The basque conflict

THE BASQUE CONFLICT

Project Framework

The Basque conflict, rendered more acute by the establishment of a terrorist organisation in the second half of the 20th century, illustrates the contemporary hindrances of an invigorated Europe, concerned with theories of integration and social consensus. This project intends to comprise a descriptive and theoretical approach, rather than a quantitative analysis based on the materialisation of the conflict by the violent incursions of the nationalist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA).

On the one hand, the first part compares and contrasts the sui generis Spanish state-building process to the thriving ' imagined community' of Sabino Arana, raised through the nationalism of the 19th century, and articulated in relevant facts and figures. On the other hand, the second part brings the conflict to a modern state of affairs, i. e. a scenario of diverse attempts to lessen violence and extremism. It considers micro and macro perspectives and reactions of exogenous actors to this aggiornamento, and despite the diverse interpretations of ethnicity, the paper considers the present context of globalisation, in which identities are no longer guaranteed through states and borders.

Introduction

The weaknesses in the process of Spanish state-building – to which Basque nationalism is inextricably linked – constitute an elementary foundation to understand the principles of ETA (1959), as a terrorist organisation, and the nature of the nationalist identities involved in the conflict. In accordance with Linz: ' Spain […] is a case of early state-building, where the political, social

and cultural integration of its territorial components was not fully

accomplished' (1973: 33), and as a result, its development differs from other

European case studies in significant ways, mainly due to its dramatic

collapse as a colonial power (Mees 2003).

Throughout time, Spain was downplayed from being the most dominant

European colonial power to a bankrupt, weakened state with ' internal

problems of legitimacy, identity, penetration and participation' (Mees 2003:

6). Within this unstable context, the unification of the disparate territories in

Spain resulted in a nation lacking the instruments of integration and

cohesion. Therefore, Spanish nationalism in the 19th century remained weak

and never became a movement (Seixas 1993).

The Post-Colonial State-Building
This process involved no common external enemy or national symbols that

would promote the idea of an ' imagined community' (Anderson 1999): it

was not the aggressive nature of Spanish nationalism that fuelled the '

durability of regional and local particularisms', but its weakness (Mees 2003:

7). The Spanish were never fully submitted to the idea of nation, and

remained loyal to their local regions, such as the Basque Provinces,

comprising a particular and differential culture, i. e. an ethnic community

that would later become mobilised as a political nation (Smith 1986).

In historical terms, the annexation of Navarre in the 16th century represents

the establishment of modern Spain and the supremacy of Castile over

uninfringeable cultures. Moreover, the Crown recognised the importance of

conceiving special rights to certain regions that became exempt from

appointing soldiers to the central forces, and were granted a system of laws and practices called fueros – that represented a major right of the Basque population, as they conferred (since its codification in the 17th century) conditions for decision-making in most political and economic affairs, with no intervention from the central government (Osma 1996: 34).

However, the evolution of the Carlist ideology (in the 19th century), desecrated the unwavering relations with Castile (Flynn 2000: 100), and following its victory in the third war (1872-1876), the Liberal Government declared the abolition of privileges to the Basque Country, instigating a strong resistance. Hence, the conflict in the Basque Country can be interpreted as a reaction to the abolition of rights and concessions granted throughout history, and according to the nationalists: the outraged reaction to the withdrawing of the fueros represented a ' national awakening' among the Basque people (Mees 2003).

Early Basque nationalist feeling in the 19th century created an hostile political and social attitude towards the central government, with a developing anti-Spanish and separatist culture (Mees 2003: 8). Furthermore, urban industrialisation and the influx of Spanish-speaking labourers were seen to pose a threat to Basque culture, which is extremely conservative and based around strictly Catholic values, encouraging a nationalist feeling (Woodworth 2001: 3). As Basque industrialisation occurred primarily in Biscay, with ' production of steel, modern shipyards and mining' (Conversi 1997: 48), these activities increased the demand for unskilled labour and society disintegration. As an illustration of this phenomenon, the population in Bilbao increased from 35, 505 inhabitants in 1877 to 83, 306 in 1900

(Atienza 1979: 73) – out of the 80% of immigrants, 50% were not Basques (Atienza 1979: 74).

The Establishment of an ' Imagined Community'
The nationalist ideology expanded by Sabino Arana, founder of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) in 1895 (Mees 2003: 5), followed his perception of industrialisation – and the consequent immigration to the region – as a threat to Basque culture. Arana published his book For the Independence of Biscay (1892) and assisted the formation of the first Batzoki – later the Bizkai Buru Batzar – i. e. an ideological group that worked as a precursor of the PNV (Elorza 1978: 113). However, after the intervention of Spanish Authorities, Arana was arrested and the party rose as an organised structure, adhering to its manifesto (PNV Manifesto 1906: Volume II).

Returned to Biscay, after a course of Law in Barcelona – where he was impressed by the Catalan Language and the development of Catalonia after the Renaixença- Arana (a central player of nationalism in the 19th century) was motivated to study Euskerab and contribute to the Basque culture (Conversi 1997: 74). He took the view that only absolute independence from the Spanish state would secure permanent happiness and freedom for the Basque people as culture, history and race needed to be reaffirmed in order to solve the rooted problems. As a consequence, anything Spanish (or non-Basque) would have to be expelled (Mees 2003: 803), as following the nationalist feeling, the only way to succeed would be through the creation of a ' nationalist history with deep mythological implications, as well as nationalist symbols and purification of the Basque language' (Payne 1971: 23).

Therefore, in a primary attempt to materialise the nationalist ideology, Arana created symbols that included: the name, Euskadi; the anthem, Gora Ta Gora; and the flag Ikurriña, adopted by the PNV in 1933. Unlike Spanish unification, Arana succeeded in creating an ' imagined community', with history, traditions and culture unique to the Basque region (Anderson 1999).

Violent Incursions and Peace Attempts

Since the early 1990s, the opposition within Basque society to the continuation of the conflict has been steadily increasing: groups of citizens became effectively mobilised in an effort to spread their pacifist views throughout the Basque community and build a new anti-violence consensus (Funes 1998: 493). Beyond Basque society, they aim at influencing political leaders, Spanish and Basque governments and at diminishing the power of ETA. As they believe that the people of the Basque Provinces has a responsibility for the existence and the continuity of violence, they intend to become a vehicle for peace. These pacifist groups have increased the conditions – both socially and politically – for resolution, though ETA retains the support of a ' qualitatively significant sector of Basque society' (Funes 1998).

On a micro perspective of external intervention, Gesto por la Paz is composed of 160 subgroups throughout the Basque country and Navarre and organises street demonstrations that regularly attract 15-20, 000 followers; and Elkarri, with up to 107 subgroups, was founded by members of the nationalist left, close to ETA and aims to influence those who would join the terrorist organisation or carry out violent attacks. The latter tries to expand dialogue on both sides through conferences, speeches and publications, as

both groups look at the Basque people for support in denouncing violence and reducing separatist radical movements (Funes 1998).

While groups such as these have done much over the years to create conditions for peace, as long as there is a minority who sees violence as the only solution, grass-root level protests have only a limited impact. There is evidence that Basque society is less and less inclined towards supporting the violence of ETA, giving room for optimism, but peace will only come when the leadership of the group comes to see diplomacy as the way forward.

There are three important moments in the history of ETA as a terrorist group, which halted its activities and brought together the two sides of the conflict. The first moment follows the most intense attack against civilians in 1987, when the political parties decided to enter into talks with one another, motivating ETA and the government to discuss the problems of the Basque Country, such as: the Pact of Madrid (1987), the Pact of Ajuria Enea (1988), the Pact of Ardanza (1988), and the Pact of Navarra (1988). In addition, the Plan Ardanza (1998), created by the President of the Spanish Government, José Antonio Ardanza Garro, in an attempt to solve the situation in the Basque Country, led to a proposal by the PNV and ETA to pursue a general agreement, in which the parties were committed to bring together the six territories of the Basque Country whereas ETA would declare ceasefire.

Secondly, and considering the incapacity of the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) in resolving the Basque conflict, parties and ideological organisations signed a pact in Estella, Navarre (1998), according to which they would study the adoption of the same

political resolutions applied to the Northern Ireland case. The elections in the Autonomous Basque Community declared victory of the PNV, and there were many agreements between this party and the PP Government until the secret meeting of 1999 between the two parties, which represented strong contact between ETA and the central government. However, for PP, this was a way to understand whether the terrorist group would be favourable to a definite ceasefire. Therefore, the meeting proved unfruitful and the terrorist attacks restarted.

ETA declared the end of ceasefire in 1999 and following this, the PNV accused the terrorist organisation of constituting a bad influence on Basque nationalism. On the other hand, ETA published the negotiations with the PNV and confessed the false ceasefire of 1998. The Euskal Herritarrok was favoured by the PNV but decided to abandon the Basque Parliament, leaving the latter in a political minority.

Finally, the third important halt in violence was the announcement of a permanent ceasefire from the 24th March 2006 onwards, in order to carry on the negotiations with the central government of José Luis Zapatero (PSOE), who informed the media on the 29th June 2006 that the conditions for an institutional dialogue had been met.

Reactions of Exogenous Actors
In terms of international cooperation by external actors, the reaction of France to this conflict has been elementary, as although in the past, the Basque leadership has chosen to operate from that country – due to fewer police pressure- since the 1990's, it has made an effort to apprehend the

ETA leadership (Telegraph 2nd March 2002). Nearly all high-ranking members of the organisation have been seized in France, including the suspected leader, Jurden Martitegi, arrested in April of this year.

However, the significance of the Catholic faith in Basque nationalist expression led to another fundamental reaction, as it preceded the intervention of Pope John XXIII, in the Encyclical Letter Pacem in Terris (1963). In accordance with this document, minority groups became widespread throughout the world but due to some solid reasons in the international state of affairs, '[…] minority peoples are often obliged to live within the territories of a nation of a different ethnic origin' (Pope John XXIII 1963 §94). Consequently:

This situation gives rise to serious problems [and] indeed, the best interests of justice are served by those public authorities who do all they can to improve the human conditions of the members of these minority groups, especially in what concerns their language, culture, ancient traditions, and their economic activity and enterprise (Pope John XXIII 1963 §96).

This participation – complemented by the address of Pope John Paul II to the United Nations (1995), where it is stated that the phenomenon of ethnicity ' must not be underestimated or regarded as a simple left-over of the past' but conversely '[…] demands serious interpretation, and a closer examination on the levels of anthropology, ethics and law (John Paul II 1995 §7) – appeals to the sense of respect of established nations and constitutes an illustration of international interventions that protect the interests of ethnic minorities. Although many authors share these same perspectives,

papal interventions were particularly relevant in the religious status quo of that region.

Moreover, as far as EU resolutions are concerned, and regarding the terrorist attack of 11th March 2004, the European Council carried out a ' Declaration on Combating Terrorism' (2004) referring to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations (Security Council 1373 of 2001), which states that granting support to the victims is paramount in the fight against terrorism. In this framework, the EU revised its strategic principles, which included: strengthening a response against terrorism and its consequences; restraining the access of terrorists to economic resources; and maximising the capacity within the EU bodies to investigate and prosecute terrorists. Furthermore, all Member States would be obliged to act in solidarity in the case of a terrorist attack, mobilising all their resources.

This measure complements the List of Terrorist Organisations – that includes ideological groups of ETA – created by the European Council in 2003. Similarly, the United States of America, following a recommendation to improve international collaboration by the President of the Spanish Government, José María Aznar, included this organisation in their list of terrorist threats.

Conclusion

As an example of an ethnic conflict, the preservation of nationalism and racial identity in the Basque Country has been guaranteed through violence – in the name of its tradition, history and national symbols – by those who perceive ancient heritage as an entitlement to self-determination, and

regard their ethnicity as racially different from the rest of Spain. Violent incursions were justified on these grounds.

In accordance with previous considerations, Sabino Arana realised that in order to save Basque cultural identity (including moral and religious values), nationalism would require an exclusivist identity. Therefore, one of the core principles of Basque nationalism became ' unity of race', maintained through eliminating Spanish influence and migration (Payne 1971: 36-37). In the Catalan and Galician Nationalist movements, membership can be gained through learning the language and assimilating culture. However, those wishing to join the PNV had to prove that their first four surnames (later only one) were ' etymologically' Basque. Therefore, in practice, Basque national identity cannot be acquired through learning of the language or practicing of Basque traditions. There is no possibility of non-natives joining and as such, it is a very exclusivist movement (Mees 2003: 12). The Basque nationalists encouraged a sense of a unique Basque racial purity, different from the one of the maketos (Conversi 1997: 60), there is condemnation of marriage between Basques and non-Basques due to the proliferation of Spanish values rather than Basque values (Flynn 2000: 154) and the belief that ' compared to the Basques, the Spanish did not even constitute a race of their own, being a mix of many peoples' (Flynn 2000: 154). There is not only a strong racial element, but also a strong religious one, with Basque nationalists believing that there should be absolute subordination of the political sphere to the religious one and of the state to the church (Payne 1971: 38). This racial stance has implications for immigrants wishing to come and work in the Basque region. Radicalisation has happened at times of mass

immigration by non-Basques into the area, creating an anti-migrant culture within the community and a hatred for anything non-Basque. Race and religion are the core values of Basque Nationalism, not culture, giving it an extremely exclusive identity.