Good patriots. The nation according to the Spanish conservative party

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The nation according to the Spanish conservative party

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In 2000, the Popular Party (PP, the conservative party) won the elections reaching absolute majority, unlike 1995 when they obtained simple majority and they had to negotiate with the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties to get approval of some of their politics. However these agreements never embedded a culture of dialogue and the conflicts became more accentuated at the end of their first term (Tusell, 2000: 239). The Spanish president, José María Aznar, interpreted the results as a big electoral support for his project and started a new orientation in some areas such as the relation with nationalism. The division between the Basque nationalist party (PNV) and PP increased after all the nationalist parties (including Herri Batasuna, the radical left party close to the terrorist group, ETA) pretended to develop a political frame, that would contribute to reaching freedom, while the two biggest national parties, PP and Partido Socialista (PSOE, social democrats) agreed to fight against terrorism and the nationalist environment together. In that context, Aznar undertook the definition of the nation maintaining this division and tried to find a way of formulating Spanish nationalism and getting some accept by the citizens.

In this paper I will examine the discursive formation constituted by PP to redefine the Spanish nationalism using the idea of *constitutional patriotism*, which emanates from the academic debate, in competition with the social democrat party, that aspires also to apply this signifier to establish their own project and collaborate with the nationalist parties, who are against the traditional conception of Spanish nationalism. In order to analyse this issue I will use discourse theory, especially as it has been conceived by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. I will show the political implications as the result of the fixation of a new consensus and how the consensus is constituted against other formations and therefore it covers up a kind of particularism, although it assumes the form of national or universal interest.

The difficulties of the Spanish nationalism

In the first part I will draw on some of the problematics about Spanish nationalism and its impact on the construction of the Spanish nation. After analysing the difference between nation and state and explaining some historical and political aspects which will help to understand the current situation, I will apply three concepts from Étienne Balibar's theory in order to explain the national formation: ethnical features, primary and secondary identities, and visible and invisible nationalism. My intention is to make the context in which the conservative party launches a new discursive formation aimed to revitalize the Spanish nationalism comprehensive.

The public debate in Spain is strongly impregnated by the discussion about the so called peripheral nationalisms – mainly Catalonia and Basque Country – and the role that the central state should play. Nevertheless it is still difficult to find well articulated arguments to defend the Spanish nation – although they have become more recurrent within the last decade – and even more to support a sort of Spanish nationalism. In principle, this lack of Spanish nationalism may sound strange when other nationalisms are very present and frequently define some targets and projects against the interest or the idea of the Spanish nation. In the following paragraphs, I will account for the reasons that explain this phenomena and how the discursive formation is constituted. I want to point out that my focus is on the Spanish nation but obviously it is impossible to analyse it without considering the role of the peripheral nationalisms.

The main problem consists in finding a successful formula to integrate all the regional sensibilities in the national state and, besides, to satisfy all these sensibilities feeling comfortable under a common idea of the nation. It is actually one of the issues which usually cause more confusion because there is no clear distinction between nation and state (Tusell, 1999: 13). There is a tendency to believe that the national state is conformed by the equation 'one state = one nation'. This conception excludes other possibilities, like multinational states, but most people create a polarization between those who want that one nation is accepted equally by all the regions and those who aspire to have their own state because they consider themselves to be a nation. The reductionism of positions prevents any kind of solution since both sides are completely incompatible.

According to Etienne Balibar, 'fictitious ethnicity' is the community conformed by the national state (1998: 149). There is no nation that belongs naturally to an ethnic community but the community is nationalized by the state and institutions, especially education. As a result the community is presented as natural and its values and culture are tied to the foundational identity. The ethnicity is principally naturalized by referring to race and language. It has always been very difficult to implement unity of the nation. The centralized dictatorship was not capable of creating a national community for all the Spaniards and, on the contrary, made the symbols and the common history and tradition suspicious since their arbitrariness was being used to legitimate the regime. On the other hand, the peripheral nationalisms maintain their own original community that collides with the recognition of the Spanish community.

When Spain starts the transition to democracy, the emerging Constitution offers a possibility of including all the regions in the same state structure. In 1978 the Constitution tries to conciliate

three realities; Spain, nationalities and regions (Fusi, 2000: 47), in order to respond to the nationalist demands – mainly the Basque and the Catalan but also the Galician. The result is the *state of the autonomies*, which is included in the Title VII. The state form is not decentralised but it is open to decentralisation, because it is the only way to reach a wide consensus (Ruipérez, 1988: 226-227). The lack of closure, however, entails an ongoing process of redefinition of the regional structure[1]. Besides it is remarkable that the term 'autonomía' designates two categories: nationalities, reserved for Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia, and regions, where all the others are included.

Regarding the national identity, article 2 states that the Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation. The national closure contrasts with the state openness. Therefore it is not surprising that the political demands of the nationalisms to get more autonomy are presented at the same time as the demands of higher recognition of their national entity. The unity of the nation faces two challenges. Firstly, the development of regional governments and the gradual acquisition of more competences imply a questioning of the state as being sustained on only one community or nation – in this sense, unity sounds inappropriate when there is a perception of diverse identities. Secondly, the unity is linked to the Spanish nationalism as it was build up under the franquist regime. This association worries above all the right-wing party who is afraid of losing its image as a modern and reformist party. This fear, among other things, explains the indecisiveness of the national discursive formation (Uriarte, 2002: 273-274) and the obstacles to find a signifier that favours the articulation of a national community summarizing diversity and avoiding to reduce diversity to unity, understood as homogeneity.

Even if it is assumed that the nation resides in the fictitious ethnicity, it does not mean that the whole ethnic identity can be constituted on the basis of the nation in stead of other features. Therefore Balilbar (2003: 54-58) distinguishes between primary identity and secondary identity. The national identity is secondary in the sense of being above the primary identities such as regional, sexual, religious, linguistic, class-based, etc. Belonging to a nation can be a signifier which includes other identities by means of hegemonizing them. For instance, the category 'being Dane' can be open and cover all kind of religions or can be more narrow and exclude the religions which are not considered as a part of the secondary identity. In the Spanish case, the hegemony of

[1] The constitution of the state of autonomies is completed between 1979 and 1983 and a total of seventeen autonomies as recognized such as. However neither their distribution nor the demands of competences are completely finished. Thus the structure of the state is continuing decentralization. The nationalist parties press the central state in order to achieve more competences and the other regions want to reach similar levels of autonomy and self-government.

the secondary identity encounters serious problems as to constituting a discursive formation as 'Spanish' or 'Spanish nation' since other primary identities, such as the linguistic and the regional, claim to be recognized as secondary – which is the case of the Basque and the Catalan nations.

The problematic relation between primary and secondary identities in Catalonia and the Basque Country, which hinders a wider 'Spanish' hegemony, increases if the identity in the rest of the regions is taken in account. According to the CIS[2] survey in 2007, the degree of identification is quite strong at the local, regional and national level:

	Not identified at all (0-1)	(2-3)	(4-6)	(7-8)	Very identified (9-10)	N.S.	N.C.	. (N)
Town or city where she lives	1.4	1.9	14.5	34.1	47.3	0.5	0.3	(3191)
Comunidad autónoma	1.0	2.2	15.5	31.8	48.3	0.8	0.5	(3191)
Basque country	7.9	3.5	16.7	31.1	36.3	3.5	1.0	(206)
Catalan speaking areas	13.9	6.4	29.9	22.6	21.6	4.2	1.3	(915)
Spain	2.1	2.1	16.9	28.7	49.4	0.6	0.2	(3191)
Europe	3.3	3.2	31.9	33.3	22.8	5.1	0.5	(3191)
Spanish speaking community in the World	6.3	4.8	40.2	25.5	13.6	8.6	0.9	(3191)
Humanity	2.0	2.6	26.4	29.1	32.8	6.5	0.7	(3191)

It is clear that the Spaniards are quite or very identified with the place where they live, their own region and Spain. It does not seem to be a problem to have shared identities (Uriarte, 2002: 267) in which the primary and the secondary identities are compatible and even harmonious. It could be a little bit more surprising that the identification with the Basque Country is stronger than with the region in the Catalan speaking areas. The reason is that the Catalan speaking areas, apart from Catalonia, also include Valencia, where the feeling of belonging to Spain is stronger and there is no identification with the aims of the Catalan nationalist parties. Thus, the Catalan language can be enough to justify the aspirations to be recognized as nation or can be assumed as a primary identity which belongs to 'being Spaniard' as a secondary identity. Anyway, it could be useful to

[2] CIS is the Social Research Centre in Spain.

compare the identification with the regional and the national levels – which this survey does not show – to understand the dynamic between the identities better.

The balance between primary and secondary identities destabilizes in the regions where there are national feelings – and the region is perceived as a secondary identity, i.e. like a nation. The data from the annual survey from the Basque Country, called Euskobarómetro, shows mayor divergences in relation to the identities but also in the way voters from nationalist and national parties define their identities. Most of the inhabitants claim to have a shared identity and feeling as both Basque and Spanish (39%) but they support national parties: the social democrats (PSOE, 69%), the left-wing party (EB, 50%) and, to a lesser extent, the conservatives (28%). Only 26% of the voters from the nationalist parties assume this identity. In opposition to the low percent of people who feel more Spanish than Basque (5%; 26% from PP and 11% from PSOE) and only Spanish (6%, 38% from PP and 9% from PSOE), almost half of the survey participants are inclined to feel more Basque than Spanish (20%) or only Basque (26%) and a high proportion of nationalist voters opts for the last category (the independent EHAK with 94% and the moderate PNV with 40% vs. 31% that feel more Basque than Spanish). The shared identity in the Basque Country is not as strong as in other regions and the feeling of being Spanish is seriously limited.

Although it could be argued that most of the Spaniards assume a shared identity and that there is only a problem for some (many) inhabitants in the Basque Country and in Catalonia, it is quite obvious that trying to impose a Spanish identity as secondary identity in these regions would not be a solution (even though it would appeal to the majority at the national level) as far as some (many) people from these regions is openly excluded from the nation form.

The impossibility of reaching a total hegemony does not depend only on the identity but also on the perception of the nation. Balibar (2005: 61) points out that nationalism must be explained according to the dynamic between invisible and visible nationalism. The first ones, also called dominant nationalisms, tend to be based on universalism and support the coexistence of different cultures, religions or classes. The second ones are visible because they turn national belonging or feeling into their main – sometimes only – demand and minimize the importance of other primary identities. Discursively the visible nationalisms resort to resistance and articulate their demands against the dominant entity.

The nationalist parties usually assume the discourse of oppressed people against the central state and present themselves as resistance against the imposition of a homogenous culture or politics. Apart from the specific reasons I have explain previously, signifiers such as ‘Spanish

nationalism' and 'Spanish nation' could be interpreted as a form of dominance and consequently confirm the nationalist discourse. The universalism around nation disappears due to the strong connotations of oppression, centralism or franquism. For this reason the Spanish nationalism reflects the notion of invisible nationalism quite well and it focuses more on the peripheral nationalism that threatens universal values such as freedom, solidarity or equality.

In this chapter I have tried to explain the difficulties of articulating a discursive formation on the basis of the Spanish nation, applying Balibar's theory on nationalism. These conditions will be useful to understand the attempt of the right wing to construct a discourse which responds satisfactorily to these challenges: the constitution of a common community, the conciliation between primary and secondary identities and a way out of the sense of domination.

Signifying nationalism: the constitutional patriotism

In 2002 the conservative party (PP) held their yearly political conference with four panels. One of them was called "The constitutional patriotism in the XXI Century". The document was drawn up by the Catalan politician, Josep Piqué[3], and the Basque politician, María San Gil[4] and this was no coincidence. The conference created big expectations but also confusion. The term 'constitutional patriotism' was well known from the academic debate – rather than from public discussions – and usually associated with other contexts, especially by Sternberger in German because of the successful role of the constitution after the Second World War (Rosales, 1999). Furthermore the tradition of constitutional patriotism, in its more recognizable version by Jürgen Habermas, had first and foremost been assumed by the centre-left whilst the right wing had not shown any specific interest in the notion. In fact, at that moment the leader of the opposition, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, was trying to articulate a new discourse about the nation applying the same label. From Zapatero's perspective the social democracy could be reframed on the terms of

[3] Josep Piqué was Minister of Industrial Affairs (1996-2000), of Foreign Affairs (2000-02) and of Science and Technology (2002-03). Later his political carreer has been linked to Catalonia. He was candidate to the Catalan presidency in 2003, without success, and he left the presidency of the Catalan Popular Party after disagreements with the national leaders of the party.

[4] María San Gil is one of the most charismatic politicians in the Basque Country, known for her fight against ETA and her permanent confrontation with the nationalists. In 2008 she left the position as president of the Basque Popular Party because she was against a more comprehensive relationship with the peripheral nationalisms.

republicanism[5] and consequently the idea of patriotism would suit this reframing according to republican ideals well.

I consider the conservative project of redefining the Spanish nation to be a discursive struggle, in which two opposite discourses compete over the definition of the meaning of one significant and articulate their discourses according to their own interpretation. I find Laclau's and Mouffe's theory useful to explain the discursive formation. In the following, my focus will be on the conservative formation but I will also pay attention to the recontextualization of a term moving from the academic into the political discourse, in opposition with the social democrat alternative.

Assuming that the practice of articulation "consists in the construction of nodal points with partially fixed meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 113), the attempt by the Popular Party to promote 'constitutional patriotism' is understood as an articulation of the Spanish nationalist discourse. The nodal points are, as defined by Laclau & Mouffe, privileged points of partial fixation. Briefly, discourse aims, according to both theorists, to reduce the social differences around a signifier. The signifier does not have a determined signified link but signifying is acquired through the discursive formation. For this reason, Laclau uses the category 'empty signifiers' to emphasise that they are not empty because they lack meaning but because "any system of signification is structured around an empty place resulting from the impossibility of producing an object" (Laclau, 2007: 40). Thus, a signifier is emptied in the attempt to define the representation of that object – which is impossible since it is discursively structured – and determine the signified. As I referred above, I consider 'constitutional patriotism' as a nodal point, an empty signified fixed to articulate a national discourse. The fixation excludes other possibilities – other floating signifiers – available to constitute alternative formations.

The document presented in the conservative congress in 2002 implies a discursive turn, where the nodal point, 'constitutional patriotism', is articulated within the constitutional and civil discourse. It is an attempt to build a discourse in positive terms (Uriarte, 2003), transcending the mere negation of the peripheral nationalist formations. There are some expressions which distance themselves from the emotional discourse on nation and create a civic and open frame: "Spain is a political nation" – in opposition to the cultural conception of nation defended by the peripheral nationalisms –, "We do not pretend to assume any kind of monopoly. No one is the only owner of

[5] From the republican tradition, Zapatero finds Phillip Pettit's work to be the most inspiring. A more detailed explanation of the inclusion of republicanism into the Spanish social democratic project can be found in García Agustín (2006) and Pettit (2008).

the idea of Spain" or "The Constitution has been useful to establish the fundaments of our democratic society". Despite the apparent openness and inclusion, it must be underlined that every articulation tends towards closure – fixing elements as moments – and to exclusion – of those who are not represented or do not share the discursive construction.

In this sense, it is important to pay attention to the discursive definition of 'constitutional patriotism', because it does not reflect the values of the constitutional patriotism as described by the more philosofical tradition. The first time it is mentioned, it is defined as an open signifier in relation to which other discourses could be articulated and there is no place for exclusion:

> We understand constitutional patriotism as a frame-concept: it does not demand that all the political sensibilities have the same, exact idea about Spain. What is important is to respect the cores of coexistence: plurality, tolerance, liberty, autonomy and unity. Constitutional patriotism is an open concept which should not be monopolized by anyone and can be defended by everyone.

The resulting idea of Spain should not be owned by any party and it should not be identified with only one party. In principle it should not be a problem to construct a common project around this (non)definition. The logic of equivalence is broad and appeals to all the different identities. This impression increases when the universal dimension of constitutional nationalism is mentioned explicitly in opposition to national movements that exhibit a particular identity based on a common history, language or culture:

> We know that in spite of the universal dimension of constitutional patriotism, it has a specific, historic and cultural expression in every country. Constitutional patriotism is the idea of patriotism which corresponds with the political culture shared at this time by all the Western countries with free and democratic institutions.

The values of constitutional patriotism are universal as far they represent the values of Western democracies. Laclau (2007) indicates that the universal is maintained by the discourse of modernity, which aims to eliminate the differences, and universality always hides a particular subject. In this case, it is easy to notice that the universal is identified with the Western democracy though it is questionable how universal the Western project is. The most relevant aspect now is to underline that the universal is articulated as concrete in all the countries where the universal values are shared. The principles of the Spanish patriotism are legitimized because they are a part of the democratic values, which are universal. This articulation creates a wide space to categorize other

political projects as undemocratic if they do not accept this notion of nationalism. Furthermore the situation must be observed in the concrete contexts. If constitutional patriotism represents universal values, as formulated by the Popular Party, other perspectives which do not share these values are not available because they do not follow democratic rules. For this reason, it is very important to draw on the chain of signifiers in which the nodal point is articulated as a concrete representation of Western democracy as a universal empty signifier. According to the document of the conservatives:

> We understand that the historic and moral fundaments of constitutional patriotism in Spain are the values inspired by the large agreement in the transition to democracy, the ones that are included in the Constitution and the ones that are developed in the statutes of autonomies.

The pride of being Spanish does not come from 'belonging to' or 'being from', it is a rational pride derived from the common ability to solve three problems in Spain: overcoming the civil struggles (Transition), establishing a democratic regime based on the State of Law (Constitution) and the recognition of plurality and regional solidarity (statutes of autonomies). The actualization of the universal signifier reflects a triangle formed by nation, law and state and above all the will to represent a general consensus over all the issues which hinder the development of the Spanish nation, as a sort of feeling linked to Spanish nationalism. It is interesting to see how significance is attributed to the empty signifier in order to present a particular project as universal and how this is really only one of the possibilities of discursive articulation.

The main problem of the Spanish nationalism, as I mentioned before, is the connotations relating it to the nationalist dictatorship. It is almost impossible to initiate a debate about the Spanish nation without considering it as a new version of nationalism under Franco. The Popular Party proposal aims to dissolve the references to this historic formation. Firstly, the signifier 'nationalism' is replaced by 'patriotism' and 'Spanish' by 'constitutional'. The problem is that the difference between 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' is difficult to understand outside the academic environment – and even inside it is not so easy to agree about its meanings. There is a risk of interpreting both as synonymous and thinking that they refer to the same discursive formation. The signifier 'constitutional' is used to avoid the identification between the traditional nationalism and the new patriotism since the focus is on the Constitution and, at other times, on the political nation and not on the nation, ethnicity or the historical and cultural community.

In order to initiate the new phase, overcoming nationalism and developing patriotism, it is necessary to reach a closure of the former phase, namely franquism, especially because the right

wing is still associated with the dictatorial regime. The Popular Party distances itself from the past, although shyly, and prefers to insist on the Transition as a general agreement through which all the conflicts disappeared. The equation is quite simple: democracy is consensus, and after ending the dictatorship, democracy emerges and this means that all the Spaniards accept the same frame. The Popular Party considers two options:

- Not accepting the current situation: it is claimed that Spaniards talk about the current Spain and not that from the seventies. They regret that "some people are still developing their discourse in relation to this [Spain in the seventies], as if they missed situations and problems which we fortunately have overcome". The closure affects the discussion of the past and, even more relevant, the impact of the previous conflicts on the democracy, both national and related to class and social and political rights. Thus, some nationalist demands and demands from the left wing are old and unfruitful after the Transition.
- Accepting the current situation: the acceptation of the Constitution is implied, because it is "the overcoming of all historic disagreements between Spaniards". The problems solved are, according to the document: the "two Spains", religious issues, procedures to solve social problems, the leadership of the state and the territorial model. The closure is broader and fixed by the signifier 'Constitution', which establishes a logic of equivalence with the elements just enumerated: the ideological right-left conflict (two Spains), religion (it is not mentioned whether they defend the laic state or assume that the catholic religion is majority), the Republic would no longer be an option and the regional reforms are only possible inside the current territorial model. The acceptance of the situation is, at the same time, the acceptation of a discursive formation of Spain and, besides, it is contrary to Habermas' integrating notion of patriotism in which the Constitution should suit the political moment (Mateo, 2005: 93).

The merger of the three signifiers is complete: the common agreement and the project of the Transition – as an agreement of all the Spaniards – are the basis of the Constitution, which represents the national willingness, and fix the territorial model. It is not possible to question any of these signifiers because they refer to the Spaniards' wishes and agreements. An attempt to change the state of autonomies would be interpreted as an attack against the Constitution and the national

will and a proposal of constitutional reform would be considered as an attack against the 'spirit of the Transition' (i.e. the national will). The empty signifier 'constitutional patriotism' reintroduces a particular notion of the Spanish nation, strongly linked to a particular constitution as the concretization of universal values. Nevertheless, a discursive formation cannot emerge without antagonism. I have mentioned some of them but my intention in the following is to show in detail how antagonism is part of the articulation of a new Spanish nationalism.

Bad patriots: limits and exclusions

The introduction of 'constitutional patriotism' makes it possible to fix the discourse of nationalism, without talking implicitly about nationalism - in opposition to the situation before where the discursive formation lacked a nodal point. The empty signifier helps to develop the logic of equivalence and dissolve the differences when it fixes what being a Spaniard means. But the equivalence does not emerge from the positive – I am Spaniard – but from the negative, i.e. the negation of the identity which does not suit my own identity. It is obvious that the category 'Spaniards' gather other categories such as class, gender, race, religion, and some individuals share this category because they feel they are Spaniards and not because they consider themselves to be workers, women, gays, Muslims or Basques – they put their secondary identity before the primary one, and they do not constitute their identity on the primary one. In this context the equivalences of 'being patriot' are elaborated against those who are not considered patriots due to the fact that they do not respect the constitution or the state of autonomies.

The constitutional patriotism aims explicitly to struggle against an antagonistic formation: the peripheral nationalisms. The universal values, the openness and the rationality, as I have described, are opposed to the particularism of nationalism:

> The excluding nationalism is an unconditional, non critical, and morally indifferent adhesion to their own community of belonging. For this nationalism, one is good if she is a nationalist and if she supports her community of belonging, reasonably or unreasonably.

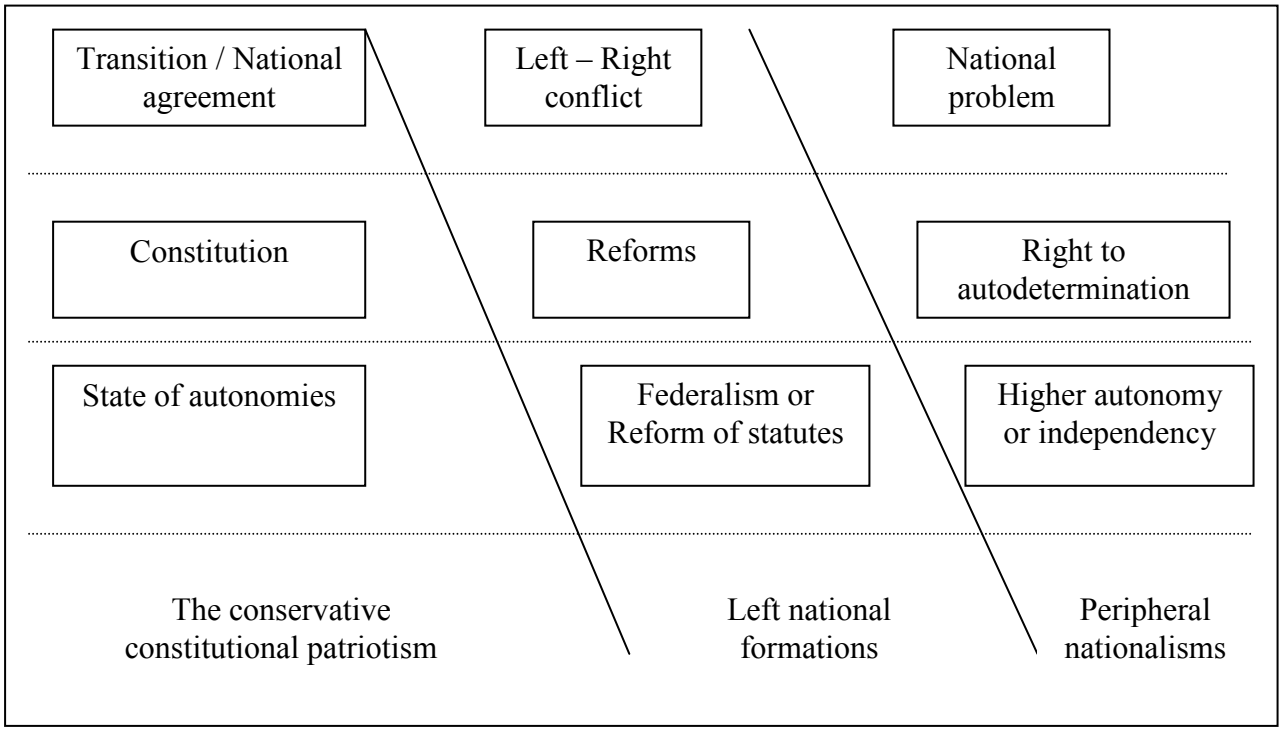
Because of the confidence in the constitutive value of the signifier 'patriotism', the Popular Party claims that in the 20th century the excluding nationalism does not make any sense but neither would a Spanish neo-nationalism. The conservative party denies being nationalist. Applying the combination of patriotism – vs. nationalism – and loyalty to the constitution, they describe

peripheral nationalism as ‘non constitutional nationalism’ because it “exalters the difference and gives priority to identity and not to liberty.” The conservative formation is constituted by the opposition of the nodal points ‘patriotism’ / ‘nationalism’, which is the basis upon which to articulate a change of oppositions: universal / particular, irrational / rational adhesion, ethnicity / ethic, difference / coexistence, identity / liberty. The way the conservatives constitute the discursive formation against other formations has a lot of consequences in the institutional design:

- The Constitution must not be reformed: “nothing is for ever. […] But it is also true that it is neither good nor convenient to make a crisis about something that is working. […] Questioning every 25 years the Spanish model will only lead us to uncertainty”. This attitude against any change under any circumstance makes Gallego-Díaz (2001) use the label ‘constitutional fundamentalism’ to reflect the excessive emphasis on the unchangeable constitution.
- The state of autonomies is the only model: “our autonomic system has a degree of political decentralization that is high or higher than the federal states.” This argument is contradictory because they refuse afterwards to use the term ‘federalism’, which is against their own national history and the Constitution. The strong refusal of the signifier, only due to history, is an attempt to avoid the articulation of the territorial model inside the Spanish republican tradition, whose heritage belongs to the left.
- The regional statutes of autonomy must not be reformed: there is no need for more decentralization because the problem of pluralism is solved. Every tendency to reach more autonomy, not to mention independence, is against the constitution and the solidarity between the regions. In opposition to the selfishness attributed to the peripheral nationalisms, Navarra is used as the best example because it has some historical, economic advantages but it is, at the same time, loyal to the constitution and shows solidarity towards the other regions.

The ‘constitutional patriotism’ is constituted against ‘non constitutional nationalism’ creating a closed model of the state and a constitutional system in which there is no alternative to the confrontation between the central state and the peripheral nationalisms – apart from accepting the current system without any reform, which is not very plausible. Furthermore, the conservative patriotism struggles against the social democrat patriotism, since they use the same nodal point to

articulate antagonist discourses. There is no trace of the republican tradition in the conservative recontextualization of patriotism (Velasco, 2002: 39) and it is a rather effective way of naming the national feeling. If the Popular Party's discourse becomes hegemonic, the PSOE should adapt to some demands and significations or else it could be attacked for being 'anti-patriotic' or 'anti-constitutional'. In this case, not only the nationalist vision would be excluded by the dominant discourse but also alternatives projects on how the idea of the Spanish nation could be develop. Not least, if all the political consequences of the conservative formation must be shown, it is necessary to pay attention to the articulation of terrorism in the constitutional patriotism. In the following figure, I summarize the articulation of constitutional patriotism according to the Popular Party and their inclusions underlying the apparent consensus:



Terrorism is identified as the main and only problem, which can be fought by the unity of all the democrats sharing the values of constitutional patriotism. This claim is normal inside a democratic conception where the rejection of violence is one of the pillars. However, it is more problematic how terrorism – more exactly the fight against terrorism – is articulated in the conservative formation. The best example of national cooperation is the Agreement for liberties and against terrorism reached by the Popular Party and the social democrats in 2000. At that moment, the new strategy against terrorism impacted the political arena since the political wing of ETA, Batasuna, was considered a terrorist group and an attack on the nationalist parties' (especially

Partido Nacionalista Vasco) understanding towards or sympathy for Batasuna and ETA was initiated. In their document, the Popular Party's policy against terrorism has and will have serious implications, although it will develop as part of the constitutional patriotism in the future. The core points underlined are the following:

- Fighting against terrorist organizations, their ramifications and their environment: It is the beginning of the illegalization of Batasuna as a political party and other young organisations and the closure of the newspaper Egin. The signifier 'terrorism' acquires a broader signified, politically and legally, and the idea that nationalist parties share the terrorist values, when the PP states: "including those who, directly or indirectly, support or understand them", is introduced.
- A narrow understanding of leading the fight against terrorism: institutional loyalty is presented as equivalent to loyalty between democratic parties. As it would happen later under Zapatero's government, the loyalty presupposes a previous agreement and, in case this does not exist or is incomplete, one of parties (the Popular Party in this case) can accuse the other of not defending the democracy.
- Rejecting any kind of agreement with groups, associations or parties close to the terrorists: any partial or general agreement would be accompanied by accusations of supporting terrorism.
- The impossibility of a negotiated solution: segregation is not a legitimized target, because it goes against the constitution, and "nothing can be achieved under the pressure of violence or guns." This position would later make the negation process initiated by Zapatero difficult as the Socialist Party was accused of surrendering to terrorism.

The articulation of the constitutional patriotism against peripheral nationalisms and terrorism, above all, is directed against the social democratic project. The initial agreement on fighting against terrorism would result in the imposition of this vision to all possible scenarios and make it impossible to propose new alternatives against terrorism once this agreement was fixed and later understood on the conditions of the Popular Party. On the other hand, the marginalization of the nationalist parties is far from ending antagonism and, on the contrary, nationalism strengthens their positions against the central state and they can take advantage of the resulting victimization.

Towards national constitutionalism

The articulation of constitutional patriotism in the conservative formation starts in 2002 but it does not develop later. The empty signifier is early left. Firstly, there is not really an intention to apply the theoretical ideas of constitutional patriotism to the political praxis. As I pointed out, constitutional patriotism is presented as an open and not well defined frame, in which the universal, ethic and rational values are used to oppose to peripheral nationalism. When we look the concrete application of the signifier, it is clear that the triangle – Transition, Constitution, State of Autonomies – reflects the political program of the Popular Party, and it is not based on the theory of patriotism.

Although the signifier 'patriotic' does not offer the possibility to build a formation which could distinguish it from 'national', the nodal point 'constitutional patriotism' succeeds in creating an opportunity to articulate a national discourse since the only signifier available before was Spanish nationalism. This has actually had an important impact because it has made it easy to introduce other topics which were previously rejected due to the link with centralism or the traditional nationalism. The use of the national flag – as a national symbol – became a key topic in 2002 and recently, in 2008, a manifesto regarding the threats against Spanish – as a national language for all Spaniards – has been signed by some relevant intellectuals.

The close connection between 'patriotic' and 'constitutional' has had some political consequences – some of them has already been pointed out – and has determined the national politics of the social democrat Rodríguez Zapatero. When he tried to initiate a reform of the regional statutes, mainly that of Catalonia, he was the blank of a lot of critics because it was argued that it would destroy the national unity and promote a balkanization of the country – and it would be an act against the spirit of consensus of the Transition and against the state of autonomies. Zapatero's attempt to reach a negotiated solution regarding terrorism was accused of being a sign of surrendering to terrorism and breaking the agreement reached by himself when he was the leader of the opposition. Terrorism was not disconnected from the territorial problem and the Popular Party insisted that there was a secret agreement between the government and ETA to deliver Navarra to the Basque Country.

Since the relationship with peripheral nationalism has not improved and especially the Basque nationalism has become the main enemy, it is a fact that 'constitutional patriotism', as understood

by the Popular Party, was not capable of creating an including frame for all political positions. It was predictable that the peripheral nationalisms would not accept it since they do not hide that their aims cannot be satisfied inside the state of autonomies (Esteban, 2002). The conflict between the Basque nationalism and the central state has actually increased and the reform of the Catalan statute of autonomy has become quite controversial. From the political opposition, the Popular Party has intensified the cultural and historical elements and promotes the pride of being a Spaniard[6], trying to enhance the sentimental feeling of the nation, which is still underdeveloped in Spain (Béjar, 2008: 267). This position contrasts with the less determined attitude shown by the social democrats and the position of the peripheral nationalisms and the appeal to civic responsibilities. However, the Popular Party is still pendent to find a new empty signifier in order to articulate their discourse, whilst they want to avoid applying 'Spanish nationalism'.

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[6] In their last congress, the political statement – in which María San Gil was initially involved – refers to Spain as the oldest nation in Europe and a common history with origins back to the Catholic Kings, and it is underlied that being Spaniard is something to be proud of.

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