

# Immigrants and the Basque nation: diversity as a new marker of identity

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## Abstract

Basque nationalism is singled out in the literature as a case of minority nationalism that faces an ongoing struggle between those in support of a liberal-inclusive definition of the nation and those favouring an exclusive-racialist one. Nevertheless, Basque nationalist parties have been welcoming of immigration and have legislated to create a regional citizenship based on residence rather than ethnicity. This article argues that, at least in part, the 'positive' response of Basque nationalists to the immigration wave that began in the early 2000s is an attempt to strengthen national solidarity by contrasting Basque values of openness and tolerance against the restrictive nature of the reforms to the immigration law in Spain that were initiated in 2000. This argument challenges the notion that sub-state nationalists are hostile to immigration because of the threat diversity poses to the nationalist project.

**Keywords:** Basque Country; nationalism; immigration; citizenship; Spain; ethnicity.

## Introduction

The forces of modernization were supposed to wipe away minority national identities based on distinct languages and cultures and replace them with post-national civic identities; however, minority nationalism remains a potent political force in advanced capitalist democracies such as Canada, the UK, Spain and Belgium (Lecours 2011). The phenomenon of immigration in the West has raised new challenges for minority nations. Minority nations define themselves from the larger state by way of distinct cultures and languages and now they must contend with an influx of migrants that do not share those languages or cultural traits. Moreover, immigrants are consid-

ered unlikely to support a nationalist party, which weakens the political power of the minority nation. Migration to the burgeoning cities in the territories of minority nations such as Montreal, Barcelona, Bilbao, Vitoria and Glasgow is occurring to various degrees, but it is becoming an important reality in all of them. For these reasons, immigrants are often portrayed as a potential threat to the survival of sub-state nations (Kymlicka 2001, pp. 277–9).

Among the cases of minority nationalism in the West, Basque nationalism has been singled out as a case of ethnic nationalism (Medrano 1995; Conversi 1997). An ethnic nationalist project is one that emphasizes immutable characteristics, namely race, to define the boundaries of the community rather than legal-rational principles as in so-called civic nations. In a comparison between the nationalisms in the Basque Country and Catalonia, one scholar remarks that the Basque nationalists ‘have demonstrated an isolationist tendency... and the *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) reigns supreme’ (Jáuregui 2006, p. 239). Taking into account this characterization of Basque nationalism as based on principles of race, one would expect Basque nationalists to favour an approach to immigration that excludes immigrants from membership in the nation. This article documents that the opposite has occurred. Basque nationalists have adopted a political strategy designed to encourage immigration to the Basque Country by implementing policies that offer socio-economic and legal incentives to foreigners to immigrate there, either from their country of origin or other regions of Spain. Although the Spanish state retains formal control over entry and naturalization, the autonomous Basque government – governed by the main representative of mainstream Basque nationalism, the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), between 1980 and 2009<sup>1</sup> – has sufficient policy capacity to define its own distinct approach to important aspects of citizenship.

Nationalist parties seek to reinforce the distinctiveness of the nation and promote national solidarity. The argument advanced here is that this drive to solidify the strength of the nation has shaped the ‘puzzling’ response of Basque nationalism to the phenomenon of foreign migration. In other words, the policy fields of citizenship and immigration have been added to the mix of identity markers that distinguish the Basque nation from the Spanish one. At first glance, this argument appears surprising because minority nationalism is usually associated with cultural issues such as language and religion rather than ‘high-level’ policy areas that are generally assumed domains of the state. Contextual changes associated with globalization are making it more difficult for nationalist elites to galvanize support and project the image of the nation as dynamic and resilient with references to the group’s distinct history, culture and language. In particular, global flows of information, culture and media are forcing

nationalists to rethink and evaluate how they construct and express national identity. Monolithic appeals to a group's history may appear stale and anti-modern to younger generations of potential nationalists. Moreover, political autonomy in the form of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) creates an incentive for nationalists to take an oppositional stance to the Spanish government. Connecting the issue of immigration with the broader nationalist discourse suggests that the Basque national community has different values and priorities than the Spanish one and therefore requires more autonomy, or independence, to pursue its goals.

The first section of this paper presents a historical survey of the development of Basque nationalism and its definition of the national community. The main leader of the early Basque nationalist movement, Sabino Arana, developed a doctrine that emphasized race, custom and tradition as the core principles of the nation (Douglass 2002). While the transition to democracy and coincident recognition that Spain is composed of 'historic nations' led to a marked change in how Basque nationalists define 'insiders' and 'outsiders', the influence of Arana's original doctrine remained present in the discourse of Basque nationalist parties. It remained a possibility, therefore, that political Basque nationalism would respond to an influx of foreign immigration by employing xenophobic rhetoric and erecting barriers to exclude immigrants from citizenship privileges.

To execute the argument that Basque nationalists constructed an open and inclusive citizenship policy in order to demarcate an emerging difference between Spanish and Basque values, the second section provides an account of the restrictive turn in Spanish immigration policy that began in 2000 during the presidency of José María Aznar of the right-wing *Partido Popular* (PP). The shift in emphasis from integration to control and exclusion in the state-level immigration law provided an opportunity for the nationalists to participate in a new public policy debate at the regional level and reinforce the distinctiveness of the Basque identity. Finally, the third section outlines the debates in the Basque Country surrounding immigration and the policies initiated by the PNV-led government. The emphasis in this section is on the jurisdictional tussle between the Spanish state and the nationalist government of the BAC.

The conclusion argues that the Basque case is illustrative of a broader trend: that nations without states are incorporating themes of inclusive citizenship into their national imaginings in contrast to European states opting for tougher distinctions between nationals and non-nationals and aggressive programmes of cultural integration (Brubaker 2001; Triadafilopoulos 2011). This suggests that a previously held assumption that minority nations manifest defensive and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants (Ignatieff 1993; Franck

1997) may no longer be useful. On the contrary, long-standing nationalist movements are adapting and changing their values to obtain broad support and maintain distinctiveness from the state identity.

### **Race as core value in the development of Basque nationalism**

When Basque nationalism emerged in the 1890s it garnered much support because of widespread discontent with the loss of traditional autonomy (*fueros*) for the Basque provinces. The resistance movement against centralization, liberalization and secularization, known as Carlism, was notably stronger in the Basque provinces than anywhere else in Spain (Lecours 2007, p. 48). The liberal version of the gestating nationalist movement was, therefore, unable to garner a broad base of support. The ethnic variant of nationalism articulated by Sabino Arana – founder of the PNV – quickly gained ascendancy. Arana's emphasis on race as the key symbol of the Basque nation stemmed from his ardent belief that the mysterious origins of the Basques made them unique in comparison to Spaniards and Catalans, whom he believed to be of the same racial stock (Larronde 1977, p. 165). As argued by Smolicz (1988, p. 394), every ethnic group confers a particular importance on a marker of its identity that therefore becomes the 'pivot around which the whole social and identification system of the group is organized', and in the case of Basque nation during the early twentieth century, Arana and the PNV decided upon race as that marker.

Arana's commitment to the preservation of the Basque race meant that even those born in the Basque provinces of Spanish ethnicity had to be segregated to prevent intermarriage. To accomplish this, he suggested that following independence from Spain, the Basque provinces should eradicate all Spanish influence on the customs and culture of the Basques by maintaining a strong border and expelling non-ethnic Basques (Pablo and Mees 2005, p. 12). The concepts of racial segregation and expulsion quickly became a part of the PNV's initial platform. The party stated that, following independence, all non-ethnic Basques would be expelled from the Basque provinces aside from those temporary workers deemed to be contributing to the Basque economy (Heiberg 1975, p. 185). The PNV also decided upon an exclusivist membership criteria by requiring an applicant to have at least one first-generation ancestor of Basque origin. While the PNV eventually abandoned its practice of requiring proof of ancestry, the party statutes of the early 1930s still mentioned that only those of 'Basque descent are considered members', and in doing so maintained race as a constitutive element of the Basque nation (Zabalo 2008, p. 799). Arana's nationalist writings also specified that other races, in

particular the Jews and the Moors (Muslims), were considered inferior to the Basques and that these groups posed a threat to Basque civilization if they were to migrate to the Basque provinces. The political autonomy enjoyed by Bizkaia in the sixteenth century allowed the province to enact legislation aimed at preventing Moors and Jews from migrating to Bizkaia.

The charismatic and influential personality of Arana factored into the decision of the PNV to build a sense of national awareness around race and relegate language to secondary status, but two exogenous factors also played a significant role in shaping the racist character of early Basque nationalism. First, rapid industrialization made available an abundance of shipbuilding and steel-manufacturing jobs in the Basque Country during the early twentieth century, especially in Bilbao, the largest city in the region. Consequently, migrants from other parts of Spain flocked to the Basque Country in search of employment, and they came with little or no knowledge of the burgeoning Basque nationalist movement. Bilbao more than doubled its population from 35,505 in 1877 to 83,306 in 1900 and net migration to the Basque provinces between 1888 and 1900 totalled 31,237, which is quite remarkable given the level of emigration from Spain to other parts of Europe and Latin America (Valderrama 2008, p. 189). More than half of the immigrants to the Basque provinces did not have any Basque ancestry and were met with resistance by nationalists who had been indoctrinated by Arana's version of nationalism (Conversi 1997, pp. 200–1). Because of the comparable economic well-being of native Basques, however, it was relatively easy for them to isolate the immigrant population by forcing them to work in the mining industry and live in remote dwellings away from the residential neighbourhoods of ethnic Basques. Second, in contrast with the situation in Catalonia where the nationalist movement fluidly absorbed immigrants by emphasizing the Catalan language as the unifying symbol of the Catalan identity, Arana and his followers in the PNV attempted to use Euskara to divide the indigenous population from newcomers rather than unite them (Conversi 1990). Arana did not afford any intrinsic value to Euskara in his imagining of the Basque nation; he believed that Catalan nationalists had made a mistake by teaching Spanish migrants the Catalan language and thus urged Basques not to commit the same error (Muro 2008, p. 60).

After the death of Sabino Arana in 1903, the tension within the PNV's ranks pitting those favouring autonomy within Spain (*euskalerriacos*) and the intransigent separatists (*aberrianos*) grew stronger. The *aberrianos* incorporated elements of socialism into Basque nationalism with a deep sympathy for the living conditions of working-class Basques and Spaniards. For the *aberrianos*, socialism also entailed curtailing the ethnic boundaries of the Basque nation in

order to accept immigrants willing to integrate and express concern for working-class issues (Ibarzábal 1978, p. 118). The *euskalerríacos*, on the other hand, maintained strong ties with Bilbao's powerful industrial and financial sectors and preferred autonomy within Spain to ensure maximal financial benefits for its support base, but still paid homage to the racist version of nationalism. The antagonism caused a temporary rupture in the PNV, although the two sides reunited in 1930 because the abuses of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship provided a new focal point for the Basque nationalist struggle.

The Second Republic (1931–9) opened up democratic space for the creation of new political parties in the Basque Country, the most prominent being the *Acción Nacionalista Vasca* (ANV). The majority of the ANV's cadre were former members of the PNV's *euskalerríaco* wing that were unhappy with the party's racist conception of the Basque nation and apathy towards issues of social justice. The ANV differed from the *aberrriano* wing of the PNV because it was not concerned with independence. The ANV sought instead to establish a new relationship with the other peoples of Spain and modernize Basque nationalism within a framework of autonomy. Despite the party's relative insignificance in elections, the contribution of the ANV to the ideological spectrum of the Basque nationalism was significant as it was the first political party to fuse socialism with nationalism and present a clear alternative to the right-leaning bourgeois PNV (de la Granja Sainz 1986, p. 612).

Peacetime in the Second Republic did not last long because General Francisco Franco orchestrated a coup to stop the tide of liberalism, secularism and modernization in Spain (Graham 2005; Casanova 2010). It was not clear at the beginning of the war whether the PNV – hegemonic in much of the Basque Country – would support Franco's forces because of the party's religious and conservative leanings, or if the autonomy statute granted by the Republican government was sufficient to secure its loyalty. In the end, two Basque provinces, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, ended up supporting the Republic while Araba and Nafarroa sided with Franco's forces. The PNV did its best to maintain cordial relations with the Francoists during the war because of the fierce anticlericalism of the Republican side. Nevertheless, the regime carried out violent reprisals during the war in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa and repressed the use of Euskara in the public and educational spheres in the post-war years (Aguilar 1998, pp. 10–11; Pérez-Agote 2006, pp. 80–1). Migration to the Basque provinces was insignificant during the 1930s and early 1940s because economic growth slowed on account of the war. Many Basques fled to South America and the USA out of fear of more reprisals by the Franco regime (Valderrama 2008, pp. 189–90).

Bilbao's shipbuilding yards and factories were handed over to Franco's forces intact because the PNV controlled the battalion that surrendered the city in 1937 and decided to ignore the Republican government's request that they be destroyed. This decision certainly was a contributing factor to the economic boom in and around Bilbao during the 1950s and 1960s, but it had the unintended consequence of attracting a large wave of migrants from other Spanish regions and some foreign immigrants from neighbouring European countries. Many nationalists interpreted the growing non-Basque labour force as a deliberate Francoist strategy to undermine Basque nationalist consciousness, but no objective data has been uncovered to substantiate this claim.<sup>2</sup>

The acquiescence of the PNV during the Franco dictatorship provided the impetus for a group of young nationalists to form *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA), the organization that came to embody the radical variant of nationalism because of its commitment to independence and nothing less. ETA's version of nationalism was influenced by the secularist and socialist ideas first permeated by the *aberriano* wing of the PNV and the ANV. ETA also drew inspiration from the Third World liberation movements and New Left theorists resulting in a de-emphasis of ethnic factors to facilitate socialist-based mobilization of all those living in the Basque Country with a 'will to be Basque' (Muro 2008, pp. 101–2). Elites within ETA lambasted the PNV for its racism and defined their version of Basqueness as voluntary in nature; ETA would consider a person with Basque ancestry who did not support the nationalist movement less Basque than an immigrant who did (Heiberg 1979, p. 187). On the other hand, the voluntary conception of Basqueness advocated by some was a source of conflict within ETA. Internal documents reveal that a traditional wing of ETA 'appropriated a more extreme version of nationalism than Arana originally did, with all of his dogmas and prejudices', even though ethnocentric ideas and anti-conservatism made for unusual bedfellows (Elorza 1978, p. 201; Jáuregui 1981, pp. 134–5). ETA could not avoid this coupling of ethnocentrism with Marxist revolutionary ideas because complete acceptance of other ethnicities would have cut the organization off from the grass-roots Basque nationalist community.

There is no doubt that the moderate nationalists led by the PNV sought to heal the schism between indigenous Basques and migrants during the twilight of the Franco dictatorship and in the early years following the transition to democracy. One of the major reforms to the Spanish state following the transition was the decentralization of power; nationalism in the Basque Country was a major reason for this development. The creation of the BAC served to strengthen the moderate version of Basque nationalism and isolate the radical stream

because it empowered the PNV politically; the party has won the most seats in the Basque parliament in every election since 1980.<sup>3</sup> Article 7.1 of the Statute of Gernika, the document that defines the powers of the autonomous Basque government in relation to the Spanish state, includes a provision that defines the Basque nation without any reference to ethnicity or language: ‘the political status of Basque is afforded to all those who reside in the Basque Country.’ Nevertheless, Arana’s original definition of Basqueness remained influential within the PNV. Xabier Arzalluz, the most powerful politician in the PNV from 1979 until 2004, refused to repudiate Arana’s ethnic nationalism. Arzalluz stated that the Basque blood type ‘is a sign of distinctiveness between ‘real’ Basques and those from ‘outside’, and those who are not ‘real’ Basques should be treated here as Germans in Mallorca, with limited social and political rights’ (Balfour and Quiroga 2007, p. 150).

### **‘Toughening up’: changes to Spain’s immigration and citizenship framework**

Citizenship and immigration are polyvalent concepts with many meanings and applications. Joppke (2010) provides a useful heuristic by ferreting out the three main aspects of citizenship that are entangled with immigration. Formal status or nationality is the most basic aspect of citizenship. National citizenship provides the holder with a passport and the maximum breadth of political and social rights. The second aspect, rights, is important because citizenship status generally creates an internal stratification of rights. For example, formal citizenship may create a distinction between nationals and non-nationals in terms of political rights (e.g. voting), but non-nationals may have the same social rights (e.g. education, health care) as nationals. The stratification of rights between nationals and non-nationals varies across countries and over time (Joppke 2010, p. 29). Finally, the identity aspect of citizenship relates to the beliefs and subjective attachment that the state seeks to impute on people. Countries vary to the extent that they associate formal citizenship with a cultural community by setting demanding requirements for knowledge of the national language and history, as well as for the adoption of particular values. In the case of Spain, as in other European countries, governments have scaled back the rights of non-nationals and made it more difficult for immigrants to naturalize and become formal citizens.

Spain’s first immigration law was enacted in 1985 to placate the other members of the EU that were concerned that it would serve as the entry point into Europe for unwanted immigrants. As Spain settled into EU membership, the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE)

began to express its disapproval of the very law it had passed in 1985. Despite losing the 1996 election to the PP, the PSOE was able to lead a coalition of non-governing parties in the Congress to pass Law 4/2000. Law 4/2000 recognized the permanency of immigration by reducing the state's discretionary powers to renew permits and expel immigrants and focused on integration by broadening access to social services such as education, health and social security, regardless of an immigrant's legality. Because it governed with a minority in Congress, the PP could only criticize the legislation; Aznar went as far as to say that Law 4/2000 would be repealed if the PP won a majority in the 2000 general elections (Calavita 2005, p. 33).

The PP won a majority government in 2000 and Aznar swiftly kept his word. Capitalizing on the high-profile anti-immigrant violence in the southern Spanish town of El Ejido, Aznar's PP submitted and passed a bill in late 2000 that overhauled Law 4/2000. It has been called a tough anti-immigration law that appeared to be 'payback for the humiliation of the enactment of a liberal law by the PSOE-led coalition' (Calavita 2005, p. 33). The Statement of Reasons of the new Law 8/2000 makes clear that immigrants only have access to the 'most fundamental' human rights. The rights to association, union membership and demonstration enjoyed by irregular and regular aliens under the previous Law 4/2000 were reversed. Law 8/2000 also created important distinctions between regular and irregular aliens in the realms of health care and education. Irregular aliens only have access to public health care in 'emergencies' and the right to education only applies to resident aliens whereas all school-aged immigrants had a right to education under Law 4/2000. Law 8/2000 also facilitates the swift expulsion of immigrants without a permit or with a recently expired permit and ended the right to automatic permanent residency after three years of residence.

While Law 4/2000 made it mandatory for the state to provide reasons if a visa request was refused, Law 8/2000 modified this provision to allow all visas to be refused without reason except those falling under the category of family reunification (Gortázar 2002, p. 18). This means that lodging an appeal is impossible because there is no way to appeal a decision if no reasoning for the decision is given in the first place. In short, the overall effect of the law has been to restrict the rights of legal and illegal immigrants and place a stronger emphasis on the policing of the 'immigration problem' rather than integration or settlement.<sup>4</sup>

The legal changes made by the PP occurred alongside a shift in societal views towards immigration. The perception of illegal immigration as a public safety risk became much more prevalent. Stories about criminal gangs from Latin America and Eastern Europe were covered daily in the Spanish media and the 2001 terrorist attacks in the

USA fuelled negative evaluations of Spain's growing population of Muslim immigrants. The PP and PSOE agreed to reforms that required visas for visitors from Latin American countries such as Colombia (in 2001) and Ecuador (in 2003) because many immigrants from these countries were entering the country as tourists and then remaining illegally (González-Enríquez 2009, p. 153). Nevertheless, Spain still provides preferential treatment to Latin Americans by reducing the number of years of residence required before Spanish citizenship can be acquired.<sup>5</sup>

Around the same time as the restrictive state-level reforms took place, new immigrants started to arrive en masse to the Basque Country. The rate of growth of immigrants between 2001 and 2002 was 46 per cent in Spain as a whole and 41 per cent in the Basque Country (Observatorio Vasco de Inmigración 2008). To put this in perspective, in 1998 immigrants in the Basque Country made up less than 1 per cent of its population and that percentage had risen to 7 per cent by 2007, which does not include those immigrants who have obtained Spanish citizenship (Valderrama 2008, p. 191). By nationality, Colombians and Ecuadorians account for close to 25 per cent of the total, while the next largest groups are Moroccans, Algerians, Romanians and Bolivians (Gobierno Vasco 2009, p. 17).

### **Forging a distinctive path: inclusive citizenship in the Basque Country**

Following the 2001 Basque elections, the governing nationalist electoral coalition of the PNV and Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), with the support of the left-leaning Izquierda Unida (IU), began discussions in cabinet and the Basque parliament about the necessity of Basque institutions and policies in the fields of immigration and citizenship. These discussions came about due to a confluence of circumstances: the restrictive reforms to the Spanish immigration law by the PP at the national level; the growth rate of immigration in the Basque Country; and the escalating concerns within some nationalist circles about the potential effect of immigration on Basque culture.<sup>6</sup> Immigration also gained traction with the public due to intensive media coverage in both mainstream Basque newspapers such as *El Correo* and nationalist newspapers such as *Deia* (see e.g. Montalban 2004; de las Heras 2008).

The first tangible institutional response by the PNV-led government was decree 40/2002 that created the Department of Housing and Social Affairs and included within that new ministry a Basque Directorate of Immigration. The parliamentary debates that preceded decree 40/2002 pitted the Basque branch of the PP against the PNV and its governing partners. The PP's initial reaction was confrontational because it perceived an institution dedicated to Basque

immigration policy as a potential violation of state sovereignty. Accordingly, the PP suggested that the management of immigration did not require a separate institutional basis because the various aspects of integration (e.g. housing, social affairs, language policy) were adequately dealt with by the Basque public administration in its current form.<sup>7</sup> This is a typical example of a jurisdictional battle in a specific policy area between the central and sub-state government that becomes embedded within the broader struggle between state and minority nationalisms (Béland and Lecours 2008).

The first Basque Immigration Plan (PVI) was passed in a plenary session of the Basque parliament on 3 December 2003. The timing and content of the first immigration plan leaves little doubt that it was elaborated in reaction to the restrictive immigration laws put in place by the PP at the state level. One of the main points of discussion in the Basque parliament leading up to the passage of the plan centred on the concept of citizenship and its connection to legal nationality; the PNV–EA–IU government intended to decouple citizenship from nationality and offer the benefits of citizenship to all residents of the Basque Country. In the words of a specialist of Basque immigration policy:

The most novel concept proposed in the Basque Immigration Plan was that of an inclusive citizenship distinct from the Spanish concept of citizenship. . . in a nutshell, the nationalists wanted to send this message: if you live in the Basque Country, you should receive all the rights and privileges of being Basque.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the Basque government sought to reduce the stratification of rights between nationals and non-nationals and nullify the importance of obtaining formal Spanish citizenship.

During parliamentary debate, the PNV–EA–IU coalition proposed a resolution to emphasize its rejection of the Spanish immigration law because of the hardships it creates for new immigrants:

The Basque government urges the Spanish government to repeal the Law on Aliens because it is discriminatory and impedes both the social integration and legal incorporation of immigrants; the same way it calls for the development of a new law that regularizes the situation of all immigrants that reside in Spain.<sup>9</sup>

The Basque PP did not receive this criticism well because of the close relationship between the party and the central leadership. Yet, its response was tempered because the party recognizes that a reputation as anti-Basque is tantamount to electoral suicide because many non-nationalist voters express some sympathy for the preservation of

Basque nationhood. Accordingly, the set of resolutions put forth by the Basque PP urged the Basque government to engage in cooperation with the Spanish state in the realm of immigration and find ways to integrate immigrants while respecting the framework of Spanish immigration law. On the other hand, the resolution pertaining to education indicated that the PP was concerned that the nationalists intended to foster an exclusive attachment to the Basque identity among immigrants rather than the Spanish one, or at least, a dual identity. In particular, Resolution 7.3 states that the Basque PP ‘urges the Basque government to guarantee a Spanish-only model of education for immigrant children because the majority of immigrants request this model of schooling for their children.’<sup>10</sup> This resolution was rather curious given that the issue of language models for education was not included within the scope of the PVI. The PP has historically viewed any deviance from the Constitution as threatening to the nation (Encarnación 2008, pp. 61–5). The Basque PP appeared to be sending a warning to the nationalist coalition that adding an identity component to its distinct notion of citizenship would not be permitted. Despite the controversy surrounding the initiative to make Euskara the principle language of education in the Basque Country in 2007, parents can still choose to educate their children primarily in Euskara or Spanish.<sup>11</sup>

The PVI defines itself as ‘progressive’ in comparison with Spanish standards insofar as it advocates ‘full and advanced protection of the rights of all people in the Basque Country regardless of origins’ (Gobierno Vasco 2003, p. 62). The preamble goes as far as to imply that the PVI is a necessary response to the restrictive policy of the Spanish government because it puts immigrants in a vulnerable situation and impedes their societal integration. The Basque government seeks to overcome the drawbacks of the Spanish legal framework through action in three main conceptual areas: integration, citizenship and Basque values. Within each conceptual area, specific goals and benchmarks are set to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the Basque model of citizenship.

Immigration is defined in the plan as a phenomenon that is positive and welcomed since it contributes to the cultural and economic enrichment of the Basque Country. Integration is not a one-way process that has an end goal of sameness; on the contrary, it is a flexible process of adjustment and balance in order to configure a new society. Integration as understood by the architects of the PVI rules out the existence of separate cultures coexisting or the assimilation of other cultures to that of the host society. While the PVI uses the term interculturalism, practices commonly associated with multiculturalism – the active promotion by the state of various cultural activities and customs – fit with Basque values so long as the objectives of any

cultural activity is intercultural communication and dialogue rather than exclusion and isolation (Gobierno Vasco 2003, pp. 63–4). The Spanish notion of citizenship does not impose a homogenous identity, but it refrains from proclaiming that multiculturalism and diversity are sources of enrichment for Spanish society. This suggests that Basque nationalists are more comfortable with the notion of multicultural citizenship than the Spanish state-wide parties.

In contrast to the Spanish immigration law that imposes distinctions between nationals and non-nationals, the PVI lays down an inclusive version of citizenship that only requires a person to live in the Basque Country to be entitled to all of its privileges. The BAC cannot provide the Spanish nationality to its newcomers, but it can alleviate some of the hardships experienced by illegal immigrants by conferring upon them the same rights and privileges as naturalized Spanish citizens living in the Basque territory. The nationalist coalition states that this concept of citizenship is also a means of deepening democracy because it allows newcomers to actively participate in society; without guarantees to basic housing, social services and health care, an immigrant's ability to contribute and feel attached to the community is circumscribed (Gobierno Vasco 2003, p. 66).

The PSOE minority government that came to power in 2004 released the *Plan Estratégico de Ciudadanía e Integración 2007–2010* (PECI), much to the chagrin of the Basque (and Catalan) nationalists because it did not acknowledge that certain regions might require additional powers in areas related to immigration. In essence, it represented a refusal to provide further recognition that Spain is a state made up of various nations and thus immigrants living in distinct territories will potentially confront different dominant values, norms and cultures (Zapata-Barrero 2007). The PSOE also disregarded the criticisms made by Basque nationalists regarding the Spanish immigration law put in place by the PP and affirmed the link between citizenship and nationality in the PECI: 'without legality integration is not possible' (Gobierno de España 2007, p. 7). Once again, the conflict between Spanish and Basque notions of citizenship is clear: the Basque conception stresses full rights based on residence rather than legality.

The final concept, Basque values, stresses the importance of respecting human rights over and above other considerations such as cultural preservation or the economy. In particular, 'the policy includes strategies to align citizenship for all residents regardless of their administrative status; this policy is associated with the Basque government's commitment to fight social exclusion and poverty among immigrants' (Gobierno Vasco 2003, p. 67). Basques accept this approach to the management of immigration because they find the vast difference in wealth between countries of the North and countries

of the South unacceptable and assume responsibility to do what they can to help those in need live a better life.

With a set of objectives in place, the governing coalition set out to realize them. Preventing legal and economic marginalization of immigrants is a common theme in the PVI and the government moved quickly to achieve this goal. The programme HELDU (Legal Service and Social Care for Immigrants) was developed to provide immigrants to the Basque Country with specialized advice on legal procedures concerning the documentation needed to obtain social assistance, employment and housing. The employees of HELDU are able to provide information to immigrants about how to deal with any issues and problems that arise because of the Spanish immigration law. The HELDU service earned rave reviews from both nationalist and non-nationalist civil society organizations that advocate for the rights of immigrants in the Basque Country.<sup>12</sup> Because few other autonomous communities in Spain have services similar to HELDU, it attracted immigrants from other parts of the country fed up with the vicious circle created by the Spanish immigration law: ‘without work, you cannot get a residence permit, and without a residence permit, you cannot get work’ (López 2009). Since opening in 2003, 33,500 cases have been handled successfully by HELDU staff and lawyers (López 2009).

On 1 March 2009, regional elections were held in the Basque Country, and for the first time since the transition to democracy in Spain, a non-nationalist coalition of the Basque PP and Socialist Party of Euskadi (PSE) formed the government, despite the fact that the PNV won the most seats and the popular vote.<sup>13</sup> The new minister of housing and social affairs, Gemma Zabaleta of the PSE, announced in early 2010 that HELDU would be shut down before the end of the year. The closure was justified by the coalition government as both a cost-cutting measure and a necessary reform in the name of ‘fairness’ because HELDU gave privileges to immigrants that were not available to other less-fortunate people living in the Basque Country.<sup>14</sup> The PNV appealed to the PSE–PP coalition to reverse its decision and organized demonstrations in conjunction with immigrant associations that dubbed the position of the PSE–PP government as ‘restrictive, exclusionary, and xenophobic’ (Europa Press 2010). The PSE–PP went ahead with the closure of HELDU in July 2010. In doing so, the coalition made it more difficult for non-nationals in the Basque Country to regularize their status in order to access housing, health care and social benefits, thus deepening the distinction between those with formal Spanish citizenship and those without it.

## Conclusion

The attempt by mainstream Basque nationalism – as articulated by the PNV today – to define a unique approach to integration that stresses an open concept of citizenship is an interesting empirical observation for two main reasons. First, the Basque case is often presented as the prototypical case of an ethnic nation that defines its boundaries according to race. The fact that the Basque government under the tenure of a nationalist coalition implemented policy instruments to attract foreign immigrants to the Basque Country and created a citizenship based on residence demonstrates that Arana's racially exclusive version of Basque nationalism no longer wields a significant influence on the politics of the PNV. Second, while other factors such as a declining birth rate may be relevant, the discourse found in official documents suggests that the PNV is using the policy field of immigration as a nation-building tool. Minority nationalist movements are alive and well in the advanced industrial world because they have successfully engaged in public policy debates in order to connect with their constituents and emphasize that the majority and minority communities have different values, thereby reinforcing the continuing relevance of the drive for more autonomy or independence.

Immigration has found its way on to the agendas of other minority nationalist movements in the West. In Quebec, the provincial government secured greater control over immigrant selection and integration than the other provinces in the Canadian federation because of its national distinctiveness in the 1970s. As in the Basque case, Quebec nationalism overcame its early ethnocentric character and redefined the boundaries of the nation to allow for the inclusion of immigrants without French ancestry (Behiels 1991). Recently, a number of high-profile cases in Quebec have reignited the debate about religious accommodation in the province. Political forces that support Quebec sovereignty are attempting to capitalize on the issue by arguing that multiculturalism is a Canadian value whereas Quebecers favour a narrower version of secularism that allows for the restriction of certain religious practices (Gagnon and Iacovino 2007, pp. 96–113; Patel 2011). In Scotland, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has asserted that more immigrants will be beneficial for Scottish society and its economy and thus advocates for the devolution of immigration policy from Westminster to the Scottish parliament (SNP 2007). The SNP has framed its demand for more autonomy over immigration in terms of a clash of values: the English dichotomy of 'us versus them' and the Scottish emphasis on 'kindness and compassion' (Hepburn 2009, p. 521).

What does this suggest about the evolution of nationalism in the advanced industrial world? Most evidently, it calls into question the

conception that minority nations are backwards, reactionary and illiberal. The response of some minority nations to globalizing forces such as immigration has not been to resist change in an effort to return to a mythical 'golden age' of the nation; on the contrary, the Basque, Quebec and Scottish nationalists have sought to present themselves as more open to globalization than their respective states. The study of minority nationalism in the West must become wholly cognizant of this paradigm shift and seek to understand the new and complex ways that small nations seek to reproduce and sustain their political projects.

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### **Notes**

1. The PNV remained in power from 1980 to 2009 by forming various coalitions with nationalists and non-nationalist parties (see Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca 2009).
2. Personal communication (email) with Ludger Mees, Professor of Contemporary History, University of the Basque Country, 20 November 2011.
3. The BAC is comprised of three of the four Iberian Basque provinces. Nafarroa secured its own autonomous institutions.
4. Personal interview with a member of *Unión Progreso y Democracia*, Vitoria, 21 September 2010.
5. Most foreigners have to be a resident for ten years, but asylum seekers can apply after only five years. Other nationalities with some historical link to Spain can obtain citizenship in one or two years.
6. Personal interview with a member of *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, Bilbao, 11 November 2010.
7. Personal interview with former Basque Director of Immigration, Bilbao, 23 September 2010.
8. Personal interview with Eguzki Urteaga, Professor of Sociology, University of the Basque Country, Vitoria, 14 October 2010.
9. Propuesta de Resolución N°1, Plan Vasco de Inmigración 2003–2005, Grupo Parlamento PNV–EA–IU, 2 April 2003.
10. Propuesta de Resolución N°7, Plan Vasco de Inmigración 2003–2005, Grupo Parlamento PP, 2 April 2003.
11. A 2007 decree approved by the Ministry of Education of the Basque government made it more difficult for students to receive a Spanish-medium education in the Basque Country. These reforms were overturned following the victory of the PP–PSE coalition in 2009 (see Tomé 2010).

12. Personal interviews with staff at *SOS Racismo* and *Anitzak Ekimena*, Bilbao and Vitoria, September 2010.
13. The PSE is the Basque regional branch of the PSOE.
14. Personal interviews with PSE Basque parliamentarians, Vitoria, 10 October 2010.

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