

The Matrixiality of the Earth in the Basque Worldview

ARANTZAZU SARATXAGA ARREGI, PhD

Abstract

The prehistory of the Basques settled in the north of the Iberian Peninsula is a special mystery. Basque language, whose origins are still unclear, does not belong to the Indo-European languages. The latest ethnological and linguistic research into the origin of this language points to a pre-Indo-European ancestry. Like any medium, language is not merely a functional means of transmitting a message. It interprets the world, gives names to the world, and organises it according to the specific meaning of each language. For Basque, it can be demonstrated that the pre-Indo-European worldview does not correspond to the Indo-European patriarchal worldview. Despite controversial positions on the matriarchal organisational structures of the Basque people and their matricultural customs, researchers agree that Basque pre-Indo-European elements represent patterns strongly influenced by the mother archetype. Matrixial patterns in the symbolism of Basque culture and especially in language and mythology are features of pre-Indo-European culture. To refer to the pre-Indo-European elements of the Basque worldview, I will use the term matrixial (Saratxaga). This is a philosophical category that designates the creative force of form and organisation into the world. The aim of this essay is to highlight the symbolic expressions of a Basque matrixiality and to present their meaning in the context of a cultural worldview. The article focuses especially on the matrixial character of the symbolic dimensions of the earth, taking into account animism and its own laws, with its spirits that inhabit it.

Based on the work of the philosopher Andrés Ortiz Osés, who has given an interpretation of pre-Indo-European symbolism against the background of hermeneutic doctrine, the Basque matrixial elements will emerge here. The



research and contribution of Jorge Oteiza are of particular importance in this context. His approach has given an aesthetic interpretation to the Basque world horizon. According to Jorge Oteiza, emptiness as a fundamental concept of a non-differentiated unity where there are no separations, where creation and death form a unity, where heaven and earth are not yet divided (zerulurra: universe), is a special feature of Basque pre-Indo-European matrixial symbolism.

Keywords: Earth, Basque matriarchalism, megalithic monument, animism, geo-cosmic force

Résumé

La préhistoire des Basques établis dans le nord de la péninsule ibérique demeure mystérieuse. La langue basque, dont les origines sont encore obscures, ne fait pas partie des langues indo-européennes. Les recherches les plus récentes suggèrent une origine pré-indo-européenne. Comme tout les médias, une langue n'est pas seulement un moyen fonctionnel de transmettre un message, la langue interprète le monde, nomme ses composantes, et l'organise selon des modes spécifiques à chaque langue. En ce qui concerne le Basque, on peut démontrer que la vision du monde pré-indo-européenne qu'il supporte, ne correspond pas à la vision du monde patriarcale indo-européenne. En dépit des positions controversées sur les structures sociales matriarcales du peuple basque, de nombreux chercheurs sont d'accord pour dire que des éléments de la culture basque représentent des schémas fortement influencés par l'archétype de la Mère. Ces schémas matriciels constituent le cœur du symbolisme de la culture basque. J'utilise le terme 'matriciel' (Saratxaga) pour désigner ces éléments pré-indo-européens dans la vision du monde basque; le terme basque fait référence à une catégorie philosophique qui s'applique à la force créative dirigeant forme et organisation dans le monde. Le but de cet essai est de souligner les expressions symboliques de la matricialité basque, et d'en présenter leur signification dans le contexte culturel. Ce texte se concentre surtout sur le caractère matriciel des dimensions symboliques de la terre et des esprits qui l'habitent, en prenant compte de l'animisme et de ses lois.

Basé sur le travail du philosophe Andrés Ortiz Osés, qui nous a donné une interprétation du symbolisme Basque pré-indo-européen, à partir des principes de l'herméneutique, notre approche devrait voir émerger ses éléments matriciels. La recherche et les contributions de Jorge Oteiza sont d'une importance particulière dans ce contexte; son approche a produit une interprétation esthétique l'horizon du monde basque. Selon lui, le vide, en tant que notion fondamentale pour la conception d'une unité non-différenciée, sans séparation, où la création et la mort se rejoignent, où le

ciel et la terre ne sont pas encore divisés (zerulurra: univers), est un trait spécifique du symbolisme matriciel pré-indo-européen basque.

Mot-clés : la Terre, matriarcat basque, monument mégalithique, animisme, force géocosmique.

Introduction: In the Corridor of Coordinates

In the Basque Country there is a widespread belief that in certain places valuable treasures are hidden underneath the earth. *Urrezulo* is the name of a cave in Ataun, which literally means 'gold cave.' A golden hide is said to be kept in some cavity. The coordinates of the place where this treasure is located are never precisely specified,¹ because the routes taken by shepherds to get there are as vague as they are indeterminate.² In Platzentzia one can still hear: *ardiaren oñak agertuko du urezko palanka mendi oetan*³ ('the sheep's hoof will discover a golden lever in these mountains').

On the mountain Ereñusare is buried an *idinaru* (oxhide) full of gold; on that of Goikogane (in Arankudaga) a goatskin; and on Igozmendi, near Santa Eufamia (Aulestia), a golden bell (...); on the mountain Aritz in Leiza a *kutxa* (chest) full of precious metal (...); and on the mountain Aralar an *arillki* (yarn winch) of the same, belonging to Marimunduko (a subterranean genie living in the cave of the mountain Muru).⁴

The gold treasures are hidden, but not concealed. The coordinates show the way to the accumulation of golden hides located in the dark labyrinthine interior of the Earth, and with their help, its infinite body can be traversed. Moreover, they are points of reference to the location where the surfaces of heaven and earth meet. Earth and sky remain knotted together through these points, through which the cycle of time runs with day and night: "The blue sky is called *Ostri*. In it move the stars that, when they set in the west, enter the 'red seas' (*Itxasgorrieta*) to make their way through the subterranean world."⁵

¹ Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore* (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1973), 22.

² Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Mitología vasca* (Madrid: Minotauro, 1960), 81.

³ Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 13.

⁴ Barandiaran, *Mitología vasca*, 54.

⁵ Ibid.



Figure 1: Coordinates anagram; © Jon Arkotxa Goikoa and Leslie Mackenzie: *Intxixu ta Lezeko* (Paris: GEU/Desclee de Brouwer, 1982), 38.

The passage through the coordinates is entrusted to the spirits. *Intxixu*, a tiny, mischievous, cunning, shrewd spirit, fully covered with dark hair, dwelling in the crevice of Arditurri (in Oiartzun), leads people through the crevice into the passage of coordinates.

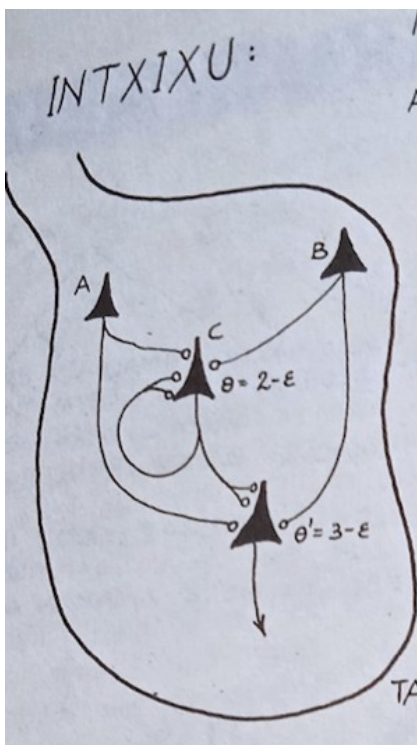


Figure 2: Coordinate mapping; © Jon Arkotxa Goikoa and Leslie Mackenzie: *Intxixu ta Lezeko* (Paris: GEU/Desclee de Brouwer, 1982), 23.

This work aims to address the symbolic order of the earth, insofar as it is central to Basque mythology. Here, the symbolic, economic, and animistic meaning of the body of the earth is presented along with the figures that animate it. This text follows the thesis of a naturalistic/animistic immanence in which symbolic order is based on a fundamental law (*logos*) that governs the body of the earth according to the law of equilibrium.

There is only the earth, whose body all beings inhabit and through which they are connected. Actually, one could speak about a Basque geo-cosmos, since the symbolic order of the Earth is the only one that shapes the horizon of meaning of Basque beliefs. Its order is determined by circular homeostasis, its laws being those of reciprocation, in that every giving is equal to a taking. The guardian of the balanced geosystem is Mari, the mistress of all genii, a female numen who guards the earth and ensures its circular organization.

Through this research, I will discuss the thesis of matriarchalism - a critical reformulation of the concept and theories of matriarchy based on Andrés Ortiz Osé's mytho-hermeneutics. The goal and purpose of this paper is to attribute the animistic Basque mytho-symbolism of the earth, characterized by strong immanence, to the category of matrixiality. Through a critical reading of Basque matriarchalism, I want to bundle the value system derived from the primary position of the earth within the Basque organization of culture (Geo-Organon) with a worldview determined by the matrixial power of formation.

METHOD: ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HERMENEUTIC AND AESTHETIC MATERIALS

The Research

The expedition through the corridor of coordinates began on an August day in 2021. Drawing on Jose Miguel Barandiaran's collection of materials attesting to the Basque worldview - a compilation of oral narratives, archaeological findings along with summarized ethnographic documents - I could set out for those places where the treasures of the female mistress of all genii, *Mari*, are kept, thus tracing the symbolic order of the Basque worldview shaped by mothers. The works of Andrés Ortiz-Osés on a collective unconscious associated with matriarchalism are considered the red thread of this expedition. The interpretation of a female numen, around whose symbolic order Basque mythologies revolve, is complemented and expanded by an aesthetic reading of Basque pre-Indo-European traces based on the artist Jorge Oteiza.

The first stop covers the Arantzazu-Aizkorri area in the northwest of the Pyrenees in the Basque Country, where Mari resides at their rock crevices and interior galleries. This is followed by several visits to the archives of the Koldo Mitxelena Library, where the complete works of the Basque archaeologist, anthropologist and ethnographer José Miguel de Barandiaran can be found. The third stop concerns the Aralar mountain range, whose crevices Mari inhabits and flies over. This area is particularly rich in

megalithic monuments that, according to archaeologists, anthropologists, artists and hermeneuticians of Basque culture, testify to a geo-philosophical belief system that this essay addresses in the context of a matrixial symbolism of Basque worldview.

The Witness

I set out on the course of coordinates with the help of three tools that relate to each other. The first tool consists in the collection of the material trace: megalithic statues, ethnographic testimonies and mythical narratives that the culture of the Basque region has left us. What do these materials speak to us about? What are they witnesses to? I would like to use two methods to shed light on the answer to these questions. One concerns hermeneutics (second tool) and the second aesthetics (third tool). The second tool is about the hermeneutics of sense (*Hermeneutica del Sentido*) by philosopher Andrés Ortíz-Osés. He has interpreted the ethnological, anthropological and cultural patrimony of the Basque culture as a symbolic order attributed to the mother and assigned to matriarchalism.

The third tool aims to consider the material traces beyond the projection surface of a cultural consciousness, as created testimonies by means of which Neolithic man bundled the sensory horizon of the earth. The Neolithic cromlech is supposed to represent the supreme creative act, whose plastic expression, according to the sculptor Jorge Oteiza, is emptiness. An aesthetic-religious reading of the void will thus connect to the Basque worldview of the earth.

The interacting triad between archaeology, hermeneutics, and art forms the methodological approach of this essay. Art bears witness to the creation of man as an individual and collective event to which material traces bear witness and whose consciousness bears witness to the hermeneutics of meaning.

Immanence of Basque Naturalistic-Animistic Worldview

Basque mythology is the main source of any talk about the matriarchal symbolism of Basque culture. Basque culture has not developed a general saga in the form of poetry, though, because it is mainly a practice based on oral tradition. Its justification therefore lies not in the saga recorded and handed down by the writer, in which the respective narratives of a generalized canon are bundled. José Miguel de Barandiaran collected, compiled, ordered, classified and assigned these narratives in the systematization of oral tradition to a documentary practice. However, he did not attribute to them either a narrative or a philosophical meta-level. Since the generalization of myths is due to their inscription in a metanarrative canon, I would rather avoid the term mythology. Instead, myths can be spoken of according to the original meaning of myth, 'discourse, word, narrative.' Shepherds and ladies tell stories that are about numen, genii, and other mythical creatures, which in turn tell something that neither shepherds nor ladies tell. Whether narratives of a second order

(those that tell about narratives) are subordinate to a general narrative structure is a subject of myth research. In contrast, I do not want to give myths a generalized structure, but to understand each individual narrative as a source of imaginary symbolism of a state of mind or as an expression of an ideal, corresponding to a particular ethnological group.

Admittedly, general characteristics are to be inferred. Barandiaran simply states that Basque myths have a magical and animistic milieu as their starting point.⁶ In fact, neither cosmogonic nor eschatological narratives are to be found, since there are no stories of beginning or end. However, they speak about the course of natural phenomena and their effect on the horizon of senses perceived by man. Natural objects are animated by spirits and the phenomena flowing out of them are controlled by them.

Eguzki-Amandre (sun), *Odei* (thunder, storm), *Sugaar* (fireball) and others are animated forces of nature. There is an analogy with human beings, since both share one and the same nature: they are all spiritual beings, despite their difference of species as natural objects and human beings. According to this equality of their nature, the communication of people with nature and vice versa is open. Through magical procedures one can approach them or defend oneself against them. One defends oneself against *Odei* (spirit of the storm) by gestures and by showing *Uztaibedar* (celestial or rainbow grass); against "Mari's lightning" one shows her an axe or a hawthorn spike.⁷

In this respect, enchantment and magical practices are medial techniques to cross the interface between humans and animate nature (*natura naturans*). Animistic naturalism and magical communication are inferential world views of an ontology whereby beings share one and the same genus insofar as they are animate and their kinship is based on belonging to the earth, to one and the same body. In this respect, animistic and naturalistic worldviews are not positions to be contrasted with technological ones, according to the definition of these worldviews by hermeneuticist Andrés Ortiz-Osés.⁸

For magic is a technique of protection and intervention, whereby the transduction of forces crosses the threshold of the human soul and the spirit of nature. This technique creates bonds and connections between all beings inhabiting the Earth. The connection that can be made through the magical practices reveals an inner kinship of all the beings inhabiting the Earth. The inner interconnectedness corresponds to a structure of reality which I call immanence and which is confirmed by language. The popular statement *Izena duen guztia omen da* (Everything that has a name is) refutes the idea of a non-existence of what has no objective reality. As soon as a thing is named, it is present and exists, it has a place in reality. The existence of a thing is

⁶ Barandiaran, *Mitología vasca*, 19.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Andrés Ortiz-Osés, *Los mitos vascos* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2007), 19-20.

based on its name, because ontology (being) and language are not separated from each other.

Geo-Sophy: House, Spirit, and Law

Earth-House (Etxe-Lur)

According to the popular narratives collected by Barandiaran, the Earth is an infinite and immeasurable surface whose surface forms a horizontal plane, with reliefs of dry land and with the waters of the oceans.⁹ The Earth extends both into the vastness and into the depths. Galleries and corridors cross the sacred and magical realm where opulence reigns: milk and honey flow through the vast region. Its interior is full of treasures, especially those made of gold, which is said to represent the vital energy of the universe. The cult of the earth comprises mainly in the admiration of a mysterious region where the treasures are hidden. Consequently, the worship cults are not carried out on the surface of the earth, where it is plowed and tilled, but in the grottoes, in the hollow surfaces that lead to the interior of the earth. Some wells, fissures, and caves are connected to them, like the Urbi6n well, the fissures of Omina and Albi, the caves of Amboto, Muru and Txindoki. Storm clouds and hurricanes emanate from these subterranean regions, announcing the arrival of Mari.¹⁰

The earth is the geo-cosmic space in which all beings are housed. It is the abode of all. Her infinite body retains that type of being whose general nature is to be animated by the power of the earth. Her interior is inhabited by spirits, mixed beings and genii; on the surface dwell men and all living beings, some of whom grow into the interior of the earth or come to the threshold of the interior and exterior of the earth's surface. The surface of the earth is perforated by caves, fissures and grottos. These are entrances and exits through which nature and human spirits pass through the earthly body in different directions and depths, and pass out over the spirits from the inside to the outside of the top layer of the earth's body. There are several generic names by which the Basque language designates those crevices of the earth through which the genii visit the world of men and the latter descend into the inner worldliness of the earth. Here are some of them: *Leiza, Leza, Zolo, Lesa*.¹¹

The passages that lead into the earth are connected to the house in particular. As Barandiaran notes, "The Amunda ravine is connected to the kitchen of the farmhouse of the Saaltse, especially in the oldest houses such as Gaztelu (in San Martin de Arberua), Jauregia (in Ezpeleta), Semeola (in Alzola), Egana (in Aizarna), the kitchens are connected (*to the ravine*) with passages."¹² Above the hearth, where the warmth of the fire brings people together and feeds them, is the passage to the inner ways of the earth. *Etxe* (house) resembles the geo-cosmic space, but in the measure of man.¹³ *Etxe*

⁹ Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 54.

¹⁰ Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³ Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 81.

is land and shelter, temple and cemetery, material support, symbol and common center of the living and deceased members of a family. The main forms of life and the whole mythological and religious system that establishes and ensures the community of the living and the deceased developed in close relation to the *etxe*.¹⁴ Each *etxe* bears the name of all the inhabitants, ancestors and those who are currently present. The house is managed by an *etxeko-andre* (mistress of the house). She takes the host of the house by the hand, and with lights she illuminates the deceased and brings them food. She maintains the household and is responsible for managing all the important institutions of the Basque social system.

Spirits of the Earth

The cohesion of communal organization of the Basque house (also called *bazerri*), beyond its social and economic level lies in its religious foundation, starting from the ancient Latin *rem ligere*, 'to bind a thing (or a project)'.¹⁵ The house, apart from its inhabitants, is inhabited by ancestors from whom there is a blood or spiritual descent. In the traditional Basque house, the ancestors had a seat (*yarleku*); this was transferred to the Church with the Christianization of the country.¹⁶ Thus, their presence in the house is taken into account and they are given great reverence.¹⁷

Besides the chasms bridging ancestral souls, numerous spirit beings circulate in the inner channels of the earth. From Aizkorri to Aralar they pass through underground paths, across the earth's crevices and chasms.¹⁸ They are numen, zoomorphs or spirits seated in natural objects. Each of them is attributed a name. They are neither fictitious nor imaginary forces, but according to the previously quoted saying 'Everything that has a name is,' they inhabit the same reality as humans. *Gaurko*, the night-lighting genie who appears in the form of a cow or a lion,¹⁹ *Inguma*, *Aideko*, and *Gaizkine* are at first sight malevolent spirits who are associated with diseases, the cause of which is not known. *Marmarro* and *Galtxagorri*, very tiny genies who help people in manual activities; *Maide*, a genie who enters the kitchen through the fireplace and hearth and receives the gifts left there for her. She is also in charge of building Cromlech together with *Intxixu*. *Sorgin* is a nocturnal genie and protector of birth.²⁰ *Ireltxu*, *Tartaro*, *Tartalo*, *Antxo*, *Iona gordi*, and *Sugaar* are all expressions for genii of subterranean regions. *Lamiak*, this beautiful girl with chicken feet, is the companion of the mistress of all genii and guardian of the laws of the earth: Mari. Of special importance are spirits that take the form of wild animals: *Zezengorri* (red bulls), *Bigorri* (red heifers), rams, sheep, goats, pigs and dogs are seen in several gorges, as in Leiza-Suloa. Barandiaran writes, "In Ataun, it was believed that in the gorge called Ituriozko-leizea, which opens in a mountain near the village of Iturioz, lives a red calf (...) It is said that

¹⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹⁵ Theodor Bergmann, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der lateinischen Vokabel re(l)igion* (Marburg: Typoskript, 1984), S. 74-77.

¹⁶ Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 57-58.

¹⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁸ Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20.

²⁰ Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 71.

in the Omina gorge (Araba) lives a golden calf guarded by witches and monsters (. ...) The most famous underground monster in the legends of Goierri (Gipuzkoa) is the *Iraunsuge*, whose description by the villagers coincides with that of the dragon."²¹

Mari: Woman Wrapped in Fire

Mari has different names depending on the topology and the destination of those places where she has been seen. Because of her appearance, which is fleeting and quick like lightning, she is respected in several places, so that there are quite a few places and villages that bear the name of Mari.²² In Durango she is called *Anbotoko Dama*, in Zenarruza *Anbotoko Semorie*, in Goierri *Muruko Dama*, in Ataun *Marimunduko* and *Sugara*, in Segara *Aketegiko Dama*; *Marije-Kobako* (in Markina), *Marimunduko* (in Berasategi), *Maya* (in Oiartzun), *Majue* (in Azkoitia). Crossing the air of the Basque Pyrenees as it moves from one pit to another, from Aizkorri to Anbotoko to Gorbeia. Mountains, caves and crevices are Mari's abodes. She crosses the celestial space in the form of a fireball in the direction of the Aralar Gorge, Aizkorri,²³ and so she flies over all these mountains like lightning. In the words of Barandiaran:

In Zurzo de Gamboa they claim to have seen the woman of Anbotoko crossing the air in the form of a crescent of fire and carrying it in the direction of Navarre²⁴ (...) The description of the woman of Aketegi, which I heard from the mouth of a peasant from Segura, reminded me of the strange phenomenon known in meteorology as ball lightning.²⁵

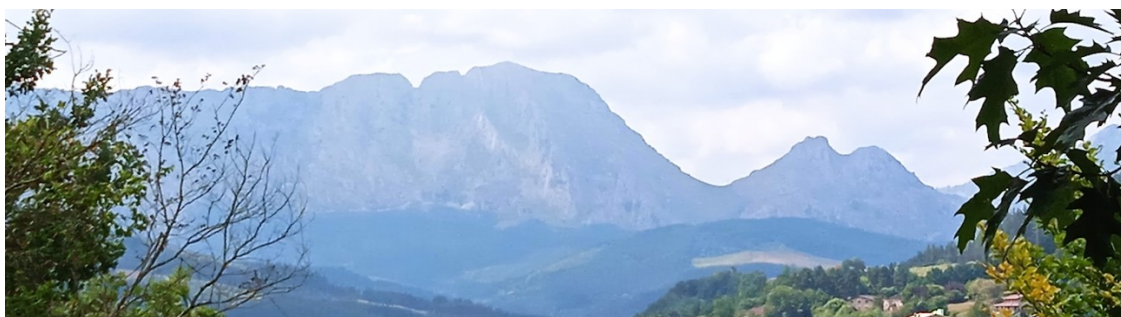


Figure 3: Legend: The habitual abode of the Lady of Anbot (Anbotoko Dama) is a precipice in the mountain of the same name. The relief of this mountain illustrates Mari's outline.

Mari also shows up in the form of a hybrid being. Her anthropomorphic femininity can be seen on her upper body. She appears as a beautiful woman, but with zoomorphic and plant representations of the lower body.²⁶ While her upper human appearance always remains the same, her lower animal form changes according to the season and

²¹ Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 20.

²² Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Diccionario Ilustrado de mitología vasca y algunas de sus fuentes* (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1972), 280.

²³ *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 370.

region in which she is seen. As a deer she was observed in Aketegi and even as a horse in Oñate; her representation as a woman with bird and goat feet is also known. Her figure in the form of a tree also appears in a legend in Oñate.²⁷

Mari's representability is equated to the symbolism of telluric forces of nature.²⁸ Without wanting to deny this analogy, I see in the species intersection of man/animal/plant-woman a clear metaphor to express one and the same origin. This can be understood as a representation of incest, which, given a mother archetype that is subordinate to the father, ascribes to heaven subordinate, telluric, hidden, and thus irrational, and forbidden values. The zoo-, phyto-, and nature-shaped figure of the female numen Mari expresses, in my view, the filiation of all species via a female lineage/uterine descent respectively. Animals, plants and humans are related and assigned to one and the same genus. As a natural phenomenon, Mari takes the form of a creative force, a force of formation that binds, unites, disperses, forms. This is embodied in the symbolic order in a female natural phenomenon whose modes of formation seem to be mutable, but the genus inherent in her remains unchanged. This can be clearly seen in her anthropomorphic form, yet her human appearance seems to radiate a tremendous beauty. Her beauty is admired by the boys and girls, i.e. children, but terrifies the shepherds and priests. Dressed in a golden robe, she combs her golden hair. Barandiaran tells:

One day a shepherd came to the entrance of the terrible cave that opens in the eastern part of the Aketegi ridge. He had heard that Mari lived in this dark cave and that she could only be seen when she went out to comb her beautiful hair or when she turned into fire and crossed the sky.²⁹

The caves inhabited by her are richly decorated and covered with gold and precious stones. In Zegama it is said that in the cave of Aketegi her room is furnished with golden beds. In Zarauz it is said that Mari winds thread with a golden spool. She turns coal into gold. She holds a palace of gold in her hands³⁰. Her visible elegance seems to be a praiseworthy attitude.

Law of the Earth

The Tribute that Mari Collects

Underlying the animistic and magical organic geo-cosmos, above all, is the view that the whole earth is an animated organism. The Basque animistic worldview has a name for the inner earth life force, a kind of geo-cosmic force from which all beings inhabiting the earth are descended and which sustains itself during ceaseless creative evolution. This force is called *Adur*, is determined as female and stands for life

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 371.

²⁹ Ibid., 299.

³⁰ Ibid., 289.

energy.³¹ The word denotes a creative and formative force attributed to the development of each organism. Thus the nature of the respective spiritual beings appears as nothing else than morphogenetic variations of one and the same life energy, a mystical force imaged as natural force, causing storms and drought.³²

In Adur's service is Mari, the mistress of all genii. As mistress of the earth, her mission is to keep the inherent energy of the earth in equilibrium. She is to ensure that there is a balanced flow of energy on earth by enacting laws and taking action to keep the geo-energy. She maintains justice on earth by ensuring a state of equal measure among all Earth's inhabitants. With appropriate actions, she triggers strong storms or causes a long period of drought.³³ Such meteorological disastrous events are not to be considered as punishments, but they are rather epiphanic interventions of Mari, through which she balances the entanglement of forces brought about by all the species inhabiting the Earth, i.e. provides for the economy of equilibrium. Her measures and judgments are serve as a guarantee for the self-preservation of the earth. Therefore, Mari symbolizes justice, a being that secures and enacts the just law of the earth. She uses a technique of regulation: that of double negation.

Technique of double negation

As a fireball, Mari flies over the Basque part of the Pyrenees looking for the negated. In a narrative collected by Barandiaran it says:

On a certain occasion, the lady of Anboto was asked where her companions were. *Elgoiabaren ezaren bila* (in Elgoibar, looking for the negation, negation, denial), she answered. A shepherd owns a hundred sheep, but is said to have counted only ninety. After the ten that he lacks, the Lamias set out. Therefore, the companions of the woman of Anboto went to Elgoibar.³⁴

Another story says that a shepherd who went to Anboto to ask Mari about something was received by her with great affection and given an excellent cider. She explained to him that it was cider that had been given to the bow (*ezari emanado sagarduak zirala*). In these passages, negation is not opposed to affirmation. The negation indicates a state that has not been taken away from reality, but rather, those apples that have been denied to the owner have been left to negation. Just like the ten sheep that have been denied. For the shepherd they are taken away, disappeared.

Eza (the negation) is the main source of income for the Lamias. Their and Mari's supply consists of what was taken away from the shepherds and ladies. This is their tax, their tribute. Thus, the economy of that relationship (*harremana* = to take [*hartu*] and to give [*eman*]) is balanced in the equilibrium of taking and giving, insofar as what has been taken is given to him - or what has been given to denial is excluded from denial.

³¹ Andrés Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco* (San Sebastian: Txertoa, 1982), 20.

³² Barandiaran, *Mitología vasca*, 80.

³³ Barandiaran, *Diccionario Ilustrado de mitología vasca*, 279.

³⁴ Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 17.

Mari denies her loss and she sets out, together with her companion, in search of the ten sheep given over to denial. Thus, the saying goes, *ezai emanak, ezak eraman* (that which is given to the negation takes away negation).

Nothing is lost, nothing is denied, everything is transformed within the cycle of life and death. For this purpose, Mari uses double negation: the denial of negation is followed by the affirmation of what has been denied and failed. The technique of double negation thus stands for the affirmation of all that is present and lost. According to Mari's conception of the world, nothing is removed from reality, nothing is lost, nothing is rejected and denied. Mari takes care to call up the memory of loss and to save it from its denial. She herself takes what has been denied and transforms it into the most precious treasures, to which one must walk underground paths.

Moreover, Mari introduces what has been rejected, what has been stolen, what has been lost into the cycle of relations (giving/taking) in such a way that a balance of the geosystem is created. Mari is considered as a great transformer and alchemist, where nothing is lost, rather all things existing on earth are subject to the law of transformation. The losses concern most precious treasures that remain veiled in the reservoir of the inner earth. The negation here is a source of wealth, a reservoir. Mari's location is one of wealth, abundance, lushness, a reservoir of powers. Again, the golden room of Mari in the caves denotes the introduction (re-entry) of negation and the transformation of losses into gains, lushness. The lost is recalled. One must only be able to see with golden eyes.

Falling into the paradox tertium non datur

With denial and affirmation (*ezagaz eta baiegaz*), Mari procures her goods. This is a clear logical paradox, since it is simultaneously about denied and affirmed goods. The matriarch theorist Andrés Ortíz-Osés interprets this ontological determination of negation as a fundamental structure of telluric cultures, whose model can be equated with chthonic archetypes. I see, on the contrary, a clear case of *tertium non datur*, that is, of an ontological paradox par excellence, whereby something is and is not at the same time. Underlying the order of Being in Western metaphysics is a logical structure that assumes only two values: being or not-being. The logical bivalence is in turn based on a tautological univalence, in that being is attributed to the highest value, the good, the best; namely, God's attributes. From the negation of being, non-being is inferred. In this tree-like logical and metaphysical structure, the third value is excluded, insofar as it has a paradoxical effect.

Nevertheless, Mari is still on the *yes* and *no* side (*ezagaz eta baiegaz*), says a report by Kortezubi.³⁵ The paradox of the third genus is the basis of an immanent ontology, whereby ontogenetic and phylogenetic developments and transformations take place on one and the same surface: on an earth without hierarchically split off zones, like the under-earth subordinate to the earth, like the sky superior to the earth. From this follows an order of being in which all beings are equal and not assigned to a highest

³⁵ Barandiaran, *Diccionario Ilustrado de mitología vasca*, 297.

category of the good, the most beautiful, and the best. It shows that reality is a process of transformation in which things are and at the same time are not; everything that has a name is, although it does not exist.

For an Ethics of the Negation of the Negation

Mari's companion intervenes where the balanced give-and-take, the law of the relationship as a rule of reciprocity, is distorted.³⁶ Mari condemns the abuse, that is, the wrong or exaggerated use of human-spiritual will, in that greed which wants to place itself above the laws of the earth. Lying, stealing, pride and boasting, disrespecting people, the greed of those who want to enrich themselves by digging such treasures (as happened in the mountains of Irikutzeta and Auza and in the fields of Arranzelei) are punished. Mari is the alchemist and the guardian of justice, for it is through her intervention that the economy of utility is in equilibrium, so that the abundance of the earth is fair to all. Her commandments are not subject to any prohibition,³⁷ but rather a universal equality of all forces.

Excursus: Basque Matriarchalism in Discussion

"We are inclined to consider it (the numen Mari) as a symbol of the earth."³⁸ With this simple statement, Barandiaran attributes an earth symbol to the anthropo-, zoo-, and phyto-morphic natural force Mari. In another place, going into the interpretations of the earth in Basque mythologies and tales, he himself states that the "earth is the mother of the sun and the moon."³⁹ Barandiaran's work is known for its high discretion in discursive speech about any interpretation of the materials. From a strictly scientific methodological point of view, that speculative statement about hypotheses which cannot be proven falls out of his work, so he does not dare to attempt to draw discursive conclusions from his detailed documentary work. The philosopher Andrés Ortíz-Osés accepted the challenge of giving an interpretative framework to the ethnological, anthropological and archaeological materials left behind and documented:

Earth appears explicitly as Mother Earth in Basque mythology itself; but her final verification as such (*Ama Lur*) appears clearly when she is personified in Mari, the Mother Goddess.⁴⁰

The spirit of the earth, whose inner force animates and binds everything on earth, place and seat of all beings, mother of the moon and the earth is, according to Ortiz Osés, synonymous with a goddess, a mother-goddess,⁴¹ whose representation confirms Mari as mistress of all genii. He has for the first time given meaning to the

³⁶ Ibid., 379.

³⁷ Ibid., 378.

³⁸ Ibid., 380.

³⁹ Barandiaran, *Mitología vasca*, 54.

⁴⁰ Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 26.

⁴¹ Ortíz-Osés, *La Diosa Madre*. (Madrid: Trotta, 1996), 63-64.

archetype of the great Basque mother Mari and has dared to attempt to conceptualize Basque culture as a whole within the anthropological-hermeneutical horizon of matriarchalism.⁴² He however rejects the theories of a general matriarchy. The philosopher attributes to the Basque collective unconscious a matriarchal-naturalistic and communally defined worldview, in contrast to a patriarchal, rationalistic and individualistic.⁴³ In this regard, he denies that a matriarchy emerged in the Basque Country, because he distances himself from the term matriarchy as an explanation of female domination in the organization of a social system. On the contrary, by matriarchalism he means a psychosocial structure characterized by the mother archetype. Ortíz Osés speaks of a structural substructure or substructures following Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralist analysis of a social system, which signifies the value system of the respective group.

The matriarchal typology would offer the following deep substructures that are intertwined: 1) Psychopathic substructure: the society in question revolves around the archetype of the Great Mother as a representation of the forces of nature, while the mythical figure of the goddess Mother Mari finds its concrete embodiment in the real Mother Woman. Matricentrism or matrifocalism; 2) Social substructure: heredity and kinship are transmitted through the female line; 3) Symbolic-linguistic substructure: language itself, in its original interpretation of reality, offers a distinctive assignment of the matriarchal-feminine; 4) Spiritual substructure: spontaneous communalism versus guilt-ridden individualism.⁴⁴

In order to subordinate all these characteristics - communalism, naturalism and priority position of women in the institution of the house⁴⁵ (Greek: *oikos*) - to matriarchalism, he uses the method of mythohermeneutics, according to which myths express a symbolic order. Myths, according to the hermeneutic school, do not claim truth, just as hermeneutics is not to be understood as exegesis or the art of interpretation. The main point is that myths and narratives are given a symbolic value that weaves the depth or substructures of a culture.

That all this is attributed to the worldview of matriarchalism is due to the fact that Ortíz-Osés sees in the earth the symbol of the maternal archetype. The analogy 'mother equals earth' corresponds to a second one, in that he equates Mari, the guardian of the earth and mistress of all genii, to a goddess. The hermeneuticist follows the interpretation, going back to Carl Gustav Jung, of the symbolic representation of a mother archetype. In this respect, for Ortíz Osés mistress seems to mean mother, so that Mari coincides as a spiritual image of the mother of a goddess.

It seems to me that the equation 'mistress = mother = goddess' is shaped by structural conditions of a culture. The generalization of attributes of dominance assigned to

⁴² Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 9.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 10-11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 51.

female figures to an archetypal mother seems to me to go back to the representation in the male unconscious of a childbearing, fertile, protective woman and mistress of the house. Is a mistress a mother? Why should Mari, the pure metaphor of a natural force taking various forms, be associated with a goddess? In my opinion, the equation of mother (as signifier of the earth) and goddess (as mistress of all genii) is a form of the ideological discourse that maintains the dualistic anthropological schema father/mother, whether for its affirmation or negation. That is, its affirmation is seen in an expression of the claim to a suppressed *natura naturans* and negation in the historiography that deals with the patriarchal worldview. The symbolic values attributed to the archetype mother were not subjected to anthropological-ethnological or critical analysis, neither by the Eranos circle nor by the hermeneuticist Ortiz-Osés.

Ortiz-Osés' mythohermeneutic studies follow the method of the hermeneutic school, which uncritically advocates an idolatrous view of a mother archetype based on two basic schemes. First, the mother archetype opposes the patriarchal archetype, so that the representation of the mother is derived from the negation or opposition of the patriarchal.⁴⁶ Secondly, the mother archetype forms the very first stage of alienation of any ontogenetic development, whose return to the maternal body is frowned upon, according to a worldview that corresponds with the domination of male organization of the libidinous economy. According to this scheme, the maternal is assigned a symbolic order equal to nature, according to which it is established as an archetype opposed to culture. I would like to raise the objection that interpretations of the archetype mother follow the structure and genesis of the historiography and cultural historiography of the modern Occident, in that, among other characteristics, a patriarchal symbolic order dominated by rationalist self-assertion is preceded by a pre-rational culture dominated by women and emphasizing the maternal archetype.

This individualized, already patriarchal view finds its parallel in the corresponding evolution of collective man from a private, tribal, magical, and 'irrational' life to a later civilized, rationalized, state-like way of life.⁴⁷

Whether the testimonies of Basque cultural materials collected by Barandiaran correspond to a conception of the world dominated by the mother archetype depends on what characteristics one assigns to the same as established from a patriarchal point of view. With this question we can observe a methodological problem that postcolonial sciences had to contend with in the light of anthropological and ethnological facts. That means in our case: how to determine matriarchy when the mother concept of the patriarchal worldview is fundamental and functional? Likewise, the equation 'Mother = Earth = Goddess = Mari' is based on associations with archaeological materials of the Stone Age mixed with the narratives of the Basque cultural heritage that were collected only at the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁴⁶ Andrés Ortiz-Osés, *Antropología vasca. Simbolos, mitos y arquetipos* (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1980), 139-141.

⁴⁷ Ortiz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 29.

On the one hand, we think that the Basque mythology around the Great Mother Goddess Mari should be associated with this matriarchal-agrarian Basque culture, since our mythology corresponds to other matriarchal mythologies as well as to the cult of the Great Mother Goddess MA in the Neolithic Euro-Asian context.⁴⁸

This statement assumes that the figurines called 'Venus' represent a maternal deity. As far as the equation of Mari with the Venus figurines⁴⁹ of the Paleolithic in the Euro-Asian region is concerned, one must assume the symbolic interpretation of such figurines. This is still unresolved in research, since the conferral of meaning on female-demarcated artifacts of the Paleolithic remains an unresolved issue.⁵⁰ Second, an agrarian culture is not present in the Basque Country to the same extent as in cultures in the Euro-Asiatic context. The cult of the earth is practiced in the rocky mountains of the Pyrenees, not in fields used for agriculture. Transhumance, pastoralism, and fishing in the sea were the main sources of an economy of subsistence that supported home consumption from regional gardens. Cultivation was carried out on small family plots,⁵¹ so conditions there could not resemble the cult of the matriarchal female world present in the Euro-Asian region in connection with early Neolithic agriculture.⁵² In fact, we see the turn from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic, characterized, among other things, by the fact that man carries out a revolution based on the domestication of animals and crops. Thus, an agricultural-matriarchal experience of the Basque Neolithic cannot be confirmed.⁵³ Moreover, no trace of female representations is found in the Basque Neolithic, rather they are encountered in the golden age of megalithic monuments as dolmens, menhirs and cromlechs. The origin of the female numen Mari is also unknown; it is not known whether she originates from the golden age of megalithic monuments or if her narrative was subject to oral tradition. Her attributes are neither those of fertility nor those of procreation.

Earth: The Surface on which the Cycles Close

The mountainous conditions of the Pyrenees were the reason for the preservation of local culture in the Basque Country for thousands of years. The Neolithic period brought about a revolution in economic practices and social organization in regions bordered by rivers, such as the Near East and the Mediterranean. Agriculture, animal husbandry, and sedentarism, among others, were new production and living practices that gave rise to the first advanced civilizations. While one can speak of highly developed civilizations developing *circa* 2000 BCE in the Fertile Crescent, the first

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12

⁴⁹ Andrés Ortíz-Osés, *La Diosa Madre*, 66.

⁵⁰ Arantzazu Saratxaga Arregi, „Allometrische Kunst. Weiblich demarkierte Artefakte in der Altsteinzeit,“ *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, forth coming.

⁵¹ Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Vasconia Antigua. Tras las huellas del hombre* (Bilbao: La gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1978), 295.

⁵² Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 26.

⁵³ Ibid., 36.

megalithic monuments were erected in the Basque Pyrenean region. They are considered funerary monuments.⁵⁴ These are cairns driven into the ground, rising to a certain height. A crypto-matriarchal totemism⁵⁵ can be deduced from the megalithic constructions, assigned by Andrés Ortíz-Osés to the Basque collective unconscious. He bases his hypothesis on animistic-magical naturalism, whose body of evidence is the central interpretation of the earth and its goddess Mari. It characterizes the communal and magical union through mystical participation in the same spirit, emblem, symbol or totem that for Ortíz Osés is embodied in Mari. I would nevertheless locate the participation in the communal and earthly order exemplarily in the megalithic monuments. On the one hand, because the Basque word for burial place, *baratze*, is about gardens and gathering places where the community unites in mystical communion, separating itself from those who do not belong. On the other hand, because all the inhabitants of the earth constitute a kinship by means of their participation in the earthly creative power.

The Cycle of Becoming: The Touch of Death and Life

The cycle is the law of the earth. The guardian of the earthly cosmos (geo-cosmos), the guardian of the laws of the earth, the regulator of its geo-homeostatic course transforms swag into gifts, she changes losses into profits, she turns fur into gold, she converts lack into abundance. As embodiment of transformations of those natural phenomena, she shows, together with all immortal genii, the processual course of that development. Death, according to the Basque geocosmic view, means a mere snapshot of that transformation. Birth and death, beginning and end, close according to the law of the earth and the cycle of the time closes in the earth. Beginning and end, both poles of the illusory idea of a linear arrow of time, can be connected and that formed junction marks that coordinate recorded in the earth.

Megalithic statues in the Basque Pyrenees and the cult of the community

Stones are neither inanimate materials nor do they belong to the past. Because the stones were erected for life and the narratives are transmitted, they speak of life and its phenomena. Aiming at the pure objectivity of science, the archaeologist José Miguel de Barandiaran, to whom we owe much of the research and documentation of prehistoric monuments, renounces any interpretation of his collected findings.⁵⁶ This does not mean, however, that he ignores the connections between archaeology, ethnography and mythology. In fact, despite his great reluctance to interpret the finds in any way, he elaborates the relationship of the megalithic statues to a Basque state of mind.⁵⁷

All the early constructions known in the Basque Pyrenees date from the Late Neolithic or from the Copper Age around 2000 BCE.⁵⁸ Caves were used as dwellings and burial

⁵⁴ Barandiaran, *Vasconia Antigua. Tras las huellas del hombre*, 280.

⁵⁵ Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 46.

⁵⁶ Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 140-151.

⁵⁷ Barandiaran, *El hombre prehistórico y arte rupreste en España*, (Bilbao: Junta de Cultura de Vizcaya, 1962), 9.

⁵⁸ Barandiaran, *Vasconia Antigua. Tras las huellas del hombre VII*, 276.

places. The only known structures from this period are dolmens, menhirs and cromlechs. These are megalithic monuments. Stones erected on the earth form a seat for the people and for the community. De Barandiaran supposes that these were funerary monuments that served as burial caves for the pastoral population and could hold several bodies.⁵⁹ In fact, skulls have been found, especially in dolmens, as well as valuable minerals and objects, from which it is hypothesized that these people died in the storeroom. Furthermore, the east/west orientation of the dolmen chamber as well as the offerings and amulets that accompanied the dead indicate an ancestor cult that was everywhere associated with religious ideas, beliefs and feelings.⁶⁰

Among them, the menhirs are considered the clearest manifestation because they most closely resemble the nearby funerary monuments.⁶¹ A menhir is a long, raw piece of stone stuck vertically into the ground. De Barandiaran admits the high probability that the menhirs precede the stela, and from this, the nature of such a stone is inferred. He documented the menhir in the meadow of Ata,⁶² a stone set into the ground three meters high, massively resembling a nearby structure (see Fig.4, below). Further, Fernando de Mendoza, in his article in the *Boletín de la Comisión de Monumentos históricos y artísticos de Navarra* entitled 'Un cementerio antiguo en la Borunda,' equated the menhirs and the stela, as if the former represented the precursor of the stela that followed them. Barandiaran paraphrases the author's words:

What should we think about the fate of the stones we are talking about? It must be stated categorically that they are grave stela [...]. Perhaps they are a memory, a faint memory of the menhir statues of other countries. Having lost the anthropomorphic signs that can be seen on them, they traditionally preserve the form of menhirs.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 281.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Estelas Discoidales del Pais Vasco* (I) (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1981), 83.

⁶² Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 141

⁶³ Ibid., 142.



Figure 4: Menhir in the meadow of Ata, two views

Places of burial: gardens and places of assembly

Burial places are chosen very carefully. Just as in the construction of houses, dolmens are never built on a meadow unsuitable for grazing cattle.⁶⁴ A dolmen station in the Pyrenees is usually located in a present or former sheepfold; dolmens are unlikely to be found far from a suitable site for a shepherd's settlement. Dolmens are located in summer pastures.⁶⁵ The appropriate place for the burial of the deceased was where the soil was fertile for grazing. There, where the life of the earth is rooted and grows internally, the spirits are rooted into the earth and they travel its inner corridors. In the body of the earth, the cycle of beginning and end is completed. This connection with life can be illustrated by the names of the burial places. They are called *baratza* in Basque, which means both garden and gathering place. Two are cromlech sites that bear the name *baratza*, one is the *Mairubaratza* and the other is the *Jentilbaratza*.

Like any building, the megalithic monuments are a work of art, a man-made work, just like the painted walls of Santimamiñe or the cave of Lascaux. Neither de Barandiaran nor current archaeological research has made an aesthetic judgment about the Paleolithic buildings. Archaeology considers tools and buildings as remains and material findings of a pre-written period. Jorge Oteiza assigns them an aesthetic meaning "because of their purpose, within which they signify the purest and highest creation that can be conceived and determined in an aesthetic language."⁶⁶

The Void in the Middle of a Circle: Spiritual Interpretation of Cromlech

Cromlech, also called *arrespil* (pile of stones), is characterized by a pile of stones forming a circular structure. It could be said that they are fences composed of several menhirs.

⁶⁴ Barandiaran, *El hombre prehistórico y arte rupreste en España*, 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

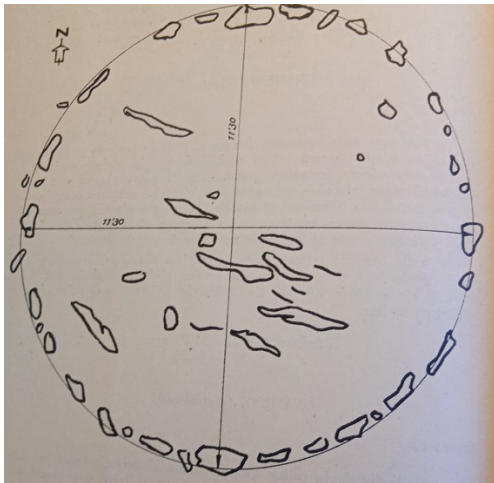


Figure 5: Reconstruction of the Unamene cromlech in Gipuzkoa; © Grupo de Ciencias Naturales 'Aranzadi' de la Real Sociedad Vascongada de los Amigos del País

It is a megalithic monument placed in a circle, from which a void is formed in the middle of the circle. Archaeologists do not pay attention to the empty space inherent in the circle, but to the material trace left by human creation. Jorge Oteiza, an artist and sculptor, has devoted himself to the aesthetic question of what structures created by Neolithic people tell us: what does this fence of stones stand for?

The Basque cromlech is a small, internally empty cromlech, an aesthetic construction (empty statues) of spiritual protection with which the artistic process of our prehistory ends.⁶⁷

Pure and emptiness fall on the Basque word *uts* (emptiness). In general, *uts* describes a state of perfection of purity and of completeness, which denotes emptiness. According to Oteiza, the cromlech is the epitome of this double meaning of purity and emptiness.⁶⁸ To this he adds an aesthetic interpretation: "The emptiness as an aesthetic sign and symbol means the completion, the end of an aesthetic development."⁶⁹ For Oteiza, the highlighting of this emptiness in an architectural monument means the highest expression of spiritual fullness, namely a connection with the body of the earth, reflection and "image of the empty firmament" (*Urtzi* = resonance of God),⁷⁰ which reaches perfection in the Neolithic Age with the plastic representation of emptiness. The man of the Neolithic procured a sense of world over creative acts, from artifacts over painting up to the architectural building.

According to the aesthetic theory presented in Oteiza's treatise *Ley de los cambios* (Law of Transformation), art is a language approaching reality which dissolves the distance created by other means. In this sense, emptiness signifies the culmination of a development of creation in creative action through successive negations, a progressive

⁶⁷ Jorge Oteiza, *Quosque Tandem...!* (Arre: Pamplona, 1995), 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16

series of eliminations, or phenomenological reductions. "Art is entering a zone of silence (I have landed in a negative space, in a space that is alone and empty)."⁷¹ In the void, all means of communication are reduced to pure receptivity, to spatial silence. The incommunicability of communication according to operative theories or the cessation of speaking about that mystical experience are considered analogous to this aesthetically determined spiritual experience of nothingness, this transcendental nothingness. Then art is no longer at the service of life. Life is there for itself, as art reveals in its nakedness:⁷²

An artistic language that aesthetically concludes with the definition of an empty sign, a transcendent nothing.⁷³

The aesthetic nothingness is, for Jorge Oteiza, the culmination of a spiritual path that every human being follows through art. The Neolithic cromlech is an expression of the radical immanentism that ends in emptiness. "In the Basque tradition, nothingness is a religious and natural affirmation."⁷⁴ Oteiza distinguishes the Basque pre-Indo-European mentality or style from the metaphysically influenced Western mentality, where being is superior to non-being. According to Ortíz-Osés, the Basque conception of the world "approached Eastern mythologies and their conception of nothingness, emptiness, or non-being (nirvana)."⁷⁵ Thus, in Basque mythology, the negative is a kind of void that has its own entity and no longer has a relationship with affirmation or fullness. This gives rise to the relationship between the no (*ez*) and the void (*uts*), since negativity is considered a void formed by reality. The hermeneuticist Ortíz-Osés argues that the foundation of the world is based on the maternal symbol, "not, therefore, the full, but the void, the womb, the womb or navel of the mother goddess that represents the earth."⁷⁶

Conclusion: Hidden Treasures

It is believed that the dolmen on the summit of Doronsorogane on the mountain Arantzazumendi, on the border between Ataum and Idiazabal, contains an oxhide filled with gold, which is why it is known as *Urezko amurra* (Almoravids of the gold hole). It is said that in Plazentzia, between the summit of Irukutzeta and Elgoibar, there are twelve boxes full of gold, eleven of which are hidden in stone mounds. During two excursions to this mountain in 1920 and 1921, I found eleven stone mounds between the

⁷¹ Ibid., 64.

⁷² Jorge Oteiza, *Ley de los cambios* (Zarauz: Ediciones Tristán-Deche Arte Contemporáneo, 1990), 12.

⁷³ Oteiza, *Quosque Tandem...!*, 8.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁵ Ortíz-Osés, *Los mitos vascos*, 47.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

places mentioned in the legend, which were later explored and recognized as dolmens.⁷⁷

The location of the treasures hidden in the earth is proved in the megalithic monuments. In the body of the earth, on whose surface the circles of life and death close, the grass (life) grows and touches the body, which likewise the body of the earth accommodates. This space enclosed by the sacred circle of all those belonging to the body of the earth is a pure space. Abundance and luxuriance reign there, for it is the place of anamnesis, where nothing is forgotten or lost, but remembered with brilliant clarity. Attended and guarded by the Mistress of all genii, her epiphany is the pure power that shapes, forms and annihilates, sometimes as a ball of fire, sometimes as wind power. She reminds us that this shape giving power is the domain of those types of mothers, namely giving birth or bringing to light.



Figure 6: Leiza, in Aizkorri, Gipuzkoa.

Oteiza's aesthetic interpretation confirms the thesis presented here with archaeological and ethnological material by José Miguel Barandiaran, that the cavity has a meaningful symbolic sense in the Basque mytho-hermeneutics of the earth. It is not filled up but remains animated by numen. Likewise, I adopt Osé's mytho-hermeneutic, according to which the figure of Mari deserves a hermeneutic attributed to a collective consciousness that is beyond occidental culture. However, I do not assign a matriarchalism towards her, nor do I attest Mari to the status of a goddess in Basque mythology. On the contrary, I propose to speak of matrixiality. This refers to a philosophical category whose semantics relates to the genus of all kinds of mothers and whose meaning goes to the embedding principle of each design (Saratxaga Arregi 2019).

⁷⁷ Jose Miguel de Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*,146.

In this thesis, I have argued that the topology of the earth is characterized by a symbolic order, that it is inhabited by shaping forces whose mistress, Mari, epitomizes that self-regulating power of the earth. Hereby, the numen Mari is to be seen less as a goddess or mother, but as a shaping force that shapes the earth in its equilibrium. To this thesis is to be added to call the earth an embedding space, equal to a cavity.

Everyone who walks through the nodes of the corridor finds the coordinates of the place where the treasures are hidden. They are those where the beginning and the end coincide. In this impossibility for the eyes, the golden coat seems to be hidden. In this paradox for knowledge, reason (*logos*) and law (*nomos*) of the earth remain.

About the Author

Arantzazu Saratzaga Arregi, PhD, born 1982, is a university lecturer and philosopher. An epistemology of complex and self-organizing processes, such as a philosophy of endomilieu and environmental ties, informs her current research. Most important publication: *Matrixial Philosophy. Mother - World- Womb: Towards a Multivalent Ontology*.

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