

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CULTURAL CONSERVATION AMONG MINORITY GROUPS: THE BASQUES AND SUSTAINABLE ETHNICITY IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

**David M. Callejo Pérez**

*West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, USA*

**Pablo Toral**

*Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin, USA*

**Keywords:** nationalism, regionalism, ethno-nationalism, identity, rural identity, sovereignty, globalism.

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## Summary

The formation of individual and collective identities revolves around the idea of nationalism, evolves differently, and has many social and political consequences. In this article the national identity formation of the Basques in Spain is examined as a case study of an ethnic group attempting to sustain their culture in the face global and national pressures.

The history of Basque ethnic identity is tracked, showing the development of a collective nationalist identity amidst the changing realities of industrialization, World Wars, and post-Cold War economic unions.

Highlighting the different political and social environments through which the Basque evolved, their social and educational systems are examined in terms of their successes and failures in passing down a collective nationalist identity to future generations.

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary moment, citizens of the world find themselves at a crossroads. The world's developed nations continue to advance globalization and capitalist industrialization as the answer to poverty and change. However, the gap dividing the "haves" and the "have-nots" grows ever wider, and the particular needs of ethnic minorities are consistently overlooked by development plans. The increased cooperation between national governments, multinational organizations and multinational corporations results in decisions being made by fewer and fewer people with minimal incentives to act in the interest of planetary stability and sustainability. This creates a difficult situation for indigenous cultural and ethnic groups with little or no representation in the governments of their controlling nation-states. As economic development comes to occupy the central role in most national plans, these goals are often at odds with the traditional interests of such minority populations.

For the planet's rich cultural diversity to survive, policies can no longer focus exclusively on accelerating the integration of all people into the global capitalist marketplace. Instead, greater attention must also be paid to preserving indigenous languages and customs if these cultural footprints and unique ways of viewing the world are to be preserved. Using the history of the Basque of Spain as a case study, this article will show that *even cultural minorities that integrate themselves into their surrounding national frameworks risk losing their traditional culture and social practices*. Ethno-national movements in the developed world face a crucial choice: they must use their traditional notions of ethnicity and sustainability to survive or risk the failure and disappearance of their traditions when colonialism and globalization are no longer state enterprises, but international undertakings.

In order for culturally distinct ethnic and indigenous groups to continue existing in a culturally diverse world, special attention must be paid to these groups' particular needs. This article will use the historical and contemporary experience of the Basque (or *Euskadi*) people of Spain to demonstrate the challenges that affect rural communities trying to keep their identities alive in the modern world. First, it will explore ways in which economic globalization, often seeking to commodify rather than preserve traditional cultures, has resulted in identity dilemmas for certain communities. Second, it will analyze the unique tensions between local ethnic nationalism, Spanish sovereignty, and the European Union's concept of local peoples faced by the Basque. Then, the necessity of redefining crucial concepts like "rural" will be discussed, first in terms of a new approach to sustainability and second as a way to create conversational models that can be applied by local ethnic minorities for their protection and the achievement of a sustainable future. In order to address these three concepts mentioned above, the theoretical notions of nationalism are explored through rural identity even in the midst of urban growth. The theoretical model will then be applied to the Basque through historical lenses that shed light on economic development and the effects on modern conceptions of identity. In exploring the industrialization of the Basque country and its effects on national identity, the essay examines the birth and growth of radicalism and its exigency through violence and war that rests in direct opposition to the sovereignty of the state and the human rights of the people. It is hoped that the

example of the Basque will shed light on other ethnic groups attempting to create national identity in an era of globalization in the market place.

## **2. The Fluid Nature of Nationalism and the Creation of the Rural**

According to multiple sources, the key in distinguishing nationality from other forms of identity flows from the fact that nationalism pinpoints the source of individual identity within a people. This idea is viewed as the source of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity. In this regard, a people is the collective population that is greater than any specific community and is always homogeneous, despite superficial divisions based on such concepts as class, location, race and ethnicity. Sovereignty of a particular group is based on an individual's identification within a people, to which the person is loyal. Nationalism is a social construct that emerges out of a group's contact and interaction with other groups. Proximity favors more interactions among a particular set of individuals, who develop a similar mentality and perception of reality. Governments, although they may attempt to create an enabling environment for governance, cannot achieve sustainable development without an interactive social partnership, actively involving all members of their society in a democratic attempt at self-determination. Ethno-nationalism is insular and protects the survival of identity in spite of changes in population and contexts. On the one hand, it is beneficial in protecting one's identity under duress and on the other it can stifle change and may rely on violence for survival when challenges are posed.

In the changes brought about by economic and social development, the overall structural context elevates some groups' expectations over others. Societal elites shape these expectations and reinterpret sovereignty based on the uniqueness of the elevated group, which then assumes the character of a collective individual possessing a single will. Some individuals emerge from the collective as interpreters of the single will. The reinterpretation of the idea of sovereignty leads a group transformed into a nationality to try to transform the social and political structures surrounding them. The downfall of the ensuing identity can lead to isolation and narrow conceptions of sovereignty that become insufficient in the face of globalization, specifically in Europe. This is the Basque example. Concurrently, Catalan identity and nationalism has taken a different course by modernizing identity; using centralized education, and consolidating the market economy to remain independent and politically relevant in international politics.

The emergence of a collectivistic nationality among minority groups has resulted from the inability of the dominant governments to satisfy the development objectives required by these local minorities. Modernization in Europe, which destroyed the traditional rural way of life, resulted in the emergence of ethnic nationalism as a reaction against industrial development. Migration of dominant elites has allowed minority groups to create a cultural cleavage between the past and the present (of both place and time) that serves the interests of the status quo in the local community and in the nation. Thus, they have constructed their national identities around a liberal ideology, to be used as a tool for the development of a nation outside of their community. In the case of the Basque, 100 years of in-migration encouraged by the central government (Madrid) and the political control by the French have stunted any

expansion of the Basque ideology. At the same time, the failure to curb the revolutionary radicalism has turned away many people from embracing the cause.

### **3. The Case for the Basque: Globalization and the Struggle for Rural Identity**

Exemplifying the above, one significant case is the strong involvement of the European Community in local politics since the late 1990s, because the global economy has come to be controlled by the powerful political patron markets of the first world (EU, NAFTA, WTO, etc), who regard places like Spain as a “natural market”, and further consider Spain a “political ally” in protecting that market. On the contrary, some Spanish ethnic minorities, specifically the Basque, continue to persist with a mainly rural lifestyle supported by the clergy, some small entrepreneurs, and the peasantry. For example, the Basque nationalists have historically regarded Spain’s industrial and agribusiness efforts as inimical to the “essence of traditional Basque life” and have distanced themselves from Spanish politics.

For this article, it is important to extend beyond traditional economic definitions of the “rural,” just as scholars have tried to go beyond definitions of labor (farming) to define rural economies. One approach in doing this facilitates experiments with time and place by breaking the “linearity of geography,” exchanging the sequencing of history for the concept of mapping; thereby, allowing the reader to see text as a map. In the case of the Basque, it will allow the reader to see how each piece (history, economics, and political ideologies) intersects to create the unique national identity. It allows for specific examinations at each stage of development and how they relate to the larger political landscape. This creates spaces or realms that can redefine the “rural” beyond simply characteristics of poverty and labor.

In a narrative meant to increase the layers of what defines rural, the hope here is to address the historical roots of Basque attempts to create a place in a global market beyond the idea of a linear historical process that dichotomizes the state and people. According to many ethnic minorities in developed nations, including the Basques, individuals must be rescued from total absorption into the contexts in which they are always embedded through recognition of their ethnic past. The definitions of place drive and inform what it means to be rural in social life and practice. This article hopes to explain how the meanings of ethnic identity are constantly challenged by the evolving nature of the global market place. Such challenges to ethnic groups include the exclusion and elimination of diversity as a means to control a changing world.

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### Biographical Sketches

**David M. Callejo** is an assistant professor of Curriculum Studies and Teacher Education at West Virginia University and a member of the Society of Professors of Curriculum. He grew up in Miami and received his doctorate in 2000, after working and teaching social studies at schools in the Mississippi Delta and Miami. He has written two books on civil rights and public space in education, and is currently finishing *Life As School* (2005) and *Educating for Democracy* (2005).

He has published many articles and chapters and has received grants for his work on identity and schools, teacher education, and qualitative research. Dr. Callejo's ongoing research explores the role of schools in the formation of identity in urban and rural areas.

**Pablo Toral** is a Mout Junior Professor of International Studies at Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin. He has published articles about Spanish multinational enterprises and their activities in Latin America, regional integration in the Americas, and about nationalism, education and identity in Spain. He is the author of *The Reconquest of the New World. Spain's Multinational Enterprises and Direct Investment in Latin America* and *Latin America's Quest for Globalization. The Role of Spanish Firms*. He also serves as a consultant. Before becoming an academic, Toral worked as a journalist in Latin America, the United States, and Europe.