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R. Vazquez. *Politics, Culture, and Sociability in the Basque Nationalist Party*. Reno: University of Nevada Press. 2011.

This book is an anthropological study of the oldest and most dominant Basque nationalist political party, the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV). This work is based on the author's ethnographic field research in the town of Tolosa, located several miles south of the provincial capital Donostia (San Sebastián), over a sixteen month period in the early 1990s. In the introduction, Vazquez tells us that while his study can be narrowly seen as being about "partisan politics in a single spot on the globe, the Basque Autonomous Community," his broader purpose is to understand "general political dynamics, with an eye toward how individuals and groups mobilize, how individuals understand and try to contribute to the making of the political world around them" (p. 7). To accomplish this, he employs what he refers to as an "ethnographic stance," which he describes as an approach that "[synergizes] local ethnographic experiences and larger temporal conjunctures and spatial processes" (p. 2). In other words, he uses an ethnographic approach that includes more than the traditional participant observation and interviewing, though these are, of course, still central.

Also in the introduction, Vazquez defines the domains that appear in the title and are key to his story: politics, culture, and sociability. Politics, according to the author, can be viewed in two ways; it can be construed as (1) "the inscription of power on individuals and its differential allocation among actors, be they individuals, groups, or institutions" or as (2) the dealing with public processes such as "institutional control and the claim making of groups vis-à-vis decision-making institutions" (p. 4). He defines culture in a way that is common within anthropology—as both meaning and practice. By this definition, meaning making is not an individual exercise, but rather a social one. As he puts it, "Subjectivity is always *intersubjectivity*; action, always *interaction*" (p. 5). Finally, sociability in his usage means not only interaction between individuals but also "bounded, repeated interaction, as configured by associational activity, and the concomitant social networks" (p. 4). In his study, politics and culture provide the context in which sociability becomes meaningful.

Consisting of ten chapters, Vazquez's work begins with a discussion of the political transition and consolidation that took place in Spain and the Basque Country after the death of Franco in 1975. In hindsight, it might be easy to assume that the transition from a fascist dictatorship to a democratic monarchy in 1975 was both logical and natural, but as Vazquez rightly points out, "The question of rupture versus reform permeated the Spanish transition" (p.10). This is most clearly seen in the attempted coups by the Civil Guard in 1981, but such questions also impacted political developments in the Basque Country, where the key question was whether or not to participate in the new Spanish state political system. The PNV decided that it would participate, while the *abertzale* (Basque patriot) left decided it would not. Through this transition, the PNV was able to consolidate its power in the Basque Country and became the key "Basque interlocutor with Madrid" (p. 19).

Chapters two through five discuss the key political players in Basque politics—the Basque nationalist parties PNV (Chapter 2); *Eusko Alkartasuna* (EA)—the Basque Solidarity party, which formed after a split within the PNV in 1986 (Chapter 3); and the *abertzale* left, especially within the context of the anti-system political party, *Herri Batasuna* (HB)—the Popular Unity party, as well as the militant group *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA)—the "Basque Country and Freedom" (Chapter 4); and the Spanish state party the Spanish Socialist Workers

Party (PSOE), or as it is known in the Basque Autonomous Community, the Basque Socialist Party, (PSE) (Chapter 5). Vazquez does a very nice job in clearly articulating the sociocultural and historical contexts for each of these entities, but Chapter two stands out as particularly important to his overall argument, as it helps the reader to understand the ways sociability created the environment in which PNV supporters had the sense of being a “family.” This is especially true regarding the role that the PNV meeting “house,” the *batzoki*, played in creating this close bond. More than just political meeting places, *batzokis* were social and cultural centers as well. As Vazquez puts it, “Social elements were thus critical to organization and [voter] mobilization, speaking to sociability’s importance for consensus, peer reassurance, and a degree of closure. This was all part of the matrix through which the PNV was connected to Basque society” (p. 32).

Chapters five and six deal with the struggle for the Basque political center. The Spanish Socialists (PSE) came up with a “postnationalist” discourse as an attempt to redefine the political landscape in Euskadi (the native word referring to the Basque Autonomous Community) and draw on an electorate that did not define itself through the Basque nationalist lens. The PNV developed a “Democratic Nationalist” platform as a means of uniting the Basque nationalist parties (with the exception of HB). In the end, neither initiative was successful, though the nationalist PNV was able to increase its relative strength in Euskadi, becoming the dominant political party. Chapter seven discusses ostensibly non-partisan organizations (environmental, peace, language advocacy). As Vazquez notes, “Euskadi was characterized by a strong history of extrapartisan activism” (p. 130). However, as one of my Basque friends put it, “everything is political in the Basque Country,” and several of the organizations discussed reflect this fact. Although these organizations were trying to be nonpartisan, people in Euskadi were always dissecting the leaders and methods, which invariably included some attempt at placing the organizations themselves within the political landscape. The only organization discussed by Vazquez that was relatively successful in this non-partisan endeavor was the language advocacy group, *Galtzaundi*.

In Chapter eight, Vazquez returns to the explicit sociability of the PNV through participating in, and analyzing, *Alderdi Eguna*, the “Day of the Party.” He explains, “Festivity allowed the metaphorical conception of family to extend to the party-community as a whole The celebration of sociability and Basqueness through such participation and the cultural representation depressed vertical [i.e., class] distinctions” (p. 138). Chapter nine examines the important role that the 19th century founder of Basque nationalism, Sabino de Arana y Goiri, symbolically plays in Basque nationalism and how the PNV has been able to appropriate the “cult of Sabino” as a legitimizing cultural symbol, claiming to be heirs of “original” Basque nationalism, and, thus, the “logical” political “center” of the Basque Country. Vazquez concludes in Chapter ten by arguing that contrary to much of the literature on comparative and ethnic politics, the PNV was able to occupy a stable political center space due in part to the diversity of its electorate (which included both Basque nationalists and non-nationalists) and the fidelity of its electorate; the PNV was also successful, Vazquez believes, by being a populist as well as a nationalist party, with an ability, therefore, to form coalitions with other parties that, while not occupying the center position, were not far from it.

Trying to write about Basque politics is like trying to hit a moving target (or, perhaps, even like trying to herd cats); it seems like things change in the Basque region daily. Vazquez has largely situated his study during the period of his ethnographic research in the early to mid-1990s. While that is eons ago, politically speaking, the picture he presents of the political

landscape in Euskadi, and the role of sociability within the PNV, are still relevant today. In the last few pages of his book (pp. 189-201), Vasquez tries valiantly to catch us up on more recent political developments in the Basque Country, but there is just too much to try to cover. With the “agreement” between the right wing Partido Popular and the ostensibly left wing PSOE to govern the Basque Autonomous Community, the question remains as to what role the PNV can and will play in the future of the Basque government. It is likely that with the re-introduction of the more leftist Basque parties, which had not been allowed to participate in elections since the early 2000s, the Basque nationalists will once again be able to govern in their own autonomous community, with the PNV taking a leading role.

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