

**Sub-state Nationalism and Immigrant Integration in Spain: Divergent Paths in the  
Basque Country and Catalonia**

**Sanjay Jeram  
Brock University  
[sjeram@brocku.ca](mailto:sjeram@brocku.ca)**

**Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science  
Association, University of Victoria, 4-6 June 2013  
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## Introduction

The forces of modernization were supposed to wipe away sub-state national identities based on distinct languages and cultures and replace them with post-national civic identities; however, sub-state nationalism remains a potent political force in advanced capitalist democracies such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Belgium (Lecours, 2012). The phenomenon of immigration in the West has raised new challenges for nations without states. Sub-state nations define themselves from the larger state by way of distinct cultures and languages and now they must contend with an influx of migrants who do not share those languages or cultural traits. Moreover, immigrants are considered unlikely to support a nationalist party, which weakens the political power of the minority nation. For these reasons, immigrants are often portrayed as a potential ‘threat’ to the survival of sub-state nations (Kymlicka, 2001, pp. 277-279).

Recent scholarship that has focused on immigrant integration policy and discourse in the context of sub-state nationalism has revealed more variance and complexity than expected according to the threat hypothesis (Barker, 2010; Hepburn, 2009b). As empirical evidence shows, immigrant integration policies in Quebec, Scotland and Catalonia, or discourses of regionalist parties on these issues, have indeed been shown to be far from as exclusionary as the threat hypothesis would expect them to be.

In Spain, a country with two ‘nations without states,’ the policy instruments and discourses of the nationalist parties and governments in Catalonia and the Basque Country have not provided much support for the threat hypothesis. The situation in Catalonia resembles that of Quebec, as the most popular nationalist party, *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), embraced aspects of multiculturalism in early 2000s, but has since shifted toward assimilationist policies such as mandatory language classes and civic education classes for newcomers (Solé & Parella, 2008). This assimilationist turn can partly be explained by the strength of the right-wing party *Plataforma per Catalunya* (PxC); the party nearly gained enough votes to enter the Catalan Parliament in 2010 and currently has a strong presence in the town halls of municipalities with high immigrant populations. In the Basque Country, immigration became a ‘hot button’ issue in the early 2000s when the Spanish government, led by the right-wing *Partido Popular* (PP), introduced Law 8/2000, which restricted the rights of immigrants ‘*sin papeles*’ (without papers) and made the consequences of illegality much more dire (Gortázar, 2002). These changes were heavily criticized by immigrant organizations in the Basque Country, and Law 8/2000 became the impetus for an immigrant integration framework that centered on a distinct ‘Basque citizenship’ aimed at helping immigrants overcome the obstacles created by the Spanish immigration law. Within a short period, diversity became a new marker of Basque identity, as the nationalists demonstrated a stronger commitment to multicultural initiatives and social support for immigrants than did the Basque branches of the statewide parties.

In both Catalonia and the Basque Country, then, nationalist parties have avoided the worst excesses in displays of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments that are found in the discourses of *Vlaams Belang* (VB) in the Flanders region of Belgium and *Popolo*

*della Liberta`* (PdL) in the South Tyrol region of Italy. Accordingly, one might seek to explain why both the Basque and Catalan are not explicitly anti-immigrant, but this research approach would obfuscate important differences between the two cases. As noted above, Catalan nationalists have recently added a strong assimilationist component to their integration approach that has not been replicated in the Basque case. This is an unexpected outcome given that the comparative literature on the Basque Country and Catalonia has tended to contrast the exclusionary nationalism of the former with the inclusionary nationalism of the latter. For example, Conversi (1997) has argued that the distinct developmental paths of the nationalist movements in the Basque Country and Catalonia can be explained by the differing core values in each case. Language was the pivot around which the Catalan movement developed, whereas race and violence filled the void in the Basque case, in part due to the poor diffusion of its indigenous language, known as Euskara (Conversi, 1990). Similarly, Jáuregui presents Catalonia as the *terra de pas* (land of passage) and the Basque Country as marked by a “historical isolationist tendency as exemplified by the concept of universal nobility and purity of blood” (2006, p. 239). It may not be that surprising, then, that Catalan nationalism is progressive and accepting of immigrants. The transformation of Basque nationalism into a movement that celebrates diversity certainly is however, unexpected. The same line of reasoning leads to the expectation that it would be the Basque case, not the Catalan one, to be the first to turn away from multiculturalism in order to adopt a more assimilationist character.

Accordingly, the explicit aims of this paper are twofold. Firstly, it seeks to account for the virtual non-existence of anti-immigrant discourses in Basque and Catalan nationalisms. Second, and perhaps more interestingly, it attempts to make sense of the variation that has developed between the two cases of sub-state nationalism in terms of immigrant integration discourse and policy. The first argument advanced is that sub-state nationalist parties are using immigration to promote national solidarity and justify increased autonomy, or even independence. In both cases, we find evidence that this manifests itself in the form of opposition to central immigration laws and the discourses and policies of state-wide parties with respect to diversity and integration. Second, but relatedly, the assimilative turn in Catalonia stems from the different electoral pressures facing the CiU, perhaps, because the immigration issue has been on the political agenda longer there than it has in the Basque Country.

### **Theorizing the Sub-state Nationalism-Immigrant Integration Policy Nexus in Spain**

An early attempt to link national identity to immigration suggested that policies are informed by distinctive and deeply rooted understandings of nationhood (Brubaker, 1992). Brubaker distinguishes between ‘civic’ nations that are open to newcomers and ‘differentialist’ nations that engender an “interest in exclusion” (1992, p. 15). Whether a state develops a civic or differentialist nation is determined during the formative periods of state formation. A state without a core ethnic group, or *ethnie*, seeking to unify its inhabitants through a common identity will develop a civic nation, while an *ethnie* in search of a state is more inclined to devise a differentialist nation. Once a national identity is in place “judgements of what is in the interest of the state are mediated by self-

understandings, by cultural idioms, by ways of thinking and talking about nationhood (Brubaker, 1992, p. 28).

By their very definition, sub-state nations are state-seeking groups and thus will develop differentialist national self-understandings. Indeed, early writing on sub-state nationalism invoked an image of sub-state nations as “revolts against modernity” that are inherently anti-modern, illiberal, and “disintegrative” (Hobsbawm, 1990). In contrast to modern states that engender patriotism based on universal values, such as allegiance to set of rules and institutions, sub-state nationalists are said to have identities that emphasize race, religion, or linguistic and particularities and a common past (Viroli, 1995). Accordingly, Brubaker’s argument leaves us with the expectation that sub-state nationalist parties (SSNPs) would be hostile to immigration and assert an ethnic exclusionary definition of the nation. The corollary of this argument is that state nationalisms are more likely to adopt inclusive positions toward immigrants, but this is empirically questionable because many nation-states have shifted toward stricter settlement policies that require cultural assimilation (Brubaker, 2001; Joppke, 2007b). More importantly, the case studies examined in this article discredit this hypothesis. Even though the autonomous governments in the Basque Country and Catalonia, more often than not under the control of SSNPs, play a major role in the integration of immigrants, there is no observable anti-immigrant discourse among parties in the Basque Country and such discourses are only marginally popular in Catalonia.

Opposing the threat hypothesis, Kymlicka argues that sub-state nationalisms are no less likely to adopt a “post-ethnic nationalism” in response to immigration than sovereign states (2001, p. 64). Rather than assuming *a priori* that SSNPs reject diversity, Kymlicka posits that certain conditions mediate the nationalism-immigration nexus. First, he claims that, if the regional government is able to manage the *volume* of immigration into the sub-state national territory, SSNPs will promote an inclusionary nationalism because the threat of ‘swamping’ is removed. Historically, states have tried to stymie the development of sub-state nationalism by encouraging members of the majority group to settle in the ‘homelands’ of minority groups. In Spain, there is no evidence that the Franco regime purposively tried to relocate Spaniards to Catalonia and the Basque Country, but economic opportunities brought an influx of unilingual Spanish migrants to both regions in the 1950s and 60s (Conversi, 1997, pp. 187-221). Lacking control over immigration flows, the Catalan nationalist movement still projected a warm attitude towards Spanish migrants, so long as they respected Catalan distinctiveness and tried to learn the language. These sentiments are well encapsulated by a quote from influential Catalan nationalist Jordi Pujol: “anyone who lives and works in Catalonia and who wants to be Catalan is a Catalan” (quoted in Guibernau, 2004, p. 67). Basque nationalism, on the other hand, was much more exclusivist, characterizing Spanish immigrants as a threat to the essence of Basque culture (Conversi, 1997, pp. 196-199). In the current democratic period, neither the Basque nor Catalan governments control immigration flows, yet SSNPs in both cases have experimented with multiculturalism.

Second, Kymlicka posits that a sub-state nation will only embrace immigrants if its regional government has control over the *terms* of integration. Here, he is referring to

policy ambits, such as education, language, employment, social welfare, that empower the sub-state national group to pursue its preferred type of integration framework, whether it be assimilative, multicultural, or something else. From a normative standpoint, Kymlicka argues that sub-state nations will inevitably use its control over the terms of integration to ensure that immigrants who settle in the region “integrate into the local culture” (2001, p. 76). In other words, he condones ‘illiberal’ policies by sub-state nationalist governments, which place obligations on immigrants to adopt the customs and language of the minority so long as the goal is to create an inclusive nationalism. From a causal perspective, his explicit link between political autonomy and the progressive move towards post-ethnic multiculturalism is tenuous and underspecified. At what point do obligations and assimilationist policies break the threshold of tolerable illiberalism and become truly differentialist? After 2003, the Catalan nationalist alliance CiU opted for a more populist position and began to ratchet up its use of assimilationist rhetoric. Most notably, the CiU proposed that Catalonia oblige immigrants to sign an integration contract that would link one’s capacity to speak Catalan and demonstrate a good knowledge of Catalan culture to speedier access to non-essential services and extended welfare provisions. The party has since softened its position on the link between social rights and cultural adaptation (Davis, 2008). While there was a decentralization of specific powers to the Catalan government in the ambit of immigrant integration in 2006 (Zapata-Barrero, 2009), this cannot explain why the CiU had a stronger multiculturalist component to its position prior to 2003.

Kymlicka correctly points our attention to the importance of political autonomy to the sub-state nationalism-immigration nexus, but it is much too “teleological to the extent that it envisions a progressive move towards post-ethnic multiculturalism” (Barker, 2010, p. 15). In the Basque and Catalan cases specifically, one observes subtle changes in the policies and discourses of the nationalist parties toward immigrants over time. These changes cannot be readily linked to the transfer of powers to the Basque and Catalan governments that allow for control over the volume or terms of integration. In both cases, but especially that of Catalonia, Kymlicka’s framework misses the persistent tension between apprehension and diversity, on the one hand, and multiculturalism, on the other.

Because of the analytical focus on the concerns that SSNPs have about preserving the national language and culture, the electoral concerns that are real and present in the minds of these parties are often ignored. Since the transition to democracy, the Basque and Catalan autonomous communities have engendered regional parliaments in which both nationalist and state-wide parties compete for executive control. While nationalist parties such as the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV) and CiU have been very successful, numerous parties contest competitive elections in both autonomous communities. According to some scholars, the immigration policies of parties can be readily categorized according to their ideological profile. For instance, Lahav (2004) finds corroborating evidence that members of left-leaning parties tend to support increasing immigrants’ access to citizenship rights much more so than their colleagues on the political right.

Accordingly, one might hypothesize that nationalism is not that important: SSNPs will position themselves on immigration according to their ideological profile. In some cases, such as Scottish National Party (SNP), this proposition rings true, as the party has, for the most part, presented a uniformly social democratic agenda (Lynch, 2009) which favours increasing immigration flows to Scotland and promotes a “multicultural society free from racism and intolerance” (Scottish National Party, 2007). In other cases, however, SSNPs are not easily mapped onto the right-left axis on immigration because cultural conservatives may favour ‘get tough’ stances on immigrants whilst economic conservatives prefer policies to attract cheap immigrant labour to the territory (Hepburn, 2009a; Hepburn, 2009b). Moreover, SSNPs are always under pressure to emphasize the diversity within the state, that is, between the majority and minority nation, and the unity within their nation that justifies their calls for more autonomy or independence. When clashes with the state over sovereignty take center stage, the socioeconomic and ideological concerns of competing SSNPs often take a back seat to the national struggle.

The ways in which party competition over immigration plays out in autonomous regions with strong SSNPs is strongly conditioned by the wider nationalist conflict. Just as state nationalisms continue to reproduce the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion with public policies, institutions, and narratives, sub-state nationalisms are also engaged in continual process of nation-building (Béland & Lecours, 2008). Contrary to the conceptualization of sub-state nations as ‘fixed’ entities, the values that are constitutive of national solidarity are subject to contestation and change. The achievement of institutional autonomy has made it more difficult for SSNPs to rely solely on references to the group’s distinct history, culture, and language to emphasize national solidarity, and they therefore seek to utilize policy priorities and positions as embodiments of distinct national values. This can be especially productive when the resulting discourses and policies diverge from those of the state-wide parties which contest for power within the regional parliament.

This article, with its focus on the nation-building imperative of SSNPs, will argue that the immigration and integration policies and discourses of SSNPs in Catalonia and the Basque Country are a result of strategic opposition to state-level policies and proposals, as well as regional party competition. In doing so, these parties are attempting to undergird the national identity with a distinct set of interests related to immigration. This process often involves exaggerating the unity of the nation and its differences with the majority nation. The nation-building imperative to highlight the distinct values of the nation makes the politics of immigration different in regions dominated by sub-state nationalist mobilization. Rather than practicing ‘normal’ left-right competition, SSNPs in the Basque Country and Catalonia have, at times, defied their right-left ideological profile on integration as a means to nation-build.

### **Catalonia**

Prior to Spanish democratization and the re-establishment of the *Generalitat* (Parliament) of Catalonia, there were two significant waves of internal migration from other parts of Spain to Catalonia. While recognizing the qualitative differences between these waves and the more recent one bringing immigrants from developing countries, the considerable

discussion among Catalan intellectuals and political elites highlights the tension within the movement as to whether Catalan identity could persist in the context of diversity. In the early twentieth century, left-wing nationalists expressed optimism about the capacity for Castilian-speaking migrants to integrate into Catalan society and learn its language. Nevertheless, others professed deep concern that immigration would eventually “cause the loss of the distinctive characteristics of the Catalan people,” and thus concluded that the Catalan identity was very much in danger (McRoberts, 2001, p. 130). With the acquisition of autonomy during the Second Republic (1931-36), the hegemonic Catalan party at the time, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC), contended that specific policies of accommodation and linguistic assimilation would “destroy the myth that nationality is a racial phenomenon” (quoted in McRoberts, 2001, p. 130). The Spanish Civil War and victory of Franco’s Nationalist forces forestalled this internal debate: Catalan political autonomy was nullified, and immigration to Catalonia came to a sudden halt during the early years of the Franco regime.

Beginning in the 1950s, economic opportunities brought another significant wave of migrants to Catalonia, primarily from southern regions such as Andalusia. In context of the Franco dictatorship, Catalonia had no political means with which to respond to the influx of Castilian migrants. The concentration of the low-skilled and poorly educated migrants in suburban areas of Barcelona made it quite unlikely that they would easily integrate into the Catalan speaking milieu. The resulting debate among intellectuals and elites about the potential impact of immigrants on Catalan identity produced various positions. The most important viewpoint was that of Jordi Pujol because he went on to become the leader of the CiU, the nationalist coalition that held the balance of power in the Catalan Parliament between 1980 and 2003 (and again since 2010). His programme emphasized the inclusionary nature of Catalan nationalism and the Catalan language as the ‘glue’ to bind the diverse nation (Pujol, 1966). Moreover, he expressed a strong desire to afford full citizenship rights to immigrants in an independent Catalonia, so long as they respect and accept the identity of the host community. Despite being open to non-ethnic Catalans, it is clear that Pujol’s position contained some assimilationist tendencies. The position of the left-wing *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC) echoed that of Pujol, stressing that new Catalans must learn the language to meld with the native population (Guibernau, 2004, p. 68). On the other hand, Cruells (1965) presented a more pessimistic opinion in his writings, stressing the growing distance between the native Catalan population and the Spanish migrants. Interestingly, he placed the blame on the Castilian immigrants themselves, arguing that they reject the Catalan language and way of life. This is quite different from a traditional ethnic nationalist position that those not born into the nation cannot join it, even if they desire to do so. Indeed, as Guibernau (2004) points out, Franco’s repression of the Catalan language and culture allowed certain sectors of immigrants in Catalonia to feel a sense of superiority and identify solely with the single Spanish national culture promoted by the regime.

Immigration was not on the agenda during the transition to democracy, and thus policy jurisdiction between the central government and Generalitat was not specified. As foreign immigration flows to Spain started to rise, the central government adopted an “efficiency model” that gives the autonomous communities and local governments

responsibility over most integration policies such as reception, housing, education, and work (Zapata-Barrero, 2012).<sup>1</sup> It was in the early 1990s that immigration first found its way onto the political agenda in Catalonia because the central government had put into motion a series of regulations that highlighted the rapidly growing ‘illegal’ immigration population, kept to the margins of society. The CiU-led regional government responded by creating interdepartmental commissions to monitor and coordinate the action plans laid out in the Interdepartmental Plan for Immigration 1993-2000.<sup>2</sup> It signalled the interest of the CiU to officially make immigrant integration an issue that is relevant to Catalonia’s national project, but there was nothing controversial in the text or debates that highlighted perceived deficiencies in the central government’s handling of immigration.

Things started to change around 2000 for a few reasons. By that year, the demographic reality had become impossible to ignore: the vast majority of population growth in Catalonia was due to foreign immigration rather than new births (Zapata-Barrero, 2007, p. 184). Second, the political consensus on immigration between the two major state-wide parties, the right-leaning *Partido Popular* (PP) and *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), broke down and a period of political conflict began. After winning its first majority in the Spanish House of Deputies in 2000, the PP enacted a series of reforms to the Spanish Law on Aliens meant to dissuade would-be illegal immigrants from coming to Spain by excluding them from a wide swath of social rights such as healthcare and education (González-Enríquez, 2009; Gortázar, 2002). During the PP’s prior stint as a minority government (1996-2000), CiU delegates in the central government supported its legislative agenda in exchange for various concessions pertaining to the transfer of powers to the Generalitat.<sup>3</sup> When the leftist opposition parties in the Generalitat came out strongly against the reforms to the Law on Aliens, it put the CiU in a difficult position because the party needed to both assuage the PP and ensure the opposition parties were not able to label the CiU as ‘sell outs’ to the Spanish state in the eyes of the Catalan public. A Catalan parliamentarian from the *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (ICV) called the reformed Law on Aliens a “veritable judicial apartheid” that denies elementary freedoms to a vulnerable segment of the population (Kleiner-Liebau, 2009, p. 189).

The CiU’s immigration plan of 2001 highlights a delicate balancing act by the nationalist federation.<sup>4</sup> The second Interdepartmental Plan of Immigration (2001-2004) maintained many of the objectives of the previous one, but added an important chapter called “A Catalan Approach to Immigration” to demarcate a difference between the CiU’s integration philosophy from that of the state government led by the PP. In this chapter, one of main points is that the Catalan nation is obligated to respect the diversity that immigration brings by equalizing citizenship rights and obligations for everyone who resides in Catalonia. Yet, the ‘Catalan Approach’ obliges immigrants to accept Catalonia’s distinct identity within the Spanish state. In the same chapter, it is confirmed that immigration is one of the great challenges of the day for European societies, with Catalonia being no exception bearing in mind “Catalonia’s specific culture, society, and politics” (Zapata-Barrero, 2009, p. 133). While it may appear innocuous, this passage represents a declaration of distinctiveness for Catalonia within Europe, using immigration as another policy ambit that justifies increased autonomy. This vision of Spain strongly clashed with the one professed by the PP, especially its leader José María Aznar, of a



singular nationality within the Spanish state. Finally, the ‘Catalan Approach’ recognizes the social, cultural, and economic hardships that arise for immigration, and thus commits the Generalitat to use its powers in health, education, and social services to fight exclusion and promote equilibrium between a sense of belonging and respect for diversity (Government of Catalonia 2001, p. 117).

Objectively, there is some truth to the argument made by Davis (2008) and Hepburn (2011) that the CiU’s ‘Catalan Approach’ to integration underscores the importance of extensive social rights for citizens, such as healthcare, education, housing, as well as rights to protest and form associations for immigrants regardless of their formal status. Decree 188/2001 on ‘Aliens and their Integration’ in Catalonia re-introduced rights to housing benefits and post-obligatory education for non-resident immigrants that were eviscerated by the PP’s reforms to the Law on Aliens. The CiU also cleverly switched the term ‘foreign immigrants’ used in the previous plan for ‘Catalans born outside of Catalonia’ as to not differentiate between Spanish migrants and immigrants from abroad, in a sense fortifying the supposed inclusiveness of the ‘Catalan Approach.’ Interestingly, the CiU tacitly supported the PP’s reforms as explained by a state-level parliamentarian from the CiU in 2000: “the global résumé of this law is sufficiently positive to support it...it’s a law that has two major areas: the first is the fundamental protection of the rights and freedoms of immigrants (quoted in Kleiner-Liebau, 2009, p. 189). Given that 2000 was the first year of the PP’s majority tenure, the party had yet to begin its political war against Spain’s internal nations. In this context the CiU was, perhaps, reluctant to alienate its governing partner at the state level during the previous prior four years, which had resulted in many concessions to the Catalan nationalists.

The 2003 elections marked a historic change in leadership as the CiU did not form the government of Catalonia for the first since Spain’s transition to democracy. The *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (PSC) led a tripartite left-wing coalition government with the ERC and ICV even though the CiU retained a plurality of seats in the Generalitat. The tripartite government carried forward much of what the CiU started in the immigration ambit, but made significant discursive changes that emphasized points of disagreement. As noted by Zapata-Barrero (2009), the removal of the phrase ‘interdepartmental’ from the third immigration plan, called the Citizenship and Immigration Plan (2005-2008) was significant in that it establishes the *political* and *social* emphasis of the new government as opposed to *administrative* one of the CiU. One novelty of the third plan is the introduction of a distinct Catalan citizenship based on residence detached from one’s status as a Spanish citizen. The intended practical implication being that an immigrant becomes a Catalan citizen by demonstrating their commitment to settle in Catalonia through the mere act of registering in their municipal register (Solé & Parella, 2008, p. 96). It also presented a less ambiguous embracement of pluralism as constitutive of Catalan culture: newcomers make Catalonia “stronger, richer, and more plural” (Government of Catalonia, 2005, p. 47). Amidst these changes, the relationship between the Catalan and Spanish governments changed on account of the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy that came into effect in 2006. Article 138 assigns the ‘reception’ of immigrants to the Catalan government, which makes it the first and only autonomy statute to reference immigration.

Since becoming the main opposition party in 2003, the CiU ramped up its assimilationist rhetoric and challenged the citizenship concept laid out by the tripartite government. In the run-up to the 2006 elections, the party promised, that if elected, it would introduce an ‘integration contract’ linking knowledge of the Catalan language and culture to speedier access to non-essential services. Not surprisingly, the left-wing parties in Catalonia fiercely criticized the proposal, but much more interesting was the fact that the PP came out against the proposal as well. A traditional party of the right that had taken security-oriented positions on immigration before now chose not to align the CiU. According to Lucia Figar, former PP Immigration Minister in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, the CiU integration contract proposal is akin to a “human rights ration card” (quoted in Davis, 2008, p. 146).

The tripartite government retained its control of the Catalan government in the 2006 elections and continued to press the points in the Citizenship and Immigration Plan. A subsequent lull in the immigration debate was broken by events in the tiny city of Vic. The decision by the CiU-led municipal council to block undocumented immigrants from inscribing in the municipal register—thus depriving them of basic social rights—ignited harsh criticism from the central government, now controlled by the PSOE. PSOE leader, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero declared in the European Parliament: “We shall not accept that human beings find themselves without assistance or unable to attend school... we will not let them downgrade the rights of immigrants” (El País, 2010). Yet, the tripartite government initially accepted the legitimacy of the Vic council’s decision even though doing so contradicted its prior position and left-leaning orientation. Xenophobic attitudes were on the rise in Catalonia and the PxC had made a breakthrough in the 2007 municipal elections, which appeared to have factored into the government’s decision (Catalan News Agency, 2011). The central leadership of the CiU gave its full support to the decision in Vic, thus calling into question whether Pujol’s original assertion that ‘anyone who wants to be Catalan is a Catalan’ still described the CiU’s definition of the Catalan nation.

The tripartite government, embarrassed by its initial handling of the Vic controversy, continued to promote the extension of rights to everyone living in Catalonia, as indicated in the fourth Citizenship and Immigration Plan (2009-2011). Yet, surveys confirmed that racist and xenophobic sentiments in Catalonia continued to rise and the opposition parties attempted to capitalize on this (Noguer, 2010). The Catalan wing of the PP, the *Partit Popular de Catalunya* (PPC), followed the lead of the central leadership and proffered a populist approach that bordered on outright xenophobia. One of the party’s leaders, Alicia Sánchez-Comacho distributed pamphlets linking crime and immigration in poor neighbourhoods in the Barcelona area. In a move that caused much controversy, the PPC posted a downloadable videogame in which Sánchez-Comacho is seen shooting at illegal immigrants and Catalan separatists. The centerpiece of its anti-immigrant campaign was an ‘integration contract’ similar to the one articulated previously by the CiU, but with stricter obligations and punishments such as expulsion from the country for being unemployed. The left-wing parties called the proposal “xenophobic and populist” and the CiU responded by rehashing Pujol’s original discourse that Catalonia is a society of immigrants (Catalan News Agency, 2010).

The November 2010 Catalan elections resulted in big gains for the CiU, but the performance of the PPC is notable as it was the only other party to increase its seat total in the Generalitat. With the economic crisis and renewed emphasis on separatism, immigration has lost some traction in debates about Catalonia's national identity. Nevertheless, in response to assimilationist legislation in certain municipalities, the CiU has resolutely dropped multiculturalism from its platform and adopted a brand of integrationism in tune with the European trend to pursue liberal aims through illiberal means (Joppke, 2007a; Triadafilopoulos, 2011). In 2011, leader of the CiU, Artur Mas, stated publically that immigrants must certify their knowledge of the Catalan language as a "crucial requirement" to demonstrate their "effort of integration" (Noguer, 2011). As the CiU continues to make advances toward holding a referendum on Catalan sovereignty, it appears that immigrants in an independent Catalonia would not become Catalan simply by living in and expressing a will be to Catalan, but would have to prove that they are, objectively.

### **Basque Country**

Much like Catalonia, the Basque Country had two major waves of immigration from within Spain prior to the end of Francoism. Rapid industrialization around the turn of the twentieth century transformed Bilbao, the Basque Country's largest city, into a magnet for southern migrants looking for employment. By 1900, half of Bilbao's population did not have any Basque ancestry (Corcuera, 1979, p. 73). This coincided with the rise of Basque nationalism and its main political party, the PNV, which formed in 1895. The PNV's founder, Sabino Arana, was committed to the preservation of the Basque race and therefore rejected the inclusion of outsiders into the Basque nation. Until the 1930s, the PNV restricted membership in the party to those of Basque descent (Zabalo, 2008, p. 799).

By the time of the second great wave of immigration to the Basque Country in the 1950s and 60s, the Basque nationalist movement had begun to splinter. The virulent repression of Basque culture and language combined with inaction by the PNV led a group of youths to form *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA). One of the defining features of ETA's nationalism was its inclusionary character: anyone who supported the goals of the nationalist movement would be considered a Basque patriot (Heiberg, 1979). Yet, all factions of ETA did not accept defining the boundaries of the nation in such a fluid and inclusionary manner.<sup>5</sup> Whereas Arana and the PNV relegated Euskara to secondary importance, ETA members afforded much greater importance to making Euskara the language of the nation (Urla, 2012). Perhaps because of the groundswell of support for ETA during this period, some within the PNV reconsidered their racial understanding of the nation. A well-cited manifesto in the PNV newsletter *Alderdi* delivered the message to immigrants: "welcome to our land, which is also your land, you are Basque" and called on them to "assume fully the duties which the impending crucial situation demands from us all" (cited in Conversi, 1997, p. 282). Nevertheless, as the transition to democracy occurred, the PNV remained hesitant to clarify its position on immigrants and the role of Euskara as a marker of integration. Xabier Arzalluz, the leader of the PNV from 1979

until 2004, made frequent reference to Basque blood type as a distinguishing marker of ‘real’ Basques. This served as a reminder that, “in the eyes of the *jeltzales* (supporters of the PNV), there are two classes of citizens, depending on their ‘ethnic purity’ and place of birth (Balfour & Quiroga, 2007, p. 150-151).

As did Catalonia, the Basque Country negotiated a high level of political autonomy within Spain following the democratic transition. Article 17 of the Basque Statute of Autonomy gives the Spanish state full responsibility for immigration and emigration, but does not elaborate which precise competencies (e.g., admissions, reception policy) are included. This remained a moot point in the Basque Country during the 1980s and 1990s, as immigration rates to the Basque Country were low in comparison with other parts of Spain.<sup>6</sup> The situation changed after 2000 as the immigration population grew rapidly and the anti-immigrant riots in the southern Spanish town of El Ejido made headlines across the country (Zapata-Barrero, 2003).

The 2000 reforms to the Law on Aliens solicited a social reaction in the Basque Country that promptly led to a political response. In 2001, the PNV won the autonomic elections for the seventh consecutive time, but failed to earn enough seats to form a majority government. The three parties that ended up forming a tripartite government—PNV, *Eusko Alkartasuna* (EA), and *Izquierda Unida* (IU)—each express a nationalist position broadly defined, but diverge quite significantly along the right-left ideological spectrum.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the tripartite government was able to proceed with its immigration agenda without any significant internal conflict.<sup>8</sup> The parliamentary debate that followed decree 40/2002, which created a Basque Directorate of Immigration within the Department of Housing and Social Affairs, highlighted the conflicting understandings of the Spanish Constitution held by the nationalists and the PP. The Basque wing of the PP questioned the necessity of a directorate dedicated to implementing and monitoring immigration policies since, according to the constitution, doing so is the exclusive prerogative of the central government.<sup>9</sup>

The first Basque Immigration Plan (PVI) was debated in a plenary session of the Basque parliament in April of 2004 after its approval by the government in 2003. The timing and content of the first immigration plan leaves little doubt that it was elaborated in reaction to the restrictive immigration laws put in place by the PP at the state level. According to the introduction of the PVI written by Javier Madrazo, the Basque Minister of Housing and Social Affairs at the time:

“This first Basque Immigration Plan cannot be separated from the existence of restrictive Spanish and European policies, as well as the vulnerable situation in which immigrants find themselves when they come to the Basque Country. The reforms to the Spanish Law on Aliens, on human rights and liberties of foreigners, continues without responding to the difficulties that are facing immigrants in Spain” (Basque Government, 2003, p. 4).

The emphasis on a distinctive Basque citizenship in the PVI was also a source of conflict

between the tripartite government and the PP. The Law on Aliens, according to the PVI, creates distinctions between Spanish citizens and immigrants in terms of basic human rights. True Integration, therefore, will only be achieved by recognizing a “new status of citizenship disconnected from the attribution of nationality” (Basque Government, 2003, p. 79). In essence, the tripartite government sought to conceptualize Basque citizenship as more inclusive, respectful of human rights, and based solely on residence in contrast to Spanish citizenship, which it considers to be prejudiced, exclusive, and xenophobic.

The PVI does not provide a philosophy of integration that can be easily categorized as assimilationist or multiculturalist. Nevertheless, taken together, various sections of the plan redefine what it means ‘to be Basque’ in the current context. There is no mention of race, culture, or nationality to define the ‘other’ in relation to the indigenous Basque. The PVI is directed at those from outside the Basque Country without European citizenship and with few resources, which puts them at risk of social exclusion. In order to prevent exclusion and foster integration, the tripartite government will “promote initiatives aimed at the simultaneous development of Basque and other cultures present in the Basque Country, which also involves encouraging the learning of both official languages of the Basque Country—Euskara and Spanish—with particular attention to ensuring young foreigners have the opportunity to learn Euskara (Basque Government, 2003, pp. 71-72). The PVI thus presents a more ambiguous articulation of a linguistically based nationalism when compared with the Catalanian case, which likely stems from the PNV’s commitment to reviving Euskara, but tempered by the reality that Spanish remains an important language in workplaces and Basque society more generally (Urla, 2012).

As immigration gained political traction in Spain, the Basque branch of the PP began to introduce populist rhetoric and defend the Spanish Law on Aliens more confidently. The 2005 elections returned the PNV-led nationalist coalition to the Basque executive and the tripartite government approved the second PVI in June of 2007, which was debated in a plenary session of the Basque Parliament the following year. The Basque PP put forth 39 motions for resolution to the second PVI, which included a plan to study the economic contributions of immigrants to the Basque Country and carry out more inspections of apartments thought to be housing illegal immigrants. During the debate, Madrazo denounced the PP for “electioneering” and seeking to “connect with the segment of the population who holds negative views on immigration, “trying to feed racist and xenophobic sentiments, a strategy that has functioned well in other countries” (Astekari digitala 2008).

The minister’s words, supported by the tripartite government, were driven not only by the resolution proposals, but also by the PP’s electoral campaign at the state level that featured the controversial ‘integration contract.’ The PP’s proposal would oblige all immigrants in Spain to affirm their commitment to Spanish laws and to do everything possible to learn Spanish and integrate into the national culture. The tripartite government perceived the ‘integration contract’ proposal as an assimilationist policy that runs counter to their integration model, which does not require immigrants to abandon their customs and origins. During debate, Medrazo remarked that the PP’s integration contract is meant to foment anti-immigrant sentiments and undermine the dignity of

immigrants by obliging them to “take an afternoon siesta, eat paella, and be submissive to the monarchy” (Astekari digitala 2008). The tripartite executive pointed to the second PVI as an affirmation of their commitment to foster a truly intercultural society that is based on respect for diverse identities that live together in the Basque Country (Basque Government, 2007).

The 2009 Basque elections brought to an end nearly three decades of PNV-led governments.<sup>10</sup> The Basque PP and the *Partido Socialista de Euskadi* (PSE) formed the first ‘non-nationalist’ coalition government to govern since the first Basque elections in 1980.<sup>11</sup> After winning the 2004 elections, the PSOE provided amnesty to a number of illegal immigrants, which the PP claimed was akin to rewarding immigrants for breaking the law. Nevertheless, in the Basque context, the two parties were united by their commitment to block the sovereigntist intentions of the PNV and other nationalist parties. In 2010, the coalition used their executive powers to close the juridical service called HELDU (Legal Service and Social Care for Immigrants), which was put in place by the prior nationalist government to provide immigrants with specialized advice on legal procedures concerning their regularization. The HELDU service earned rave reviews from immigration associations in the Basque Country because it helped to ameliorate the vicious circle created by the Law on Aliens (López, 2009). The nationalist parties in the Basque Parliament criticized the decision to close HELDU and many PNV-governed town councils asked the government to reconsider its decision (El Mundo, 2010).

The non-nationalist government decided to take a two-year period to reflect upon and evaluate the second PVI before enacting a third, soliciting complaints from the PNV. The non-nationalist government was true to its word, however, and approved the third immigration framework with a revised name, *Plan Vasco de Inmigración, Ciudadanía, y Convivencia Intercultural*. This framework was approved by the governing council in late November 2011 and presented to the Basque Parliament for debate in February of 2012. The PNV humbly acknowledged that it agrees with the proposed actions and philosophy of the plan, but still put forth 38 motions for resolution, touching upon sensitive issues such as working conditions for immigrants, interculturalism, campaigns condemning xenophobic attitudes, and special programs for refugees (Antia, 2012). These resolutions continue the PNV’s attempt to position itself to ‘left’ on immigration issues. This cannot be explained by ideology alone, as the PNV is a traditional centre-right party that identifies itself as part of European Christian Democratic party family. The PNV has connected immigration with the broader nationalist discourse to reinforce its claim that the Basque nation has different values than the Spanish one and buoy national solidarity.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to both document and explain the development of the immigration debate in the Basque Country and Catalonia. Both autonomous communities within Spain are home to strong nationalist movements that were, to some extent, responsible for the decentralization of Spain following the end of Francoism and the transition to democracy. SSNPs, the main representatives of political nationalism in the Basque

Country and Catalonia, have relentlessly projected the image of a cohesive territorially based national community that does not belong to the nation associated with the state. The message of internal cohesiveness from SSNPs has often pointed to distinct languages, cultures, values, and racial characteristics that mark the nation off from the wider state. The intuitive argument that immigrants would be threatening to sub-state national cohesiveness and solicit exclusionary responses from SSNPs has not been borne out. In fact, we find in both cases strong discourses by main SSNPs that favour the inclusion of immigrants into the national territory with few obligations.

During the first two waves of internal migration from central and southern Spain to the Basque and Catalan territories, it was Basque nationalism that proffered a more exclusionary response. According to Arana's original doctrine for the PNV, Euskara was of secondary importance to race, and thus an immigrant could not 'become Basque.' Whilst in Catalonia, the national identity pivoted around residence and respect for the indigenous language and culture, allowing newcomers the ability to integrate. This variation had disappeared by the time foreign immigration became a political and social issue in Spain around the turn of century. Neither the PNV nor the CiU used its dominant position as the central party in its respective autonomous parliament to foster populist anti-immigrant rhetoric or pursue tough assimilationist policies. Certainly, this outcome fits with Kymlicka's argument that political autonomy leads sub-state nations to adopt post-ethnic multiculturalism in response to foreign immigration. Nevertheless, the teleological nature of the argument neglects the instrumental nature of the key causal mechanism between autonomy and openness to diversity: the imperative to reproduce the nation by connecting new distinguishing values with the broader nationalist struggle.

This comparison of Catalonia and the Basque Country also provides further insights as to why SSNPs sometimes shift their position regarding the nationalism-immigration nexus. Autonomic parliaments and institutions serve as a focal point for nationalist mobilization because they provide incentives for SSNPs to preserve decentralized powers and acquire new ones (Lecours, 2012, p. 274). In the context of party competition along both the right-left and nationalist-centralist axes, SSNPs must stake a position that is both vote-maximizing and still can be connected to the values of the nation. It is not a coincidence that the CiU unveiled its plan to install an 'integration contract' linking cultural integration to citizenship rights while the Generalitat was governed by a leftist coalition made up of nationalists and a constitutionalist party sympathetic to Catalan issues. In the Basque case, the PNV seized an opportunity to make diversity a new marker of identity in response to the state-level reforms to Law on Aliens by the PP and its venerable attack on Basque nationalism. The PNV and its coalition partners have since been consistent in criticizing attempts to deprive immigrants of social rights and creating distinctions between illegal and legal immigrants. Moreover, the identity aspect of the PNV's program has supported interculturalism without assimilation and a soft emphasis on Euskara as an important language for immigrants to have the opportunity to learn. No regional parties in the Basque Country have taken far right populist stances on immigration, allowing the PNV to confidently maintain the link between the promotion of internal diversity and Basque values.

It is worth mentioning that the rapidly changing political landscapes in the Basque Country and Catalonia may change the current manner in which immigration is framed by the main SSNPs. The recent ‘separatist turn’ by the CiU and its support for a sovereignty referendum raises many questions about how both illegal and legal immigrants would be managed in an independent Catalonia. In the Basque case, the renunciation of violence by ETA and the *izquierda abertzale* movement translated into a legal political coalition of *abertzale* parties, Euskal Herria Bildu (EHB), which won the second most seats to the PNV in the 2012 Basque elections. Notably, EHB does not accept the legitimacy of the recent *Pacto Social Por La Inmigración en Euskadi* because the EHB rejects the Spanish state’s exclusive control over the control immigration flows and attribution of nationality. It remains to be seen if the PNV will also take up the cause of strongly pursuing more competencies in the immigration ambit.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The central (Spanish) government retains exclusive authority over immigrant admissions and naturalization.

<sup>2</sup> This was the first plan of its kind in any autonomous community of Spain.

<sup>3</sup> By the end of PP’s term as a majority government in 2004, the relationship between the CiU and PP would become fractured, but at this point, it was not.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the federation between the two constituent parties of the CiU—*Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) and *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (UDC)—had slightly different ideological profiles and baseline positions on immigration according to official party documents. The Catholic and more right-leaning UDC stressed the need for Catalonia to “adopt those traits of alien cultures which enrich our own,” while the CDC placed more emphasis on obtaining more powers for the Generalitat to allow Catalonia to create the “necessary conditions for immigrants to integration” (Guibernau, 2004, pp. 129-139).

<sup>5</sup> Some scholars have challenged the argument that ETA’s nationalism was inclusionary. Both Elorza (1978) and Jáuregui (1981) suggest that the traditionalists within ETA accepted Arana’s idea that Basque nationalist was undergirded by an ethnicity that one cannot join, but must be born into.

<sup>6</sup> As of 1998, only 0.7 per cent of the Basque Country’s population was born outside of Spain.

<sup>7</sup> The PNV is a traditional European Christian Democratic party with fairly conservative views on the management of the economy, whereas the EA and IU are more left-leaning parties.

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with former Basque Director of Immigration, Bilbao, 23 September 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Plenary session of the Basque Parliament, 06/08/03/00/0056, 09/06/2000, 55, 4.

<sup>10</sup> See Calle and Sanchez-Cuenta (2009) for an explanation of why nationalist rule came to an end.

<sup>11</sup> The relationship between the PSOE and PP at the state level has become more acrimonious in recent decades, ending the informal pact to govern by consensus adopted following the transition.

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