‘Las Dos Españas’: Spanish Political Nationalism Since the Democratic Transition

Adrianne J. Lapar

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Approved by:
Gary Marks
Liesbet Hooghe
John Stephens
This paper traces the evolution of Spanish political nationalism since the country’s democratic transition. By examining the nationalist discourses of Spain’s two main political parties, the _Partido Socialista Obrero Español_ (PSOE) and the _Partido Popular_ (PP), this paper identifies historic trends, ideological and philosophical influences, and sources of division within each party. The author argues that each party’s respective discourse has been shaped by four factors: historians’ interpretations of Spain’s national identity and past; political alignment on the Left or Right; whether the party belongs to the government or the opposition; and the degree of reliance on peripheral nationalist parties for electoral success. This paper contributes to the debate about the existence of Spanish political nationalism, as well as to the wider literature on nationalism and European politics.
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I. INTRODUCTION

For nearly forty years, Francisco Franco’s authoritarian regime promoted Castilian Spanish, the Catholic faith, and the right-wing ideology as the essence of the Spanish nation. At the same time, the dictatorship denied Spain’s cultural and linguistic diversity, reducing peripheral nationalisms to “mere folkloristic expressions of regional specificities” (Muñoz, 2007, p. 5). This illiberal imposition of nationalism, paired with the repression of cultural and linguistic expression, led to the delegitimization of Spanish nationalism and the simultaneous empowerment of the peripheral nationalists by the time of Spain’s democratic transition in the late 1970s (Núñez Seixas, 2001, p. 721). During the transition and for years afterward, Spanish nationalist discourse all but disappeared from the public sphere, including public statements and speeches of political parties and leaders.

Today, Spanish nationalism continues to be a delicate subject. The state’s main political parties have been struggling since the 1980s to reintroduce the concept of Spain as a nation in an attempt to foster national unity. While reluctant to use the term ‘nationalism,’ the two main parties have equally tried to create a sense of unity around the Constitution of 1978 through an ideology known as constitutional patriotism. Both parties have converged on the concept of the Constitution as the basis of the Spanish nation and as the source of its political legitimacy. However, they differ in their respective interpretations of the concept, particularly regarding Spain’s authoritarian history.

In this paper, I explore the debate on Spanish political nationalism since the
transition, as seen from the point of view of the country’s two main political parties, the center-left *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, or PSOE) and the center-right *Partido Popular* (Popular Party, or PP). Through this exploration, I seek to address two main questions. First, what have been the main nationalist discourses of these two parties since the transition? And second, what factors have motivated each party’s respective discourse and actions?

In order to answer the first question, I examine the evolution of each party’s nationalist discourse since the transition, highlighting the legacy of Franco, ideological and philosophical influences, internal divisions, and the role of history in shaping national identity. In particular, I look at how the debate—or lack thereof—on the historical memory of Spain’s Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship has influenced the PSOE and PP’s concept of the nation.

In response to my second research question, I argue that these parties’ nationalist discourses are shaped by a number of factors, which include historians’ interpretations of Spain’s national identity and past; political alignment on the Left or Right; whether the party is part of the government or the opposition; and the degree of reliance on peripheral nationalist parties for electoral success.

Since the transition, there has been a heated debate over the existence of Spain as a nation and over the existence of Spanish nationalism. Along with a number of academics, I contend that Spanish nationalism does, in fact, exist, albeit in a less visible form than in other nations or regions. Several scholars of Spanish nationalism (Núñez Seixas, 2005; Balfour and Quiroga, 2007) point to Michael Billig’s concept of banal nationalism to explain its so-called ‘invisibility’ in Spain. Billig (1995) argues that nationalism is not always represented
in a flagrant way, as extreme nationalists and separatist movements might suggest. Instead, nationalism is present on an everyday basis, often beyond citizens’ conscious awareness, manifested through minor and often unnoticed reminders, such as the use of a common language or loyalty to a national sports team.

However, for the purposes of this paper, my focus is on Spanish *political* nationalism, rather than popular manifestations of its presence in society. Therefore, I look specifically at the more visible and public displays of nationalism, such as speeches and/or articles written by political leaders, proposed legislation, and other actions taken to promote identification with the Spanish nation.

Today, Spanish nationalism is one of the least researched areas of Spanish politics. While there is a plethora of literature about the peripheral nationalisms, there is not a great deal written about Spanish nationalism as a political phenomenon today. Among its leading experts are political scientist Andrés de Blas Guerrero and historian Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas. Antonio Morales Moya (2001) attributes this lack of research to Spanish nationalism’s identification with the Francoist dictatorship; despite the success of the democratic transition, the approval of the 2007 Law on Historical Memory, and other steps towards ‘reconciliation,’ the Civil War, the dictatorship, and other aspects of Spain’s dark past continue to be delicate subjects.

Continued pressures from the peripheral nationalists, the increasingly charged debate on Constitutional reform, and the mounting need for a shared concept of the Spanish nation all make Spanish political nationalism a topic worthy of investigation and relevant to the study of European politics. This paper aims to contribute precisely to this sparsely researched area of Spanish politics.
II. THE PSOE’S ‘NEO-PATRIOTISM’

By the time of Franco’s death in 1975, it seemed as though Spanish nationalism had died with him. Largely discredited by the dictatorship’s imposition of national-Catholicism, Spanish nationalism had been all but converted into a taboo. While the mainstream parties of the democratic Right moderated their nationalist rhetoric, the PSOE and other leftist parties avoided the subject altogether. As a result of pressures from the recently vindicated Basques and Catalans, as well as out of its own electoral interests, the PSOE sided with the peripheral nationalists and lent its support to the project of political decentralization during the democratic transition.

While the transition has been called a period of great compromise for many members of Spanish society, the PSOE in particular made many compromises, adapting its stance towards nationalism, the state model, and its own political ideology during this time. These changes were, in many ways, opportune since they allowed the PSOE to establish itself as one of Spain’s main political parties at the national level, leading to its election in 1982.

Since the 1980s, PSOE leaders have realized the need to rejuvenate Spanish national pride and patriotism, with leaders like former President Felipe González working to reclaim the sentiment and later with the party’s espousal of constitutional patriotism.

Today, the PSOE emphasizes two main points in its concept of the nation (Núñez Seixas, 2007, pp. 161-162). First, it differentiates between the so-called ‘political nation’ (in this case, Spain) and the ‘cultural nation’ (Catalonia, the Basque Country, etc.). From this
idea, the PSOE has developed the image of Spain as a ‘nation of nations.’ Second, the PSOE emphasizes Spain’s connections with Europe, implying a more cosmopolitan identity that can be shared by all Spaniards regardless of their regional identification.

It is important to note that, while the PSOE is a national party, its regional federations often have their own agendas in addition to social democracy. For example, the Partido Socialista de Euskadi - Euskadiko Ezkerra (Socialist Party of the Basque Country, or PSE-EE) regards itself as both a socialist and Basque nationalist party. It aims to promote social welfare in the region, while facilitating dialogue between the Basques and the central government. Among the party’s objectives is the “self-governance of the Basques within the framework of solidarity and cooperation with the rest of Spain’s peoples” (PSE-EE, 2008). Similar parties exist in several other regions. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the PSOE at the national level. References to the party’s regional federations are clearly indicated.

2.1 The Transition and the PSOE’s Political Shuffling

The PSOE leadership took a number of steps during the transition and the years immediately following to ensure future electoral success. Firstly, it won the favor of the peripheral nationalists by conceding to many of their demands and essentially rejecting Spanish nationalism. Secondly, it altered its political ideology as an originally Marxist, republican party, instead becoming a more moderate, social democratic party of the mainstream. One issue, however, that remained disputed for many years was the PSOE’s take on the state model.

The PSOE and the Peripheral Nationalists

During the transition, the PSOE and other left-wing parties—most prominently
Spain’s Communist Party (the PCE)—experienced what political scientist Andrés de Blas Guerrero (1989) calls a “philo-nationalist enthusiasm,” or a strong partiality for the peripheral nationalists. Blas Guerrero attributes this so-called enthusiasm to the “bad conscience” that permeated Spanish society and made many leaders more receptive to the demands of Basque and Catalan nationalists, despite the fact that the oppression they had suffered under Franco had not been “qualitatively distinct […] in relation to the rest of the state” (p. 106). I, however, argue that it was not so much guilt, but rather political opportunism, that drove the PSOE and other parties of the Left to side with the nationalists.

As mentioned previously, Franco’s regime had severely repressed the cultural and linguistic rights of the peripheral nationalists. Moreover, these nationalists had played an important role in the opposition to the dictatorship. As a result of these two factors, the peripheral nationalists had earned a great deal of popular support. At the same time, the dictatorship’s imposition of national-Catholicism had largely discredited Spanish nationalism. Naturally, it was of greater benefit to side with the ‘winners,’ so the PSOE did what it could to ally itself with the peripheral nationalists.

In addition to favoring regional identification over identification with the Spanish nation, the PSOE temporarily became a great proponent of the regions’ right to self-determination. This stemmed, in part, from the Left’s defense of self-determination in postcolonial countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 137). In 1975, the PCE defended the right to self-determination of the ‘historical’ regions of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia, and the following year the PSOE went a step further, defending the right to self-determination of all of Spain’s regions and nationalities (Pastor Verdú, 2007, p. 196).
This came at a time when ‘autonomous regionalisms’ were appearing throughout Spain. These regionalisms, in places such as Aragon, Navarre, and Andalusia, had not existed previously as political movements. During the transition, they emerged in reaction to the demands of the historical regions. Instead of calling for greater autonomy, the leaders of these movements demanded that their regions be granted the same level of autonomy as the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia (Núñez Seixas, 1999, pp. 152-53).

However, when it came time to sign the Constitution in 1978, both the PCE and PSOE abandoned their support of self-determination for the regions. Perhaps both realized that such a concession was too drastic considering the number of regionalist and nationalist movements, and it implied real risks for the Spanish state, such as the separation of the Basque and Catalan regions. Instead, the PCE and PSOE expressed their backing for decentralization.

The PSOE’s defense of the nationalists was a clearly pragmatic decision. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, various regionalist and nationalist groups had integrated into the party, facilitating its electoral success throughout the 1980s (Balfour y Quiroga, 2007, p. 141). In the first half of the 1990s, the PSOE would come to depend on the political support of Basque and Catalan nationalists, as it would no longer have a majority in the government.

*The PSOE’s Ideological Alterations*

Originally a Marxist party, the PSOE moderated its ideological basis during the transition so that it would not conflict with its newfound alliance with the peripheral nationalists. Marxism and nationalism clearly did not coalesce. Firstly, Marxism had an international vision and objectives that ultimately surpassed the nation-state. Secondly, nation-building was largely considered a project of the bourgeois elite that had excluded the
working classes. Marxism had been seen as an alternative to nationalism, the workers’ revolution making the national question irrelevant (Pastor Verdú, 2007, pp. 193-195). The PSOE’s original vision had been a state based on the Marxist ideology, but which recognized the plurality of the nationalities within it (Blas Guerrero, 1989, p. 104). Future President Felipe González pushed for the party’s moderation, which would allow the PSOE to become more mainstream, and by the end of the 1970s, the PSOE had abandoned Marxism for the more moderate social democracy.

Another alteration of the PSOE’s tenets was its take on the monarchy. Spain’s Left has traditionally been strongly republican and, therefore, opposed to the existence of the monarchy. Currently reigning King Juan Carlos I played an important role in the democratic transition, which had won him great respect from both the international community and the Spanish citizenry. Today, the monarchy continues to enjoy a high level of popular support, being one of Spain’s only formal national symbols to do so (Núñez Seixas, 2001, p. 743). As a result of the royal family’s overwhelming popularity, the PSOE has reoriented itself increasingly in favor of the monarchy (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 164-166).

Internal Divisions Over the State Model

Thanks to a series of internal changes and ideological shifts during the transition, the PSOE had consolidated its political power by the early 1980s, establishing itself as one of Spain’s main parties. In 1982, the PSOE won its first national elections and would remain in government for the next fourteen years. However, it is also during this period that the socialists first began to face fragmentation over the so-called ‘national question.’

With regard to this question, Balfour and Quiroga (2007) identify three main factions of the PSOE which existed until quite recently. The first, the “neo-regionalists,” calls for a
symmetric model of subsidiary and a high level of decentralization, all of which favor the regions over the central government. However, the neo-regionalists are critical of the historical regions which, from their point of view, have monopolized political power in the name of nationalism. As such, this faction of the PSOE calls for an equal division of competencies among all regions. Furthermore, the neo-regionalists consider Spain to be the only true nation and therefore, the only entity to possess political sovereignty.

The second faction is comprised of socialist leaders in the three historical regions who consider their respective regions to be nations and, as such, Spain a ‘nation of nations.’ They call for a high degree of decentralization and an asymmetric model of autonomy that would grant more competencies to their regions. Under the leadership of Pasqual Maragall, the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) expressed its support for a ‘differential federalism,’ which would grant different degrees of autonomy to particular regions. This idea was swiftly rejected by political leaders in other regions who contended that such a proposal clearly tipped the scale in favor of Catalan interests (Pastor Verdú, 2007, p. 203).

The third and final group is made up of the more conservative wing of the PSOE and takes on a much more republican reading of the nationalist debate. To this faction, Spain is a ‘nation of citizens,’ who are equal under the law and should, therefore, enjoy the same quality of representation and benefits. Consequently, this group defends the powers of the central government and calls for limits to the degree of decentralization.

In 2003, the PSOE finally settled the debate on Spain’s state model, when party leaders met in the northern town of Santillana del Mar to prepare for the upcoming national elections. Following this conference, the PSOE released the so-called “Declaration of Santillana,” known under the official title of “La España Plural: La España Constitucional,”
La España Unida, La España en Positivo” (“Plural Spain: Constitutional Spain, United Spain, Spain in a Positive Light”). This document expressed the party’s full support for the State of Autonomies established in the 1978 Constitution, as well as a desire for reforms to the Constitution and to the statutes of several autonomous regions, greater European integration, and the promotion of constitutional patriotism.

The declaration was a clear compromise between the three factions of the PSOE. It appeased the first two by lending its support to regional autonomy. Although it initially raised the concerns of the third and more centrist faction of the party, the final version included the declaration that equality among citizens took priority over regional autonomy (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 148). The Declaration of Santillana was an important step in balancing national solidarity with regional autonomy.

2.2 A Bright Future: The PSOE’s Campaign for Modernization and Europeanization

While appeals to Spain’s historical past have formed a part of the nationalist discourse of both ends of the political spectrum, the PSOE and other parties of the Left have differentiated themselves from the Right in that they more often refer to the future of Spain than to its past, highlighting the bright possibilities yet to come.

During the 1970s and 1980s, many leaders of the Left shared the idea that Spain’s history was one of failure (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 153). A popular interpretation of Spain’s national reality circulating among historians at the time was that, as a result of delayed industrialization and the delayed rise of the middle class, the country had not developed a national identity by the end of the nineteenth century as had many other European states over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As such, appeals to Spain’s ‘glorious’ past were not widespread among socialist politicians during this period.
However, having consolidated its political power, the PSOE undertook a certain ‘recuperation’ of national pride in the mid-1980s. Although avoiding references to historical episodes, such as the discovery of the Americas or the unification of Spain by the Catholic Monarchs, President Felipe González and other leaders of the PSOE often alluded to the progressive philosophies of the Generations of ’98 and ’14. These two literary movements expressed great frustration over the downfallen state of the Spanish political system and nation, and called for regeneration, modernization, and ‘Europeanization,’ or an opening up to Europe at a time when Spain was very isolated. These ideas became particularly poignant in the 1980s, when Spain underwent its own ‘regeneration.’ González and other leaders of the PSOE appealed to these writers’ calls for modernization and Europeanization, understood respectively as the signing of the Constitution in 1978 and the entry of Spain into the European Economic Community in 1986 (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 154). The focus of the PSOE’s nationalist discourse was not Spain’s historical past, but rather its future.

By the 1990s, historians had begun to depart from the previously negative image of Spain and instead began to depict Spain as a ‘normal’ European nation-state which, although not without its share of peculiarities, was just like other members of the European Community. It is during this period that three modern national mitos, or myths, took shape and replaced those that had been projected by the Francoist regime (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 155-156). First, the transition and the consolidation of democracy became synonymous with reconciliation, consensus, and tolerance among Spain’s diverse peoples and political ideologies. Second, Spain was identified with Europe rather than with Hispanidad, the Francoist national myth of a common cultural and linguistic heritage linking Spain and Latin America. Third, modernization replaced Franco’s traditionalism as the
common national project. For the first time in over fifty years, Spaniards could be proud to belong to a peaceful, modern, European nation.

2.3 Historical Memory: The PSOE’s Political Weapon

During the transition, Spain’s main political leaders had silently agreed not to discuss the country’s recent history. This so-called ‘pact of silence’ was considered necessary to ensure a peaceful transition. Moreover, parties on both sides of the political spectrum stood to benefit (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 158-160). For the PP’s forerunner, the Alianza Popular (Popular Alliance, or AP), downplaying the authoritarian past allowed the party to distance itself from the dictatorship and to present itself as democratic. The PSOE, on the other hand, was seen as a ‘new’ party that had emerged after democracy, with its hands clean of the Francoist regime. Why dwell on the dark past when the party could appeal to a future filled with opportunities?

By the 1990s, however, the PSOE’s future was not looking quite as bright. As a result of poor economic results and the party’s implication in numerous scandals, support for the PSOE began to wane, and in 1996, the party lost national elections for the first time since 1982. The newly-elected Partido Popular (PP) ushered in a variety of changes, among them a greater emphasis on Spanish nationalism. President José María Aznar and other leaders began to employ a nationalist rhetoric that was highly based on Spain’s historical past, as we will see later. In 2000, the PP won a second term, this time with a majority.

In what Núñez Seixas (2005) regards as a political strategy against the PP, the PSOE broke the nearly twenty-year-old pact of silence, bringing the issue of historical memory to the surface. In 2000, the PSOE and its far-left counterpart Izquierda Unida (United Left, or IU) presented a proposal to provide economic compensation to those exiled during the Civil
Although this proposal was brushed aside by the PP, the PSOE and IU continued pressing the government over the following years, and in 2002, several laws were finally approved to provide citizenship rights and monetary compensation to the victims of the War (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 161-162). Having returned to power in 2004, the PSOE continued its mission to shed light on the long-ignored past through a variety of initiatives such as the declaration of 2006 as the “Year of Historical Memory” and the 2007 Law on Historical Memory.

These initiatives were met with great support by a large part of Spanish society. According to a survey conducted by Spain’s Center for Sociological Investigation (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, or CIS) in 2005, 54.1% of Spaniards favored the adoption of some sort of initiative to recognize the victims of the Civil War, while 24.8% opposed it (Sanz Ezquerro, 2005).

The PP and its voters—with their close ties to Franco’s regime—were among those opposing the Law on Historical Memory. The PP’s spokesperson at the time, Eduardo Zaplana, argued that the law only opened up old wounds and that the PSOE was using the “graves of the Civil War” for its own advantage. María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, the Vice President of Spain and of the PSOE, affirmed that the law concerned the victims of the War and their families and nothing more (El País, Nov. 1, 2007). Regardless of the PSOE’s motives, these initiatives were long overdue and marked an important step in coming to terms with the Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship.

In October 2008, Judge Baltasar Garzón of the Spanish National Court went a step further, making history when he declared Franco and his accomplices guilty of “crimes against humanity” and authorized the criminal investigation of acts committed during the
Civil War and the dictatorship (Yoldi, 2008). While the Law on Historical Memory was important for symbolical reasons, Garzón’s investigation of Franco and his cronies marks the first legal action taken against them.

A year has passed since the adoption of the Law on Historical Memory, and little has changed with regards to the PP’s position on historical memory and digging up Spain’s authoritarian past. Interestingly enough, however, the PSOE has not been as enthusiastic about Garzón’s decision to put Franco and his colleagues to trial as one might have expected. President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has first and foremost expressed his respect for any verdicts the judge reaches, but he has also added, “History has already judged Franco’s regime” (Díez, 2008). The day after Garzón announced the trials, the PSOE’s Congressional Secretary General Ramón Jáuregui pointed out that the 2007 law never sought to make a general case against Franco’s regime, nor a criminal investigation of it, and called the judicial route “dubious at best” (Yoldi, 2008b). These cautious reactions suggest that even the PSOE is wary of jolting the skeletons in Spain’s closet.

Garzón’s decree—however important it may be—is just another step in the long and controversial reconciliation of Spain’s past. While it is true that the Constitution of 1978, the democratic transition, and Europeanization have all become national mitos that mark Spain as a peaceful European liberal democracy, the lack of an explicit condemnation of some forty years of authoritarianism undermined these myths for a long time. In addition to Spain’s positive identification with the Constitution and the values it represents, there needed to be a negative identification of what the nation is not. The PSOE’s success in passing the Law on Historical Memory and Judge Garzón’s efforts to bring Francoist leaders to justice have helped to affirm that the Spanish nation as a whole does not defend its violent illiberal past.
However, the lack of consensus between the PSOE and the PP on Spain’s historical memory stands as an obstacle to the creation of a common national identity.

2.4 ‘Constitutional Patriotism’: The PSOE’s Reappropriation of Nationalism

During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the ‘Spanish nation’ had been unified around the national projects of democratic consolidation, modernization, and entry into the European Community. Having achieved these goals by the 1990s, many leaders of the PSOE felt that Spain was lacking a unifying element, and so they turned to the Constitution of 1978 and to Habermas’ ‘constitutional patriotism’ (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 168-169).

Constitutional patriotism is a concept originally devised by the German philosopher Dolf Sternberger in the later 1970s and later made popular by Jürgen Habermas, also a German philosopher (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 167). According to Habermas (1998), rational democratic citizenship could replace nationalism as a means to unite the citizenry.

In 1991, Habermas presented his concept at a conference in Madrid. His discourse about a new form of patriotism founded in the Constitution attracted the attention of several PSOE members in the audience, including Juan José Laborda Martín, a senator from the northern city of Burgos. The following year, Laborda Martín published various articles in support of constitutional patriotism. He placed great emphasis on the differentiation between cultural and political nations, an idea which continues to be important to the nationalist discourse of the PSOE today.

In “Patriotas y de Izquierda,” Laborda Martín (2002) heralds the positive aspects of constitutional patriotism. He is clear to distinguish patriotism from nationalism, writing that patriotism recognizes the cultural and linguistic complexity of Spain, manifested in the State
of Autonomies. Furthermore, Laborda Martín recognizes the legitimacy of both conservatism and reformism, calling for an end to the vicious cycle of disagreement and rivalry between the two main political parties in order to guarantee national unity.

It is important to note that the PSOE’s concept of constitutional patriotism is not one and the same as Habermas’ concept (Núñez Seixas, 2005; Bastida Freixedo, 2007). Núñez Seixas (2005) links the PSOE’s concept with the theories of early twentieth-century Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. For Ortega y Gasset, nationalism was a mix of historical determinism and the search for a ‘common project’ for all Spanish people. In his book España invertebrada (“Invertebrate Spain”), Ortega y Gasset explains that a nation is formed when a group of elites mobilize the population around the idea of national unity. However, the creation of this nation does not imply the disappearance, nor the denial of the existence, of the distinct peoples that constitute it (Blas Guerrero, 1989, pp. 62-63). Ortega y Gasset’s philosophy could be used in coherence with Spain’s Autonomous State because this model could be seen as a “regenerative project of Spanish political life” (Blas Guerrero, 1989, p. 74).

The conservative wing of the PSOE, which rejects Spain’s multinational character and argues for the equality of all citizens and regions, has often appealed to constitutional patriotism as an alternative to regionalism. The leaders of this wing emphasize the superiority of a post-nationalist civic identity, such as the one proposed by Habermas, over the so-called ‘ethnic nationalisms’ of the Basque Country and Catalonia1 (Balfour and

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1 As political movements, the Catalan and Basque nationalisms have origins in the late nineteenth century, although both claim existence as ‘nations’ since much earlier. Catalan nationalism has a mixture of political roots in the working class movement and cultural-linguistic roots in the Catalan literary movement known as the Renaixença. Basque nationalism evolved as a political movement in reaction to the central government’s 1876 abolition of the fueros, a special system of taxation and privileges that belonged exclusively to the Basque Country and Navarre and that had been around since the Middle Ages. However, Basque nationalism differs
Constitutional patriotism has a number of positive qualities that suggest it can offer an alternative path to national unity, unlike Franco’s national-Catholicism. First, it implies a civic identity to which citizens can subscribe regardless of their cultural, linguistic, or ethnic background. As such, constitutional patriotism can coexist with Spain’s diverse regional and nationalist identities. Second, it is based on liberal democratic principles and thus, does not require adherence to any particular political ideology. Despite Spain’s authoritarian past, the Constitution has the potential to bind citizens together in the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, the PSOE’s version of constitutional patriotism has received its share of criticism. Some have argued that it is incapable of integrating the peripheral nationalisms into a common national project (Núñez Seixas, 2001; Balfour and Quiroga, 2007). The Constitution is written with the assumption that the Spanish nation exists and that all Spanish citizens ascribe to it. However, there are citizens in Catalonia, the Basque Country, and other regions who do not themselves feel a part of this nation, or who do not necessarily agree with its existence; these people may have trouble accepting the Constitution as a basis of national legitimacy. One of constitutional patriotism’s toughest critics, Xacobe Bastida Freixedo (2007) calls the promotion of constitutional patriotism in Spain an attempt to create nationalism without it seeming so. Bastida Freixedo argues that, while claiming to be constitutional, respectful of human rights, and democratic, constitutional patriotism actually discriminates against the peripheral nationalisms and denies their right to recognize their own nationalist sentiments. He goes so far as to call the ideology a form of ethnic nationalism rather than the civic nationalism it claims to be.

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from its Catalan counterpart in that it has certain racial and ethnic implications, effectively making the integration of migrants to the region impossible (see Núñez Seixas, 1999).
Leaders of the PSOE have themselves acknowledged that the Constitution alone cannot serve as a strong basis of Spanish identity. After all, it is a political document that would form a very impersonal basis of linking the Spanish citizenry.

Furthermore, the promotion of constitutional patriotism has had an important undesired effect: it has converted the Constitution into an almost sacred text. This is evident from the way that many scholars and politicians portray the transition and the Constitution. In a 2002 essay, Senator Laborda Martín writes that Spaniards should be proud of 1978, the year that they achieved a political change “based in liberty.” Laborda Martín refers to this change and to the Constitution from an almost reverent point of view, suggesting that regardless of political leanings, no one can deny the inherently positive nature and outcome of the transition. Renowned Spanish historians Juan Pablo Fusi and Jordi Palafox (1997) make similar assumptions: “The transition from the dictatorship to the democracy was […] a model operation, a great historical success. […] The transition […] was, as we have said, an extraordinary political achievement” (pp. 369-370).

As a result of this glorification of the Constitution, a phenomenon which Balfour and Quiroga (2007) call its “petrification” has occurred, limiting the possibilities to reform or alter the document. The PSOE’s promotion of constitutional patriotism has, in some ways, backfired because, instead of fostering national unity, it has contributed to division. The PSOE faces constant pressure from the peripheral nationalists, as several regions have put forth statutes that clearly defy the Constitution. The proposed Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country, known as the Ibarretxe Plan for the Basque president of the same name, has been perhaps the most radical. This statute would recognize the region’s right to self-determination and proposes, among other things, a referendum to decide the future political
status of the Basque Country. Furthermore, the PP increasingly ascribes an unchangeable, almost-sacred character to the Constitution and resists calls for amendments to it, severely limiting the PSOE’s options for resolving Spain’s increasingly critical ‘national problem’ (Núñez Seixas, 2005, p. 131).
III. THE PARTIDO POPULAR’S STRUGGLE WITH THE PAST

Founded in 1989 with José María Aznar at its head, the PP is undoubtedly rooted in Francoism. Its predecessor was the Alianza Popular (Popular Alliance, or AP), a party founded by former Francoist minister Manuel Fraga\(^2\). The party was formed out of a fusion of several Christian Democrat parties, including the Unión del Centro Democrático (Union of the Democratic Center, or UCD) and a reorganized AP, as leaders attempted to move closer to the political Center in hopes of reaching a greater constituency (Balfour, 2005, pp. 147-149). Today, many of the PP’s leaders are descendents of the dictatorship’s political elite.

As a result of these connections with Spain’s darker past, the PP has battled for political legitimacy since its birth. Perhaps the biggest struggle has been between the party’s traditionalist and modernizing wings. The traditionalists have favored a classic nationalist rhetoric, while the modernizers have sought to recreate the image of the PP as a modern European political party of the Center. The solution has been a compromise between the two, resulting in a sometimes contradictory nationalist rhetoric: while the peripheral nationalists are portrayed as racist and pre-modern, the PP defends its own version of ‘patriotism’—which is oddly reminiscent of nationalism itself—as necessary for the unity of

\(^2\)Fraga is an important figure in Spanish politics, highly regarded especially among the right-wing. Under Franco, he served as Minister of Information and Tourism and later as Ambassador to the UK. He founded the AP in 1977 and continues to been involved in Spanish politics to this very day. At the ripe old age of 86, Fraga serves as Senator for his native region of Galicia. He is the Founder and Honorary President for Life of the PP of Galicia (PP, 2008a).
the Spanish nation. Moreover, the PP has consistently used a strategy of attack against the PSOE, most likely because the PP has spent such a large part of its history in the opposition.

On the question of nationalism, the PP is divided into two main groups at the national level (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 187). For the first group, the nation is believed to be the product of historical determinism. All of Spain’s historical episodes—the Reconquest of the peninsula from the Muslims, the discovery of the Americas, the institution of the monarchy—are seen as forces that shaped the Spanish nation. The second group sees the nation from an organic point of view as a living organism that has developed naturally and has not relied on people or events to shape it. Despite these differences in interpretation, there are several trends in the PP’s nationalist discourse that are common to the majority of the party.

3.1 Tendencies Within the PP

Reactionary Nationalism

One of the main tendencies in the PP’s nationalist discourse is what can be called reactionary nationalism, since it feeds off the demands and actions of the periphery nationalists. Since the 1970s, Spain’s democratic Right has monopolized on the stigmatization of explicit state nationalism, accusing peripheral nationalists of being exclusive, totalitarian, and racist (Núñez Seixas, 2005, p. 123). Today, the PP continues to throw these accusations around, while nationalist leaders in Catalonia and the Basque Country often throw them right back, pointing to connections between the PP and Franco’s regime. As Balfour and Quiroga (2007) explain, each side of this debate sees its own ideology as true and the other as false, and its relation with the nation as ‘patriotism’ and the other as the negatively-connoted ‘nationalism.’ The PP adamantly defends individual rights
over collective rights and perceives the periphery nationalists to be a threat to the Spanish nation since they constantly highlight cultural and linguistic differences and since some have proposed separation from Spain (Núñez Seixas, 2001, pp. 729-730).

The use of co-official languages in several of Spain’s regions is among the issues upon which reactionary nationalism most often feeds. The PP has accused several regional governments of ‘imposing’ a monolithic culture on all citizens under their power and using discriminatory cultural and linguistic policies (Núñez Seixas, 2001, p. 729). In the PP’s 2008 electoral manifesto, the party makes several mentions of the “right to education in Castilian Spanish,” giving the impression that the co-official languages pose a threat. Collective rights are also portrayed as a threat to “individual liberty,” as the manifesto explains: “A person’s birthplace, or cultural, linguistic, or institutional identification, should not entail any sort of privilege” (PP, 2008b, pp. 11, 33).

The activity of the Basque terrorist group ETA only serves as more fuel to the PP’s reactionary fire. Between 1998 and 2004, the PP often expressed a need to honor the ‘memory’ of the victims of ETA (Núñez Seixas, 2007, pp. 168-169). Leaders of the PP have accused Zapatero’s administration on numerous occasions of being soft on the terrorist group and of “betraying the dead” (El País, Mar. 23, 2006). Through the use of this sort of emotional language, the PP seeks to portray the PSOE’s anti-terrorist policies as ineffective in order to woo dissatisfied voters.

Since losing the 2004 general elections, the PP has taken the offensive, using a rhetoric that suggests the demands of the peripheral nationalists and the PSOE’s concessions to them are threatening the stability of the Spanish nation-state. On several occasions, party leaders have warned that the demands of the peripheral nationalists will lead to the
‘Balkanization’ of Spain. In September of 2005, former President José María Aznar told a notable Argentine newspaper that Spain was “at risk of Balkanization” as a result of the PSOE’s concessions to the Basque and Catalan nationalists. Aznar accused the nationalists of being “very bold” and the Zapatero administration of being “mistaken and weak” (El Mundo, Sept. 7, 2005). In March of 2006, Senator Manuel Fraga reaffirmed these accusations during the PP’s National Convention, sarcastically asking if the country had anything to gain from this so-called Balkanization (El Faro de Vigo, Mar. 4, 2006). The PP has often used such fiery rhetoric to incite fear, anger, and indignation among the constituency. However, this rhetoric comes more as a strategy of attack against the PP’s political enemies than out of any actual fears about the future stability of Spain.

Reactionary nationalism was particularly prominent in the 1990s, as a reaction to the PSOE’s reliance on Basque and Catalan nationalists to maintain majority in the government (Núñez Seixas, 2007, p. 168). However, the PP began to put special emphasis on Spain’s cultural diversity in the months leading up to the 1996 national elections, most likely because party leaders knew they would need the support of the nationalists to be able to form a government once elected (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 200-201). In fact, the PP did just that, forming a coalition with the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party, or PNV) and the Catalan nationalist party Convergencia i Uniò (CiU) in 1996. Although the PP shared some consensus with these parties over socio-economic policies, the three were clearly divided over the “status of nation, state, and region” (Balfour, 2005, p. 154). In order to ensure their support, the PP made several concessions, including greater devolution of powers to regional governments, a principle which the party has traditionally opposed.

By 2000, the PP had consolidated its power, winning a majority in that year’s
elections and no longer needing the help of the nationalist parties. Instead, the PP focused on modernizing the party, in an attempt to further distance itself from Franco’s regime (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 201-203). These efforts, combined with the ever-present demands of the peripheral nationalists, stirred the PP to adopt and to adapt the PSOE’s concept of constitutional patriotism, as we will see later in this paper.

Regionalist Variants

Although the focus of this paper is the discourse of the PP and the PSOE at the national level, it is important to note the existence of regional variants since each of these parties has a considerable presence at the regional level\(^3\). In the PP, the regionalist variant seeks to combine loyalty to the Spanish Constitution and nation with greater regional identification, and has been particularly successful in Galicia and the Balearic Islands, where the PP (and before its foundation, the AP and UCD) has enjoyed electoral success since the early 1980s (Núñez Seixas, 2001, p. 732). Like its counterpart in the Left, this variant of the PP has supported the principle of subsidiary and the need for decentralization. It has, at times, clashed with the centrist sectors of the PP, although its leaders are clear to differentiate between “healthy regionalism” and self-determination, which is seen as strictly unacceptable (Núñez Seixas, 2005, pp. 128-129).

Between 1995 and 1999, the PP won elections in several regional governments, including Valencia, the Balearic Islands and Aragon. Many party leaders at the national level praised these regions as being part of a new, ‘non-nationalist’ periphery. However, certain

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3The PP has enjoyed great electoral success in several regions. However, there are some regions where the PP’s success has been marginal; most notably, Catalonia. In this region, CiU—a Catalan nationalist party with center-Right political leanings—had enjoyed electoral hegemony for some 23 years before losing the majority in the Catalan parliament to the Partits dels Socialistes de Catalunya (Catalan Socialist Party) in 2003. Today, a coalition of three leftist parties governs the region, while CiU and the Catalan division of the PP form the opposition (El País, Nov. 24, 2006). The PP is the fourth largest party in terms of representation in the Catalan parliament (El Mundo, 2006).
members of the PP’s more centrist wing became uneasy about the growing power of these regional elites (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 204). One of the most problematic policy issues is the division of competencies between the central and regional governments. The PP has traditionally favored a greater distribution of power to the center and an equal distribution among Spain’s seventeen Autonomous Communities. In recent years, however, there has been a split within the party between so-called ‘traditionalists,’ who call for this equality, and ‘modernists,’ who insist on an asymmetric distribution of competencies, granting greater autonomy to some Communities. Many of these modernists are from Communities which have traditionally developed separate identities, such as Catalonia and Valencia (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 127-128).

National-Catholicism Revisited

Several parties of Spain’s extreme Right continue to display what Núñez Seixas (2001) refers to as “national-Catholic nostalgia” for their similarities to Franco’s brand of nationalism. These parties exhibit nostalgia for the pre-modern Spanish Empire and cultural imperialism in Latin America. They strictly oppose Spain’s integration into the European Union and deny the existence of Spain’s diversity. It is important to note that the parties adhering to this ideology are far from mainstream and have had minimal electoral success. However, remnants of this so-called national-Catholic nostalgia have occasionally shown up in the PP’s discourse, particularly among older leaders (Núñez Seixas, 2005, pp. 127). The existence of such discourse is problematic because of links between Spain’s democratic Right and the dictatorship. Progressive members of the Right have been striving to dispel the ‘fascist’ label for over thirty years, and the use of rhetoric that is in any way reminiscent of Franco’s regime is a step backwards.
A number of characteristics of the PP’s nationalist discourse have been likened to those of the dictatorship. For example, during Aznar’s administration, the party showed a great affinity for the use of national symbols and public ceremony to promote Spanish identity and national pride (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 220). In 2000, party leaders proclaimed the necessity to recuperate mass patriotic ceremonies and the use of national symbols (Núñez Seixas, 2007, p. 176). In 2002, the PP government erected a Spanish flag measuring 965-square feet (294-square meters) in Madrid’s Plaza de Colón. The largest of its kind in all of Spain, the flag became the subject of controversy in October of that year, when Minister of Defense Federico Trillo-Figueroa and Madrid’s Mayor José María Álvarez del Manzano—both of the PP—held an official ceremony in its honor. This tradition—to be carried out monthly thereafter—is normally reserved for the military or for national holidays. Furthermore, the two leaders insinuated that the ceremony was a ‘timely reminder’ of the “integrity of Spain,” referring to contemporary developments in the Basque separatist movement. Needless to say, this outraged members of the PNV, PSOE, and other parties in the opposition (González and Díez, 2002). Although the PP has since moderated its stance, the party’s 2008 electoral manifesto includes a section devoted to “language and symbols.” Here, the PP calls a “lack of respect for the symbols […] an attack on our constitutional model.” Moreover, the misuse of the flag can be understood as a territory’s desire to deny that it forms part of Spain (PP, 2008b, p. 38).

Francoist public symbols, such as streets and town squares named after the regime’s top military officials or statues of the dictator himself, were widespread until recently. However, other reminders of the regime remain, such as patriotic holidays, the most prominent being the celebration of Spain’s national day on October 12. This day, coinciding
with the anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of the Americas, had been named the national holiday by Franco in commemoration of the national *mito of Hispanidad*, or the brotherhood between Spain and Latin America. In Madrid, this day has been celebrated annually with a military parade attended by the King and major politicians. There seems to be a contradiction in the fact that October 12 continues to be Spain’s national day instead of December 6, the anniversary of the signing of the Constitution.

Another issue linking the PP to Spain’s more backward past has been its attitude towards the European Union. Some party members have suggested that European integration has detracted from the national project in Spain, diluting Spanish national identity in favor of a ‘weaker’ cosmopolitan identity. Of course, the modernizing members of the party strictly reject such discourse. Former Catalan senator and current Member of the European Parliament, Aleix Vidal-Quadras, and other pro-EU members of the party have contended that European identity is compatible with the Spanish one and may even help to overcome what some call the “archaic” peripheral nationalisms (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 219).

*Neo-Regenerationism*

Another attribute of the PP’s nationalist discourse is its emphasis on Spain’s historic past. As mentioned earlier, some party members subscribe to historical determinism to explain the origin of the Spanish nation, while others have taken on a more organic approach. Nonetheless, both place great importance on Spain’s history, perceived as the basis of national legitimation. This traditionalist view of nationalism and nation-building sharply contrasts with the PSOE’s modernist version, which places greater emphasis on the future.

As we saw in the previous section of this paper, Spanish historians painted a rather negative image of the nation’s past for the greater part of the 1980s. As such, most parties
stayed away from referencing it, although the Right has traditionally favored history as a basis for nationalism, often using interpretations similar to those used by Franco (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, pp. 184-190). For example, the PP has highlighted the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims in the Middle Ages as one of the nation’s greatest achievements and emphasized the importance of the Catholic Monarchs in unifying Spain in the fifteenth century (Núñez Seixas, 2001, p. 729).

The positive change in interpretations of Spain’s past that took place in the 1990s was particularly important for the PP since it allowed leaders—particularly party leader and future Spanish president Aznar—to reference Spanish history in a positive light during their nationalist discourse (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 156). Once in power, the Aznar administration often attempted to ‘reinterpret’ history in a way that would “promote Spanish unity” (Núñez Seixas, 2005, pp. 136-137). Núñez Seixas (2001) has called this tendency of the PP “neo-regenerationism” for its attempts to appropriate the republican reformism of the early twentieth century. This includes highlighting the more ‘common’ elements to all regions and the more positive historical episodes, such as the Restoration period of the late nineteenth century, the 1876 Constitution, and Spain’s Second Republic. In several public discourses, President Aznar referred to Spain as a long-lasting historical and political reality, a nation based on the principles of “democracy, cultural plurality, and progress,” with a ‘brief interruption’ between 1936 and 1978 (Núñez Seixas, 2001, p. 731).

At the same, the Aznar administration attempted to downplay the more negative aspects of Spanish history. For example, the literary movements of the Generation of ’98 and ’14 were depicted as pessimistic movements which clouded the view of liberalism, eventually giving way to the Civil War and the dictatorship (Núñez Seixas, 2005, p. 137).
Today, the PP continues to define the Spanish nation through its historical past, while distancing itself from the dictatorship. In the introduction to its 2008 electoral manifesto, the party identifies itself as “a young party that has been born and raised with this democracy, and which assumes the tradition of Spanish liberalism that emerged with the Constitution of Cádiz [of 1812]” (PP, 2008b, p. 8).

3.2 The PP’s Adoption—and Adaptation—of Constitutional Patriotism

At the PP’s fourteenth annual National Congress, held in 2002, Foreign Minister Josep Piqué and the president of the PP in the Basque Country María San Gil addressed fellow party members, calling for a new Spanish nationalism based on the Constitution. This new ‘constitutional patriotism,’ as it would be called, reaffirmed the concept of the “unity of the nation of Spain” and defended it against certain regions’ demands for self-determination. The proposal met overwhelming approval from party leaders, although not without some reservations on the part of the party’s more traditionalist wing (El País, Jan. 26, 2002).

According to the PP’s interpretation of constitutional patriotism, Spain is defined as a “plural nation” with constitutional values. Moreover, the Constitution and the democratic transition are seen as great national achievements (Núñez Seixas, 2005, pp. 133-134). This interpretation of the past has led to frequent clashes with the PSOE, such as the debate about constitutional reforms and the 2007 Law on Historical Memory, as we will see in the following section of this paper. Moreover, the introduction of constitutional patriotism has had a profound effect on the PP’s internal politics. The influence of the regionalist variant has reduced considerably since 2000, as the concept of constitutional patriotism takes hold as the predominant nationalist ideology (Núñez Seixas, 2005, p. 129).

Just as the PSOE has been criticized for straying from Habermas’ original concept,
the PP has been accused of adapting constitutional patriotism to its own right-wing agenda. Núñez Seixas (2005) argues that the PP’s version of constitutional patriotism is problematic because, unlike Habermas had originally intended, the PP has not explicitly condemned Spain’s fascist past, nor helped to create a broad, anti-fascist consensus upon which to base Spain’s unity. Furthermore, several scholars (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007; Bastida Freixedo, 2007; Núñez Seixas, 2007) have pointed out the contradictory nature of the PP’s interpretation; indeed, the PP’s brand of constitutional patriotism does not seem far from a constitutional nationalism.

Although the terms ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism’ are often used interchangeably, there is in fact an important difference between the two. Kwame Anthony Appiah, a professor of philosophy from Princeton University, suggests that nationalism is a political ideology (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 23). Patriotism, on the other hand, is more of an emotional sentiment of attachment to one’s homeland. Thus, when citizens feel proud to belong to a particular nation, they are expressing patriotism. However, once these feelings are used to justify actions, they cease to be patriotism and are, instead, a manifestation of nationalism. Thus, the PP’s version of constitutional ‘patriotism’ is more indicative of constitutional ‘nationalism’ because it is used to justify the party’s nationalizing policies: resistance of Constitutional reform, attitudes towards the peripheral nationalists, use of national symbols, and other policy areas.

3.3 Forget About It: The PP and Historical Memory

As we have seen, Spain’s democratic transition was characterized by compromises from both sides of the political spectrum in order to avoid bloodshed. The democratic Right sought to create a new ‘political culture’ that would be acceptable to the majority—including
Franco’s former supporters and the opposition to the regime. This meant resituating itself between the dictatorship and a new form of conservatism. At the time of the transition, a large part of the two main right-wing parties, the UCD and the AP, was directly implicated in Franco’s regime, making it impossible for these parties to blatantly denounce the dictatorship. Furthermore, the UCD and AP relied on the votes of an electorate that had supported Franco (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007, p. 182).

Moreover, the nature of the transition prevented Spain from ever truly confronting its fascist past, as many other European democracies had already. Spain’s democratic Right has demonstrated a long-lasting desire to forget and “put aside” ‘shameful’ episodes of the past for the “sake of Spain’s unity” (Núñez Seixas, 2005, p. 135).

It comes as no surprise that when the Congress declared 2006 the “Year of Historical Memory,” the PP found itself the only political party in opposition, proposing instead a “Year of Concordance.” This proposal was swiftly rejected in favor of the original (20minutos.es, Apr. 27, 2006). That same year, the PSOE tried to raise support for a law that would officially recognize the illegality of the 1936 military coup and the dictatorship of Franco, and require Spain’s municipalities to remove all Francoist public symbols. The PP firmly rejected these initiatives, calling them “an attack on the transition.” The only other party to veto the law was the Esquerra Republicana de Cataluña (Republican Left of Catalonia, or ERC), a left-wing Catalan separatist party, on the grounds that the law did not go far enough to overturn Francoist judicial verdicts (El País, Oct. 9, 2007).

The Law on Historical Memory was finally passed on October 31, 2007, despite the PP and ERC’s disapproval. It marked a major step in Spain coming to terms with its authoritarian past. However, to a certain extent the PP’s lack of support for the law
undermined what could have been a path to greater national unity. Spain’s second largest national party had not joined in this explicit condemnation of fascism; this represented a major symbolic blow for reconciliation.

When Judge Baltasar Garzón of the National Court authorized the investigation of atrocities committed during the Civil War and the dictatorship in October 2008, the PP reaffirmed many of its earlier protests. The party’s spokesperson for justice Agustín Conde said that Garzón had “lost his bearings” and made a decision that would “reopen wounds that had been happily sealed” (El País, Oct. 17, 2008). Manuel Fraga called the decision “a foolish act” and “a very serious error.” He also called into question Garzón’s jurisdiction to bring Francoist leaders to trial due to existing “amnesty laws” (referring to a 1977 law that had been intended to facilitate a peaceful transition) (Yoldi, 2008b).

As we saw in the previous section of this paper, the PSOE has also been hesitant to lend its support to this legal investigation. The Spanish Attorney General has challenged Garzón’s jurisdiction over crimes committed decades ago, and it remains questionable whether they will ever be put to trial (Yoldi, 2008c). Perhaps this is the end of the road for reconciliation between the two sides of Spain’s Civil War, as now both major political parties refuse to lend their backing, or perhaps they will come around as time passes. What remains clear, however, is that the lack of consensus between the PP and the PSOE on the nature of Franco’s 1939 military coup and his nearly forty years as dictator of Spain stands as an obstacle to creating an anti-fascist consensus, which would affirm Spain’s identity as a modern liberal democracy and unite all its citizens behind democratic principles.
IV. CONCLUSION

Since the democratic transition in the late 1970s, Spain’s main political parties have been striving to gain their footing on the subject of nationalism. The delegitimization of Spanish nationalism and the simultaneous empowerment of peripheral nationalisms have made this a difficult task. Both the PSOE and the PP have borrowed ideas from the past, such as early-twentieth-century regenerationism and liberal democratic ideals from Spain’s Second Republic, and from philosophies, such as Habermas’ constitutional patriotism, that have found success in other post-dictatorial societies. Both parties have also suffered internal divisions over the debate between national solidarity and the degree of regional identification and autonomy. The articulation of Spanish political nationalism remains weak and ambiguous, as politicians from both sides continue to avoid discourses that might be negatively interpreted as ‘nationalist,’ opting instead for the more positively connoted ‘patriotism.’

In this paper, I have shown the existence of four factors that have affected the evolution of the PSOE and PP’s nationalist discourses: historians’ interpretations of Spain’s national identity and past; political alignment on the Left or Right; whether the party is in government or the opposition; and the degree of reliance on peripheral nationalist parties for electoral success.

Provided the constantly changing trends in historical research, historians’ interpretations of Spain’s national identity and past have influenced how political parties
relate to the nation. As we saw earlier, historians in the 1980s presented an image of Spain as a backward country that had missed the projects of nation-building, industrialization, and democratization that other European states had experienced more than a century before. As a result, neither the PSOE nor the PP dared to suggest otherwise. Both parties opted to downplay the history of Spain as a marker of national identity. Instead, the PSOE emphasized common national projects, such as modernization and Europeanization. Although the PP as such was not on the scene in the 1980s, its predecessor the AP limited its historical references during this period. When historians shifted towards a more positive representation of Spanish history in the 1990s, both the PSOE and the PP monopolized on this, comparing themselves to leaders from Spain’s Second Republic and changing to a more history-oriented image of the nation.

Another factor affecting a party’s nationalist discourse is its alignment on the political spectrum. While parties on the Right have traditionally been more inclined to use nationalist rhetoric, they have also had to be more wary of it in order to avoid their association with authoritarianism. Parties on the Left have less frequently relied on nationalist rhetoric to bolster electoral support, but when they have, these parties have not had to face the same prejudices as their right-wing counterparts.

As a result of the stigmatization of Spanish nationalism during the dictatorship, both the PSOE and PP have been cautious in their use of nationalist rhetoric, preferring the more neutral term ‘patriotism.’ However, as a result of the Right’s historical and ideological ties with the Francoist regime, the PP has faced greater challenges in establishing its legitimacy as a liberal democratic party. Its use of nationalist rhetoric has been subject to greater scrutiny than that of the PSOE and other leftist parties. To overcome these difficulties, the
PP moderated its nationalist discourse in its early years as a political party. Today the party continues to receive criticism for its often contradictory and sometimes illiberal interpretations of patriotism, suggesting that as a party of the democratic Right, the PP will always face certain obstacles to its uninhibited use of nationalist discourse. The PSOE, meanwhile, has enjoyed greater freedom in its use of such discourse since it has not had to answer to an authoritarian past. As a leftist party, it has not traditionally placed much emphasis on nationalism anyway, having sided with the peripheral nationalists on many issues over the last thirty years. However, when the PSOE has brought up Spanish nationalism, it has not had to face accusations of fascism and national-Catholicism, as has the PP.

Whether the party is in government or in the opposition has also shaped its nationalist discourse: the party in power has usually been less restrained, while the opposition has taken the offensive against its enemies. During the PSOE’s first fourteen years in power, party leaders often called Spain’s modernization and Europeanization ‘common national projects,’ and President Felipe González proudly compared his party to early-twentieth-century reformist movements. During this time, the PP often attacked the PSOE for conceding to the demands of the peripheral nationalists, with whom it shared power at the national level. When the tables turned and the PP won the 1996 national elections, the PSOE went on the offense, this time bringing to the surface historical memory and the role of the Right during the Civil War and dictatorship. Meanwhile, the PP undertook a campaign of ‘renationalization,’ in efforts to rejuvenate public displays of patriotism and the use of national symbols. After winning its second straight elections in 2000, the PP adopted its own version of constitutional patriotism. However, the party returned to the opposition in 2004
and has since retaken its attack against the PSOE, accusing party leaders of risking the
‘Balkanization’ of Spain by siding with peripheral nationalists.

This leads us to another factor affecting nationalist discourse: the degree of reliance
on peripheral nationalists for electoral success. The PSOE has in many ways manipulated
the support of the nationalists since it was first legalized as a political party in the late 1970s.
It has had a long tradition of cooperation with the peripheral nationalists, always lending its
support to regional autonomy and the recognition of cultural and linguistic rights. Although
the Right had traditionally rejected the cultural and linguistic diversity of Spain, the PP
became more tolerant of the nationalists in efforts to become part of the mainstream.
However, for the first half of the 1990s, the PP was quick to criticize the PSOE for conceding
to their demands, provided that the PSOE was governing in coalition with Basque and
Catalan parties from 1993 to 1996. Naturally, the PP was forced to moderate this position
when it needed the nationalists’ support to form a government in 1996 and during the next
eight years, made a number of concessions to them as well.

Although all of these factors have helped to steer the direction of these parties’
nationalist discourses, the underlying factor is electoral success; both the PSOE and PP have
been driven largely by political motives. After all, party leaders are not philosophers seeking
to create an ideal image of the ‘nation,’ but rather, they are politicians whose actions and
public discourses seek to win votes and increase their power. This explains why a party’s
position either in government or in the opposition and its degree of reliance on peripheral
nationalists have had such a strong effect on the evolution of nationalist discourse.

Despite coming from two ends of the political spectrum, Spain’s two main political
parties, the PSOE and the PP, do not differ a great deal in their understanding of Spanish
nationalism today. Over the course of thirty years, the two have gradually converged on the nationalist ideology of constitutional patriotism. Despite subtle differences between each party’s respective interpretations of the concept, there is no doubt that the PSOE and PP agree that the Constitution of 1978 forms the basis of the Spanish nation and gives legitimacy to its existence as such. Perhaps each party’s ability to adapt to the political circumstances and to moderate its nationalist discourse when necessary explains why these two are the dominant political parties in Spain.

An area where these parties do differ a great deal is their respective interpretations of Spain’s historical past. This carries over to how they understand constitutional patriotism and how they articulate their nationalist discourses. The PSOE focuses always on the future: the establishment of a common national project and the union of Spain’s peoples around the liberal values embodied in the Constitution of 1978. The PP has always placed an emphasis on Spain’s ‘glorious’ past: the Reconquest, the discovery of the Americas, the Second Republic, and the democratic transition. However, both parties exhibit a marked avoidance of the part of Spain’s history which is most resonant today: the Civil War and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Efforts such as the 2007 Law on Historical Memory have been an extraordinary step in coming to terms with the recent past. However, the lack of an ‘anti-fascist’ consensus between Spain’s two main political parties stands as a major obstacle to solving the country’s so-called ‘national problem.’
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