

24-26 June 2022

Oslo, Norway

Sport and National Identity: Basque Nationalism and the ‘Vuelta Ciclista a España’ (1935-2021)

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ABSTRACT

The Basque Nationalist Party (BNP), born at the end of the 19th century in Northern Spain, turned to sport as an instrument of nationalization. In 1924 the newspaper *Excelsior*, with links to the BNP, created the ‘Vuelta Ciclista al País Vasco’. The foundation of the ‘Vuelta Ciclista a España’ in 1935 had an opposite national and political slant. Like the ‘Tour de France’ and the ‘Giro d’Italia’, the ‘Vuelta a España’ was created to promote Spanish State nationalism. Given its name and its relationship with Spanish identity, the ‘Vuelta a España’ has been regarded with a degree of suspicion by Basque nationalists. Particularly when the race visited the Basque Country, some interpreted this as the incursion of a *foreign* race into a different national territory. But, in spite of these misgivings, the relationship between the ‘Vuelta a España’ and Basque nationalism has been very complex and cannot be separated from the great passion for cycling that exists in the Basque Country. The race has also reflected the difference between moderate and radical sectors of Basque nationalism. Traditionally, the BNP, more moderate, has tended to accept the Vuelta’s presence in the Basque Country and taken advantage of this as an opportunity to emphasize Basque specificity. Meanwhile, the radical sectors, for years associated with the terrorist organization ‘Euskadi Ta Askatasuna’ (ETA), have assumed a far more critical attitude, reflected in boycotts, demonstrations and attacks.

Keywords: Banal Nationalism, Basque Country; Cycling; Spain; Terrorism