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Diversity and nationalism in the Basque Country and Flanders: understanding immigrants as fellow minorities

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Why have immigrant integration policies in the Basque Country and Flanders been framed according to multicultural principles? This paper offers an addendum to rationalist and institutionalist approaches, arguing that we cannot make sense of multicultural policies in these two cases without considering the interplay between historical narratives that undergird the nation and elite decision-making. Narratives of cultural oppression have been essential for nationalist mobilization in the Basque Country and Flanders. In turn, the choice of multiculturalism over assimilation by sub-state elites made sense because it fits with their understanding of the nation as an oppressed group.

Keywords: nationalism; immigration; Basque Country; Flanders; multiculturalism

Immigration has raised new challenges for sub-state nations such as Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland. Sub-state nations define themselves from the larger state by way of distinct cultures and languages and now must deal with an influx of immigrants that do not share those languages or cultural traits. Kymlicka (2001a, 2001b) was among the first to recognize the potential ‘threat’ that immigration poses to non-state national communities in liberal democracies. In particular, there is a strong temptation for newcomers to integrate both linguistically and culturally into the majority nation because of the perceived economic benefits and the lack of sympathy among immigrants for the mentality of *la survivance* that develops in sub-state nations (Kymlicka, 2001a, p. 278). Logically then, there is a strong incentive for sub-state elites to adopt exclusionary or assimilationist positions towards immigrant-generated diversity: to protect the cultural homogeneity needed to legitimize claims for independence or autonomy.

Recent scholarship that has focused on immigrant integration policy and discourse in sub-state nations, however, has revealed variance and complexity (Adam, 2013a; Barker, 2010; Hepburn, 2011; Jeram, 2013). Immigrant integration policies in Quebec, Scotland and Catalonia have indeed been much less exclusionary than the ‘threat’ hypothesis would expect them to be (Hepburn, 2009). Various sub-state nations have oscillated between, and simultaneously favoured, both multicultural policies that provide some ‘additional form of public recognition or support of ethnic groups, identities, and practices’ (Banting, Johnston, Kymlicka, & Soroka, 2006, p. 52) and assimilationist policies that incorporate newcomers according to a ‘one-sided process of adaptation:

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immigrants are expected to give up their distinctive characteristics' (Castles, 1995, p. 297). Particularly in Catalonia and Quebec, following a period during which multiculturalism was the guiding frame for diversity policies, sub-state elites have supported and adopted policies to encourage immigrants to 'feel and act' like members of their respective sub-state national communities (Barker, 2010; Solé & Parella, 2008; Zapata-Barrero, 2012a).

The attention here is placed on two cases of sub-state nationalism that, at first glance, appear most likely to corroborate the 'threat' hypothesis: the Basque Country and Flanders. According to Kymlicka, 'racialism remains a stronger force in both Basque and Flemish nationalism' (2001a, p. 282). This argument reaffirms the tendency of the sub-state nationalism literature to categorize Basque and Flemish nationalisms as 'ethnic', emphasizing immutable characteristics, such as race, to define the boundaries of the community rather than legal-rational principles (Conversi, 1997; Deprez & Vos, 1998; Jáuregui, 2006). The corollary of having ethnically defined national boundaries is an outright rejection of diversity, or, at best, a philosophy of assimilation that leaves no room for cultural, racial or linguistic diversity. Yet, even a cursory examination of the facts reveals that Basque and Flemish nationalisms have (generally) avoided proclamations that define national membership in racial terms and promoted policies in line with the philosophy of multiculturalism.

Starting in 2001, a nationalist coalition in the Basque Parliament, led by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), put immigration and reception policy on the Basque political agenda.¹ The first Basque Immigration Plan (PVI), which was executed in 2003, is a strong vision statement for immigrant reception policies that support multiculturalism in the public sphere alongside programmes to assist immigrants in learning Euskara and Spanish, the official languages of the Basque Autonomous Community. By excluding the far-right *Vlaams Blok* (VB, later renamed *Vlaams Belang*) from the Flemish Government through the *cordon sanitaire*, Flemish elites were able to construct a policy regime that embraced multiculturalism as a means to 'emancipate' immigrants from their marginal position in Flemish society (Adam, 2013a; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). The assimilationist policies that have been implemented since 2003, such as courses on Flemish values and Dutch-language tests, have been carried out alongside continued funding for immigrant associations, public recognition of cultural diversity, as well as public funding for employment, educational, social and youth programmes designed specifically for immigrants. This justifies the continued classification of important aspects of Flemish integration policy as multicultural (Adam, 2013a).

Accordingly, the explicit aims of this paper are twofold. First, it counters with empirical evidence the claim that the public policies and discourses of Basque and Flemish nationalist elites are intolerant of immigrants. In doing so, the paper utilizes the principles of the 'crucial case' study design, essentially 'scoring a clean knockout' over the 'threat' hypothesis by showing that it fails twice under favourable circumstances (Eckstein, 1975, p. 127). Second, it links the development of multiculturalism as a guiding framework for Basque and Flemish elites to an underemphasized factor in the extant literature: the narrative of past cultural oppression, which weighs in on decision-makers by invoking a 'logic of appropriateness' in favour of pro-diversity positions. We draw attention to the fact that identity, which constitutes a fundamental worldview for most sub-state nationalist elites, can influence the decision-making of political actors in unexpected ways. In order to mobilize support, sub-state elites invoke narratives that highlight past attempts by the state to eliminate the sub-state nation's cultural

distinctiveness (Lecours, 2012). While it is credible to respond to the impulses of majority nationalism with an affirmation of the cultural distinctiveness of the sub-state nation, a different set of norms tend to influence decision-making in the context of immigration-based diversity. Sub-state elites express sympathy towards newcomers because the narrative of oppression undergirding the sub-state nation casts assimilation in a negative light. Even from a rationalist position, the articulation of a national identity influenced by a narrative of repression may lead elites to favour multiculturalism; claims for (more) recognition and autonomy by sub-state elites would be less credible if the sub-state nation pursued homogeneity within its territory.

The categorization of cultural immigrant integration policies

Policies that deal with the cultural dimension of the socio-economic and political integration processes are generally classified using the assimilationist–multiculturalist binary, ideal-type categories at opposite ends of a continuum along which different actor positions, policies and policy instruments fall. The assimilationist and multiculturalist models can be distinguished from each other by the way in which the objectives of equality and social cohesion are achieved: by promoting the reduction of cultural differences (assimilationism) or by recognizing, celebrating and even promoting those differences (multiculturalism) (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013).

Early work from sociology defined assimilation as ‘a process of interpenetration and fusion, in which persons and groups acquire the memory, feelings, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated in a common cultural life’ (Park & Burgess, 1921, pp. 320–321). In this way, assimilation was thought to be a naturally occurring process of social life rather than an outcome of governmental intervention. As societies became more diverse, however, academics and policy-makers grew more pessimistic that immigrants would assimilate without policies aimed at supporting this process. Assimilationism as a policy framework is exemplified by state intervention that promotes cultural adaptation through integration courses and citizenship exams whereby immigrants learn about the values, language and history of the host country.

Multicultural policies are defined as going ‘beyond the protection of the basic civil and political rights guaranteed to all individuals in a liberal democratic state, to also extend some level of public recognition and support for minorities to express their distinct identities and practices’ (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013, p. 582). Multiculturalists believe that the state must promote cultural diversity actively in order to achieve genuine equality (Kymlicka, 1995). Examples of multicultural policies include: ethnic representation in the public media; exemptions from dress codes in public spaces; funding for ethnic group organizations; funding for bilingual education or mother tongue language classes; affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups; and revisions to school curricula to reflect ‘new’ types of societal diversity (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013, p. 583).

Sub-state nationalism–integration nexus: bringing identity back in

Early writing on nationalism evoked an image of non-state nationalist movements as anti-modern and illiberal in comparison to the modern and progressive nationalisms of sovereign states (Hobsbawm, 1990). Ergo, a common hypothesis, was that sub-state

nations would reject internal diversity. As mentioned previously, however, the ‘threat’ hypothesis does not stand up well to the empirical evidence. Moreover, the coincident argument that state nationalisms are more likely to adopt inclusive positions towards immigrants is questionable because many nation states have shifted towards stricter immigration and settlement policies that use integration tests as tools of exclusion (Goodman, 2011). In short, lacking a sovereign state does not necessarily result in a ‘backwards’ nationalism that is centred on the maintenance of ethnic homogeneity.

In order to correct for the shortcomings of the ‘threat’ hypothesis, Kymlicka (2001a, pp. 285–286) suggested that sub-state nationalisms could become ‘post-ethnic’ – welcoming to immigrants and supportive of their ethnic identities – so long as the sub-state government controls the volume and terms of integration. His preferred example is the transformation of Quebec nationalism from a defensive inward-looking project into a territorially based identity open to newcomers following successive federal–provincial agreements that empowered Quebec relative to the other provinces of Canada in immigrant selection and reception policy (Juteau, 2003). Nevertheless, his argument is ‘teleological to the extent that it envisions a progressive move towards “post-ethnic” multiculturalism’ (Barker, 2010, p. 15). An equally plausible interpretation is that nationalist elites will resort to using political autonomy as a means to execute exclusionary and assimilationist policies. For example, in Italy, the Northern League (LN) argues that the homogeneity of the Celtic, Christian and Calvinist ethnic community of Northern Italy must be preserved through regional legislation that reduces immigration from non-desirable sources and tightens asylum regulations (Hepburn, 2009, pp. 524–525). It is difficult to envision the LN or other elites in Padania campaigning on a pro-diversity policy in Northern Italy even if regional institutions were in place.

Another shortcoming is that Kymlicka’s use of the term ‘post-ethnic’ does not distinguish between multicultural and assimilative nationalisms. He argues that the ability of nationalist political elites to protect the ‘prestige’ of the minority culture with regional autonomy frees them to ‘allow [immigrants] to express their ethnic identity, while simultaneously encouraging their integration into the minority nation’ (Kymlicka, 2001b, p. 63). This disregards the likelihood that the ‘encouragement’ of integration might come at the expense of multiculturalism. Policies that forcefully secularize public spaces and link immigrants’ legal status or access to social benefits to language tests can be used as instruments to reduce cultural differences between natives and migrants. At worst, such policies result in the outright exclusion of foreigners from the membership community and citizenship privileges (Goodman, 2011). Several of these integration programmes have the intention of moving immigrants closer to the cultural ‘core’ of the nation (Michalowski, 2011). Whether or not integration practices contradict liberal values is not an issue here: integration measures often put assimilative pressures on immigrants. For example, the recent proposal of the *Parti Québécois* to ban the wearing of religious headgear by public servants in Quebec is hardly indicative of a position in favour of the full expression of minority ethnic identities.

As a corrective, we suggest that ‘bringing identity back in’ can help us better understand why sub-state nationalists respond to diversity differently across cases and over time. Sub-state nationalist movements look to the past for symbols and stories that help them construct a group narrative through time (Lecours, 2012, pp. 275–277). This narrative generally tells the story of the relationship of the nation with other groups and with the state. For example, the narrative of the Basque Country’s relationship with Spain is ripe with references to colonialism, subjugation and the ‘golden age’ of Basque

independence prior to its incorporation into Spain (Muro, 2008). Similarly, Flemish nationalist discourse is riddled with references to past cultural oppression at the hands of Francophone elites, which stymied the occupational and social advancement of the Flemish lower classes (Ter Hoeven, 1978). Narratives are neither fixed nor strictly factual; certain facts, myths or stories of the nation's past are forgotten over time as new interpretations come to the forefront. Nationalist elites are the drivers of this process; they attempt to persuade themselves and their supporters of the aspects of the group narrative that must be shed or adapted due to changing circumstances. Yet, they are constrained by the discursive structures that 'articulate in accessible ways the fundamental notions a group holds intersubjectively about itself in the world and that allows or disallows specific strategies of persuasion' (Cruz, 2000, p. 277). Accordingly, actor preferences cannot be reduced to a simple calculation of strategic interests: matters of identity can exert a significant influence on what actors perceive to be 'rational'.

In her study of immigrant integration policy in Quebec, Barker (2010) uses an approach that revolves around how conceptions of national identity shape actor preferences, and therefore policy outcomes. She suggests that overlapping and interacting tropes of collective identity, such as assertive majority, state-like actor and 'minority' nation, constitute the backdrop through which actors form policy preferences. For example, the expansion of the Quebec Government into new policy areas following the Quiet Revolution reflected, as Barker puts it, 'a political effort to address and control the issue as a regular society' (2010, p. 20).

The central argument of this paper squares with Barker's emphasis on the content of national identity as a key variable that shapes sub-state elite responses to diversity. In particular, we posit that narratives of past cultural oppression, which animate nationalist mobilization, foment multicultural responses towards immigrants by sub-state elites. This is due to a powerful 'logic of appropriateness': accepting immigrants and celebrating the diversity they bring is in sync with the claim that the sub-state nation deserves recognition and autonomy, or even independence. Of course, the content of national identity as exhibited by both Basque and Flemish sub-state elites is complex and contains unifying symbols and images besides narratives of past hardships in the form of cultural repression. We provide evidence, however, that these narratives of past oppression have shaped the interests of elites and thus weighed in on policy outcomes. In the cultural domain of immigrant integration policy, this has manifested in policies that align closer to the philosophy of multiculturalism rather than assimilationism.

While the narrative of past oppression has proven durable and powerful in the context of immigrant integration policy in the Basque Country and Flanders, the dominant narrative shaping policy can shift (Hall, 1993). A change in context, such as a significant election, institutional change or demographic shift, can alter the content of the dominant narrative shaping elite interests in a particular area of policy. Flemish elites have recently begun to think and act like a majority in the realm of immigrant integration policy, employing assimilationist instruments much like many state governments in Europe. This has been done, however, without eradicating previously institutionalized multicultural policy instruments, such as public funding for ethnic organizations, state holidays for religious minorities and affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups (Adam, 2013a; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). In this way, we acknowledge that the strength of particular sets of ideas that shape elite interests can change over time, which means that an identity-centric analysis does not predict static outcomes.

Case study I: Basque Country

Basque nationalism and the narrative of cultural oppression

Basque nationalism became a potent force in the provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and to a lesser extent, Araba in the late 1890s because Basque discontent with the Spanish state reached a high point following the erosion of traditional autonomy for the Basque provinces. The founder of Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana, articulated a definition of ‘Basqueness’ centred on race based on his belief that the Basque people have unique racial characteristics that are ‘pure’ in relation to Spaniards who had endured racial mixing during periods of Muslim invasion (Pablo & Mees, 2005, pp. 2–3). Arana detested all things Spanish and lamented during his famed 1893 diatribe that Bizkaia (a Basque province) was ‘already intoxicated by the virus of Spanishness’ (as cited in Lecours, 2012, pp. 276–277).

During the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), the Spanish state tried to eliminate all expressions of Basque culture and identity. From 1939 to 1945, the Basques were subjected to a level of systematic terror that was nothing short of brutal. After establishing military control over the Basque provinces, Franco’s troops began a campaign of repression against every innocuous sign of Basque identity such as dance, music and literature (Conversi, 1997, p. 81). The president of the Basque Government-in-exile wrote a message to UNESCO in 1952 in which he denounced the many acts of the Franco regime such as a decree requiring that all Basque names in the public domain be translated into Spanish and the forced removal of all Basque names from tombstones (Beltza, 1976, pp. 134–136). Fear and persecution led thousands of Basques to flee their homeland for destinations such as the USA, Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico.

Nationalists in the Basque Country and diaspora communities internalize the collective memory of victimization regardless of whether they experienced the Franco dictatorship first hand (Totoricagüena, 2003). Research examining the sentiments of Basque nationalists has found that a significant segment of them still harbour a strong antagonism towards Spain (Mata López, 1993). The PNV and other nationalists continue to depict, to varying degrees, the Spanish state as the ‘enemy’ of the Basque people and occupier of the Basque Country as a means to activate nationalist sentiments among the masses.

Immigration and multiculturalism in the Basque Country

In 1998, foreign immigrants made up only 1% of the Basque population, but that number had risen to 8% by 2008 (“Euskadi es la”, 2012).² Despite having an immigrant population that is lower than in some larger autonomous communities, such as Madrid, Catalonia and Andalusia, the growth rate of the immigrant population in the Basque Country has been among the highest in Spain. Since around 2000, a debate concerning the place of immigrants and preferred mode of integration has taken place between and within the Basque political parties. Traditionally, nationalists associated with the *izquierda abertzale* network of parties, trade unions, and other social groupings that supported *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* were stronger adherents to a linguistically defined national community than the PNV, but both movements have converged upon a strong commitment to reviving Euskara in an inclusive fashion (Urla, 2012). While tensions still exist between recent Spanish migrants and native Basques, many second- and third-generation Spanish migrants have learned Euskara and intermarried with indigenous Basques, which has helped to blur the formerly strong ethnic boundary between Spaniards

and Basques (Zabalo, Mateos, & Iraola, 2013, p. 524). In this context, the more recent arrival of immigrants from Latin America, North Africa and Asia could have been construed as a threat to the recovery of Euskara, dominance of nationalist parties in electoral politics, and the strength of identification with a Basque identity among the populace.

The major competences in the ambit of immigration remain with the Spanish state, but the Basque Government has sufficient policy capacity to shape specific expectations of cultural and social adaption for immigrants. In 2001, the process of developing a distinctive Basque integration policy was set in motion by the creation of a Directorate of Immigration under the auspices of the Ministry of Housing and Social Affairs. The directorate was given the task of spearheading the implementation of the PVI, which was approved by the executive in 2003 and debated in parliament in 2004.

The bedrock of the first PVI is the development of a distinct Basque citizenship that provides a common set of rights and obligations for all Basques. In contrast to the Spanish citizenship that is conferred through both *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* models, Basque citizenship is based on the *jus domicili* model, meaning that anyone living in the Basque Country and inscribed in their municipal register is recognized as a Basque 'citizen'. This is very significant because municipalities in Spain can register immigrants that are 'illegal' or 'irregular' according to Spanish immigration law (Zapata-Barrero, 2012b). In terms of specifying the identity aspect of Basque citizenship, the plan suggests that immigration is contributory to Basque society from both an economic and cultural perspective. Basque culture is explicitly defined as 'progressive, plural, and dynamic', giving the impression that nationalist elites are eager to dispel any notion that Basque culture is static and incompatible with modernity (Gobierno Vasco, 2003a, p. 62).

The PVI conceptualizes integration in the Basque Country as a 'bidirectional process that requires adjustment and adaptation from both the host society and immigrant population' (Gobierno Vasco, 2003a, p. 63). Section three of the PVI underscores the responsibility of Basque institutions to promote initiatives for the protection and development of Basque and other cultures whilst creating opportunities for all living in the Basque Country to learn Euskara and Spanish, as well as to promote the learning of other foreign languages.

At the time of the PVI's release, the Spanish Government had been relatively silent on matters of cultural requirements necessary to integrate into Spanish society. The governing Popular Party (PP), a centrist right-wing party, overhauled Spain's immigration law, but the main thrust of the reform was to minimize access to social services for illegal and legal immigrants and increase the waiting period before a landed immigrant would be eligible for Spanish citizenship (Gortázar, 2002).

After the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) took the reigns of power from the PP, this void was filled by the *Plan Estratégico de Ciudadanía e Integración* (Strategic Plan of Citizenship and Integration – PEI). The plan aims to define the policy framework of all 17 of Spain's autonomous communities without any acknowledgement that those regions that constitute separate nationalities, such as the Basque Country and Catalonia, might face unique challenges on account of immigration, which would necessitate additional competencies (Zapata-Barrero, 2012a). The PEI does not set out demanding language requirements or prescribe mandatory civics courses, but it affirms that there is a single Spanish 'culture' that all immigrants arriving in Spain will confront. The Basque Government was critical of the PEI and embarked on its own path that was more multicultural in its aims and goals. Decree 61/2007 of the

Basque Ministry of Housing and Social Affairs established a programme for the funding of multicultural events to be administered by the three provincial governments and municipalities of the Basque Country. Funding from this initiative has been awarded to non-governmental organizations that identify as representatives of specific ethnocultural groups such as the Association of Moroccan Immigrants, Association for the Cooperation of Bolivians and Association of Argentines in the Basque Country (Jeram, 2012, pp. 142–145).

The broad principles laid down in the PVI have been accompanied by multicultural policies in municipalities with high immigrant populations. In 2007, the Bilbao town hall installed multilingual machines in its administrative offices to ensure that new immigrants can access services and properly receive instructions regarding their housing and work permits. According to a PNV town councillor responsible for citizen relations, ‘it is important that language no longer present a barrier for immigrants as Bilbao is more and more a modern city, plural and integrated that welcomes people with a lack of knowledge of the official languages’ (Vázquez, 2007). In Vitoria, the second largest city in the Basque Country (after Bilbao), a service centre for immigrants called Norabide was opened in 2004 to coordinate and implement municipal actions in the areas of immigrant settlement and multiculturalism. Since then, thousands of immigrants have benefitted from free legal advice, Spanish and Euskara classes, psychological counselling and translation services. Norabide is partially funded by the Basque Government and the Association of Basque Municipalities (Echeazarra, 2010).

The renewal of the PVI to cover the 2007–2009 period vindicated the preoccupation of the nationalist coalition with coordinating a unique Basque approach to immigrant integration. While much of the content and discourse remained unchanged, the points relating to the issue of language acquisition for immigrant pupils put more emphasis on learning Euskara (Gobierno Vasco, 2007, p. 120). The promotion of Euskara among immigrant pupils in the Basque Country has been accompanied by distinctly multicultural policies that recognize and celebrate the diversity that characterizes many Basque schools. In 2003, the Basque Ministry of Education released a report entitled *Programa para la atención del alumnado inmigrante* (Plan to care for immigrant pupils), which suggested that the cultural distance between students coming from immigrant families, unless managed effectively, could incite problems that would make the learning experience less than optimal for both native and immigrant pupils alike. The ministry suggested practices for schools to implement in line with the philosophy outlined in the PVI: ‘the immigrant student population should feel they are part of the group, but should also feel that their languages and cultures are valued in our society’ (Gobierno Vasco, 2003b, p. 7).

For example, many primary schools in the Basque Country have a welcome message at the entrance printed in the foreign languages that are represented among the student body. All correspondence from the school for parents is printed in various languages and translators are hired for parent–teacher interviews in schools where numbers make such a service feasible. Another concrete action plan found in the document is the addition of various aspects of immigrants’ home cultures into the curriculum to ensure that educational activities take on more meaning for new Basques (Gobierno Vasco, 2007).

Beyond the articulation and implementation of multicultural policies, none of the Basque nationalist parties have presented anti-immigrant positions or pressed for assimilationist integration policies. In the case of the PNV, ideology cannot explain this

outcome because the party has a centrist orientation and traditionally favours positions close to those of other European Christian democratic parties; Christian democratic parties across Europe have been willing partners in the 'return of assimilation' with regard to immigrant immigration policy (Brubaker, 2001).

Linking the narrative of cultural oppression and multiculturalist immigrant policies

The Basque nationalist narrative is laden with references to the Spanish state as an occupier of the Basque Country and 'enemy' of the Basque people (Lecours, 2012, p. 277). The projection of this narrative in official speeches and discourses has been quite effective at consolidating a negative perception of Spain among a significant portion of the Basque population (Lecours, 2007, p. 89). Even though political decentralization has made Basque nationalists the majority political force within their territory, legitimacy for the nation-building project is still obtained by invoking the image of the Basque people as a persecuted minority group. An extract from a text submitted by the Basque Government to the Spanish state to oppose compliance with the European Union (EU) 'return directive' included this telling passage:

The Basque Country has been a land of emigrants for political and social reasons ... and now we must remember our history and offer to those who knock at our door the same treatment we received when we were forced to abandon our place of origin. ("El gobierno", 2008)

This sentiment that the Basque Country is a land sympathetic to the plight of immigrants has been expressed in other key documents. The introduction to the PVI refers to the laws of both the Spanish state and EU that deprive immigrants of their rights and liberties and declares that the Basque Government opposes these conditions (Gobierno Vasco, 2003a, 2007).

Until the early twentieth century, Basques emigrated in search of economic opportunities, but more recently, they migrated to escape the persecution brought on by the Spanish Civil War and oppression by the Franco dictatorship (Totricagüena, 2003). Basque diaspora communities have been formed in the Americas and other parts of Europe, fomenting bonds of solidarity through dense associationism, mutual support and the formation of transatlantic networks linking Basques around the world (Molina & Oiarzabal, 2009, p. 700). During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, newly independent states that were home to many Basques, such as the USA, Uruguay and Argentina, engaged in multicultural, rather than ethnic, nation-state-building that allowed Basque identity to be maintained in diaspora communities (Molina & Oiarzabal, 2009, p. 707). During the Franco dictatorship, Basque diaspora communities provided a forum for speaking and learning Euskara and cultural activities, as well as connecting Basques with the events occurring at 'home'. The positive image held by nationalist elites of the role diaspora communities played in 'emancipating' Basques from the repressive conditions at home has influenced their attitudes towards foreign immigrants who are also, in many cases, leaving repressive political contexts. Anti-immigrant positions or policies obliging immigrants to assimilate would therefore clash with an important component of the Basque national identity: resistance to the assimilative pressures placed upon the Basque people by the Franco regime and Spanish state.

Case study II: Flanders

Flemish nationalism and the narrative of cultural oppression

The birth of Flemish sub-state mobilization can be traced to 1830, the year during which the Belgian state came into existence. The exclusive use of French in public affairs in a country with a majority Dutch-speaking population very rapidly led to the mobilization of what would become the ‘Flemish Movement’ (Clough, 1930; Deprez & Vos, 1998).

While the first grievances of the Flemish Movement were mainly linguistic and cultural, social issues were soon added to the mix because of the class cleavages fomented by language policy; the bourgeoisie across Belgium spoke French, while the masses in Flanders spoke only Dutch (Boehme, 2008). Because of the choice of French as the public language, the Flemish masses were excluded from social, economic and political opportunities. Demands for the use of Dutch in the public domain, including the courts, schools and military, were not merely symbolic; improving the status of the Dutch language was considered a means to the ends of social and economic emancipation for the lower classes (Boehme, 2008, p. 543). It was only after the First World War that Flemish mobilization, constituting demands for cultural and linguistic equality, transformed into a nationalist movement in support of self-rule. Since the onset of mobilization in favour of cultural and linguistic rights, phrases, such as ‘cultural oppression’, ‘discrimination against the Flemings’ and ‘feelings of injustice’, have been present in the discourses of the organizations representing the early Flemish Movement and the more recent Flemish sub-state parties (Ter Hoeven, 1978). These citations refer to a survey of militants within the nationalist party Volksunie on ‘the essence of the Flemish problem’ in 1978. The statements are illustrative of the discourse of cultural oppression that runs through nationalist claims from the First World War until today. Even though economic and political power has shifted from the Francophones to the Flemings, the discourse of cultural dominance still inspires nationalist claims. For example, in a recent interview, a candidate for New Flemish Alliance (NV-A) said: ‘They [the Francophones] have absolutely no respect for the Flemish culture. Deep in their hearts, they still consider us to be rude peasants’ (“Ik speel”, 2013).

Immigration and multiculturalism in Flanders

After the Second World War, following the example of other European countries, Belgium actively recruited temporary foreign workers who were expected to eventually return home. Aside from the neighbourhoods surrounding the Limburg mine region in Flanders, the lion’s share of these guest workers settled in Wallonia because of its superior economic opportunities. From the 1970s onwards, the Brussels region experienced a spectacular rise in its immigrant population. The percentage of immigrants and immigrant origin Belgians has always been lower in Flanders than in Wallonia or Brussels, but the number of immigrants in Flanders has risen rapidly since the 1990s (Adam, 2013b). In 2011, the foreign population in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels amounted to approximately 7%, 10% and 31% of the total population in each respective jurisdiction.³

Flanders has been attributed full legislative and executive powers over the ‘reception and integration of immigrants’ according to the Special Law of 8 August 1980. Nevertheless, the major competences associated with immigration (i.e., admissions, removals, asylum, residence rights and citizenship) remain with the Belgian state. Flemish control over immigrant integration mainly concerns the promotion of *de facto* integration, since

the state also retains control over the attribution of various immigrant rights such as voting and access to most social benefits.

Immigrant integration was not a highly politicized issue in Flanders for most of the 1980s. This changed after 1988 due to the electoral victories by VB in local, regional and national elections (Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007). The first immigrant integration policies made by Flemish authorities in 1980 were decisively multicultural in character (Adam, 2013b; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). In 1983, the Flemish minister responsible for immigrant integration expressed her views on integration in the Flemish Parliament: ‘my views on immigrant integration have been known since 1979 and I have not deviated from them. We have to give immigrants the possibility to integrate in our society without obliging them to deny their own cultural background’.⁴ The initial Flemish integration policy consisted primarily of three policy instruments: (1) financial support to a range of social organizations that provide free social and legal assistance to immigrants, organize language courses and coordinate sociocultural activities; (2) financial support to immigrant organizations that promote ethnic cultures; and (3) the establishment of a consultative council for immigrants in order to represent the opinions of ethnocultural groups in governmental decision-making. Although initiated under the pretext that the children of immigrants would eventually return to their countries of origin, ‘mother tongue’ education in public schools was promoted as a means to ‘emancipate’ ethnocultural minorities, thus fostering their integration into the host country (Adam, 2013a). The Flemish investment in mother tongue education for immigrants in schools has always been more pronounced than in Wallonia (Brans et al., 2004).

The multiculturalist slant of Flemish integration policies was not changed following the victories of VB in Antwerp’s local elections in 1988. On the contrary, the emergence of the far-right nationalist party provided a window of opportunity to accentuate the Flemish multiculturalist integration policy. The government policy note on immigrant integration after the first electoral victory of VB defends a ‘positive approach to integration’. According to the Flemish Executive, assimilation must be rejected, ‘the [immigrants’] ethnic identities must be allowed to be expressed collectively’ and ‘the government must play a role therein’.⁵ The electoral victories of VB were the main reason for the 1990 expansion and institutionalization of public immigrant integration services, which consisted of sub-regional and local integration centres offering socio-judicial guidance and sociocultural activities for the immigrant public (Adam, 2013b). Other policy measures that demonstrate the increasingly multicultural character of Flemish integration policies during the 1990s include the public financing of grass-roots ethnic minority organizations and the emancipatory role assigned to activities that valorise their cultures of origin, the establishment of a ‘cultural diversity mainstreaming policy’, the renaming of the target group from ‘immigrants’ to ‘ethno-cultural minorities’ and the creation of the Minorities Forum to allow ethnic minority organizations and their federations to prepare joint policy positions. The decree of 28 April 1998 on the Flemish policy towards ethnocultural minorities embedded the measures within a legal framework. A minister’s speech to the parliament during the plenary debate of this decree reiterated the Flemish preference for multiculturalism over assimilationism:

I am convinced we have to opt for a society that refuses [cultural] homogeneity and flattening. We have to opt for pluralism ... the society that we aim for cannot be a melting pot but [should be] a mosaic ... The Flemish Community bears the responsibility of working towards this.⁶

During that same debate, a representative of the moderate Flemish nationalist party Volksunie, supporting the decree from outside the governing coalition, felt the need to express that 'not all nationalism is extremist or xenophobic'.⁷

At the onset of the new millennium, a comprehensive change to integration policy occurred in Flanders. After the regional elections of 1999, the Flemish Christian Democratic Party (CD&V), which had been the main actor in the development of Flemish integration policy since 1980, lost its place within the Flemish Government. The new executive, on the initiative of the Flemish Liberals (VLD), introduced a compulsory integration course for newcomers (*inburgering*) fashioned along Dutch lines. The programme includes mandatory Dutch-language and civics courses and a specified trajectory for labour-market integration. The emphasis on learning 'common Flemish social norms and values' endows *inburgering* with an assimilationist goal not present in the previous policy. Nevertheless, the introduction of *inburgering* did not result in the eradication of existing multiculturalist policy instruments, in fact, they were reinforced (Jacobs, 2004). Moreover, new multiculturalist policy measures were introduced, for example, the recognition in the Flemish compulsory education system of the right to legitimate absence on festive days of religious denominations recognized by the Belgian Constitution.⁸ Another pertinent example is the cultural diversity mainstreaming policy that covers the cultural, sports, youth and media sectors, which was developed by a minister from the Flemish nationalist party Spirit. Flemish integration policy since 2000, therefore, has advanced in a dual-track fashion: towards both the assimilation and the multicultural poles on the integration policy spectrum.

Linking the narrative of cultural oppression and multiculturalist immigrant policies

The development of multicultural Flemish immigrant integration policies cannot be explained without reference to Flemish national identity and the discourse of cultural oppression therein. When the Flemish Government started to legislate in the policy ambit of integration, ethnocultural organizations were promoted as an important policy tool to promote integration through cultural emancipation. References were made to the role Flemish organizations had played in the cultural emancipation process of the Flemish people. For example, the minister from the CD&V responsible for integration stated in 1982: 'the Flemish people, who have themselves fought so much for their own identity, cannot but sympathize with a similar endeavour [of immigrants] in mutual respect' (Steyaert, 1982). In Francophone Belgium, public support for immigrant organizations and activities to promote the 'home cultures' of immigrants is generally seen as an obstacle to their participation in mainstream society. Although the influence of its cultural neighbour France, which has historically practiced a model of republican assimilation, cannot be neglected, the historical narrative of Francophone Belgium does not provide the same basis for a sympathetic response to immigrant organizations because French was the language of mobility in the official spheres of the early Belgian state (Delwit, 2012).

In 2005, the role of ethnocultural organizations in the integration process was, for the first time, contested in a Flemish parliamentary debate. The moderate nationalist minister for culture and several left-leaning and Christian Democratic members of parliament defended the emancipatory role of these organizations by referring to the history of cultural repression faced by Flemings and the important role Flemish organizations played in the process of Flemish cultural emancipation. Unlike similar debates that took place in the 1980s and 1990s, however, not all political parties agreed that

multiculturalism should continue to define integration policy in Flanders. The hegemonic view until 2000 was that by strengthening the connection immigrants have to their cultural heritage, ethnic minorities would feel ‘emancipated’ and thus better able participate in and contribute to Flemish society. More than likely, VB opposed financial support for immigrant associations, but due to the *cordon sanitaire*, no policy discussion on this issue had ever taken place. Generally, until 1999, the *cordon sanitaire* worked to depoliticize the issues of immigration and diversity in Flanders to some extent.

Between 1980 and 1999, Flemish immigrant integration policy was primarily the domain of ministers from the CD&V, a party which is closely associated with Flemish nationalism (Erk, 2005). From 1999 onwards, the fragmentation of the Flemish party system (Brack & Pilet, 2010) and entry of the VLD – a party competing with the VB for right-wing voters – into the governing coalition in the Flemish Parliament generated conflict between parties supporting multiculturalism and those supporting assimilationism. This divide pits centre-left parties (CD&V, Flemish Socialist Party and the Flemish Green Party) and moderate nationalists (Spirit) against right-leaning (VLD) and independence-seeking nationalist parties (VB and NV-A). The newfound self-confidence of Flemish sub-state nationalist elites – due to relative economic prosperity and more policy-making competencies for the Flemish Government – now also influences policy-making in the immigration ambit. Political and economic strength for Flanders is causing some nationalist leaders to think like a majority rather than as a beleaguered minority, and pursue integration policies that are assimilative.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the role of narratives of cultural repression in the development of multicultural immigrant integration policy regimes in two cases of sub-state nationalism. The Basque Country and Flanders were analyzed because of the tendency to associate these cases with ethnic rather than civic nationalism, thus making multiculturalism an unlikely policy response to diversity by sub-state elites. The scant literature on the sub-state nationalism–immigration nexus has emphasized the importance of institutional leverage for nationalists to control the volume and terms of integration; a self-confident stateless nation in control of its ‘destiny’ will adopt a ‘post-ethnic’ national identity and legislate policies corresponding to that identity (Kymlicka, 2001a, 2001b). Our findings neither confirm nor dismiss this argument entirely, but suggest that identity-based explanations need to be considered alongside instrumental and institutional perspectives. In comparison with Flanders, the Basque Country has less formal control over immigrant reception policy, yet this has not translated into a more exclusionary or assimilationist emphasis by Basque nationalist elites. In fact, governments in both the Basque Country and the Flanders have made multiculturalism a defining feature of their immigrant integration policies.

Focusing solely on institutions misses the central role narratives occupy within sub-state nationalist movements. In both cases analyzed in this paper, the consciousness of sub-state elites of their respective group’s historical struggle against an oppressive state made multiculturalism the appropriate choice. Certainly, we do not deny that material and strategic calculations by elites in Flanders and Basque Country can help explain their policy choices in the immigrant integration ambit. This is especially true in the case of Flanders since 1999, which has seen the construction of a two-track policy regime that combines multiculturalism and assimilationism. The fragmentation of the party system

and growing presence of the VB in the Flemish Parliament and municipal councils has prompted previously staunch multiculturalists, such as the CD&V and the various incarnations of Volksunie, to accept *inburgering*. Moreover, an institutionalist perspective on recent developments in Flanders propounds that the narrative of cultural oppression has lost its power to influence sub-state elites because their desired level of autonomy has been achieved. In short, perhaps the dynamic link between multiculturalism and sub-state nationalism is severed once sub-state elites are insulated from nation building at the state level. As Conversi (2012) argues, the principle of popular sovereignty has ‘led to endless boundary-building practices’ (p. 178) by nation states, which raises the possibility that sub-state nations will follow the same path after achieving independence or de facto sovereignty vis-à-vis maximal political decentralization.

Contending that the form and content of mobilization in stateless nations is more than a politics of interests is not a novel argument (Peterson, 2002). Yet, our contribution is worthwhile in that it adds a new insight to the growing literature on the sub-state nationalism–immigration nexus that has thus far been dominated by instrumental and institutional perspectives. Future research should continue to investigate how and when identities and narratives weigh in on the policies and discourses of sub-state nations in the immigration ambit, as well as other policy jurisdictions, which will contribute more generally to our understanding of the contemporary nature of sub-state nationalism in liberal democracies.

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Notes

1. PNV formed a tripartite government with *Ezker Batua-Berdeak* (EBB) and *Eusko Alkartasuna* during the period in which the first two immigration plans were drawn up. Members of EBB held the key posts in the Ministry of Housing and Social Affairs and Immigration Directorate from 2001 to 2009.
2. This percentage would be even higher if those who recently obtained Spanish citizenship are included in the statistic.
3. Statistical Overview of Belgium: Key Figures 2011, http://statbel.fgov.be/en/binaries/Key%20figures2011_en_tcm327-148284.pdf (accessed 21 May 2013).
4. Vlaamse Raad [Flemish Council], Proceedings, 20 April 1983, p. 656.
5. Vlaams Parlement [Flemish Parliament] (1988–1989), Document, 193, nr 1, Immigration Policy Note proposed by J. Lenssens (Flemish Community Minister for Wellbeing and Family), pp. 5–6.

6. Vlaams Parlement [Flemish Parliament] (1997–1998), Proceedings, nr 37, p. 30 and x.
7. Vlaams Parlement [Flemish Parliament] (1997–1998), Proceedings, nr 37, p. 30 and x.
8. Regulation of the Flemish Government, 21 March 2003.

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