

## **BASQUES AND BASQUENESS: COMPETING AND CONFLICTING IDENTITIES**



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The Basques have long been identified as a distinct people with a unique history and culture. The most important component used to define Basqueness is the Basque language, *Euskera*. However, in-migration of non-Basque speakers, Spanish state policies, modernisation and ethnic assimilation has led to a bilingual region and to the creation of an ethno-nationalist movement. This all causes difficulties in defining Basque identity.

This work examines the complexity of Basque identity. The aim of this research is to describe which competing, multiple and conflicting identities can be found among the Basques. The concepts of ethnic identity and other forms of identities are examined and connected especially to the Basque case. Basque identity is examined through three different components: territory, nationalism and language.

This research and its methods are qualitative. The main method is through the use of thematic interviews. The empirical material consists of 20 interviews with young people, living in the Basque Autonomous Community.

A collective Basque identity exists, but it is still fragmented due to many elements. The territory, on which the collective identity is based, is still unclear and dynamic. Nationalism has also its contribution to Basque identity. Nationalism is dividing Basques into different groups. Also the language of the Basques affects their identity. Due to several factors it is not spoken by everybody. The results of this research indicate that those interviewees who were able to speak Basque had the clearest Basque identity.

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## FOREWORD

Tämän työn tekeminen on ollut minulle sen tieteellisen puolen lisäksi yhtä suurta kielikurssia. Tämän vuoksi haluan kirjoittaa esipuheen omalla äidinkielelläni ja ilmaista itseäni juuri niin kuin haluan. Pitkä ja toisinaan vaikeakin prosessi on nyt takanapäin. Prosessin laajuutta kuvaa myös se miten monelle eri paikkakunnalle kirjoitusprosessi on maantieteellisesti jakautunut. Tätä työtä on nimittäin kirjoitettu Joensuussa, Forssassa, Vitoria-Gasteizissa, Wageningenissa, Buenos Airesissa, Poortugaalissa ja Amsterdamissa. Vihdoinkin kaikki on valmista. Nyt on helppo hymyillä ja kurkottaa kohti uusia haasteita.

Jos oppimisen määrää voisi mitata kiloissa olisin monta kiloa oppineempi. Jos nyt aloittaisin kaiken uudelleen, näyttäisi tämä työ varmasti hyvin erilaiselta. Olen nimittäin oppinut, että kaiken voi tehdä aina paremmin.

Suuri kiitos kaikille, jotka ovat minua auttaneet. Yksin en olisi tässä. Kiitos ohjaajilleni Minna Tanskaselle ja Paul Fryerille kaikesta avusta ja kannustamisesta. Kiitos kaikille baskiystävilleni, jotka jaksoivat aina selittää. Kiitos haastateltavilleni. Kiitos Katelle kielentarkastuksesta. Kiitos Hansille kaikesta avusta ja tuesta. Kiitos kaikille, jotka ovat minua auttaneet.

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Niina Jokinen

# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Background**

Through the European Union, we are heading towards more integrated regions in Europe and there has been a lot of discussion about European identity. However, within the European Union and European states themselves there exist several competing ethnic groups. Some of these groups feel that they do not have full rights, and they are demanding more rights. For these ethnic groups, European integration can appear to be a new threat. Though the borders become weaker, the distinction between ‘us and them’ can become even stronger. One such group is the Basques. The Basque region has a rich, but divided history, and the present situation continues to demand a long-lasting solution from the Spanish government in Madrid. Some Basque nationalists are seeking full independence, but some only want to maintain their identity and culture.

In 2001-2002, I had the opportunity to spend one year as an exchange student in the Basque Country, and during that time a deep fascination with the culture and of public debate was awoken in me. What is the Basque Country geographically when it is located inside of two states; Spain and France? And how do people feel about it? Where do they belong? The world is blanketed by different and some times overlapping national, ethnic, regional and local identities. These different identities do not always live happily together and many conflicts have their roots in ethnicity. When these identities are better understood, it can help to solve ethnic conflicts. Today this is really important when many groups are demanding their rights and when the methods these groups apply are in some cases even violent.

## **1.2 The research question**

The Basque identity is very complex. To understand the complexity of Basque identity an answer will be given to the main research question, which is shortly stated as: “What is Basque identity?” It is a difficult question because of the politically complicated situation behind the Basques. The aim of this research is to describe which competing, multiple or even conflicting identities can be found among the Basques and what are the reasons for all this complexity.

In this research I examine concepts of ethnic identity and other forms of identities and connect these especially to the Basque case. I connect these theories and concepts to the Basques through three components of their identity; territory, nationalism and language. During my stay in the Basque Country, conversations about identity always were related to these three main issues. In this research, Basque identity is examined through these components.

The Basque case is geographically interesting, because of their relation to their territory, which we can call a 'homeland'. There are many definitions of which regions comprise the Basque Country today and even the Basques themselves have differing opinions. How do these different definitions and opinions concerning the Basque territory affect Basque identity? Basque nationalism also affects Basque society. Inside of the Basque Country there are many nationalist groups, ranging from extreme to moderate and there are also a lot of people who are not nationalistic at all. How does this division between the Basques affect their identity? Basques have also their own language, *Euskera*<sup>1</sup>. It has been repressed in history and nowadays not all of the Basques are able to use it. Today it is heavily promoted and this causes a lot of disagreement among the Basques. Language has an important role in identity formation. What does it mean for Basques, when only a minority uses it? All of the above components are used to comprise Basque identity.

### **1.3 Methodology and structure of this research**

This research and its methods are qualitative. Thematic interviews are combined with literature in this study to understand the complexity of Basque identity. In Chapter 2, the problematic nature of collective identity and the concepts behind it are viewed. Chapter 3 includes a theoretical discussion of territory, nationalism and language. Research methods are discussed in Chapter 4. The qualitative methodology is used through ethnographical research methods. The empirical part of this research was conducted in the Basque Autonomous Community, one of the seventeen autonomies of Spain, from August 2003 to October 2003 in the form of thematic interviews and participant observation. Additionally, photographs are used in this research, which were taken during the empirical period. The purpose is to create a dialogue between theoretical perspectives and empirical perspectives. Through the interviews it is possible to find experiences of individuals and stories in a humanistic way, but through structuralism it can be

understood what is behind these experiences and how they are built up. Chapter 5 consists of the analysis and the results. The analysis is based on the collected data and is examined along with the theoretical background. Conclusions and a discussion are presented in the last chapter, Chapter 6.

Human geography is interested in human agency (Graham 1997, 19). I consider this thesis to be human geography, though I have used ethnographical research methods in my fieldwork and literature from sociology, history and geography in its different forms just to mention some. However, behind all this interdisciplinary literature I have the Basques and the Basque Country, the people and their place. Though questions about identity are linked to many disciplines, in this research they are linked to human geography. Identities also have a spatial form and when Basque identity is examined, it is rooted to the Basque Country. There is a humanistic point of view how individuals have built their identities, but society is affecting identity as well and this brings a structuralist view to this research. Structuralism is concerned about the role of language in shaping social life (Filmer et al. 1998, 33). In structuralism social relations are a constructive element of society and the aim is to find explaining structures behind the phenomenon (Häkli 1999, 96).

Within human geography, this work is mainly cultural geography, but partly also political geography. Human geography used to be concentrated on describing the world. Nowadays this is not enough anymore, though descriptions do function as important background information. Globally there is huge diversity and cultural geography studies this diversity by attempting to understand how cultures make sense of their place (Crang 1998, 2). Identities, which are connected to a certain place, are one form of how we make sense of a place. Through identities, which are connected to a place there is a link between an individual and a place. Cultural geography examines how different processes come together in particular places and how those places have meanings for people (Crang 1998, 3; Shurmer-Smith 2002, 3). Cultural geography is looking at this fragmented polarity of cultural forms and identities, which are arising from the relationship between place and people (Crang 1998, 5). This is the question in the Basque Country as well. Identities are processes that are shaped by place and in this case this place is the Basque Country. Diversity of different cultures forms a big stimulant to cultural geography (Crang 1998, 59). The Basques are one cultural group differing from others or at least claimed

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<sup>1</sup> In this research the Basque word *Euskera* is used when the question is about the Basque language. Also the term *Euskara* is common and has the same meaning.

to be different. According to Crang (1998, 60), a lot of recent work in cultural geography is connected to identities, which can be individual, group or national identities. Political geography is interested in nationalism and in how identities create boundaries between people (Shurmer-Smith 2002, 2).

Humanistic methodology concentrates on the observation of individuals. Humanistic methodology emphasises subjective meanings and underlines the world of experience. With this methodology, it is easier to find individual experiences behind the identities. Typical for humanistic research is an interest in multiplicity and unexpectedness of human life (Häkli, 69-70). In this research, individuals will be observed and they are able to tell their own experiences and ideas. This study does not aim to generalise, but rather to emphasise the individual experience. Though we should not forget that behind the individual the society is an important component affecting the human mind.

#### 1.4 Research region



**Figure 1.** The historical Basque regions in *Euskera*.

The region presented in the map (Figure 1), is the Basque Autonomous Community, (in *Euskera* – *Euskadi*<sup>2</sup>) administratively constructed of provinces: *Álava*<sup>3</sup>, *Vizcaya*<sup>4</sup> and *Guipúzcoa*<sup>5</sup>. Traditionally, many have seen the Spanish province *Navarra*<sup>6</sup> and three provinces across the border in France, as belonging to the Basque regions as well. Together all these regions form the historical Basque Country (in *Euskera*: *Euskal Herria*, in Spanish: *El País Vasco*). As old nationalist graffiti says “4 + 3 = 1” (Kurlansky 2000, 29), and this refers to these seven provinces that together form the Basque Country. The term *Euskal Herria* has been the term used by Basques to refer to the area occupied by the Basque speech community. The name *Euskadi* was invented later on to stress a political-operative point of view rather than an ethno-cultural one (Gardner 2000, 11). However, in ordinary language the Basque Country refers also to the autonomous region. The territory has been divided between two states. The French side is often called *Iparraldea* (North Part) and the Spanish side as *Hegoaldea* (South Part). The three Basque provinces in France, *Lapurdi*, *Nafarroa Beherea* and *Zuberoa* are not administrative regions in France, instead they are part of a modern French *département*, the *Pyrénées-Atlantiques* (Gardner 2000, 13). It is also good to remember that all of Spain has been divided into seventeen autonomous regions (Figure 2). On the Spanish side, the Basque Autonomous Community and *Navarra* are separate autonomous regions.

Due to my own expertise I limit my research mainly to the Spanish provinces, which belong to the official Basque Autonomous Community. I examine the issue from the point of view of people in the Basque Autonomous Community. In this thesis, the term Basque Country covers all of the Basque regions and it will be stated more precisely if the question concerns a certain region in particular.

The historical Basque Country, called *Euskal Herria* by the Basques, straddles the Pyrenees Mountains and today is divided in two by the political border between Spain and France. Historically two rivers formed the borders, the Ebro in the south and the Garona in the north (Ramirez & Sullivan 1987, 120). Together this historical area covers 20,664 square kilometres (Gobierno Vasco 2004). However, during the historical processes *Navarra* and the French parts have gone further away from Basque culture, or at least Basqueness has been diminished at the

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<sup>2</sup> Officially *Euskal Autonomi Erkidegoa*, but *Euskadi* is used more commonly. In Spanish Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco, but in the spoken language el País Vasco is used.

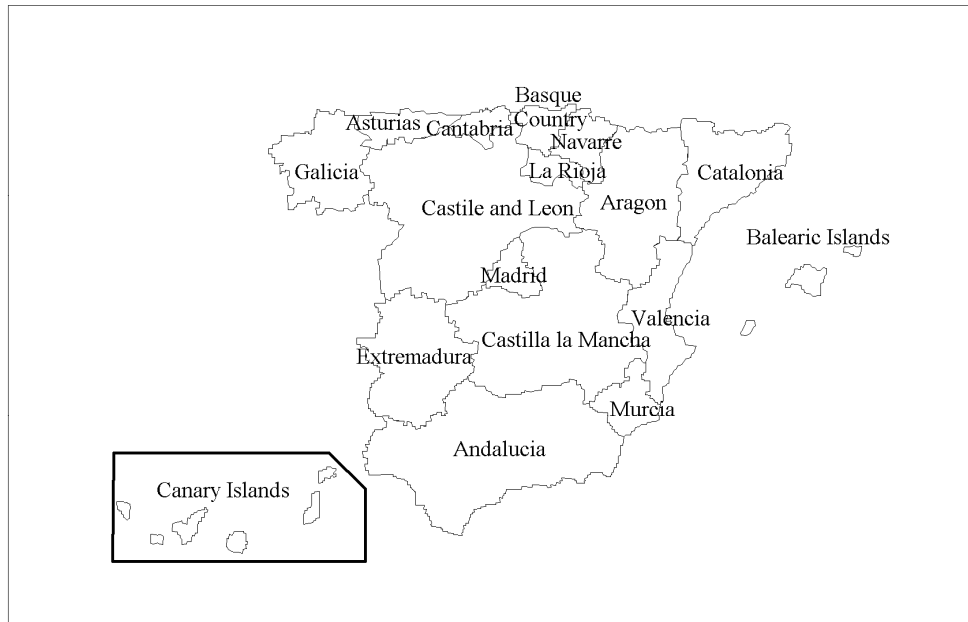
<sup>3</sup> In *Euskera* – *Araba*.

<sup>4</sup> In *Euskera* – *Bizkaya*.

<sup>5</sup> In *Euskera* – *Gipuzkoa*.

<sup>6</sup> In *Euskera* – *Nafarroa*.

official political decision-making level. Navarra has its own autonomy and the Basque regions in France do not have a separate official status. *Euskadi*, or the Basque Autonomous Community, covers 7234 square meters and has 2,082,587 inhabitants (Gobierno Vasco 2004).



**Figure 2.** Spain and its autonomies.

For an outsider, the first image of the Basques is their conflict. There are bombs, extreme nationalists, violence and above all the separatist armed group ETA, which stands for *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (Basque Country and Freedom). ETA aims to form an independent socialist Basque Country. Several researchers have focused on the Basque conflict (e.g. Raento 1993a; Raento 1996; Raento 1999; Montoya 1999; Conversi 1997; Bruni 1998; Heiberg 1982), but in many of these studies they concentrate mainly on the conflict itself and not on the ethnicity behind it. The aim of this research is to illuminate the identities behind the conflict. However, a small review of the conflict and its history is convenient and it is presented later on. Social processes affect identities and therefore the conflict has its part in identity formation as well.

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In this chapter, the research question and the components comprising the research question are presented. Also the structure of the research, methodology and research region are shortly reviewed. The aim of the next chapter is to give the theoretical foundations of identity, which will create a basis for the collective Basque identity. This happens through the concepts, which are linked to collective identity. Basque identity cannot be examined without these concepts.

## **2 THE CONCEPTS OF IDENTITY AND THE BASQUES**

### **2.1 The concepts**

There are many concepts that accompany the discussion of identity, which we are using often without thinking much about their true meaning. Definitions are not always clear and sometimes they can even be confusing. Definitions can be partly overlapping or there can be several meanings for one concept. Important concepts when discussing collective identities are ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic group, ethnic community, and national identity. Though these identities are mainly collective ones in these types of identities collective and individual forms of identity can become fused (Paasi 1999, 5). These concepts have several definitions in literature and this also shows how complex these concepts are. It is difficult to find universally agreed definitions and all the definitions are based on some interests or purposes. Most importantly one must find proper definitions to analyse certain theoretical problems (Cohen 1996, 83). These concepts can also be approached from different perspectives and disciplines. In this research, these concepts form the foundation upon which Basque identity is to be examined.

Even though these identities are collective, the purpose later on is to combine the collective level with the individual level. This happens through thematic interviews where an individual point of view is revealed. Also the intention is to focus on the geographical side of these identities. How are identities connected to this place? Who is a Basque and to which place is his or her identity connected?

### **2.2 Identity and the Basques**

Identity is a complex concept. It has been a catch phrase in the modern world and is frequently used. It seems that in a globalised world we need something to hold on to when everything around us moves faster and faster. First the idea of the identity seems simple; it is how people view themselves through different aspects such as ethnic group, national group, language group or religion. The list is endless. When examining deeper the concept of identity it gets more complicated. What does this kind of identification mean, which eventually forms identity? How permanent does it have to be? How can we distinguish it from other relations, such as roles of behaviour? How can we measure it? According to Castells (1997, 6), identity originates from

people's meaning and experience. Hall (2002) sees identity as being formed through unconscious processes and behind its unity there is always something imaginary. It is always an incomplete process, (Hall 1996, 2) and never completed and stable. Identities are also constructed, which is common for all human activity (Schöpflin 2003, 478).

Identity differs from roles in the way that institutions and organisations of society define these roles when identities are sources of meaning for the actor him- or herself. Identities are stronger than the roles and behind them lay a process of self-construction and individualisation (Castells 1997, 7). Identities originate more from the inside of the individual itself than the roles, which are given more from outside. Our lives are full of multiple identities and roles such as familial, territorial and religious or based on class, gender or ethnical background (Smith 1991, 7).

According to Hall (2002, 21), there have been three different insights into identity: 1) a subject of enlightenment, 2) subject of sociology and 3) subject of postmodernism. The first one is based on the idea that people are solid individuals with a core, which have been the same since birth. This core is the identity inside of the individual. It is developing while we are growing but the core remains without any changes. The second idea about identity reflects the complexity of the modern world and there is awareness that the core is not autonomous but is formed in relation with others. This has been the classical idea about identity in sociology, and according to this idea identity is formed through interaction between the individual and society (Hall 2002, 21-22). However, today it is said that subjects and social worlds are moving and from this we end up at the post-modern idea about identity. The post-modern subject does not have a fixed identity and it is being shaped continuously. Identity is historically defined and not biologically formed. A subject can take different identities over time and inside of people there exist many conflicting identities at the same time (Hall 2002, 22-23). This means that identity is not permanent at all. Identity can change and people have several identities, which are competing inside of them.

People have both individual and collective identities (Schöpflin 2003, 478). We are members of many collective identity groups. In some form individual and collective identities are reinforcing one another (Schöpflin 2003, 478). The Basque Country is a territorial entity and the identities, related to the Basque regions are collective. However, it is curious to see how individuals are connected to these collective identities. People have always identified themselves with self-

defining groups and this may happen, for example, through common beliefs and values or through a sense of common origin (De Vos 1995, 15).

Group identities are defined in relation to non-members of the group (e.g. Eriksen 1993; Billig 1995; Hall 1996). There is always a concept of 'us and them'. People define the groups in which they belong with the help of other existing groups. Identification happens through identifying who one is not (Pratt 1999, 154). It is quite impossible to form any kind of identity if there are not any opposite identities and groups. These 'us and them' groups are often territorially limited and this connects identities deeply to geography (Crang 1998, 61). This differentiation process makes identities politicised and often this differentiation is about controlling material and symbolic or territorial resources (Smith 1999, 129). Collective identities are also dynamic, socially constructed and affected by historical processes (Paasi 1999, 8). Time and place are crucial components for identity (Smith 1999, 139). Identity is also a spatial category because territory needs always a dividing line with the other (Paasi 2001, 10). This means that territory is defined through 'us and them'.

Identity seems to be a modern issue or even a modern problem. People are thinking more who they are and where they originated from. Reasons for this might be due to increasing migration. People no longer live in clearly defined ethnic communities. People have the need to ask who they are; e.g. am I Basque, Spanish or something else? Where are my roots? Currently, it becomes more and more problematic to think about the maintenance of original ethnic identity among other identities. Also, globalisation is causing questions; are all ethnic identities wiped out little by little and replaced by one unified global identity? Or is there still space for different ethnic identities and languages?

The Basques have long been identified as a distinct people with a unique history and culture (Conversi 1997, 44). Despite many centuries of association with/domination by the Spanish Kingdom and state, the Basques have maintained a separate culture identified by many customs, such as traditional dances, sports (Figure 3), etc. However, the most important component used to define Basqueness by many is the Basque language, *Euskera*, which is completely distinct from Spanish-Castilian. These clear lines between the cultures have been blurred by centuries of in-migration of non-Basque speakers into the region, (Spanish) state policies, modernisation and ethnic assimilation, both natural and forced, which has led to a bilingual region and to an ethno-

nationalist movement that resorts even to terrorism. Still today the Basque Country has its own language and culture and some consider it to be a nation without a state.



**Figure 3.** Traditional Basque sports, *Herri Kirolak*.

One can find many multiple and conflicting identities inside of the Basque Country. People originate from different places, they have different mother tongues or they are bilingual. Important factors affecting identities in the Basque Country include if people are born in the region and if they are able to speak *Euskera*. Most of the people in the Basque Autonomous Community have a double identity and this is most obvious for them who have been born in the Basque Country but who are not able to speak *Euskera* (Raento 1993a, 106).

It is not an easy task to define who is Basque and who is not. Many definitions are commonly used, and one of the definitions is that Basques are people who speak *Euskera*. Another definition says that Basques are those who have Basque ancestors, even if they cannot speak *Euskera* (Gardner 2000, 18). Then there are also two definitions, which are a bit wider. A Basque is a person who lives or works in the Basque Country, or a Basque is a person who

thinks that he or she is a Basque (ibid.). For the nationalists, being a Basque is a political choice and it happens by devoting oneself to the Basque cause (Raento 1993a, 106). It is always possible to set different pre-conditions to define who is a Basque, but it is difficult to determine from the outside how the identity of each individual is constructed, because it happens inside each individual. Who is a Basque can be politically defined, but it is impossible to control who really has a Basque identity.

## **2.3 Ethnicity, ethnic group and identity**

### 2.3.1 Ethnicity

Within ethnicity, factors such as a sense of kinship or race, group solidarity and common culture, historically have been seen as having deep roots. Ethnicity is close to the term ethnic identity, but its meaning is still a bit uncertain in literature. For an ethnic group it can mean its essence, or it can be what an ethnic group has, or also a quality of belonging to an ethnic group (Hutchinson & Smith 1996, 4). Almost all of the approaches agree that it is linked to the classification of people and group relationships (Eriksen 1993, 4). It can be simply said that ethnicity is a sense of group identity, which is derived from real or imagined common bonds. These bonds can be based upon, for example, language, race or religion (Edwards 1977, 254). In social anthropology it is related to the culturally distinctive groups identified by themselves and by outsiders (Eriksen 1996, 28). In this way, it is related to groups' self-recognition and there is a distinctive element, which distinguishes a group from other groups. Contemporarily seen, it is the result of interaction between different ethnic groups (Cohen 1996, 83) and in this way ethnicity is constituted through social contacts (Eriksen 1993, 18).

Ethnicity can cause conflicts because ethnic groups normally do not stay in a permanent position and they can often form boundaries. Ethnically plural societies have always existed, and one reason for that has been imperial conquest (De Vos 1995, 16). At this moment, ethnicity is also an important issue because of all of the social mobility that we have today. For example, for European countries, it has been a big challenge to cope with the integration process of immigrants especially when distinctive cultures, customs and religions are in question.

When researching ethnicity, there are two main camps: 'primordialists' and 'instrumentalists' (Smith 1986, 7; Hutchinson & Smith 1996, 8). The primordial point of view is connected to the

idea that nations are natural and inherited (Smith 1986, 8). In this way seen, nations and ethnic groups have always existed. They are constructed from ‘a set of givens’, including traditions, customs, language, religion and origins (Lindholm 1993, 8). ‘Instrumentalists’ see ethnicity as a social, political, and cultural storage for different interest groups (Hutchinson & Smith 1996, 8). The previous distinction is also close to the division between objective and subjective features. Objective features are, for example, linguistic, racial, geographical or religious, and they can be seen as given features (Edwards 1985, 7). In this interpretation, ethnicity is also given and inherited (ibid., 7) as in the primordial perspective. From a subjective perspective ethnicity is above all a question about belief (ibid., 8). This way seen, the objective perspective means that ethnicity is involuntary, while the subjective perspective means that there has to be one’s own will in the background. However, these given features can be seen as invented as well (Lindholm 1993, 8). When one tries to understand ethnicity, some kind of combination between these perspectives is necessary (Edwards 1985, 8). When Basque identity is seen in a primordial way, emphasis is on its non-Iberian and non Indo-European origins and this sets Basques apart from other peoples and cultures of the peninsula (Flynn 2001, 705).

### 2.3.2 Ethnic group and community

Normally an ethnic group is formed by people who have some common traditions, not shared with other people, with whom they are in contact (De Vos 1995, 18). Ethnic groups can, for example, be religious, linguistic, racial or communal groups (Bell 1996, 144). Significant is that they form a social organisation (Barth 1996, 78). Common traditions inside of the ethnic group can be formed by religious beliefs and practices, language, the feeling of historical continuity and also by common origins or ancestors. When speaking about origins, in the background there are often legends or mythologies and some kind of common roots with genetic generation continuity (De Vos 1995, 18). Ethnic groups are forming boundaries with other groups, but these boundaries are never permanent (Barth 1969, 10). In other words, ethnic identities are changing their form continuously. They can receive influences from the outside from other groups, and they are influencing others as well. Boundaries between groups are social ones and these boundaries help maintain the ethnic identity of each group (Barth 1996, 79). Sometimes when all the original forms of a culture are lost, ethnic identity can change to something else.

Culture has an important role in forming ethnic groups. For a long time all ‘cultural groups’ were defined as ‘ethnic groups’, but cultural boundaries do not always correspond with ethnic

boundaries (Eriksen 1993, 33). Shared cultures, religions or languages are often important, but they are not defining ethnic groups so unambiguously. Different ethnic groups can have the same language. One ethnic group can have several religions. Cultures between different ethnic groups can be similar and people inside the same ethnic group can have very different life. It can be said that cultural differences are relevant only if they are made relevant in social interaction (ibid., 38). Perhaps most important for ethnic groups is that they have some unifying components and those components should be strong enough to maintain the feeling of 'us'.

Ethnic group and ethnic community are not totally synonymous to each other, though they are sometimes used as synonymous words. Most of the time an ethnic group forms an ethnic community, but not always. Ethnic communities are normally created by particular social groups; leaders or elites (Brass 1996, 89). Within an ethnic community the members have regular interaction, they share interests and they have collective organisations (Hutchinson & Smith 1996, 6). If an ethnic group has not formed an ethnic community its existence is not so clear yet and the special characteristics for this group are still loose. The distinction between ethnic groups and national groups is needed, because not every ethnic group desires to form its own state (Hettne 1996, 18). Ethnic groups and communities can cross also political boundaries (Edwards 1985, 6).

Historically, ethnic communities have different characteristics. Smith (1986, 22-30) has categorised them into six different characteristics. First is the collective name, which gives the 'essence' to the group and distinguishes it from the other groups. Second, behind the ethnic group is the idea of the common myth of descent. This myth tries to answer the questions of similarity and belonging. Through these myths, a group can define itself to others and also for itself. Third is a shared history. When an ethnic community has a sense of shared history all the generations can be unified. The history, in this case, does not have to be really authentic. More important is that it tells a story about this specific people. Fourth is a shared culture, which separates this one unique culture from other cultures (Smith 1986, 22-28). This culture-bearing aspect has got strong importance when researching ethnic groups (Barth 1996, 76). Fifth is the relation with the certain territory, 'homeland', which can be the present living area of the ethnic group or just a symbolic link to it, like for a diaspora people. Sixth and the last characteristic for ethnic groups, is a sense of solidarity (Smith 1986, 28-30).

According to Brass (1996, 85), there are three ways to define ethnic groups: through objective attributes, through subjective feelings and through relations in behaviour. Objective attributes refer to the cultural features, which distinguishes one group from another. These cultural features are for example language, territory, religion, colour, diet, and dress. Subjective feelings refer to the self-consciousness of the groups, but it is difficult to define how this stage is achieved in the first place. Behavioural relations are the concrete ways how different groups behave (Brass 1996, 85).

Eriksen (1993, 13) also divides ethnic groups into categories. However, these kinds of classifications are always just instruments to understand and they do not represent the whole truth. His division does not cover all kinds of ethnic groups (ibid.). In real life, the lines between different groups can be overlapping. He divides ethnic groups to urban ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, proto- nations and ethnic groups in plural societies (ibid.).

### 2.3.3 Ethnic identity

When there is an ethnic group there has to be an ethnic identity as well. Otherwise its existence is impossible. An ethnic identity is not stable and it is not constantly in the same stage. It is a social process, which is developing continually, and it can sometimes even occur within one generation (De Vos 1995, 17). Ethnic identity refers to the identification of an individual with collective group, which is defined culturally and through ethnic identity a person belongs to that specific cultural community (Hutchinson & Smith 1996, 5). Through this collective belonging differentiation compared to other groups happens and again there is the important differentiation between 'us and them'. Without them there is no us. Ethnic identity is historically-oriented and it is embedded in the cultural heritage (De Vos & Romanucci-Ross 1975, 363).

De Vos (1975, 10-16) sees that there are many factors, which affect ethnic identity. Firstly, genetic differences are part of the ethnic identity for many groups (ibid., 10). There are real or imagined differences between people (De Vos 1995, 19) and these differences create the sense of one group belonging together with the feeling of uniqueness. Secondly, territoriality is deeply linked to ethnic identity (De Vos 1975, 11), because ethnic groups have often a certain territory to which they are linked either historically or presently. Thirdly, also economic factors affect ethnic identity (ibid., 12). In the case of Jews, for example, their certain economical autonomy helped to defend themselves from ethnic assimilation. Fourthly, religion is involved in ethnic

identity. Religion can have a supporting effect on ethnic identity or it can be a means to abandon ethnic identity as has happened when non-Christians were converted to Christianity. Fifthly, there are aesthetic cultural patterns, which affect identities. These kinds of patterns are, for example, tastes in food, dance tradition, styles of clothing, etc. Sixthly, the last factor he distinguishes is language. It is often stated as the most important feature maintaining a separate ethnic identity and it can have also symbolic meaning (De Vos 1975, 12-15).

## **2.4 Nation and National identity**

A nation can be defined as a community of people with common culture and with the political goal to have some kind of independence (Donnan & Wilson 1999, 6). This political goal is one factor, which makes nation different from ethnic group. However, ethnic groups can be minority nations inside of states, which are dominated by another nation or nations (ibid.). A nation is always a certain kind of a political community (Smith 1991, 9).

The concept of national identity is a multidimensional collective and a cultural phenomenon (Smith 1991, 7). It sites a group of people in time and space (Lindholm 1993, 8). National cultures build national identities by creating meanings about 'nation' with which people can identify themselves (Hall 2002, 47). According to Benedict Anderson (1982), nations and their identities are imagined.

Normally there is a spatial or territorial bond behind a national identity (Smith 1991, 9), at least in the Western definition. National identity has many features, some of them are stronger and some of them are weaker. One feature is that there is at least some kind of sense of a political community with common institutions, rights and duties for the members which belong to this community (ibid.). There is also a social space to which the members feel they belong and this territory has to be a historical 'homeland'. This 'homeland' represents something special and unique to its members and the 'homeland' has its special heroes and myths as well as special nature for its members (Smith 1991, 9).

A myth of national descent exists when the members believe that they are ancestrally related (Connor 1992, 48). Basques are an illustrative example of many co-existing myths when some of them are not realistic at all. However, it does not affect national identity at all. There are claims that Basques are survivors from Atlantis, or a long lost tribe of Israel, or direct

descendants of the Cro-Magnon. What matters most for the Basque nationalists is that the Basques are a distinct national group, different from others (Connor 1992, 49).

Another important feature is that there is a community of laws and institutions, which provide the political meaning for the national identity (Smith 1991, 10). When there are common values and traditions among the members, then a mass public culture is formed. A last important feature for national identity is a common economy and territorial mobility for its members (Smith 1991, 14).

Hall (2002, 48) argues that nations and their identities are built up by different imagined elements. Firstly he says that there is a story about the nation and how it is told in national histories, literature, media and popular culture. These produce stories, pictures, landscapes, historical events, national symbols and rituals, which represent common experiences and give meaning to the nation. Secondly, there is common descent, continuity and tradition. There is something, which has always existed. This feeling can be imagined as well. Thirdly comes the invention of tradition. Many old traditions behind the nation are not so old at all. Fourthly, there is the myth of common descent like Basques had as well. Fifthly, there is a symbolic idea about a pure and original nation (Hall 2002, 49).

Even if there are different categorisations of nations the basic components are quite similar: territory, feeling of uniqueness, myths, etc. These components try to unify people in a same big national group and forget other differences. Most modern nations are not unified at all. Inside of national states there are different ethnic groups, sexual groups and classes.

## **2.5 Ethnic group or nation?**

What is the difference between an ethnic community and a nation, and between ethnicity and nationality? How can ethnic identities and national identities be separated? Ethnic identity is a broader concept than national identity (De Vos 1995, 20), but the line between national identity and ethnic identity is not clear. It is even suggested that the nation can be an enlarged ethnic community (Smith 1986, 2).

Differences between ethnic identity and national identity, as well as between ethnicity and nationalism, are very small and the concepts are partly overlapping. This causes many features

belonging to one concept to be suitable for the others as well. In both cases groups of people may share cultural values (Rubenstein 2003, 223). Previously, there have been two separate fields of study, the study of ethnicity and ethnic community and the study of nationalism and national identity. However, these two fields of study are intimately related to each other (Smith 1992, 1). It is possible to even speak about ethnic nationalism.

An ethnic group is almost the same as a nation. A nation is just one form of an ethnic group, but more official and more political. Nationalism has been seen as an extension of ethnicity (Edwards 1985, 5). An ethnic group can change into a nation if it desires political autonomy (ibid., 13). According to Cohen (1996, 83), politically observed, ethnic grouping is basically informal. It is not part of any official framework or political power inside a state. In this way, a formally recognised ethnic group, which has a state or political region, is not connected anymore to ethnicity but to a nation or to international politics (ibid.). Brass (1996, 86) suggests that a nation may be seen as a politicised type of ethnic community. According to Krejčí and Velímský (1996, 209), there are five objective factors and if these factors are fulfilled we can talk about nation. These five factors are territory, state (or similar political status), language, culture and history. If all these are fulfilled it is quite certain that a nation exists (ibid.).

Nation should not be mixed up with state. State refers normally to the political judicial sphere and nation to the political cultural sphere (Lindholm 1993, 3). A nation can exist even if it does not have a state of its own and several nations can share one state. However, often the goal for a nation is a state or a similar territorial region. According to Paasi (1996b, 39), a state is a political organisation inside of a specific territory. A nation is a community of people with a common identity and the nation-state is the combination of a nation and a state (ibid.). If a nation and a state are combined it is a very powerful territorial community. Interestingly, Europeans are not as unified as they first might look. Almost all states have their ethnic minorities. In some states these ethnic minorities are stronger, such as Catalans and Basques in Spain, while in other states they are weaker, such as the Sámi people in Finland. Nowadays just over 200 states exist in the world, when the number of existing nations is around 400-600 (Paasi 1999, 6).

Also the term nation-state has two meanings. Traditionally seen it means a territorial state, which is totally politically formed and its people have decided to live under its constitution and laws (Hobsbawn 2000, 22-23). A good example of this is France where the French Revolution

created an ideology in which nationality was most important and all individuals were equals under the national laws (Montoya 1999, 30). This is not an ethnic or linguistic definition of a state; instead it is totally political (Hobsbawn 2000, 23). It is more concentrated to the borders and to defending patriotically the fatherland (Montoya 1999, 30). Another meaning of nation-state is more recent and behind it there is an idea that every territorial state belongs to a particular group of people, which has its own ethnic, linguistic and cultural characteristics (Hobsbawn 2000, 23). When states are maintaining a national identity it goes already close to ideology, which is connected to the territorial inclusions and exclusions (Paasi 1999, 9).

In Spain there is a state identity, which covers all of the country, but inside there are several ethnic identities or even national identities. The Basques have their autonomous territory, but they do not have full independence. The line between the existence of Basque national identity or ethnic identity is unclear. However, the definitions between these two concepts are partly overlapping. They mean almost the same but national identity is more linked to a certain political territory than ethnic identity is. In literature Basques are sometimes defined as a nation (Letamendía 1995; Lorenzo Espinosa 1999; Conversi 2000) and sometimes as an ethnic group (Smith 1991; Krejčí & Velímský 1996).

However, the situation in the different Basque regions is not the same. The Basque Autonomous Community is more linked to territory, because it has a political autonomy and the regions in France or Navarra are not because they do not have such an official Basque status. It can be even claimed that the Basques who are living inside of the autonomy are more close to having a national identity while the Basques in France lean towards an ethnic identity. A nation is not the same as a state even though many people think that it refers to that. When national consciousness is more linked to language and culture, instead to a separate political unit, it is more natural to speak about their ethnic identity instead of national identity (Krejčí & Velímský 1996, 211-212). However the Basques fulfil the criteria of being a nation. In many cases it is a question about interpretation whether there is a nation or an ethnic community.

There are many definitions and categorisations of ethnic identity and national identity. It is possible to create clear lines and definitions, but because the world is such a complex entity also these definitions can have exceptions. The world is full of multi-ethnic and multinational states. For example, Belgium is divided between Dutch-speaking Flemings and French-speaking Walloons. Still both groups consider that they have the Belgian nationality (Rubenstein 2003,

228). Multinational states contain more than one ethnic group with traditions of self-determination. A good example of this is the United Kingdom, which contains four significant nationalities; English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish (Rubinstein 2003, 229; Sidaway 2001, 465). Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests that all communities, in which direct contact between all their members is no longer possible, are imagined. Maybe this causes the difficulties in making clear definitions and divisions.

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This chapter reconstructs the basis for Basque identity. It explains the issues behind identity and illuminates how ethnic groups are created. In the next chapter the components constructing identity are examined. These components include Basque territory, nationalism and language. These components together are trying to answer the questions about Basque identity.

### **3 BASQUE IDENTITIES: territory, nationalism and language**

#### **3.1 Basque identities and territory; 4+3=1?**

As referred to previously, A. D. Smith (1991) suggests that ethnic groups normally have a link to a specific territory, or 'homeland'. This link creates the connection with cultural geography and identities. This specific territory has a large effect on identity, because it is always present. It has an important role in defining both nations and ethnic groups (Lindholm 1993, 10). People are always spatially situated somewhere and have almost always some kind of territorial home (Holt-Jensen 2001, 1). There is a connection between identity and place, the Basques and the Basque Country.

People have their regional consciousness and through this, they can see the spatial dimension of society (Paasi 1984, 46). Regions are social constructions, created during political, economic, cultural and administrative practices (Paasi 2001, 16). When and how are people identified with some region in such a way that we can speak about a regional identity or a territorial identity (Paasi 1984, 66)? These are complex questions. Territories are created through human actions and through a geographical execution of power (Holt-Jensen 2001, 1). People can be identified with a specific region even if it does not have a political status. Regional identity as well has two sides; on the one hand we can speak about the regional identity of inhabitants of regions, but on the other hand we can speak about the identity of regions (Paasi 1984, 66). The identity of regions is often defined for some purpose, for example when making regional divisions, but for individuals regional identity is an emotional bond to some region or territory (ibid., 67).

Territory is a spatial construction. Territorial units are formed through historical processes (Paasi, 1996b, 2) and they are not permanent. Nor do they have a fixed identity (Paasi, 2001, 8). Territorial units are formed through institutional practices and they can emerge, exist and disappear (Paasi 1996b, 2). Frequently, ethnic groups have had a spatial dimension in their existence. They have had territorial or political independence or something similar at one moment in their past (De Vos 1995, 19). The Basques have their territory or regions where people are identified and rooted. When we are thinking about the territorial unit behind the Basques it is a complicated question. Which are the Basque regions? What is the place to which Basque identity is connected and what is forming Basque identity?

Preconditions for regional identity include that people want to identify themselves to that specific regional group and that they have some kind of 'us'-spirit (Paasi 1984, 92). The region has to be commonly approved, for example, through a common history (ibid., 93). The Basques have a common history and they have always had certain territorial regions, which are commonly mentioned as Basque regions. In the Basque case, there is approval from the outside as well, because the Basque Country is often mentioned separately, rather than simply as regions of Spain or France. Some Basques may feel that the seven Basque provinces provide a territorial identity. The three provinces inside the Basque Autonomous Community have a clear political territory, and individuals inside of it may have a stronger territorial identity than those Basques living outside of the autonomous region. The identity of the Basques may also be based upon the Basque-speaking region. In the autonomous area there exists an administration, an educational system and partly its own legislation, which create collective institutions. These collective institutions legitimatise territoriality (Paasi 2001, 10).

These days, when we are living in a world of nation states, the state is one important way for an ethnic group to feel totally protected (Conversi 1997, 6). The major demand of the Basque nationalist movement has been full independence. However, if an ethnic group has a strong identity and its future survival looks certain, then these demands for independence may become irrelevant (ibid.). Many factors have contributed to the reality that the Basques are still weak, for example as indicated by the uncertain status of the language in the various Basque regions or the different regional views among the Basques.

However, Basques have transformed their identity towards a more territorial identity. At the beginning they were more of an ethnic community, but when politics come along a group has to define itself also territorially (Raento 1993a, 102). Membership of the community no longer occurs because of history, race or culture, but as a result of living in the region and a willingness to identify oneself with the region (ibid.). Territory has a powerful meaning when Basque identity is studied.

### **3.2 Nationalism and Basque identities**

Nationalism is primarily a political phenomenon with a geographical character and there is almost always a territorial dimension behind it (Agnew 1989, 167). It requires ethnic and

political boundaries to be uniform (Gellner, 1983). In nationalism, an ethnic group or a group of people identify themselves in nationalistic terms. Often the main goal is political autonomy, generally a state (Waterman 1989, 117). There is the demand for self-determination or desire for a sovereign territorial unit where its inhabitants together create a nation, which is defined, for example, by ethnic, linguistic, religious, institutional or other categories (Agnew 1989, 168). Nationalism can be seen as a strategic form of territoriality in which one of the aims is to control a specific territory (Paasi 1999, 5). Normally nationalism promotes a sense of national consciousness (Rubenstein 2003, 224).

Nationalism appeared first with capitalism in the eighteenth century in Europe (Berberoglu 1995, 1). Historically, the first forms of nationalism were emerging in the nation-states of Western Europe such as England, Spain and France (Orridge 1981, 42). There, the bourgeoisie wanted to create nation-states to protect their economic interests (Berberoglu 1995, 1). In this way, nations were first connected to classes. However, today nationalism is a world-wide phenomenon and the reason for many ethnic conflicts around the world.

When speaking about nationalism itself, it can be political or cultural (Hutchinson 1992, 104). Normally they are seen together but it is possible to divide them as well. Politically it is an ideology of a self-defined group, which wants some political formulation (Mar-Molinero 1996, 69). Political nationalism tries to achieve an autonomous state, which has a common citizenship and can participate equally in the modern world (Hutchinson 1992, 105). Culturally, nationalism is the outcome of an awareness of shared characteristics (Mar-Molinero 1996, 69). Aims of cultural nationalists are directed at the moral regeneration of a unique historical community, mainly through educational movements (Hutchinson 1992, 104-105). In Europe most of the ethno-nationalist movements are based on cultural demands and most of the time they are linked to language questions (Conversi 1997, 2). Language has been one tool for Basque nationalists as well. Ethno-nationalist movements refer to movements working on behalf of a stateless nation (ibid., 6)

Nationalism has been seen as a peripheralised phenomenon in which minority groups are trying to create new states (Billig 1995). However, there is nationalism in every existing state already. States also foster nationalism when they promote symbols of the nation-state, such as flags and songs (Rubenstein 2003, 224). Today, nationalism is merely hidden and the term national

identity is used more often. Even these two elements that bind together nationalism have a negative meaning while national identity is seen positively (Paasi 1999, 6).

Historically seen, Spain has never been a strong nation-state with a unified culture. Instead, it has included several ethnic or national groups with different cultures and languages, such as the Catalans, the Basques and the Galicians. Already for centuries the Basques had a separate cultural and political identity. They had the reputation of being a mystical people with their strange and difficult language. Nobody knows where their real roots are and from where their language originates. There is research in which it is claimed that the Basques form a group that is racially different to others. They say that a typical Basque has a long and straight nose, thick eyebrows, a strong chin and big ears (Kurlansky 2000, 30). Also it is said that the Basques have a major concentration of blood type O and that they are the major group with Rh-negative blood in the world (Ramirez & Sullivan 1987, 121). It does not matter if these studies about their racial homogeneity are true or not. They are just creating the story for the 'imagined community'. However, Basque nationalists could present a strong case with a long period of isolationism combined with distinct physical features (Mar-Molinero & Smith 1996, 8).

The Basques have always thought that they have a special status in comparison with other regions in Spain. The Basque provinces were one of the Spanish regions, which were able to maintain their local laws, *fueros*<sup>7</sup>, for a long time (Conversi 1997, 45; Letamendía 1995, 180). This separate system of administration was not abolished until 1876 (Mar-Molinero & Smith 1996, 2-6). The Carlist civil wars (1833-76)<sup>8</sup> were mainly fought in the Basque Country (Conversi 1997, 46). Liberals favoured Queen Isabel II and conservatives favoured her brother, Carlos (Ramirez & Sullivan 1987, 126). The rural Basques were conservative Carlists, because they were against centralisation and they felt it was a question of their rights (Gardner 2000, 16). The urban Basque bourgeoisie fought against them and their goal was liberalism (Raento, 1993a, 95). As a result of the Carlist wars the Basques lost their *fueros* (Gardner 2000, 16). After losing the *fueros* the Basques felt that their autonomy and rights had been taken away. During this time, the existing regionalism was transformed little by little into nationalism (Letamendía 1995, 180). Nationalism was born as a result of a historical situation, which was produced through a contradiction between Spanish nationalism and Basque resistance to the loss of the *fueros* (Lorenzo Espinosa 1999, 63).

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<sup>7</sup> *Fueros* refer to traditional Basque laws of the Middle Ages. *Fueros* provided a degree of self-government to the Basque territories (Letamendía 1995, 196).

<sup>8</sup> The first Carlist war was occurred in 1833-40 and the second Carlist was in 1872-76 (Montero 1993, 96).



**Figure 4.** Basque flags hanging in the street.

In the second half of the nineteenth century rapid industrialisation, especially in Vizcaya, (Gardner 2000, 16), modernisation and economic growth brought a lot of immigrants to the Basque Country. During the deepening industrialisation, the local upper class started to search for a political ideology and they wanted the re-establishment of *fueros* (Conversi 1997, 49). This all led to nationalist movements starting to emerge in a response to the dramatic social and economical changes (Raento 1999, 219). The father of the nationalist movement in the Basque Country was Sabino Arana (1865-1903) (Conversi 1997, 53; Letamendía 1995, 181). According to his beliefs the Basques formed a pristine European race, which had remained unconquered in the mountains throughout the ages (Mar-Molinero & Smith 1996, 8). He created most of the symbols and values for Basque nationalism, such as its anthem, flag (*ikurriña*)<sup>9</sup> (Figure 4), and political programme (Conversi 1997, 53; Letamendía 1995, 181). He also created the Basque Nationalist Party, the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasca) and he was the person who shaped the development of *Euskera* (Kurlansky 2000, 170-171). For Arana, the originality of *Euskera* demonstrated the purity of the Basque race (MacClancy 1996, 209). Sabino Arana was a

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<sup>9</sup> *Ikurriña*, the Basque flag, was designed to symbolise national unity. The term *ikurrin* derives from *ikur*, which means sign, mark or logotype (Euskadi 2004).

traditionalist, who saw the Catholic Church and the rural peasantry as the soul of the Basque people (Mar-Molinero & Smith 1996, 13). For him nationhood was based on race, not on language or territory (MacClancy 1996, 209; Letamendía 1995, 181). He had this primordial standpoint to Basqueness (e.g. Smith 1986, 7), where identity is inherited and based on ‘given’ things.

The first Basque nationalists and the PNV were the petty bourgeois and artisan groups, whose livelihood was under threat due to the rapid industrialisation of the Vizcaya region. At the turn of the century a modern middle-class gained influence within the party (Mar-Molinero & Smith 1996, 13). Nationalism was developing slowly through different forms and at the end of the 1950s under the dictatorship of Franco, a branch of this nationalism took the form of ETA (Bruni 1998, 24). ETA was born when the youth wing of the PNV, Ekin, broke away from the party in 1958 (Letamendía 1995, 183). It was a counteraction to the repression, which Franco was inflicting against the collective Basque identity (Letamendía 1995, 180). He forbade any use of *Euskera* and removed all names in *Euskera* from public buildings and even from gravestones. He also forbade the teaching of *Euskera* and the performance of any Basque folklore (Raento 1999, 98). At the beginning, ETA was a cultural movement, which tried to maintain the language and the local culture (Conversi, 1997, 90; MacClancy 1996, 210), but later it took a violent form; the main goal was an independent Basque Country. During its evolution, ETA had many schisms and always those who kept their arms kept the name of ETA (MacClancy 1996, 210).

Today, after forty years, ETA still continues its programme of violence and terrorist attacks, even if it has had lately a quite quiet period. ETA murdered, for example, many police officers, editors and politicians. Altogether almost 850 persons have died in attacks by ETA after 1968 (Helsingin Sanomat 2004). Basque nationalism is divided into different levels; from moderate to extreme and from left-wing to right-wing nationalists. These different nationalist groups together with non-nationalist groups have affected the division of Basque society. Basque nationalists have difficulties in forming national unity and their support varies from one region to another (Raento 1999, 219). Today the traditional right-wing nationalist party, PNV, still controls the autonomous parliament. Despite this, the nationalist community in the Basque Country is bitterly divided (Mar-Molinero & Smith 1996, 24). Nowadays PNV accepts autonomy, but ETA has continued its armed struggle and demands identity and creation of

socialist state with its recently outlawed political wing Herri Batasuna. Today you can see often graffiti on public buildings, which demand an independent Basque Country (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Graffiti demanding an independent Basque Country.

Radical Basque nationalists define Basqueness in such a way that not all who are born and are living in the Basque Country are Basques. According to nationalists, Basqueness is a political choice (Raento 1993a, 106). PNV made a declaration in the 70s that a Basque is a person who has integrated with Basque society and adopted its identity (Raento 1993a, 106). For *Herri Batasuna* Basques are *arbetzales*<sup>10</sup>. An *arbetzale* is a person who actively participates in the Basque political struggle (MacClancy 1996, 213). According to this radical interpretation a real Basque is a Basque nationalist.

### **3.3 Language and Basque identities: the most important ethnic marker?**

Ethnic groups are defined by boundaries, which exist between different groups (Barth, 1969, 15). These boundaries are not fixed and they may change and transform over time. The creation

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<sup>10</sup> *Arbetzale*=patriot.

of boundaries happens through contact with other groups (Lindholm 1993, 14). They are maintained by different kinds of mechanisms, or *ethnic markers*. These markers indicate who is a member of a certain group and identify what are the cultural items that define membership in this ethnic group (Nash 1996, 24). A sense of solidarity is based on symbols of identification and culture and experiences, which emphasise common traditions (Raento 1993b, 13). Boundary mechanisms can vary from dress code to dietary codes (Schöpflin 2003, 481). Also language and religion have been seen as significant ethnic markers (Hutchinson & Smith 1996, 18) or as symbols of identification. Language is more concrete one and with language it is easy to make the distinction between 'Us and Others' (Raento 1993b, 13). Language can be defined as a system of signs, sounds, gestures, and marks that have meaning for the cultural group (Rubenstein 2003, 19).

Almost anything can function as a boundary mechanism but the most important mechanism is language (Schöpflin 2003, 481). Language often has an important role in ethnic identity. It means often much more than only a means of communication and it can be a very powerful symbol when discussing ethnic identity (Fishman 1977, 25). Language has a communicative and symbolic role for the group as well (Edwards 1996, 227). This means that a separate language as a symbol can be more important than its actual use (De Vos 1975, 15). This is the case for many Basques and will be examined more deeply later on.

Often national movements are closely linked to language, which has often been seen as the main distinctive object between different nations (Edwards 1977, 255). In Basque nationalism language also has been an important factor. In the Basque Autonomous Community, however not a single language is spoken (MacClancy 1996, 207). Language can be seen as a reminder to an ethnic group of its origins and as a distinctive factor among other groups (Edwards 1977, 257). In this way it can have an important role in nationalism (ibid.). Many nationalist groups follow the principle of one nation, one people with one language (MacClancy 1996, 207).

The origin of *Euskera* has always been mysterious. It is not a Romance, Germanic or Celtic language as its neighbouring languages in Western Europe (Gardner 2000, 19). *Euskera* is an isolated language and unrelated to any others (Rubenstein 2003, 163). There have been several efforts to determine its origin but without any results (Kurlansky 2000, 33). There have been speculations that it could be related to an African language family, to a Caucasian language family or to Iberian languages, but so far it is classified as an isolated language without any relatives (Gardner 2000, 19). In Europe, Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian and other Finno-

Ugrian tongues are also unique living languages, which are not Indo-European and there have been also speculations that *Euskera* is related to these languages (Kurlansky 2000, 35).

*Euskera* played an important role in the identity forming process. There is not any word in *Euskera* to formulate a person who is Basque and the only word to identify a member of Basque community is *euskaldun*, which means a speaker of the Basque language (Kurlansky 2000, 30). Also the Basque term *Euskal Herria* (the Basque Country) means literally the territory of the Basque speakers (ibid.). Language also has been a barrier between Basques and others. It is the defining factor in Basqueness.

When Basques were able to retain their *fueros*, Castillian was accepted as an administrative language while *Euskera* was spoken in oral situations and mainly in rural areas (Mar-Molinero 1996, 77). There was no significant medieval literacy in *Euskera*, mainly because of its divisions into dialects (ibid., 78). Still today *Euskera* has a number of dialects and its standardisation process is still undergoing (Gardner 2000, 20). The uniform standardised language, *Batua*<sup>11</sup>, was developed in late fifties and early sixties (ibid., 30).

*Euskera* was declining because it did not have official status or a literary tradition. Only rural people spoke it and it was hardly spoken in urban centres by the middle-class or upper middle-class. The decline increased after the civil war when Franco occupied the Spanish Basque Country (Gardner 2000, 26). Under Franco's dictatorship, the minorities in Spain's periphery were repressed (Mar-Molinero 1996, 81). During his rule until 1975, *Euskera* was not in favour (Gardner 2000, 26). The use of minority languages, such as *Euskera* and Catalan, was seen as anti-patriotic and the language question became a political one (Mar-Molinero 1996, 81).

*Euskera* has not been a core value for Basque nationalism until very recently (Conversi 1997, 162), due to several reasons. The difficulties in learning it have prevented it from becoming a language of the masses. Also the father of Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana, wanted this language solely for Basques. For him the most important common value for Basques was their race, distinct from others, and he did not want immigrants to learn *Euskera* (Mar-Molinero 1996, 79). His opinion was that it was better to have a society of pure Basques who spoke Spanish than 'half-breeds' who spoke *Euskera* (MacClancy 1996, 209). It is estimated that in 1860, more than half of the population of the Basque regions in Spain spoke *Euskera* (Edwards

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<sup>11</sup> Standard, unified *Euskera*, in *Euskera*: *bat*=one, *batu*= to unify.

1985, 188). Today only around 20 % of the population in the Basque Autonomous Community are able to speak *Euskera* (Conversi 1997, 163). *Euskera* was part of the nationalists' arguments, but it was more of a symbol (Heiberg 1982, 358).

Basque nationalism emerged first in Bilbao<sup>12</sup> (Heiberg 1982, 358), which is the most important city in the Basque Autonomous Community. Although Vitoria<sup>13</sup> is the official capital, Bilbao has always been the economic centre. In Bilbao, *Euskera* was hardly spoken and its status also was decreasing in other parts of the Spanish Basque Country (Heiberg 1982, 358). The Franco regime (1939-75) repressed all non-Spanish symbols but *Euskera* was most strongly repressed in the schools and in the streets (Tejerina Montaña 1996, 222). The Basque language was almost entirely excluded from the educational system until the Basque Country obtained its autonomy in 1979 after Franco's death (Euskara, Language policy 2003). During the regime of Franco, it was impossible to use *Euskera* in public places and its use was then only in the hands of parents in the home (Tejerina Montaña 1996, 222).

However, in the 1960s Basque nationalism redefined its ideas so that the language became a key element of collective identity and distinctiveness (Tejerina Montaña 1996, 221). During that time, *ikastolas* started to emerge. *Ikastolas* were schools organised by parents where all the subjects were taught in the Basque language. In 1982 a law was passed that entitled pupils to be taught in both languages, in *Euskera* and in Spanish (Gardner 2000, 33). Also language schools for adults (*euskaltegi*) became important and Basque literature and Basque culture increased (Tejerina Montaña 1996, 221). ETA took *Euskera* as well to its fundamental component creating Basque collective identity. Political repression made people aware that their language was declining and it increased its promotion (Tejerina Moñtana 1996, 224). *Euskera* became a major symbol of Basqueness for nationalists. According to nationalistic interpretations *Euskera* also shapes the way of thinking and a Basque who is not able to speak *Euskera* can be only half a Basque (Raento 1993a, 105).

Today the main emphasis of the language policy in the Basque Autonomous Community lies mainly with the education system. The number of bilinguals, those who can speak both *Euskera* and Spanish, has increased during the past years mainly due to the 'Basquification' of the education system (Euskara, Language policy 2003). Today practically all Basque speakers are

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<sup>12</sup> In *Euskera: Bilbo*.

<sup>13</sup> In *Euskera: Gasteiz*; the combination Vitoria-Gasteiz is often used as well.

bilingual (Gardner 2000, 22). For the most radical nationalists bilingualism is not enough. For them a real Basque is a person who demands that only *Euskera* is spoken in *Euskadi* (Raento 1993a, 105). Nowadays *Euskera* is heavily promoted in the Basque Autonomous Community but the situation is not so good in Navarra and the French parts where the official policies are against *Euskera*.

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The aim of this chapter is to present the components, which I consider most important in the construction of Basque identity. These components are chosen because they arose in the interviews and they have been recently present in local media. There can also be many other components in identity formation, for example religion and culture, but some are deemed more important than others. The components used in this study provided the answer to the main research question: What is Basque identity? The complexity behind Basque territory, nationalism and language together are providing reasons why Basque identity is competing and conflicting. In the next chapter the research methods used to address this complex question are examined more deeply.

#### 4 METHODS AND RESEARCH MATERIAL

In this research, I apply a qualitative approach. Qualitative research tries to describe reality (Hirsijärvi et al. 2000). Qualitative research is interested in the attitudes, motivations and behaviour of individuals (Hakim 1987, 26). Normally in qualitative research there is not a clear hypothesis, which means that a researcher does not have fixed pre-assumptions about the research object and the research results (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 19). Questions on identity are linked to an individual's experiences and there is a process of self-construction (Castells 1997, 7), which makes these questions difficult to describe in quantitative ways. Qualitative methods are most suitable when a depth of insight and understanding is needed (Robinson 1998, 409). In this research, the aim is to understand and explain the complicated situation in the Basque Country. What is the individual story behind the collective ethnic identity? Ethnographical methods, like participant observation and interviews, were used in this research. However, they are not 'techniques' in such a way that they can adapt like mathematical models (Robinson 1998, 410). Methods in this research just linked the researcher to the group, the Basques.

The main reason for my research was my exchange period in the Basque Country, which took place in 2001-2002. Before this exchange, I did not know much about Basques themselves. I heard about ETA, bombs and the existence of the conflict, though the reasons behind the Basque conflict were not clear to me. During my exchange year I studied Basque culture and history and even a bit *Euskera*. I started to follow the political discussion in the newspapers and often I discussed with my Basque friends how they felt about everything. Back in Finland, I realised that my thesis should be about Basques because then I might understand more about their situation.

When I went back to the Basque Country in 2003 to conduct the empirical part of this research I already had an image of Basque society. This affected my selection of the research topic. I had ideas about Basqueness and these ideas were formed in a Basque context through the Basques I met. It is difficult to say if these images are totally true or only a part of the greater picture. However, most important is that I had some kind of image about the society. I had lived inside of the society and I was not totally an outsider. Naturally, as a researcher this familiarity can compromise my objectivity, but when I have been aware of this factor I have tried to avoid this situation. According to Eskola and Suoranta (1998, 17), objectivity is formed by recognising

your own subjectivity. This means also that a researcher has to try not to mix one's own beliefs and attitudes towards the research object.

For background information I conducted a literature review on Basque history and in general I have tried to follow the current situation. I have also watched movies and documentaries about Basques. During my empirical research period I tried to participate in all kinds of events in Basque society and to see and experience things personally and more from the inside. These components together build up a more complete picture about the Basques in this research. Side by side with the methods described in the following sub-chapters is the use of photographs. They provide a visual background of the identities.

Primary data collection is one of the main components of this research, especially themed interviews, which were conducted in the Basque Country. Interviews seemed to be a natural method to collect information about individuals' thoughts on such a sensitive issue. Questionnaires would have not provided suitable information that would have been deep enough to clarify how individuals construct their identity and to analyse the complicate situation in the Basque Country.

#### **4.1 Fieldwork in Vitoria**

Fieldwork was conducted mainly in Vitoria from August 2003 to October 2003. During this time I conducted my interviews, engaged in participant observation and collected other data. As I had already stayed in Vitoria one year previously, the city and its surroundings were familiar to me and it was easy to get back inside of the Basque community. Vitoria is the official capital of the Basque Autonomous Community and is located in province of Álava. Álava differs from Guípuzcoa and Vizcaya, because it has always been the most Spain orientated and it has less traditional Basque culture. Also, the main language in Álava is Castilian and you do not hear *Euskera* often. However, also this city has certain places where you can become aware of the ethnic conflict or of Basque nationalism. In the old part of the city there is one street with many bars, Cuchilleria (Figure 6), which is considered to be the most nationalist part of the city. On this street you can see many posters in *Euskera*, demands to set free the imprisoned ETA members or political graffiti.



**Figure 6.** Nationalist bar in Cuchilleria

The University of the Basque Country has faculties in every capital of the Basque provinces. The Faculty of Philology and History is located in Vitoria. The possibility to study Basque philology results in many political nationalists studying in Vitoria and this brings its own atmosphere to the city as well. There are often demonstrations or strikes. The reason for many of those actions is that some of the students have been detained as possible ETA members or that teaching in *Euskera* is not sufficient.

However, as the empirical part has been done only in one location, it also might have its effects on this research. Results might have been different if other parts of the Basque Autonomous Community had been included as well. Also, the Basques in Navarra and the

French Basque regions would have had their own stories. The purpose of this study is not to create one unifying picture about the Basques. Instead the aim is to find individual stories and to show that identity questions cannot ever be unambiguous and there are as many results as stories behind it.

#### 4.1.1 Thematic interviews

The most common method applied in qualitative research is the in-depth interview (Hakim 1987, 26). In this research, the thematic interview technique is used and it is one form of the in-depth interview. Interviews are a common method to collect information in qualitative research. It gives you information when one's real thoughts, attitudes, motives and beliefs can be revealed. An interview is a kind of discussion, which happens on the initiative of the researcher (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86). As a method, an interview is sensitive and people-orientated and it offers an interviewee the possibility to explain his experiences and thoughts in his own words (Valentine 1997, 111). Different kinds of interviews exist, ranging from highly structured to

freer (Robinson 1998, 413). The thematic interview used in this research is something between these two approaches. It is a semi-structured interview method, which also can be called a focussed interview (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 47). In a thematic interview the topics of discussion have been decided beforehand, but questions do not have an exact form and order (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86). In this kind of interview it is important that the interviewee can speak freely and the researcher just has to make sure that all interesting themes are covered (Grönfors 1982, 106).

In qualitative research the sample is discretionary (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 59). A small amount of cases is used and the purpose is to analyse it as carefully as possible (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 18). The emphasis lies on detail and in-depth information (Hakim 1987, 27) and the aim is not to make a statistical generalisation, but rather to understand and search for new theoretical viewpoints (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2001, 59).

The interviewees were between 20 and 30 years of age. It was my personal decision to concentrate on this specific age group, as this generation is forming the future. For people in this age group the Basque conflict has been present during their entire lifetime and this might have affected their identity as well. Also, it was easier to get into contact with people of my own age group.

The number of the interviewees was 20, but one interview was rejected because of a bad recording of the interview. The number was not decided before hand, rather it was determined through the interview process. Interviews were conducted until the same themes began to be repeated by the subjects, indicating that the major issues had been covered. This is called saturation of data (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 62).

The number of the interviewed females was 12 and the number of males was 8. Most of the interviewees were students or were recently graduated. The mother tongue was Spanish for 14 of the interviewees and for six it was *Euskera*. For one person *Euskera* was not the mother tongue, but the language she used most frequently today. All of the *Euskera* speakers were bilingual; all spoke *Euskera* and Spanish. In the Basque Autonomous Community it is obligatory to study both Spanish and *Euskera* at school. More details about interviewees are presented in Appendix 1.

Because of my own stay in Vitoria and connections there, all of the interviewees had some kind of link to this city. They were either born or had studied there. I conducted 18 interviews in Vitoria and 2 in small villages in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa. The majority, 13 of the interviewees, were born in Vitoria and the rest of them lived there during their studies. Because Álava, the province in which Vitoria is located, is the most Spanish orientated province in the Basque Autonomous Community, certain impacts on the research results must be acknowledged. However, I had to use my personal relations to get deeper into the topic and if I would have stayed in other parts of the Basque Autonomous Community it would have been more difficult. In this kind of research you need to live in the research location to get a more complete picture.

Interviewees were found by using ‘snowball’ sampling. Through my previous contacts in the Basque Country I selected some key persons. These individuals were interviewed and then they were asked to suggest some other people, who might agree to be interviewed as well. In this way I found interviewees quite easily and through different key persons, different kinds of views were presented. It is important to have enough of these initial contacts to make sure that all of the interviewees do not come from the circle of like-minded people (Valentine 1997, 116). I was afraid that the key persons would suggest only their own friends and then opinions might become too similar. However, often interviewees suggested by other interviewees had completely different opinion and ideas on the topics. The final result was that the interviews represented different perspectives and offered different opinions about the interview themes. This makes the interview material pluralistic and interesting.

The interviewees were able to choose the location of the interview and most of the time they came to my house. One reason for this was that even though my research topic was not directly linked to the political situation, it was always present. Most of the students lived still at home or in a student flat shared with others. They felt uncomfortable to talk at home when other family members or housemates might be present. I tried to keep a free and relaxed ambience during the interviews and to encourage them to say what they thought. I wanted them to feel comfortable to talk and often we just drank coffee at the same time in my kitchen. I was participating in the interviews as well to make them more natural, but I tried not to lead too much of the conversations. When a researcher conducts interviews by him- or herself the conducting process is very important. During the interviews, the reactions of the interviewees can be observed and perceptions can be made about their behaviour (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 119).

When the interviews were conducted, a basic framework with interview themes was used with supporting questions (Appendix 2). Supporting questions were used only to make discussions more fluent and they were not always used or the order of questions was different. These themes helped to guide conversations and ensured that the same topics were covered in every interview. When the same topics are used in each interview it makes them more comparable. Interviewees did not see this framework; it was only at my disposal and I was able to react in every interview as needed. This allowed interviewees to tell their story in their own words. After the interviews I tried to write down my perceptions about the interviews, for example how people reacted, if they were willing to speak, what kind of speech tone they had and what kind of emotions they exhibited during the interviews.

When conducting the interviews, my own identity and personality affected the interaction with others as well. I had the feeling that because of my Finnish nationality they considered me to be a neutral person to talk to about my themes. Some of the themes were rather sensitive, for example topics concerning the political situation, nationalism or even ETA. Many of the interviewees said they were not used to talk about these issues, because they always had to be aware of with whom they were talking about these issues. One of the interviewees even closed the windows so that neighbours could not listen while we were talking. Also my background helped, because I was student as well. Besides being a student, I was of similar age as the interviewees and this could have provided trust. Many interviewees also said that it was good that somebody from another European country is interested in the Basques and their situation. Some even remembered that Finland was oppressed by the Russians and linked this to the situation of the Basques.

The duration of the interviews varied from thirty minutes to two hours. The length of the interview depended on factors such as the personality of the interviewee, personal chemistry and time available. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, recorded and afterwards transcribed. Normally, thematic interviews are recorded, because recording enables fluent interviews without breaks (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 92). I always asked if the interviewees minded the recorder, but none of them was disturbed by it. The transcription process took quite some time because Spanish is not my native language. There was always a question if my language skills were good enough and if it prevented a profoundness in the interviews. However, I think that it was not major problem and that language was not an obstacle.

In general the interviews went well and all interviewees were willing participants. Interviewees were interested in my topic and they wanted to reveal to me their viewpoint. They were eager to explain the complicated situation inside the Basque Country, where two strong cultures, Basque and Spanish, are coexisting.

#### 4.1.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic method. As a method it involves living or working within the communities, which are researched (Cook 1997, 127). It consists of observing, listening and experiencing the research location, and in this way collecting observations of daily life (Robinson 1998, 422). The aim of participant observation is to look at the researched community more from the inside. As I lived in the Basque Country altogether one year and three months, I became partly an insider. I lived within the community and participated in its activities as a community member. Instead of a clear research diary, I made notes about the situations, events and my experiences, which I felt were important ones. These perceptions affected how this dissertation is built up and they are not directly presented. Participant observation was only used as a supporting method; the interviews were the main method.

### 4.3 Analysis of the material

The result of the transcribed material is a huge amount of written text. It is difficult to analyse such text and to find essential remarks and opinions. How is one to read the text in an objective way and to reveal the right things and not to leave anything important out? How is one to find also those hidden meanings behind the words and avoid misinterpretation? The abundance of the data in its true to life nature makes the analysis period interesting, but laborious (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 135). It is difficult to create an order to different phenomenon, to search for meanings and interpret the answers of the interviewees (ibid.).

When analysing qualitative data, analysis and synthesis are combined. Data is collected during an analytical process and it is broken down into conceptual parts. With the help of synthesis, separate parts were put together as scientific conclusions (Grönfors 1982, 145). Qualitative analysis tries to clarify the research material to produce new information about the topic being researched (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 138).

When analysing qualitative material there are two main ways to do it; to stick strictly to the material or to keep it as a starting point for theoretical thinking (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 146). In this research, the theoretical frame is used to help the analysis. Humanistic observation is brought out through the emphasis on the individual's participation in identity formation and by underlying the individual's point of view of the various themes, which were used in the interviews.

During the time that I lived in the Basque Country, I established a personal relationship with the research region. I believe that this helped me make the analysis. I felt that I was able to understand and interpret my interviews better, because of this personal relationship. When analysing, this personal relationship has to be kept in mind to preserve objectivity.

During the analysis process I did not have a clear path to follow. First interviews were transcribed and notes about the interview situations were made. Afterwards the tapes were listened to and the transcripts were read again and again until the contents of the interviews were familiar enough to me. After that I started to categorise the interview material. Then I rearranged the material according to categorisation. Arranging the material was an external process, which helped to analyse the research material thoroughly. A big part of the analysis process happened inside of my head and through huge amounts of notes, about which comments and perceptions on the interviews were written down. Categorisation should happen in such a way that categories can be justified both conceptually and empirically (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 147). This means that categories should be connected to theory and to my interview material.

In this research, I tried to create a picture of the identities of my interviewees and to examine their relation to the Basque Country. I analysed interviews through different themes and categories, which arose from the interviews and from the theoretical background. I concentrated on themes about competing and conflicting identities, territory, nationalism and language. Also divergences are presented, because I was not trying to create the most typical picture and generalisations. Instead, I tried to create a multidimensional picture about the material and to illuminate it from as many sides as possible. Also through the individual's point of view I tried to address the complexity of this sensitive issue. However a text, in this case transcribed interview material, is always a version or a certain point of view to the topic (Eskola & Suoranta

1998, 142). Language is producing the story but in this case the story has been created because of the initiative of a researcher.

The categorisation was not the final step of the analysis. Important is that a researcher examines categorised material from his or her own world of ideas. The purpose is to get a diverse understanding of the phenomenon and to develop such a theoretical viewpoint or model where the research material can be located (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 150).

There are many phases in qualitative analysis. Analysis is combined with synthesis, which means that there is an intention to create a general view and to present researched phenomenon in a new perspective (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2001, 143). Analysis should be followed by interpretation (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2004, 146). There are many qualitative methods, which can be used as a tool when an analysis is made, like content analysis, discourse analysis, discussion analysis and grounded theory. My method, when doing analysis, was a bit of a mixture of all of these and it could be described as an ‘analysis of meanings’. The purpose is to find deeper meanings behind the ‘discourses’. Overall, this research involved a high degree of self-interpretation, as formally-defined tools were not flexible enough to allow the identification of deeper meanings in the interview materials.

The interview material was many-sided and shows how multidimensional the situation is today in the Basque Autonomous Community. Among the interviewees there were both Spanish as well as *Euskera* speakers, nationalists from moderate to slightly extreme and both left-wing as well as right-wing. Also, there were nationalists who were able to speak *Euskera* and some where not. Many of the interviewees had different ideas about nationalism, for some it was political and cultural and for others only cultural. Also non-nationalists were able to explain how they saw the Basque Country and how they experienced living together with nationalism. The many different opinions and ideas are part of everyday life and it shows the division of Basque society. There were no notable differences between different genders, therefore the analysis of the interviews is not conducted according to gender.

The analysis of Basque identity is built up with the help of direct quotations from the interviews. Quotations are presented both in Spanish and English. Spanish was the language of the interviews and the quotations are afterwards translated in English. I have made the translations from Spanish to English. In some cases the translations do not correspond totally with the

original ones, because of the difficulties of translating the spoken language. Interviewees have been coded as follows: gender: F/M (female/man), age, mother tongue: E/S (*Euskera*/Spanish) and number of the interview as in Appendix 1. Pseudonyms are not used in order to preserve the meaning and feeling of the original words.

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In this chapter the research methods, fieldwork period and process of analysis are presented. Also the personal relationship between the methods and researcher are highlighted, because in a qualitative research this is very important. The next chapter concentrates on the analysis. Analysis is done with the help of themes or categories, which were generated by the interview material. First comes the basis behind identity; how interviewed persons define their identity. Second comes the relationship to Basque territory and how people experience it. Third comes nationalism, which is present in the Basque Autonomous Community in many ways. The fourth constructing element in the analysis is language, which defines and divides Basques. Together these elements answer the main research question of what is Basque identity, which on one hand is collective but on the other hand is still fragmented.

## 5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 5.1 Competing and conflicting identities

Are people within the Basque Autonomous Country Spanish, Basques or do they have another identity? What is a true Basque or a true Spaniard? After all, these ethnic and national identities are ‘imagined communities’ and in the post-modern era people have several identities, which have their eternal processes. Despite all of this, people still need their identities. They need to feel that they belong somewhere.

In the literature Basques are often defined as an ethnic group or even as a nation (e.g. Conversi 1997). They fulfil many criteria concerning ethnic identity and national identity. Basques have a collective name, a shared history, a common myth of descent, a shared culture, a relationship to a specific territory and a sense of solidarity as Smith (1986, 22-30) defines an ethnic community. However, these historical definitions are connected to the past. The approach in these definitions is collective. Behind this collectivism are individuals, who are able to tell how unified the Basque community really is.

One major question for the people in the Basque Autonomous Country is whether they are Spanish or Basque or something in between. Basque nationalists have their criteria of how to be a real Basque and the Spanish government is demanding other things. Inside of the Basque Country you can feel that you do not fulfil any of these criteria’s. A Spanish-Basque identity is sometimes difficult and it can be frustrating to define yourself all the time, or to prove to be either a Basque or a Spaniard when you feel that you are something in between them:

*“Yo soy española y dentro de España del País Vasco, porque he nacido en el País Vasco. Que no me siento vasca vasca vasca ni española española española.”*

*“I am Spanish and inside of Spain from the Basque Country, because I was born in the Basque Country. I feel neither Basque, Basque, Basque nor Spanish, Spanish, Spanish.” (F27S2)*

It is possible to be Basque and Spanish at the same time. The Basque Country has a long Spanish history and a lot of its culture is a mixture of both Basque and Spanish culture. There are also nationalists who are partly Spanish, but at the same time they want to maintain their

Basque culture. Do especially those Basques who cannot speak *Euskera* have a strong connection to Spanish culture? It is difficult to separate the Spanish and Basque components in their identity. A separate identity in itself is a hybrid Basque-Spanish one, different from either Basque or Spanish. Most of the people in the Basque Autonomous Community have a double identity (Raento 1993a, 106) and this makes it difficult to separate Basqueness and Spanishness:

*“No me siento mas española que vasca y ni mas vasca que española. Es lo mismo. Tengo cosas en común con gente de Vitoria pero puede que tenga muchas cosas tambien en común con alguien de Sevilla.”*

*“I don’t feel more Spanish than Basque and not more Basque than Spanish. It is the same. I have things in common with people from Vitoria but it might be that I have also a lot in common with somebody from Sevilla.” (F22S6)*



**Figure 7.** Protest against the Spanish state.

Defining Basques as being Spanish is, for many Basque nationalists, an insult. They do not have anything against Spain, but they see it as a neighbouring territory. Though, sometimes they feel that Spanish state is repressing the Basque Country. (Figure 7). In their minds, the Basque

Country is a separate state and they are bothered that, for example, in their passports their nationality is listed as Spanish. Geography in their minds is different than the official administration. In their minds the Basque Country is a separate state, totally distinct from Spain or other autonomies:

***“Pues España es un territorio que vivo al lado de él. Yo no...me jode moyon, en pasaporte soy española o en el DNI. Quiero decir yo no me siento española como tal pero me siento que es el territorio vecino.”***

*“Spain is a territory and I am living next to it. I don’t...It disturbs me a lot that in [my] passport I am Spanish or in [my] ID number. I am trying to say that I don’t feel Spanish or something, but I feel that it is a neighbouring territory.” (F22E4)*

However, there are always exceptions among Basques as the following quotation shows. This interviewee always spoke *Euskera* and has studied at a Basque school, *ikastola*<sup>14</sup>. She has a strong Basque culture at home but she is not disturbed about the Spanishness:

***“Me considero vasca pero no me molesta decir que soy española, pero no me siento española. Aquí lo que pasa es que mucha gente el sentirse vasco ya odia el español y a mi no. Otra cosa es que yo con españoles digo, hombre soy vasca y me siento más vasca que española. Sé que soy española porque mi DNI y todos mis documentos lo ponen. Pero no me importa. Pero si busco mi sentimiento dentro dentro pues me siento vasca.”***

*“I consider myself a Basque but it does not bother me to say that I am Spanish, but I don’t feel Spanish. What happens here is that for many people feeling Basque means disliking Spanish and for me it does not. Another thing is that to Spanish people I say that I am Basque and I feel more Basque than Spanish. I know that I am Spanish because my ID and all of my documents say so. But it doesn’t disturb me. But if I search my feelings inside of me I feel Basque.” (F23E17)*

In the Basque Autonomous Community live many Basques whose parents have immigrated from elsewhere in Spain. The rapid industrialisation period in the second half of the nineteenth century caused many immigrants from other Spanish regions to come in search of work in the Basque Country. Nowadays some of their descendants feel insecure about their identity and some of them have even turned into the most radical nationalists. Some of them, who are not so nationalistic, have difficulties though they feel Basque. Sometimes they can still feel as

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<sup>14</sup> Ikastola= Basque School. See chapter 3.3.

‘outsiders’ even if they were born in the Basque Country and have spent their entire lives in it. One descendant described her feelings as follows:

*"Yo soy de aqui, está claro pero a veces si que hay gente que te hacen sentir que eres de fuera. Porque yo no soy...quien dice, un RH negativo, los facistas estos de Arzalluz y a veces si que te sientes un poco...bueno yo he nacido aqui, yo soy de aqui como otra, cualquiera como un euskaldun de pura cepa y a veces si que me siento un poco... pero ni caso."*

*"I am from here, that is clear, but sometimes there are people who make you feel that you are from outside. Because I am not...a -RH<sup>15</sup> as those fascists of Arzalluz<sup>16</sup> say...I was born here, I am from here like any other, like a pure ‘euskaldun’<sup>17</sup> and sometimes I feel a bit...but I don’t care." (F23S15)*

Many non-nationalists want to keep their Basque identity, but without its political burden. For those who feel both Spanish as well as Basque, the political ideologies and expectations to be a ‘good Basque’ are sometimes too much. Because of the negative connotations, e.g. ethnic conflict, some people in the Basque Autonomous Community are fed up with the whole situation and are neglecting their Basque identity. Few interviewees said that they do not feel anything special for any specific region, but rather that they are members of the whole world. They said that they were neither Basque nor Spanish:

*"Yo no creo que pertenezca a ninguna tierra. No me considero ni vasco o ni español. Yo soy yo. No soy de ningún sitio. Bueno, yo nací en Vitoria. Es lo más que puedo decir pero no me considero parte de ningún estado o nación."*

*"I don’t think that I belong to any territory. I feel myself neither Basque nor Spanish. I am not from any place. I was born in Vitoria. That is the only thing I can say but I don’t feel that I am part of any state or nation." (M25S5)*

Officially, the nationality of the Basques is Spanish, though being Spanish does not say much to many Basques. What is a real Spaniard? Spain is divided into 17 autonomies, each that have varying levels of self-government. Some of them have their own culture and own language and this makes it difficult to define a single Spanish identity. Spain as a state does not have a strong national identity. Its identity consists of multicultural parts, which together create a complex

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<sup>15</sup> It has been claimed that Basques are the major group with RH negative blood in the world (Ramirez & Sullivan 1987,121). Basque nationalists have used this as a racially distinctive element.

<sup>16</sup> Xabier Antia Arzalluz is a Basque nationalist politician, who has been the leader of the Basque Nationalist Party for two decades, until 2004. He is a conservative nationalist and has been a powerful politician in the Basque Autonomous Community.

entity and varies from one region to another. Basques form one part within multicultural Spain. Even the non-nationalists acknowledged that Spain differs from other states in Europe. There are many autonomies, which are quite different and Spain is not seen as a nation:

***“Yo no pienso España como sentir español. Yo me siento de aquí, no sé. Creo que va por provincias y sentir nacionalidad de cada provincia. Española, pues no sé. Tampoco nos da mucho más.”***

*“I don’t think of Spain in such a way that I would feel Spanish. I feel that I am from here. I think it goes by provinces and to feel the nationality of every province. Spanish, I don’t know. It doesn’t give us much more.” (F23S15)*

A few of the interviewees, who had a strong Basque cultural connection at home and whose mother tongue is *Euskera*, had a romantic view of the Basque Country. They felt that they are deeply connected to its territory and they only have a Basque identity:

***“Yo me siento vasca porque me siento superunida a esta tierra y en alguna manera cuando veo... ¿Sabes?... Cuando por ejemplo ahora estaba fuera o tal... recordar la cultura de aquí, imaginas del monte de aquí, de la naturaleza de aquí. ¿Sabes? Es algo en mi corazón. En mi corazón hay algo que me hacer dar cuenta que soy de aquí. ¿Sabes?”***

*“I feel Basque because I feel really unified with this land and in some way when I see... You know? ...When for example I have been abroad or so on...to remember the culture from here, to imagine mountains from here, nature from here. You know? It is something inside of my heart. In my heart there is something, which makes me realize that I am from here. You know?” (F22E4)*

In general, for those interviewees who spoke *Euskera*, it was easier to define their identity. They felt that they are Basques and only Basques. They quickly defined why they are Basques: they were born in the Basque Country, they have a Basque culture and above all the Basque language, *Euskera*. Language is an important ethnic marker (Nash 1996)<sup>17</sup>, and with language you can easily distinguish between different groups. It is easy to say that you are Basque if you have a concrete way of showing it, such as a distinct, separate language, which is very different from other languages:

***“He nacido aquí. Mis padres son de aquí. He estudiado aquí. Hablo la lengua de aquí. Tengo la cultura de aquí.”***

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<sup>17</sup> In *Euskera*: Basque speaker. Sometimes it can have a political meaning; that *euskaldun* is a real Basque person.

<sup>18</sup> See more about ethnic marker in Chapter 3.1.

*“I was born here. My parents are from here. I have studied here. I speak the language from here. I have the culture from here.” (M27E7)*

***“He nacido en el País Vasco, toda mi familia es vasca y me siento vasco.”***

*“I was born in the Basque Country, whole my family is Basque and I feel myself Basque.”(M25E13)*

It can be concluded that among the interviewees who were from Basque Autonomous Community, there exist Basques and people who are both, Spanish and Basque. Nine of the interviewees considered themselves to be only Basque; two persons maintained that they do not have any identity and the rest felt that they have both Spanish and Basque components in their identity. Nobody considered themselves to be only Spanish.

## **5.2 Territory and the Basques**

Ethnic identity, national identity and nationalism are strongly connected to territory. It is the place where collective identity is linked and rooted. A territory creates the unifying link between cultural geography and identities. It is the place Smith (1991) calls ‘homeland’. Identities within the Basque Country are multiple, divided and sometimes even conflicting. There are many reasons for this, but one important factor is that even the territory, to which their ethnic identity is rooted, is unclear even for the Basques themselves. Historically, the seven provinces, comprising Álava, Guipuzcoa, Bizcaya and Navarra in Spain and the three provinces in France, formed the Basque Country. Administratively, these regions have been together only 200 years under the kingdom of Navarra (Raento 1993a, 95).

Historic Basque regions are divided now into two states and in Spain into two autonomous communities. The Basque Autonomous Community has a strong, officially recognised, Basque culture but Navarra and the regions in France do not have such an official status. Some consider that today only the autonomous region comprises the Basque Country and others see that all seven provinces together form the Basque Country. This all makes the Basque territory geographically interesting. It is geographically divided and its territorial sketch is unclear and conflicting. In general, people have different territorial concepts about the Basque Country. The official homepage of the Basque Autonomous Community<sup>19</sup> states:

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.euskadi.net>.

*“today it consists of seven herrialdes or districts which, for political and administrative purposes, form part of two European countries. Basque people and its territory have been divided because of the political transformation of Spain and the creation of autonomies” (Gobierno Vasco 2003).*

There are several names for the Basque Country and its provinces. Spanish terms and terms in *Euskera* are used side by side. All of the places and cities in the Basque Autonomous Community have both a Spanish and *Euskera* name. Nationalists prefer to use toponyms in *Euskera* and when they speak about *Euskadi*, they mean the autonomous area or *Euskal Herria* when Navarra and the French parts are included. It can be said that geographically the situation in the Basque Country is very interesting, though complicated. The ethnic group is divided into complicated entities. Several different regional units exist where people have built up their territorial and regional identities and where the same places have different names for different people.

When interviewees from the Basque Autonomous Community were asked to define the Basque Country the answers were quite different. There was not one unified picture of the regions that constructs the Basque Country. Eleven out of nineteen interviewees said that seven provinces are included, because there is a common culture and language. Many of these eleven interviewees said that they think that the seven provinces are included, even if the people in those regions might not think so. The interviewees recognised the problems, which Basque culture is facing inside of these regions. However, they saw that there are places in Navarra and in France where there is still the traditional Basque culture and which are important Basque zones:

***“Pues para mi son las tres provincias, Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa y Álava y Iparralde también, País Vasco Francés también. Porque la verdad que si hay muchos sitios que conserva la cultura vasca más que sitios de aquí. Navarra, para mi también es País Vasco aunque muchos Navarros no estan acuerdo”***

*“For me they are the three provinces, Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa and Álava and also Iparralde<sup>20</sup>, the French Basque Country as well. Because there are really many places, which are preserving Basque culture more than here. Navarra for me is also Basque Country even though many people in Navarra do not agree with that.” (F27S1)*

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<sup>20</sup> In *Euskera*: the French parts of the Basque Country.

Problems and fears for the future of the Basque culture outside of the Basque Autonomous Community were considered very important by the interviewees. Almost all, even the strong nationalists, had a sceptical attitude towards maintaining the Basque culture in Navarra and in the French parts. They saw it mainly as a result of politics, which have a negative attitude towards Basqueness, its culture and language. Also ETA, by its actions, causes attitudes to be negative in Navarra and in the French parts. The situation in France is seen as especially alarming:

***“La parte francesa... hombre también hay diferentes opiniones pero lo tienen más difícil en la parte francesa porque el Estado Francés no nos diferencia como provincias vascas, si no que los meten en otro departamento, los Pirineos Atlánticos. Entonces lo que hace el Estado Francés es eliminar el problema ignorándolo.”***

*“The French part... there are different opinions but the situation is more difficult there in the French part, because France does not separate us into Basque provinces, but puts us with another district, the Atlantic Pyrenees. In other words what France is doing is eliminating the problem by ignoring it.” (M25E13)*

All *Euskera* speakers saw that seven provinces are included. Most of the *Euskera* speakers were more nationalistic and this might be the reason that they included all seven provinces. According to nationalist ideology, seven provinces form the Basque Country and they should be unified in one nation or even a nation-state. This mainly is a dream for political nationalists, because they recognise the problem that many people inside of these regions are against Basque nationalism and do not want to belong to the Basque Country. Still many, especially *Euskera* speakers, experience these regions deeply connected to the Basque Autonomous Community:

***“Pues para mí son siete; las tres que somos la Comunidad Autónoma Vasca; Álava, Guipúzcoa, y Vizcaya y Navarra y las tres en País Vasco Francés. Históricamente han sido todas quieren ellos o no quieren ellos. El origen de los Vascones son Navarros ... y para mí son los siete.”***

*“For me they are seven; three, which are forming the Basque Autonomous Community; Álava, Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya and Navarra and the three in the French Basque Country. Historically they have all been whether or not they want to be. The origin of the Vascones<sup>21</sup> is that they were the people of Navarra ... but for me there are seven.” (F23E17)*

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<sup>21</sup> *Vascones* were a pre-Roman tribe who lived in the region where Navarra is situated currently. The Basques are their descendants (Kurlansky 2000, 41).

Eight of the interviewees said that only the Basque Autonomous Community forms the Basque Country and only one other person said that Basque Country is formed by the autonomous region and Navarra. Almost all of these eight interviewees had quite strong opinions that only three provinces are included and all of them were Spanish speakers. The interviewees recognised the connection in the past but now the situation is different and they are no longer connected. Especially the French parts were considered distant. One of the interviewees shortly stated how she forms the Basque Country:

***“Navarra es Navarra y el País Vasco Frances es País Vasco Frances. Si dibujo el mapa del País Vasco es Álava, Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa.”***

*“Navarra is Navarra and French Basque Country is French Basque Country. If I draw the map of the Basque Country it is Álava, Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa.”*  
(F27S17)

Identification with a region contains different spatial levels (Paasi 1996a, 211). The lowest level is on a micro-scale, for example identification with a village. The spatial level becomes higher, for example, in the case of identification with a state. Identification differs at each spatial level and at higher levels the identification is more symbolic (ibid.). For some the Basque Country represents this higher level and for others it is Spain. For both, identification is more symbolic.

In the Basque Autonomous Community, symbolic identification is sometimes complicated when you do not know whether it or Spain is the symbolic level for you. Many of the interviewees identified stronger with a concrete level, for example, a province, a city or a village. The Basque Autonomous Community is divided into small geographical areas and there is great pluralism inside, both physically and socially. Guipuzcoa and Bizcaya have been more nationalistic ones and Álava less. Also *Euskera* is less spoken in Álava. This causes that the provinces in the Basque Autonomous Community to have strong regional identities. This regional identity in each province is sometimes more important than the territorial identity of the Basque Country. Many Basques identify themselves with their province instead of the entire Basque territory:

***“Para mi España no es un país. No tengo la identidad a ser española. Si me tengo que definir soy vizcaina, vasca y española pero para presentarme los demas. Yo soy de Vizcaya.”***

*“For me Spain is not a state. I don’t have a Spanish identity. If I have to define myself I am Vizcayan, Basque and Spanish but just to present myself. I am from Vizcaya.” (F24E3)*

Also nationalism is divided into zones inside of the Basque Autonomous Community. In general, the interviewees who were more nationalistic identified themselves with the traditional Basque Country with seven provinces and then their identification was more symbolic.

Basque nationalists often experience Spanish territory differently and this experiencing is connected to their Basqueness. For them, Basqueness means that they consider the Basque Country and Spain are neighbouring territories. For five of the interviewees Spain was a territory next to the Basque Country. Even though they know that officially they belong to Spain it is experienced as another country:

***“Legalmente o geográficamente estoy dentro de España, pero como sentir mio, no. No me considero dentro de España, Me siento igual dentro de España que Inglaterra.”***

*“Legally or geographically I am inside of Spain, but I don’t feel that it is mine. I don’t consider that I am inside of Spain. I am as inside of Spain as inside of England.” (F23S11)*

For non-nationalists the Basque Country is inside of Spain. However they recognise the special status, which the Basque Country has as autonomy. The Basque Autonomous Community has its own culture and language but it is still part of the Spanish state as one of the interviewees commented:

***“Pues es una comunidad autonoma que forma parte del resto de país. Que tienen una personalidad diferente, unos costumbres, unos marcadas, un idioma historicó pero es algo especial dentro de un territorio más grande.”***

*It is an autonomous community, which forms part of the rest of the country. It has a different personality, customs, identifying marks, historical language, but it is something special inside of a bigger territory. (F22S6)*

It can be concluded that 11 of the interviewees considered that seven provinces construct the Basque Country, though in those regions are people who do not agree. For eight interviewees the Basque Country was only the Basque Autonomous Community and for one interviewee it

was the Basque Autonomous Community combined with Navarra. For nationalists most commonly it was seven provinces and for non-nationalists only three. Nationalists and non-nationalists experienced also territories differently. Spain was a neighbouring territory for nationalists. For non-nationalists the Basque Country was inside of Spain. Symbolic identification was experienced differently. Some identified themselves with Spain and some only with the Basque Country.

### **5.3 Nationalism**

Basques are divided into different nationalist groups. The groups can be roughly divided into: non-nationalists, moderate nationalists and radical nationalists. Obviously, this is a simplified division. Between these groups there are many subcategories. Nationalism is also politically divided into right- and left wing and between them there are big disagreements as well. However, these simplifications make it easier to understand complicated situations and somehow create a more clarified picture. All of the interviewees recognised the existence of nationalism in the Basque Autonomous Country and its division into different levels. One of the interviewees, who considered herself as a nationalist, defined Basque nationalism as follows:

*“Pues el nacionalismo vasco es un movimiento que trabaja por la cultura y la identidad vasca y hay bastantes niveles, menos nacionalistas, más nacionalistas y nacionalistas más radicales.”*

*“Basque nationalism is a movement, which works for the benefit of Basque culture and Basque identity and there are many levels, less nationalistic, more nationalistic, and with nationalists who are more radical.” (F25E19)*

Non-nationalists accept the autonomy, but they do not accept that the Basque Country would separate more Spain. Moderate nationalists are often satisfied with the strong autonomy or they want to reinforce it. Radical nationalists demand full independence and radical leftwing nationalists want to establish a socialist system in an independent Basque Country. Two of the interviewees dreamed about a socialist Basque Country. One of them said:

*“No solo quiero el independencia del País Vasco y que sigá funcionando en la misma manera que funciona ahora. Me gustaría que el País Vasco fue independiente y que fuera un país socialista con llamar en alguna manera.”*

*“I don’t want only the independence of the Basque Country and that it would continue working in a same way as it works now. I would like the Basque Country to be independent and socialist, to put it in this way.” (F22E4)*

Territory can play an important role in nationalism. Modern nationalism always had a spatial dimension (Conversi 1997, 6). Nationalism is a strategic form of territoriality and behind it there is almost always a struggle for control of land (Paasi 1999, 5). A state is the most territorial entity (Paasi 1984, 80) and such territorial units are always the results of historical processes (Paasi 1996b, 2). National identity links territory to culture, language and history (Paasi 1999, 5). For some, this political nationalism is too concentrated on a struggle for territory. Then the true Basqueness is forgotten as one of the interviewees, to whom nationalism meant to speak in *Euskera*, commented:

***“Hoy en día me considero nacionalista pero una manera, para nada a la manera de nacionalistas políticos ¿Lo más importante que es la tierra o la gente? Pero aquí parece que por un catzo de tierra se va a matando todo el mundo Es como Palestina y Israel, todo por tierra.”***

*“At this moment I consider myself as a nationalist but in one way, not in the way of nationalist politicians. What is the most important, territory or people? But it seems that here for a piece of land they are ready to kill everybody. It is like Palestine and Israel, everything for territory.” (F23E17)*

All of the interviewees recognised the special status of the Basque Autonomous Community. They saw it as a territorial unit with a strong autonomy and a separate language and culture. Some of the interviewees had a vision of the Basque Country as a nation and some saw it as a strong region inside of Spain. Few of the nationalists said that a Basque nation could not exist before an independent Basque Country was formed. It is an endless dispute whether this region is a nation or not. However, a political community exists with common institutions, rights and duties for the members, which according to Smith (1991, 9) are preconditions for national identity. Some of the interviewed nationalists made a distinction between their political citizenship, Spanish, and their nationality, Basque. For them it was clear that the Basque nation exists but that it is now repressed by the Spanish state.

The division between nationalists and non-nationalists is not totally clear. There are several nationalist groups, from moderate to more radical and from political to cultural. Roughly, it can be said that ten out of nineteen of the interviewees considered themselves to be nationalists, but

they had different ways and methods to be nationalistic. All of the *Euskera* speakers were included, but there were also nationalists who were not able to speak *Euskera*.

The demand of the most radical nationalist is full independence; a creation of a different nation-state with its own sovereignty. The most ideal vision would be that all the seven traditional provinces would be included in this state. Overall seven of the interviewees were nationalists in such a way that they were dreaming about an independent Basque Country even though they knew that it is not easy to achieve. Even though all of them were not radical nationalists they still wanted to have an independent Basque Country.

For many non-nationalists and moderate nationalists in this study visions about independence were utopian, and will never become a reality. Especially when the borders inside Europe are disappearing, the formation of new states and borders seems to be something without any sense. In many cases, nationalistic feelings were accepted when they focus on protecting and maintaining the culture and language, but not on creating a new state. Independence is, at this moment, quite far away from reality, but it is still always a topic for discussion for both nationalists and non-nationalists. Nationalists felt that the Basque Country should be allowed to decide its own matters and its own future. The Basque Country should act in Europe as any other nation-state. Interviewees who were non-nationalists considered these demands ridiculous. They thought that even economically the Basque Country could never survive alone and it would always need a union with others. For them strong autonomy was enough and something to be satisfied with already:

***“No me importaría la sentimiento nacionalista. Bueno no me importaría que existiría pero por supuesto sin violencia y sin muertes. Tampoco estoy parte de gobierno española ahora y hombre me gustaría que las cosas siguieran. Pues eso, que la cultura Vasca se mantuvieran, una identidad. Pero vamos, no sé, la independencia de Euskadi pues tampoco hasta que punto..un mundo en que todas las fronteras estan rompiendo y Europa está ahora con euro. ¿Igual conservar la autonomia, no?”***

*“I wouldn’t mind the nationalistic feeling. I wouldn’t mind that it exists but of course without violence and deaths. I am not on the side of the Spanish government and I would like things to continue, that Basque culture would be maintained, an identity. But the independence of Euskadi, until which point...a world where frontiers are breaking down and Europe is now with the euro... [the best is ] to maintain the autonomy, isn’t it?” (F27S1)*

There are many nationalistic groups and views, but most of the publicity goes to the extreme nationalists, in other words to ETA. Non-nationalists did not see any point in their action, also most nationalists were against ETA. Many of the interviewees thought ETA had its purpose at the beginning. It was established to help the oppressed people and their culture, to maintain the Basque identity. For the most part, attitudes were against ETA, but some of the interviewees started to question what the situation would be in the Basque Country without it:

***“Yo por supuesto quería que ETA acaba pero también pienso que a veces es la única forma. Yo creo cuando surgió tenía más sentido que sigá ahora pero es que la situación es muy complicada. Hombre, yo creo que como todos queríamos que no existiría y poder vivir en paz y felices pero es que no hay manera.”***

*“Of course I would like ETA to stop but I also think that sometimes it is the only method. I think that when it emerged it had more sense than now when it is continuing, but the situation is really complicated. I think that we all want it not to exist and that we can live in peace and happily, but there is no way to do it.”*  
(F25E19)

Among the interviewees nationalism was seen in two ways, positively or negatively. Some thought that the idea behind it is good and for some the word nationalism was totally covered with negative meanings. Positively seen, it was understood as a feeling of belonging to a certain territory or culture:

***“El nacionalismo como yo lo entiendo, sabes, sentirte en alguna manera parte de una tierra, de su cultura, de sus orígenes y todo eso y sentirte unido pues eso un idioma... sentirte parte de ese lugar. Lo que pasa es que, lo que no me gusta de ciertas personas que se consideran también nacionalistas es, el creerte mejor que otras personas que han nacido en otro sitio.”***

*“Nationalism, how I understand it, is to feel in some way part of one land, its culture, its origin and to feel unified with its language... to feel part of this place. What happens, which I don't like, is that certain people, who consider themselves nationalists as well, believe that they are better than other persons who were born in a different place.”* (F22E4)

Negatively seen, nationalism was considered themselves a bad ideology in which groups of people consider to be better than others. Behind these negative comments was a division in Basque society, which still exists in the Basque Autonomous Community. People who do not share nationalistic ideologies feel this separation mostly as the following quotation of one non-nationalist shows:

***“Nacionalismo es sentirse vasco por el encima de todos, decir yo no soy español soy vasco. Todas las cosas juntos... tu no eres vasco, tu fuera. Bueno es nacionalismi aqui.”***

*“Nationalism is to feel Basque above all, to say that I am not Spanish, but I am Basque. All the things are together... you are not a Basque, you are out. That is nationalism here.”* (M25S5)

Nationalism divides people in the Basque Autonomous Community. Non-nationalists were blaming nationalists and vice versa. Especially non-nationalists felt that they are not allowed to be non-nationalists when they live in the Basque Country:

***“Es cierto que en este comunidad autonoma hay nacionalistas pero no se tiene que olvidar que tambien hay gente queno lo es. Entonces no entiendo porque no nos respetan a los posturas.”***

*“It is true that there are nationalists in this autonomous community but it should not be forgotten that there are also people who are not. So I don’t understand why positions are not respected.”* (F28S9)

Even between nationalists, opinions vary widely. Especially the division between right- and left-wing is deep. One of the interviewees from the left-wing did not accept the right-wing nationalists at all:

***“Para mi hay dos clases de nacionalismo vasco; el que es derechas, vamos el gobierno estos momentos y el que es izquierdas. Nacionalismo vasco derechas yo no me siento identificada con ello. Para mi ellos son los que dicen que si no tienes dieciseis apellidos vascos no eres vasco. No entiendo. Nacionalismo vasco es los que quieren una nacion vasca... querer una nacion vasca, independiente.”***

*“For me there are two types of Basque nationalism, the one from the right-wing, government today, and the other from the left-wing. I don’t identify myself with right-wing Basque nationalism. To me they are those who say that if you don’t have sixteen Basque surnames you are not a Basque. I don’t understand it. Basque nationalism is to want a Basque nation... to want a Basque nation, an independent one.”* (M25E13)

Nationalism can be totally different when it is seen politically or culturally. According to Hutchinson (1992, 104), it is possible to have political or cultural nationalism. Politically, it is more an ideology for the group to gain some political formulation like a state (Mar-Molinero 1996, 105). These two ways of nationalism often go hand in hand, but because of the political conflict in the Basque Autonomous Community there are people who consider themselves only

to be cultural nationalists. They want to maintain the Basque culture, language and above all the Basque identity, but they do not want to participate in the political struggle. Sometimes they can feel that they are in the middle of the nationalistic debate:

*“Yo por ejemplo no me considero nacionalista politicamente, culturalmente si, pero no soy antinacionalista y tampoco me siento representado por ningun partido. Pues es una putada porque estás allí en medio y no sabes muy bien a quien votar o quien te representa, pero bueno.”*

*“I, for example, don’t consider myself a nationalist politically but only culturally, but I am neither anti-nationalist, nor do I feel represented by any party. It is a bad thing because you are there in the middle and you don’t know very well who to vote for or who is representing you.” (M27S14)*



**Figure 8.** Nationalist sign on a balcony.

For some interviewees who were nationalists, being a Basque was a political choice. Some of the nationalist are showing their opinions openly (Figure 8). For them being born in the Basque Country is not enough. For them a Basque is a person who recognises the Basque problem and does something about it:

*Hay gente que, para mi son desde aqui y otra hay otra gente que son vascos, euskaldunas.*

*“There are people, who for me are from here and other people who are Basques, euskaldunas<sup>22</sup>.” (F25E19)*

## 5.4 Language

Today, *Euskera* is still not spoken by all Basques, but its symbolic meaning is important among the Basques. It is seen as a core value of Basque culture and as one of the significant ethnic markers<sup>23</sup> on which the Basque identity is based. For the nationalists, it is something unique and beautiful and for some non-nationalists all the politics have moved their attitudes against its use. Only a minority of Basques is able to speak *Euskera*, and this may contribute to the complex Basque identity.

Seven interviewees spoke *Euskera* fluently. For most of them, it was their mother tongue. *Euskera* speakers were mostly from other provinces (Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya), rather than from Álava. Álava has been always a region of Castilian speakers. Only 8.6 % of the inhabitants of Álava are *Euskera* speakers, while the percentage in Vizcaya is 18.9 and in Guipúzcoa 45.9 (Gardner 1999, 20). Usage of *Euskera* is geographically divided and there are some regions in the Basque Autonomous Community where almost everyone uses *Euskera*, for example in the coastal villages in the North. However, all *Euskera* speakers are bilingual and they can speak Castilian fluently as well. Either they have learnt Spanish at school or one of the parents speaks Spanish.

There are strong Spanish speaking regions in the Basque Autonomous Community as well Spanish has a strong position inside of the autonomous region in media, literature, music and movies. Also two channels and several newspapers exist in *Euskera* in the Basque Autonomous Community. Spanish culture affects the culture within the region.

Today *Euskera* is still a minority language in the Basque Autonomous Community, even though it is strongly promoted by the Basque government. For many, it is the most important component forming Basque culture. For many interviewees, who were not able to speak

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<sup>22</sup> In *Euskera*: Basque speaker.

<sup>23</sup> See more about ethnic markers in Chapter 3.3.

*Euskera*, it was still important. In this case, language has a more of a symbolic meaning (De Vos 1975, 15). One of the interviewees who is not able to speak *Euskera* commented:

***“A mi me parece que es lo que más nos identifica como vascos. Lo que más nos hace diferentes porque es algo que, sabes que, es un lengua común que tenemos y que es único. Me parece que es eso, lo que más nos identifica como vascos.”***

*“My opinion is that it is what identifies us most as Basques. Which makes us different, because it is something, you know, it is our common language and it is unique. I think it is that, which most identifies us as Basques.” (F23S11)*

*Euskera* has significant meaning for those who are able to use it. Many of the interviewees who spoke *Euskera* considered that the language is the most important component constructing their identity:

***“Para mi el Euskera es... es lo más importante en la cultura vasca para mi. Sin lengua no hay cultura y soy ellos que piensan así. Entonces para mi es mi lengua.”***

*“For me Euskera is...it is for me the most important in Basque culture. Without language there is no culture and I am one of those who think in this way. So for me it is my language” (M25E14)*

Among the Basques it is always a question whether all Basques should be able to speak *Euskera*. This question is problematic and there were many different opinions about it among the interviewees. During the dictatorship of Franco *Euskera* was heavily repressed. This resulted in many Basques not being able to speak *Euskera*. Because of this, many interviewees thought that not being able to speak *Euskera* does not necessarily mean not being a Basque. A radical nationalist interpretation is that a Basque is a person who speaks *Euskera*. However, many young nationalists whom I interviewed thought that it is possible to be a Basque without knowing the language. On the other hand, some admitted that it might be a different kind of Basqueness:

***Puede ser que habla castellano y que se considere vasco pero si es distinto, no?***

*“It is possible to speak Castilian and to consider yourself a Basque, but it is different, isn't it?” (M22E8)*

For those interviewees who were most nationalistic, language was especially important. Its antiquity, dissimilarity with other languages and most of all status of being repressed but still

surviving, gave a special symbolic value to *Euskera*. It was seen as something unique and uplifting, a special language for a special people:

***"Es un idioma, dicen que es uno de las mas antiguos. No se sabe realmente su origen porque no se parece otros idiomas. Sé que es un idioma especial porque durante monton de años, igual mi abuelo, mis abuelos, mis abuelas, vivieron unos años en los que si les oían hablando en vasco los llevaban a la carcel. Quiero decir que ha estado muy reprimido y todavía sigue hablando. Entonces para mi es muy especial por eso alguna manera tambien con la gente que puedo hablar en Euskera siento esa cerca mia."***

*"It is a language; they say that it is one of the oldest. Its origin is unknown because it is not similar to other languages. I know that it is a special language, because over many years my grandfather, my grandparents have lived in times when they were put into jail if they were heard to speak Euskera. What I want to say is that it was repressed and still it is spoken. So for me it is really special because of that and in a way I feel closeness with the people with whom I can speak in Euskera."* (F22E4)

For the interviewees who were able to speak *Euskera*, language had normally a special meaning. It is much more than a means of communication. For them it was deeply connected to their identity. Many of the *Euskera* speakers preferred to use *Euskera* as much as possible. They also commented that they like it more than Spanish. It is more like a feeling that it is your language, something that distinguishes an ethnic group from another. However, today it is impossible to live inside of the Basque Autonomous Community and only use *Euskera*. This upset some of the interviewees who were *Euskera* speakers. They thought that a bilingual Basque Autonomous Community should mean that you could manage by using only *Euskera*. Two of the interviewees preferred to use shops where they knew that they could receive service also in *Euskera*:

***"Es que la question es, los dos idiomas son oficiales pero la sociedad no es bilingue en estos momentos en Vitoria. Yo no tengo la oportunidad hablar todo el día Euskera en Vitoria, ni mucho menos. Si voy al ayuntamiento hacer algo o si voy a un banco, si voy a comprar el pan tengo que buscar un sitio donde hablen Euskera, si no, tengo que hablar castellano. Si fueran iguales, pero en este momento no son iguales."***

*"The question is that those two languages are official, but society is not bilingual at this moment in Vitoria. I don't have an opportunity to speak the whole day in Euskera in Vitoria, but much less. If I go to the town hall to do something or if I am going to a bank, if I go to buy bread I have to search for a place where they speak in Euskera. If they would be equals, but at this moment they are not equals."* (F25E19)

Today teaching in *Euskera* has increased a lot. At school there are different models<sup>24</sup> that you can choose, for example courses both in *Euskera* and Spanish or all the courses in *Euskera* and Spanish as an obligatory foreign language. Also applying for a job in the public administration requires that you have a certificate about your *Euskera* skills. Some of the interviewees did not like this development. They felt that they were being forced to study *Euskera* to find a job in the Basque Country. They also saw *Euskera* being used to divide those persons who are able to use it and those who were not:

***“He estado tantos años estudiando Euskera y ahora resulta que hay que potenciar tanto el Euskera. Por ejemplo que se utiliza como un límite para las personas que no lo hablamos, como una frontera que si tu no pasas, que si tu no estas en el otro lado te cierran algunas puertas”.***

*“I have studied Euskera for many years and now the result is that it should be boosted a lot. For example it is used as a limit between persons who don't speak it, like a frontier and if you cannot cross to the other side some doors are closed to you.” (F26S10)*

***La gente se juntaba con la gente que hablaba Euskera. No le daba oportunidad a la gente que no lo hablaba.***

*“People who speak Euskera get together with other Euskera speakers. They don't give the opportunity to those who don't speak it.” (M26S12)*

Because of the ethnic conflict and all the politics surrounding it, *Euskera* also has a political meaning. It is not only the language of a certain geographical area, it is also part of the political ideology. When it became a core value for the nationalists, it caused many Basques, who are against these nationalist ideas, also to be against the language. For political reasons, some of the interviewees, who were nationalists, defended *Euskera* and some of the interviewees were against it:

***“Lo que me da rabia el Euskera, es que parece que esta liado con ideología política y eso me molesta mucho. Lo mismo que la bandera. Esa bandera es mía pero no comparto las ideas políticas que simbolize.”***

*“What makes me angry with Euskera is that it seems that it is connected to political ideology and it disturbs me a lot. It is the same as the flag. This flag is mine but I don't agree with the political ideas that it symbolises.” (F28S9)*

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<sup>24</sup> Model A: Almost all teaching carried out in Spanish, *Euskera* as a foreign language; Model B: Teaching carried out half in Spanish and half in *Euskera*; Model D: Almost all teaching is carried out in *Euskera*, Spanish as a foreign language (Gardner 2000, 44).

***“Pienso que los políticos han conseguido conectar el Euskera con ser vasco y conectar la gente que habla Euskera con ser más vasca.[...]Han conseguido que mucha gente esté muy favor del Euskera por ser muy vasco o esté muy contra del Euskera por no querer ser tan vasco, por no ser tan nacionalista.”***

*“I think that politicians have managed to connect Euskera with Basqueness and to link Euskera speakers to being more Basque. [...] They have managed to get many people in favour of Euskera to be very Basque or to get people very against Euskera when they don't want to be so Basque, not to be so nationalistic” (F22S6)*

At this moment in the Western world, cultural differences are not so clear as before. Similar habits and trends are spreading everywhere. It is impossible to predict to where this development will lead and it might be even frightening. However, different languages are seen as borders between different collective identity groups. Also many Basques rely on their language when it is a question about maintaining their identity:

***“Euskera, el idioma mío, lengua materno, muy importante. Es lo que nos caracteriza, los vascos se supone, el idioma. Que la gente distinto pues desarrolla otros idiomas, otras identidades pues otros idiomas.”***

*“Euskera, my language, my native language, is very important. It is what characterises us, the Basques, the language. Different peoples are developing from different languages, other identities are other languages.” (M22E8)*

Opinions on the future of *Euskera* differ. Some of the interviewees thought that it will prosper and others thought that at some point it will disappear. All recognised that the teaching of *Euskera* is heavily promoted, but still both nationalists and non-nationalists saw errors in the system.

Language is a unifying component, but at the same time dividing. It has a big effect on Basque identity. For many it was the most important cultural component of Basque identity, but for some it was an excluding component. Language skills divide Basques into two groups; those who are able to speak it and those who are not able to speak it. For some it carried an important symbolic value even though they were not able to use it, but for some it was a divisive thing. It divides Basques into ‘insiders and outsiders’:

***El Casco Viajo de Vitoria es la zona dónde más usos en Euskera. Todos los bares todo esta en Euskera. Entonces si que he vivido situaciones incomodas [...] En la que cuando entras en un bar y pides algo no te ‘entiende’ y eso me molesta mucho. Pero es muy sencillo, vas a otro y ya esta.***

*In the old part of Vitoria there is a zone where Euskera is mostly used. In the bars everything is in Euskera. So, yes I have experienced uncomfortable situations. [...] When you enter a bar and ask for something they don't 'understand' you and it disturbs me a lot. But it is really easy, you go to another bar and that's it. (F28S9)*

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In this chapter the interviews are analysed. The objective was to find answers to the research question about Basque identity and to study why it is so conflicting and competing. An analysis is made with the help of thematic interviews, in which Basque identity was analysed through individual perceptions, visions and opinions combined with a theoretical background.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I have examined Basque identity. The aim of this research was to describe and explain competing, conflicting and multiple identities among the Basques in the Basque Autonomous Community. Research was done with the help of a theoretical discussion about collective identities and the components, which have influenced the complexity of Basque identity the most. These components were territory, nationalism and language. In other regions other components might be important as well, but in this research these components had the strongest influence.

I do not generalise the experiences of interviewees in this study to apply to all Basques. Basques are a heterogeneous group and already the fact that they are divided between different countries and regions causes a complexity in the situation. The main objective was to show the pluralism in Basque identity, and to explain what are the reasons for all this complexity.

The collective Basque identity is still fragmented due to many elements. The territory, on which the collective identity is based, is still unclear and dynamic. Some of the Basques in the autonomous area identify themselves with the Basque Autonomous Community and others with the historical Basque territories, including the French parts and Navarra. Those of the interviewees who had more nationalistic views always included the seven provinces instead of the three of the autonomy, and those who were satisfied with the autonomy saw the seven provinces as history and in the past. For them the Basque Country is only the autonomous area. A big challenge for the Basques is to define their territory and what happens to the historical Basque regions, which are not inside of the Basque Autonomous Community. Behind ethnic identity or national identity, territory is always present. It can cause confusion if the territory is not a clear unity.

Secondly, Basque nationalism is divided and it has also its contribution to Basque identity. There are many nationalist groups who have disagreements between them. In addition, there are also those who are non-nationalists or cultural nationalists. This division also divides Basque society and can affect to their identities. All the negative politics can also cause people to deny their Basqueness and to start to dislike Basque elements like language and cultural traditions. Among the interviewees were persons who did not want to use or study *Euskera* because of the political ideology behind it.

The third element in the complex Basque identity is language. It can be seen both as a unifying, as well as a dividing element among the Basques. It is an important ethnic marker but spoken by a minority of the Basques. However, language has a big meaning in Basque identity. Those of the interviewees who were able to speak *Euskera* had a clear Basque identity. For them it was easy to define that they are Basque, not Spanish. In many cases, Spanish speakers had a double identity including both Basque and Spanish components. Though, there are always exceptions and among the interviewees were two people who defined themselves as Basque and Basque nationalists, but were not able to speak *Euskera*.

It seems that people who are able to speak *Euskera* have a stronger Basque identity. Much of the traditional Basque culture is expressed through and symbolised by *Euskera* and the language has an important role in maintaining identity. A major question in future will be whether the autonomous Basque government will be successful in its *Euskera* language promotion programme and if it will be able to do it in such a way that people do not feel forced to learn it.

It is easy to create clear lines between the definitions and concepts, but in the Basque case it is not always the most convenient thing to do. Definitions about who is Basque and who is Spanish are not relevant. In the Basque Autonomous Community there are many Basques who are at the same time also Spanish. It is more important to accept that people cannot always be in clear categories.

Collective Basque identity is weak and strong at the same time. Among Basques there is a core of people with a strong identity. In most of these cases, they are individuals who speak *Euskera* and have a clear image about the Basque Country as a nation-state. This group forms the core, but the further you go away from this core, the more mixed Basque identity becomes.

As we know, the world is not stable as people migrate from one place to another. However, in some cases these migrating groups grow strong in their new homelands. There are strong Basque communities outside of the Basque Autonomous Community, for example in Argentina. In future research it would be interesting to look at these Basque ethnic communities outside of their original homeland territory. What are the important components maintaining their identity when their home territory is distant? Is a sentimental bond with their homeland, together with language and other cultural elements, enough to maintain a separate Basque identity?

The identity question for the Basques does not seem likely to become simplified any time soon. As citizens of the European Union, the Basques, as a rather small ethnic group, are involved in a process that aims to forge a more unified Europe. For them it is not always a positive process. If small member states in the European Union are afraid of losing their sovereignty and identity, for ethnic groups without their own nation-state it is even more threatening. The Basques, among many, fear that some identities may be erased from the map of Europe forever.

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## APPENDIX 1: The Interviewees

Case	Gender	Age	Occupation	Mother tongue
1	Female	27	Student of medicine	Spanish
2	Female	27	Student of audio-visual design	Spanish
3	Female	24	Student of history	<i>Euskera</i>
4	Female	22	Student of social work	<i>Euskera</i>
5	Male	25	Student of information science	Spanish
6	Female	22	Student of Spanish philology	Spanish
7	Male	28	Student of geography	<i>Euskera</i>
8	Male	22	Student of geography	<i>Euskera</i>
9	Female	28	(PhD) student of Spanish philology	Spanish
10	Female	26	(PhD) student of Spanish philology	Spanish
11	Female	23	Student of psychology	Spanish
12	Male	26	Student of geography	Spanish
13	Male	25	Student of medicine	<i>Euskera</i>
14	Male	27	Student of medicine	Spanish
15	Female	23	Student of childcare	Spanish
16	Male	25	Waiter	Spanish
17	Female	23	Student of economics	<i>Euskera</i>
18	Female	24	Student of sociology	Spanish
19	Female	25	Teacher of <i>Euskera</i>	Spanish, <i>Euskera</i>
20	Male	30	Secondary school graduate	Spanish

## **APPENDIX 2: The original framework of the interviews (in Spanish).**

### **Los datos personales:**

Nombre:

Edad:

Lugar de nacimiento:

Actual residencia:

Estudios:

Países de viaje:

### **Los Temas**

#### **1. Relacion a lugar/ sitio/territorio**

(preguntas que ayudan)

- Cuál es tu tierra natal?
- En tu opinion, qué es Pais Vasco geograficamente/territoriamente?
- Qué significa País Vasco como territoria para ti?
- Qué significa España como territoria para ti?
- Qué significa Europa como territorio para ti?
- Sientes que tienes raizes en algun sitio geografico?

#### **2. Relación a idioma**

- Puedes hablar *Euskera*? Qué nivel tienes?
- Si puedes donde lo usas?
- Qué significa *Euskera* a ti?
- Qué significa castellano a ti?
- Hay connecion dentro de *Euskera* y a ser vasco?

#### **3. Relación a cultura vasca y nacionalismo**

- Qué es cultura vasca?
- Qué significan cosas vascas y cultura vasca para ti?
- Qué piensas, qué significa el nacionalismo aqui? Cómo lo puedes definir?
- Lo ves nacionalismo en tu vida normal?
- Qué piensas sobre nacionalismo?

#### **4. Futuro**

- Cómo quieres que las cosas evolucionen aqui en el futuro?
- Cómo crees que es la situación dentro de diez años?
- Cómo ves el futuro de *Euskera*?

## **APPENDIX 3: The framework of the interviews (translated into English).**

### **Personal Data**

Name:

Age:

Place of birth:

Present place of residence:

Studies:

Visited countries:

### **Themes**

#### **1. Relationship to place/territory**

-Which is your home country?

-How do you define the Basque Country geographically?

-What does the Basque Country as a territory mean to you?

-What does Spain as a territory mean to you?

-What does Europe as a territory mean to you?

-Do you feel that you have roots in some geographical place?

#### **2. Relationship to language**

-Are you able to speak *Euskera*? What level do you have?

-If you are able to speak it, where do you use it?

-What does *Euskera* mean to you?

-What does Spanish mean to you?

-Is there a connection between *Euskera* and Basqueness?

#### **3. Relationship to Basque culture and nationalism**

-What is Basque culture?

-What do Basque traditions and culture mean to you?

-What does nationalism mean here? Can you define it?

-Do you see nationalism in your everyday life?

-What do you think about nationalism?

#### **4. Future**

-How do you want things to develop in the future?

-What is your prediction of the situation over the next ten years?

-How do you see the future of *Euskera*?