



**SEPARATISM AND  
REGIONALISM IN  
MODERN EUROPE**

Edited by Chris Kostov

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# Separatism and Regionalism in Modern Europe

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## A rolling stone gathers no moss: Evolution and current trends of Basque nationalism 2

ONINTZA ODRIOZOLA, IKER IRAOLA AND JULEN ZABALO

A rolling stone is constantly on the move and ever-changing. It does not gather any moss; it does not fossilize. The metaphor of this proverb serves as an introduction to this chapter in which we shall study a nationalist movement that has undergone major changes throughout its history. We shall present its evolution since its birth, its transformation midway through the 20th century, and the new trends emerging in the 21st century. It is a question of sub-state nationalism, with a solid presence in part of the territory it lays claim to as a nation, the Basque Country, and characterized by a context of political violence. It is here, precisely, where this nationalist movement has undergone a major transformation in recent years, as witnessed by the end of ETA's activity in 2011 and its self-dissolution in 2018.

First of all, we shall provide an introduction to the Basque Country, while highlighting its territorial complexity (with three administrative areas divided into two states, Spain and France) along with the main characteristics that need to be taken into account in order to understand Basque nationalism. In the following two sections, we shall study the origin and evolution of this movement. To start with, Chapter 2 outlines the initial context and its emergence, led by Sabino Arana Goiri. Chapter 3 follows with its renewal, in the context of the second half of the 20th century, driven by ETA and left-wing Basque nationalism. In both points, we shall analyze the reasons for its upsurge, as well as the factors that helped weaken its practice and discourse. To conclude, in the fourth point, we shall analyze the changes occurring in the 21st century and the new trends that can be appreciated in Basque nationalism. Inevitably, we shall refer to a large array of diverse organizations, given its clear nature as a *movement*, as shall be seen below.

### 1 The Basque Country: A complex national reality

The very concept of the Basque Country and its demarcation is a matter of dispute by the nationalisms operating in said geographical space (apart from the Basque one, there are also the Spanish and French nationalisms, in their respective spheres of influence). Basque nationalism understands the Basque Country as a political, cultural, and social space covering a territory divided between Spain and France, made up of seven provinces and three institutional areas, as can be appreciated in Figure 1, and as will be used in this article, to best translate the original concept

in Basque, *Euskal Herria* (Basque Country). On the other hand, particularly from the point of view of Spanish nationalism, this reality is not acknowledged, and the Basque Country is limited to the territory making up the Basque Autonomous Community.



Fig. 1: Provinces and institutional distribution of the Basque Country.

The provinces of Araba, Bizkaia, and Gipuzkoa make up the Basque Autonomous Community (CAV, its initials in Spanish), which is often confused (in the name, flag, and other symbols) with the whole of the Basque Country, as has been mentioned. It is here where Basque nationalism has the greatest social and electoral strength. Since its restoration in 1979, it has been governed by the Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV), often in coalition with the Socialist Party of Euskadi (PSE-EE), except in the period from 2009 to 2012 during which the latter party was in government<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>The illegalization of the Nationalist Left during that time had a profound effect on the majorities in the Basque Parliament, which made a Spanish nationalist coalition of the PSE and Popular Party possible.

In the center is the Foral Community of Navarre (CFN in Spanish), whose diversity, as regards nationalism and identity, is worthy of mention. Whereas Basque national identity is dominant in the north, it is undoubtedly a minority force in the south. Unlike in the Basque Autonomous Community, Navarrese regionalism, as represented by the Union of the Navarrese People, UPN (which can be understood as a variant of Spanish nationalism<sup>2</sup>), and the Socialist Party of Navarre (PSN) governed the Foral Community, at different times, in clear opposition to Basque nationalism. However, since 2015, two center-left coalition governments have been formed with the participation of Basque nationalists, which could indicate that the scenario has changed to one in which right-wing Spanish nationalism fails to reach an absolute majority.

These two communities and their four provinces are called the Southern Basque Country by Basque nationalism (as opposed to the Northern Basque Country, in French territory). The relation between these four provinces was intense from the 19th century onward but has since become the subject of fierce political debate, particularly since the creation of the two communities, in 1979 and 1982. Basque nationalism has always tried to unite both communities to form just one, something strongly opposed by Spanish nationalism. It is worth pointing out that, despite the unequal influence of Basque nationalism in Navarre, said territory plays a central role in its vision. Thus, for example, Basque nationalism sees Pamplona/Iruñea, the capital of Navarre, as the historical capital of the Basque Country. And the Navarrese symbols (like the flag) have acquired the status of national symbols—of the whole of the Basque Country—for significant sectors of Basque nationalism, as a consequence of the historical importance attached to Navarre<sup>3</sup>.

Over and above this vision, in legal terms, the CAV's own Statute of Autonomy<sup>4</sup>, as well as the Spanish Constitution of 1978<sup>5</sup>, includes the option of joining the four Basque territories into one Autonomous Community. Moreover, despite the fact that they have been on opposite sides of the political spectrum, above all, due to the influence of Navarrese regionalist politics and state-wide political forces, both these communities making up the Southern Basque Country share common features within the Spanish legal system, such as *foral laws* (the acknowledgement of the so-called *historical rights* for the *foral territories*<sup>6</sup>). This peculiarity is reflected in taxation, with the four Basque tax offices (one in Navarre and the three, one for each province, in the CAV) solely in charge of tax collection. Furthermore, as can be appreciated in the CAV's institutional network, and in keeping with this *foral*

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<sup>2</sup>In line with the important role traditionally played by regionalism in Spanish nationalism (Archilés, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>This view is elaborated further in Martínez and Rekalde (2012).

<sup>4</sup>Article 2 of the Statute of the CAV: "Araba, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia, together with Navarre, have the right to be part of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country."

<sup>5</sup>Fourth transitional provision of the Spanish Constitution of 1978.

<sup>6</sup>First additional provision of the Spanish Constitution of 1978.



standpoint, the provinces (officially called *historical territories*) have broad powers in areas like taxation, transport, and social services.

The territory under French administration, the Northern Basque Country, is made up of the traditional provinces of Lapurdi, Lower Navarre, and Zuberoa, although they form a single territory due to their size and population. In this part of the Basque Country, institutionalization is very recent and much weaker than in the Southern Basque Country. The *Basque Country Community* (CPB in French), as the institution covering the Basque territories is called, was set up in 2017, and its competences are limited to matters like mobility or waste management, among others. From Basque nationalism's point of view, more than the institution's real power, its importance lies in the acknowledgement of the territory of the Northern Basque Country, which had until then been considerably diluted and unrecognized within the Department of the Atlantic Pyrenees and the region of New Aquitaine, to which it belongs.

This division into two states, three different kinds of community, and five main administrative entities (each of the three territories making up the CAV has a number of competences, among them, fiscal policy) is reflected in the sociological reality of the Basque Country. It is a complex reality, with its own dynamics in accordance with the administrative area.

In all, the Basque Country has a population of 3,152,200 inhabitants, of whom the majority—over 2,100,000—live in the Basque Autonomous Community, almost 650,000 in Navarre, and the remainder—approximately 320,000—in the Northern Basque Country. The most populated areas are along the coast. A feature of the Basque population is that it is aging, with 21.6% of the population over 65 years (above the European average and steadily increasing) (Gaindegia, 2019a).

From the point of view of nationalism studies, worthy of particular mention of the available sociodemographic data is the migratory question, key to the evolution of Basque nationalism. In the case of the Southern Basque Country, following the first migration flows to Bizkaia between the 19th and 20th centuries, there was major migration from Spanish regions in the 1960s and 1970s. Each one of these two migratory moments—the first flow at the end of the 19th century and the second half of the 20th century—coincided, in the first place, with the emergence of Basque nationalism and, then, with the new reformulation (cfr. Iraola & Odriozola, 2017). The so-called international migration began in the Northern Basque Country, in the early 21st century, in line with French migratory patterns.

Therefore, nowadays, the population of immigrant origin (not taking into account the people born in Spain) is 10% in the CAV and 15.1% in the CFN (Ikuspegi, 2019b). In general, considering both migratory flows, the international one and the intra-state one (despite their major differences in terms of legal status, social perception, etc.), currently, 29% of the Basque population was born outside the Basque Country, the highest percentage being in the Northern Basque Country, where

43% was born outside the region, practically all of them in France (Gaindegia, 2019b).

A totally different matter is the Basque language, Euskara, a core issue for nationalism, as shall be seen later on. Euskara, a minoritized language and unique to the country, is unevenly spread and has unequal legal status in Basque territory. For example, in the CAV, it is the official language together with Spanish, just like in the northern part of the CFN. The fact of the matter is that, in Navarre, Basque has three different kinds of legal status: co-official in the north, with no official recognition in the south, and an intermediate situation in the center, which takes in the capital, Pamplona. In the Northern Basque Country, the Basque language is granted no effective legal recognition. Together with this unevenness regarding the legal standing, the language's situation is ambivalent depending on the administrative area and social space one is referring to. Thus, in the territories where it is official (mainly the CAV), it plays an important role in a large part of the educational system, far removed from other minoritized European languages. Yet, on the other hand, its knowledge and use are not predominant in society, and its situation is particularly weak in certain social environments.

Generally speaking, 28.4% of the population are Basque speakers (with another 16.4% having some knowledge of it), but its presence is not evenly spread throughout the territories. Whereas, in Gipuzkoa or the hinterland of the Northern Basque Country, Basque speakers account for approximately 50% of the population, in Navarre, as a whole, the figure is 12% (Gobierno Vasco, Gobierno de Navarra, Office Public de la Langue Basque, 2016). Nonetheless, dynamics differ greatly on either side of the border: in the Southern Basque Country, the number of Basque speakers has been growing in recent decades and is greater among the younger population, whereas in the Northern Basque Country, the trend is the opposite. The Basque language is used by 12.6% in the whole of Basque territory, although this use is likewise unequal and varies according to the territories (greater, 31%, in Gipuzkoa) and age (greater in the case of young people), in line with the trends mentioned earlier (Soziolinguistika Klusterra, 2017).

This division by territory and the varying degrees of prevalence of the Basque language is interrelated with the different rates of entrenchment of Basque national identity and Basque nationalism's electoral results. It means that the territories with the greatest number of Basque speakers have been, at least in the case of the Southern Basque Country and with significant variations, those in which Basque national identity is more dominant, and Basque nationalism has traditionally obtained better electoral results.

The question of how to measure national identity is complex, as is well known. In the Basque case (particularly in the Southern Basque Country), the so-called Moreno scale (1988) is commonly used. This method allows you to choose between different combinations of being Basque and Spanish. Despite its widespread use,

this type of categorization is problematic when studying national identity, as it can include different types of affinities and identities (regional sentiment, emotional affinity toward a particular territory, etc.), apart from the national identity itself (Blas, 2012). Even so, if we apply this scale, we can see that the solely Basque identity accounts for 31.5%, which rises to 50.14% if we add those who feel more Basque<sup>7</sup> than Spanish or French; on the other hand, the solely Spanish or French sentiment is a minority, less than 5% (Zabalo et al., 2016, p. 24). In this respect, it is interesting to note that state sentiment is much greater in the Northern Basque Country than in the Southern Basque Country, as the percentage of those who feel only French is 24.2% in this territory, far above the 2.5% or 4.6% who feel only Spanish in the CAV and the CFN, respectively (Zabalo et al., 2016, p. 25).

This complexity regarding national sentiment correlates with the opinions on the independence of the Basque Country. Although the percentages differ according to the studies, all of them reveal the following reality: the existence of a significant base in favor of independence (which could vary between 20% or 40% according to the study<sup>8</sup>), another opposing block, which seems to have been strengthened in recent years (approximately 30–35% in the abovementioned studies), and a third space for the undecided, which is in favor or against depending on the context. When it comes to what people think about independence, there appear to be three, more or less equal, thirds which change depending on the circumstances (particularly in the case of the Southern Basque Country, as, in the Northern Basque Country, apart from the fact that there are far fewer studies in this respect, support for independence is lower).

These blocks of opinion on independence are related, but they should not be confused with the support for Basque nationalist forces. As we shall see, and because of the influence of other secessionist movements, like the Scottish or Catalan ones, in recent years, the pro-independence and nationalism have tended to diverge in the discourse (as a political strategy) and in the theory (which seeks new approaches in order to address the national question). If we focus on nationalism and analyze its support in electoral results, we can see that the Basque nationalist forces—PNV and EH Bildu—are supported by almost 60% in the CAV<sup>9</sup> and 32% in Navarre<sup>10</sup>, and that the main Basque nationalist force in the Northern Basque

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<sup>7</sup>In the referred study, the term “Navarrese” was used interchangeably with the “Basque” term. In any case, the percentage is similar in studies limited to the CAV.

<sup>8</sup>By way of example, in the CAV, 20% of the population supports independence according to the *Sociómetro Vasco* (Gabinete de Prospección Sociológica, 2019). It is important to emphasize that, in this study, a further 31% affirm that they would be “in favour or opposed depending on the circumstances,” which is why the abovementioned 20% must be understood as the support base of independence. Moreover, throughout the Basque Country, when offered a dichotomous option in relation to an independent state, another study gave a result of 40.7% support for a Basque or Navarrese State (Zabalo et al., 2016, p. 33).

<sup>9</sup>Results of the elections to the Autonomous Parliament in 2016.

<sup>10</sup>Results of the elections to the Parliament of Navarre in 2019.

Country—EH Bai<sup>11</sup>—obtained 16%<sup>12</sup> of the vote. As a consequence of this reality, both the practice and characteristics of Basque nationalism differ, to a certain extent, according to the territory. We shall now go on to analyze the aforesaid.

## 2 The emergence of Basque nationalism

Like all social phenomena, the objectivation of the nation must, in most cases, be examined over the *longue durée* perspective. Said objectivation occurs when the community or part of it become aware of its existence. History and myth on the Vascones and the Basques, oral as well as written, have existed since Roman times. However, it is in the 16th century when the first Basque writers mention “the Basque nation” and write about the language spoken by the Basques and the territory where they live. They have left a record of a collective imagination which, subsequently, took hold in a movement of literary and scientific renaissance in favor of the Basque culture and historical institutions. This ethnohistory has been stoked by reflection on the part of many Basque writers and politicians that paved the way for Sabino Arana Goiri, who, in the 1890s, established the language and symbols of the first Basque nationalist movement. Arana’s political awareness, which went beyond the literary, cultural, and scientific framework of his predecessors, must be understood in a period of great political, social, and cultural changes at the end of the 19th century.

### 2.1 The Basque Country at the end of the 19th century: Identity crisis of Basque society

The first nationalist movement came into being in a context of a surge in peripheral nationalist movements, a phenomenon that responded to a particular generalized situation of alarm (moral, social, cultural, and political)<sup>13</sup>. At least three interrelated factors explain the reasons that led to the crisis of Basque identity at the end of the 19th century. The economic and demographic factor was fundamental. The process of industrialization that had got underway in the 18th century implied new ways of thinking and understanding life, which clashed with the traditional mentality of the peasantry (Mann, 1993). Thus, in the Basque Country, mining production and the shipbuilding industry grew considerably during the 19th century, particularly around the city of Bilbao, and this led to the shift of a large number

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<sup>11</sup>Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu, Unite the Basque Country) and Euskal Herria Bai (EH Bai, Yes to the Basque Country) are two left-wing coalitions, formed in part by the same parties. The former operates in the Southern Basque Country, and the latter operates in the Northern Basque Country.

<sup>12</sup>In the cantonal elections in 2015.

<sup>13</sup>In this point, we shall speak, for the most part, of Basque nationalism in the Southern Basque Country and in its origins, particularly of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. Although it holds a far more minority position in the Northern Basque Country, we shall take the whole of the Basque Country as a reference in order to have an overall view of Basque nationalism.

of workers in the primary sector to industrial centers, some of whom came from the north of Spain. This led to a radical change in the landscape of Bizkaia, in its social structures and way of life: new customs, often less related to religion; new ideologies, such as socialism; and new linguistic habits (Larronde, 2005; Solozabal, 1975).

The loss of political sovereignty of the Basque Country was another factor with a decisive impact on the political awareness raising of the Basque nation by Arana and his generation. By the end of the 19th century, the Southern Basque Country had experienced two internal wars, the so-called *Carlist Wars*, for succession to the Spanish throne, which entailed a clear break between the liberalism of the city bourgeoisie and the conservatism of rural nobility, the church, and the peasantry. Within the historical process of the construction of the modern nation-state, the Spanish state embraced centralist politics, and this led to the abolition of the *Fueros*, the system of local laws that had governed each of the Basque territories. The definitive dissolution of the Basque *foral* system was considered an attack from outside by the majority of Basques, as it implied the loss of their own laws, institutions, customs, and values (Corcuera, 1991; Elorza, 1978).

The identity crisis resulting from the loss of the *Fueros* was aggravated when significant immigration brought with it a process of acculturation, leading to an intensification of the decline of the Basque language by this influx of immigrants. In addition, Spanish centralist politics meant that schooling in the Southern Basque Country was in the hands of non-Basque teachers in order to ensure uniformity, in both content and language, throughout Spanish territory. The number of Basque speakers continued to drop at an unprecedented rate. This third linguistic and cultural factor, interrelated with the incipient process of industrialization and the loss of political sovereignty, caused a deep identity crisis in traditional Basque society. It is in this changing context that the need arose to afford the Basque nation a political projection (Gezala, 1995; Tejerina 1999).

## 2.2 Discourse and practice of Sabino Arana and the Basque Nationalist Party (1893–1936)

A context of total transformation in Europe saw the emergence of predominantly conservative stateless nationalist movements (Fusi, 2003, p. 83). In the Basque case, Arana formulated the discourse of the first Basque nationalism and defined five fundamental elements or characters of the Basque nation: race, language, government and laws, character and customs, and historical personality (1978, p. 52). In this hierarchy of values, race is the element that agglutinates “Basque essence”<sup>14</sup>. In this respect, he made use of a concept—that of *Basque race*—created precisely in the

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<sup>14</sup>It would appear that, up till then, there had not been any racial theorization in Basque tradition. The concepts of *Euskal Herria* and *Euskalduna* used by predecessors referred to the language (Jáuregui, 1981, pp. 16–17; Larronde, 1977, p. 124).

European scientific sphere in the 19th century, when racism was common. It is a concept calling for no biological or physical characteristic (Conversi, 1997, p. 68); in fact, distancing himself from the many racist authors of the time, Arana based his *race* on surnames (Larronde, 1977, p. 187). As explained by Douglass, Arana's singularity does not lie in his using race as a political and defining argument for the nation, but rather in making such an assertion with respect to a stateless nationality (2004, p. 106).

Although the racial dimension is fundamental to his discourse, it would seem that, in Arana's scale of values, the nation itself is subject to a higher value, religion (Apalategi, 1985, p. 86). In Arana's imaginary, *Euzkadi* (the name coined and used by Arana to refer to the political Basque Country) is in itself of no worth unless it is dedicated to God. His primitive slogan, which could be translated as "we for Euzkadi and Euzkadi for God" (our translation), represents this subordination of the political ideology and objectives to the will of God. In this respect, for Arana, independence is the way to safeguard the Basque race (Apalategi, 1985, p. 246).

The remaining national elements played a complementary role in Arana's social values and were subordinate to the racial element. The Basque language held the essence of the Basque soul and was a mechanism of integration, social cohesion, and the differentiation of the ethnic group. It was its connection to the race that made the language interesting. From this standpoint, it was therefore logical for Arana to try to ensure by all means that the language was not affected by any kind of "external interference" (Jáuregui, 1981, p. 17).

Above and beyond the discourse, Arana was also a person of action. Shortly after formulating his theoretical principles, he carried out major outreach work, by creating and running his own reviews which played a vital role in the renaissance of Basque culture. At the same time, he opened up a social center and founded a political party: the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) in 1895. Accordingly as the party defined its social base, a series of nationalist institutions and associations were created from it. Similarly, it enjoyed considerable support from a large part of the Basquephile movement and one advocating the *Fueros* which preceded Arana's discourse (Apalategi, 1985; Gezala, 1995).

After 1901, different associations were set up by the community that was being created around the PNV. These associations built the structures of the nationalist movement during the first three decades of the 20th century: in addition to their activities involved in spreading propaganda and information as well as culture, worthy of mention is everything they did to promote the creation of other nationalist organizations. Of note is the trade union Euzko Langileen Alkartasuna-Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos, ELA-STV (Solidarity of Basque Workers), because of its long tradition right up to the present day. However, there were also associations for women, students and trekkers, or associations in the sphere of education and research (Camino & Gezala, 1991).

The PNV defined itself as a “supra-partisan movement for national salvation” (Mees, 1992, pp. 341–342, our translation) and tried to agglutinate and win over the greatest number of sectors of Basque society, gradually increasing its social base<sup>15</sup>. As pointed out by Larronde (1977), traditional nationalism built its own world, separate from the Spanish one. Elorza defined it as “a ‘micro-society’ within Basque society” (1978, p. 6, our translation). To this end, an entire range of symbols were created, similar to those of a state (a flag, coat of arms, anthem, etc.), a slogan for its community (God and the Fueros), and venues for frequent encounters to celebrate the nationalist ceremony, both religious and secular. Affiliation to one of the many “bodies close to the PNV” (Larronde, 1977, p. 322, our translation) and the use of its symbols created, as pointed out by Mees, “a system of identification and self-esteem that helped integrate the nationalists in the new capitalist industrial society” (1992, pp. 341–342, our translation).

### 2.3 A traumatic end for the discourse and practice of the first Basque nationalism

The first three decades of the 20th century implied no substantial change in the previous trend: the process of industrial growth continued and, with it, the consequent socio-cultural changes. Likewise, Arana’s nationalist doctrine predominated as far as theory was concerned until the 1930s. However, in practice, Basque nationalism was much more lax than in the abovementioned theory. By 1906, within the party, the upper hand was gained by the moderate line of the liberal bourgeoisie, which, while upholding Arana’s theoretical principles, significantly tempered the PNV’s political practice. Consequently, the core of Basque nationalism was subject to great tension and rifts in the first decades of the 20th century, between the orthodox wing loyal to Arana’s principles and another of a more possibilist nature (Elorza, 1978, pp. 331–343).

Race was becoming a more symbolic than practical element,<sup>16</sup> and the goal of independence was less clear (Jáuregui, 1981, p. 17). Evidence of its evolution is that the PNV became temporarily known as the *Basque Nationalist Communion* in December 1916 and took on a more conservative nature. However, following the First World War in 1921, the more pro-independence sector created a new PNV (generally known as PNV-Aberri). One of its members, its leader Eli Gallastegi *Gudari*, revealed, at first in public for this nationalist movement, its solidarity with communists and acknowledged the existence of a class struggle (Lorenzo Espinosa, 1992). Despite their differences, both currents joined in 1930 under the name EAJ-PNV.

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<sup>15</sup>The PNV became the first political force in Araba, Bizkaia, and Gipuzkoa in 1936.

<sup>16</sup>According to Corcuera, once the PNV started to hold a relevant position in elections, the practical importance of race receded, and, too, the obligation to have Basque surnames in order to become a member of the party was no longer applied after 1899 (2001, p. 430).

That same year also saw the forging of a liberal nationalist project. Following other unsuccessful experiences, Acción Nacionalista Vasca (ANV, Basque Nationalist Action) was created. It enjoyed greater success than previous attempts, but it failed to outstrip the PNV (De la Granja, 2008). The novelties of ANV's discourses included understanding race as yet another theoretical element of Basque nationalism but rejected race as a requisite for taking part in the movement; what's more, it came out clearly against Arana's *racism* (Díez Medrano, 1999, p. 104). It likewise laid claim to the unity of the Basque Country, it showed an interest in closer collaboration with left-wing Republican parties, while supporting their secular stance (Elorza, 1978, p. 418; Jáuregui, 1981, p. 20). Shortly after, in 1934, it would be the *mendigoizales* (members of Basque nationalism's trekker society) of the *Jagi-Jagi* who took over *Aberrri's* social and national activity, in the middle of another more serious crisis. By means of their weekly newsletter and political rallies, the *mendigoizales* reaffirmed the anti-capitalist stance and social solidarity of young nationalists (López Adán, 1974; Lorenzo Espinosa, 1992).

The Francoists' coup d'état and the subsequent war of 1936–1939 interrupted this debate and the political, cultural, and social movement associated with it. Basque nationalism went through a period of political inaction which lasted practically two decades. Said inaction was based in part on the fact that the Basque Government in exile as well as the PNV was hoping for a military intervention by the Allies in the Second World War, particularly the USA and the UK, which would put an end to the dictatorship and restore the political system of Spain's second Republic and, with it, the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country. However, the so-called *Pact of Madrid of 1953*, allowing the USA to avail of four military bases in Spanish territory in exchange for financial and military aid for the Francoist regime, together with the signing of *Concordat between the Spanish State and the Holy See* a few weeks earlier, destroyed the Basque Government's hope that an international intervention in Spain could have a positive effect on their demands (Apalategi, 1979, p. 145).

### 3 Renewal of Basque nationalism

The war of 1936–1939 was followed by an impasse of some years for Basque nationalism. It would be the generation of the 1950s who would react to the disappointment felt among nationalists and the deplorable situation of the Basque language during the Franco dictatorship. Awareness of the decline of the Basque nation had a great impact on the founders of Ekin and ETA.<sup>17</sup> This new generation set them-

<sup>17</sup>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (The Basque Country and Freedom), ETA, was created in 1958 (1959 according to other sources, as it does not have a fixed date of foundation). Its predecessor, the Ekin (*Do or undertake*, in Basque) group was created in Bilbao in the academic year 1951–1952 by a group of university students with Basque nationalist ideology with an aim to learning about politics (cfr. Apalategi, 1985; Casanova, 2007; Elorza, 1978; Jáuregui, 1981; Letamendia, 1994).



selves two urgent goals: to break with the passivity of their leaders and to rethink and redefine the bases of a new Basque nationalism (Tejerina, 1999, p. 122). To better understand the why and how of the renewal of nationalist tradition and its evolution toward a new left-wing nationalism, we shall first analyze the series of factors defining the post-war context.

### 3.1 The Basque Country midway through the 20th century: The post-war identity crisis

The period of the mid-20th century is particularly active in Europe. The Second World War had a contradictory effect: it helped strengthen solidarity between social classes and reinforced the sense of nation of the states, but likewise implied the new division of the world into two blocks, capitalism versus socialism. In addition, the union of national solidarity with socialist movements gave rise to a powerful and influential anti-colonial movement, particularly active in that period. As far as nationalism is concerned, two of the ideas are noteworthy. On the one hand, being as it is incompatible with the concepts of democracy or socialism, the nationalist movements need to shy away from the use of race if they seek approval in the international community. On the other hand, a new wave of nationalism was enjoying a boom during those years, the one linked to the colonies, as opposed to the mother countries. This wave began with China in 1949 and, in a short space of time, spread to most of Asia and Africa (Núñez Seixas, 1998).

In this context, we are once again faced with a fresh industrial upturn in the Southern Basque Country and with a major migratory flow, from the different regions of Spain, which spread first through Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa and then through Araba and Navarre (Ruiz Olabuénaga & Blanco, 1994). By contrast, the Northern Basque Country continued to lose population. This second migratory flow, considerably larger than the previous one, had a major impact on how the new Basque social structure was shaped and gave rise to the growth and redevelopment of cities, a rise in environmental pollution, etc.

As regards politics, two phenomena stand out. On the one hand, political repression and fear were the norm, and this fear gripped nationalist leaders (some in the Southern Basque Country, many in exile), still frustrated by the loss of the war. As a result, traditional nationalism proved incapable of responding (Conversi, 1997, p. 267). On the other hand, the younger generations were unhappy with the response being given by the older generations. They were impatient to shake off the fear and, moreover, were more permeable to the new European tendencies (Letamendia, 1994, p. 214). In this respect, Pérez-Agote states that Franco's political repression not only helped spread Basque nationalism to new social sectors but also helped radicalize it, leading it toward left-wing ideological currents as well as the use of violence (2008, p. 82).

Following the repression to which the Basque language and culture were subjected during Franco's dictatorship, the language, which had been losing ground (use and knowledge) as a means of communications for several decades, continued to decline. However, paradoxically, the decline in the use of Basque led to heightened awareness of its loss. Self-awareness of this traumatic loss helped reinforce the symbolic dimension in the new left-wing nationalist (Tejerina, 1999).

### 3.2 Discourse and practice of left-wing nationalism: ETA and the Nationalist Left (1958–1998)

Although at first it embraced some aspects of Arana's nationalism, ETA quickly distanced itself, specifically in relation to two of the most important aspects of said ideology (Elorza, Garmendia, Jáuregui, & Domínguez, 2000, pp. 201–202). On the one hand, ETA replaced the concept of race by the linguistic and cultural concept of ethnic group as a defining element of the Basque nation. It turned Basque into the *raison d'être* of the nation and of Basque nationalism. Therefore, just as, for Arana, the independence of the Basque Country was the way to safeguard the Basque race, for ETA, it was the only way to save the language from extinction (Apalategi, 1985, p. 246). On the other hand, it rejected confessionalism: ETA strongly criticized the Catholic Church, especially church hierarchy (Elorza et al., 2000, pp. 201–202).

As regards the social question, it quickly evolved to actually state that socialism is the preliminary step toward a classless society or communism and started a debate on Marxism and the national question (Apalategi, 1985, p. 252). As a political movement, and with anti-colonialist movements and socialism as a reference, ETA immediately went on to define itself as a *Basque Revolutionary Movement of National Liberation* (see its *Principles* document from 1962; quoted in De Hordago, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 528–531) and *socialist* at its V Assembly [see the *V. Asamblea Nacional de ETA 2. Sesión (Actas)*; quoted in De Hordago, 1979, vol. 7, pp. 84–97].

Under the influence of the work of Fanon, Mao, Che Guevara, etc. and the success of third-world national liberation movements as a reference, ETA embraced the model of the revolutionary war of colonized countries and tried to adapt it to Basque reality in order to deal with the double contradiction that the Basque revolution entailed in its view: national liberation and social liberation (Jáuregui, 1981, pp. 196–203; Saratxo, 2013). Thus, from the very beginning, it defended direct action against the Franco dictatorship and was organized in six branches, including the *military* wing (Jáuregui, 1981, p. 136). With respect to its ideology, following long and intense debate processes, not without the emergence of differences, expulsions, and splits, after holding its V assembly (1966–1967), ETA began to call its ideological stance *revolutionary nationalism*. Broadly speaking, this political

line was upheld over the following decades by ETAm<sup>18</sup> and the Nationalist Left<sup>19</sup> (Casanova, 2007, p. 84).

Above and beyond the discourse, in practice, ETA sought to afford a wide-ranging meaning to its ideological formula of revolutionary nationalism and to articulate the concept of *Basque Working People* as the political subject of the Basque nation, something completely new in the Basque case. Self-styled as a movement, and not as a party, it defended patriotic activity and strove to base its political strategy on the creation of an associated popular movement. By the end of the nineteen sixties, ETA already had internal structures that went beyond those typical of a mere organization of its characteristics, as it had created a network of collaborators and supporters among members of Basque civil society which, though they did not become structured activists, provided help for logistic or other needs<sup>20</sup> (Odriozola, 2016).

In a context of intense movement in the social sphere both in Europe and in its colonies, there was likewise a surge in neighbors', cultural, sports, etc. associations in the Basque Country, and, among them, of particular note was the strong *enskaltzale*<sup>21</sup> movement in defense of the Basque language. People began to gradually take part in all kinds of cultural measures (such as the setting up of *ikastolas*<sup>22</sup>, centers for adult literacy and Basque language learning, dance and theatre groups, Basque festivals, etc.) and social activities (the workers' movement was revived at the beginning of the 1960s). This entire cultural, political, and social movement caused the nationalist world, hidden during the first years of the dictatorship, to resurface in the 1960s: history, language, and culture became especially relevant. This is when mass nationalism re-emerged in the Southern Basque Country, after almost three decades of silence (Jáuregui, 1981, p. 275). Although Basque nationalism was still a minority movement in the Northern Basque Country, the aforementioned context and the joint activity between ETA and certain local nationalist sectors helped stoke the revival of the political and cultural movement in

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<sup>18</sup>Following the most important split in ETA history, ETA was divided into ETA *militar* (ETAm) and ETA *político-militar* (ETAp) in November 1974.

<sup>19</sup>Since the 1970s, the Nationalist Left (*Ezker Abertzalea* or *Izquierda Abertzale*) has been equated with the term "Basque Movement for National Liberation." We shall explain in more detail later in the text.

<sup>20</sup>These networks of support for ETA included members and followers of other social and political parties and groups such as the PNV or Enbata, the Nationalist Party of the Northern Basque Country founded in 1963, a major promoter of Basque culture and language in this region of the Basque Country (Jáuregui, 1981, p. 273) and deep interaction between the rebellion on the part of the clergy and that of Basque youth was likewise established (Jáuregui, 1981, p. 131). Women actively took part in ETA's network of logistics and infrastructure and, above all, were organized in and around ETA's cultural front (Odriozola, 2016).

<sup>21</sup>The movement in favor of the recovery and normalization of the Basque language and culture.

<sup>22</sup>The *ikastola* is the school whose function is to provide an education to new generations and enable them to socialize in Basque.

the Northern Basque Country and new organizations and movements, like, for example, Enbata, were set up.

By means of the comprehensive strategy it strove to apply, ETA's activists and network of supporters took part in parallel in the activities specific to its organization, as well as in other activities of different movements, including the workers' movement, to which it was clearly moving closer (Odriozola, 2016). Obviously, ETA was not the only driving force of the cultural and social dynamics to resurface on the Basque scene in the 1960s, but it could be said that it acted as a *condition*, as the majority of the socio-political and cultural initiatives of the time developed around ETA's discourse and nationalist practice (Odriozola, 2016).

Following Franco's death (1975), the Spanish Constitution of 1978 was signed into law, and the following year, a statute of autonomy was passed for the Basque Autonomous Community, and for Navarre in 1982. As opposed to the previous stage, when Basque nationalism suffered many years of silence, exile, and repression after losing the war of 1936, it now emerged with force. The PNV took center stage after reorganizing itself within the new political context and began to gain significant ground in elections.<sup>23</sup>

ETA, on the other hand, continued its armed activity. At that time, several of the more dynamic groups of the Basque popular movement coincided with the ideology of the Nationalist Left (represented by the Herri Batasuna coalition<sup>24</sup> from 1978 onward, together with other minor groups). This close relationship between both spaces gave rise to the term "Basque National Liberation Movement (MLNV)" from the 1970s onward, when referring to the series of political and sectorial bodies working along the lines of left-wing nationalism (Casanova, 2007, p. 283). During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, numerous organizations revolved around the MLNV: in the feminist sphere, trade unions (Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak—LAB, Patriotic Workers Committees—was created, subsequently, with a strong tradition), youth, social and anti-repression, environmental (anti-nuclear) organizations, or *enskaltzale* associations. In the Northern Basque Country, on the other hand, in that period of time, left-wing nationalism was divided between those close to the MLNV in the Southern Basque Country and those who proposed an autonomous movement in the north and led by Iparretarrak<sup>25</sup> and other groups (cfr. Ahedo, 2006; Bidegain, 2011; Jacob, 1994).

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<sup>23</sup>The PNV had likewise evolved in its discourse in comparison with its ideology prior to the war of 1936, shunning the idea of race and defending democracy and the integration of immigrants (De Pablo, 2009).

<sup>24</sup>Herri Batasuna (HB, People's Unity) was a coalition of political parties close to the left-wing pro-independence movement, which was created in 1978.

<sup>25</sup>Iparretarrak (IK), an armed group in the Northern Basque Country, set up in 1973 and active until 2000, which defended a homegrown nationalist strategy for this part of the country.

### 3.3 A discourse called into question

The predominant Basque nationalist discourse until the 1980s had been one of resistance and well suited to such an adverse situation as Franco's dictatorship. However, the institutional and political changes (Autonomous Communities, in particular) that occurred following the latter's death opened up new possibilities, the reason why the existing discourse began to be challenged. One of the sources of tension arose precisely in relation to the main theoretical element defining the Basque nation, the language. ETA's definition of the nation around the Basque language and culture, which, in the former context, helped give cohesion to nationalism's social mass, following the political changes, in the 1970s and 1980s, faced political and socio-linguistic difficulties in order to uphold its theoretic principles. A difficulty worthy of particular mention is the existence of a large mass of non-Basque speaking population.

On the one hand, the social prestige of Basque rose according as the new Basque institutions began to embrace and support it: its use in public grew and language policies were drawn up to foment it. However, one sector of nationalism, the one most concerned with the importance of the language, felt that the policies promoted by the Autonomous Community's institutions were insufficient, while opinions clashed within the nationalist movement on the strategies with regard to the institutionalization of the *euskaltzale* movement. In general, this sector criticized nationalism for its failure to ensure that the language be learnt and used to the extent that it should, despite it having been afforded a central role in its theory (Zabalo & Odriozola, 2017).

Another major source of tension worth highlighting refers to political practice. Following Franco's death, clandestine structures with their large numbers of activists were no longer necessary, while political attention was concentrated on institutional activity, as is usual in a liberal democracy. However, this scheme of things clashed with the revolutionary praxis of former times. Within left-wing nationalism, the driving force behind the former discourse, contradictions arose around several points: the validity of the institutions, the degree of democracy they implied, how to approach the new situation, the need for ETA to persist, etc. (Zabalo & Odriozola, 2017).

In this respect, efforts to solve conflicts in different parts of the world by means of dialogue became highly important. In the Basque case, of special relevance is the dialogue-based solution given to the Irish conflict, with the result that Basque nationalism's two main forces, PNV and the Nationalist Left, together with EA,<sup>26</sup> launched some conversations which they called the *Ireland Forum* (Casanova, 2007, pp. 422–423) in 1998 (following the Stormont and Good Friday agreements).

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<sup>26</sup>Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) is a political party with social democratic ideology. It was founded following the split with the PNV in 1986.

## 4 A new nationalism? Basque nationalism in the 21st century

The globalization process has not only brought us its intentions to homogenize, doing away with borders and equalizing trends and customs, but it has also provided us with the response of self-identification and differentiation, which is, ultimately, the cornerstone of nationalism.

In this respect, diversity is seen as an asset that must be safeguarded in all spheres and aspects. The concept of biodiversity, a term coined in the field of environmentalism, is applied to all living beings on the planet and, by extension, to all cultures and identities in the world. In opposition to the homogenization process, and at times theoretically incompatible with the concept of equality, the concept of diversity has revitalized nationalist theories, particularly in the western world, and afforded them a new theoretical corpus, closely linked to the concept of democracy, as we shall later see in relation to the Basque case.

### 4.1 An intense start to the 21st century

Generally speaking, the Basque Country has witnessed a change in its demographic and socio-economic structure, and this has had an impact on the nationalist movement. The coastal population has risen in the Northern Basque Country thanks, to a large extent, to its appeal for tourists and retired people, as well as its capacity to generate new jobs. This has led to a double migratory flow toward the Basque coast, mainly linked to the first sector, from France and the Basque hinterland, which is gradually being depopulated. These movements have affected Basque nationalism in two respects: in part, by a heightened defense of the culture associated with the Basque language, in decline here too, and an environment that is more urban than it used to be; and, on the other hand, a robust environmental movement in defense of the land and the revitalization of the hinterland.

The defense of the culture and the land are therefore the core areas of new Basque nationalism in the Northern Basque Country. Highly active in both aspects, its political moves have been largely concerned with winning institutional recognition for its territory, diluted since the 18th century within the department of Atlantic Pyrenees. Availing of the diverse possibilities for decentralization that the French state has been implementing, especially, since 1982, Basque nationalism's historic demand for its own department has evolved since then to new ways of organization, eventually leading to the Basque Country Community in 2017. Irrespective of the limited competences of this Community, it was considered of vital importance for Basque nationalism as it has managed to agglutinate a large number of political parties and a significant part of the population around an objective put forward and defended by the nationalist movement.

Changes are likewise evident in the territories of the Southern Basque Country. Since the end of the 20th century, the economic structure has changed radically:

the large shipbuilders and steelworks have disappeared, and, in their place, smaller businesses have proliferated, often as cooperatives; the services sector, among them, tourism, has developed quickly; and the primary sector is far less important than it was. The countryside is still being depopulated, even more acutely in the Pyrenees region of Navarre, although a large number of recent immigrants, from Africa, Eastern Europe, and South America, have been attracted to the primary sector, particularly in the Ribera region of Navarre, where immigrants make up a third of the population.

Problems of integration, immigrants' rights, and rejection by a sector of the local population are the order of the day, although studies have highlighted the high degree of acceptance of the migrant population by the native population (Ikuspegi, 2019a). Basque nationalism has a wait and see attitude to these issues, as it is aware that immigration could threaten its budgetary funds (above all, as far as Basque culture is concerned), but the more left-wing currents of Basque nationalism are likewise seeking a possible alliance with the more active sectors in immigration.

However, what has changed radically is the political situation in the Basque Country, due, above all, to ETA's unilateral decision to abandon its armed activity in 2011 and, more so, to its dissolution in 2018. Since the end of Franco's dictatorship, there had been an intense debate within Basque nationalism on the legitimacy of using violence to reach its objectives, with outright opposition from more moderate nationalism, such as parties like PNV and EA. Furthermore, at the end of the century, a clear change in the international context can be appreciated with respect to the use of violence in Western European countries (reflected in the ending of the armed campaigns in Northern Ireland and in Corsica). Nevertheless, in the early 21st century, other internal reasons were added to these external reasons, with respect to the strategic appropriateness of continuing with the armed struggle (cfr. Murua, 2016; Whitfield, 2014; Zabalo & Saratxo, 2015).

In the space of a few short years, between 1998 and 2010, the changes were of great magnitude. In 1998, ETA tried to forge an alliance with the different nationalist political and socialist forces (under the so-called *Lizarra-Garazi Agreement*) with an aim to outline a path toward self-determination, without the use of violence. The agreement broke down in 2000, although, in another sense, the subject of self-determination and a greater share in government was included in a proposal for the renewal of the Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Autonomous Community (popularly known as the *Ibarretxe Plan*, in reference to the then president of the Basque Government), which was passed by the Autonomous Parliament in 2004. It was summarily rejected by the main Spanish parties on its presentation the following year.

The frustration generated by the refusal to discuss any point of the proposal was further aggravated by lack of unity within Basque nationalism, and even more so within the PNV itself, the party that had actually promoted the proposal. It could

be said that the wing of the party clearly satisfied with the Autonomous Community system or the less pro-independent faction within the PNV took control of the party and was eager to abandon new proposals for self-government, which it subsequently managed to do and has continued to do, thanks to its favorable electoral results up to the present day.

While the negotiations with respect to this project for a new statute of autonomy were underway, in 2005, a new framework for negotiation, this time between ETA and the Spanish Government (under the PSOE), was set up, with an aim, once again, to find channels to reach an end to ETA's armed activities. It was unusual as it also included a political negotiating table at Basque level, between the Socialist Party of Euskadi (part of the PSOE), the PNV, and the Nationalist Left (the so-called *Loiola Conversations*).

The failure to reach agreement in both negotiation fronts had serious consequences for the Nationalist Left, as, during that period, the Spanish Government launched a severe campaign of illegalization and arrests affecting any organization or person related to the Nationalist Left. ETA activists were arrested, but so too were political representatives of Batasuna (of the Nationalist Left), activists in youth organizations, social movements, bodies providing support for Basque prisoners; major newspapers were shut down; fines were handed out on a steady basis, etc.

In this repressive atmosphere and with two failed negotiating processes in a period of eight years (1998–2006), the Nationalist Left, including ETA, embarked on a process of reflection on the strategic appropriateness of maintaining armed activity. As far as the civil side was concerned, the process culminated in 2010 with an official presentation in Pamplona, in which the Nationalist Left upheld its strategic goals, but with the democratic channels only in order to achieve them and with no reference whatsoever to the use of armed activity (the *Zutik Euskal Herria* document). Moreover, the move was complemented by a debate held by ETA, which led to its unilateral decision to abandon its armed activity in 2011.

What would seem logical in this situation is for Spain to have shown an interest in strengthening this stance and verifying the actual end of armed violence. However, this was not the case, as, quite the contrary, the stance of the Spanish government was both unrelenting and obstructive (mainly on the part of the Popular Party, in power for many of these years, but also at times on the part of the PSOE), unwilling to see the end unless it were as a result of a resounding military defeat. Denied any chance of negotiation by the Spanish side, ETA decided to dissolve unilaterally, with the aid of a series of experienced international observers, and this it did in 2018.

These last 20 years of the 21st century thus offer us two widely differing scenarios in the Southern Basque Country. The first unstable decade focused to a large extent on ETA, subsequently compounded by the economic downturn; and a



second decade, in which ETA was voluntarily disappearing from the scene, forced the political forces and society itself to reposition themselves. Undoubtedly, the most evident change is the repositioning of the Nationalist Left, which, in a very short period of time, went from being illegalized and outlawed to entering into alliances with other political forces, to governing in many town and city councils (some as important as San Sebastian and Pamplona), or in the historical territory of Gipuzkoa, and participating in coalition governments, as is the case in Navarre.

Institutional activity became more important in these last few years for Basque nationalism. Nevertheless, more than one alternative social movement and part of the Nationalist Left's social base had certain qualms in relation to this activity. They wanted the institutions to pay more attention to the daily work of these movements but were likewise concerned about the eventual greater presence of the institutions in spheres they considered their own, due to their prolonged involvement in them. The first stance was patent in the movement for the recovery of the Basque language, which calls for effective policies on the part of the institutions and which are considered insufficient by this movement. The second stance can be appreciated in feminist and environmentalist groups, to give just two examples.

Either directly as a result of ETA's dissolution or due to the changes and movements arising in consequence, and because there is a constant flow of new ideas and initiatives from within and abroad, the 21st century is forcing people to rethink their former positions and ways of doing things, which now seem more or less exhausted. First of all, we shall see how the theoretical conceptualization of Basque nationalism is changing and why; and second, we shall look at how it is affecting its day-to-day activities.

## 4.2 Rethinking Basque nationalism in the 21st century

The idea that nationalism is unchangeable in time is transmitted both from outside, and always understood as negative criticism, as being something firmly anchored in the 19th century, and from inside, understood as an example of positive cohesion, that a nationalist movement exists which is in no way affected by time until it has achieved all its goals. The fact of the matter is that, logically, like all movements, it evolves accordingly as new ideas and contexts emerge and develop. This is certainly the case in these first years of the 21st century.

### 4.2.1 The right to decide

The first nationalism of the 19th century saw the nation as a unique subject in history, with its own path unlike other nations in the world, the reason why it claimed the same rights as the rest of nations, among them, the right to establish a state. The perception of uniqueness has not changed since then, but, during the 20th century, with the advent of the right to self-determination and, in particu-

lar, since the end of that century, it came to be understood that, in the name of diversity, all identities deserve to be acknowledged and preserved, provided those holding said identity decide so. In other words, in the case of nations, they have the democratic right to set up a state if the majority of the citizens in the territory in which the consultation on the subject is held decide so. This is the basis of the so-called right to decide, which, during the 21st century, has had such an impact on Basque nationalism.

It derives from the right to self-determination, an important democratic instrument for establishing new states in the 20th century, particularly the overseas colonies of a number of European countries, although not just in these. Indeed, the discussion on whether the right to self-determination only affects the colonies or too any nation claiming it is at the origin of the right to decide.

A major contribution to this discussion is provided by Quebec, with respect to going beyond the colonial theory. Indeed, the attempts at independence in Quebec (referendums in 1980 and 1995) gave rise to an academic (see, e.g., Macedo & Buchanan, 2003; Moore, 1998), as well as a political and legal debate on the actual legitimacy of a democratic consultation of a given population if the state of origin does not agree to it.

Be it understood as a reformulation of the right to self-determination, or as a different theory, although one based on said right, the right to decide has been the subject of extensive theorization in Catalonia in recent years. In its formulation, the uniqueness of the nation loses its position to the democratic right which all political communities should have to be able to decide on their future. In other words, rather than a nation, we are referring to a *demos*, a political community in a given territory that may be made up of more than one nation, but where the democratic spirit prevails for resolving any conflicts that might arise, among which that of setting up an independent state (see Cuadras-Morató, 2016; López, 2011; Vilajosana, 2014).

Over and above the foregoing debate on whether certain conditions are met in order to be able to hold a referendum on self-determination, López proposes bringing the debate back to democratic terms, on whether there is in fact a right “to participate in a decision.” “Based on a principle of democratic radicalism,” the right to decide “refers to citizens who have the right to decide because the decision affects them” (2011, p. 24).

The theoretical consequences of these proposals are obvious with respect to nationalism, given that its main objective, setting up an independent state, remains but it is now based on a *demos* which does not coincide with the nation itself. The illusion of a state comparable to a nation, which was hardly ever true, fades away immediately in this formulation, which must satisfy its population not in terms of national identity but rather in terms of social, economic, political, and cultural well-being.

The influence of these new theories in the Basque Country is clear, particularly going by the echo the Catalan secessionist experience has had, although it is true that reception varied. Basque left-wing nationalists were highly enthusiastic as it put forward a real, if complicated, way toward independence whereas the PNV were more cautious, as they are not happy with unilateral channels not agreed on with the state, and fear that state repression in Catalonia could affect the Basque Country's autonomy.

At all events, and as a consequence of Catalonia's influence, there have been appreciable changes in the pro-sovereignty message, which is now more open to material questions, related to well-being, and not only to identity issues. Some recent proposals, for example, abandoning the concept of nationalism and embracing that of pro-independence, underlining the fact that the political project is open to all citizens and, to a certain extent, disassociated from national identity (e.g., Apaolaza, 2016).

Moreover, this new approach sits well with other contributions coming from feminist or environmentalist movements, as we shall see later. Its formulation, directed at all citizens, and focused on well-being, democracy, and individual rights, is not, on the other hand, so appealing for some *euskaltzale* sectors, who insist that the recognition of individual rights does not guarantee the recognition of collective rights, such as cultural and linguistic ones. They emphasize that a stateless nation like the Basque Country is in an asymmetrical power relation with Spanish and French cultures and languages.

In other words, we can currently appreciate that there is a combination of two discourses in Basque nationalism. Both discourses propose an independent Basque state. One of them attaches great importance to factors relating to identity, above all, to the Basque language, and its aim is to set up a state that can equip the Basque nation with the mechanisms and structures for safeguarding Basque culture and language,<sup>27</sup> as well as other more material objectives. On the other hand, the new discourse attaches greater importance to the diverse improvements that a Basque state could imply for the entire population, and not, in particular, for the Basque nation, which is why it tends to lower its emphasis on identity factors and the central role of the Basque language.

#### 4.2.2 Language and diversity

As we have seen, the language question has been central to Basque nationalism since its origins, but, especially, since the second half of the 20th century, when left-wing nationalism, to start with, and then Basque nationalism as a whole accorded it a central role as a defining element of the nation. It needs to be clarified that this central role was qualified in practice, as a consequence of the socio-linguistic reality

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<sup>27</sup>UNESCO's Atlas of World's Languages in Danger (2010) rates Basque's situation as "vulnerable."

of the Basque language. In other words, as it is a minority language, not spoken by the majority of the population, and excluded from many social spaces, nationalism was obliged to be more flexible in its position: the language defined the nation, but, in practice, allegiance to its political project was put before the language (Conversi, 1997, p. 240; Zabalo, 2008).

At any rate, Basque has been, and still is, a core element in Basque nationalism, which helps us understand the tension caused by the new tendencies seen in the previous point, insofar as they diminish its leading role as the main national factor. In light of these new approaches, some sectors, with acknowledged relevance within Basque nationalism, advocate upholding the central role of Basque (in its theorization, e.g., Azurmendi, 2017). At any rate, Basque nationalism cannot be understood today without the Basque language, and proof of the same is that said debates on theory are being held mainly in Basque, unlike what occurred decades before (the language's situation has improved considerably since the 1980s).

Nevertheless, nowadays, the challenge faced by Basque nationalism with regard to the language and culture is not limited to Basque, as there is also a question of its diversity and the management thereof. As already mentioned, immigration—without taking into account inter-state migratory flows—is a growing reality in the Basque Country, especially since the beginning of the 21st century. The truth is, despite the importance in demographic terms of this phenomenon, no significant variant of Basque nationalism holds an anti-immigrant view, unlike some other European nationalist movements. It could be said that, as far as its management by the institutions, particularly in the CAV (Jeram, 2012), and civil society are concerned, Basque nationalism's view is that of a nation open to immigration (Iraola, 2015).

However, how do the defense of a native tongue and the construction of an open approach to cultural diversity relate? There is no doubt that the relation is complex and there are tensions, but the need to open up to the migratory reality has likewise led to a need to reformulate certain ideas about the role of language in nationalism. Therefore, acceptance of cultural diversity as a value has helped strengthen further a more open approach to the linguistic diversity of the Basque Country.

Worthy of note is that this relation between multiculturalism and the Basque language is being led by a social movement in favor of the recovery of the language, *Euskalgintza* (not strictly nationalist), particularly at local level. In addition, incipient initiatives have cropped up around the Basque Country, such as *Euskal Herria Hamaika Kolore* (The multi-colored Basque Country), which seek a more general approach, relating the migratory issue and multiculturalism with Basque, accordingly the central role to the Basque language, providing the means for greater cohesion of a diverse society (H11Kolore, n.d.).

#### 4.2.3 Emerging contributions from feminist and environmentalist movements and alternative economy

Basque left-wing nationalism has always had ties with social movements, which have helped inspire its theory, despite the fact that they have not always been strictly nationalist. It could be said that, in recent years, this dynamic has been enhanced, due to the boom of, and the greater role played, by certain movements in the Basque Country. It is true that these are minor contributions, within society as a whole, but they are extremely significant in theoretical terms, given that they are reflected in Basque nationalism's current discourse, especially that of left-wing nationalism, and, to a far lesser extent, in the case of the PNV's nationalism.

Here we would point out the contributions from feminist movements, environmentalist movements and alternative economy entities, three interrelated movements, in their practice as well in their new theoretical approaches. In many cases, their influence can be appreciated in specific local practices, but several of the theories emerging from these movements have had an impact on Basque nationalism.

Feminism is today one of the most influential movements in the Basque Country and, at the same time, one of the most productive as regards theory. A movement in vogue in Europe and throughout the world, it is reflected in a very specific way in the Basque Country, where the specific features of Basque feminism add to its overall clout: a widespread network of small groups in numerous towns in the Basque Country; a socially relevant movement for many decades, although constantly rejuvenated, and currently boasting a large number of young women among its members; and two sides, as a social movement and an institutional one. An example of the latter can be found in the *Emakumeen Etxeak*, women's houses, which are spread around different towns and are funded by the municipal authorities.

The relation between Basque nationalism and feminism is not new, as we have already pointed out. It can be traced back to the women's groups—as yet not feminist—which, after 1922, formed the PNV's female branch (Ugalde, 1993). However, *abertzale* feminism, linked to left-wing nationalism, began to take shape in the 1970s and 1980s, in the framework of the effervescence of the broader Basque feminist movement (women's assemblies, numerous local groups, etc.). This is when the first feminist organizations were set up within the Basque nationalist movement, in coordination with the rest of the groups in the feminist movement, and have continued until this century, when they gained in significance, particularly in recent years.

Its importance within the general feminist movement is clearly reflected in the use of the Basque territory as the framework for discussion and action of the entire movement, and not as a mere appendage of the Spanish or French one. Similarly, its importance as a major social player can be appreciated in numerous recent examples: the feminist strikes of 2018 and 2019, organized by the Basque feminist

movement throughout the Basque Country; the Women's Global March; or the general strike held in the Southern Basque Country by nationalist trade unions and a variety of social movements (among which was the feminist movement with significant participation) on January 30, 2020, in *defense of a dignified life*, according to the slogan (EiTB, 2020).

In what way does feminism have an impact on Basque nationalism? On the one hand, feminism's input in terms of theory is fundamental today in the approaches of left-wing nationalism, political parties, and trade unions. This is evident in the use in these discourses of concepts like *feminist sovereignty*<sup>28</sup> or in the feminist review of the national question currently underway. Added to these new pro-independence currents, which we have already analyzed, are the theories that have arisen relating the pro-independence objective to feminism, envisaging the Basque state as a tool in the fight against patriarchy (Goikoetxea, 2016).

Environmentalism too is making a fundamental contribution to Basque nationalism, particularly, left-wing nationalism. This is not new as this relation has existed since the 1960s, especially with the antinuclear struggle in the 1980s. Just as with feminism, broadly speaking, it is a social movement which, currently, has considerable clout, due perhaps to the alarm caused by climate change. This impact on Basque nationalism is particularly relevant in the Northern Basque Country, where environmentalism plays a leading role in its political program and in movements such as *Bizi (Live)*<sup>29</sup> or in the *Chamber of Agriculture of the Northern Basque Country*<sup>30</sup>.

How is Basque nationalism influenced by environmentalism? Generally speaking, it is evident in the success of concepts like that of *food sovereignty* (Conversi, 2016), agroecology or the importance attached to local communities in the political community's overall development, as well as its criticism of capitalism. All these concepts are highly attractive and appropriate for nationalist theory, insofar as what the latter proposes is a defense of what is one's own, namely one's country. The concept of sovereignty has been renewed, linked as it is now to food production and consumption. An example of this influence is a manifesto of 2020 advocating an *environmental transition*, within the framework of the COVID-19 crisis, with the support of the nationalist left-wing parties and trade unions (Euskal Herria, 2020).

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<sup>28</sup> A concept defended by the feminist and Basque nationalist organization, *Bilgune Feminista*, among others, for example, and which interrelates the feminist viewpoint of the concept of sovereignty with the sovereignty of the Basque Country (Bilgune Feminista, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> An alterglobalization movement in the Northern Basque Country, founded in 2009, closely linked to Basque nationalism, which is active in fields related to climate change and the environment, and attaching considerable importance to civil disobedience.

<sup>30</sup> Association set up by the agricultural trade union of the Northern Basque Country, ELB to defend farmers' interests and help promote sustainable agriculture.

On the other hand, worth mentioning, and in relation to more practical initiatives, is the importance it has in the Northern Basque Country, where Basque nationalism seems to be evolving toward green nationalism, under the theoretical banner of the concept of biodiversity. With the defense of diversity at its core, it advocates the defense of a cultural identity and the defense of the earth, understood as the environmental survival of a peripheral community in the French context. In the Southern Basque Country, it is embodied in different points of the nationalist left-wing movement's political programs. Thus, one of the central points of the left-wing nationalist coalition, EH Bildu when they were in the regional government of Gipuzkoa between 2011 and 2015, was its all-out opposition to a waste incineration plant. Moreover, one of the coalition's proposals, were it to win the elections for the Autonomous Community Government in 2012, was to create a Ministry for Food Sovereignty (see *La Vanguardia*, 2012).

A third emerging, although brief, contribution worth highlighting is alternative economy, associated, in the Basque case, to cooperatives. The cooperative is a phenomenon characteristic of the Basque Country's economic make-up, where it is of major importance in its industry. The model's author of reference is José María Arizmendiarieta, its theorist and founder of Mondragón Corporación Cooperativa, a major social economy business group. It is a solid model and prevalent in the town of Mondragón and throughout the region, where it even has its own university linked to the venture.

There are, however, other numerous models of cooperatives. After the economic downturn that began in 2008, many small cooperatives were set up in the Basque Country, some of them associated with what is called alternative economy (closely linked to feminism and environmentalism). We are talking about minor initiatives, often implying a discourse linked to sovereignty: they claim that the question of sovereignty is not limited to the independence of the Basque Country, but is rather linked to the self-organization of communities, to material sovereignty, which is why they defend creating tools apart from large companies.

It should be noted that many of the initiatives we have mentioned are not, strictly speaking, nationalist, but sit well with left-wing nationalism, insofar as they promote and give a new dimension to the concept of sovereignty, fundamental in all nationalist theorization. Economic sovereignty, food sovereignty, and political sovereignty act as a tool to combat patriarchy, and with it, the enhancement of local and daily practices, associated with the territory. All these highlight the concept of sovereignty, and the fact that the latter is a practice that can be built on a daily basis.

#### 4.3 Basque nationalism today

Nowadays, Basque nationalism is, without a doubt, one of the main political and social players in the Basque Country. Although it may have failed to achieve its ul-

timate aim of creating an independent state, it wields considerable political power, above all, in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country; national identification, to the detriment of the Spanish or French ones, is considerable; and its presence in different aspects of Basque society is notable. Let us look now at how Basque nationalism is organized today.

Apart from the institutional recognition of the Basque Country, in the Northern Basque Country, the process of establishing the Community of the Basque Country has helped agglutinate the majority of political nationalists around a new coalition, Euskal Herria Bai. Set up in 2007, it is made up of three parties, as well as some independents, and has a close relationship with the EH Bildu coalition in the Southern Basque Country (in fact, two of its parties form part of both coalitions). Its electoral experience is limited, but it has maintained an upward trend, which has turned it into an important reference in the political context of the region as it was the third most voted party in the legislative elections of 2017, with 10.42% (in local elections, it is capable of obtaining over 20% and of actually holding office in some small towns).

The main objectives of this institutionalization are focused on the recovery of the Basque language, to which end they demand its being made official; on the defense of the primary sector in the country's hinterland; and on other progressive social measures or policies, often environment-related. Nationalism is extremely active in the latter sphere, and many of its activists are involved in associations or initiatives of this kind: acts of environmental disobedience, the use of a local environment-friendly and solidarity currency, or the organization of numerous local alternative projects. This new approach has led Euskal Herria Bai to strengthen ties with French Green parties (resulting in numerous joint voting lists between environmentalists and nationalists).

In the Foral Community of Navarre, the relative progress of Basque nationalism is evident in the continuity and development of left-wing nationalism, but, likewise, in the emergence of a new party which agglutinates a more centrist spectrum and with a diminished Basque nationalist profile. The main party is Euskal Herria Bildu, a coalition forged in 2012 between three left-wing parties, and whose main element is the traditional Nationalist Left. The second party is Geroa Bai (Yes to the Future), a coalition of parties and associations set up in 2011, with the PNV as the main element. The presence of the latter party has been pivotal in the historical turning point in the political scene in Navarre. In point of fact, the predominance, over decades, of regionalist or right-wing Spanish parties, strongly opposed to Basque nationalism, has been partially checked by the possibilities that these two parties and other left-wing ones have to form a coalition. As well as holding office in a variety of towns in Navarre, they have formed part of the last two Navarre governments, the first of which was, moreover, presided by Geroa Bai.



In the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, ETA's end and the possibilities opening up for the Nationalist Left (illegalized for the first decade of the 21st century) to stand in elections has led to the total domination of Basque nationalist forces. The main political force in this demarcation is the PNV. With a centrist, Christian-democratic ideology, it has been the dominant party in many of the CAV institutions since the end of the Franco dictatorship and up to the present. The second political force is EH Bildu, a left-wing force, as we have already pointed out, which is connected with the Nationalist Left (historically close to ETA) and to the PNV's leftist splinter wing. Despite the fact that their electoral results imply an absolute majority in the Basque Parliament, being in charge of practically all of the regional and municipal institutions, a climate of cooperation between them is absent, as both are vying for primacy. Their condition as nationalists does, however, reveal itself in matters relating to the promotion of the Basque language, or in the recent project for drawing up a new statute of autonomy, which was launched in 2018.

A distinctive element of Basque nationalism is the great strength of its trade unions, something that other regions find particularly striking, and which can be explained, in part, by the long left-wing tradition of some of the branches of the nationalist movement. Currently, the main trade union in the Southern Basque Country is ELA. Of Christian origin and very close to the PNV, its theory has evolved toward a more alternative and radical stance than what its origins would indicate. Currently, the second largest nationalist trade union (third of all those in the Southern Basque Country) is LAB. Founded in 1974, in the final years of Franco's regime, it has always held a left-wing nationalist position and has gradually gained in significance in the Basque trade union scene.

With a, at times, tense relationship, due to their rivalry in trying to reach primacy, they are aware of the force they can accumulate when they join together. This has occurred quite often, with joint political statements and, above all, a call for general strikes, which have been quite successful. They have likewise collaborated in other social initiatives, together with other alternative movements and organizations. LAB is the only one with an organization in the Northern Basque Country, and its power as a trade union is extremely limited. However, its influence is greater than its specific importance, as, here too, it collaborates in alternative initiatives.

We could not conclude this overview without mentioning, albeit in a general fashion, all the specialized organizations and movements who maintain some kind of relationship with Basque nationalism. Thus, they too keep to the path opened up by the first nationalists, which was broadened with the second form of nationalism, in order to build a global nationalist movement, which encompasses broad aspects of Basque organizational life, although not directly organized as nationalists.

The main movement is, undoubtedly, the one related to the Basque language. It is made up of numerous groups and small organizations involved in a variety of aspects: the teaching of the language, local groups promoting the language, publications, etc. A second movement that has gained strength in recent years is the feminist movement, and it is certainly worth pointing out the importance of its proximity to Basque nationalism, with the result that the mutual influence has been constant. A third dominant movement in recent times is the one related to the right to decide. Organized locally, it has been highly active and has organized initiatives with great public impact. Without exhausting the list of movements revolving around Basque nationalism, last of all, we would mention the diverse socio-environmentalist and anti-repression groups which have proliferated in recent years.

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