McGuggenisation? National identity and globalisation in the Basque country

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Abstract

This paper examines recent debates about the globalisation of cities and regions through a discussion of the recent opening of a Guggenheim Foundation art gallery in Bilbao. Through an analysis of the political context surrounding the project, I aim to explore the role of cities as crucibles for the negotiation of globalisation, and in particular how this relates to national identity.

In the paper I set out several layered narratives which try to capture the significance of this event for Basque political identity. After discussing issues of globalisation, political strategy and European territorial restructuring, I explore the following: first, the process of 'McGuggenisation' and its consonance with ideas of global cultural imperialism; second, the 'indigenisation' of the Guggenheim by the Basque political elite, a strategic engagement with globalisation; third, the contestation of the museum by particularist radicalism.

In summary, the Guggenheim event is seen as a collision between Basque extremism, modernising 'bourgeois regionalism', and the interests of a museum poised to become a global art corporation, providing a context for examining theories of globalisation in the European city. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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The opening of Bilbao's Guggenheim art gallery in October 1997 was received with critical acclaim in the international press for Frank Gehry's striking titanium-dressed concoction of interlocking planes, curves and abstract shapes. But perhaps as significantly, the building represented a new wave of museum curating, the arrangement offered by the Guggenheim Foundation to the Basque regional government being part of a strategy of expansion aimed at establishing a chain of Gug-

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genheims around the world. Critics were quick to call this process McGuggenisation, suggesting both a global franchising strategy and the extreme commodification of art. Furthermore, it contained overtones of the continuing dominance of American cultural capital over Europe's largely defenceless cultural spaces at a time (during the GATT negotiations of the early 1990s) when European states were attempting to resist such penetration of domestic cultural markets, particularly in the audiovisual sector. But the establishment of the Bilbao Guggenheim is worthy of more detailed consideration: the whole project raised a number of questions over how ethnic particularist groups such as Basque nationalists are positioned in a global cultural economy. Furthermore, this can be situated within broader debates over the impact of globalisation on European territorial politics.

   In this paper I set out to address the issue of the impact of globalisation on the *European* city. I begin by arguing that while the impact of globalisation on cities is well documented in economic terms, there is less coverage of how this has been implicated in shifting place-based political identities. Furthermore, hegemonic urban theory has tended to be developed from the experience of a narrow range of cities, many of which are in the United States, leading to doubts as to its sensitivity to the huge political and cultural diversity that exists in contemporary Europe (McNeill, 1999a). In particular, I suggest that the arrival of the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the Basque country poses a number of questions relating to political strategy in the European city, which I deal with in turn: the need to conceptualise the 'McGuggenisation' process not as a simple flow from core to periphery, but rather as a more complex negotiation of identity which includes the possibility of local actors 'indigenising' dominant cultures; the strength of a 'bourgeois regionalism' which is challenging the established European nation-state and which revalorises cities peripheral to the metropolitan core of the nation-state; and the particularist reaction from radical sections of the Basque political community which raised questions over Basque cultural identity. I begin, however, by framing globalisation within the context of European territorial politics.

Globalisation and European territorial politics

   Important work has been done in exploring the dynamics of particular 'global cities': the financial and corporate centres of Tokyo, New York, London, nodes in a complex flow of global capital, or the multi-ethnic cities of Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong (see Friedmann, 1995 for a summary of the 'world city hypothesis'). However, several authors have criticised the tendency to use a particular city as a paradigm — the use of thoroughly researched cities such as Los Angeles and New York to provide conceptual frameworks which are then built into general theory. Thrift (1997, pp. 142–143) points to the myth that 'one city tells all', criticising the over-concentration on Los Angeles to the neglect of equally important trends going on in other cities, and obscuring the fact that 'events in cities are often linked to events in other cities'. Similarly, Perera (1996) talks of the dangers of the 'New York-centric approach,' and draws on Colombo as an example of how

non-economistic conceptual frames (in this case, post-colonialism) might be more useful in understanding the impact of globalisation in certain urban contexts. Here, I want to consider the importance of Bilbao as a symbolic site of regeneration within the territory of the Basque 'regional' space as an example of how cities within Europe's emergent micro-nationalisms are important and problematic foci of cultural flows.

However, while trends in the spatial restructuring of European cities have been covered in some depth by economic geographers (for example, Dunford & Kafkalas, 1992Jensen-Butler, Schacher & Van Weesep, 1997), there have been markedly fewer attempts to explore the relationship between territorial restructuring and *political identity* under conditions of globalisation. In particular, it is less than clear how organisations such as political parties and urban social movements and their leaders, or influential individual 'opinion formers' such as journalists or academics from civil society interpret and articulate their relationship to external forces. Nor is it clear how this operates at a variety of interlocking spatial scales, because as commentators such as Brenner (1999) have illustrated, European cities, regions, and nation-states cannot be considered as discrete scale entities. The complexity of this task is obvious when we consider that in this discussion, we are dealing with a city, Bilbao, which is also an important metropolitan area within a province, Bizkaia, which in turn is part of a region, the Comunidad Autónoma Vasco (CAV), which is again in turn part of a historic Basque national territory as well as being a constitutionally defined region of Spain. Rather than defining rigidly a single spatial scale as a basic unit for analysis, the narrative that follows shows that the symbolism and discursive construction of Basque identity is undertaken by actors using their institutional power (which has a territorial dimension) to participate in transnational negotiation (cf. Hannerz, 1996, pp. 127–139; Yeoh, 1999).

This is important because European cities and regions have a complex relationship in the restructuring of European economic, cultural and political space, and because the dynamic can tell us a lot about the rescaling of urban form and governance in this space (Brenner, 1999; Kunzmann, 1996). Yet this requires greater attention to the cultural specificities of individual European cities than has hitherto been the case in many anglophone urban geographies. Driver and Gilbert (1998), speaking specifically about the European imperial city, suggest that this lacunae is because:

> urban sociologists and historians have been so concerned to carve out a niche for a specifically urban field of enquiry that they have often bracketed off questions about the position of cities within wider networks and structures. Moreover, where such questions have been asked…they have generally been framed by a concern with the political economy of capitalism, and have tended to assume that whereas the economy is increasingly global, culture is somehow necessarily rooted in the local. (Driver & Gilbert, 1998, p. 12).

So it is important to consider, first, how cities are intricately bound into all manner of networks of power (cf. Massey & Jess, 1995) within European and broader, global

spaces and, secondly, how culture and identity are implicated in such processes (Featherstone, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991; Waters, 1995).

Nonetheless, attention to the political economy of such specificities in the European urban experience under globalisation needs to be addressed also, particularly the suggestion by Manuel Castells that:

> the more national states fade in their role, the more cities emerge as a driving force in the making of the new European society…[and so]…we will be witnessing a constant struggle over the occupation of meaningful space in the main European cities, with business corporations trying to appropriate the beauty and tradition for their noble quarters, and urban countercultures making a stand on the use value of the city. (Castells, 1994, pp. 23–25).

As such, certain parts or districts of cities are valorised by global investment, making them of greater symbolic and material importance than their mere territorial girth. A variety of locally-dependent elites are, through planning and promotional mechanisms, seeking to plug certain spaces within their cities into the globalised investment strategies of mobile capital, be it from corporations or tourist expenditure.

This academic interest in cities and regions is part of the thesis that the nation-state is being undermined, or losing its powers, particularly in the case of those states ceding competence in certain areas to the European Union. This is — of course — prone to overstatement. Anderson's (1996) more nuanced assessment of the two scenarios often painted of the future shape of European integration — intergovernmentalism on the one hand, and a more federal system with a clear separation of supranational and regional powers on the other — concludes that we may be seeing neither future: "maybe in some respects 'the future' has already arrived, maybe 'this is it', neither a simple continuation of the modern system of states, nor a federal state in embryo, but something quite different from both, an 'intermediate' form which is distinct in its own right rather than merely transitional" (134). This prompts Anderson, following Bull (1977) and Ruggie (1993) to forward the idea of overlapping or unevenly 'unbundled' sovereignties, a 'new medievalism' where geographic space is seen not as absolute, but as relative and variable. By extension, the state's control over that territory is also relative and variable — as is demonstrated by the history of nation-state formation. Castells (1997, chapter 5) notes that "in the 1990s, nation-states have been transformed from sovereign subjects into strategic actors" (p. 307). Simultaneously, political or economic or cultural groups can seize unevenly occurring possibilities to by-pass the nation-state *in certain areas*: "people are often directly members of international networks, not via national bodies; small local groups increasingly deal directly with transnational bodies, not via national intermediaries; regional groups and institutions deal directly with their counterparts in other states without the respective states necessarily having any involvement" (Anderson, 1996, p. 150).

It is interesting to apply these insights to what Morley and Robins (1995) have called the 'European identity crisis' in the face of globalisation. Here, the process of European integration is tied to a defensive realisation by national states that the

only hope of retaining any economic power is through pooling sovereignty. Simultaneously, however, numerous political and cultural movements have awakened within European nation-states which challenge the legitimacy of centralised government. Such regionalist or micro-nationalist movements urge:

> local attachments against the anonymous standardisation of global culture; it reasserts local independence against the abstract and bureaucratic power of transnational agencies. The appeal of this Europe of the 'Heimats' — Basque, Lombard, Breton, Corsican and others — is to a more 'authentic' way of belonging. (Morley & Robins 1995, p. 20).

This resurgence of nationalisms — and we should also mention the 'purification' of the nation-state pursued by the likes of Le Pen in France — is at best politically ambiguous (Hall, 1992; Nairn, 1992). Central government has often been a defender of minority rights and multiculturalism, however imperfectly, and for socialists has offered a means of territorial income redistribution, which these new regionalists may seek to roll back (Harvie, 1994).

This has offered political space to regionalist parties such as the Partido Nacional Vasco, the Christian Social Union of Bavaria, or Convergència i Unió of Catalonia, all representatives of territorially embedded business elites (among other political constituencies). As Harvie (1994) argues, by the late 1980s "certain regions…now seemed at the sharp-point of European consciousness: areas of sophisticated technology, environmental awareness, local democracy, and a culture and civil society *which integrated the intimate and the cosmopolitan*" (p. 2, my emphasis; see also Cooke, Christiansen & Schienstock, 1997). As well as drawing on the symbols and scripts of ethnic particularism — history, cuisine, language — such movements embraced many of the most intensively 'global' sectors of the economy such as high technology and the media.

While this has made such regions economically dynamic, it has far-reaching consequences for their cultural identity, and it is also crucial to note that globalisation as a process of capitalist development is extremely uneven by sector. Waters (1995, p. 124) argues that "globalization proceeds most rapidly in contexts in which relationships are mediated through symbols". As such, it has been the major producers of symbols — film and television corporations, advertisers, satellite news agencies, software and games companies — that have had the greatest intensity of global penetration. It is clear that those corporations carry a particular symbolic message from a producing to a receiving culture, and that some degree of alteration of the receiving culture will occur. Sklair (1991) calls this the 'culture-ideology of consumerism', in which the values of the centre flow to the periphery of the world-system. As a consequence, such developments in globally-influenced cultural production have had an unsettling impact on the geographical imagining of territories. As Edensor (1997, p. 191) has noted, with reference to Scottish nationalism,

> disembedding processes [the heritage industry]…place-marketing, and mediatisation [think of Braveheart] have a profound effect on national and local ident-

ities. On the one hand, they remove aspects of the production of identity from the local stage and transform situated characters and events in transmitting them to a local audience. On the other hand, they provide reworked narratives and images *which can reignite debates over identity and be repatriated.* [my emphasis]

I hope to show that the debate over the Guggenheim encapsulates this paradox. The museum clearly absorbed resources which would otherwise have been allocated to locally-based cultural producers. Simultaneously, however, the process of obtaining the museum is a profound message from one section of the Basque nationalist family as to their preferred vision of Basque cultural identity. I explore three aspects of this in the paper: the ability of certain global actors (the Guggenheim, in this case) to impose themselves upon peripheral cultural spaces; a competing interpretation that sees the political guardians of such spaces strategically 'indigenising' such global flows; and the threat this poses to a particularist ethnic identity, along with the (sometimes violent) reaction to such impositions. I begin, however, by discussing issues of interpretation surrounding the Guggenheim's expansion into Europe.

Interpreting the Guggenheim

The establishment of the Guggenheim in Bilbao has attracted considerable attention, both from Basque media and academics, and from the international, particularly American, art press. Also, as Beauregard (1993) has argued, debates over urban restructuring are often shaped by mass media interpretations of events. Throughout this study I follow the lead of Jacobs (1994, 1996) who has demonstrated the importance of struggles over the production of urban space in crystallising more complex narratives of power and identity. While Jacobs is interested in the relationships of power in post-imperial cities, the approach is clearly relevant in shedding light on (re-)emergent micro-nationalisms. It is to assert that urban change is often closely linked to shifts in political strategy: change in this sense cannot be attributed singularly to invisible structural forces. Instead, symbolic projects of urban redevelopment are linked to broader territorial strategies in the creation of political identity, which Robert Sack defines as "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area" (Sack, 1984 p. 19, cited in Forest, 1995, p. 136). Bilbao, in this case, has become a 'condensation site' for the negotiation of cultural values (cf. Cohen, 1985; Edensor, 1997), where struggles over the material transformation of symbolic spaces and landscapes are often redolent with political meaning, and have important impacts on political identity. As Linda McDowell (1997, p. 262) has argued,

in important ways our perception of, awareness of and reactions to landscapes and to places, the connections between them and the sets of meanings associated with them are always imagined. Places and landscapes have no intrinsic meaning.

Instead they are socially constructed, embedded within the sets of social relations
and the value systems of a period.

So our understanding of urban change cannot be dissociated from the discursive
or representational shifts that take place within political strategy. Cities, and their
transformation, are fundamental to contemporary re-imaginings of the national com-
munity (cf Anderson, 1991). Furthermore, it may be that the construction and contes-
tation of these landscapes is more important than the aesthetic and physical compo-
nents of the building. Here, I suggest that the Guggenheim as event is as important
as the Guggenheim as a concrete, physical place, notwithstanding the coverage given
to the building's remarkable design, and as such I draw on the accounts of a number
of journalists and academics who have followed the negotiation process behind the
museum closely.

The most complete account of the period leading up to the museum's establish-
ment comes from Joseba Zulaika's painstaking — and highly critical — account
Crónica de una Seducción (Zulaika, 1997). Writing as a commentator/ anthropologist
on Basque culture, Zulaika's 305 page account provides an in-depth study of the
institutions involved, as well as interviews with the leading participants in the negoti-
ation process. This includes, crucially, interviews with Thomas Krens, the director
of the Guggenheim Foundation and the initiator of the franchising approach. In one
of these interviews, Krens describes himself as a 'professional seductor', a phrase
which Zulaika employs as a narrative framework for his highly critical analysis. This
could perhaps be summarised as having three basic foundations: first, the vulner-
ability of the Guggenheim itself, a major American cultural foundation seeking to
operate as a trans-national corporation, its profit-seeking motivations masked by a
cynical and manipulative conception of culture by the seductor Krens; second, the
naivete of a Basque governing elite all too ready to be seduced as it tried to revive
a deindustrialised economy in a society riven by ethnic bloodshed; third, the debased
attitude taken to the role of the museum and art itself in contemporary capitalist
societies, the cliched 'museum of the 21st century' that both parties were happy to
speak about. Zulaika's work represents the viewpoint of many in the Basque country
who saw the museum as an unwarranted intervention in Basque culture (see also
Ortega, 1995; Zulaika, 1999).

A less critical account is offered by Tellitu, Esteban and Carrera's (1997) study,
El Milagro Guggenheim (The Guggenheim Miracle), The authors, journalists on the
Bilbao daily *El Correo*, offer the view that the museum has been an important stimu-
lant in regenerating the Basque economy. While documenting fully the same contro-
versies and nuances seized upon by Zulaika, this stresses the museum's role in offer-
ing an 'optimistic vision' for a Bilbao in its death throes (Tellitu et al., 1997, back
cover). 'We don't think Krens tricked anyone' notes Carreras, "But the negotiations
were conducted in secrecy, at the margin of public debate. There were a lot of things
we didn't know" (cited in Cembalest, 1997, p. 63). Their analysis is more sympath-
etic to the soundbites and promotional literature of the Basque institutions which
coalesced around the PNV and the museum project (see also Plaza, 1999 for an
upbeat account of the museum's impact).

A third set of commentaries is offered in the pages of the international art and quality news press, particularly as focused around journals such as *Artforum, Art in America*, or the arts pages of leading US dailies such as the *New York Times*. Commentators such as Cembalest (1991, 1992, 1997), Bradley (1997) and Moore (1995) or Thorncroft (1998) have provided penetrating accounts focused on the Guggenheim Foundation, particularly its performance under Krens. These critics are concerned in particular with the impact of Krens' strategy on the future of museum management, the curatorial implications of the expansion plans, and the financial rationale behind the project.

Taken together, we can see that the discursive representation of the founding of the museum is of interest in itself. In what follows, I draw on the accounts described above as a means of considering some of the issues surrounding national identity and globalisation in contemporary Europe, weaving these into a commentary on contemporary Basque and Spanish politics.

McGuggenisation as cultural imperialism?

I begin by exploring the charge — made frequently by some Basque critics after the negotiation process became public — that the Guggenheim's arrival in Bilbao was an example of the latest stage of American cultural imperialism, a corollary of inward investment by American multinationals, the dominance of Hollywood in televisual and film production, the increasing hegemony of English as a global language, and the long-term military interests of NATO and the US in the Iberian peninsula. Critics such as Mattelart (1979) and Schiller (1976) have documented the impact of various forms of American cultural product which, by virtue of the strength of American economic and diplomatic muscle, introduces commodities which usurp or replace existing, indigenous products. And as Tellitu et al. (1997, chapter 3) demonstrate, many in the Basque artistic community explicitly identified this threat.

Certainly, Ritzer's (1996) McDonaldization thesis lent itself neatly to the Guggenheim director's avowed intention to establish a chain of museums throughout the world operating on a franchise basis. Thomas Kren's plans to create the 'museum for the 21st century' involved the Guggenheim selling itself as a brand, allowing local operators to pay for new premises in their locality, to pay for the curatorial skills offered, and to benefit from a continuous circulation of the museum's stock (the central branch can display less than 5% of its total holdings at a time) (Thorncroft, 1998). The 'Guggenheim' name would benefit the franchisees as a tourist magnet, bestowing instant cultural kudos in the global culture circuit.

At the end of the 1980s, the Guggenheim's difficult financial situation was forcing Krens to pursue a strategy of opening satellite museums, such as the (stalled) MassMOCA in Massachusetts and a new gallery in downtown Manhattan, as well as searching for partners in cities across the world. In 1991, Robyn Cembalest was noting in *ARTnews* the "surge of rumors that have Guggenheims popping up like McDonald's all over the globe". Venice, Osaka, Salzburg, Graz, and Vienna, and Seville were all linked to the Guggenheim with varying degrees of veracity, but

what was ultimately revealed towards the end of 1991 was that the Basque regional government, the Comunidad Autónoma Vasco (CAV), had signed a preagreement with the Guggenheim to establish a franchised museum in Bilbao (Cembalest, 1991).

The Basque interest had emerged from the leadership of the dominant Basque nationalist party, the Partido Nacional Vasco (PNV), which was exploring ways in which it could move Euzkadi (el País Vasco in Castilian) out from the dual bind of deindustrialisation and crippling terrorism which had effectively devastated its local economy. The PNV bear many similarities to what Harvie (1994) refers to as 'bourgeois regionalist' parties, centre right in stance with a strong degree of indigenous business participation, along with a fierce defence of cultural particularism and demands for far-reaching political and economic autonomy. Unlike many other such parties in Europe, however, they had considerable executive power to negotiate directly with the Guggenheim. Electorally, they had dominated the key institutions in the Basque country such as the regional government since its establishment in 1980. In addition, they possessed a remarkable degree of financial autonomy. Historically, Navarre and the three provinces that constituted the CAV had — until 1876 — collected their own taxes. The post-Francoist constitutional settlement allowed provincial *Diputaciones* to retain and administer taxation within the Basque country, paying a reverse block grant to the central government for services provided. As Ross (1997, p. 81) describes, this means that negotiations over funding are conducted directly with central government and are independent of the broader regional financial regime in Spain, and means that any delays in the negotiation process are harmful to central government, giving the CAV and Navarre an upper hand in the negotiations. The PNV elite thus had considerable scope to finance a cultural policy distinctive within Spain, and linked this to their attempts to regenerate the ex-industrial areas of its territory, particularly the province of Bizkaia which contains the Bilbao metropolitan area. As such, once Krens was informed of the seriousness of the PNV's interest, he was able to convince them to pay $100 million for a landmark building in Bilbao, but also to pay a fee of $20 million for the services rendered — the franchise (Moore, 1995). In addition, the Basques would create a fund of $50 million to build up the museum's own collection.

The negotiation process began with the intercession of Spanish ex-minister of culture, Carmen Giménez, who was by 1991 employed as a curator by the Guggenheim in New York, and which by May of that year had led to the signing of a 'memorandum of understanding' between the two sides. As well as the fee demanded by the Guggenheim, they also put pressure on the Basque institutions to fund a flagship building, and while the ultimate success of Frank Gehry in an architectural competition satisfied all sides, it was felt that he was strongly favoured by Krens. The contract was finally signed in December 1994, after a considerable amount of amendments on the Basque side (provoked by criticisms from the PNV's socialist coalition partners in the CAV and an unfavourable response in the press). These included a restriction on Guggenheim expansion in Europe without the prior consent of the Basques, and the requirement that the Foundation provide at least three exhibitions per year of equal merit to those being staged in New York (Bradley, 1997).[1]

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[1] Bradley (1997) provides an excellent summary of a complex process of negotiation.

Despite these concessions, critics such as Zulaika (1997) and a couple of notable interventions in the press by Basque academics suggested that the deal was not in the best interests of the Basque country; the local PNV grassroots and the CAV president, Ardanza, all initially needed to be convinced of its viability and suitability (Tellitu et al., 1997, pp. 86–89); and all the opposition parties in the CAV were at some point opposed to the project.

The overriding concern was that the Basque institutions were the weaker partners in the negotiating process, on the wrong end of an aggressive cultural imperialism. There are four reasons which would suggest this. First, the Guggenheim Foundation were able to play upon the structural weakness of the Basque economy in a way similar to the strategy of any trans-national corporation that demands favourable conditions in return for their investment. Krens was already negotiating for new branches in Venice and Salzburg and had attempted to use the rivalry between European cities to force an early signing of the contract in terms favourable to the Guggenheim (cf. Harvey's (1989) formulation on inter-urban competition within the 'spatial division of consumption'; Peck & Tickell, 1994). This strategy would, it appears, have been successful had it not been for the political opposition of the socialists and sections of civil society. Second, fears raised about the impact of the flagship museum on indigenous cultural production had echoes with the opening of Euro Disney outside Paris in 1992. The dilemmas were similarly clear: in the latter case too there was a contradiction between cultural policy and economic policy; fears of a dilution of French culture by an Americanised homogeneity; the repackaging of 'European' tales such as Pinocchio and Cinderella, just as the Guggenheim was commodifying European artworks; the French government had similarly fought off strong competition from Spain to be chosen as the site of the theme park (Forbes, 1995, pp. 255–256; Kuisel, 1993, pp. 227–230; Pells, 1997, pp. 306–313). Third, there was a difference in *cultural capital* between the two negotiating teams. Zulaika (1997) argues that the individuals participating in the Basque negotiating team drawn from the PNV were naïve with respect to Kren's self-stylisation as a 'professional seducer'. They had a poorly developed knowledge of art markets, all but one had weak English, and lacked negotiating ability, doing little more than meekly accept the terms of the contract initially offered by the Guggenheim (which was vague in a number of key aspects, and would subsequently be modified following local pressure). Fourth, the accord signed between the Guggenheim and the regional government was also vague in specifying which artworks would be coming to Bilbao: there were fears that the work of 1960s and 1970s conceptual artists such as Donald Judd and Joseph Beuys would be more likely to appear than the blue chip Modiglianis or Picassos of Manhattan. Indeed, some local critics argued that had the Basques gone it alone they could have afforded a modern art collection that outshone what the Guggenheim was able to offer. Furthermore, it became clear that the Guggenheim would absorb all the resources that had been dedicated to a coherent plan for museum funding throughout the Basque region (Tellitu et al., 1997, pp. 126–127).

Can we accept the process of the Guggenheim's establishment as being an example of how an institution from the core of the global cultural economy is able to dictate terms to an actor in the periphery? Massey's (1994) well-known argument of the

variable 'power-geometry' of globalisation is applicable here in explaining the relative ability of each *elite* to influence the negotiating process. Almost every aspect of the process of attracting the Guggenheim involved a complex assessment of intangible factors such as the commercial value of conceptual art (such as the Judd and Beuys works); the real, as opposed to apparent, power of Krens to play a firm hand. Zulaika (1997) notes that at the time Krens was having no success in his Salzburg or Venice expansion plans, while simultaneously New York Guggenheim's curatorial strategy was being severely questioned by the American art world. The Guggenheim Foundation desperately required a cash injection, with the Basques at that time being the only firm bidders. As such, for Zulaika the McGuggenisation process opens up questions as to the *real* as opposed to the *apparent* power of the American institution, the latter possessing, quite simply, a greater 'worldliness' in influencing the negotiations. Tomlinson (1991, p. 132) is careful to stress, then, that the 'power-geometry' argument is 'about the differential access to control over events *within* the [globalisation] process' rather than *exclusion* from the process.

A clue to the veracity of this is given by the (PNV) director of the Bilbao Guggenheim, Juan Vidarte, speaking shortly after the museum's opening: "With this unique space and this important collection, we can be playing a role in the periphery that we could not do otherwise…To play in this league, you have to be associated with someone in it. Otherwise, it's hard to get there" (cited in Cembalest, 1997, p. 64). The obvious allusion is that of the strategic corporate alliance, a realisation that for a political elite to compete in a globalising world requires a critical awareness of one's competitive weaknesses, and a strategic alliance — widespread in the likes of airlines and semiconductors — may be the most profitable way forward. It is important, therefore, to consider the establishment of the Bilbao Guggenheim not as a simple power-play between core and periphery, uneven though the bargaining process was, but *also* as part of a manoeuvre by the ruling party in the Basque regional institutions to enhance its relative strength within its immediate political space — Spain.

Indigenisation and 'bourgeois regionalism'

As Appadurai (1990) has noted, the thesis which sees globalisation as being synonymous with a commodity-led Americanisation, as a one way flow of cultural and financial influence and power is misleading:

> What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one or other way: this is true of music and housing styles as much as it is true of science and terrorism, spectacles and institutions…But it is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic Republics. (Appadurai, 1990 p. 295).

Notwithstanding the explicit critique of American imperialism which has influenced many Basque groups such as Herri Batasuna (reflected in, for example, opposition to Spanish membership of NATO), it is clear that the 'historic nationalities' of Spain — Basques, Galicians, and Catalans — have faced a more pressing threat to their culture — Hispanicization. The negotiation of the post-Francoist constitution in Spain thus reflected political demands to restore a strong degree of autonomy, with the CAV, Navarre and, to a lesser extent, Catalonia and Galicia being given differing levels of autonomy from the rest of Spain's 'autonomous communities', which has included provisions for interventionist linguistic policies in the fields of education and media.

Aside from language as a source of identity, however, certain aspects of *territory* take on symbolic value for regionalising or nationalising elites, a continuation of long-established processes of nation formation (Smith, 1991). Yet as the above examples suggest, in contemporary Europe, symbolic value can be found not just in romanticist landscape ideology, battlefields, statuary or castles. They may instead be found in all-seated football stadia, reinvented cuisine, science parks,…new art galleries, many of them symbols of a rejuvenated post-industrialism. In this vein, the PNV's decision to bid for the Guggenheim gave the party a powerful totem, a statement that the Basque identity was at home in the contemporary world, rather than being mired in pre-modern ethnic bloodshed. To understand why this was so important to the party, however, requires a brief survey of recent Basque political history.

In many ways, Basque identity was reinforced by the industrialisation of the country in the late 19th century. The founder of modern Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana, constructed a racial theory of the Basques which held them to be superior to the rest of Spain, mobilising language as the essence of Basque 'purity'. While Arana's racialist theories were abandoned for a number of reasons by all the Basque nationalist parties, the Basque language — Euskera — has remained the defining point of identity. Under the fiercely (Castilian) centralist Francoist dictatorship (1939–75) which emerged from the bloody Spanish civil war, it was not only Basque political autonomy which was proscribed, but elimination of the use of Basque in all public spheres — at church, in school, in print, and even on tombstones (Conversi, 1997, p. 81). This paralleled the repression of Catalan culture being carried out at the same time. As much of the West recognised this dictatorship in the post-war years, the PNV dominated Basque government in exile was left isolated, and lost legitimacy within the Basque country itself, especially among radical youth (Conversi, 1997, pp. 80–90). The attempt to build a more effective resistance movement to this Hispanicisation culminated in the formation of ETA (Euzkadi 'ta Azkatasuna, Basque Land and Freedom) in 1959. Without wishing to document the complexity of Basque politics following this period, it is important to note two things: first, the role of ETA in developing an armed opposition to the Spanish state, most notably with the 1973 assassination of Carrero Blanco, Franco's annointed successor, which ultimately proved very influential in ensuring that the dictatorship crumbled after Franco's death in 1975; second, the ideological split that opened up between the centre-right, 'bourgeois' PNV, and the often Marxist-inspired groupings on the

Basque nationalist left such as ETA and its political wing, Herri Batasuna (HB) (Clark, 1990; Conversi, 1997).

Upon the restoration of an autonomous regional government from 1980, the PNV won a succession of majorities in the regional elections, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s have pursued an ambivalent strategy of hostility to the Spanish state's legitimacy, while distancing itself — precariously — from extremist terrorism. It remains far more committed to independence than many other nationalist groupings in Europe, and its calls to strengthen institutions of economic autonomy, such as proposals for a Basque Central Bank, have been at the forefront of its policy programmes (and reflect its 'bourgeois' profile). For a number of reasons the party split in 1986, and as a result almost lost its status as leading party in the regional government. By the mid-1990s, it had recovered and continued as the dominant Basque party, though having to work in coalition in most regional institutions (Ross 1996, 1997).

Simultaneously, the Spanish nation state had been dramatically reinvented, a succession of social democrat (PSOE) governments between 1982 and 1995 professionalising the army, joining NATO and the European Community, and dismantling the corporatist state machinery through privatisation (Holman, 1996; Hooper, 1995). After the cultural archaism of Francoism, there was also an attempt to internationalise Spanish culture, central to which was the *annus mirabilis* of 1992, when Barcelona held the Olympics, Seville a World Expo, and Madrid the European City of Culture title. The events of 1992:

> were explicitly intended to celebrate Spain's coming of age as a modern, democratic European nation-state, marking the end of a period of political transition (and uncertainty)…But these popular celebrations of Spain's new status tended to neglect the past and glorify the present. Indeed this seemed to be part of an official attempt to represent Spain's new, 'modern', democratic national identity as if it were built on a *tabula rasa*, thus avoiding confrontation with the cultural, social, regional and political tensions that have plagued Spain since its emergence as a nation-state. (Graham & Sánchez, 1995 p. 406)

The Basques were noticeably absent from these events. Xabier Arzalluz, the PNV leader, made reference to the 'pomp' of 1992 (Zulaika, 1997, p. 27), and it was clear that the Basque elite was both desirous to be excluded from any association with a 'New Spain', but was equally keen to retain its political strength relative to the other Spanish regions. In this context the Guggenheim acts as the PNV's own 1992, but with negotiation conducted independently of the central government. As noted above, the relative financial autonomy of the Basques — similar to that of a small nation-state — was something which convinced Krens of the seriousness of the Basque application (Zulaika, 1997, p. 163).

Aside from the sensation of being left out of Spain's renaissance, the PNV had to address the deindustrialisation of the local economy which had proceeded apace during the 1980s. Bilbao and its hinterland in the province of Bizkaia had seen 94,766 jobs lost in manufacturing between 1979 and 1985, particularly in shipbuild-

ing, heavy engineering, and iron and steel production (Gómez, 1998, p. 109). By 1993, unemployment in the city had reached 25%, far worse than at any time in the 1980s. Furthermore, the rate of joblessness in the municipalities on the left bank of the river Nervión, the traditional working class districts of Bilbao, was three to four points higher than the average for the metropolitan area as a whole (Gómez, 1998, pp. 116–117).

In seeking solutions to the problems, the Basque government had identified the need to pursue a strategy aimed at turning Bilbao into a post-industrial centre for services, finance and tourism. They used a number of planning strategies, pushed primarily by Bilbao Metrópoli 30, a public-private partnership aimed at implementing a metropolitan plan. This was augmented by the creation of Bilbao Ría-2000, an urban development corporation dedicated to clearing old industrial land for new property investment. These strategies identified the need for a transformation both of Bilbao's image and its physical environment, centred around the removal of its port functions from the heart of the city to new facilities at the mouth of the Nervión river estuary. A riverfront area at the heart of the central city was zoned to site various new leisure, shopping and office developments, and it would be here that the museum was located, on the site of a former steelworks at El Campo de los Ingleses, at the Abandoibarra section of the river (Webster, 1993).

As noted above, the Guggenheim had stipulated that the new museum building be a high calibre architectural project. As such, Gehry's competition victory over Arata Isozaki and Coop Himmelblau would soon allow Bilbao Metrópoli 30 to put the museum at the centre of its place-marketing strategy. The Basque country had an image problem with parallels in Western Europe only in Northern Ireland, deindustrialisation and economic weakness combined with a reputation for violent civic strife. Along with strategies to stimulate new economic functions and improve infrastructure, the metropolitan agencies had already sought leading architects to design their major projects — a new metro system designed by Norman Foster; a footbridge over the Nervión by Santiago Calatrava; a transport interchange by James Stirling and Michael Wilford. The Guggenheim would form the centrepiece, the magnet of regeneration, a choice vindicated by its astonishing promotional and pulling power.[2]

The reimaging strategy drew strongly on European experience. The metropolitan plan insisted that "the Bilbao area will be an example in Spain as Glasgow and Manchester have been in Great Britain" (CS, 1989, p. 76; cited in Gómez, 1998, p.

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[2] There are two points to stress here in anticipation. First, with hindsight, the venture has been very successful economically. The museum had more than 600,000 visitors in its first six months, and had its millionth guest well before its first anniversary, far exceeding the half-million projected for the first year, with the tourist board registering a 28% rise in tourists in the first quarter of 1997 (Burns, 1998; Webster, 1998). By the end of the first year, a Peat Marwick survey suggested the following, glowing, figures: 1.4 million visitors, three times the original projected first year figure; 85% of visitors who had travelled to the city to visit the museum had prolonged their stay; which all contributed to 0.47% of the annual GNP of the Basque country (Cashing in, 1999). Second, Krens, motivated by the need to pay off the debts incurred in refurbishing and expanding its Frank Lloyd Wright flagship in Manhattan, has now been successful in enlisting the financial support of various corporate sponsors such as Hugo Boss and the Deutsche Bank. (Cembalest, 1992; Thorncroft, 1998).

113). As such, the refurbishment of the central city and an aggressive place marketing strategy is seen as being the key to attracting service industries and tourist expenditure. The development of a European economic space which transcends national boundaries allowed Bilbao to be modelled as 'capital of the Atlantic axis' (Ortega, 1995). Furthermore, Zulaika (1997, pp. 123–129) notes that the PNV leadership had watched jealously as Pasqual Maragall in Barcelona had slotted himself and his city into international political and diplomatic circles during the 1992 Olympics. They had also seen how Frankfurt had used a combination of new museums and a strong financial sector to become one of the leading cities in Europe in terms of economic muscle.

Their desire for change was motivated by a need to escape from the problems of separatist isolation implied by Basque identity. The PNV had already split in the mid-1980s over its ambivalence towards terrorism, and its newly-formed 'sister' (Eusko Alkartasuna) remained an important electoral consideration. Pushed on one side by Herri Batasuna, which represented a radical, pro-ETA popular nationalism, on another by the social democracy of the Partido Socialista de Euskadi (PSE) and on a third by the steadily more popular pro-business, centralising Partido Popular (currently the party of government in the central state), the PNV had to find a spatial fix which retained its (conservative, christian democratic) hegemony over Basque identity yet which avoided it being trapped within a separatist isolation from both the Spanish and global economies (see Khatami, 1995 for a report on the 1994 CAV elections). In the late 1980s it was explicitly invoking the Europe of the Regions as a potential model, but with the anti-Maastricht climate of the 1990s it began once again to flirt with HB and a ceasefire (Ross, 1996, p. 106). The Guggenheim offered a Basque-controlled flagship which advertised Basque difference (and financial autonomy) to the world, yet which represented Euzkadi not as a primordial backwater but as a society at ease with global modernity.

Euskadi or Euskodisney?

Yet while the PNV could reconcile the arrival of the Guggenheim with the maintenance of political control, the museum was just one more source of tension within the broad family of Basque political groups. As noted above, ETA was formed precisely because of the PNV's inability to defend Basque culture against Francoist attack. Furthermore, the post-Francoist settlement which saw considerable powers being devolved to the CAV — and in particular the creation of the Ertzaintza, the autonomous police force — only exacerbated tensions within Basque nationalism. The PNV, through their hegemony in the CAV, and the Ertzaintza were quickly pushed to the forefront of anti-terrorist measures, which in turn saw them being labelled as traitorous and reactionary by some Basque groups. Why is this?

The more radical version of Basque nationalism is represented by a triumvirate of HB, the political party, ETA, the armed section, and KAS (Koordinadora Abertzale Socialista), the ideological front. As MacClancy (1996, 1997) has described, this version of Basque nationalism is built upon a coherent worldview, the *abertzale*

identity. This is defined by a devotion to Euskera, the Basque language, and as such Basque identity is defined culturally, not racially (by contrast with Arana's earlier attempts to define Basqueness in terms of genetics). Being an *abertzale* (a Basque patriot) is "not defined by birth but by performance: an *abertzale* is one who actively participates in the political struggle for an independent Basque nation with its own distinctive culture…You are not born *abertzale,* you make yourself one" (MacClancy, 1996, p. 213). Thus a substantial number of *abertzales* are actually children of immigrants from the rest of Spain. Such patriotism is often combined with a Marxian interpretation of the Basque country as being underdeveloped by both centralism (the Spanish government) and capitalism (the large corporation). As MacClancy continues, this fusion of nationalism with left-wing politics (with similarities to the IRA and Sinn Fein) makes Basque radicalism very different from racially defined particularisms. And furthermore, *abertzale* ideologues "have created an explanatory world-view with great interpretive extension":

> Basque politicians who do not advance the Basque cause are 'traitors', the attempt to build a nuclear power station on the Basque coast becomes 'genocide', the entry of Spain into NATO is damned as subversion of 'Basque sovereignty', and anti-nationalists' calls for the teaching of French or English in schools instead of Euskera becomes 'linguistic imperialism'. (MacClancy, 1996, p. 214).

There is a clearly defined interpretation of Basque culture here, one which embraces both the pre-industrial and the contemporary urban experience: language, folklore, a celebration of Basque landscape, and ethnic memory, but also radical Basque rock and football (Athletic Bilbao, in particular).

Furthermore, *abertzales* place considerable importance on the street as a forum for political mobilisation. Basque cultural festivals frequently turn into violent street demonstrations against the state, the large cities such as Bilbao and San Sebastian becoming a theatre for displays of political disaffection. Aside from the range of terrorist attacks (primarily focused on the kidnapping or assassination of leading members of the local political and industrial elites), the organisation Jarrai (the youth wing of the KAS) has been very active in a campaign of political vandalism against both state and private property. Between 1986 and 1996, 2628 such incidents were recorded (with others presumably going unreported), 332 of them being in Bilbao. Of the total figure, 689 were directed against banks, 210 against trains, and 161 against buses. Interestingly, from 1992, branch offices of the PNV also became targets, escalating to 39 attacks in 1995 alone and reflecting the PNV's alleged status as traitors. The form of attack was primarily through the Molotov cocktail (1432) but also through home-made bombs (410) and stone-throwing (786) (Batista, 1996). Furthermore, as Chaffee (1988) and Raento (1997) have described, graffiti and radical public art has long been an important means of political expression (a tradition established under the censorship of Francoism). It is clear, then, that the streets of the major Basque cities form an important stage for the proclamation of radical nationalist identity.

Given this background, a strong popular and critical perception of American col-

onialism added to the suspicion with which the museum was regarded. Many were offended by the secrecy of the negotiations, and questioned the appropriateness of spending so much on a prestige project in an area of high unemployment. When the model of the Guggenheim was unveiled at the Bilbao bourse those attending had to run a gauntlet of unemployed workers shouting "Ladrones! Mangantes! Menos museos y más trabajo"! ("Thieves! Scroungers! Less museums and more work!") (Zulaika, 1997, p. 231). More chillingly, Krens was somewhat disconcerted when he received in his Manhattan office a letter from Herri Batasuna criticising the secretism of the negotiations, and the effect such a mammoth flagship project would have on funding other popular cultural events (Tellitu et al., 1997, pp. 61–64). While nothing more was heard of the matter, the opening of the Guggenheim in October 1997 coincided with the Supreme Court trial of 23 Herri Batasuna leaders in Madrid, accused of tacitly supporting the activities of ETA. The inauguration of the museum — conducted by King Juan Carlos — was overshadowed by the discovery of an ETA attempt to attack the ceremony. One member of the Ertzaintza was shot dead when he grew suspicious of a team of municipal gardeners, who had been concealing 12 anti-tank grenades within ornamental flowerpots (Nash, 1997; White, 1997). The spectre of the Lemoniz nuclear reactor, whose chief engineer had in 1981 been kidnapped, held to ransom, and finally executed by ETA, was raised once again — the Basque megaproject as terrorist target.

Aside from the politico-economic critique coming from *abertzale* quarters, specific criticisms also emerged rapidly from the Basque art world and intelligentsia. The first of these was a criticism of the cultural policy of the PNV. When the PNV's prioritisation of an international flagship art gallery (which took up 80% of its culture budget) became known, there was an outcry from local cultural producers. A pressure group — *Kultur Keska* — was quickly formed, consisting of more than 400 artists, writers, actors and journalists who were active in drawing attention to the cuts in subsidy made to the broader Basque cultural world. They pointed to the PNV decision to scrap plans for a Basque Cultural Centre, 'El Cubo', in favour of commodified American artefacts (Zulaika, 1997, p. 223). As such, the Guggenheim was seen as part of a centre-right nationalist strategy for the Basque country which favoured tourism and place-marketing over both needs of working class Basques and support for organic or grassroots cultural activities (Ortega, 1995).

Second, there is a sensation among Basque artists that their bourgeoisie has shown little interest in their work, preferring to purchase artwork from international producers, or else to iconise the unchallenging work of Basque artists from the 1920s such as Zuloaga or the Zubiaurre brothers which "have been reproduced in prints and posters, in coffee-table books and magazines, on postcards, on television advertisements, and on calendars, to the level of saturation" (MacClancy, 1997, p. 207). As such, the contents of the Guggenheim — Warhol, Serra, Hirst, among a range of internationally famous artists represented — reflected the purely functional interpretation of Basque culture which many have accused the PNV as possessing.[3]

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[3] Zulaika (1997) describes the sorry history of Picasso's *Guernica* which the artist had offered to the Basque government in exile after the Civil War but which had been declined by the PNV president on

The principal ideologue of radical Basque art, the prolific octogenarian sculptor Jorge Oteiza, refused to donate his valuable legacy of works to the museum in protest. Furthermore, McClancy (1997, pp. 208–209) summarises the views of many of these critics who see the museum "as an exemplar of the economically-motivated 'culture of spectacle' where…the Guggenheim Foundation…is treating its pictures, not as a collection to be curated, but as stock to be played on the world art market".

Oteiza's interventions were notable for his reference to the 'Euskodisney swindle' (quoted in Zulaika, 1997, p. 278), and the metaphor was intended to reflect the PNV's impoverished conception of a Basque cultural politics, to embarrass an elite which fails to see the contradiction in subordinating the nation's cultural identity to its economic programme. This has parallels with nationalist-regionalist groups across Europe which are intervening ever more heavily in such cultural 'g-localisation'. This can be seen in the Scottish National Party's embrace of Hollywood icons — Sean Connery and Mel Gibson — as a means of renarrating the nation (Edensor, 1997), or in Umberto Bossi's (Italian Northern League) fusion of Milanese modernity with Lombard and Venetian ethnic folklore (Farrell & Levy, 1996), or in the fervent morality of Bavaria's Christian Social Union, simultaneously requiring crucifixes to be hung on the walls of all state schools while nurturing one of Europe's most dynamic high technology clusters, or in Jordi Pujol's Catalan nationalists seizing the unprecedented media coverage offered by that quintessentially global event — the Olympics — to broadcast Catalan 'difference' around the world's leading business journals and newspapers (McNeill, 1999b, chapter 3). Is this the dilemma facing micro-nationalisms in Europe, a choice between Euskadi and Euskodisney?

Conclusions

The opening of the Guggenheim gallery in Bilbao is as obvious a metaphor of the impact of globalisation on the European city as one could wish for. However, I have suggested that this is by no means as straightforward a process of cultural imperialism as it first appears. There are three main points which I want to emphasise. The first is that rather than homogeneous 'Heimats' emerging in the backwaters of Europe's faltering nation-states, such territories are currently the object of struggle between competing nationalist groups which each seek to position themselves politically both in relation to outsiders and in relation to their 'brothers' who struggle over the same territory. Basque political identity itself has been notorious for its fractured, plural nature (Conversi, 1997, pp. 236–240). Under the incursions of cultural globalisation, all cohesive nations face a struggle for cultural survival, but there may be a danger in reading too much into the very visible signs of xenophobia or ethnic chauvinism. Many nationalist groups are very much aware of the opportunities

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aesthetic grounds. Krens and the Basques spent considerable effort in trying to persuade Madrid to part with it as a centrepiece of the new museum. The requests were ultimately refused due to the fragile state of the enormous canvas.

offered for strategic alliances with other global actors. Second, the reterritorialisation of Europe is being played out symbolically in once provincial cities. The likes of Bilbao have become of importance not just as motors of a post-industrial transition, as service sector capitals, but also as counterpoles to the symbolic landscapes of the capital cities of Europe's major nation states. Thus cities such as Cardiff, Barcelona, Edinburgh, Antwerp (and peripheral capitals like Dublin, Stockholm and Lisbon) have been the subject of significant new architectural projects which can tell as much about the future of national identity (in the course of their production) than sacred battlefields or churches. Third, I argue that instead of seeing globalisation solely in terms of economic geography more attention be paid to how urban and economic restructuring is implicated in the territorial strategies of political groups. I have suggested that if we conceptualise European urban change in terms of political strategy, we can gain a greater insight into how political elites ground globalisation. This is not to say that events like the Guggenheim have no economic rationale. However, it is how such events are *politically mediated* which will dictate their importance in discursive or symbolic 'imaginings' of the nation — how they are negotiated, funded, designed, represented, controlled and curated. Only through a detailed analysis of specific events do we gain an understanding of the power relationships lying behind them.

Smith (1990, pp. 174–175) has argued that "the range and specialized flexibility of transnational corporations' activities enable them to present imagery and information on an almost global scale, threatening to swamp the cultural networks of more local units, including nations and ethnic communities." This is clearly the fear from the Basque left and its artistic community. Yet it has to be noted that the supposed guardians of vulnerable cultural spaces, the PNV in this case, felt better able to defend Basque identity with an American partner than with acquiescence to Spanish state cultural policy. While globalisation is often constructed as a colonising process, it could thus also be conceptualised as a strategic move — a cultural *realpolitik*. Furthermore, could it be the nation-state which has most to fear from cultural imperialism, as witnessed in the xenophobic reaction of the British Conservatives to European integration, and the strident defence of French cultural autonomy and linguistic purity in the face of the GATT negotiations and the encroachment of Hollywood?

What the Bilbao Guggenheim represents in this context is a dual process of micronational reimagining: a resistance to the cultural threat posed by the Spanish nation-state, and a means of strengthening the PNV within the crowded spectrum of Basque politics. In this viewing, core and periphery were constructed less in terms of coloniser-colonised, but rather as a more symbiotic agreement between two embattled elites. Elites are capable of harnessing the 'global-local' interplay to gain a competitive position for their own ends. Whether Basque identity is safe in the hands of the PNV is clearly open to debate: ETA was formed precisely in response to the former's inability to defend Basques against Francoism after the Civil War. Here, then, the PNV's wooing of the Guggenheim was part of a longer strategy to reposition the object of its territorial strategy — the Basque Country — in global space, as a means of making Euzkadi, and their control over it, more robust.

Acknowledgements

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