

**BASQUE MILITANT YOUTHS IN FRANCE:
NEW EXPERIENCES OF ETHNONATIONAL IDENTITY
IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

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The “ethnonational identity” of young French Basques in France is analyzed in the context of European integration, and compared with the situation in the Spanish Basque Country. Due to the French state’s refusal to recognize regional languages, transmission of the Basque language in France is characterized by ethnonationalist values. But these values have shifted recently, from an emphasis on consolidating a Basque nation to practical concerns with grassroots and sustainable development.

This article is concerned with the construction and expression of ethnonational identity by young Basque nationalist militants in *Iparralde*, the northern, or French, part of the Basque Country. Against the broader background of European integration, its objective is to identify the elements used by young Basque militants in *Iparralde* in constructing and expressing their identity, and the reasons for their choices. A comparison will also be made between what is found in *Iparralde*, and the mechanisms for construction and expression of ethnonational identity by young Basque nationalist militants in the southern, or Spanish, part of the Basque Country, *Hegoalde*.

This article is structured as follows: after a brief description of the methodology used for gathering the data presented here, I clarify what I mean by “ethnonational identity,” and distinguish between “ethnonational” and “national” identity. After a brief discussion of European integration, I go on to describe the cultural and political situation in *Iparralde* and the differences between this region and *Hegoalde*.

In conclusion, having expressed doubts about the usage of the term ethnonational for describing all grassroots political

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mobilization in places like the Basque Country, I shall argue that both ethnonational identity and national identity in Iparralde are largely transmitted via the Basque language. In the context of the French state, where Basque, like other regional languages, is marginalized and has no official status, the language has come to serve Basque militants as a central marker of their identity. In contrast with the situation south of the Franco-Spanish border, where Basque is recognized as an official language alongside Spanish and learning it is a routine part of most young people's education, learning Basque in Iparralde, where there is no official policy in favor of the language, inevitably becomes an act of militancy. After difficult beginnings prior to the early 1990s, various structures in favor of Basque, such as the *ikastola* system of Basque-language schools, Basque-language radio stations, and *Alfabetatze Euskalduntze Koordinakundea* (AEK, literally meaning in Basque, Coordination for literacy and basquification), an association dedicated to teaching Basque to adults, are now well established. Their survival, however, continues to depend on the efforts of their supporters.

The oppositional role of the Basque language in this context is strengthened by the fact that, as many pro-Basque language initiatives in Iparralde were launched with the inspiration and help of people with past experience in Hegoalde, where Basque nationalism is more deeply entrenched, transmission of the language is often characterized by references to ethnonationalist values and anti-establishment views. In a context of continuing militancy, it thus becomes associated with a certain notion of collective identity and is used to affirm and express this identity, sometimes in opposition to French cultural and linguistic normalization.

Finally, we point out that while modern Basque identity continues to be characterized by a strong identification with the idea of a Basque nation, there is a trend towards a more open discourse targeting sustainable development at grassroots level. Basque militants in Iparralde have of late increasingly focused their energy on local cultural, social and environmentally-conscious economic development. For example, in 2005 farmers created their own chamber of agriculture, called *Euskal Herriko Laborantxa Ganbara*, or Chamber of Agriculture of the Basque Country, arguing that the official regional chamber failed to cater to their particular needs, principally by favoring a more intensive agriculture at the

expense of their traditional small-scale approach to farming. Such initiatives are nationalist to the extent that their efforts are placed within the territorial boundaries of what makes up Iparralde, and a strong emphasis remains on the use of the Basque language for expression of what is Basque. But, as one militant told me, “what do I care about the Basque nation if the nature and culture of Iparralde dies, and the Basque language with it?” Emphasis therefore is no longer on the creation of a Basque nation at all costs, but on the more realistic and urgent concerns of grassroots and sustainable development in the fields of the economy, the environment, culture and the Basque language.

Methodology

Following social anthropological methodology, the findings for this article are the fruit of long-term fieldwork carried out using the method of participant observation and open-ended interviewing technique. With time, I have become a familiar figure of sorts in the various social circles of Basque militancy. More specifically, over the course of 2005 and early 2006, I spent significant time in the company of young Basque militants busy in their various activities, including private meetings, public demonstrations and social events, mainly in bars and festivals. In these contexts, I was able to observe militant behavior and their interaction with each other as well as with non-members. Open-ended interviews were carried out with the spokespersons of the various groups, and with a handful of their supporters, during the months of November and December 2005, and January and February 2006. These interviews also involved asking people to recount their personal biographies and to explain how they decided to become militants. General fieldwork research was also backed with information-gathering in local newspapers and militant journals.

Ethnonational Identity

As a category of practice,¹ identity, understood as the notion of the self, is constructed and expressed by the individual through processes of identification. All sorts of symbols and markers can be used by individuals to demonstrate their identity, and language is one among them. In a context where individual actors have the

possibility of using more than one language for self-expression, the choice by a person of one particular language in preference to another marks that person as different from another who, while capable of using this language, chooses not to do so. By means of language, these two people draw what is in effect a boundary between them. However, the extent to which this boundary actually serves as a marker of difference will depend on whether or not one or both so recognize it. In the case of the Chamber of Agriculture *Laborantxa Ganbara*, its organizers explained to me that they chose to name it in Basque because this is the language with which they most strongly identify and which characterizes the space in which they live. By contrast, the French state authorities have responded negatively to this initiative, arguing that the use of Basque is exclusivist, and taking them to court on the grounds that this agricultural chamber is illegal.

In any dynamic social context, the number and range of possible identifications varies with an individual person's exposure to different situations.² In situations of insecurity or pressure, some identifications may become more prominent and thus reinforced as boundaries. Equally, different boundaries may be drawn up in different contexts, with the degree of divisiveness of such boundaries playing a role in the extent to which individuals mark themselves off as different from those around them. Thus, for instance, identifying oneself as a pacifist amongst a group of people favorable to war as a means of pursuing political objectives is likely to have more impact in terms of identification than revealing oneself in the same context as a devoted football fan. On the other hand, if the other people present turn out also to be football enthusiasts, the sense of identification aroused in this respect may compensate for the sense of opposition caused by disagreements over violence in politics. Opposition vis-à-vis other people creates the boundaries that characterize one's identity, while the acknowledgement of shared values contributes to a sense of group belonging.³

When I speak of "national identity," I mean identity that is primarily marked by identification with a specific nation. The concept of "ethnonational identity" goes further in that it refers to an identity marked not only by identification with a nation⁴ but also by a code dictating who can and cannot belong. While

national sentiment of this sort is not exclusive to stateless nations,⁵ its intensity is often a function of a perception of grievance or discrimination, and a feeling of insecurity. Even when adhering to a common ideology, however, people with a national or ethnonational identity may vary in terms of the importance they give to other identifications as well. And this may also change according to the context and time.⁶

Basque national and ethnonational identity was first articulated by the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV), the Basque nationalist party founded at the end of the nineteenth century. In line with the thinking of those times, the party maintained that Basqueness was primarily determined by Basque lineage. The Basque language was considered secondary to biological traits. But with the development of an alternative Basque nationalist movement from the mid-1950s, it became possible to claim Basqueness without this kinship tie. This is a heritage of the political activism of the generation of Basque nationalists that grew up in Hegoalde during the Franco era. Influenced by the anti-colonialist and revolutionary movements in Africa and Latin America, these young Basque nationalists were more inspired by social concerns and revolutionary rhetoric than by the rather traditionalist, bourgeois aspirations of the PNV. In pursuing their struggle for recognition of Basque specificity, they sought to include a broader cohort from among their contemporaries, including many who were the children and grandchildren of immigrants from other parts of Spain but who by virtue of living in the Basque region felt Basque rather than anything else.

This was the context that gave birth in 1959 to the ideological movement *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA, or Basque Homeland and Freedom), quite different in character to the armed clandestine grouping of these past few years. Rather than racial issues, ETA was concerned with the political, cultural and linguistic dynamics of Basque identity in a modern context. Instead of speaking of the Basque race, these left-wing Basque nationalists sought to appeal to the “Basque people” along Marxist lines, as the working class in the Basque Country. Combining nationalism and socialism, they defined a Basque person as anyone who sells their labor in the Basque Country. To be Basque, according to the left-wing nationalist creed of ETA and *Herri Batasuna* (HB, or Popular Union), a political party created in 1978 and known for its tacit support of

ETA,⁷ was to be active in the political struggle for an independent Basque nation with its own distinctive culture. This, rather than birth, was the criterion for recognition as a Basque patriot, or *abertzale*. The development in an urban context of bars and other public social spaces that are the preserve of an *abertzale* clientèle provided a “breeding ground” for these ethnonationalists that ensured generational renewal independently of ethnic confines.

Traditionally, the defining characteristic of a Basque—*euskaldun* in Basque—was the fact of speaking, or ‘having’, Basque.⁸ However, the fact that people of non-Basque descent could learn Basque, even if only superficially, provided an opportunity for expanding the membership of the Basque community. By learning the language, the *euskaldun berri*, or “new Basque speaker”, could be identified as a Basque person within the left-wing ethnonationalist movement. Language provided a new boundary, demarcating group belonging.

European Integration

European integration brings with it a lowering or removal of barriers within the European space, in which frontiers between state territories in the EU are now open to free circulation of EU citizens and goods. This freedom of movement causes us to re-think territorial, political and symbolic boundaries as we become increasingly exposed to new symbols, objects, foods, fashions, images and ideas. Our points of reference are no longer restricted to state/national territory, and frontiers no longer so clearly delimit people with definite notions of national belonging.⁹

Amid this wider choice of potential identifications, power structures and the ways in which we construct and express our identity are also transformed. In this way, European integration provides an additional context, parallel to local, national and other contexts, in which people can develop a sense of self and of belonging to a number of perceived communities and interact with others in consequence. We may still be far from seeing the development among European citizens of strong personal identifications with Europe, but an awareness of being part of this perceived community is certainly developing.¹⁰

Ideas of Europe are often imbued with values such as participatory democracy, civic responsibility and human rights,

and much progress has been made in these directions over the past decades. Although we are still far from a Europe of the Peoples or of the Regions, European integration has become a process in which regionalization and devolution, encouraged by the EU's funds for regional development and social and economic cohesion, play an important role.¹¹ In an ideally pluralist world, there would not be one sole locus of power but several, each corresponding to people's differing identifications at different points in time; decentralized institution-building would cater for these differences, and Europe would ideally provide a forum in which different ideas about sovereignty and the roles of the state and the nation can be explored.¹²

Already under present conditions, the process of European integration offers members of stateless nations an opportunity to renegotiate traditional boundaries to obtain different forms of self-determination that do not necessarily involve independence from the state.¹³ In Spain, for example, the regional governments of both the Basque Country and Catalonia are tackling new ways of conceiving their relationship with the central state, talking in terms of pluri-nationality and post-sovereignty of "a nation of nations" or "a state of nations."¹⁴ In this vein, moderate minority nationalists are also rethinking their field of action and making more flexible their own notion of the nation and of the political and cultural dynamics within it.¹⁵

Reflecting such changes and the negative exclusivist connotations that have come to be associated with nationalism, some militants in Iparralde have become uneasy about calling themselves nationalists. They have never, on the other hand, described themselves as ethnonationalists, an adjective which has remained so far largely used only by academics and outside observers. It is revealing to note that while in Hegoalde, Basque nationalists are quite happy with calling themselves *nacionalista* in Spanish, in Iparralde it is the Basque word for patriot, *abertzale*, rather than the French *nationaliste* which has come to take on this meaning.¹⁶ Such a shift is an aspect of the dynamics of nationalism and social movements today which calls for more research. To be recognized as a nation, for minority nationalists, is a crucial step in the consolidation of their national identity, enabling them in the Spanish context to cooperate as equals with the Spanish state. In Iparralde, however, the possibility of being recognized

as a separate nation by the French state remains a far-off dream, and so they have chosen to concentrate on more immediate tasks as explained before. Often faced with criticism by French politicians¹⁷ for being ethnonationalist and concerned about possibly losing their appeal to members of the local population, militants in Iparralde prefer the term *abertzale*.

One visible result of European integration in the Basque Country is the growth in numbers of people living on one side of the Franco-Spanish frontier and working on the other. Since 1993, when frontier controls were lifted as a result of the Schengen treaty and the European Single Market, people living in the border area have grown accustomed to using the locations on either side of the frontier as if they were part of a single, unified space.¹⁸ With this new border-living have come new forms of identification, as people are increasingly exposed to the social and cultural experiences of their neighbors. Local media have become increasingly cross-frontier in nature. The regional television and radio services of Euskadi, the autonomous Basque region that is one of the two territorial components of Hegoalde, are now broadcast in Iparralde. Some Hegoalde news services also have offices on the French side of the frontier. Various municipal authorities have begun to join forces across the frontier and launch joint cooperation initiatives.¹⁹ This exchange may be said to be contributing to the creation of a trans-frontier Basque public sphere.²⁰

For the moment, nonetheless, there are no clear signs of this emerging cross-frontier reality extending to a stronger identification with Europe.²¹ Nor indeed do cross-frontier or trans-national forms of identification appear for the moment to be developing to any significant degree. Instead, the frontier continues to be a mental boundary for many people in their notions of identity, as can be seen in the ways in which individuals behave and talk about each other and in the languages they speak. In situations of crisis or insecurity, the boundaries separating Spanish Basques from French Basques become stronger, for example when French and Spanish Basque fishermen quarreled with each other over their share of fishing quota. The emerging construction and expression of cultural and political identity of a younger generation of people living in the border area who have grown up familiar with French, Spanish and Basque and identifying freely with symbols without

regard to their territorial specificity to one or other side of the state frontier, will merit research in the near future.

Similarly, while much research has been done on militant youths in Hegoalde,²² there remains a lacuna for Iparralde. In Hegoalde, the phenomenon of the *cuadrilla*, the so-called group of friends made during childhood in the local close-knit community to which individuals are generally tied all their lives, has been appreciated as a key context for understanding peer pressure and personal political identity formation,²³ leading perhaps to ethnonational militancy. Such a phenomenon does not exist so distinctly in Iparralde. In the countryside, close groups of friends are formed in the context of small village communities. However, outside this rural context, the close social networks found in the urbanized and industrialized areas of Hegoalde are not replicated in the urban areas of Iparralde. This has much to do with the lack of tendency in France today to socialize in the public space. As we shall see later, the conditions in which bonding and Basque militancy are more likely to develop in Iparralde are in the context of Basque-language education, the *ikastola*.

Iparralde, the French Basque Country

Just as European integration is felt differently by people in different contexts,²⁴ regionalization and devolution in Europe take on diverse forms in different state territories. Many of the continuing cultural and political differences between Hegoalde and Iparralde have to do with the differences in institutional status and cultural conditions in the two parts of the Basque Country. On a purely social basis, young people in Iparralde tend to be more familiar with the political and cultural character of Hegoalde than is the case for their counterparts in Hegoalde in relation to Iparralde. Many young people from Iparralde choose to spend free time south of the border, attracted by its wider choice of cultural and social activities. All of the young Basque militants that I interviewed professed to having—or wishing to have—relations with people and militant activities in Hegoalde. By contrast, the reverse is less frequently observed, reflecting the fact that cultural and social life in Hegoalde already offers such a range of opportunities to young people that they do not feel the need to associate so much with the French part of the Basque

Country. Iparralde tends to be viewed by inhabitants of Hegoalde as dull and inactive, its Basque character muted by French cultural influences. People do not socialize so much in the streets, and the Basque language, as already noted, enjoys only a minimal position in the French public space. Although more and more Spanish nationals are living on the French side of the frontier, attracted by relatively cheaper housing prices, many of them continue to work and lead their social and cultural lives on the Spanish side. Thus, the frontier, as a mental boundary,²⁵ appears more willingly crossed by militants who grew up in Iparralde than vice versa.

If lifestyles and customs in Iparralde are different to those of Hegoalde, so are the political and institutional arrangements within which the Basque communities on either side of the state frontier live. In Spain, the Basque people are recognized by the constitution as a nationality within the Spanish nation. Euskadi, the Basque region which, along with the neighboring region of Navarre, constitutes the geographical area known to Basque nationalists as Hegoalde, is a clearly delineated territory with its own government, parliament, budget and taxation system. In Euskadi, the Basque language is officially recognized and taught in schools, and use of it is given importance in both the public and private worlds. Thanks to such developments following the end of the Franco dictatorship, Basque national identity can be transmitted by institutional means without the need for recourse to subversive or minority symbols. While use of the Basque language remains an important element of Basque identification and self-identification, Basque is no longer subservient to Spanish, and Basqueness is thus normalized.²⁶

This is in fundamental contrast with the situation on the French side of the Basque Country. Far from enjoying any degree of autonomy, Iparralde, with a population of only about 264,000, is part of a larger administrative entity, the *département des Pyrénées Atlantiques*, which in turn is part of the much larger region of *Aquitaine*. The French state continues to refuse any official status for regional languages, contrary to the European Charter for Minority Languages drafted by the Council of Europe and ratified by most EU member states. The Basque language's precarious status is continuously denounced by Basque militants in Iparralde, as for example in a letter published in a local paper late February 2006, whose authors call on the French state to

finally recognize that it has a role to play in ending Basque conflict.²⁷

Only approximately 27 percent of the population of Iparralde can speak Basque, and these are largely people above 50 years of age. Basque is perceived by many in Iparralde, including some native Basque speakers, as an archaic language of little value. In the face of such pressures, efforts to revive the use of Basque have made the language into one of the most important identity markers for Basque militants in Iparralde. Militants invest their energy in transmitting identification with Basqueness to the next generation principally by teaching the Basque language and speaking it as often as possible in public as well as in private. In a context of continuing struggle to gain concessions from the French state, learning and speaking Basque become militant acts—and the principal expressions of Basque ethnonational identity in Iparralde. So while on the Spanish side numerous people live out their identification with Basqueness quite comfortably, speaking Basque in a wide range of contexts, with its defense no longer such an issue, on the French side, Basque militants worry about how their language, customs and sense of collective identity are going to survive.

A number of Basque nationalist parties are presently active in Iparralde. Three originate from Hegoalde—the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), the traditional Basque nationalist party which currently heads the government in Euskadi and which established a base in Iparralde in 1990; *Eusko Alkartasuna* (EA, or Basque Gathering), a social democratic scission of the PNV ruling in alliance with the PNV in Euskadi, which set up in Iparralde in 1988; and *Batasuna* (Union), which represents left-wing separatist Basque nationalism and has had a presence in Iparralde under that name since 2001 and other names since the mid-1980s. Since 2001, *Abertzaleen Batasuna* (AB, or Union of Abertzales), has operated independently as a left-wing Basque nationalist party that condemns the use of violence and focuses on grassroots militancy in Iparralde while keeping a pan-national perspective.

Reflecting their different political ideologies and strategies, ranging from regionalist to outright separatist, members of these parties have different views of what importance to give to the idea of a Basque nation as such. For all of them, the ability to speak Basque is highly valued, but members of the separatist left-wing

movement insist far more on its exclusive use. Other groups, by contrast, while more open to the possibility of speaking in Basque, French or Spanish in different circumstances, may consider other marks of Basqueness as more important, such as Basque descent for some or, now increasingly for others, active concern with grassroots cultural and economic development. As a consequence of these different standpoints, different people feel closer to one or other of these branches. It is to this extent that some Basque militants may have more or less of an ethnonational notion of their identity.

For young Basque militants in Iparralde, the left-wing movements are the most attractive. Indeed, unlike in Hegoalde, the PNV and EA do not have youth movements in Iparralde. As we will explain later, AB is particularly attractive to young Basque militants in Iparralde because of its discourse linked to the concerns of the local population, in terms of housing problems, education, promotion of the Basque language and alternative and ecological modes of organizing local economic, cultural and social activities. Batasuna, by contrast, appeals to a minority for its more intransigent and outspoken anti-establishment stance.

Ethnonational Identity Transmission in Iparralde

The main concern of Basque nationalists in the French Basque Country 40 years ago was to ensure the transmission of a Basque identity to subsequent generations, halting and reversing a trend that they had witnessed amongst their own age group. Many among their parents' generation had felt no interest in ensuring that their children spoke Basque, viewing the language as backward and primitive. The national consciousness of these young people at the time was awakened by the presence of political refugees from the Spanish side of the Basque Country who were fleeing the dictatorial regime of Franco. Many of these refugees were Basque nationalists who settled on the French side of the frontier and maintained their Basque identity as a matter of political and socio-cultural pride. Inspired by the activities of ETA, an armed movement was also born in Iparralde in 1975, called *Iparretarrak* (meaning Those of the North), which was dissolved again in the late 1980s.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, under their influence, two principal avenues were developed for the transmission of Basque ethnonational identity in the French Basque Country. The main way of transmitting a sense of Basqueness was identified as via the Basque language, through formal teaching to both children and adults encouraging its use in everyday life. In parallel, Basque nationalists sought to transmit familiarity with the Basque language in an informal manner, via radio broadcasts in Basque. Initiatives down both avenues were launched amid opposition from a significant portion of the local population who continued to consider any Basque cultural initiative as part of a separatist and violent movement associated with political activists on the Spanish side.

The first ikastola, or Basque-language school, was opened in 1969. During the 1970s, the ikastola movement struggled to win official recognition and obtain financial support from the French government. The ikastola movement made its first agreements with the French ministry of education in 1982, but it was only in 1994 that a contract of association was signed, recognizing the ikastola as a utility of public interest. Since then, ikastola teachers have their salaries paid by the French state. State funding of the individual ikastolas, however, remains restricted and does not respond to increasing demand. At present, there are 24 ikastolas, but only 15 where it is possible for children to study until secondary (collège) level, and only one lycée where it is possible for students to prepare for high school examinations, the equivalent of the French Baccalauréat.

In parallel, to develop knowledge and use of Basque amongst adults, an association known as AEK was set up in Iparralde in 1981. AEK was originally founded in Hegoalde, with the mission to teach Basque to adults and provide them with social contexts in which they can practice the language. In addition to day and evening classes and two-week long courses, AEK organizes numerous festivities. Today, it is recognized in France as a non-profit organization and as such can apply for financial support from the state. It collaborates with various local authorities which subsidize employees taking lessons with them.

Similarly, Basque radio stations were set up in the early 1980s, when the French state deregulated control over the broadcasting media. Three Basque-language radio stations now broadcast in

the three provinces of Iparralde and aim to provide Basque speakers with an entirely Basque-language media. As private non-profit entities, they can apply for funding from the French state but they depend heavily on voluntary support and financial help from local inhabitants.

Today's young French Basque militants represent a second or third generation in this movement to develop a Basque national identity. Some have pursued their primary and secondary education entirely in Basque, making them the first generation of young Basques to have been brought up with a clear and deliberate identification as Basques. As the children or grandchildren, in many cases, of the young pioneers of the 1960s, they continue to pursue many of the objectives for which their forebears campaigned decades ago. They are the living embodiment of a strategy for the formation and transmission of a Basque national identity in the French Basque Country via the Basque language.

Their parents' militant convictions are transmitted via the *ikastola* to these children who strongly live out this identification with the Basque language and its social context in their everyday school life. Aware of the difficulties the *ikastola* has in surviving, constantly struggling to retain support from the French educational system and in the context of the generally unsympathetic local political atmosphere, they come to understand that their situation is exceptional and under threat. Despite official recognition and some financial support from the state, the *ikastola* movement is still in need of basic funds and local support. *Ikastola* families participate in fund-raising activities which are strong social bonding events. Together, participants speak Basque as much as they can and are brought together in a common cause. Because of the limited number of *ikastolas*, many children must travel longer distances to attend school than is the case for children who go the local French-language schools, another factor adding to a sense of community among *ikastola* children. They are correspondingly sensitive to political issues surrounding the Basque language and Basque culture, developing strong friendships in this context and a firm sense of personal Basque national identity and militant will.²⁸ As they grow up, this nationalist aspect of their identity tends to remain strong. Many continue to be active in militant initiatives, pursuing further studies and eventually finding jobs in activities

related to grassroots cultural and economic development in Iparralde.

Teenagers and young adults with Basque nationalist commitments have the opportunity to participate in the activities of a number of militant youth groups of varying political hues. Not all will have attended Basque-language schools as children. Some may have grown up in Iparralde in contexts where the Basque language was not used or valued. For many such people, consciousness of the struggle for maintaining the Basque language often gets formed in student gatherings or in the numerous festivals and other events taking place in Iparralde, many of which are organized by Basque militants. Popular events are the ikastola's annual festivity *Herri Urrats* (The People's Footsteps), AEK's marathon across the whole of the Basque Country *Korrika*, and the big music festival *Euskal Herri Zuzenean* (The Basque Country Live). Singing and music are an important aspect of Basque culture, and popular songs are often imbued with nostalgic references to the Basque nation, the Basque Country united in its seven provinces, and the Basque warrior who relentlessly fights for the independence of his people. In this way, too, the Basque language is a carrier of ethnonationalist values. Tellingly, such themes are more frequently evoked in the lyrics of contemporary Basque pop rock groups of Iparralde than by similar groups in Hegoalde.

Among militant campaigning groups in Iparralde, one that has attracted public attention in recent years is the non-violent Demo group campaigning for three key causes: official recognition of the Basque language, self-determination for the French Basque Country, and state fulfillment of the rights of imprisoned Basque militants.²⁹ Their campaigning takes the form of imaginative non-violent symbolic *ekintzak* or actions, usually involving pranks and installations. In a campaign to encourage the French state train service SNCF to use Basque alongside French in Iparralde, militants staged a sit-in in which they disrupted rail traffic by playing cards on the main line of the Paris–Hendaye railway. Other examples include abducting the historical archives concerning the three provinces of Iparralde and “kidnapping” a statue of Marianne, the symbol of the French République, from the regional offices. The Demo group has no specific party political affiliations although it is close to many Basque

left-wing initiatives active in grassroots sustainable development. Ideas behind this movement were developed during the time of ETA's ceasefire declared in late 1998 which lasted just over a year, when many militants finally felt confident about considering alternative non-violent modes of action.

On a more obdurate plane, *Segi*, the Basque pan-national youth group, brings together young left-wing Basque militants close to the party Batasuna. It is the result of a merger in 2000 between two similar groups, one based in Hegoalde, *Jarrai*, and the other in Iparralde, *Gazteriak*, during which the presence of ETA was made clear by the punctual appearance of some of its members and the brandishing of its banners. Correspondingly, its members employ a rather more intransigent mode of action involving active resistance and aggressive retaliation against state authorities. They have often been associated with *kale borroka* or street-fighting. Their presence is particularly marked by an urban and dressed-down look, their meeting places characterized by pro-independence and anti-establishment graffiti.

A third category includes open groups of young people concerned with a particular social or cultural issue who express themselves in Basque. An example is the *Gaztetxe* group which demands that the local authorities provide young people with their own cultural center. Such groups do not have any distinct political line, but they often involve young people also present in Demo or Segi or who identify strongly with Basque militancy, using Basque as their main mode of public communication and engaging in local social and cultural actions of a pro-Basque nature.

These different groups in Iparralde have different degrees of openness, ranging from the Demos, who are open to anyone who feels concerned by the issues dealt with, to Segi, which forms a much more closed group. As one of its spokespersons told me, "in Segi, you don't enter just like that." Due to their often confrontational stance, members are wary of police reprisal and are suspicious of outsiders. Despite Segi members' efforts to present an accessible and open face with actions in favor of local needs, such as campaigns against a motorway project or the lack of affordable housing for young people and people with low wages, the ethnonational boundary between insider and outsider is far more anchored than is the case with other movements such as the Demos or *Gaztetxe*.

Similarly, these different militant groups have other ways of using the Basque language which demonstrate how they differently construct their Basque national identity, some to the extent of making it more ethnonationalist.³⁰ While Segi pursues a strategy of denial of French presence, the Demos campaign in favor of co-existence between French and Basque and insist on the complementarity of the Basque and French languages. For example, in an ongoing campaign to have public road signs written in Basque, activists with Segi and Demo employ quite different tactics. While Segi members simply obliterate signs in French, Demo activists spray text in Basque alongside the French text.

Conclusion

We have seen how Basque national identity in Iparralde is largely transmitted via the Basque language. It is the central marker of Basque national identity because it continues to have a marginal status in France. It is important to note in this context that integration into Basque cultural and social life in Iparralde can be swift when one gets involved in these militant activities, since expressions of interest in and commitment to these activities are always warmly welcomed. What makes modern Basque identity ethnonationalist is when an exclusivist approach is adopted. This can be by insisting that only those persons having Basque kinship ties or those adhering to a left-wing separatist ideology can be Basque. Learning to speak Basque becomes an inevitable part of the Basque integration process. As such, the language can become a vehicle of particular ethnonationalist values, used to mark who belongs to the Basque nationalist community and who does not.

By contrast, in the Spanish Basque Country, the Basque language is officially recognized and the Basque government manages the infrastructure of its clearly delineated territory. Basque national identity has as its main rallying point the lack of official recognition of the Basque people as a nation entitled to its own state. For young people seeking identification in an anti-establishment sense, belligerent extremism occupies the terrain filled by the Basque language in Iparralde.

We may ask ourselves what is the future of the Basque language and sense of Basqueness in Iparralde? How will a notion

of national identity for stateless nations develop in the context of European integration—is it threatened with extinction or will it survive as a result of continuous resort to strong oppositional boundaries, in particular ethnonationalist ones? Much scholarly research has recently focused on seeing European integration as encouraging pluralism. But this depends on the institutional structure—some institutional structures are more accommodating than others to different notions of collective belonging. The Spanish system is currently accommodating while the French system continues not to be, despite some positive moves toward decentralization over the past two decades.

Ethnonationalism will continue to survive in the face of opposition. We cannot foresee how future generations will cope with developments in the context of globalization. Depending on the nature of the opposition, they could continue to resort to some kind of ethnonational sentiment, or they could take a road similar to Ireland's whereby young generations today generally express no interest in keeping the Irish language and culture alive, preoccupied by more global interests of consumption.

What is clear however is that for ethnonational identity to evolve into an emancipated national identity that is able to coexist harmoniously with other identifications, including French national identification, French institutions need to incorporate the possibility of different national identifications and adopt a more open approach to local governance than is at present the case.

Notes

1. Rogers Brubaker and Francis Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–47.
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3. Zoe Bray, *Living Boundaries: Identity in the Basque Country* (Brussels: PIE Peter Lang, 2004).
4. Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
5. Bray; Michael Keating, *The Politics of Modern Europe: The State and Political Authority in the Major Democracies* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1999); Michael

- Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe: Territorial Understanding and Political Change* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998). Pierre Van den Berghe, "Denationalizing the State," *Society*, January/February 1996, pp. 64–8. John Edwards, "Sovereignty or Separation? Contemporary Political Discourse in Canada," in Daniele Conversi (ed.), *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the study of nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2002).
6. Bray; Michael Keating and Zoe Bray, "Renegotiating Sovereignty; Basque Nationalism, European Integration and the Ibarretxe Plan," *Journal of Ethnopolitics*, (forthcoming, 2006); David McCrone, "The Rise of Neo-nationalism" in *The Sociology of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998).
 7. Since June 2001, the party has been reformed and taken on the name of Batasuna.
 8. There is of course debate about this now, whereby euskaldun could also mean "having the Basque Country" in your heart, so to say, thereby including also those people who feel strongly attached to the Basque Country in spite of not knowing the Basque language.
 9. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, Vol II of the *The Information Age* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Adrian Favell "Games without frontiers? Questioning the transnational social power of migrants in Europe" in *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Winter 2003), pp. 106–36; Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities and Political Change* (Oxford: Rowman LittleField, 2002).
 10. Dieter Rucht, "The EU as a target of political mobilisation: Is there a Europeanization of Conflict?" in Richard Balme and Didier Chabanet (eds.) *L'action collective en Europe* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2002).
 11. Liesbeth Hooghe and Marks Gary, *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Claudio Radaelli, "Europeanisation, governance, regulation, political science," *European Integration Online Papers*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (6 October 2004).
 12. Michael Keating, "European Integration and the Nationalities Question," *Politics and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2004), pp. 367–88; Neil Walker, "Late Sovereignty in the EU," in Neil Walker (ed.), *Sovereignty in Transition* (Oxford: Hart, 2003).
 13. Michael Keating, *Plurinational Democracy. Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
 14. Keating and Bray.
 15. Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention. Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Pedro Ibarra, *Nacionalismo. Razón y pasión* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2005).
 16. Different ways of understanding what *abertzale* means over time has been noted in Bray. See also Michel Cahen, *Abertzalismo en temps de mondialisation* (Bayonne: Fondation Manu Robles Arangiz, 2006).

17. Ironically, we are all too well aware however of the ethnonationalist character of many of these French politicians (Bray, *Living Boundaries*; Keating, *The Politics of Modern Europe*, and Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*).
18. Zoe Bray, "Boundaries in a "Borderless" Europe: European Integration and Cross-Frontier Cooperation in the Basque Country," in Harlan Koff (ed.), *De/ceiving (Dis)Appearances: Analyzing Current Developments in Europe and North America's Border Regions* (Brussels: PIE Peter Lang, 2006); Zoe Bray, "Europe as Living Boundaries: The Case of the Basque Country," in Bo Strath and Hans-Ake Persson (eds.), *Reflections on Europe: Defining a Political Order in Time and Space* (Brussels: PIE Peter Lang, 2007 forthcoming).
19. Bray, *Living Boundaries*.
20. Zoe Bray, "Living Boundaries: An emerging Basque public sphere in today's era of cross-frontier communication?," Unpublished document for Sixth Framework Research Project *EMEDIATE: Media and Ethics of a European Public Sphere from the Treaty of Rome to the "War on Terror,"* (EUI: Florence, 2005).
21. Doug Imig and Sydney Tarrow, "La contestation politique dans l'Europe en formation," in Richard Balme and Didier Chabanet (eds.). *L'action collective en Europe* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2002).
22. Tormod Sund, *Jo Ta Ke, irabazi arte. On the maintenance of Basque radical nationalist identity and sentiment* (NTNU, Dept. of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Managements, November 2002).
23. Eugenia Ramírez Goicoechea, "Cuadrillas en el País Vasco: Identidad local y revitalización étnica," *Revista Española De Investigaciones Sociológicas*, Vol. 25 (1984), pp. 213–22; Ramírez Goicoechea, Eugenia, *De jóvenes y sus identidades: socioantropología de la etnicidad en Euskadi* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1991); Joseba Zulaika, *Basque Violence: metaphor and sacrament* (Reno: Nevada University Press, 1988).
24. Juan Diez Medrano, *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain and the UK* (Princeton University Press, 2003).
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26. Interestingly, a recent survey reveals that inhabitants of Euskadi tend to define the Basque Country more in institutional terms, therefore delimiting themselves to the region of Euskadi, while inhabitants of Iparralde tend more to define the Basque Country in more ideal national terms, following the romantic idea of "zazpiak bat," a Basque motto for "the seven provinces (three in Iparralde, and four in Hegoalde) make one." (Euskal Kultur Erakundea, *Pratiques culturelles et identités collectives au Pays basque*, Ustaritz: 17 September 2005).
27. "Orain Herria, Orain Bakea," (Basque for Now the people, now peace) *Le Journal du Pays Basque* (25 February 2006).
28. Zoe Bray, *Militant Youths in Iparralde* (Home video, December 2005).
29. See also Igor Ahedo, *El Movimiento Demo y la Nueva Cocina Vasca* (Bilbao: Alga Alberdania, 2004) and Aude Soubiron, "Emergence et place d'un nouveau

- movement nationaliste: le cas des démos au Pays basque,” (Masters thesis, University of Paris IX-Dauphine, 2004).
30. Chris Shore, “Ethnicity as Revolutionary Strategy: Communist Identity Construction in Italy,” in Shirley McDonald (ed.), *Inside European Identities* (Oxford: Berg Press, 1993).

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