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Abstract

How and why do some young people become street fighters who rally behind a political ideology? This article attempts to explore this complex issue. First, using ethnographic data, the article examines political and violent socialization, and its connections to and influences upon individual, peer and discourse conditions. Second, it explores how individual predispositions, i.e. those dispositions acquired from a certain family, social class or peer group in an ideological background, constitute, or not, prerequisites for young men to turn to nationalist street fighting, such as the *Kale Borroka* in the Spanish Basque country. Finally, the article shows that the current representation of young activists is not a mythological construct, rather it is an extension of complex processes in early socialization, a product of virtual and physical *interactions raisonnantes* with the police organizations, and lastly, a form of self-referential violence.

Keywords

Basque country, *Kale Borroka*, police, socialization, street violence

Sociopolitical context of the study: The Basque social movement and violence

This study takes place in a singular historical and political context marked by the weight of a social movement since the 1960s: that is, the radical Basque nationalist movement (*abertzale*) during and after an authoritarian regime.¹ This article attempts to clarify one

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important point. Since the 1990s, the Basque nationalist movement has achieved political influence in various social movements of Basque society. It has imposed a dominant interpretation of nationalism by creating a consistent, yet complex, continuum between this interpretation and public and private spaces, through various social institutions, such as the *cuadrilla*, *ikastolas* and family, and public spaces, such as the media, universities, and through symbolic demonstrations. The existence of a suffering community (Muro, 2008) demonstrates that violence, including the terrorist violence of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), had long been legitimized, before its decline in the 1990s (Funès Rivas, 1998).

Our study is placed within this modern historical context. However, we do not directly study radical nationalism, nor ETA violence, rather the original violence that began in the streets in the late 1980s, and which to our knowledge has not yet been studied (with the exception of Pérez Agote, 2006: Conclusion).

The Kale Borroka in the Basque country in the 1990s and 2000s

Our interest is in the structured street violence practised by young people in the urban areas of the autonomous region of the Spanish Basque country in the 1990s and 2000s. According to official records, the Basque radical pro-independence left, and the terrorist organization ETA, stimulated this new form of violent action known as the *Kale Borroka* (literally, street violence in Basque), by actively pursuing their objectives. These objectives were to create and maintain a climate of tension, and to remobilize the masses (the Basque society) by organizing violent actions in the streets of Basque cities.²

This strategy was created and formalized by the terrorist organization ETA at the end of 1980s, as the discovery of the private documents of one of the historic ETA leaders during a 1992 police operation showed (in Bidart, French Basque country). This document makes explicit reference to an enigmatic new strategy, 'XYZ', that corresponded to three levels of terrorist action. The first was to be within conventional institutional and political spaces, the second was to be called the *Kale Borroka* and the third was the use of terrorist violence.

The choice of this new strategy was perhaps understandable. Within the historical context, the decline of the radical pro-independence social movement was a deliberate project of the leaders of the Basque terrorist organization in order to compensate for the breakdown of social support mechanisms due to a split between *reason and feeling*, according to the terms used by Pérez Agote (2006). This ensured the coherence of the support of the activists, in particular, young adolescents, for this radical nationalist movement in the 1980s.

From this historical point of view, the *Kale Borroka* could have been considered a complementary strategy intended to introduce the potential for permanent destabilization into the Basque society, using insurrectionary logistics and creating an ongoing sense of open confrontation (Morena Bustillo, 1998).

In this context, we will begin by summarizing the existing theories on the *Kale Borroka*. We will then specify our assumptions and method, present our results (three dimensions of a dynamic and complex socialization), and we will conclude by examining theoretical considerations.

Principal psycho/sociological paradigms of the *Kale Borroka*

A degenerative violence

In the first wave of studies, the young *Borrokists* are presented as agents deprived of freedom of action, acting blindly. Some authors argue that this violence is closer to a form of fanatical support than to violent political activism (Unzueta and Barbería, 2003). For these authors, the fact, for example, that there are no skinheads in the Basque country (unlike other Spanish regions) can be explained in the sense that these young extremists are already known and recognized within the radical world. Thus, radical nationalism constitutes a more attractive alternative to other subcultures.³ From another perspective, it is a degenerative, anomic violence (Boudon, 2012), essentially reactive, and implemented by a new, volatile working class in the suburbs of major centres, such as Bilbao (Reinares Nestares, 2001).

A pure nationalist violence

One area of research has defined the *Kale Borroka* as a rational violence, managed and entirely controlled by the terrorist organization ETA and its networks within the Basque society's social layers. The transition from radical youth accustomed to violence by the *Kale Borroka* through to legal action seems quite natural when adopting a model of reproduction and mechanical socialization (the *Kale Borroka* as a 'school of violence') or of rational choice (De la Calle, 2007). These *Borrokists* are portrayed as violent aggressors, themselves victims of the totalitarian strategy they serve.

A ritualistic violence

For other authors, it is the ritualistic ideal that is used to describe this violence: it becomes a ritual response to symbolic violence (without definition and explanation on causality between symbolic violence and action) and the physical aggression of the Spanish state and the Basque country's police. That is, a ritual or a wider political protest supported by non-organized groups, perpetrated by committed and autonomous assailants, making use of gratuitous violence, destroying and burning property without clear motivation (Elzo, 1996).

The reasons for these adolescents use of violent action are generally depoliticized: many young people involved in violence – without any argument or political intent – are animated by a playful and aesthetic design of violence (Douglass and Zulaika, 1990). The *Kale Borroka* is a form of ritualistic violence, activated as an immediate response to state repression (detention by anti-terrorism units, murders, torture, etc.). Casquete (2009) describes this as 'nationalist dramaturgy' or 'nationalist religion'.

Other authors have emphasized the ritualistic aspects of the manifestation of street violence. MacClancy (1993), for example, noted that the clashes between the left nationalist demonstrations and police institutions included clear ritualistic elements, but he was quick to emphasize that it was always a political struggle. That is, this movement would never have developed without the existence of a complex discourse on national identity

and the particular political situation of the Basque people. Radical Basque nationalists have managed to create a powerful voice within the social Basque context (Van den Broek, 2004).

Where are the actors? Our theoretical framework, hypothesis and method

We propose to go beyond these current theories. In our opinion, they homogenize classic individual characteristics, and do not study the dynamics of confrontation that produce a singular socialization. Our theoretical framework is thus located at the crossroads of two semantic networks: first, a sociology of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1979) and post-Bourdieu dispositions (Lahire, 2002, 2006); and second, a philosophy of reasoning produced by the action (Brandom, 2011) and micro interactions' sociology of violence (Collins, 2008).

First, we learn from Bourdieu (1997) that it is not straightforward to establish an automatic relationship between a meta-discourse (radical nationalism), social conditions (urban exclusion, etc.) and some actions (street violence). All of these meta-variables are therefore of little help (Bourdieu, 1997), because the concepts of ideology, imaginary, myth, religion and so on are too weak to explain how ideas may generate an action. Additionally, the concept that an ideology comes naturally is too rudimentary because it tends to see using a nationalist passion as an initial error, or a sort of blindness (Bourdieu, 1997).

These concepts do not explain the hidden conscious awareness (*prise de conscience consciente*) that belongs to a long, virtual, complex process of socialization. These ideas, embodied within interactions and implicit agreements, institutions, families and friends, are not insistent that actors consciously integrate structures. The structure is more the result of a lot of hard and specific work in a private space, and shows paradoxical naturalization positions (both institutional and personal) producing a self-referential system (Bourdieu, 1997).

We argue for the examination of the one-dimensional nature, the *habitus*, in favour of a psychological sociology as part of the extension of Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu, 1979; Lahire, 2002, 2006). Thus, we state that the individual has a possible dispositional complexity (various practice areas or patterns of action), concentrating on, yet singling out, the dispositional and contextual properties of the actors. The main objectives of our experimental research are to illustrate and provide support to these *dispositionnalistes* notions as patterns (schemes) or *habitus*, and to observe the variability of the transfer of dispositions from one *champ* (family, peer group; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) to street violence with the same actor.

However, this is not sufficient. In all cases of the violent young actors we interviewed, the situation, the interactions between the state, police and young people in the street, or in a more symbolic confrontation (discourses, representations, etc.) have their own logic. These situations follow a past practice, and generate and recursively build, in turn, a new framework created by the confrontation (Collins, 2008). The previous framework of an ideology in and of itself is complex, but the framework also originates in *interactions raisonnantes* (Brandom, 2011), involved in the perpetuation of an action by a specific violence.

We also emphasize the need for contextualizing structural behaviours in articulating physical/symbolic interactions with enemies (Brandom, 2011; Collins, 2008), in order to understand why some young people are violent and others are not, in the same spaces of socialization. The sociology of violence lies in a singular space that tackles these conflicts of meaning. Instead of simply challenging them, it will focus on the process through which these discourses become reality, and how those involved in action make these conflicts tacit and, in turn, create situations of violence. This elucidation involves the unveiling of the structure of the rational interactions between young radical nationalists and police forces in two spaces of confrontation (Brandom, 2011).

To this end, the combination of these two theoretical spaces allows us to propose a model of dual socialization by complex family and symbolic inculcation; a model remains implied if it is not legitimized through practice, with the understanding that what is produced by this activity remains very uncertain.⁴

Method

Our method is based on a strong (but difficult and experimental) empirical basis. It considers a young actor as the holder of knowledge. We aim to describe this knowledge, and to understand what does or does not contribute to the action, and finally, what in the end produces the action. It requires detachment from the actors' ascriptions of meanings (opinions or truth on an historical event or global process). This requires strong differentiation during the fieldwork (interviews and interpretation of data) between a reflective or theoretical knowledge (*logique logique*, Bourdieu) and a practical or incorporated knowledge (*logique pratique*); what Mannheim called non-theoretical knowledge, or as Bohnsack derived from Mannheim, a conjunctive experience (1996: 224).

How can this implicit reflexive knowledge be accessed? First, it requires the objectification of preconditions, in order to engage in the struggle with the background of the interpreter; a very important notion in the case of violence (axiological judgement, sympathy or fascination).

Second, we consider the lengthy interviews to be portraits (Lahire, 2002), which means controlling the emotional tunnel (Collins, 2008). We must consider, especially in our case study, that an interview is also a social relationship between two social locations (the actor and sociologist).

Specifically, these actors were imprisoned, and were interviewed by psychiatrists and psychologists. It is therefore necessary to neutralize the hidden history, and to find a form of empathy.⁵ It requires the robust preparation of the interviews on historical, political contexts in order to understand implicit behaviours or responses, and thus, to not destroy the relationships with misunderstandings.⁶ This is the reason that between May 2010 and February 2011, we conducted 11 exploratory interviews by emails with a *gatekeeper*, a former activist who is now a parliamentarian in a Basque assembly.

Interviews as portraits

Between May 2011 and December 2011, we conducted two major interviews with each of the five former activists.⁷ We had two main matrices: first, the family, peer group and

institutional socialization with the project in order to observe the duration, intensity and areas of relevant dispositions; and, second, the street practices, that is, the socialization in the street. These interviews were between 1 h 40 min to 3 h in duration. Each interview followed the same thematic framework, using a combination of the actors' and the sociologist's interpretations, and ended with a brief summary to establish a portrait.

Each portrait was compared with the other four portraits in order to capture patterns or topics, but should not stop the reconstruction of single cases (although this may be an artificial reconstruction), that is, a biographic illusion. Some similar topics emerged as, for example, collective, atheoretical knowledge based on practices, memory and external labelling of the *Kale Borroka* (society, police, social control, other youths), plus the internal self-labelling of *Borrokists* (distinction, control, reasoning within the action).⁸

Results

First dimension: A hidden and complex socialization

As discussed, the existing categorizations of the *Kale Borroka* highlight young people who are either led by actual or ludic rituals (using senseless violence caused by alcohol, music or drugs), or who are blinded by a clear ideology. However, in all these cases, we are considering an individual who does not exist, that is, we do not know anything about him. Taken as actors (implying a recognition with an axiological neutrality), these individuals nevertheless claim autonomy, and have a measure of reasoning in their discourses. And, immediately, they reject the idea that they are prisoners of their myths. For example, to follow is the answer provided by our gatekeeper to our question on the meaning of commitment. Note that we tried to ask him directly what had led him to commit acts of arson and vandalism in the street:

Any reductionism of the spiral of external elements, either philosophical-ideological, emotional, or vital elements which lead a young man to an act of street violence, oversimplifies matters. Even in the case of young people who drift away from the mainstream (often prisoners of their own mythology), we could say that their ideologies, aspirations and utopias deserve an in-depth study, if we want to reach an acceptable conclusion to this question: who is more a slave to the myths? The young man who throws a stone for a cause (more or less interiorized) or the sociologist that is prejudiced? (*Laughs*) (J, Durango, 24 March 2011)

We can see that this response is theorized, and fed by an internalized past, as if the attribution of stigma and violence awakened a kind of insult by reducing it to a product of a mechanical socialization. Others interviews that were conducted with G and J2 in Durango continue to follow this theme. J2 was born in a family divided between the PNV (Moderate Nationalist Party) on the mother's side, and the *abertzale* left for the father. When J2 was asked questions about his past, he preferred to speak of *recorrido* (a trajectory), or even of a chaotic path, rather than a well-plotted career. He began by explaining that as a boy he had always been active, and those he had met in the *Kale* were also active youths, involved in mountain hikes, debates in the *ikastolas* (Basque schools) or in the changing rooms of sports clubs. Regarding these institutions or spaces for socialization, he stopped the conversation immediately when his school years were mentioned. He

stated that the *ikastolas* were not indoctrination centres, and that 'It is insulting to believe that'. Yet, he admitted that some teachers in particular may have played a role in him taking clear ideological positions.

Distinction and seeking recognition in others. Sporting prowess, physical conditioning and appearance are all distinct signs that may arouse our attention. Dressing in mountaineering clothing with the necessary mountaineering equipment and accompanying physical conduct may suggest the worship of nature. Physically, all the actors interviewed could be considered physically very active, following a healthy lifestyle in keeping with their commitment to nationalist causes. This strategy of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) evokes other opinions from J2; that the Spanish youth are deprived and depoliticized, and are only good for organizing *botellones* (drunken feasts). In passing, he also mocks the quality of Spanish politicians and public debates which he regards, in some respects, as vulgar. Value judgements here express a sense of superiority, a self-assertion based on a form of self-control.

These distinctive signs are also marks of self-control that correspond to an underground culture but also to a form of personal commitment. When asked to describe a typical series of actions of the *Kale Borroka*, J2 smiled, and remarked:

We do not do anything, we do not drink like fish, we don't talk to anyone. We are cautious, we can handle local affairs. It is said that today some *borrachos* (alcoholics) claim they are *Kale Borroka* but it is only three or four shitheads that will burn *cajeros* (ATMs) at the end of a party or fight among themselves.

Here, J2 expresses a real concern, a fear of degradation of the struggle even, and he highlights the issue of internal discipline in cases where new recruits are involved in acts of sabotage as if it is always necessary to be aware of the risk taken. That is why, in their view, participating in the *Kale Borroka* cannot be just for fun.

An autonomous thinking. On the subject of nationalist ideology, J2 also considers that it is insulting to consider him as simply an actor of low works, as a mere puppet in the pay of this or that organization: 'I am not an automaton and nobody dictates anything to me from above. There is no ideological guide book that we have to follow, nor any circumstantial commitment; we are positive on that.'

For example, in terms of the natural connection with the terrorist organization ETA, many reservations are expressed in the course of the interviews. All players take care to note the separation between their activities and those of a terrorist organization on an organizational level. The latter is not directly condemned but, at the same time, they say the irreducible singularity of street violence (i.e. the idea that the *Kale Borroka* is the antechamber of terrorist violence) raises doubts based on logical considerations. Thus, if some elders of the *Kale Borroka* joined the ranks of the ETA organization, they would still be a minority.

Many actors of operational cells of the terrorist organization do not necessarily come from the *Kale Borroka*, because this form of commitment is quite different and requires very specific constraints. However, these commitments and constraints do not mean the

same thing. For someone coming from the *Kale Borroka*, having been monitored, detected and infiltrated could mean, even for our interlocutors, an incompatible risk with the absolute underground logic that a terrorist organization requires.

Second dimension: A socialization by inculcation symbolique: The peer group

When G was asked how he had come to the concept of fighting, that is, of throwing Molotov cocktails, burning cars and other risky behaviour, he immediately stressed the importance of the *cuadrilla*, of friendships and strong solidarity developed since his teenage years in village fairs and places of commemoration. This group of friends provided a structure to the period of adolescence and ensured the *prise de conscience consciente* of the actor. The group renewed emotional connection in order to ensure continuity with reality, and to enable the actor to find a group of people who (like him, and with him) resist the political indifference.

There are particular places (neighbourhoods, villages, etc.) where intergenerational relationships develop. Institutions, groups and activities related to the teaching and learning of *euskara* contribute to the constant plausibility of fight (Pérez Agote, 2006). Another class of activities exists that we describe as public political protest. These activities include demonstrations of support for imprisoned activists, campaigns for the transfer of prisoners closer to the Basque country or their amnesty, or even trips organized from villages to visit Basque prisoners in Spanish prisons (Aretxaga, 1988; Casquete, 2009). All of these activities are what Pérez Agote defines as a field of social life, where intense moments of strong collective emotion are built, notably through the funerals of heroes of radical nationalism, or from members of ETA who were killed by the police in raids or in the 1980s, by the GAL, a para-police, para-governmental, armed organization.

A new collective memory and a set of rituals: The Kale Borroka. But the *Kale Borroka* has operated since the 1990s as an autonomous space of initiation and body of practices, which, through concrete experiences, maintains and changes the structure of social plausibility to keep the nationalist prophecy alive. As we have seen, this structure is first and foremost the result of a complex weaving of social relations and activities that involve different degrees of institutional formalization. But the *Kale Borroka* as an autonomous space is also a constructed memory (i.e. a commitment, or the courage of other young activists; Halbwachs, 2004), and a set of rites of initiation that play a fundamental role in the juvenile *champ*, originating from the oldest activists who have taught them various techniques. G says, after a long silence: 'Others have done it before us.' We believe this theme is critical, and is found in the testimonies of the next generation with J and G. As these two young people explain, the organization of an action by the *Kale Borroka* means the practical use of knowledge acquired by experience and codes. Street action, for example, cannot be prepared in advance. It is also implemented according to the circumstances. It requires the ability to assess the opportunity to act; of taking the environment into account; of adapting to the strategy *in situ*. Most of the time, direct confrontation

with the enemy is avoided, for example, a fire is lit in an underground entrance in the morning or at an ATM, taking advantage of there being no one in the streets, whilst wearing a hood to avoid identification. The activists we interviewed explained that this was not done to satisfy a macabre ritual:

Otherwise, what would be the point of wearing masks and hoods to act when the streets are deserted and with no cameras there? Prestige? At 6 o'clock in the morning, when no one knows you're there, that you're going to be there, that you are anonymous, and that you run away as soon as you have done it, how can that be prestigious and exhilarating? (J3, Durango 3 May 2011)

Third dimension: A socialization activated and maintained by the dynamic of confrontation

We understand that the culture passed on within a family, the *cuadrilla*, should not just be seen as a whole, that is, as a range of behavioural patterns internalized passively, a sort of sleeping mental structure (Cefai, 2007). In our view (and this confirms the assumption we made before the study was undertaken), it is simply the context of experiences and especially of actions that provide meaning. That is, by confronting the reality that culture can change, a project may be deflected off course from the original idea.

A nationalist culture, learnt and embedded in the rites of the peer group (Pérez Agote, 2010), remains in the state of a single coordinated system for understanding the world if it is not put into practice as a perceptive coordinated system. It is not only in our heads, it is in the world, and it feeds on the reasoning of those who fight it. Therefore, it is in the interaction that we must look for the catalyst that fuels street violence. There are symbolic forms that are publicly available, legitimized through a history of practices, such as the use of violence, of icons, past fights, struggles, jargon, codes, but that have had to confront reality. Thus, organized action happens in a context of meaning fraught with tragedies, arguments, stories, discourse, drama which produces a culture in action and interaction.

A virtual, confrontational space only?

The question now is to know how the interaction between dispositional complexity, peer group symbolic inculcation and reality works, and what it produces in practice against an enemy. To explore this dimension, Aretxaga (2000) states that spectral violence in the Basque country can be very enlightening. In one of her works, she describes the construction of what she calls a space of fantastical confrontation between young radicals and the autonomous Basque police. For her, violence is created, materialized and reproduced by rumours of abuse and police violence, giving itself to the nationalist world through discussions in the bars, the streets but also in interactions and acts of street violence.

Aretxaga sees violence more as a fantastic reality, as an ideological product. According to her, talking about violence as a fantastic reality does not mean that this violence is illusory or that it falls within any social pathology. Rather, this means that in the Basque

context, the experiences of violence correspond to different realities, the strength of which is increased by its invisible and constructed aspect.

Yet, beyond the theory of this anthropologist, we may say that the victimization of the two sides is not a distortion of reality, or an illusion, or a frenzied construction. Conversely, it works as a form of reality structuring the subjectivity of actors, which eventually becomes an invasive reality, which monopolizes the actors' representations. Eventually, violence becomes a daily reality and produces its own effects, and then its own vigilante violence fuelled by the structuring effects of police repression.

The same can be said for officers of the *Ertzaintza*, the Basque autonomous police, who feel the same sense of harassment on the part of young people practising this street violence, considering themselves as prisoners of a fratricidal war. This feeling can even strengthen the legitimacy of institutional violence including dimensions that are outside the scope of violence dealt with by law. Indeed, the police institutions are caught up in a contradictory situation, and may be tempted to over-react in their role by overstating their ability to be right regardless of the circumstances of the use of private force. That is to say, the function of protection must show no sign of weakness.

Therefore, we must be very cautious that those dramaturgical approaches do not suggest that depictions of young radicals and the young Basque police are partly a fantasy, or instrumentalized to justify a struggle strategy. There is obviously a danger in fictionalizing this discourse by making it simply tactical. The facts are solid, and confrontation is real: all that is required is to read the statistics of arrests and criminal convictions in order to understand that it is much more than a rhetorical, confrontational space. The *Kale Borroka* actions, whether or not they cause clashes with riot police, and even if they are only moments limited in time and in space, may be included in this cosmos of activities maintaining the structure of plausibility for the younger group.

We could even say that street violence in its multiple forms is a validating factor of these victimizations, and that we consider this a much more effective explanation of the variables than the hypothetical, social determinisms. That is why we may consider the space of the *Kale Borroka* as an autonomous, virtual and physical confrontational space that produces structuring effects favouring the self-regeneration of that violence. It is in the confrontation and the maintenance of a confrontational space with repression that we see the main workings of this continuing action of *prise de conscience consciente*, leading to the capacity for action or inaction, and to the ability to commit oneself or not. (We must also consider the self-capacity of the actor; see Wieviorka, 2005.)

Practical reasoning interaction: The tests against the state and the challenge to the concentration of force

The Basque autonomous police gradually stepped into the heart of the Basque conflict, and became more and more involved in the repression of violent actions committed by radical nationalists. By entering into that process and institutionalizing itself as a sovereign police force, it became (in the same way as the other Spanish police forces, *Guardia Civil* and *Cuerpo Nacional de Policia*) an active agent of the victimization of young nationalist radicals, and certainly one of the driving forces for the revitalization of this form of street violence.

This process was also the result of a shift in the policing paradigm and the transformation of police policies. As a way to describe this, we define a first period from the late 1970s to the end of the 1980s that can be characterized by a state policy of repression (marked by an authoritarian culture, for example, with the *Guardia Civil*) as diffuse (the groups to suppress are not identified), hard (high level of violence in mass demonstrations) or even dirty, such as the illegal anti-terrorist groups (GAL). The assimilation of the Basque police into this repressive configuration, the counter-terrorist collaboration with France, the deep changes in police culture, the political consensus and the media coverage of the anti-terrorism issue are some of the many variables which have markedly affected the policing policy. This has since become a targeting policy of surgical strikes, focused on the community of the radical left (Jaime Jiménez, 2001).

Police targeting and structuring effects

Two interviews with I⁹ allow us to refine the following hypothesis: from 1992, police policy was to target senior leaders and trainers of the radical youth of *Jarrai*, *Haika* and *Segi* – the successive names of radical Basque militant organizations in the nationalist movement's sphere of influence. This change of style of policing had practical and direct effects on the structure of these organizations, and on violence itself.

Therefore, as a result of the entry of the Basque police into the fight against terrorism, the radical nationalist movement considered as feasible the possibility that its representatives may be assaulted. This founding violence was born in a sequence which was described to us in an interview with I,¹⁰ who lived through it *in situ*. In August 1993, a police officer of the *Ertzaintza* infiltrated crowds of demonstrators as a *paisano* (agent in civilian disguise), and was spotted and beaten in public by a group of young activists. This event broke a taboo – direct confrontation with the forces of order was now permitted. Thus, the anti-terrorism police and new practices of undercover infiltration had restructuring effects.

Structures of supervision within districts established by organizations of young radicals were gradually curtailed by arrests, and by the neutralization of training coaches. Young people were left to their own devices, and were forced to organize themselves – in other words they had to socialize autonomously.

Previously, these youths were trained by older men who acted as role models both in terms of knowledge and in codes of violence. For example, we note the story of a young activist we interviewed dating back to his years of activism in the early 1990s in the neighbourhood of Rekalde, Bilbao. In a discussion of *cuadrilla* between teenagers, one of the youngsters present referred to the murder of a police officer by a member of ETA and laughed at the former's death. He was immediately corrected by an older man who was coaching them who required them to respect the memory of this dead police officer. However, this coach was none other than the person in charge of that murder.

This episode may contain an important lesson regarding the will of the young leaders in the struggle to contain, control and socialize future young *Borrokists* within a self-limiting violence. These training sessions were informal: they were organized around discussions in bars, fairs, private meetings, etc. These prohibitions established a moral border of sorts, and took the form of a social peer control; the process being both

practical (dictated by infiltrated police surveillance in order to refrain from action for fear of endangering the organization and its members) and symbolic (belonging to a meaningful community).

However, this social control disappeared with the confinement and repression of the oldest members since the 1990s, which caused a break in the chain of socialization and the loss of technical and organizational knowledge, but also of a moral code. The *movimentista* experts, those who taught younger members how to make a Molotov cocktail or to organize a campaign of verbal intimidation in neighbourhoods, were now gone. The younger ones were now required to socialize in a vacuum by constructing their own knowledge and their own rules. The symbolic authority relationship that existed between the youngest and oldest was also disappearing, so that violence could focus on itself, and be practised for its own sake, with nobody being reminded of its objectives and limitations.

It becomes violence for the sake of violence. It is in this sense that it can be said that this violence is potentially degenerative, that is, in the opening of a new range of possibilities and of practices that overstep the limits, but not in the degeneration of the social origin of the actors. Our interlocutor, for example, evoked the feeling that he experienced during the famous arrest of the *cupula* (head) of the ETA in Bidart in 1992 by the French police. According to him, all of the arrests created a vacuum in the organization, and caused among some people (particularly the younger members) the feeling that anything was possible, and in fact that they could attack everything by any means available. However, all that had been implemented in the past was a part of, and continues to be a part of, the rewriting of the code of rules, and, as paradoxical as it may seem, a civilizing form of violence.

On a more theoretical level, it is not prohibitive to recognize that these activists' reasoning is neither fantasy nor a delusion of persecution. It is probably a common mistake made by those who strive to identify the traces of a simple persecution complex buried in the narrative of nationalist passion. These stories have an obvious rhetorical vocation, but victimization does not simply feed on mythology. It needs practical experience to operate, and it is strengthened by the transmission structure of plausibility (Pérez Agote, 2006). So, this confrontational space between police and young radicals is not only expansive, it is a practical work in the criticism of the state's action in the implementation of force.

Misleading statistics and the police framing of Borrokists: Putting the state's symbolic power to the test

The main objective for the young *Borrokists* and their networks is to deconstruct the official discourse of the Spanish government, and also that of the Basque autonomous community and police (Arzuaga, 2010). Our research involved testing the categories of police statistics using a thorough analysis of the memoirs published by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, and its accounts of the acts of the *Kale Borroka*. However, beyond the simple census of facts, it is the logical imputation and the construction of the reasoning of the state that is challenged. It is important to see this criticism as an actual

work of endless politicization, aimed at undermining the basis of the legitimate jurisdiction of the state.

For example, if we ask our interlocutors of the *Gurasoak*¹¹ association, police efficiency is continually questioned on the basis of an audit of statistics. The acts committed by the *Kale Borroka* in 2008 are less numerous than in 2007, but are twice as high as those committed in 2003.

‘Do we have to conclude that, in 2000, with 630 acts of sabotage, the state’s security forces were on vacation?’ asks a member of the association.¹² This developed counter-argument (Arzuaga, 2010) aims to provide alternative explanations. Another example can be taken from one of our interviews. If one looks at the graphs of the acts committed by the *Kale Borroka* in the 2000s, it is possible to see that there have been, at times, strong variations from one year to another. The formal explanation is that the degree of conflict depends on political events (for example, the prohibition of the *Segi* organization), and on the (more or less) offensive strategies of the *abertzale* world. The opposing argument is quite different: this instability of the recorded facts is simply explained by the purely spontaneous nature of the acts of the *Kale Borroka*.

An example of a counter-symbolic work: Police abuse and brutality

In its 2004 report, the Spanish Department of Justice says that: ‘126 people were arrested for acts of street terrorism, while only five of them were sentenced to prison by the judges, and with 121 remaining free’ (Arzuaga, 2010). This is similar to the confessions of the young radicals met in the course of our study, that is, that the official data are an admission of powerlessness and the arbitrariness of police pressure.

Out of the 1383 young people arrested by the security forces between 2000 and 2008, 207 came before the judicial authorities (in general, the National Hearings) – after having been informed that they were wanted, or on the basis of a denunciation, in confessions obtained from other young people under duress. For these young people, there was clear evidence that the mass arrests were groundless: in fact, 61% of young people were released immediately after their detention and 11% remained free due to a lack of clear charges (Arzuaga, 2010).

These experiences convey to the members of the *Gurasoak* a deep sense of injustice, and the continuation of a practice of arbitrary arrests; accounts of which support this sense of victimization.¹³ Thus, the political consciousness of young activists feeds on the asymmetry of political resources that the various protagonists may have: the judicial status of young people becomes a political identity (victims of injustice), and the police and the judicial arena turn into a political space.

Officially, it is a misapprehension shared by both parties; a game in which everyone knows (and does not want to know), that everyone knows (and does not want to know), the truth of the exchange; as if the denial of knowledge was a common driving force in this distant confrontation, not just in words but also in acts. The Basque police have a somewhat paradoxical position: they are somehow a sovereign police force and yet they are involved in the repression of young Basques by fostering this politicized deviance and by using excessive force. However, within the police ranks, it does not appear to be recognized that repression may contribute to the escalation of violence.

The facts are intractable, and the issues are officially clear. There is no wish to enter an argument that would weaken the whole structure, and open the door to doubts expressed unofficially by interlocutors in the Basque police. Yet, for some police officers we interviewed, it was clear that this type of street violence was used politically by the Spanish government during Aznar's presidency (1996–2004), which deployed an unprecedented legal and media arsenal. One of the perverse effects of this escalation was that it placed the Basque police at odds with the Basque youth. The police were caught in a downward spiral, with many of its officials undergoing heavy reprisals from being associated with the national forces of repression. Police recognized, off the record, that the fight was disproportionate when compared to normal policing.

Theoretical conclusion: The past, the context and the action in the same feedback loop

Using the results of our case study, it is clear that the analysis of interactional violence dynamics allows us to reveal the past, and the socialization forged in silence, in the long and complex story of the individuals involved in this violence. Our theoretical conclusion, starting from this empirical study of street violence, is that all ideological projects must, where possible, be located in the action, with behaviours adjusting in a structure of cross-confrontational reasoning. Thus, the actor of violence becomes a dynamic construction. This is supported after our study in the form of this *prise de conscience*; analysing context as motivating and binding. This defines what can be updated from the embedded past (Lahire, 2002: 101). In a concrete sense, this means that social situations, ranging from informal to formal and to institutional, are real activators of our incorporated experiences, and precipitators of our actions or habits. We rely heavily on the social contexts that drive us. We leave some to develop in the future, while leaving others dormant.

In fact there already exists a positive context, a potential battleground that allows the transmission of an important element that eventually sees the cessation of violence on the streets. Investing, opposing and confronting can become inherited habits, a technique that resonates with actual engagement.

The nature of the context experienced by an individual helps in the act of self-knowledge. It is intrinsic and objective. It authorizes but limits any risk taking. As a result, it dictates what is allowed to be done (or not) in one's life. It depends to what degree we inhibit or repress our reserve of skills, acumen and knowledge that we possess, have learnt or acquired due to our own curiosity or initiative.

In the case of street violence, the logic of emotions can certainly play a part in the engagement with such violence. One may become involved in spite of oneself, and be caught up in the collective vortex of violence on the street.

However, most of the time, the action is outside the movement. It is an assortment of skills (for example, putting together a Molotov cocktail, identifying locations, signalling through eye-contact, behaviour during confrontational situations, managing press leaks and evading police raids), whether or not they are carried out in the midst of action. In this same type of street violence, the actor does not act in a vacuum, which leads us to consider a complementary perspective: the logic of situations (Collins, 2008).

There is no context without prior meaning: it is critical that we do not go against interactionism in the sociological tradition. However, there is still a context in which this sense can be expressed and embodied within a stable environment, forming a receptive space where expression is codified, and allowing for confrontation on the streets and attacking targets.

So much violence creates as many new conditions as the older ones it reproduced. The causes of the latter exist, but they are updated and refreshed automatically, in the course of intrinsically dynamic processes of violence.

It is for this reason that in the ongoing study of violence we must be careful to observe what is really happening in a violent confrontation, in order to respond more accurately to the following questions: how are the actors of violence (violent youth and police, for example) exploiting the opportunities offered by the fundamental logic of these situations; how do they make use of these new opportunities; and finally (an important issue), *how* do they feel and *what* do they feel they have earned, that is, how do they define a *symbolic victory* in conflict dynamics?

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Glossary

Abertzale – Patriot (Basque language)

Cuadrilla – Group of friends

Ertzaintza – Autonomous Basque police force

ETA: Euskadi ta Askatasuna (military) (Euskadi and Freedom) – Terrorist organization that seeks the formation of an independent state in Euskadi

Haika, Jarrai, Segi – Successive youth organizations linked to Basque radical nationalism

Ikastolas – Schools that teach in the Basque language

Kale Borroka - Struggle in the street (Basque language)

MLNV: Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco (Basque National Liberation Movement) – Set of movements linked to Basque radical nationalism

PNV: Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party) – Liberal Conservative Nationalist Party

Notes

1. Note that we do not attempt to present here the sum of the sociohistorical research on this nationalist movement (Mata López, 1993), and its relationship to violence in Franco Spain and post-Franco Spain, in particular the ETA violence (see Fernández Soldevilla and López Romo, 2012; Muro, 2008; Tejerina, 2001).
2. There were 400 acts of the *Kale Borroka* (all forms) on average per year between 2000 and 2009 (Arzuaga, 2010).

3. We mention other alternative influential subcultures such as squatters or punk music which are also very influential in the Basque country.
4. In the future, we will compare our hypothesis with the concept of actionism, 'as specific forms of action that are not aimed at the confirmation and reorganization of collective stocks of knowledge, but at their emergence. In this sense, their outcome is to a large degree uncertain, as are the opportunities and risks involved. Thus, actionisms are not based on handed down stocks of knowledge, but are of a specific reflexivity where this is understood not as a theoretical consideration, but as being embedded in practical processes of exploration and experiment on the base of actionisms' (Bohnsack and Nohl, 2003: 370).
5. J2 refers during the interview to his deep wounds and trauma caused by his confrontations with psychiatrists. He has experienced all the stereotypes that were imposed on him incredibly violently: 'A violent father, drug use, dropping out of school' were some of many anecdotes noted by his psychologist in prison.
6. The story of police torture during interrogations following the arrests was a difficult moment in the interviews. We let, for example, J2 talk and many anecdotes arose, such as the story of the trial during which the famous anti-terrorism judge Garzon read a tourist brochure in the *Audiencia Nacional* (National Hearings) while the indictment of a young fellow prisoner was being read. Through this testimony, we can measure the exorbitant cost of such a commitment when these acts were committed at the age of 18, 12 years ago.
7. These are all males. Two had been active in the 1990s: J1, 40 years, from Durango, a small town (31 km from Bilbao), graduate of law (San Sebastian); I, 40, Bilbao, Rekalde, UPV University, as an assistant professor. Three of them fought in the 2000s: G, 30, Durango, a graduate engineer; J2, 31, Durango, a graduate of an engineering school; J3, Bilbao, 31, a doctoral student.
8. There were two other types of original data. First we also had the unexpected opportunity to exploit original data from a series of surveys conducted by the Basque government (Ruiz Olabuenaga, 2005). This report on the *Violencia Juvenil en el País Vasco* was developed from the results of a series of surveys on 1200 young Basques aged 15–30 years in 2002. We also accessed other material, through an association called *Gurasoak*. It should be noted that this is a nationalist organization established in 1996, composed of the parents of teenagers detained or arrested for acts committed by the *Kale Borroka*. In 2009, executives told of a statistical compilation work of a young nationalist lawyer who defended this association. The latter provided lists of 1663 young activists between 1992 and 2007. This document, published in 2010, contains a large amount of police and judicial data that we analysed during the course of our study (Arzuaga, 2010).
9. Bilbao, 5 March 2011, 3 hours.
10. At: www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/PAIS_VASCO/ESPANA/PAIS_VASCO/JARRAI/ETA/HERRI_BATASUNA_/HB/Ertzaintza/detiene/otros/jovenes/paliza/agente/elpepisp/19931110elpepinac_7/Tes.
11. The *Gurasoak* association conducted work collating journalistic information, reports prepared by non-governmental organizations, official statistics, records and databases developed by accredited lawyers. This work led to the development of the computer base from which can be extracted some findings of a general nature (Arzuaga, 2010).
12. Durango, 3 May 2011, 1 hour.
13. A 2008 documentary by Eñaut Tolosa and Hammudi Al-Rahmoun Font shows this suffering by interviewing the families of these youths, filming the mass detentions of young Basques, documenting the lack of communication on the part of the National Hearings with regard to prison or convictions. This film was quite widely distributed and directly accessible via the internet, and has had a significant impact in the radical community and certainly achieved the

emotional construction of the human realities of *Kale Borroka*. The documentary was entitled *Broken Window* as a reference to social control theory (Kelling and Wilson, 1982).

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Author biography

Jérôme Ferret, an Associate Professor at University of Toulouse 1 Capitole (Idetcom) and Associate Researcher at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Cadis, EHESS-CNRS) studies the confrontational dynamics (conflict/violence) between youth and police in urban areas in France (community policing) and in Spain (radical nationalist violence in the Basque country, 'neo-anarchism' and *Indignados* in Catalonia). He has authored/co-authored articles in four main languages: English, French, Spanish and Catalan. His work has been published in the following international journals: *Policing and Society*, *International Review of Sociology*, *British Journal of Criminology*, *Annales de la Recherche Urbaine*, *Papeles del CEIC*, *Déviance et Société* and *European Journal of Crime and Criminal Justice*. Ferret's research interests comprise the following social and political issues: conflict and violence dynamics, urban violence, 'anti-system' movements, community policing and policing and he is currently working on the effects of digital media on the dynamics of conflict/violence and policing in recent collective digital mobilizations in Spain (*Indignados*).

Résumé

Pourquoi et comment certains jeunes deviennent-ils des combattants de rue prêts à se rallier derrière une idéologie politique ? Il s'agit là d'un problème complexe. A partir de données ethnographiques, je me propose de clarifier la question des intersections et des influences entre individus, pairs et conditions du discours dans la socialisation de la politique et de la violence. Mon objectif sera d'explorer et d'articuler les prédispositions individuelles et les dispositions acquises dans certaines familles, classes sociales ou groupes de pairs, marqués idéologiquement, afin de déterminer dans quelle mesure elles constituent une condition nécessaire pour que des jeunes hommes se tournent vers le combat de rue. Je tiens également à démontrer que les représentations de ces jeunes activistes ne sont pas des constructions mythologiques, mais des extensions spécifiques d'un processus antérieur et complexe de socialisation, le produit d'une interaction raisonnée virtuelle et physique avec les organisations policières et un moteur d'auto-référencement de la violence.

Mots-clés

Interactions raisonnantes, *Kale Borroka*, situations, socialisation complexe, violence urbaine

Resumen

¿Por qué y cómo algunos jóvenes se convierten en combatientes callejeros que se congregan detrás de una ideología política? Esta es una pregunta compleja. Con base en datos etnográficos, me gustaría esclarecer la cuestión de las intersecciones e influencias entre condiciones individuales, de pares y discursivas en la socialización política y en la violencia. Mi objetivo será explorar y articular cómo predisposiciones y disposiciones adquiridas de una familia determinada, una clase social o grupo de pares, en un fondo ideológico individual, constituyen o no requisitos para que hombres jóvenes se vuelquen a la lucha callejera nacionalista. Y me gustaría demostrar que las representaciones de los jóvenes activistas no son una construcción mitológica, sino que especifica extensiones de complejos procesos anteriores de socialización, productos de algunos compromisos discursivos virtuales y físicos (interactions raisonnantes en francés) con las organizaciones policiales y finalmente un motor de violencia auto-referencial.

Palabras clave

Kale Borroka, interacciones raisonnantes, situaciones, socialización compleja violencia callejera