Boundaries and Identities on the Franco-Spanish Frontier

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Abstract
Following the dismantling of most border controls within the European Union as a consequence of the 1985 Schengen agreement, many communities located in border zones have had to reassess their socio-cultural, economic and legal relationships with neighbouring communities on the other side of state frontiers. This has been true, among others, for the towns of Irun and Hondarribia on the Spanish side of the Franco-Spanish frontier and the neighbouring town of Hendaya on the French side. Since the late 1980s, Irun, Hondarribia and Hendaya have sought to strengthen their relations with each other in an attempt to boost their local economy. This led, in 1999, to the launching of the Bidasoa-Txingudi Cross-Frontier Consortium - Bidasoa-Txingudi Mugaz Gaindiko Partzuergo in Basque - a formalisation at the level of their municipal administrations of the ties between the three towns that form the area now known as Bidasoa-Txingudi.

As at many other international borders, the communities on either side of the frontier have markedly different cultures, reflecting the dominant influences of the state of which each forms part. In parallel, however, both share a common Basque cultural and linguistic heritage, reflecting their location in the Basque-speaking region that straddles the Franco-Spanish border at the western end of the Pyrenees. The result is an unusually complex environment, in which contrasting and sometimes conflicting issues of identity, ethnicity, nationality, sense of belonging, language and culture mingle and interact.

This essay will review the history of the Partzuergo, its political and economic objectives and its attempts to bring to life the idea of a ‘Txingudi identity’, in the context of a local environment in which the ideals motivating the Partzuergo are far from universally accepted and in some cases are a source of controversy. In so doing, it will attempt to shed light on issues of identity and selfhood in this and other border communities whose inhabitants are subject to potentially conflicting national, regional and ethnic allegiances.

This paper examines issues of identity in an area known as Bidasoa-Txingudi, covering the towns of Hendaya, Irun and Hondarribia on either side of the state
frontier between Spain and France on the Atlantic coast. It is concerned with boundaries in the social and symbolic sense of the word, and its purpose is to explore forms of expression of identity in a border area inhabited by what is often assumed to be a homogeneous ethnic group. It takes as its point of departure the recognition that nationalities on either side of state frontiers cannot be considered simply as discrete cultural groups whose dominant characteristics are reflected and replicated in the sense of self of individuals. Instead, I shall argue that the state frontier is just one of many boundaries present in a community and that these boundaries are permeable and changing both in their nature and in the way they are perceived by the inhabitants of the area.¹

Using the concept of boundaries as an analytical tool, I explore from an anthropological perspective the construction and expression of identity as felt by the inhabitants of a particular border area.² By reviewing the diverse meanings, interpretations and manipulations of boundaries, both physical and symbolic, I highlight the challenges involved in current political attempts to create a new cultural identity in a recently re-conceived space located in a border area. This essay contributes to the blossoming literature in the social anthropology, sociology and politics of culture and identity at borders in general (O’Dowd and Wilson 1996; Donnan and Wilson 1994, 1999; Wilson and Donnan, 1998). At the same time, it will have implications for the further understanding of the social phenomena of nationalism and ethnicity.

The focus of my research is the area known as Bidasoa-Txingudi, straddling the river Bidasoa at the point where it emerges from the western end of the Pyrenees and enters the Atlantic Ocean. I have chosen this area for a number of reasons. In administrative terms, it is divided into two parts: one under French jurisdiction within the département des Pyrénées Atlantiques and the region of Aquitaine, and the other under Spanish jurisdiction as part of the
province of Gipuzkoa within the region known in Spanish as *Comunidad Autónoma Vasca*, or Autonomous Basque Community, and in Basque as *Euskadi*.

The river, which at this point forms the frontier, is more than just a political and geographical boundary: it also marks a socio-cultural boundary between two communities with different social, cultural and linguistic characteristics and differing notions of identity in the local, regional and state contexts. At the same time, however, the areas on either side of the frontier share a common Basque cultural and linguistic heritage with the rest of the Basque-speaking region of southwest France and northern Spain. The Basque terms *Iparralde* and *Hegoalde*, or ‘north side’ and ‘south side’, are commonly used by people with Basque nationalist sensibilities to describe the two parts of the Basque Country without referring to the ‘French’ or ‘Spanish’ side of the frontier.

The result is the existence in this common area of a combination of various competing political and cultural discourses. As a border area with a specific social, cultural, linguistic, political and economical dynamic, Bidasoa-Txingudi provides an ideal context in which to examine the role of boundaries of various kinds in the construction and expression of identity. In analysing the different ways of expressing identity used by representatives of various social groups in ‘Bidasoa-Txingudi’, I shall be challenging notions of fixed identity among members of what are often perceived as homogeneous groups. By illustrating the varying notions of self that can be observed in the area, I shall endeavour to go beyond current debates on the relationship between collective and individual identity. My aim will be to show how, despite the efforts of local politicians, different notions of self continually emerge. Using the concept of boundaries as an analytical tool, I shall expose the social and political challenges inherent in attempts by local politicians to forge a sense of cross-frontier unity and identity in an area where deep divisions of a social and cultural nature remain. Focusing on the differences between theory and reality
in the expression of identity, I hope to go beyond the Basque context in order to contribute to the analysis of relationships between culture and identity in changing border areas throughout Europe.

Bidasoa-Txingudi is a relatively new invention in topographical and socio-political terms. As a name for this area, it has gained currency over the last two decades in the context of a number of local political and economic initiatives. As a border zone, the area has been a focal point for political and socio-economic exchanges. The French and Spanish states have left their imprint on the cultural and linguistic landscapes on either side of the frontier, influencing both the dynamics of local Basque culture and the construction and expression of Basque ethnic identity. The different characters of the three towns, Hendaia, Irun and Hondarribia, reflect the different development processes that each has undergone in a context of contrasting Spanish and French socio-economic trends. The experience of each is relevant to the wider picture of the Basque region as a whole as it stands today.

As the only open, flat area on the Franco-Spanish border in these parts, the area of Bidasoa-Txingudi has been a major transit point for centuries (see, for example, Uranzu 1975; Michelena 1997). It has also been a site of conflict between the populations of either side. A particular curiosity is the small uninhabited island in the middle of the river Bidasoa on which the Treaty of the Pyrenees was signed in 1659 to demarcate Spanish and French territory. Over the centuries, ownership of this island switched between the French and Spanish state. Today, the island changes jurisdiction between the two states every six months. The railway lines linking Hendaia to Paris and Irun to Madrid were laid in the late 1860s. Despite recent urban development, the three towns are still largely surrounded by countryside characterised by a mainly rural economy.
Irun, with a population of around 56,000 inhabitants, is an active industrial and commercial centre situated directly across the river Bidasoa from Hendaia, to which it is linked by four bridges catering for a continuous flow of rail, motor and pedestrian traffic. Irun’s location on the border has been crucial for its economy and social dynamism. Much local activity has focused on rail and lorry transport services and on light industry, capitalising on cross-frontier trade. Until recently, a significant proportion of the local population was employed in the frontier police and customs services. In the 1950s, like other industrialised parts of Spain, this area experienced an economic boom, attracting many people from elsewhere in search of work. Irun shopkeepers benefited from the custom of relatively well-off clients from Iparralde coming to buy Spanish goods.

By contrast, the neighbouring town of Hondarribia, two kilometres away on the southern side of the Bidasoa estuary, has retained a more traditional character. This in part reflects its somewhat peripheral position relative to the hinterland. Thanks to the picturesque qualities of its small fishing port, beach and medieval fortress, Hondarribia, with a population of nearly 16,000, has become a popular tourist location. The town has some light industry but, due to its distance from the frontier, this has not been developed to the same extent as in Irun, where a considerable proportion of the population of Hondarribia is employed.

Hendaia, with a population of over 13,000, was once, like Hondarribia, the site of an active fishing port. Until the early 1990s, similarly to Irun, it was also a busy border transit area, attracting a significant population from the rest of France employed in border-related activities. Today, it has some light industry, but thanks to its extensive beach and recently constructed marina it owes much of its prosperity to tourism. Until the devaluation of the peseta in the early 1980s, Hendaia also benefited from the custom of people who
crossed the border from Hegoalde to purchase goods not found in Spain. Now, Hendaians prefer to shop in Irun and Hondarribia where goods are relatively cheaper. In the mid-1980s, Hendaia, along with the rest of Iparralde, saw extensive residential construction. Because property prices were cheaper than in Hegoalde, Hendaia became the target of a significant influx of people from across the border, coming to invest and live in newly built villas and residential areas. This has enhanced the town’s character as a residential resort.

In 1993, border controls were dismantled following the extension to Spain of the 1985 Schengen agreement, under which a number of EU countries had introduced an open frontier policy. In line with the Schengen agreement, merchandise from within the European Community was no longer obliged to stop at the frontier for inspection. More than half of the people locally employed in frontier-related activities lost their jobs, dealing a serious blow to the economy of the three frontier towns.

In advance of this economic setback, the municipal authorities of the three towns had already begun to review their socio-economic prospects within ‘a Europe of open borders’. Recognizing the need to work together, they initiated a process of rapprochement between the three towns which led in 1990 to a declaration of mutual recognition, within the context of the European Single Market, known in Spanish as the *Declaración Institucional del Bajo Bidasoa*. Shortly after the ending of frontier controls in 1993, the three towns launched a study exploring the area’s economic and social potential. This led to the creation later that year of the *Euro-District Bidasoa-Txingudi*, an entity which initially lacked any formal legal status. The idea of using a Spanish juridical structure known as a ‘Consorcio’ was first approved by the Spanish state in 1998, opening the way for an ‘Inter-administrative Convention’ between the three municipalities. Following the French state’s approval of the project in
October 1999, the Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi, Partzuergo Bidasoa-Txingudi, in Basque, finally formally came into existence.

In pursuit of its objective of forging a new metropolitan area out of the three towns, the Partzuergo has sought to promote a common local identity based on a heritage combining non-political elements that are Basque, Spanish and French. In doing so, the Partzuergo officially seeks to go beyond the frontier as a political and social boundary in a way that is highly relevant to the theoretical debates on identity, power politics and the use of culture as a political tool. By promoting cross-frontier social and cultural co-operation, the Partzuergo adds a new dimension to the co-existence of the Spanish and French states on either side of the frontier.  

One of the Partzuergo’s main objectives, in order to win the support and participation of the local population, has been to create a new sense of local belonging, or ‘Txingudi spirit’, which can unite the populations of the three towns in a common endeavour. This already led in the early years of the project to a re-definition of the area as a common space under the newly coined name of Bidasoa-Txingudi. The name of the river Bidasoa was already used to define the district or comarca which groups Irun and Hondarribia, the Comarca del Bajo Bidasoa (or lower part of the Bidasoa river). The word Txingudi, originally used to refer only to a bit of land bordering the bay of Hendaia (San Martín 1998), has come to be used over the past few decades to refer to the bay as a whole. Combining the two words, the three municipalities invented a new name for their common area. In its use of Basque symbols, words and ideas likely to appeal to Basque sensitivities, the Partzuergo draws on cultural elements that are common to society on both sides of the frontier as ‘levers’ to win support for its activities and objectives.
However, by keeping participation to three seats per municipality, the Partzuergo holds a distinctive political command, as its structure ultimately entails only the leadership of the majority parties in power. Since cross-border co-operation was first initiated, the three municipalities have been headed by the same political parties. In Hondarribia, the mayor and his accompanying two councilllors have always been from the Basque nationalist alliance *Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea*\(^\text{10}\) and *Eusko Alkartasuna*.\(^\text{11}\) In Irun, the long serving Socialist mayor leads a co-alliance between the *Partido Socialista de Euskadi*,\(^\text{12}\) EAJ and the *Partido Popular*,\(^\text{13}\) while in Hendaia, the Socialist mayor is accompanied by two councillors of his personal list. This means that the left-wing Basque nationalist parties, which enjoys the support of at least 7 per cent of the local population in the area, is excluded. This makes the Partzuergo less than fully representative. The exclusion of these left-wing Basque nationalists lends support to their claims of Basque cultural oppression at the hands of Spanish and French partisans. The frontier, meanwhile, retains its status for Basque nationalists as the ultimate obstacle to the fulfilment of their ideals of Basque unification. Ironically, in this way, the Partzuergo project highlights the contradictions inherent in attempts to promote a unified identity in a society where identities are multifaceted and varied.

**Why the interest in a ‘border area’?**

Frontiers are classically associated with the notion of the modern nation-state. The frontier is generally regarded as a physical demarcation, defining where the territory of one state ends and that of another begins (Anderson 1996:1-3). As a representation of the territorial limits of the state, the frontier has also conventionally been understood as the circumscription of the territory within which the residing population feels identified with the state and shares in a ‘national’ identity. Geographers have played an important role in opening the way for an appreciation of border areas as locations with a social and political dynamic very different from that of non-frontier zones (Prescott 1987). Their
analysis has helped political and social scientists to appreciate the frontier as having a particular role in the formation of a sense of difference between populations on either side of it and in the creation of the ‘nation’ in line with the state of which either side forms part.

International frontiers have also generally been associated with a peculiar quality of no-man’s land. Indeed, a particular characteristic of borders as social spaces is the way in which local populations live with the state frontier as a factor in their daily existence. This has led to the concept of ‘border identity’ as some kind of unique sense of self found amongst inhabitants of border areas (Wilson and Donnan 1998). As a space where two or more states meet and end, the border is an area in which the presence of the state in the human landscape is particularly evident. Elements that identify the state, from the language of road signs and advertisements to the style of urban architecture and the uniforms of state officialdom, are visible in abundance until they suddenly cease at the frontier. This makes it starkly evident to the person crossing that he or she is going from one particular space to another. Just as in ritual passages, this change in context obliges the individual to reflect on his or her position in relation to the changing environment (Van Gennep 1960).

In the political sciences, concerned as they are more with the larger political and institutional consequences of frontiers, borders in Europe have traditionally been assumed to have a ‘static’ or ‘frozen’ quality (Anderson 1996:3). From the late 1980s, however, the Schengen Agreement of the EU brought about a change in the nature and perception of borders. Many border areas have evolved from merely peripheral status into sites of active economic and cultural interchange (Ricq 1992; Leresche 1995). This has aroused new interest among both state and institutional political theorists and policy makers. With the breakdown of frontier controls, local institutions and organisations on either side of frontiers have begun forging stronger links of cross-frontier co-
operation. This trend has been particularly encouraged by financial assistance from the EU, in the form of the INTERREG programme (Balme and Jouve 1995; Le Galés and Lequesne 1998). This new dynamism of border areas has prompted some theorists to talk in terms of an erosion of the sovereignty of the modern nation-state, from above by the construction of Europe, and from below by the greater self-assertion of localities and other sub-national authorities (Loughlin 1994). As discrete socio-economic areas providing fertile ground for different cultural, economic and political discourses and as potentially new dynamic areas in the wider context of the EU, European borders have lately attracted increasing interest on the part of researchers in the political and economic sciences and legal studies (for the Basque country, see for example, Letamendia et al. 1994; Cambot 1998; Jauregui et al. 1997).

In the social sciences, the study of borders in Europe is increasingly attracting the attention of researchers. This can largely be related to the broader debate about globalisation and the demise of the nation-state as the pre-eminent political structure of modernity. As the realms of society, culture, politics and economics become increasingly boundless and translocal, the analysis of notions of the self in the context of discrete cultural units and neatly identifiable socio-political groupings has been brought into question. Nonetheless, the physical structures of territory and government remain an everyday reality, continuing to influence and assist in people’s construction of the self. Borders are key vantage points from which to view the processes of building and redefining the states, nations and transnational networks which comprise the new Europe. Anthropologists’ concern with the study of the human being in society inevitably leads them to focus on these particular and singular spaces.

The anthropologists Cole and Wolf (1974) and the historian Sahlins (1989) played a pioneering role in generating social scientific interest in borders. Their work underlined the importance of frontiers as instrumental in the construction
and expression of identity. In the Italian region of Alto Adige, Cole and Wolf (1974) noted how the inhabitants of the two neighbouring villages, one traditionally German-speaking and the other Italian-speaking, had retained their sense of different identity despite being affected by the repeated shifting of the Austrian-Italian frontier during the two World Wars. Long after the political boundaries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had disappeared, cultural boundaries continued to divide the two villages in spite of the fact that they were now both situated within the territory of the Italian state. In everyday encounters, Cole and Wolf noted, the inhabitants of the two villages played down their differences. Yet, once in the company of their own cultural group, those of each village were quick to resort to stereotypes to explain the actions of their neighbours (cf. Donnan and Wilson 1999: 33).

Sahlins (1989), in his study of the construction of state national identity in the Cerdanya, straddling the Franco-Spanish frontier to the east of the Pyrenees, noted how the existence of the frontier served to reinforce the formation of separate French and Spanish identities by providing a boundary across which to view the people on the other side. He observed how the inhabitants used the frontier for their own convenience, sneaking across it in order to avoid conscription and other civic obligations. This shows that the border does not just impose difference, but can be used by the local inhabitants to their own advantage. From this, Sahlins proposed a model of national identity based on instrumental manipulation. When it was in their interest to associate themselves with their cross-border neighbours, local inhabitants asserted their common Cerdans identity. When it was in their interest to deny any involvement with their neighbours, for instance in situations of rivalry or political divisions, or when comparing the lifestyle, economic progress and cultural ‘openness’ of the contrasting state contexts, they emphasised their state national identity. With this case, Sahlins demonstrated how state national identity develops not only through the nationalisation projects of the state, but also through the interests of
the local inhabitants. By incorporating the border into their social psychology over the centuries, they came to see each other as French or Spanish first and Cerdans and Catalan-speaking second; ‘their national disguises ended up sticking to their skin’ (1989:269). From this, Sahlins has suggested a bottom-up approach to the construction of state national identity which remains relevant to analyses of identity in many border areas today.

With the recent transformation of frontiers, particularly in the EU, borders are recognised today as ‘meaning-making and meaning-carrying entities, parts of cultural landscapes which often transcend the physical limits of the state and defy the power of state institutions’ (Donnan and Wilson 1994:4). Following this line of thought, recent academic analysis has focused on the ‘porosity’, ‘permeability’ and ‘ambiguity’ of state borders, and on the consequences that these imply for a unified sense of state national identity (Douglass 1978, 1998, 1999; Donnan and Wilson 1999, Wilson and Donnan 1998). By stressing the ‘blurred’ quality of borders, these anthropological accounts highlight borders as particular contexts in which people of theoretically opposed notions of identity can cohabit in many domains of daily living, thereby making the distinction between state national identities situationally irrelevant. Moncusí, for example, in his anthropological research in the Cerdanya, identified a unique kind of ‘reciprocal’ relationship between people on both sides of the frontier that led to their having ambivalent attitudes towards French and Spanish identity (1999:127). In a similar vein, Leizaola (1999) has focused on the phenomenon of dual nationality in the rural Basque border area to demonstrate the ‘ambiguity’ of French and Spanish national identity. She described the strategy of *frantses egin*, in which Basque-speaking border inhabitants with Spanish nationality acquire French nationality for functional motives, such as getting French Social Security benefits, work permits or exemption from certain taxes. Leizaola describes a people she maintains are ‘used to shifting from one state to another without ever losing their sense of community and of identifying
themselves as such' (1999:116). She suggests that the local people’s sense of border identity enables them to feel at ease within both state contexts, without necessarily feeling any strong national identity. Common to both accounts is the idea that when a common ethnic culture straddles a frontier, border inhabitants enjoy a special bond among themselves that over-rides any state boundary.

The notion of the frontier, or *muga* in Basque, plays an important role in Basque consciousness in a number of ways. By dividing the Basque region between two states, the state frontier is the political and administrative reality that formalises a dis-united Basque country or *Euskal Herria* in Basque. For Basque nationalists, it is the ultimate obstacle to their goals of a united Basque country. This is evoked in many songs and poems of the last two centuries which hark back to a romantic and legendary past when the Basques were a free people (for example ‘Orixe’ 1972:195-97; ‘Xalbador’ in Aulestia 1981:459). Nonetheless, the word *muga* avoids negative connotations precisely by negating reference to the French and Spanish state, in the use of the terms Iparralde and Hegoalde. Instead, it thrives on its centrality in the delimitation of the seven provinces that make up Euskal Herria, here making the meeting point of Labourd and Gipuzkoa.

The concept also has positive connotations. In addition to referring to the border between Iparralde and Hegoalde, the word *muga* is used to refer to other boundaries negotiated and agreed upon by the local populations (Descheemaeker 1950:150). Before the establishment of the frontier between French and Spanish territory, muga was used to refer to the demarcation lines, marked by landmarks or by natural frontiers such as rivers, that defined the areas in which local inhabitants enjoyed rights to pasture, fishing and hunting (Zubiaur Carreño 1977; Gómez-Ibáñez 1975:44-5). These were also known in Spanish as *facerías*, contracts between neighbouring villages sharing land and various natural resources (Fairén-Guillen 1955; Descheemaeker 1950). One
such accepted frontier was formed by the river Bidasoa, long before it was identified in 1659 as part of the state frontier between French and Spanish territory. Many of these still exist today, some of which have remained in effect over five centuries, even across the Franco-Spanish frontier (Fernández de Casadevante 1989).

These *mugak* have occupied a central role in Basque tradition, featuring in folk tales that recount instances of mutual assistance, reciprocity and negotiation over the use of common land by a local population. In some cases, the inhabitants of Basque villages refused to bear arms in the service of the Spanish or French states, citing their allegiance to ancient territorial entities circumscribed by a locally accepted *muga* (Descheemaeker 1950:136, Gómez-Ibáñez 1975). Boundary stones, known as *mugarik*, maintained over generations, have come to form an essential part of the Basque cultural landscape. In Basque folk tales, they are given an important symbolic value, respected as references of Basque cultural space and imbued with a magic character of their own, as they stand undisturbed in their natural landscape (Barandiarán 1972:174).

The ambiguous nature of the *muga*, which simultaneously unites and divides the inhabitants of neighbouring areas that are competing for the control of local natural resources, can be seen in Bidasoa-Txingudi. Along the Bidasoa river, well before the establishment of the Franco-Spanish frontier in 1659, the towns of Irun and Hondarribia, on the south bank, and Hendaia, on the north bank, quarrelled over fishing and transportation rights. The actions of Spanish and French militias in favour of one or other side during the skirmishes and military campaigns that took place in the area further polarised local relations. Fortresses were drawn up along each side of the Bidasoa facing each other (Lafourcade 1998:6). Despite a common language, shared traditions and the fact that many families had close relatives living on the other side of the muga
- in this case the Bidasoa - a sense of difference between the two communities was already established well before any demarcation of Spanish and French territory (Lefèbvre 1933).

Indeed, it was not until 1856-66, with the Treaty of Limits and the Treaty of Baiona, that a formal demarcation line was agreed between the two states. These treaties fixed the position of the border in the middle of the Bidasoa’s current at low tide, simultaneously demarcating the fishing zones of either side and rights to control of passage up and down the river. With these treaties came border guards, who in turn provided the local population with a figure formalising the ‘outsider’. From 1861 onwards, it was no longer legal for people to take goods across the border without paying some kind of tax. Local people’s rejection of this constraint was epitomised in the mugalari, or smuggler, carrying out his gaulana, or ‘night work’, a romantic figure following secret paths through woods and over crags, outwitting the Spanish and French authorities and thus maintaining the independent Basque spirit (Baroja 1985). Today, border inhabitants still delight in anecdotes of their own and others’ feats in smuggling goods through Spanish and French frontier controls without being caught.

In reality, this clandestine border-crossing has not always been either romantic or fun. Throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly during the two Carlist Wars in Spain, not just goods but arms and people were smuggled across the muga (Peillen 1998:116-8). There was also much abuse on the part of some mugalariak who, once in the mountains, would simply abandon their customers to their fate and run off with their pay. During the First and Second World Wars, men with French nationality crossed into Spain from Iparralde to avoid military conscription or to join the flow of refugees from Nazi persecution. In the opposite direction, during and after the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, thousands of people fled across the muga to France, many settling
just beyond the frontier in Iparralde. Although many were Basques, they were not always welcomed, but rather regarded with mistrust as poor, politically dubious and undesirable newcomers. Later, during the 1960s and 1970s, Iparralde became a destination for people on the Spanish side of the frontier seeking to share in the greater economic prosperity enjoyed by France. In addition to immigrants from the rest of Spain and Portugal, many people who lived close to the frontier, crossed daily from Hegoalde into Iparralde to work. The *muga* delimited two very different socioeconomic contexts on either side of the frontier, with France perceived as a more developed and democratically emancipated country than Spain.

Also during the Franco period, numerous Basque nationalists sought political refuge across the *muga* in Iparralde. Among them were militants of the Basque separatist organisation *Euskadi ta Askatasuna*, or ETA, who used Iparralde as a safe haven from which they could plan their operations. Use of the term *mugalari* was extended by the local inhabitants to include people who assisted ETA militants to cross the *muga* or smuggle ammunition or documents. Even today, many militants from Hegoalde live in effective exile in Iparralde, unable to return home for fear of arrest. Such circumstances serve to support the Basque nationalist notion of being ‘imprisoned’ in one’s own country.

While Basque nationalists in Iparralde shared the negative views of the frontier held by their counterparts in Hegoalde, for non-nationalists in Iparralde the frontier came to acquire a very different significance, as a rampart against the political and social tensions reigning south of the border. This view of the *muga* was reinforced during the 1980s, when ETA’s war against the Spanish state spilled over into Iparralde with a series of violent incidents, many involving the GAL, a Spanish secret armed force. Numerous of these took place in Hendaia. For many inhabitants of Iparralde, the frontier came to reify the dichotomy between the peaceful ‘French Basques’ and the
troublesome ‘Spanish Basques’, along with other cultural stereotypes contrasting the populations of either side. This perception re-emerged during the period leading up to the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht treaty, when debate focused on the risks posed for Iparralde by disappearing frontiers with Hegoalde. If the predictions of the direst doomsayers were to be believed, Iparralde not only risked succumbing to the economic domination of ambitious entrepreneurs from Hegoalde but also becoming more vulnerable to nationalist extremism imported from Hegoalde.20

In the Basque region, the muga has become a focus for border-crossing rituals on the part of Basque nationalist movements. Road signs by the border marking French and Spanish territory are often painted out. On the bridge between Irun and Hendaia for example, these are often ‘corrected’ with the marking of ‘Gipuzkoa’ and ‘Lapurdi’. The annual day of the Basque motherland, Aberri Egun, involving a big gathering of Basque nationalist supporters from both Hegoalde and Iparralde, has often deliberately been held close to the border. In April 1996, this celebration began in Hendaia and ended across the muga in Irun. In October 2000, during my fieldwork, EAJ, whose headquarters are in Hegoalde, organised in Hendaia a gathering for its supporters in parallel with a European Summit for heads of state that was taking place in Miarrizte21 on 13 and 14 October 2000. By organising this meeting in Iparralde, the chairman of EAJ, Xabier Arzallus, was making a symbolic statement on the right of the Basque people to be represented at such a European summit, and of support for this objective in both Iparralde and Hegoalde.

Another example of this ritualisation of the border-crossing can be found in the Korrika, a marathon relay race organised every year by an association that organises Basque tuition for adults, AEK.22 The Korrika, which helps to raise funds for AEK, follows an itinerary that weaves its way through both Hegoalde and Iparralde, mobilising crowds of supporters on its way.
the state frontier is always a moment of great excitement, expressing a
defiance of state division and a sign of communication and unity. The relay is
passed on to the next person waiting on the other side of the frontier. This
moment is often particularly emotive as some participants, because of their
militant past in Hegoalde, risk arrest by the Spanish police if they cross the
frontier from Iparralde into Hegoalde. As they approach the muga, they
abandon the Korrika, unable to go any further (personal observations, 6 April
2001). In her book on the Korrika, anthropologist Del Valle (1988:122) recalls
one tense scene when, during the fourth version of this event in 1986, a young
woman from Irun was waiting in the ‘no-man’s land’ to take the baton and run
back with it into Hegoalde. Just as she crossed the demarcation line to re-enter
Hegoalde, the Spanish police stopped her to check her papers (Egin 2 June
1986:29 in Del Valle 1988:122). In 2001, the crossing of the twelfth Korrika
from Iparralde to Hegoalde was tinged with comedy. As they ran across the
International Bridge linking Hendaia to Irun, all participants had to disinfect
their feet by wiping them on a mat placed there by the ertzaintza, the police
force of Euskadi, in order to prevent foot-and-mouth disease from entering the
territory of Hegoalde (personal observation, 6 April 2001).

Such incidents explain why, despite the ending of frontier controls in 1993, the
frontier retains its symbolic status in Basque nationalist discourse. Indeed, the
ending of border controls has given rise to new opportunities for using the
frontier as a focus for protest, as was exemplified in July 2000 when an
association that supports Basque prisoners organised an impressive silent
demonstration spanning the border. For an entire afternoon, supporters of the
association stood at approximately ten metre intervals from each other along
the road from Hendaia across the frontier to Irun and Hondarribia, wearing
white masks and holding up flags with the slogan ‘Euskal Presoak Etxera’.
While free circulation is now permitted across the frontier, state authorities on either side continue to have the power to close the frontier in the case of an ‘emergency’. In March 2000, the French authorities closed the frontier in order to prevent a large group of Basque nationalists from Hegoalde from crossing it in order to join a demonstration in Baiona, the main town of Iparralde. French police squads were deployed along the frontier crossings to block passage into Iparralde. Representatives of the demonstrators subsequently made an official complaint, stating that the French authorities had violated the rights of EU citizens freely to cross the frontiers, as provided for under the Schengen agreement. In October 2000, on the occasion of the European Summit in Miarritte, the French state briefly contemplated closing the frontier to keep out demonstrators from Hegoalde, including a large contingent of members of the Basque left-wing youth movement *Haika*. In the end, the frontier was kept open, though heavily patrolled by both Spanish and French police.

As such incidents demonstrate, control of the frontier continues to lie in the hands of the state authorities on either side. The French police and the *ertzaintza* are often seen patrolling their respective sides of the frontier on the bridge between Irun and Hendaia. In March and April 2001, the anti foot-and-mouth mats positioned on the Spanish side of the frontier provided a further reminder of the frontier’s continued existence. This provides Basque nationalists with a continued justification for using the *muga* as the symbolic obstacle to a united Euskal Herria.

**Frontier as boundary**

Borders are interesting not just as sites permitting the construction and interplay of competing national identities but as contexts in which to explore the multivocality as well as the multilocality of place (Douglass 1998). While the frontier is and remains a real dividing line in political and social terms, it
also has significance in symbolic terms as a boundary relevant to individuals in their construction and expression of personal identity. Crossing the frontier means different things to different people (Cohen 1998:28). While some people are very much aware of moving from one context to another, others can remain largely unaware of it. In some cases, this can be a source of frustration for people who regard the frontier as an important line of demarcation. Cohen, for example, comments on how he would wish English people to be more conscious of the fact that they have crossed some kind of boundary and entered another social context when they come from England to Scotland. This remark is very illustrative of the different and often competing use of symbols. It may not be so much a question of English people being unaware of their crossing the border but rather of actually not wanting to recognise it, as part of their self assertion in what they believe to be their space. We will see that such strategies are similarly acted out by some in the case of the Basque country.

The role of the state boundary in determining issues of identity is often more complex for the inhabitants of border areas than it is for people from other non-peripheral parts of the state. Examples of local multilayered uses of the boundary can also be found amongst Basque nationalists. For example, the destructive *kale borrokat* of some young Basque nationalist militants from Hegoalde during the October 2000 demonstrations against the European Summit sparked criticism among Iparralde nationalists who expressed their concern that this could prove harmful to their cause and their regret at the lack of sensitivity of their Hegoalde counterparts to the different nature of nationalist politics on the French side of the *muga*. In another example, I witnessed a surprising change of behaviour on the part of some left-wing nationalist activists from Hegoalde in relation to myself and some friends when we encountered them in Iparralde. After having taken no notice of us in the bars of Hondarribia and Irun, where we had seen them on numerous occasions, they suddenly adopted an attitude of friendly familiarity with us on seeing us in similar bars in
Iparralde. As one of my friends remarked with some cynicism, ‘they completely ignore us when they see us in Hondarribia, and now that we find ourselves across the border, they suddenly think we are the best of friends’. In spite of these youths’ fervent Basque nationalist discourse and their insistence on treating either side of the Basque country as their home, crossing the frontier evidently produced a particular effect on them. Their lack of identification with Iparralde and their perception of it as a different space was revealed by the alteration in their behaviour.

In spite of the great effort made by Basque nationalists to maintain their own way of talking about crossing the frontier, it is not uncommon to hear them sometimes getting their terms mixed up, and talking about ‘France’ and ‘Spain’ instead of Iparralde and Hegoalde, or bestalde, ‘the other side’. Among those Basques less nationally minded, many opt for the term ‘the other side’, also in French or Spanish (de l’autre coté or del otro lado), rather than referring to the state territory. This may serve as a means of maintaining neutrality and avoiding being branded a French or Spanish nationalist (españolista). Such lexical dilemmas and slips of the tongue demonstrate that the border remains very much anchored within personal consciousness, whether desired or not.

Stereotypes referring to the people originating from either side of the border also persist amongst the general population, irrespective of Basque consciousness or familiarity with inhabitants of the other side of the border. In Irun and Hondarribia, it is common to hear people refer in derogatory terms to people originally from Iparralde as gabachos, generalising about the arrogant and imperialistic attitude of ‘the French’. In Hendaia, I have often heard long-time inhabitants complain about the way in which recently established ‘Spanish’ residents treat the town as a mere extension of their own territory. Their alleged persistence in codes of behaviour typical of Hegoalde rather than Iparralde and
their failure to make any effort to speak French amount to a refusal, deliberate or unconscious, to acknowledge that they have crossed not only a state border but a socio-cultural border.

In September 2000, a sharp rise in French petrol prices temporarily served to reinforce the border as a social boundary between the local populations. The possibility of purchasing petrol at much lower prices in Spain became even more attractive than usual for inhabitants of Iparralde, prompting queues at petrol stations in Irun as car owners from the French side of the frontier nipped across the border to fill their tanks. For inhabitants of Irun and Hondarribia, this generated much criticism of the ‘French’ coming ‘to nick our petrol.’

As these examples illustrate, while frontiers and borders alert us to lines which mark the extent of contiguous societies, boundaries can point to those abstract divisions which appear routinely not just between cultures but between individuals who share the same culture. These abstract divisions are interpreted diversely by the individuals of the common collectivity. By looking at how boundaries are transformed by individuals, we can begin to understand the qualitative nature of collective boundaries. While state borders are clearly not contestable by the individual, boundaries, as subjective referents of the borders, are. As a ‘social fact’, the frontier is given meaning when a person consciously or unconsciously makes it into a symbolic boundary for his or her own strategies (Cohen 1998:28-29). How the individual interprets and uses the frontier as a symbolic boundary will depend on how that person feels his or her sense of identity, who he or she is interacting with, the nature of the situation, and the interests and objectives sought.

The various social uses and interpretations of the frontier which we have seen above give clues to how identity is constructed and expressed by individuals. Before proceeding to explore issues of identity in the border area of Bidasoa-
Txingudi, it is necessary first to clarify what is meant by the three concepts of *culture*, *ethnicity* and *identity*, all of which have been given very different meanings in both academic literature and current use. I shall treat identity as the way or ways in which a person is, or wishes to be known by others. Cultural identity is then the representation of the person or group in terms of a reified and/or emblematized culture.

In anthropology, the notion of culture has gone through a succession of paradigm shifts. In the past, it was used to suggest a determination of behaviour. In early anthropology, culture was taken as the means by which the supposedly discrete processes of social life, such as politics, economics, religion and kinship, were integrated in a manner which made them logically consistent with each other. Under this approach, the individual was perceived merely as a miniature replicate of the larger social and cultural entity. Today, by contrast, the tendency is to treat culture more loosely, as something which gathers people and processes together, without necessarily integrating them. This is an important distinction since it implies recognition of differences rather than insistence on the similarity among people. Rather than as exercising some kind of determining power over people, culture is taken as the product of social interaction (Geertz 1973). In this way, we can appreciate people as active in the creation of culture, rather than passive in receiving it. Culture is the means by which we make meaning and with which we make the world meaningful to ourselves. This is articulated by symbols, themselves inherently meaningless but invested with meaning through social processes of different kinds and so becoming the carriers of meaning. As such, they are potent resources for political objectives and general projects of identity construction.

The concepts of culture and identity, in turn, help to define ethnicity. This is the most difficult concept to pin down, despite the frequency with which it is used. In common parlance, ethnicity has been used to mean a racial and therefore
exclusive group identity, often political in nature. As such, it has often been associated with isolated, traditional and pre-modern societies or with regressive, primordial and violent groupings, in line with images of ‘Balkanization’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’. This is particularly problematic for consideration of Basque identity, commonly known as an ethnic identity, the Basque people being the ethnic group. Studies of the Basque people have traditionally dwelt on such aspects as their particular cranial characteristics, their blood type, their limited territorial location and the mysterious origins of their language as non Indo-European and with no known links elsewhere. These senses of differentiation have been reinforced by the political claims of Basque nationalist groups to a right to independence from the Spanish and French states.

Symbolic boundaries and identity
Basque nationalist movements have played a powerful role in shaping notions of Basque identity. EAJ, founded by Sabino Arana Goiri in 1895, explicitly valued the Basques’ distinctiveness, making it a crucial part of the movement’s raison d’être: the Basques were different and had to be recognised as such. The rise of the iron and steel industries in parts of Hegoalde attracted mass immigration of people from other parts of Spain, resulting in an emerging society in which traditional values did not hold as much sway as before. The racial discourse of the Basque nationalist movement helped to distinguish the local Basque population from the immigrant outsiders. Arana regarded Basques and Spaniards as members of different races (Arana Goiri 1895) and viewed this distinction as something to be actively preserved. In line with this belief, the Basque nationalist movement drew on and encouraged archaeological studies and biological and linguistic anthropological studies which could shed light on the unique origins of the Basque people (Azcona 1984; MacClancy 1993:109-114). The early twentieth century saw the emergence of anthropological and archaeological research in the rural areas of the Basque country, and the veneration of figures
such as the archaeologists and anthropologists José-Miguel Barandiarán, Telesforo Aranzadi and José-María Basabe Prado.

While the initial emphasis of EAJ on explicitly racial criteria became attenuated in the following decades, archaeological and anthropological interest in the Basques’ supposedly unique origins has persisted. Despite the emergence of other approaches to the definition of identity, the image of the Basque people with their fiery and independent character, their strange and rare tongue and their distinctive physical features, remains strong. The international media, for example, by drawing on this myth-ridden traditionalism as a partial explanation for the political conflict that persists in the region, help to sustain this image. The status of Basque as one of the few non-Indo-European languages spoken in Western Europe and the scientific evidence of the distinctive blood types to be found among the region’s inhabitants are often taken as proof of the supposed antiquity of the ‘Basque people’. The Basques, in sum, continue to be popularly presented as both a biologically and a socially distinct people with ancient roots on the western Pyrenean soil.33

At the same time, the fact that as far back as the eleventh century the provinces of the Basque country were granted privileged statuses (known as *fueros*), by comparison to other parts of the Iberian peninsula dominated by the kingdom of Castile, has helped sustain an image of Basque authenticity and a Basque historical right to political autonomy (Greenwood 1977:87; Moreno 1995:25). Modern accounts of Basque history continue to give great importance to the *fueros*, highlighting them as a factor in the singularity of the ‘Basque people’.34 Arzallus, as the head of EAJ, repeatedly emphasises the importance of the *fueros* in this respect.35 He has also often talked about the uniqueness of the Basque people for its various racial characteristics. In conversation with people in the Basque region, one often hears expressions of
interest in ‘our origins’ and attempts to analyse the ‘Basque character’. Rightly or wrongly, Basque identity is often regarded as being closely linked to some notion of race.

Many anthropologists, while appreciating that ethnicity is the subjectification of culture invoked by a drawing up of conceptual boundaries (Barth 1969), continue to insist on the importance of primordial criteria for its effective understanding. Roosens (1994) has proposed adding perceptions of kinship as an element to Barth’s definition of ethnicity as a social construction made up simply of different kinds of oppositional boundaries (see also Vermeulen and Govers 1994:1-3; Barth 1994). During my fieldwork, I encountered many people who, despite being born in the Basque region or active in many aspects of Basque culture, believe they cannot call themselves Basque because of their lack of a Basque ‘pedigree’ in terms of blood-line.

Nonetheless, as we will see with the development of an alternative Basque nationalist movement from the mid 1950s, it is also possible to claim membership of the Basque ethnic group without this kinship tie. This is a heritage of the political activism of the generation of Basque nationalists that grew up in Hegoalde during the Franco era. Influenced by the anti-colonialist and revolutionary movements in Africa and Latin America, these young Basque nationalists were more inspired by social concerns and revolutionary rhetoric than by the rather traditionalist, bourgeois aspirations of EAJ. In pursuing their struggle for recognition of Basque specificity, they sought to include a broader cohort from among their contemporaries, including many who were the children and grandchildren of immigrants from other parts of Spain who by virtue of living in the Basque region felt more Basque than anything else.
This was the context that gave birth in 1959 to ETA as a Basque cultural and humanist movement. Rather than with racial issues, ETA was concerned with the political, cultural and linguistic dynamics of Basque identity in a modern context. Instead of speaking of the Basque race, these left-wing Basque nationalists sought to appeal to the ‘Basque people’, along Marxist lines, as the working class in the Basque country. Combining nationalism and socialism, they defined a Basque person as anyone who sells his labour in the Basque country (ETA 1979b:509). To be Basque, according to the left-wing nationalist creed of ETA and Herri Batasuna, or HB, a political party created in 1978 and known for its tacit support of ETA, was to be active in the political struggle for an independent Basque nation with its own distinctive culture. This, rather than birth, was the criterion for recognition as a Basque patriot, or abertzale. The development in an urban context of bars and cafés that are the preserve of an abertzale clientèle has provided a ‘breeding ground’ for nationalists that ensures generational renewal independently of ethnic confines. As sociologist Jaureguiberry notes, this appropriation of significant parts of the urban environment by Basque nationalists in Hegoalde has contributed to ‘the construction of a new identity, a non-ethnic ‘background’ that is the fruit of a common socio-historical experience’ (1986:95).

ETA was particularly concerned with the survival of the Basque language, which it believed to be central to the nationalist strategy (ETA 1979a:105). Under Franco, speaking Basque was banned in all public places. As a result, the Basque language became a rallying point and a symbol of resistance against a popularly recognized anti-Basque enemy, the Spanish government. Its importance as a tool for creating identity was actively seized upon from the 1970s onwards, particularly by the left-wing nationalists in their search for a broad-based constituency. Traditionally, the defining characteristic of a Basque - euskaldun in Basque - was the fact of speaking, or ‘having’, Basque. However, the fact that people of non-Basque descent could learn Basque, even
if only superficially, provided an opportunity for expanding the membership of
the Basque community. By learning the language, the *euskaldun berri*, or ‘new
Basque speaker’, could be identified as a Basque person within the left-wing
nationalist movement. Language provided a new boundary, demarcating group
belonging.

As the case of the *euskaldun berri* demonstrates, even within Basque nationalist
circles, definitions and understanding of Basque identity are fluid and
negotiable. According to this emerging subjective approach, it is possible to feel
Basque through active participation in a cultural and ideological project,
without resort to primordial criteria. The group is defined by the drawing up of
symbolic boundaries, linguistic, ideological and cultural in kind. Identity can
then be understood as something that is socially constructed, on the basis of a
sense of difference, contrasted to some ‘other’. In line with this approach,
Cohen defines ethnicity as a mode of action and of representation. Ethnicity,
he says, is a politicised cultural identity (1998:23).

It is precisely at this point that the difficulties of defining Basque identity
begin. As my own field research demonstrates, many people living in the
Basque region insist that it is possible to feel Basque in a variety of ways,
from speaking Basque and/or being of Basque descent to sharing in Basque
culture and/or adhering to Basque nationalist ideals. As noted above, a person
who is Basque by ancestry may not necessarily speak Basque or be a supporter
of any kind of Basque nationalism. Equally, a person who supports the Basque
nationalist cause may not necessarily be of Basque origin or Basque-speaking.
Clearly, there is no single or clearly defined way for an individual to ‘be
Basque’.

For most people, Basque identity is defined by social, cultural and political
affiliations, which influence and determine behaviour in the different
circumstances of daily living. Identity is repeatedly subject to re-definition, re-negotiation and subjectivisation as individuals react to circumstances and other people’s presence and actions. In some cases, this can lead to excessive reactions, as for example when a person opposed to Basque nationalism links any form of pro-Basque cultural activity with generalised images of extremism. In other cases, individuals may - either deliberately or unconsciously - adapt the image that they display of themselves in public to take account of specific pressures, as for example when a person with little or no Basque nationalist sentiment adopts Basque nationalist signs of identity to avoid possible conflict.

Physical signs or symbols such as dress style and the use of stickers with Basque flags or political slogans are one common way of expressing Basque identity. While having generally accepted conventional meanings, however, such symbols are also open to different personal interpretations and use (Cohen 1985:15). For example, a silver pendant in the form of the lauburu, a traditional Basque symbol, can equally well be worn as an expression of identity by a radical Basque nationalist supporter and by a non-Basque who appreciates it for its aesthetic and cultural value.

Choice of language is another important signal of personal identity. On both sides of the frontier, alongside French and Spanish, the official languages of the two states, varying proportions of people speak Basque dialects, complemented by the use of a standardised version of Basque, known as Batua, or ‘unified’ Basque. The inhabitants of the region show wide variations in linguistic ability, with some speaking either French or Spanish and Basque equally well, others showing proficiency only in one or other of the two official languages, and a small minority speaking all three. Whether, under what circumstances, and to whom a person speaks the local Basque dialect, the standardised Basque language, Spanish, or French, form an important part of
the expression of that person’s identity and of his or her presumptions with regard to the other person’s identity. This is illustrated, for example, in local telephone etiquette: An urban Basque nationalist sympathiser with only rudimentary knowledge of the Basque language may answer the telephone in Basque but then have to switch to French or Spanish to conduct a conversation. Conversely, a local farmer may answer the telephone in French but then hold a conversation in her local Basque dialect if the caller is someone she knows.

Individuals’ use of symbols of identity can lead, on occasion, to what is seen by others as unexpected or contradictory behaviour. For example, a person who does not consider himself to be a nationalist supporter may, despite the disapproval of non-nationalist friends, place his children in a Basque-language school, or *ikastola,* for reasons of personal sympathy towards Basque culture, plurilingualism or a certain type of teaching system. Another person with minimal knowledge of the Basque language and little interest in Basque politics may choose in a social situation to pepper her speech with Basque words, thereby appropriating for her own purposes some Basque identity markers. My observation of such behaviour in Bidasoa-Txingudi leads me to consider the possibility that, contrary to conventional views of identity as homogeneous within a given social or ethnic community, people may be selective in their appropriations of different aspects of identity according to circumstances. This is not in itself a new discovery in the social sciences. However, this basic recognition is essential for beginning to understand how people with different notions of the self and different views and attitudes and categorisations of others can interact with relative harmony in otherwise sometimes tense socio-political situations.

An individual’s identity is a reflection of the ability to apply multiple boundaries, with the adoption of any one boundary at any particular time
implying belonging to the group within that particular boundary, and distance from or rejection of those outside it. A person may use different boundaries at different moments, depending on the situation and the objectives of social interaction. Some boundaries are more easily moved, or ‘switched’, than others. In the case of language, for example, a person who knows Basque may choose to speak it in one context and not in another. A person who does not know Basque may choose to learn it, thereby introducing another possible boundary into the range of choices available to him. Alternatively, such a person can choose to demonstrate his sense of Basqueness in relation to some other boundary, such as dress or taste in music. In addition, some people may use the same boundaries and yet apply them differently in the same contexts.

In this way, despite the apparently monolithic character of ethnic identity at the collective level, each person has the ability to create a complex individual construction of identity. In doing so, he or she contributes to the collective identity (Cohen 1998). By way of conclusion to this section, I wish to make clear that my aim is not to attempt to find my own definitions of ethnicity or identity. Such a task would be unprofitable in itself, since it would prevent me from identifying various uses and strategies of self-expression that do not quite fit with pre-defined concepts. In my research in Bidasoa-Txingudi, I have sought to be receptive to the various different understandings, uses and expressions of borders and space and of the concepts of culture, identity and ethnicity.

Conclusion
In this paper, I have sought to examine how the concepts of identity and ethnicity can be applied to the understanding of social relations in a border area with strong characteristics often labelled as ethnic. By exploring the significance of borders and, by extension, of boundaries in individuals’ formation and expression of personal identity, I have also shed light on the
different ways in which Basque identity can be experienced and expressed. I have briefly shown that frontiers can be re-constructed in the mind as symbolic boundaries by border inhabitants. As such, frontiers are shown to influence the lives and sense of self of local inhabitants, not only as physical barriers but as boundaries engraved in the mind, even when their authoritarian nature and role are progressively becoming obsolete in an ‘open Europe’. What form of boundary the frontier assumes in individual inhabitants’ consciousness depends on their personal notions of identity. By taking identity as incorporating a variety of symbolic boundaries played out by individuals at different times and under differing circumstances within society, we can begin to address this issue. By focusing on the operations of the Partzuergo and life in Bidasoa-Txingudi and how both affect each other, I seek to explore the process of boundary construction and how this is influenced by borders and, in turn, how it contributes to their pervasiveness or reconfiguration.

The Partzuergo attempts to promote a new common sense of local belonging across a state frontier, based on a combination of existing regional and cultural ties. An understanding of the dynamics of identity inherent in such an undertaking is relevant not just to the Basque country but for other border areas in an eventual ‘Europe without frontiers’. In the long run, projects like the Partzuergo’s may pave the way for the development of a European ideal of ‘multiple identity attachments’ or a ‘European supranational consciousness’. This is likely to prove a complex process, however, because of the ambiguities and contradictions that result from the different uses of boundaries by individuals in contexts where identities and allegiances are highly contested.

As the ‘European identity’ concept develops, one of the main challenges facing policy makers will be to resolve such ambiguities and contradictions. Judging by what I have observed so far in Bidasoa-Txingudi, varying and sometimes conflicting notions of supposedly common notions of the self
within the Basque, French and Spanish contexts exist in the locality, giving the border area a particular multilocal and multivocal quality. The result of the Partzuergo’s attempt to forge a new sense of common local belonging based on an alliance of the three locally salient cultural expressions in a wider European setting may be not so much a shift from the nationalist sentiments of yesterday and today to the European supranationalism and a new form of regionalism that the European idealists might hope for. Rather, it may be a move towards the construction of new shifting symbolic boundaries in a new kind of identity formation, that does not always go neatly in the direction of either regional or European ideals. If that is the case, the abolition of frontiers may actually reinforce certain symbolic boundaries and de-construct others. It remains an open question, however, as to whether this is true only in border areas where a conflict between different notions of local, ethnic and national identities exists, or indeed whether it is a general phenomenon accompanying globalisation.

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**Notes**

1 Anderson has shed some light on the changing use of the concepts of frontier, border and boundary in the political sciences (1996), making a clear distinction between the three. The frontier has the widest meaning, which applies not only to the precise demarcation line where two state jurisdictions meet, but to the area around it (1996:8-9). In this way, Anderson understands the frontier as a zone of contact in which neighbouring populations maintain relations of contiguity. The border means both the demarcation line, and the zone around it, marked by the changing presence of the relevant states. The boundary, on the other hand, refers to the actual line of delimitation. These items are often used differently in anthropology.
I intend to use the terms frontier, border and boundary in the manner outlined by Cohen (1994a, 1994b, 1998). Following Cohen, I will use the term frontier strictly in its limited geographical and legal applications. The border, on the other hand, while also geographic in character, will be used to refer to the area on and close to the frontier and influenced by it politically, socially, economically and environmentally. As for the term ‘boundary’, following Cohen, I will use it as a basis for social differentiation. Contrary to the other terms, which are specific and geographical, it will be seen to be abstract, symbolic and individually interpretable (Cohen 1998:25-26).

2 Research was carried out with a view to writing a PhD thesis in the Social and Politics Department of the European University Institute, Florence. This follows anthropological methods. A total of a year was spent living in Irun, Hondarribia and Hendaia, between late 1999 and early 2002, doing participant-observation and holding semi-directed interviews with selected informants. Consultation of local archives, newspapers and various documents was also carried out.

3 The neologism Euzkadi, invented by Arana, the founder of Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea, the ‘Basque Nationalist Party’, in the late nineteenth century, as the national name for the Basque country, has been taken in its standardised (batua) version, as Euskadi, for reference to the Basque Autonomous Community.

4 This is a perfect illustration of the minimal contact that existed between the two sides on this level. The two lines were built with different gauges, making a direct connection between them impossible. Passengers travelling across the frontier had to make their own way across the frontier from one station to the other in order to carry on with their journey.

5 Another bridge links Irun further east to the neighbourhood of Pausu which belongs to the small town of Urruña.

6 Most border areas in the EU now have some kind of cross-border cooperation agreement between the regions on either side. However, these come in different forms and have varying objectives and focuses. For more on regional cross-border cooperation elsewhere in the EU see, amongst others, Balme (1998), Palard (1999) and Le Galés and Lequesne (1998).


9 While the term Bidasoa-Txingudi is hotly contested by some inhabitants, I have chosen to use it to refer to the area of the three towns as a whole, since there is no other alternative term.

10 Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea is the Basque translation of the Basque Nationalist Party.

11 Eusko Alkartasuna means Basque Solidarity in Basque. It emerged as a schism of EAJ in 1986. It marks itself off from the latter by claiming to be more driven towards Basque independence and defending social democratic values rather than EAJ’s more conservative ones.

12 The Spanish Socialist Party was in charge of the Spanish government for four consecutive legislatures, under the Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez. It is a federalist structure. In 1993, it affiliated with Euskadiko Eskerra, meaning the Basque Left, to become the present structure PSE-EE.
The Popular Party has its origins in the right-wing People’s Alliance founded in 1976. Its present name dates from 1989. It is currently the ruling party in the Spanish government, under the Prime Minister José-María Aznar.

For a review of border studies in the social sciences see Donnan and Wilson (1994, 1999).

'una gente habituada a hacer malabares entre dos estados sin que por ello deje de sentirse una comunidad y a identificarse como tal' (my translation).

In Basque, the suffix ‘k’ signifies the plural.

Based on interviews with people who experienced this change.

This means ‘Basque Homeland and Freedom’ in Basque.

Grupo Anti-terrorism de Liberación.

In Hendaia, 49.2 per cent of the population voted against the ratification of the Maastricht treaty, although the then Mayor Raphael Lassallette had proclaimed himself in favour of it.

Miarritze is better known by its French name Biarritz.

This means ‘Bring the Basque Prisoners Back Home’ in Basque.

Enbata 19 October 2000.

‘Guri kasu egin gabe Hondarribin, eta orain, muga gainditu eta, batpatean pentsatzen dute lagun hoberenak garela.’

‘Nos chupan toda la gasolina’. This was one of many derogatory comments I heard around this time.

This kind of preoccupation was voiced, for example, when the French government debated again the possibility of ratifying the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 1999. The then minister of the Interior, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, talked of the risk of ‘balkanisation’ in such an engagement (Le Monde 7 May 1999 p.13 and Libération 7 May 1999 p.9).

For a critique of this, see MacClancy (1993).

Larronde has insisted on looking at the Basque Nationalist Party as a xenophobic rather than racist movement (1977:102). I take this observation into consideration by opting for the use of the word racial rather than racist.

The romantic literature on the Basque people has been a main contributor to the sustenance of this image. An example is the novel Ramuntxo, written by Pierre Loti, amateur writer stationed in Hendaia, who exalted the pure and independent Basque spirit. For a critique of these kinds of essentialisation see, for example, Koldo Izagirre (1998).

Larronde maintains that when the party’s founding members talked of ‘race’, they meant ‘what we today mean by ‘people’ or ‘ethnie’’ (1994:92). However, it seems to me that this assertion does not resolve confusion with ‘racial group’, as we shall see with ETA’s own use of the term ‘Basque people’. Today, members of the Basque Nationalist Party show diverging approaches to the issue of national sovereignty, with some being more outspoken than others in their demands for independence and their references to the Basques’ racial character.

The importance given to history as a legitimator by Arzallus and his followers is illustrated by his invitation of historian and lawyer Jean-Claude Larronde to give a speech about the history of the Basque Nationalist Party on the occasion of its alternative gathering to the European Summit in October 2000.

Popular Unity.

Since June 2001, the party has been reformed and taken on the name of Batasuna.
It must nonetheless be noted here that ETA also sometimes uses racial criteria in relation to individuals. On the one hand, ETA considers an enemy of the ‘Basque people’ anybody who does not adhere to its ideology and its demands for independence for Euskal Herria. This can include a person with Basque ancestry or who speaks Basque or is active in relation to Basque culture and Basque nationalist projects, but disagrees with ETA’s stance. Any such person risks being branded by ETA as ‘espaniola/espanolista’ or ‘frantzesa’, a label made to go along with the term ‘faxista’, or ‘anti-Basque’ as noted by Heiberg (1980). On the other hand, however, the ‘Basque people’, according to ETA, is not made up merely of people who adhere to its ideology. This was demonstrated in December 2000 when ETA demanded a cash contribution from Bixente Lizarazu, a French Basque football player originally from Hendaia, reproaching him for ‘representing a country (France) that is not his’ (My translation) (ETA 2000). From such demands, it is clear that, for ETA, anybody who has Basque ancestral origins has a duty to ‘the Basque people’.

Peillen has noted that this term was generalised from around the sixteenth century. Before this time, the word *euskara* or *uskara* not only referred to the Basque language itself but also to the Basque speaker (1998:96). In recent times, the term *euskaraduna* has been introduced in an effort to resolve the polemic around how to include non-Basque speakers as Basques. Euskaraduna literally translates as ‘someone who has Basque’ meaning ‘someone who has Euskal (Herria) (in their heart)’. I sometimes heard this term used though it was often a source of debate, with discussions revolving around its meaning and whether such a term really ‘existed’.

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