Basque-Atlantic shores: ethnicity, the nation-state and the diaspora in Europe and America (1808–98)

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Abstract
Classical approaches to nationalism and ethnicity have traditionally understood ethnic groups as ethno-nationalist groups that were irrevocably predisposed to constitute political entities in order to preserve and promote their assumed socio-historical and cultural markers. However, we argue that the Basque case illustrates much the opposite. Basque ethnic identity was not only utilized by the Basque nationalist movement, but it helped to form diverse processes of national identifications such as the Spanish, French, or Venezuelan for that matter throughout the nineteenth century. In this sense, the debate on Basque ethnicity is not a marginal issue in the re-elaboration of Spanishness and identity politics on both sides of the Atlantic but a central and main one in the Spanish and Latin American national and state-building discourses.

Keywords: Basque; ethnicity; nation-state; diaspora; state; Latin America.

Introduction
Ethnicity as a cultural tool may contribute to the formation of multiple processes of coexisting or opposing national identifications. Though not exclusively based on ethnicity, ethnic identities can help construct different types of nationalisms (Neil Conzen 1992; De Vos 1995). Ideologies and political cultures can also make use of certain elements of a given ethnic identity; although identity in relation to a group is something quite different from an ideology, which refers to a specific political project. Moreover, a given identity does not owe its existence to a particular ideology, and the association of an identity with a particular ideology is not always exclusive.
By examining the Basque-Spanish case in the nineteenth century, we will explore how ethnic nationalism, as well as other diverse and contradictory contemporaneous cultures and ideologies in states with multiple nations capitalized on ethnic identity. Our argument is that an ethnic identity did not always become a unique ethno-national identity, but rather helped to formulate diverse political expressions in a changing world, such as that of nineteenth-century Europe and America.

The Basque diaspora and transnational spaces, 1492–1898

As of June 2007, the Basque diaspora has engendered 198 associations in twenty-four countries, each explicitly self-defined as Basque. Authors such as Douglass and Bilbao (1975) and Oiarzabal (2004, 2005, 2006) have reformulated contemporary and past Basque identities in a global, transnational, and diasporic context. Diaspora communities are formed by emigrants who shared a collective identity in their homeland, which socio-economic and/or political conditions forced them to leave, or who for other reasons chose to settle in another country. Collectively and associatively, some of them attempt to preserve or develop cultural, religious and even political expressions of their identity, reflecting different degrees of assimilation into their host societies. Diaspora associations create transnational networks that maintain varying degrees of personal, institutional, cultural, social, economic, political and business ties with the homeland and with other countries where there is a Basque presence: a globe-spanning network of attachments and allegiances.

Pagden and Canny consider the history of the formation of specific identities in colonial societies to be 'the history of the transformation of (cultural or social) values', which were 'initially imported from the metropolitan cultures'. They argue that this transformation was the result of 'self-perception', 'self-assertion' and 'the recognition of separateness' (1987, p. 269) from metropolitan values. Historical and socio-anthropological studies (Douglass and Bilbao 1975; Douglass 1989; Azcona 1992; Iriani 2000) showed that Basques were already a self-aware, distinctive ethnic group when they arrived in the New World in 1492. Douglass and Bilbao argued that 'this awareness was translated into collective actions, mutual assistance, [and] a common stance towards outsiders [such] that the Basques were set apart from other Iberian and Creole groups' (1975, p. 74). Additionally, claims to universal nobility and pure blood made by the inhabitants of the Basque Provinces secured their access to administrative, military and other high positions throughout the Hispanic Empire, 'since access to administrative posts and honorific positions was reserved for persons who could demonstrate "Old-Christian" [i.e. pre-Arab conquest]
genealogical credentials, which is to say those with a demonstrable claim to *limpieza de sangre* or clean blood* (Douglass 2000, p. 142).

Several authors (García 1996; Gonzalo 1996; Herzog 1996; Ortiz de la Tabla y Ducase 1996) have demonstrated how the Basques knit themselves into tight networks of powerful families who were the hegemonic, socio-economic and political elites throughout the Empire’s colonial and post-colonial eras. Casaus (1996, p. 298) estimated that in the eighteenth century, 70 per cent of the hegemonic elite in Central America were of Basque ancestry. The traditional Basque merchant role during early modern times in northern Europe was exported and exponentially increased in the New World through the formation of trans-oceanic colonial trading and business networks that linked Basque communities throughout the Hispanic Empire to the homeland. Lynch (1964, p. 35) estimated that an average of 65 per cent of New World trade was controlled by Basques between the beginning of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Bonds of solidarity among members of Basque communities, expressed through historical associationism, collective action and mutual support, illustrate the dynamics of diaspora identity formation and the maintenance of cross-border, trans-oceanic and ethnic collective networks. Basques established aid societies, confraternities and voluntary religious, cultural and ethnic solidarity organizations in the Hispanic territories as well as in the Peninsula, soliciting benefactors and creating business networks on both sides of the Atlantic (Bilbao 1992; Escobedo, De Zaballa and Álvarez 1996). According to Pescador those associations and networks illustrated the emergence of a ‘pan-Basque colonial identity that emphasized common cultural traits over Old Country social markers, such as status, origin, and household membership’ (2004, p. 21). He argued that these organizations, particularly the confraternities, united Basques from different provinces to common religious and linguistic purposes, creating a generic sense of Basque identity. Consequently, ‘the differences among provinces and historic rivalries among neighboring jurisdictions withered’ (ibid., p. 116).

By 1825, all the American colonies had achieved political independence after long, brutal civil wars against the Spaniards and their local allies, ‘undergoing the process of transformation from societies of immigrants to societies of natives’ (Elliott 1987, p. 12). Spanish control in *Las Americas* was reduced to the Antilles and the Philippines. Peninsular Spaniards were given the choice of either leaving the new American countries or renouncing their old world ‘citizenship’, with the option of retaining their national identities symbolically or sentimentally. Basque post-colonial emigration continued to America, particularly to Río de la Plata (today’s Argentina and Uruguay) during
the 1830s. A rough estimate of around 200,000 Basques immigrated legally into the New World from the 1830s to the early 1900s (Azcona 1992; Iriani 2000). Douglass and Bilbao commented that 'there was no discontinuity in the awareness of a former migratory tradition' (1975, p. 135); emigration had been etched into the collective memory of families and villages over the previous 400 years. Moreover, the Napoleonic military campaigns on the Basque territories of Spain, followed by civil wars (1833–9 and 1872–6) between liberals and traditionalists (called Carlists because their candidate to the Spanish throne was Carlos/Charles of Bourbon), and the famine of 1846–7, forced many Basques into exile or emigration (Douglass 1989). The rise of capitalism and the demand for wage labourers pulled many Basques out of their homeland and into countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada or the United States, constituting a Basque labour diaspora.

In the 1850s, the newly independent countries of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile created positive discrimination immigration policies that specifically requested Basques, among other European groups, as new settlers and manual labourers in a 'civilizing' enterprise based on racial purity (whiteness) and Catholicism. Additionally, in 1853 a Spanish Royal Order lifted previous restrictions on emigration. Within an assumed 'anti-Spanish' post-colonial and post-war context, peninsular immigrants found it easy to detach themselves from the negative stereotyping associated with Spanish identity, which was seen not only as colonial, or imperial, but also as national and in clear competition with the host identity. To a certain degree, they could claim other dimensions of their multiple identities, such as Basqueness. At that particular time, being Spanish or Basque was not yet thought of as hierarchical – national vs. local – or in terms of mutually exclusive identities, which was intensely the case by the end of the nineteenth century. The rise of Basque nationalism and the reinvention of Spanish nationalism after the loss of Cuba and Puerto Rico to the United States fostered the polarization between Basque and Spanish identities in political terms (Álvarez Junco 1996).

Basque identities were shaped by Basques' own experiences of migration and its complex interrelation with nation-state building processes taking place throughout the American continent. The ethnic politics of Basque identity construction spread throughout the American continent by the establishment of immigrant associations and the work of ethnic leaders in diaspora communities. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, waves of Basque post-colonial immigration established new ethno-cultural transnational organizations in every Latin American country (Douglass and Bilbao 1975, p. 170). Several periodicals by and for the diaspora communities began around this time, connecting
Basques across geographies and generations. They offered general news on local communities and helped construct a Basque diasporic consciousness among immigrant communities and their descendants. Diaspora media helped to promote a sense of a common transnational and transatlantic identity. This increased the sense of interconnectedness among Basques, who shared common experiences of migration and identity on both sides of the Atlantic (Molina 2005a). Diaspora media were instrumental in shaping and articulating their own particular sense and understanding of local culture, which was openly influenced by interaction with political and cultural identities and by cohabitation with other groups in their host societies, resulting in multiple interpretations of a generic sense of being Basque.

From the Hispanic Empire to the Spanish State: the origins of the Basque question, 1808–98

In a war with the United States of America in 1898, what was once one of the largest Western empires on earth lost its last colonies, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines (Balfour 1995, 1997; Portillo 2006a), and found itself reduced to an embryonic, modern European liberal state with a Castilian nucleus and barely more than its original lands in the Iberian Peninsula. Under the tutelage of conservative and liberal theorists, the once-hegemonic Spanish monarchy managed to retain a third-class seat in the Western concert of nations. Scholars such as Boyd (1997), de Pablo, Mees and Rodriguez (1999) and Mees (2001) argued that Spain as a modern nation was still far from ‘complete’ by the end of nineteenth century, because it lacked uniformity, alleged distinctiveness and uniqueness, which theoretically must be present in a ‘classical nation’ (Smith 1992). They argued that, due to its weak oligarchic state, inadequate mass schooling system, divided political class and the triumph of liberal-moderate positions, Spain was incapable of developing mechanisms for political, economic and cultural integration, exemplified by the late creation of national symbols, such as flag, anthem or historical myths of origin. In addition, autonomous political systems in the Basque Provinces and Navarre defied the formation of a unique and centralized judicial, fiscal and administrative system for the whole Spanish national territory.

Consequently, de Pablo, Mees and Rodriguez argued that ‘the failure of Spanish nationalism in the nineteenth century, or the crisis of its social penetration’ facilitated ‘the political success of alternative nationalisms in fin-de-siècle Spain’ (1999, p. 20). They contended that ‘Basque nationalism offered a new identity, a new sentiment of community, with their own symbolic references, emotional communitarian ties, and relationships and mechanisms of socialization’ (1999,
pp. 56–7). Rubio (2003, pp. 28–9, 155–77) strongly supported this argument by stating that 'the weak penetration' of the Spanish State in the Basque Country allowed the development of a specified Basque national conscience. The loss of the Basque autonomous system in 1876 provoked an identity crisis, a sense of having lost the traditional values of the collective imaginary of society. These scholars were strongly influenced by theories of nationalism such as Hroch's (1985) stages for 'national awakening' and presupposed that increased social communication and weakened local and regional identities were necessary 'preconditions' for a nation-building process. This perspective has permeated historical research on Spanish nation-state building, asserting that the survival and strong maintenance of identities, such as those of the Basques, Catalans or Galicians in the nineteenth century, should be seen as a sure symptom of weak nation-building, especially in those historical regions, and a forerunner to state-seeking nationalisms (de Riquer 1994, 2001). However, authors such as Sahlins (1991), Núñez Seixas (2001a), Archilés and Martí (2001) and Molina (2005b) give evidence of more complex and shifting loyalties in nineteenth-century Spain. They argue that state nationalism and even the states that carried out nation-building policies during that century also supported local and regionally based ethnic identities in order to reinforce the roots of national identity among the population.

The nineteenth-century Basque Country shows potential for a new reading on the changing frontiers of loyalties and allegiances in Western culture. We propose that nation-building also implied region- and ethnicity-building, to the point that the former may have been very dependent on the latter. Collective identity should be seen as a set of concentric (emotional) spheres that complement each other while acknowledging that all forms of social identity result from historical processes that can be modified by political and social change. In modern political terms, the idea of the Spanish nation began with the birth of liberalism during the 'War of Independence' against Napoleon (1808–14), and experienced quick and intense social diffusion in the heat of the conflict unleashed by the long struggle between liberals and traditionalists. The 1812 Constitution of Cádiz was the first liberal attempt to transform a monarchical empire into a national community of 'Spanish people in both hemispheres'. Spain was imagined as a nation of citizens, though plagued by history and religion, which was allegedly the necessary precondition for the emergence of the Spanish political body. Similarly, the need to come to terms with the claims of representatives from the colonies forced Spanish liberals towards a more organic concept of the nation. Anxious for Spain to continue as a multi-continental political community, they proclaimed the American territories to be part of the nation, and the rights of their citizens
equal to those living in Europe. Spain was to become a nation extended within the Empire and moulded to its shape (Portillo 2006a).

At the beginning of this revolutionary period, peninsular liberals found themselves caught in contradictory situations regarding the American colonies and the Basque Provinces. Following the principles of liberalism, representatives of the American Creoles proposed to the Parliament of Cádiz political autonomy and self-government for their diverse territories within a supra-transoceanic imperial parliament to be established for the equal representation of all ‘Spanish citizens’ – meaning those with Hispanic European ancestry (Anna 1998). Nonetheless, the Constitution of 1812 decided to exclude the Creole elite from full and equal participation in the new project of the Hispanic liberal state. The euro-centric position of the peninsular liberals ultimately forced the colonies to seek independence as the only viable solution for achieving the ideals espoused by those same liberals. However, in a contrary move the peninsular liberal governments opted for a singular solution in relation to the quasi-autonomous territories of the Basque Provinces and Navarre, which were ruled by the old provincial laws (fueros): one of the last surviving remnants of the ancien régime, which promoted an extensive system of fiscal, legal and administrative self-government (see Monreal 2005). These provinces were included in the liberal project and their local laws recognized, granting them political autonomy. In some ways, this tolerance towards the Basque privileges was a lesson learned from the recent crisis with the American Empire and was linked to the necessity of having to cope with what remained of it.

Toward the end of the First Carlist War (1833–9), the Law of 25 October 1839 was enacted to regulate relations between the Basque Provinces and the central power of Madrid. The result was the survival of the ancient Basque territorial privileges under a new liberal form (Portillo 2006b). Modifications to the Basque autonomous system after 1839 safeguarded most of its predominant elements, such as the financial autonomy of the region, exclusion from compulsory military service and the control of regional politics by local elites. It was the Spanish national identity, brought about by the liberal revolutionary process that inspired the Basque elite to join forces in order to construct a modern national culture. Spanish liberalism appealed to a strong historicism and regionalism by presenting new political thought as a revival of medieval local parliamentary institutions, thus defending itself against conservative accusations of moving too far away from national tradition. Along these lines, Basque local laws were presented as an outcome of the liberal character of the Spanish nation. They were broadcast in the public sphere as something purely Spanish, an idealized relic of ‘pre-Liberal constitutionalism’.
Consequently, Basque liberals and most Spanish liberals identified with the Basque tradition (Molina 2005b).

This identification process clashed head on with the roots of Basque ethnic singularity, which was based on their own autonomous history, the local home-rule tradition and the Basque language, Euskara. These elements were connected to the iconographic history and culture of the Spanish nation. The medieval wars against Arab invaders (the Reconquista), the American and Asian Empire and the 'national' war against Napoleon were the three main myths that demonstrated the essential link between Basques and Spaniards. Fuerismo, the discourse of the collective identity associated with local traditional laws or fueros, played the role of an ethnic regionalism, encouraging a strong and primordial local ethnic tie to the Spanish national sphere, defined by Castilian ethnic parameters. With its local commemorations and symbolic mobilizations presented as a kind of multiple patriotism – local, regional and national – it became a widespread elite movement including all Basque liberal factions as well as neo-absolutist groups such as the Carlists. Fuerismo defined Basque identity as an ethnicity based on an orthodox religion (Catholicism), the Euskara language, a sense of historical continuity given by the oral (adjective of fueros) tradition and a sense of common ancestry. This was fed by a secular mythology related to the supposed first inhabitant of the Iberian Peninsula, called Tubal – the grandson of the biblical Noah. There was also a sense of an unbroken biological continuity related to the assumed aristocratic origin of the Basque people, defended by one of the most important local myths – that of universal nobility. This secular myth imagined all Basques to be common descendants of one original family, distinct from the rest of Spanish peoples, and provided some sense of genetically inherited differences associated with enduring rural traditions and a local political system embedded in traditional laws (Molina 2005a, following Barth 1969; Horowitz 1985; De Vos 1995; Hutchinson and Smith 1996).

Within the framework of the liberal revolution, Basque regionalism was a movement of ethnic leaders who attempted to create a dual identity: ethnic-Basque and civic-Spanish. The relation between regional and national identities was not immutable; they tended to clash in times of civil wars and revolutions. In fact, the linking of Basque local laws to the traditionalist insurrection during the Second Carlist War (1872-6) brought about the vehement abolition of the Basque autonomous system. The Spanish nationalistic elites considered Basque identity an intrinsic element of the peripheral traditionalist revolt that had firmly rejected the democratic State founded by the Revolution of 1868, which ended with the proclamation of the Spanish Republic in 1873. As a result of the liberal military victory over the traditionalists, the old Basque laws were abolished by the Law of
21 July 1876. However, in 1878 the President of the Spanish Government, Cánovas del Castillo, designed a special autonomous fiscal and administrative status for the Basque Provinces in the form of economic agreements, which were a pragmatic transition between the traditional local system and the liberal regime. Thus the Basque tradition was reinserted into the unitary idea of the Spanish nation (Castells 2003; Oiarzabal 2004; Molina 2005b).

After 1876, the ‘foral question’ became not only a question of defending historical legal rights within the Spanish nation-state, but also a question of preserving collective values bound to an ethnic identity, which had lost its most important political reference – the local laws. The ‘foral question’ became the ‘Basque question’. Basque regionalism maintained its dual patriotism, but strongly mythologized the old political way of life embodied in the lost laws. The historical context was changing. Industrial modernization and mass society brought thousands of immigrants and new socio-cultural and political movements, such as socialism, anti-clericalism and new local economic and political elites allied with the Madrid elite (Glas 1998). Sabino Arana (1865–1903), a son of defeated traditionalism, proposed a new conception of the Basque Country as an ethnic nation, heavily influenced by ethnic local culture. By mythologizing its history and culture, Basque nationalism imagined a pre-existing Basque identity and culture. Basque authenticity was believed to be based on a remote past that justified the present existence of the Basque nation. Nationalist discourse and its raison d'être was projected into the past, asserting certain direct links to what were considered common Basque myths of ancestry, origin and election: direct descent from the first inhabitants of Europe, with mysterious pre-Indo-European origins evidenced by linguistic, racial and biological distinctiveness (see Smith 1992, p. 21). According to Douglass, Lyman and Zulaika (1994, pp. 90–3) those ancient myths recreated a culture of continuity, purity, isolation and resistance, which ended the historical cohabitation of Spanish and Basque identities (see also Conversi 1997).

Arana’s nationalist discourse also meant an abrupt split with Basque regionalism. He reinterpreted local laws as national and constitutional Basque laws, the expression of independence and sovereignty. He stressed the incompatibility of these laws with the Spanish constitution, and by extension the nation-state, and called for the independence of the seven historical Basque Provinces – four in Spain and three in France – under the motto of Jaun-Goikua eta Legi Zarra (God and the Old Law). According to Conversi (1997), Corcuera (2002) and de la Granja (2002), Basque nationalism was born as a reactionary anti-Spanish and anti-liberal ideology, a doctrine perfectly reflected in its definition of who was considered Basque: those who had Basque ancestry, spoke Basque and were Catholic.
Sabino Arana believed that Basque identity was given by God and threatened by Spain, who sought to insert Spanishness into the Basque people. Conversi (1997) particularly argues that the Basque language also become a clear differentiating factor of great symbolic value for the national mission. Arana’s political project was the creation of a Confederation of Basque States or Euzkadi for Basques of pure race and Catholic religion. In 1895, he founded the Bizkai-Buru Batzar – the embryonic Basque Nationalist Party. The general outcry over the end of the Spanish Empire was still being heard when on 11 September 1898, Arana was elected provincial council member for the district of Bilbao and proceeded to demand independence for Euzkadi.

Across the Atlantic: Basque diaspora and homeland discourses

The processes of reconstructing diverse identifications transcended the frame of the Basque Provinces and the Spanish State as they were transplanted in America. The Atlantic Ocean was not a border but a channel for communicating national cultures and collective representation and identification. Basque identity travelled across the ocean and was reinterpreted, adjusting for migration experiences and the different socio-historical, cultural and political contexts of the host societies. The independence of the Hispanic colonies did not sever the personal, economic, commercial, cultural or political-institutional ties on both sides of the Atlantic, but those links were modified by the emergence of the nation-state both in Spain and in post-colonial America. The trans-oceanic relationships between the peninsula and the newly independent nation-states fuelled a complex exchange and reconstruction of collective identities in the nineteenth century.

Particularly from 1870 on, Basque emigrants arrived in countries that were engaged in nation-state-building processes similar to those developing in Spain, and which actively focused on the cultural and national homogenization of their inhabitants, including immigrants. This national politicization process was not incompatible with the promotion of ethnic loyalties among the emigrant communities, who were in effect new communities of citizens. In general terms, host countries such as the United States, Argentina or Uruguay promoted the creation of multiple and complementary identities around the idea of the nation as a civic identity, through the use of positive stereotypes related to immigrants. These countries modelled a multi-ethnic national state characterized by varying degrees of national assimilation of successive waves of European migration, through public education programmes, mandatory military service, intense commemoration policies, symbolism and nationalist saturation of the public space with patriotic parades and national monuments (Moya 1998; Devoto and González 2001). In a sense, new civic loyalties to the new
national host societies became part of the immigrant identity. Basques re-elaborated and reconstructed their own sense of identity to accommodate the diverse host-society identities, particularly the national identity. This illustrates the dialectical contradiction between becoming like those in their new countries while staying different, affirming their uniqueness and exclusiveness within the host societies, particularly in relation to other ethnic immigrant groups. This identitarian mechanism was not so different from what developed in European countries such as France, Germany, Italy or Spain in relation to identities described as ethnic, regional or local (Gjerde 1999, pp. 3–21). American countries that lacked prestigious pre-Columbian civilizations as immediate patriotic ancestors upon which to build their new nation found the central racial/ethnic constituent for their nations in the massive waves of European immigrants, such as the Basques. As a significant example of this, Aristides Rojas (Professor at the Universidad de Caracas, Venezuela) (1874, pp. 3–6, 16–42) argued for the need to build a nation not only upon the heroes of the fight for independence against Spain, such as el libertador Simón Bolívar, but also on his Basque etnia. Basques thus became part of the essence of the new Venezuelan nationality, among others. Rojas contended that Venezuela as a nation existed prior to Columbus’ arrival on the American continent but lay dormant, waiting for the Spanish people to ‘awaken’ it. Not just any Spaniard, but only the most biologically pure, a Basque, could accomplish this. Rojas went on to state that ‘Bolivar, the genius of America, is also the genius (genio) of Spain.’ The Basque element was the ethnic link between two worlds, and particularly between Venezuela and Spain. Rojas’ argument closely resembled those of Basque regionalist leaders in Spain a few years earlier, such as Antonio de Trueba (1873), one of the most influential in the nineteenth century. All of them exalted the virtues of the Basque people as the ‘Araucanos of the Pyrenees’, or as a ‘unique and timeless people’, a millenarian myth. The Basque etnia’s virtues, such as honesty, industriousness, stubbornness or patriotism, believed to be transmitted by blood, could be useful for stabilizing a nation – whether Venezuela or Spain – in periods of turmoil.

Basque ethnic leaders in America used local culture to create a new sense of Atlantic Basqueness, more symbolic than political, in order to accommodate the realities of the host country and avoid any potential clash between the two cultures and identities. Consequently, cultural elements of political origin, such as the fueros, capable of fostering strong internal cohesion in the homeland, had a more rhetorical content in America. Other elements, such as the Basque language, which was more symbolic in Europe, gained greater relevance in recreating the Basque identity in the diaspora. The ethnic element of the Basque-Atlantic shores 11
Basque identity allowed the immigrant community to manage its own identity in relation to specific circumstances and social and political contexts. In this regard, the nineteenth-century Basque diaspora associations were not far removed from Basque and Spanish politics. The first Basque diasporic organizations were created in Uruguay and Argentina as a response to the loss of political autonomy and the defeat of traditionalism in the Civil War of 1872–6. The Laurak Bat was established in 1876 in Montevideo (see Irigoyen 1998), and the following year La Sociedad Vasco-Española Laurak Bat – later known as Laurak Bat – was established in Buenos Aires as a political organization celebrating annual protests against the loss of Basque political autonomy in Spain in 1876. This act of remembrance for the lost fueros helped to amalgamate the diverse existing interpretations of regionalism. Both organizations sought to promote Basque culture, assisting only Basque immigrants from Spain. In 1895, the Centre Basque-Français and the Centro Navarro, both in Buenos Aires, were also established to attend to the needs of their respective compatriots: Basques from France and Navarrans from Spain (Cava, Contreras and Pérez 1992; Cava 1996; Márquez 1996).

The establishment of the Asociación Cultural y de Beneficencia Euskal Echea de Buenos Aires y de Lavallejo (1901/1916), in Argentina, was the first successful diaspora venture to integrate all Basques, from both sides of the Pyrenees, into one common cultural project by softening the regional rivalries and particularities from back home. By the end of the nineteenth century, Basque diaspora associations such as the Asociación Vasco-Navarra de Beneficencia from La Habana and the Laurak Bat of Montevideo, which had previously embraced Basque regionalism and its Laurak Bat motto, began to promote a more inclusive approach towards French Basques. To reflect this new inclusive policy, the Basque club of Montevideo was renamed Euskaldun Guztikiak Bat (All Basques are One) a decade after its creation and the Basque club from La Habana replaced the Laurak Bat motto with Euskal-Erria Ari da (The Basque Country in Motion), in order to include Basques from France. These associations exemplified an early pan-Basque (or Zazpiak Bat – Seven are One) identity, expressing a new Basque conscience and a new way of imagining themselves as a people united across homeland political divisions. This spread to other Basque diaspora associations the world over.

By the beginning of the new century, Basque identity was sometimes tied to Spanish identity, and sometimes not, due to the emergence of Basque nationalism as an identification-strengthening factor between Basque ethnic identity and the national identity of the host societies. Basque nationalism was exported to the diasporic communities in America under the motto of Zazpiak Bat – a nation-state-building project based on an imagined ancestral territory formed by seven
historical provinces. However, it was not until the 1920s that a true Basque national politicization of diaspora associations began in Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, the Philippines, the United States and Uruguay (Alvarez Gila 1996, 2000, 2005). Once again, the symbolic national politicization of the Basque ethnic identity in the diaspora depended on the participation of ethnic leaders (see Núñez Seixas 2001b, 2002, 2003). Increasing and diverse nationalist and regionalist propagandistic literature enhanced the imagination of diaspora Basques as part of wider Spanish and/or Basque communities. This Spanish or Basque ‘long-distance nationalism’ was understood as the ‘ideology of belonging that extends homeland politics into transnational social fields’ and ‘links together people living in various geographic locations and motivates them to action in relation to an ancestral territory and its government’ (Anderson 1991, p. 327).

Conclusions

The nineteenth century was a period characterized by ‘ethnic fever’, expressed in a search for an ancestry resulting from political efforts to establish authenticity and antiquity as the foundations for the European and American models of the nation-state (Thiesse 1999). The value of the ethnic element increased in the cultural market of the nation-state: the French searched for the Franks, the Germans for the Germanic tribes and the Italians for the eternal Rome. It acquired added value, guaranteeing the nation-state by recreating the inherited authenticity of ethnic groups, whose assumed essence was linked to past golden eras.

The Basque case of ‘ethnic fever’ is paradigmatic. It became the guarantor of the authenticity, and thereby the right to existence, of various nations, such as Spain, Argentina or Venezuela, which were culturally linked across the ocean by this ethnicity. Basque identity in the nineteenth century was neither homogeneous nor static, as it was composed of multiple loyalties and consciousnesses within the political panorama of Spain and the independent American countries. It also ratified the development of a status quo – the national identity as the supreme identity – which overrode other identities and loyalties. We have seen how the ethnic component of the Basque identity was utilized by diverse national identities to satisfy the need for patriotic ancestors on both shores of the Atlantic. This identity was profoundly reinterpreted and reutilized by the different ideologies and political cultures involved in the Atlantic crises of the Hispanic monarchy, and in the subsequent development of the nation-state system in America and Spain.

To some extent, the different ideological postulates of the century – liberalism, regionalism, traditionalism and Spanish and Basque
nationalisms – assumed Basque identity as the basis for their different conceptions of nations as territorial and somewhat homogeneous entities both in America and in Europe. Throughout the entire nineteenth century, these specific ideologies redefined the meaning of Basque ethnicity to fit their own political agendas: whether to regain power, build a state or impose an ideology. Every meaning given to the conceptualization of Basqueness is an historical construct tailored to its spatial and temporal context. Basques were bound by a multiplicity of institutional, economic and psychological ties to their localities, regions and metropolises. However, their attitudes and experiences of migration and settlement transcended the conventional identity boundaries of the country of origin. This helped them to reshape and bring out their own sense of identity as Basques, as Atlantic colonists and later as diverse American nationals.

During the nineteenth century Basque identity continued to reconstruct itself as a transnational, de-territorialized and diasporic identity that created a common identitarian space on both sides of the Atlantic and interlinked Basques from diverse nation-states and territories throughout the American continent. Consequently, Basque culture was a transatlantic network of multiple identifications, loyalties and consciousnesses that encouraged a multi-directional movement of ideas, materials and people, evidenced by the influence and the rapid dissemination of homeland political ideologies. This provides an Atlantic framework for analysis of American and peninsular identities, cultures and ideologies.

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Note

1. Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uruguay and Venezuela.

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