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66

THE MAKING OF THE BASQUE NATION

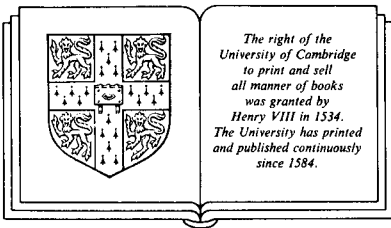
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Preface

A nation is a community of people who consider themselves to be a nation (Seton-Watson: 1977). To create a nation involves a dramatic substitution of diversity with uniformity. People who felt themselves to be culturally distinct and distant must be transformed into a community bound by cultural affinity and solidarity. An array of divergent traditional loyalties must be ruptured, reshuffled and redefined in order to fuse neatly around the boundaries of this community. This monograph is a study of Basque nationalism and the means by which this complex, often violent, political phenomenon created the Basque nation.

To understand Basque nationalism I initially attempted to concentrate on only one manifestation of it – in the first instance, the Basque language schools (*ikastolas*), in the second, nationalism in a specific village. The intention was to use a small-scale study as a means by which to view the Basque movement as a whole. However, this narrow approach yielded a narrow, partial picture. The critical aspect of Basque nationalism remained obscure. This aspect was that Basque nationalism has transformed the culturally diverse human raw material upon which it operated into a national entity. It has endowed this entity with new collective representations and with claims to political rights, most of which are currently recognized by the Spanish state. The more I learned about Basque nationalism the more I became aware that it involved a closed system of belief that produced wide-ranging processes of ideological and political organization, mobilization and legitimation. It was the nature of those beliefs and of the processes generated by their logic that I wanted to understand. In consequence, I felt forced to adopt a telescopic, rather than microscopic approach to my subject.

Although I have regularly visited the Basque country since 1969, my main research was based on two periods of fieldwork. The initial period took place in the summer of 1971 when I lived in a village near San Sebastian. The purpose of this field trip was to collect information for a postgraduate dissertation. In addition to the valuable material assembled at this time, I gained enduring personal contacts that were to prove crucial for the success of my second period of fieldwork.

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I returned to the Basque country in February 1975 and remained until September 1976. While the Basque country during 1971 was relatively peaceful, during my second period in the field the Basque country was convulsed by a level of violence unparalleled in the post-civil war era. The period corresponded roughly to the two years surrounding the death of General Francisco Franco in November 1975. During these two years in the Basque country more than 140 people died through political violence. Many thousands of people were arrested for politically motivated offences and there was convincing evidence that a large portion of these were subjected to torture. This violence was a constant part of my fieldwork and had serious effects on the manner in which my research was conducted.

My research proceeded on three levels. First, I cautiously expanded my contacts with urban nationalists in Bilbao and San Sebastian in order to build the networks required to operate with some mobility inside Basque political circles. Because of the bitter polarization between Basque nationalist and non-nationalist groups, the possibilities of maintaining close contacts with individuals on both sides of this political cleavage were few. The boundary between the two political camps was like a semi-permeable membrane. Free movement from the nationalist camp to the non-nationalist one was permitted. Free movement the other way around was very difficult indeed. Therefore, I chose to work almost exclusively with Basque nationalists during the first part of my field research and work with non-nationalists only towards the end of my field period. Eventually leaders and supporters from all Basque political groups were interviewed – many in depth – and detailed biographies of numerous political and cultural activists were obtained. Second, I carried out a study of the village of Elgeta, where I lived for most of the nineteen months spent in the field. Members of the family with whom I lived were among the leading activists in village affairs and helped introduce me to the more covert aspects of village life. Third, background material on various historical, economic, linguistic and demographic aspects of the Basque country was collected from a range of sources. These included official publications, newspapers, archives and interviews with Basque historians, agronomists, economists and so forth.

I am aware that for the anthropologist the incorporation of historic materials is often a risky affair. Lacking both the appropriate training and time to do primary research, the anthropologist is thrown back onto secondary sources. In this context any endeavour to understand Basque history seemed particularly risky. The Basque political world was sharply polarized into opposing camps – the nationalist and non-nationalist. Each possessed a distinct interpretation of Basque history used to underwrite and justify current political attitudes and positions. Moreover, much of Basque historical research has been conducted with this explicitly political aim in mind. Historical discussions among Basques were usually highly emotional

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affairs. In rough, general terms the two versions of Basque history can be summarized as follows:

(1) Because of their unique language and culture, the Basques have always been a people apart; a nationality which has struggled over the centuries to defend its political autonomy and, thereby, its cultural heritage. This constant resistance in order to survive culturally can best be seen in the Basques' staunch defence of their *fueros*, Basque traditional rights which had their core in custom – in the fabric of traditional society. The various Basque regions were themselves autonomous with each region enjoying an autonomous political apparatus. The alliances and political links between these regions and especially between the Basque region as a whole and Castile were voluntary pacts entered into by juridically sovereign and equal partners. These pacts were seen as dissolvable because sovereignty, although partially delegated, was never surrendered. Internally, Basque society was an egalitarian one even though sharp economic differences were recognized. It was free from rigid social stratification and permanent class differences. The political system – a sort of 'peasant democracy' – ensured real political participation for all Basques. Moreover, this equality was explicitly emphasized in the *fuero* which extended the status of nobility to all Basques. The dynamic behind Basque history can best be understood in terms of the continual drive of the Basques to maintain both their autonomy and their egalitarian mode of life.

(2) In the context of the slow emergence and development of Spain as a politically unified entity, the Basque country, given certain economic peculiarities, was as integrated into this wider political entity as the other regions of Spain. The Basque *fueros*, similar to the *fueros* of other regions, were by no means Basque primordial rights which, among other things, guaranteed Basque liberties. They were concessions from the kings of Castile. Basque society was strictly stratified with control of both economic and political power in the hands of small élites. Due to changing circumstances, these various élites (urban, rural, local, provincial, etc.) pursued a strategy of complex and shifting alliances in order to defend their vested interests which at times brought them into conflict and at times into collusion both in regard to each other and to the Madrid political centre.

In spite of their apparent irreconcilability, I believe that these two images refer to different aspects of Basque history and that both are partially valid. I shall suggest that inside the Basque country two opposed but overlapping social orders have existed side by side since the Middle Ages – the one urban, Hispanicized, complex, prosperous and powerful and the other, encompassing the vast majority of the population, rural, *Euskaldun* (Basque-speaking), relatively impoverished and largely impotent to affect events in the wider world. In the Basques' own view this basic cultural opposition is conceived in terms of *kaletarak* (those from the street, i.e. urban dwellers)

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and *baserritarak* (those from the farmsteads). The coexistence of discrete urban and rural cultures has deep historical roots in the Basque country. The nationalist version of Basque history looks primarily to rural society where the ideas of social equality and cultural distinctiveness have been deeply embedded. In the non-nationalist version the motor of Basque history resides in the urban centres.

Modern Basque society has been shaped by the intricate, fluctuating relationship between these two traditionally antagonistic orders. The Basque nation has been shaped by their merger.

Rather than give a general overview of Basque history, the historical material presented here will attempt to delineate certain specific historical themes that become critical with the emergence of Basque nationalism. These are: (1) the historical relationship between the Basque country and the rest of Spain; (2) the nature and evolution of the foral regime, the Basque traditional political system; (3) the emergence and development of the Basque bourgeoisie; (4) the social and economic evolution of the rural areas and (5) the process of industrialization.

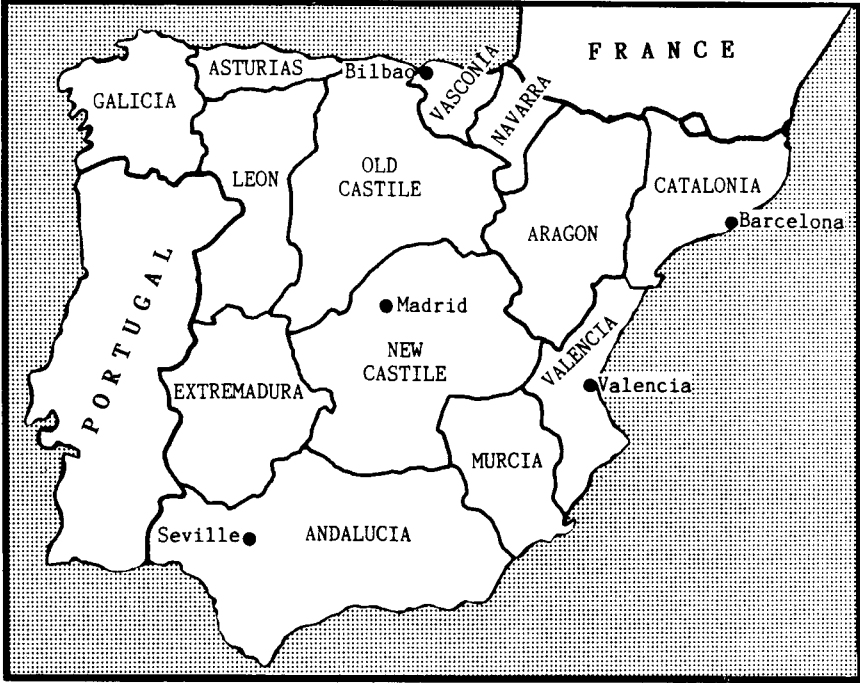
Many people have contributed to the making of this book. In the Basque country I am particularly indebted to Javier Corcuera, Yolanda Iturbe, Gotzone Echebarria and José Gorriti who shared with me their abundant knowledge of Basque life and who have become enduring friends. I should also like to express my gratitude to Xavier Amuriza, Julio Caro Baroja, Dionysio Blanco, Jon Lopategui, Abel Muniategui and Juan San Martín for their constant support and intelligent counsel. My debt to the people of Elgeta, who tolerated my presence during a very difficult period, can never be repaid. In particular, the family of Don Marcelo Basauri, the family of Don Modesto Elcoro and the *cuadrilla* of Patxi Basauri made my stay in the village a deeply rewarding experience.

There is an original debt of gratitude to Dr Peter Loizos who generously nurtured my initial interest in nationalism and under whose aegis I first began to think seriously about the subject. I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of Professor Julian Pitt-Rivers whose unfailing efforts on my behalf made it possible for me to carry out research and whose valuable insights into the Mediterranean and the Basques helped guide my research.

My main intellectual debt, however, is to Professor Ernest Gellner whose work is basic to my understanding of nationalism and who year after year patiently supervised the preparation of my doctoral thesis upon which this book is based.

Finally I wish to thank Manu Escudero.

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Map 1 The historical regions of Spain