[12] A. Aragón-Ruano, A. Angulo-Morales, 'The Spanish Basque Country in Global Trade Networks in the Eighteenth Century', *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (2013), pp. 159–172, cit. in pp. 159–160.

[13] W.A. Douglass, J. Bilbao, *Amerikanuak. Basques in the New World*, Reno NV 1975 (2005 edition), p. 120.

[14] W.A. Douglass, 'Basque-American Identity: Past Perspectives and Future Prospects', in S. Tchudi, ed., *Change in the American West. Exploring the Human Dimension*, Reno NV 1996, pp. 183–199, cit in p. 185.

[15] J.P. Bieter, N.M. Ray, 'Dilution vs. Dancing: Scotch-Irish and Basque Cultural Assimilation and Preservation', *Journal of Scotch-Irish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2013), pp. 77–94, cit. in p. 78. This very same phrase was used by the promoters of the historical exhibit on Basque Migration to the United States that was organized by the Basque Museum and Cultural Center of Boise, Idaho, and Ellis Island Museum, New York: "Hidden in Plain Sight: the Basques" (http://www.basqueexhibit.com, consulted on August 10, 2014).

the fact that very few of them were proficient on the Spanish language, so it became easier for them to get away from the public image of average Spaniards.[16]

Once the group started being recognized as such, the next step was to provide the identity of this group with some content, especially with the construction of a set of images that would lead to the emergence of a clear, stereotyped construction. Even though there has been some criticism for decades about the limits and usefulness of the concept of "ethnic stereotype," it is still a valuable label to define some of the bidirectional elements of the recognition of any ethnic minority group within a wider society, as was the case of Basques and other immigrants in the context of American society during the period of mass migration. Ethnic stereotypes, even though they can be regarded, like Bringham does, as "generalizations that are considered as unjustified by the person who affixes the label,"[17] must not be rejected because of their lack of validity for a true description of the collective traits of the group they are ascribed to.[18] Stereotypes -and more concretely their resistance to change-[19] condition the way any ethnic group is accepted and are determinant either in helping or in impeding the path towards integration. In the case of Basque-Americans, the strength and broadness of the Spanish or French stereotypes they were first included in, as constructed by American society, were an obstacle for their visibility as a separate group during the first years of their immigration process. Some examples taken from American newspapers during the Spanish-American War in Cuba (1898) illustrate how Basques from Northern Nevada and Idaho were simplistically viewed through the misleading lens of the stereotype of the "Spanish bullfighter."[20] To a certain extent, a similar situation happened with the French-Basques in the areas they mainly settled in. Moreover, in the case of the Basques from France, there was another problem: some of the "typically French" features were Basque rather than French: as Chew states, "the beret is typical of SW-France and the Basque country, but not France as a whole;

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[16] Ó. Álvarez-Gila, 'Changes of Perception of Ethnic Identity after the End of Mass Migration. The Basques in the United States', *Amnis*, Vol. 12 (2013), available at http://amnis.revues.org/1977, cit. in #9.

[17] J.C. Bringham, 'Ethnic Stereotypes', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (1971), pp. 15–38.

[18] D.M. Taylor, F.E. Aboud, 'Ethnic Stereotypes: Is the Concept Necessary?', *Canadian Psychologist / Psychologie Canadienne*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1973), pp. 330–338.

[19] J.C. Bringham, 'Ethnic Stereotypes', p. 20.

[20] W.A. Douglass, Bilbao, *Amerikanuak...*

thus here a distinctive and therefore easily identifiable and memorable *regional* characteristic ha[d] been elevated to a 'typical' *trans-regional* feature."[21]

Eventually, the economic rationale of this 19th–20th centuries migratory movement of Basques to Western American states strongly helped the emergence of their own, differentiated stereotype. Basque migration in the American West can almost be defined by one profession: sheepherding. Douglass and Bilbao state that the involvement of the pioneering Basque immigrants in sheepherding was facilitated by the previous, successful experience in the River Plate countries, rather than in a century-long tradition back in the homeland.[22] The steadily increasing demand for wool by the Eastern textile industry cemented the virtual monopoly of the sheep industry by Basque immigrants in the new sheepherding areas opened in the Northwestern states by the mid-19th century, especially after their early arrival during the Californian Gold Rush of 1848–49, spreading themselves throughout the regions where open range land was available for their flocks along the Rocky mountains.[23] In this area far up north from the region in which the Spanish -and after them, Mexicans- had traditionally herded flocks of sheep during the colonial times, "Basque" soon became a social synonym of "sheepherder." As Douglass states:

> (...) as much as any immigrant group within the American experience and more than most, Basques became identified with a single industry -sheep husbandry. While Basque Americans also engaged in mining, cattle ranching, construction, and small-scale commerce in the towns of the sheep-raising districts of the American West, it is also true that by the turn of the present [*20th*] century throughout much of the region to say "sheepherder" was to mean "Basque."[24]

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[21] William L. Chew III, ''Literature, History and the Social Sciences?' An Historical-Imagological Approach to Franco-American Stererotypes', in William L. Chew III, ed., *National Stereotypes in Perspective: Americans in France, Frenchmen in America*, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 1–53, cit in pp. 10–1.

[22] W.A. Douglass, Bilbao, *Amerikanuak...*, pp. 212–215.

[23] On Basque immigration and sheepherding in the United States, see among others: J.P. Bieter and M. Bieter, *Un legado que perdura. La historia de los vascos en Idaho*, Vitoria-Gasteiz 2005. Anyway, not all of the Basques that migrated to the United States ended up in this business of sheepherding. Some small Basque communities in the East coast, especially in port cities like New York, were involved in other economic activities like boardinghouses, small shops and sea trade. There was also a small group of sailors. Along with that, the creation of a web of Jai Alai courts in Eastern states like Florida or Connecticut also brought some Basque sportsmen (*pelotaris*) to these places. See among others: A. Angulo-Morales, 'The Basques in America around the Birth of a Nation,' paper presented at the *10th International Workshop "Euskal Herria Mugaz Gaindi: Basques in New York,"* Columbia University, New York, 10–11 October 2013.

[24] W.A. Douglass, 'Basque-American Identity...', p. 185.

But recognition did not prevent confusion. Being Basques citizens of two different European nation-states, each of them having their own recognizable set of stereotypical features, it was troublesome from the beginning to ascertain which elements their stereotype would be composed of based on their ethnic background. Basques were still an unknown people, difficult to include in any of the main ethnic groups that were socially established. Douglass recognizes that:

> While the linguistic, cultural, and genetic evidence suggest that Basques do not even qualify as Latin population, in the average American's reckoning the southern European location of the Basque Country and the fact that Basques entered the United States as either French or Spanish nationals were likely to make them Latins. At the same time, Basques by and large did not fit the Latin stereotype of short, dark persons and could therefore easily "pass" as generic Europeans.[25]

Because of this *confused* ethnicity, Basques were first randomly presented with stereotypical ethnic features either of the Spaniards - more often, Spanish or Latin Americans[26], or of the French, with several degrees of mixture among all of them, and sometimes even of particular cultural elements of the Basques themselves, like their own language that was, in words of Molina and Oiarzabal, the main "root of Basque ethnic singularity."[27] Basque language is one of the few non-Indo-European languages of Europe, and the only pre-Indo-European one that has remained in the continent, not having any known linguistic link with any other language in the world. So it is clearly differentiable from either Spanish or French, and can be considered one of the key elements in the path towards recognition of identity.[28] Even after the starting point of the creation and emergence of a particular and separate ethnic image of the Basque-Americans,

[25] W.A. Douglass, 'Basque-American Identity...', p. 187.

[26] This distinction between "Spaniard" (a native or inhabitant of Spain) and "Spanish" (related to Spain and its language) makes a lot of sense in the specific context of the American cinematic industry, located from an early moment, as it is widely known, in the Southern Californian area around Los Angeles. This region, very close to the Mexican-American border and with a huge historical presence of the Spanish (Mexican) culture, is one of the main reasons of the simplification of the meaning of this term to refer mainly to Latin Americans and, more often, Mexicans.

[27] F. Molina, P.J. Oiarzabal, 'Basque-Atlantic Shores: Ethnicity, the Nation-State and the Diaspora in Europe and America (1808–98)', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2009), pp. 698–715, cit. in p. 705.

[28] A reflection on the role of Basque language as an unifying factor for the creation of Basque communities abroad in Ó. Álvarez-Gila, '¿Vascos o *euskaldunak*?: una aproximación al papel del euskara en la conformación de las colectividades vascas de América, siglo XIX,' *Sancho el Sabio*, Vol. 32, (2010), pp. 75–88.

although numerous elements of these other ethnic stereotypes were still applied frequently to them in a combination of some pieces that clearly belonged to Basque cultural traits with others that were no more than the persistence of an early, mistaken attribution. Arostegui shows that popular literature was then a key element in the process of transmission and dissemination of Basque-American stereotypes into a wider American public.[29] Popular literature, as Etulain states,[30] would be soon turned into an element of reinforcement and spreading of these stereotypes. The cinema would, in its early times, feed from popular literature, transmitting the main features of the literary stereotype into the new language of the moving images.

## BASQUE IMMIGRANTS IN THE SCREEN: "ONLY A BASQUE IN THIS COUNTRY CAN DO THAT"[31]

Soon after the Lumière brothers publicly presented their new invention, the *cinématographe*, it was transformed from a documentary representation of reality into a space for the creation of fiction. At the same time, that cinema -and from the middle of the 20th century, television- was obtaining a higher degree of penetration among the public as one of the most important, if not the dominant, channels for receiving information, enjoying fiction, modeling opinion and overall acquisition of a vision of the wider world. Ethnic stereotypes, and more specifically the particular images of immigrant groups developed in the host societies during and after the process of mass migration in the 19th–20th centuries, were also spread on the screens of theaters and television sets.[32] As Leerssen recognizes, cinema "is a privileged genre for the dissemination of stereotypes, because it often works on the presupposition of a "suspension of

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[29] E. Arostegui, 'The Construction of Basque-American Identity: Stereotypes and Imagery in Western Literature,' paper presented at the *American Ethnicity and East European Immigration Conference*, Cracow (Poland), June 15–18, 2014.

[30] Etulain speaks about the "misguided notion that Basques from Spain or France must be Spanish or French is one that has plagued Basques throughout the last centuries and one that pervades much western literature written about them in the twentieth century." R.W. Etulain, 'The Basques in Western American Literature,' in R.W. Etulain, ed., *Basques of the Pacific Northwest*, Pocatello ID 1991, pp. 63–74, cit. in p. 63.

[31] Transcript from the dialog of "Wild is the Wind" (1959, Paramount Pictures. Dir.: George Cukor).

[32] M. Sanfilippo, 'La figura dell'immigrato nell cinema statunitense. Quando la passione cinefila raggiunge l'analisi sociale,' *Studi Emigrazione*, Vol. XLV, No. 169 (2008), pp. 87–104.

disbelief" and some (at least aesthetic) appreciative credit among the audience."[33] This suspension of disbelief is actually a common element that links both cinema and stereotypes. As Núñez Seixas says, stereotypes must also be realistic in order to be operative as social categories:

> [Stéréotypes] ne correspondent pas toujours a la *realité*. Mais por être opérationels, ils devront posséder un degré acceptable de *vraisemblance* qui les rendent potentiellement crédibles et donc, socialement efficaces, dès lors que les individus peuvent, dans divers contextes, ressentir une confirmation (plus ou moins interférée) de ce préconcept par voie cognitive.[34]

But the relationship between cinema and society, in the case of the transmission of stereotypes, is always bidirectional. As Dudley says, "films became ideal objects of analysis because they are fabricated within corporate and semiotic systems, yet they speak back to those systems because they are collectively made and viewed."[35] In one of the earliest studies on ethnic stereotypes and their depiction in cinema, Krakauer was aware of this dependence: "Fiction films are mass entertainment everywhere, and what information they include is more or less a by- product. Any national cinema yields to the impact of subjective influences in portraying foreigners; these portrayals, that is, are strongly determined by such audience desires and political exigencies as currently prevail on the domestic scene."[36] So to speak, the expectations of the public for the stereotypical features of specific foreign characters should be present to a certain extent, making it compulsory to use stereotypes in cinematic productions, and on the other hand, the inclusion of characters with marked ethnic features is one of the self-imposed obligations of the industry.

In the case of Basque immigrants, our research has been focused on finding, cataloging and finally analyzing how this specific group was portrayed in

[33] J. Leerssen, 'Imagology: History and Method,' in M. Beller, J. Leerssen, eds., *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*, Amsterdam 2007, pp. 17–32, cit. in p. 26.

[34] X.M. Núñez-Seixas, *Icônes littéraires et stéréotypes sociaux. L'image des immigrants galiciens en Argentine (1800–1960)*, Besançon 2013, p. 12. "Stereotypes are not reality. But in order to be operative, they must have an acceptable degree of verisimilitude that makes them believable and, therefore, socially efficacious, because individuals can find in them a confirmation (more or less inferred) of their preconceptions in different contexts by the way of knowledge".

[35] A. Dudley, 'The Core and the Flow in Film Studies', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2009), pp. 879–915, cit. in p. 913.

[36] S. Kracauer, 'National Types as Hollywood Presents Them', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1949), pp. 53–72, cit. in p. 70.

American cinematic production (this is, not only in the movies as such but also in other moving image productions despite the type of screen they were designed to be projected). Two main characteristics should be present in order to be included in our analysis of any film, TV movie or TV series: firstly, they should be fictional films, not documentaries;[37] secondly, at least one character identified as Basque (or American of Basque descent) living or having lived in the United States should appear. Up to this moment (September 2014) we have found no less than 137 objects that match these two conditions, starting in 1916 -the oldest mention of a Basque character, in the film "The Land Just Over Yonder," (Dudley Motion Company. Dir.: Julius Frankenberg) a Western filmed between Southern California and Arizona- and ending in 2014.

Nonetheless, there is a great divide in the 1980s between the previous and following productions that can be noticed in two main elements. First of all, the number. The representation of Basque characters experienced a boom since the middle of that decade, with an increasing presence in the following decades. Only one quarter of the American films and movies with Basque immigrant/ Basque-American characters was produced from 1916 to 1985; moreover, slightly more than one third was made just during the first decade of the 21st century. The explosion of TV related production (movies and especially TV series) lies primarily, but not exclusively, behind this increase. Another explanation comes from the dominant stereotypical features of the Basques on the screen before and after this divide: from 1990 onward, Basques have been basically identified with terrorism.[38] There is no doubt that this image is directly derived from the increasing presence of Basque terrorism in the news, that was first internationally recognized because of the killing of the Spanish Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973, during the last period of the Francoist dictatorship, but whose actions became greater in intensity during the last two decades of the 20th

[37] Even though the thin line between a documentary and a fiction film is not as defined as usually presumed, there are two main differences that have made us decide to exclusively focus on the latter group: the objective with regard to the object of our study (to present a "real," accurate depiction of Basque immigrants instead of reflecting on the main stereotypes of them) and, more importantly, the audience each of these kinds of films tries to reach.

[38] On this identification, see O. Álvarez-Gila, I. Arranz-Otaegui, 'La imagen del inmigrante vasco en el cine: ¿reflejo, construcción o refuerzo de los estereotipos sociales,' *Sesión no numerada. Revista de letras y ficción audiovisual*, Vol. 4 (2014), pp. 68–96, cit. in pp. 68–69 and 81–82. A good example of this identification, because of its directness, can be found in the 2005 film by Steven Spielberg, *Munich*: when one of the members of the Israeli commando has to cover for himself in the presence of members of Palestinian Al-Fatah, he points at himself saying: "Basque, Basque, E-T-A." ETA is the acronym of *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (Basque Country and Freedom).

century. The stain of being included among the "riskiest ethnic groups" of the world has also tarnished the image of Basque Americans: even though there is no historical evidence of the presence of any member of ETA on American soil, let alone of any terrorist attack performed by ETA in (or against) America(ns), Hollywood fiction has recently depicted Basques kidnapping generals of the American army, trying to murder Spanish government members while travelling across America, using biological weapons and trying to attempt terrorist actions in Washington DC.[39]

But prior to 1980, the main stereotype of Basques was a completely different one. Moreover, this stereotype was deeply rooted in the experience of immigration: Basques were supposed to be as Basque immigrants were seen by Americans. It is not a coincidence that the very first Basque character found in a Hollywood production, in the aforementioned 1916 film "The Land Just Over Yonder," was an unnamed "Basque sheepherder" listed in the cast of secondary characters.[40] In reality, it would not be until the late 1950s when we can find a Basque (living or not in America) that was not (or was not a relative of) a sheepherder. Besides, most of the early films are Westerns, whose plots are located in the space between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean; that is, the regions where most of Basque immigrants settled.[41] The films were in most of the cases echoing the components of the stereotypical explanation that had been socially developed in America to explain the quasi-monopolistic involvement of Basque immigrants in sheepherding. In the episode "The Lynching" of the NBC's TV

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[39] Specific references to all these films and TV series, in Ó. Álvarez-Gila, I. Arranz-Otaegui, 'La imagen del inmigrante...', p. 70. Another added element has been the identification with other internationally active terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda. In one of the most recent mentions to Basque terrorism, the CBS series "Intelligence" (2014, season 1, chapter 3: "Mei Chen Returns"), the protagonist presents the image of the members of a supposed "Basque separatist sleeping cell" in Madrid whose racial features are clearly Arabic.

[40] We have not been able to find a copy of this film yet, even though there is enough written documentation on the content, plot and other elements related to it.

[41] Among others: During the 1920s: *The Pride of Palomar* (1922, Dir.: Frank Borzage), *The Enchanted Hill* (1926, Dir.: Irvin Willat), *The Night Cry* (1926, Dir.: Herman C. Raymaker), *Whispering Sage* (1927, Dir.: Scott R. Dunlap) *Thundering Thompson* (1929, Dir.: Ben F. Wilson). During the 1930s: *The Call of the Wilderness* (1932, Dir.: Herman C. Raymaker), *Valley of the Giants* (1938, Dir.: William Keighley). See: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), Los Angeles, California, Herrick Library, Core Collections, Production Clippings; Special Collections, Audrey Chamberlin scrapbooks. Also: Warner Bros. Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, BOX B00462, #213; and University of California Los Angeles, Film and Television Archive, #M1858. We can also include the aforementioned *Wild is the Wind.*

series *Tales of Wells Fargo* (season 1, episode 7, 1957, Dir.: Allen H. Miner), the Basque protagonists in the storyline introduced themselves in the opening scene with the following remark that reproduced one of the main lines of the Basque stereotype in the American west: “we are Basques from the Pyrenees. We are the best sheepherders of the world. Sheep are sheep, and the mountains are mountains.” Actually, the specialization of Basques in the sheep industry was usually explained on the basis of a supposed centuries-old tradition of sheepherding in their homeland, even though, as it has been repeatedly shown, this specialization is just a result of the historical contingency of the early moments of pioneering immigration.[42] But the cinematic explanation usually avoids the historical analysis and prefers the social stereotype: “The Basques,” said Gino (Anthony Quinn), one of the main protagonists of *Wild is the Wind* (1959), “they’ve got a sheep in the blood,” when he was trying to explain to his newlywed wife Gioia why he had written “to a Church in Spain” asking for a little Basque orphan to live with and work for him.

Nevertheless, the appearance of Basque immigrant characters in films during these early decades was not the result of a conscious attempt by producers, scriptwriters or directors to introduce this kind of ethnic characters in their films. Basques were not intentionally looked for, but found by chance in the main sources filmmakers were extracting their stories from: popular literature. Books by very popular authors like Peter B. Kyne or Harry Sinclair Drago were soon transformed into films, usually under the supervision of the novelists themselves in the process of scriptwriting.[43] These authors, that either were local residents and had direct knowledge of the social scenery of the West, or tried at least to obtain first-hand information on it, introduced some Basque characters in their novels, if the story was dealing with sheepherding. Films only performed a passive reception of these characters during the process of adapting the novels they were first presented in. Probably because of this, the main feature of the way Basque characters were depicted in these early films was their *physical invisibility*: apart from the explicit mention to their Basque origins and/or their job in sheepherding, there was no other element, visual or not -especially after the implementation of sound films -, that would permit direct identification as members of a specific ethnic or racial group by the audience. To a certain extent, this indistinctiveness was not a particularity of Basques, but a common feature in the early description of any immigrant group in American cinema. As Mullin

[42] W.A. Douglass, Bilbao, *Amerikanuak...* Also W.A. Douglass, *Global Vasconia. Essays on the Basque Diaspora*, Reno NV 2006.

[43] Ó. Álvarez-Gila, I. Arranz-Otaegui, ‘La imagen del inmigrante...,’ p. 84. Also E. Arostegui, ‘The Construction...’, who analyses the works by Drago.

states, "many of the [...] films of the silent era [...] nourish the cherished vision of America as a vast melting pot of ethnic groups who discard their individual cultural heritages to form one people." Moreover, he adds, "the fact that ethnic characters in movies were customarily played by 'actors of WASP descent' also helped to reinforce an American norm of reality for immigrant audiences, where 'identification with character means identification with the effacement of ethnicity.'"[44] Basques were not outside of this tendency: the actors that played Basque characters during the 1910s, 20s and 30s were mainly white, Anglo-Saxon or of Western European origin.[45]

After a brief hiatus during the decade of the 1940s, because of the war effort Hollywood was also involved in, the revitalization of the genre due to its transplantation to television brought some significant changes in the representation of Basque immigrants in Westerns. This was the moment of classic serials, in black and white and, from the sixties onward, in color, like *Tales of Wells Fargo* (1957–1965), *Gunsmoke* (1955–1975), *Wagon Train* (1957–1965), *The Big Valley* (1965–1969) or *Bonanza* (1959–1973). With the only – and noteworthy[46] – exception of the last, all the rest of these serials had, at least, one chapter devoted to develop a story centered on Basque sheepherders. But there was one big difference in comparison with the previous period with regard to the way Basques were now depicted on the screen. In a preceding article on the topic, I named this phase, which lasted up to the middle of the 1980s, as the "folkloric period" of the evolution of the stereotype of Basques.[47] During this period, films

[44] P. Mullins, 'Ethnic Cinema in the Nickelodeon Era in New York City: Commerce, Assimilation and Cultural Identity', *Film History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2000), pp. 115–124 cit. in p. 117.

[45] For instance Sydney Lang (*The Land Just Over Yonder*), Ed Brady (*The Pride of Palomar*), Emile Chautard and Natalie Joyce (*Whispering Sage*), Neva Gerber (Thundering Thompson), Warner Baxter (*Their Mad Moment*) or Paul Panzer (*Valley of the Giants*). The main exception is the Spanish language version of *Their Mad Moment* (filmed as *Mi último amor*, 1931, Dir. Louis Seller), in which all the Basque characters are played by Spaniards; but in this case the main reason for this selection lies, to our understanding, in the language they spoke, not in a supposed attempt to present a more accurate depiction of the Basques.

[46] The ranch *Bonanza*, that gave its name to the serial, was supposed to be located around Lake Tahoe, in the North-Eastern part of Nevada, very close to Carson City, Virginia City and Reno. This was one of the regions of preference for the settlement of Basque sheepherders; even today, the oldest and biggest center of Basque Studies outside of the Basque Country is at the University of Nevada-Reno.

[47] See Ó. Álvarez-Gila, 'Percepción social y estereotipos de los inmigrantes en las sociedades de acogida. El cine como fuente de estudio', in L.E. Blacha, G. Mateo, eds., *Territorios, migraciones e identidades en un mundo rural heterogéneo y de cambios (1850–1960)*, Buenos Aires 2012, pp. 247–274.

and moviemakers started a process of "ethnicization" of the image of Basque people, managing to generate a visual stereotype of these immigrants in order to identify them, based on three elements, by order or relevance:

a) The adoption of a specific, ethnically marked clothing, identified with -or derived from- the traditional, folkloric costume as was established in the beginning of the 20th century and afterwards used by performers of traditional, folkloric dances and music. This costume, as presented in the movies, was always composed in the case of the men, at least, of the traditional Basque beret (or *txapela*), a white shirt, and a red belt (or *gerriko*), in a suit that is very closely related to the costume traditionally used by the participants in the "running of the bulls" in Pamplona, Navarre. It could also be completed by the addition of other elements, not as habitual, like a handkerchief around the neck, a vest, and/or the traditional esparto shoes or *espartinak* (*Image 2*).

Image 2.

Manolo Etchahoun (Robert Urich) wearing one of the most complete Basque folkloric suits, including a beret, shirt, vest and handkerchief.
"Manolo", *Gunsmoke*, 20th season, 23rd episode (1975)

b) The election of actors with strongly distinct, unmistakable, ethnic features to play the role of Basque characters. In the majority of the cases, these roles were put in the hands of Latin Americans. One of the earliest examples of this shift from European to Latin American actors can be seen in the 1953 film *Titanic* (Dir.: Jean Negulesco). Here a Mexican actor, Salvador Baquez, was selected to play Mr. Uzcudun, a Basque trying to emigrate to America in the

renowned ship.[48] This tendency became consolidated during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the preference for Latin Americans, or sometimes Spaniards, turned into a general practice. Even in cases in which the main roles were reserved for well-known American actors, it became customary to hire some actors from a Spanish-speaking country. In *A Time of Destiny* (1988, Dir. Gregory Nava) the co-scriptwriter and director, himself of mixed Mexican-Basque descent, decided to call a renowned Spanish actor, Francisco Rabal, to play the role of the patriarch of a Basque immigrant family living near San Diego, California, during the Second World War, while the rest of the cast were plain American actors like Timothy Hutton or William Hurt.

The progressive identification of Basques as Latinos was conditioned by a misunderstanding of the available information about their homeland and peculiarities of their cultural traits. Geographically, the Basque Country is a region divided between Spain and France. In the process of creating the cinematic stereotype of Basques, Hollywood based it upon a mixture of elements taken from the most widely known and identifiable stereotypes of the French and Spanish. A good example of this practice is *Thunder in the Sun*, a failed attempt to recreate the immigrant experience of the Basques in America (1959, Dir.: Russell Rouse). In this B series film, apart from some evident historical mistakes, the spectator is confronted with a group of French Basques that wear Basque folkloric costumes, speak French and bear French family names, but dance *flamenco* and use Spanish given names.[49] Nonetheless, as time went by, the weight of the Spanish side of this mixture ended up prevailing over the other half-identity. In an episode of the final season of *Gunsmoke* ("Manolo", 1975), the premises of the club where Basque immigrants gather is shown: a space full of Spanish national flags decorating the walls. But the basic elements of the Basque stereotype were neither related to Spain nor France, both European nations, but to Latin America, whose language is the same and whose culture is closely tied to Spain, but is not by any means the same. More than along the border between Spain and France, it seemed that the Basque Country was located somewhere between Paris and Mexico City.

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[48] Nonetheless, the role of Mrs. Uzcudun, his wife, was played by a Polish actress, Marta Mitrovich. The election of the name of the fictional Basque family also denotes an interesting attempt to give verisimilitude to their ethnic background, as this name belonged to who can be considered the most famous Basque sportsman of the first half of the century, the boxer Paulino Uzcudun.

[49] Ó. Álvarez-Gila, 'Los equívocos de una identidad confundida. La imagen de los inmigrantes vascos en la película Thunder in the Sun (1959)', *Guregandik*, Vol. 4 (2008), pp. 11–31.

As a consequence of this process, the Basque stereotype on the screen ended in the identification of the physical, racial features of Basques with those of the also stereotyped Latin American: short, stocky, dark or of mixed race. So it was, for instance, that the producers of the TV serial *Tales of Wells Fargo* decided to hire the Mexican actor Víctor Millán, a mestizo, to play the role of Manuel, a Basque sheepherder mistakenly accused of raping a child because, among other reasons, of his impossibility to speak any language other than Spanish (*Image 3*). The early use of actors with these visible racial features reinforced the identification for future productions, in a give and take process in which filmmakers, instead of innovating, preferred to rely on previous movies.

Image 3.

The Basque sheepherder Manuel (Víctor Millán)

c) Finally, the use of non-visual elements like voice intonation, language and the soundtrack of movies is also remarkable. The few examples in which the Basque language is used, or at least referred to as being the native tongue of these immigrants, contrast with the overwhelming majority of films in which French, and much more frequently, Spanish are their language of use. When the latter happens, as we could expect, Latin American accents are dominant. Along with that, the musical arrangements that accompany the introduction of the Basques usually are not Basque folkloric music at all, but Andalusian or Mexican at best.

EPILOGUE

What about the identification of Basques and Gypsies? In actual fact, it was not an invention made in Hollywood. Starting from the European Romanticism of the early 19th century, when Spain became a focus of attention for many Western, North European writers and artists looking for the authenticity of a next-door exoticism, this confusion had actually spread into some of the better known stereotypical discourses on Spanishness. They were largely presented by French writers like Victor Hugo or Prosper Merimée, the first author who made the connection between Gypsies and Basques, mingling a not so accurate understanding of the internal diversity of Spain with regional French stereotypes -that also included Basques. This is the case, for instance, of Victor Hugo's portrayal of Esmeralda the Gypsy girl that protagonizes *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1931):

> In a wide space left clear between the crowd and the fire, a young girl was dancing.
> (...) She was not tall, but her slenderlightsomeness made her appear so. Her complexion was dark, but one guessed that by daylight it would have been the beautiful golden tint of Andalusian and Roman women. Her small feet, too, were Andalusian, for they seemed at once tight yet comfortable in her dainty shoes. (...) She danced to a Basque tambourine which she tinkled above her head, thus displaying her lovely arms.[50]

The opera *Carmen*, by Georges Bizet, based on the novel by Proser Merimée epitomized the exotic identification of Gypsyness with Spanishness. But even here, the Basques are also somehow mixed up: Don José, the lover of Carmen, is actually a Navarrese-born Basque that, among other things, has been able to teach some Basque words and expressions to Carmen.

But more than in this literary tradition, it is more likely that, to a certain extent, some of the elements that were blended into the cinematic Basque stereotype during the 50s and 60s could explain the emergence during that last century of some degrees of identification between Gypsies and Basques. One of the bases could come from the very same popular literature the first films were adapted from. As Etulain points out, the early view of the first Basque sheepherders in the West presented them as "wily rascals, (…) nomads [that] were a constant

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[50] Quoted by J.A. Brown 'If Looks Could Kill: Power, Revenge and Stripper Movies', in M. McCaughey, N. King, eds., *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in Film*, Austin TX 2001, pp. 52–77, cit. in pp. 54–55.

headache for the ranger because they were tramp sheepmen who chose to graze their ewes and lambs on public lands rather than their own range."[51] Harry Sinclair Drago and Joseph Noel, in their novel *Whispering Sage* (1922), when describing the behavior of one of the Basque sheepmen of Pleasant Valley, Nevada, said that his "humility, this bending of the knee, might be well enough for Mexicans; but he was no Latin. In his veins was the blood of the gypsying Celt. It gave him vision enough to see that the way of the Basques and these English-speaking people did not lie together."

Sheepmen, nomads, exotic, folkloric and ethnic. These five terms could abstract the stereotyped vision that American cinema and television managed to create about the Basques from the 1910s to the 1980s. They were also, on the other hand, a particularly naive and unharmful people, whose role in the often simplistic, black-and-white division of the characters between good and evil lay on the side of the first. But this mixture of ingeniousness, romanticism and folklorism did not endure long after the emergence of the "Basque question" in the international arena of politics and news. After decades of herding sheep, a new stereotype of the bombing, rebellious Basques was on its way to creation.

[51] R.W. Etulain, 'The Basques in Western...,' p. 63.