

Spanish essays - euskadi ta askatasuna



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The Evolution of the social support for ETA from its foundation to present day.

DISCUSSION

Modern-day Spain is comprised of seventeen autonomous communities, several of whom share cultural ties. However, the primary galvanizing force behind the Spanish kingdom was Catholicism, established as a state religion following the expulsion of Moorish conquerors in the late 15th century. As a result, Catholicism, not ethnicity, became the tie that bound the seventeen communities under the Spanish monarchy. Compared with the rest of the various provinces of Spain, the Basque people have little in common linguistically speaking. Like Catalonia, *Pais Vasco*, or Basque Country, is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain, today the point of the Spanish economic spear. It came naturally that a separatist movement would evolve; much like the Kurds of the Middle East who have strong populations in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, the Basque people are scattered across northern Spain and southwestern France. As the separatist movement grew under the brutal dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, a part of the Basque nationalist movement resorted to violence, manifested in 1959 with the creation of *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), a notorious terrorist group who today has claimed responsibility for the deaths of more than 800 Spaniards (West 1998, p. xxv). Viewed by some in Spain and abroad as little more than villains, ETA is also positively regarded by others for their forward views on race, religion, and socialism.

The Spanish government regards ETA as a terrorist group and refuses to accede to its demands as long as attacks are carried out against the civilian

population. To Spain, ETA is comprised of separatists who would advocate anarchy and chaos to achieve their goals. ETA's violence was sporadic from its inception in 1959. ETA first "introduced its version of nationalism in 1961, when it undertook its first armed action" (Kasmir 1996, p. 97). Though unsuccessful, the Basque nationalist movement had begun stirring in Spanish political thought. Initially disregarded as a negligible movement, the Spanish government only began to pay real attention to Basque nationalism after the 1968 assassination of San Sebastian police commissioner Meliton Manzanos and traffic policeman Jose Pardines (Mansvelt 2005, p. 66). Unlike other separatist movements of the world, however, public opinion supported ETA, as Manzanos was notorious for torture. Immense local support from Basque areas prompted ETA to continue their attacks, earning the Basque cause the collective enmity of a large portion of the Spanish people. Though perceived from an international stance as a contained military operation, the prevailing Spanish fear of Basque violence is the longevity of the movement. Unlike the two Palestinian Intifadas of 1987 and 2000, the Basque movement has existed as a violent movement for more than forty years, making compromise seem impossible. In addition, the violence incurred rarely involves civilians; unlike Palestinian and Irish separatist violence, ETA attacks target political and governmental figures. In addition, 77% of ETA attacks take place within Euskadi (Mansvelt 2005, p. 177). Very rarely do ETA attacks take place in major urban hubs such as Madrid or Barcelona. Neither Spain nor the Basque nationalists are willing to accept anything less than the complete realization of their goals. Spain's growing unemployment and waning economy cannot afford a Basque secession, and ETA cannot bear what they perceive is glaring inequities in the Spanish political system.

Though support was considered by the average Spanish citizen during ETA's fledgling years, moral approval plummeted with the increase of ETA violence, piquing in the 1980s.

Many Spaniards find it difficult to empathize with the Basque cause because of the nature of the argument for a Basque state. After all, most of the other communities speak different languages. The Spanish government feels it has made enough concessions "toward ethno regionalism" with its granting of relative autonomy among the different provinces (Mansvelt 2005, p. 176). Castilian, the official Spanish language, is spoken natively only in Madrid. Because of the linguistic diversity of the rest of Spain and the common Catholic religion, most Spaniards do not see the logic in Basque secession. ETA's non-militant factions fight to contend this position, using "language activism" as a means of rallying support from its non-radical contingencies (Mansvelt 2005, p. 93). That ETA can utilize such unorthodox means of separation makes the Basque nationalist movement wholly unique. Unlike Ireland, which fought Britain on the pretext of religion, ETA finds itself struggling to secure the most obvious cultural differences as reasons behind secession. ETA's lingual separation manifests itself in France as well, its "terrorist campaign [also] in pursuit of political independence for all seven Basque provinces" (West 1998, p. xv). Much like its diversified separatist logic base, ETA's structure is multi-tiered so as to invoke all support possible. Scholars liken the organization of ETA to "other violent movements" such as the "Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Shining Path, and neo-Nazi groups" because their "combatants are usually young males" (Mansvelt 2005, p. 183). In addition, ETA features several different tiers of action, extending its

appeal to all faces of society. Basque ETA volunteers participate in “ several levels of personal involvement”: “ the first and highest one concerns direct commitment to ETA” (Mansvelt 2005, p. 183). The most evident level of involvement, this level includes armed militants who engage in highly organized strikes on Spanish soil. The second involves those willing to engage in rioting and gang-like violence. The third and lowest comprises those who support ETA actions by voting for Basque nationalist parties. The legal faces of ETA, political parties and means are always approached first. Violence is also dismissed in favor of “[extorting] businessmen, professionals, and other persons eligible to pay *impuesto revolucionario*”, or “ revolutionary taxes” (Mansvelt 2005, p. 178). Though “ revolutionary taxes” used to be confined to the wealthy and privileged, ETA often functions in manners reminiscent of *Il Cosa Nostra*, or the Italian mob, in its extortion of small business owners and other people of average economic stature. Championing the cause of the people, therefore, has therefore turned into an organized crime syndicate, earning further spite from the Spanish majority, many of whom may have been erstwhile supporters of the nationalist cause. The conservative contingent of Basque country has begun to shy away from ETA’s staunch militarism on account of the association ETA has with “ anti-system movements, ecologists, squatters, radical feminists,” and other movements attributed to “ the ideological package of the violent organization” (Mansvelt 2005, p. 179).

Though socially liberal causes typically earn the respect and sympathies of many across the world, ETA has often likened itself to other separatist movements in its violent protests. ETA’s street violence, for example, “ was

often inspired by the situation in Palestine and IRA-linked actions in Northern Ireland,” evidenced by the “ Palestinian shawls” and “ IRA provisional sweaters” worn during riots (Mansvelt 2005, p. 179). These demonstrations, while garnering support from other separatist movements, prevent the Basque movement from gaining widespread European support, especially among countries such as the United Kingdom and Serbia. ETA’s violence strikes a particularly resonant chord in its glaring successes; a Basque targeted assassination claimed the life of then-Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973 (Shafir 1995, p. 11). Europe could ill afford more instability on the continent, already facing the mounting ethnic tensions of the Eastern Bloc. Furthermore, the forced segregation in Basque country over non-Basque Spaniards instituted to “ regain cultural and political clout as a fortress of Basque identity” prevented the integrated communities of metropolitan cities such as Berlin, Paris, London, and Rome to empathize; immigration is still a sensitive topic in many European circles (Kasmir 1996, p. 81). Israeli scholar Gershon Shafir notes the general academic disdain for violent extremism, especially unusual in a developed area such as Euskadi, whose citizens enjoy a higher standard of life than most all other Europeans. Many in the international community are wary of the Basque movement as they feel it is not just a matter of “ opposition to administrative centralization but also to capitalism itself” (Shafir 1995, p. 88). American intervention is henceforth a completely forgone conclusion, as a threat to capitalism equates with a natural misalignment with the North American superpower.

The Basque nationalist movement is not only contained within Spain, however. Basque nationalists “ have [instated] a European Chapter in their

[programs]" in an attempt to internationalize the movement (Mansvelt 2005, p. 162). Following ETA's example, many French Basque groups have emerged, among them an organization known as Iparretarrak who " since 1973 have used violence", dividing the French Basque community between those who support and those who condemn violent measures (Mansvelt 2005, p. 101). Resorting to violence and spurring like-minded movements across national borders has only led to the international association of virulent nationalism with violence, particularly the Basque brand of nationalism. ETA's manifestation in France has mirrored its Spanish counterpart, spreading street violence and polarizing the youth. Following the ETA return to violence, its legal face has been disaffected, losing credibility as a rational movement. While Basque politicians lobby fiercely for independence, ETA hampers all progress in its criminal activity. The international face ETA presents to world media is one of radicalist ideology, not desperate nationalist endeavor. Much like the oppressive Muslim countries of the Middle East, ETA has suppressed publications, the press, and airs " one-sided nationalist views on Basque TV", casting " serious doubts on the pluralist pretensions of the nationalists and their institutions" (Mansvelt 2005, p. 162). The measures taken by ETA's militant wings are predominantly those of intimidation, idle threats shouted by young men in the manner of Fatah and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) stone throwing.

However villainous they are regarded, ETA is also highly regarded among liberal circles for their liberal views and all-inclusion of a Basque state. Social support began nominally upon ETA's founding in 1959 by other separatist

movements such as those in Catalonia; once ETA began assassinating Spanish authorities in Euskadi and abroad, however, public support waned and became relegated to liberal radicals. Prior to ETA's establishment, the Basque nationalist movement had not mobilized militarily; consequently, the Spanish people regarded the conflict as a matter of ideals, understandable, as Franco-era Spain was incredibly repressive. Franco's repression earned ETA such sympathy that "in the waning years of the dictatorship, Basque nationalism and specifically ETA, presented the most daring challenge to Franco and as such attracted a novel degree of sympathy for the local cause which even extended to workers of non-Basque origin" (Shafir 1995, p. 115). ETA members were constantly martyred during heightened periods of tension in the 1980s, following Franco's death and the democratization of Spain when "high-ranking Spanish politicians and civil servants" created "Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberacion (GAL), death squads who killed, took hostage, and illegally arrested supposed ETA members" (Mansvelt 2005, p. 65). The evolving Spanish government and economy began to take on more capitalist undertones, and liberal Spanish youth began to side with the unabashedly socialist nationalism that permeated North and East Spain. In addition, the heavily unionized nature of Spain initially lent ETA moral support. Unionization and egalitarian tendencies of Basque nationalism are wholly unique, and by their nature earned the respect of immigrants and Spaniards alike. Unlike most nationalist movements, ETA's cause is linguistically, not racially based. Basque scholars easily solved the contemporary African and Middle Eastern immigrant issues facing Europe. Even Algerian and Moroccan nationals could take part in the Basque movement, so long as they spoke Euskara (Basque). ETA "adopted a more

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accommodationist perspective toward immigrants, though one of dubious coherence (Shafir 1995, p. 4). A byproduct of the Basque attempt to disregard religion and race as inherently “Spaniard” traits, the universal albeit conditional acceptance of foreigners earned the approval of many American and British scholars. Popular support for ETA and the Basque nationalist movement is represented in ETA membership in countries such as “Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Cape Verde, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Germany, Holland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Panama, Sao Tome and Principe, Uruguay, and Venezuela” (ICT 2003).

Unlike the majority of the heavily Catholic Spanish nation, the Basque left-wing nationalist movement sparked by ETA is accepting of other “like-minded” populations including homosexuals, feminists, and socialists. Prior to the escalation of Basque violence the Spanish working class shared the socialist sentiments of the movement, though they did not approve of secession. Socialism’s supporters rallied around the Basque cry that supplication to the Spanish government was “built in the belly of capitalism” (Kasmir 1996, p. 87). The common values of the Basque nationalist movement naturally politically aligned the ETA with Marxist elements of Europe, which called for a popular uprising among the people. A large student movement known as “las Cabras” formed, whose sole purpose was the propagandizing of Spanish civil buildings; as a student movement, the Basque nationalist struggle became one supported in higher intellectual structures, bolstering its reputation as inherently more rational than the Irish separatists who were of the same race and religion as their British occupiers (Kasmir 1996, p. 97).

The general international acceptance of the Basque movement despite the ETA's violence is indicative of the many shared goals nationalist movements share. Unlike the secessionist Kashmiri movement of India that could possibly destroy Indian unity, Basque nationalism would have no such adverse affect. The world recognizes this, as do the Basques and Spaniards. Popular support stems mostly from economic sympathy; the Basque population enjoys a much higher standard of living than the average Spaniard. The feasibility of the Basque movement is another reason behind international approval; the potential Basque state may very well be as wealthy as Luxembourg if granted independence.

CONCLUSION

Heavily influenced by the IRA and PLO, ETA took cues from peace developments in the other organizations, attempting to secure a 1992 peace treaty with Spain in a secret Algerian summit. However, the hard line positions taken by the Spanish government prevented a peace from being reach, and the conflict continued, stopping for a brief 14-month ceasefire. The majority of the Spanish population had begun to call for an end to ETA violence by 1992, especially after Spanish immigrants to Basque country reported prejudice and hostility. ETA is rightly perceived to the same degree as the rest of the world perceives Islamic militancy; its purpose and rationale do not appeal to many Spaniards who are unable to see the logic behind secession, especially after the post-Franco democratic governments granted cultural and relative administrative autonomy.

ETA had plentiful public support in Spain and abroad from its 1959 inception to its first political killing in 1968; following its militant activity, ETA's support system was reduced to other international separatist movements such as the Palestinian Intifada and the British bombing campaigns of the IRA. The intellectual revival of socialism in Europe in the 1970s then garnered the support of the world's students, especially given the context of Basque nationalism.

ETA's goals appeal to many outside Basque Spain; the conditional inclusion of immigrants and other ethnic groups is a relatively innovative tool in the nationalist struggle. African movements such as Black Nationalism under Uganda's Idi Amin were fascist in nature. ETA supported immigrants so long as they adopted Euskara as a first language, a historically opposite action to the Spanish Inquisition that made Catholicism the binding religion of the "Spanish people" in the late 15th century. Like the IRA and Sinn Fein, ETA and its political affiliates struggle within the system, resorting to violence sporadically and at times inopportunistly. Though they stop short of denouncing ETA publicly, Basque nationalist politicians are perceived as more representative of the movement than ETA, allowing the common Spaniard the luxury of sympathizing with the Basque movement while simultaneously denouncing ETA.

The Basque Diaspora in France and Spain, though morally unified, has not merged ideologically as French Basque populations are wary of ETA violence. Identifying themselves more with France than with a Basque nation, the French Basque populations serve as a constant counter to Basque contentions of secession. Their obstinate rejection of violence further

discredits ETA worldwide. In addition, the Spanish-speaking ETA's foot soldiers only lend a more Spanish identity to the Basques, lending doubt to the authenticity of ETA's ethnic and linguistic claims. Spanish support of ETA and the Basque nationalist cause happened only when ETA called for a cease-fire during the first years of the Aznar administration. When Aznar agreed to discuss Basque terms and the future existence of a Basque state, Spaniards from all parts of the country threatened secession unless their demands were also met; the wealthy Basque state posed a special threat to Spanish cohesion. However, ETA also provided Spain with a common enemy; Galicians, Catalans, and Castilians have little in common, outside their shared trepidation and revulsion of militancy. The ETA needs Spain to a degree; without Spanish repression, the ETA would be just another extremist group. Among Basques themselves, the "standing of ETA" is difficult to measure (Shafir 1995, p. 201). Recent demonstrations against ETA violence have recurred since the December 1999 end of ETA's ceasefire. However, many "demonstrations in support of ETA" have also taken place; the rift between those advocating violence and those condoning it continues to grow today. Whether regarded as villains or heroes, most Spaniards and people abroad will agree that ETA exists for a purpose, willing to sacrifice itself for a belief, "unlike the GAL" and Spanish guerilla groups of the past (Mansvelt 2005, p. 68). The future of ETA and the Basque nationalist movement, however, lies with extremist groups both against and for secession.

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