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On the Interpretation of Terrorist Violence: ETA and the Basque Political Process

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Whatever social scientists might desire, there are some social phenomena whose impact is immediate and profound, even decisive, but whose significance cannot effectively be assessed until well after their occurrence; and one of these is surely the eruption of great domestic violence (Geertz 1973:323).

Political violence, labeled loosely as “terrorism,” is a seemingly ubiquitous factor in twentieth-century world politics. Coping with it has become a major preoccupation of governments and is the object of considerable international cooperation among them. The purpose of this paper is to examine the case of ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna or Basque Country and Freedom) within the Basque nationalist movement in order to underscore several of the conceptual weaknesses in the literature on terrorism while also suggesting avenues for future research.

The tactics employed by ETA have included bank robberies, kidnappings, intimidation, sloganeering through public graffiti, hard-line political posturing through surrogate political parties, exaction of a “revolutionary tax” from targeted Basque businesses, bombings, and assassinations. Between 1968 and 1987, approximately 600 persons have died in ETA-related actions—including ETA activists, Spanish police, and unfortunate bystanders.¹ Consequently, ETA is regarded as one of Western Europe’s most virulent terrorist movements, second only to the IRA. Although space considerations preclude our systematic development of a comparative perspective, it is our belief that much of the following analysis is applicable to the study of other “terrorist” movements as well; however, as will become apparent, it should

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¹ Clark (1984:124–6) notes that there is considerable ambiguity in the figures since it is not always possible to ascertain whether a particular action should be attributed to the ETA. Our estimate was derived from the combination of the figures provided by Clark (1984) with those given by Fusi (1988).

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in no way be construed as an attempt to "explain" any of them in a causal sense.

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF TERRORISM

We might begin by considering certain definitional anomalies and methodological quandaries. Studies of political terrorism provide a good example of how a research field can flourish without even minimal agreement regarding the definition of basic terms. One only has to consider the overview in Schmid's *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature* to find that there is almost complete lack of consensus regarding such notions as "political," "power," "aggression," and "force," which in turn are used to define "terrorism." In fact, if one reviews the literature on terrorism, the major consensus among the various authors seems to be that there is no adequate definition of it, the difficulty being not the degree of detail or comprehensiveness but the very "general framework [that] is chosen for definition" (Schmid 1983:8). We continue to argue over whether terrorism is the result of primitive logic, religious fanaticism, a type of warfare, ritual action, faulty vestibular functions in the middle ear, or psychopathology. Indeed, it might be well to sound two cautionary notes drawn from the social scientific literature. One regards the similarities between the present theories on terrorism and those produced decades ago by pioneering anthropologists in the fields of magic, religion, and totemism. The other derives from Max Weber's methodological concerns with the desirability of causal explanation and with distinguishing objectivity from value judgment.

At the turn of the century, armchair anthropologists regularly interpreted fragmentary data on religion, witchcraft, taboo, and other social institutions without much regard for their broader cultural contexts; rather, the tendency was to explain seemingly quaint practices in terms of emotional states or logical mistakes. Fear, awe, fanaticism, evil projections, and deficient causal inferences were employed profusely to account for a variety of institutions. Subsequently, social anthropologists denounced this "psychological fallacy," also known as the "If I were a horse" argument, wherein one projects one's own emotions and attitudes onto the subject under study were he to be placed in their situation. A fine example of the approach is Spencer's treatment (1882) of primitive religion, which he derives from dreams and the belief in ghosts, his conclusion being that ancestor worship is at the root of every primitive religious system. Tylor (1871) evoked the notion of "*anima*" (soul) and the theory of animism, which remained unchallenged for many years until advances in both psychology and ethnology prompted its abandonment.

In the "dream theories" of religion, the investigator imposed his own logical constructs upon primitive belief systems. Contemporary analysts who explain violent nationalist movements as the product of a mere "millenarian

dream” or who contend that terrorism is the result of “messianism” can be considered heirs to such thinking. The anthropological study of totemism provides a somewhat different lesson for the student of terrorism. W. H. R. Rivers defined it in 1914 as a combination of (1) a social element (the connection of an animal or plant with, typically, an exogamous group or clan); (2) a psychological element (a belief in a relation of kinship between members of the group and the animal, plant, or thing); and (3) a ritual element (taboos on eating the totem). By 1920, Van Gennep distinguished forty-one theories of totemism; yet as early as 1916 Boas had charged that it was an artificial entity that existed nowhere outside of the mind of the anthropologist. Rather, totemism in nature was epiphenomenal to the formation of a social system. Lévi-Strauss postulated a homology in response to the question of why the animal and vegetable domains offer a nomenclature for denoting a social system and what logical relations exist between the system of denotation and the denoted system that was situated not so much within the system of denotation, as Boas contended, but in a differential feature existing between the given species and the clans. The lesson is that when the semantic field is distorted by singling out certain aspects at the expense of others and by granting them an originality that they do not in fact possess, we are deceived by the mirage of illusory categories—such as totemism. Consequently, Lévi-Strauss said that

totemism is like hysteria in that once we are persuaded to doubt that it is possible arbitrarily to isolate certain phenomena and to group them together as diagnostic signs of an illness, or of an objective institution, the symptoms themselves vanish or appear refractory to any unifying interpretation. . . . But the comparison with totemism suggests a relation of another order between scientific theories and culture, one in which the mind of the scholar himself plays as large a part as the minds of the people studied; it is as though he were seeking, consciously or unconsciously, and under the guise of scientific objectivity, to make the latter—whether mental patients or so-called “primitives” more *different* than they really are (1962:1).

By substituting “terrorism” for “totemism” it is hard to imagine a more precise characterization of the muddled state of affairs in our studies.

There is a similar problem with the anthropological analysis of witchcraft and sorcery, since these terms may turn out to be “labels for social phenomena that differ radically from society to society” (Beidelman 1970:351). Such taxonomic preoccupations may conceal problematical interdependencies when applied on a comparative level, and we may “feel we have explained matters away through having imposed some nominal category” (Beidelman 1970). Consequently, Crick has proposed that “our understanding will advance when ‘witchcraft’ is analytically dissolved into a larger frame of reference” (1976:112). If the foregoing can be said of anthropologists who have carried out extensive and detailed studies of totemism and witchcraft in many societies, it is even more applicable to those of us who, possessing scarcely

any ethnographic knowledge about terrorist groups, tend to talk of “international terrorism” in the most general manner, as if we were dealing with the real “thing.” As with totemism and witchcraft, it may be that the theoretical advances in our understanding of “terrorism” require us to first disassemble the general category into the types of behaviors and persons constitutive of it.

Weber’s methodological essays should caution us against two other major flaws in many of the scholarly treatments of terrorism. One concerns the reliability of causal explanations in the social sciences; the other refers to the confusion of objectivity with value judgment. Weber does not deny the desirability of the quest for causation but rejects the possibility that one cause—or even a simplistic set of definite causes—can fully explain the actions of what he calls the “historical individual” (the “terrorist” would be one such individual). For Weber, causal analysis involves the imputation of motive which, in turn, rests upon assumptions. This analytical approach prompted him to make a comparison that is particularly *à propos* to the present subject: He equated the search for historical causality with the problem of determining guilt in the criminal court process. He notes, in regarding the latter, “For this question is no longer a purely causal one, soluble by the simple establishing of facts which are ‘objectively’ discoverable by perception and causal interpretation. Rather, it is a problem of criminal policy oriented towards ethical and other values” (1949:168–9). Weber’s skepticism regarding simplistic causal analysis is shared by other leading theorists. Thus Geertz contends that social analysis “is more like interpreting a constellation of symptoms than tracing a chain of causes” (1973:316); whereas, for Needham, “any causal, and particularly uncausal, explanation in comparative sociological analysis is unlikely to be right” (1962:122). All of them were reacting in part against the same turn-of-the-century armchair anthropology considered earlier that was obsessed with explaining the origins of such institutions as religion, law, and the family—the quintessential quest for causality that has long since disappeared from the social scientific agenda.

Such longstanding caveats regarding causal analysis in the social science literature seem to have escaped the notice of students of terrorism, since many of their publications and all of their conferences are concerned with the “causes and consequences” of the phenomenon. Such was the case, for instance, with the one organized by Rand in 1980 that brought together 144 officials and investigators from thirteen countries, even though its director was well aware that “discussion of the causes of terrorism or the conditions that are propitious to terrorism are invariably frustrating [since] . . . we do not know what causes terrorism to flourish in one society and to be absent in another” (Jenkins 1982:9). Why then not abandon the causal frame as the main intellectual strategy in the analysis of political violence?

The confusion of objectivity with value judgment is another major flaw in the literature on terrorism. Weber’s discussion of objectivity is premised on

the essential discontinuity between factual and normative statements—between the “is” and the “ought”:

What is really at issue is the intrinsically simple demand that the investigator and the teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts (including the “value-oriented” conduct of the empirical individual whom he is investigating) and his own practical evaluation. . . . These two things are logically different and to deal with them as though they were the same represents a confusion of entirely heterogeneous problems (1949:11).

The crucial implication of such a methodological viewpoint is that scientific analysis can help determine the efficacy of adopting certain means for the attainment of certain goals, although no amount of scientific knowledge can determine how a person should value the latter. Faced with irreconcilably competing ideals, empirical knowledge and logical analysis can only help clarify their nature; however, science cannot tell a social actor how to choose. As summarized by Giddens, “The whole point of Weber’s analysis is that there is an absolute gulf between factual and ethical truth, and that no amount of empirical knowledge can validate the pursuit of one ethic rather than the other” (1971:137). Such thinking led Weber to distinguish between a political conduct guided by an “ethic of responsibility” and one guided by an “ethic of ultimate ends”; in the latter there is no rational calculation of means to secure the ultimate ideals. The practical politician will be compelled to mediate—and ultimately choose—between antagonistic positions, but “this has nothing whatsoever to do with scientific ‘objectivity’ ” (1949:57). This by no means implies moral indifference to the issues studied or the elimination of ideals from scientific discussion.

Given the emotional and practical consequences of terrorism in the modern world, it is scarcely surprising that much of the research on it is commissioned by existing states or is otherwise advocacy by its nature. In the study of political violence we are particularly tempted to disregard the epistemological gulf between factual and normative propositions, as if there should be no question as to what “ought to be” the case regarding such a heinous phenomenon. This tendency—to define terrorism as more of a “problem” to be dealt with rather than as a “phenomenon” to be studied in its own terms—thereby violates Weber’s dictum that the social sciences “are the least fitted to presume to save the individual the difficulty of making a choice” (1949:10) and consequently also disregards the methodological imperative that science cannot determine the validity or falsity of ultimate ideals.

BASQUE NATIONALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF ETA

Given the foregoing general definitional problems and the advocatory nature of much of the research on terrorism, it is scarcely surprising that the literature is dominated by instrumentalist approaches which frequently lead to prescrip-

tive conclusions.² The extent to which this is so may be illustrated by examining the Basque case, and particularly the attempts to understand ETA.

The modern Basque nationalist movement was founded in the last decade of the nineteenth century by Sabino de Arana. It was in large measure stimulated by the perception that Basque culture was in imminent danger of extinction. During the nineteenth century, Basques fought and lost two wars (the Carlist campaigns) against liberal, centralist Spanish governments in defense of regional privilege as guaranteed by ancient Basque *fueros* or charters. Militarily defeated and politically prostrate by the end of the nineteenth century, the Basque provinces were experiencing a new threat to their cultural identity. Rampant industrialization and urbanization of the Basque area had converted it into a magnet for migration from throughout Iberia. The newcomers became a majority in key Basque economic centers. Meanwhile, Basque culture, and particularly use of the language, was retreating visibly. Arana called for repatriation of non-Basque Spaniards to their natal areas and proclaimed that the Basque country should be exclusively the homeland of those who were racially Basque.

The labyrinthine history of Basque nationalism is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that its fortunes waxed and waned in the early years as it experienced schisms between the hardliners seeking total independence of the Basque Country and the more moderate regionalists who envisioned varying degrees of Basque autonomy within a Spanish state structure. Basque ethnonationalism—a coalition of the traditional social elite, a segment of the bourgeoisie, and the rural peasantry—was ideologically conservative and particularly leery of the political rhetoric of class conflict in the urban, industrial centers as a political radicalism that was easily identifiable with the non-Basque, lower-class immigrants. The Basque Catholic clergy exerted considerable influence within the movement, giving it theocratic overtones.

During the second decade of the twentieth century and the period of the Spanish Republic (1931–36), the mainstream Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) was able to contest (at times quite successfully) local and national elections, becoming a dominant political force in municipal and provincial bodies and a vocal minority within the Spanish Parliament. Conversely, during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923–30) the movement was outlawed and forced into underground clandestinity.

Probably the most impressive—if ill-fated—political triumph of Basque

² One of the most ambitious and influential books on political violence in the modern world, Horowitz's *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, unabashedly states that political stability and conflict reduction are positive values. The author notes, "It is . . . both fruitless and undesirable to attempt to abolish ethnic affiliations, but not at all fruitless to attempt to limit their impact" (1984:xiii). For a particularly egregious example of treatment of a "terrorist" group as a political anathema virtually by definition, see Conor Cruise O'Brien's (1988) recent, ostensibly objective, analysis of the Sikh movement in the Punjab.

nationalism was creation of the Government of Euskadi during the first nine months (1936–37) of the Spanish Civil War. While the Basque state was a coalition of nationalist and republican forces, the former controlled the key posts (including the presidency). Defeated by Franco in 1937, the Basque government was forced into exile, establishing its seat in Paris with little semblance of its former coalitionist character. That is, it became almost synonymous with the Basque Nationalist Party.

Basque nationalism during the Franco years pursued an anti-Madrid campaign in international forums. The exiled Basque president, Jose Antonio Aguirre, and his supporters collaborated closely with the Allies during World War II, establishing intelligence networks in Europe and throughout the Basque emigrant communities in Latin America and Asia. Confident that the fall of Mussolini and Hitler presaged that of Franco, Aguirre established residence in New York City to press the Basque case before the United Nations. Ultimately, however, the effort was a victim of the Cold War and the political considerations of the superpowers. Desirous of establishing military bases in Spain during the early 1950s, the United States reversed what had been an effective international political and economic boycott of the Spanish regime. Consequently, the Basque Nationalist Party was beset with a failed policy and an aging leadership in the late 1950s, which were the darkest depths of the Franco years, since they were characterized by systematic state suppression of all Basque cultural expressions including use of the language. While it continued passive resistance within Spain and commanded the loyalties and financial support of many Basques in the emigrant diaspora, the party seemed locked into a waiting game of simply outlasting the Francoists.

It was at this juncture in 1959, that a group of Basque youths, exasperated with the “do little” policy, formed ETA, proclaiming that the Basque Country was occupied by a foreign power and calling for a campaign of national liberation. This was consonant with one ideological strand within traditional Basque nationalism; however, ETA made three original contributions. First, it eschewed confessionism by advocating the exclusion of the church from politics. Second, it rejected race as a basis of Basqueness and substituted the notion of *ethnos* as expressed in commitment to the language and Basque cultural ideals. By rejecting biological criteria, ETA made it possible to accommodate non-Basques, particularly the sympathetic descendants of former non-Basque migrants to the area. Third, ETA evinced concern over the plight of the workers within the capitalist system and advocated creation of an independent socialist state for Basques (Jáuregui, 1986:592–5).

In 1964 ETA released a pamphlet entitled “Insurrection in the Basque Country,” in which it likened the area to a Spanish colony, identified it with Fanon’s colonized “wretched of the earth,” and called for rebellion against the oppressors. Recognizing that direct military confrontation was out of the question, ETA opted for the classic third-world insurrectionist model, in

which guerrilla action was designed to provoke state repression of the general populace, thereby raising the latter's political consciousness and resentment, which could then be channeled into support for the guerrilla movement. The Franco dictatorship, which was quick to react to any challenge, provided the perfect foil.

In order to maximize its effectiveness while minimizing its exposure, ETA opted for an atomistic cellular structure of unconnected local groups of a few individuals acting autonomously or on orders from a single contact from above. This made it extremely difficult for the Spanish police to penetrate the organization and also assured damage control by restricting the amount of information a captured activist could provide, even under the duress of the torture which had become commonplace during interrogation sessions. Most ETA activists were young, single males who were part-timers, in the sense that they were students, workers, or agriculturists who were activated only sporadically for an *ekintza* (action). At any one time there were only a few *liberados* (liberated individuals) who were provided with financial support from the organization to enable them to devote all of their energies to its purposes. They periodically met in assembly to formulate tactics and goals.

Three other situational factors facilitated ETA's activities as well. First, it had access to an international network of other national liberation movements. The nature and extent of such ties is but imperfectly understood. It is clear, however, that ETA received some of its arms from abroad, maintained contacts with groups like the IRA, and trained at least some of its key activists in places like Algeria. Second, ETA was able to make excellent strategic use of European discomfort with the Franco dictatorship. France, in particular, provided refuge for political dissidents. The adjacent French Basque area became an ideal haven for those activists who had been identified by Spanish authorities. While less politicized than Spanish Basques, there was a modicum of sympathy for Basque nationalism among some French Basques, a fact that allowed ETA to use their area as a staging ground for its activities across the border. The frontier itself was extremely porous. Spain depended heavily upon trade with the Common Market countries and European tourism and was therefore not in a position to seal its borders. There were also the longstanding Basque contraband networks through the Pyrenees and a myriad of small vessels engaged in the extensive Basque maritime activity in the Bay of Biscay. ETA was therefore able to move personnel and arms with near impunity both into and out of Spain.³ ETA's third tactical advantage was the very nature of its guerrilla activity. In large measure the organization could select the time and place of each *ekintza* with an eye toward maximizing its symbolic value through selection of prominent and precise targets, rather than

³ In point of fact, of the thousands of detentions of suspected ETA members by the Spanish authorities over the past two decades, virtually none has transpired at the French-Spanish border.

resorting to indiscriminate violence. It did not limit its activities to the Basque area, but it operated in such places as Barcelona, Madrid, and Zaragoza—forcing the Spanish government to institute a national state of alert. ETA's most spectacular accomplishment along these lines was the 1973 assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco, Franco's handpicked successor, in the streets of Madrid.

Despite such strengths, ETA's fortunes waxed and waned. The very success in provoking the Spanish state periodically brought its full repressive capacity down upon the Basque Country, resulting in harsh police tactics that led to the detention of many ETA members and sympathizers and forced others to flee abroad. Another problem was the internal division within the organization, which led to two major schisms. In 1966 ETA leaders held their watershed Fifth Assembly during which three factions emerged. One group argued for the primacy of working-class conflict over the goals of Basque nationalism and opted for incorporation within the revolutionary movements of the new European left. Another faction rejected Marxism in favor of traditional Basque nationalist objectives. Yet a third contingent stressed activism and armed conflict, arguing that liberation of the Basque Country was the prime objective and that ideological debate should be postponed until the period of postindependence. This third faction triumphed and expelled the first two from the movement (Jáuregui 1986:598). There was yet one more schism within ETA in 1974 of considerable historical importance. There was a debate on the eve of Franco's death over the tactics which had divided the organization into ETA *político-militar* (ETApm) and ETA *militar* (ETAm). The former, while espousing nationalist goals, evinced a concern with working-class issues. ETApm also advocated a blend of conventional political activity with selective armed action. Conversely, ETAm favored continued, unrelenting armed resistance as the only avenue toward true national liberation.

To the surprise of many observers, Spain in the post-Franco period underwent a successful democratic transformation and, as a part of the process, received a new constitution that guaranteed a high degree of political autonomy to the regions, particularly to the "historic territories" of Catalunya and the Basque Country. Both were allowed to institute regional governments with a president, parliament, and ministries. In the case of the Basques, this process has been dominated by the Basque Nationalist Party. In point of fact conventional politics in the Basque Country now embrace a spectrum of political parties ranging from the right to the radical left, some of which are Basque nationalist and others Spanish in orientation. Despite this considerable degree of freedom in political expression, ETA remains an unresolved challenge to the system. For the ETA hardliners, the enemy was never Franco but rather Madrid, and those Basques who participate in the current political process are simply collaborators. The mantle of armed resistance has passed

exclusively to ETAm, since most of the activists of ETAp have "come in from the cold" to form the political party of *Euskadiko Eskerra* (EE) or the Basque Country Left, which now works within the system. At the same time a more radical political party, *Herri Batasuna* (HB) or the People United, is viewed as ETAm's political surrogate. While it contests elections, it refuses to occupy posts within the Spanish or Basque governments. (It does, however, participate in local governance and even controls some town councils.)

Following the lead of the Italian state in dealing with the Red Brigades, Spanish authorities have allowed ETA members willing to renounce violence to "reenter" society on the condition that they abandon armed struggle. Several hundred ETA operatives, almost exclusively from the dissolved ETAp, have done so. At the same time, French authorities have changed their policy toward the organization. Initially, they required that known ETA operatives in France reside outside the French Basque area. Some were expelled from the country and thereby forced to resettle in other parts of the world. Since 1986, however, France has extradited or returned to Spain over 200 alleged members of ETA and other political exiles.

Perhaps the most significant development—and one that raised real hopes of ending the stalemate—was the publicly admitted contact between the Spanish government and ETA as the first step toward a negotiated settlement. Two rounds of discussions have failed; yet their very existence is most remarkable, since "negotiation" is now the key demand of Basque political radicals and moderates alike. There is cautious optimism in government circles, which is premised, in part, upon the apparent recent setbacks suffered by ETA. At the same time there is reason to be pessimistic regarding the possibility of a negotiated settlement. Since 1978 ETA has demanded five conditions for a cessation of hostilities: (1) amnesty for all Basque political prisoners; (2) legalization of all political parties including those espousing separatism; (3) expulsion of the Spanish Guardia Civil and other police agencies from the Basque Country; (4) adoption of measures to improve the conditions of the working class; and (5) recognition of the national sovereignty of Euskadi and the right of the Basque people to self-determination (Clark 1984:253). If these demands are truly non-negotiable, as stated repeatedly by ETA, then it is difficult to conceive of a compromise which would be acceptable to both the Spanish state and Basque nationalist hardliners; yet, the most politically sensitive of the foregoing points is the "right" of self-determination. Basque nationalists insist this is not such an extreme demand when, for example, Canada recently proffered it to Quebec and, more to the point, the Spanish Socialists now in power favored it when they were in the opposition.

Such, then, is a brief overview of the history and current status of ETA. In presenting it we do not purport to contribute anything new to the literature since, in fact, there are several excellent and extensive treatments of the

subject.⁴ The review forms, however, the necessary basis for the critique that follows, for it is our contention that analyses of ETA to date have tended to emphasize two aspects of the phenomenon: the concern with its organizational properties and activities (internal structure, recruitment, membership profile, ideology, and tactics), as well as interest in determining the extent of support enjoyed by the organization within the Basque Country. The underlying premise in most of the analyses is that it is necessary to understand the origins and supporting rationales of ETA in order to prescribe remedies for it.

UNDERSTANDING ETA

Given the preceding emphases and objectives, the literature on ETA is dominated by detailed historiography and the analysis of electoral results and public opinion polls. There has also been one major attempt to synthesize the results of such studies in the 1986 report by a panel of international experts on terrorism (Rose *et al.*, 1986), which had been commissioned by the Basque government as a way of prescribing a plan of action for combating ETA.⁵ All such treatments tended to emphasize and indeed reify ETA's organizational properties, and led to such statements as those indicating that 15 percent of the Basque populace "supports" ETA (as reflected in the electoral tallies of EE and HB) and 50 percent "understand" it (that is, empathize with it to some degree), as determined by public opinion polls (Jáuregui 1986:603). Such interpretations are not incorrect but, in our view, incomplete. In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of ETA, and its many seeming anomalies, it is necessary to explore the full implications of Jáuregui's (1986:599) statement that: "ETA always defines itself as a movement of national liberation and not as a political party. Its activity is not exclusively political but fundamentally resistant; it is a regenerative activity." In this respect ETA is as much a concept (with symbolic properties) as a structure. Hence, attempts to situate it within the Basque political spectrum and measure its public support capture only some of its several dimensions. In a conceptual sense, ETA permeates the Basque scene and is even capable of transcending Basque politics *per se* in response to situational and symbolic exigencies. It therefore becomes extremely difficult to measure support for ETA in standard political terms and equate or translate such support into a measure of ETA's strength or efficacy. We will consider each of these points in turn.

ETA and the Political Process

There are several issues which obfuscate any effort to gauge ETA's political support. First, there is the fact that the organization has denounced the politi-

⁴ For two of the better ones, see Jáuregui Bereciartu (1981) and Clark (1984). For an excellent discussion of the ETA's recent tactics, see Ibarra Güell (1987).

⁵ The exercise proved to be largely sterile and banal, as the conclusions and recommendations of the panel scarcely transcended a statement of the obvious, thereby becoming a major embarrassment for its sponsors. For an analysis of the report, see Zulaika, n.d.

cal process itself at various times and exhorted its supporters to abstain from elections. Second, while ETApM essentially converted itself into a political party (EE), it thereby practically ceased to exist as a manifestation of ETA. Third, ETAm has continued its armed resistance; while the HB Political Party (in at least certain respects) purports to represent and defend its political interests. It is not altogether clear, however, that the two of them act in perfect concert or that one controls the other. In short, HB is more than simply ETAm's political arm.

Such caveats notwithstanding, political analysts have sought to determine relative support for ETA from Basque electoral results. In the June 15, 1977, election, for example, EE gained 60,996 votes, or 6 percent of the total cast.⁶ While it was widely recognized that ETAm opposed the election, it was felt that this provided the first, if imperfect, electoral measure of the strength of ETA. The crudeness was further intensified by the fact that EE espoused a socialist agenda and therefore provided electoral expression for the Basque-nationalist and socialist voter who was not necessarily a supporter of ETA.

By the March 1, 1979, election, HB had entered the fray and garnered 15.5 percent of the vote (172,110). Combined with the support of EE, the "radical" Basque nationalist vote approximated 23 percent of the total. There is a sense in which the HB tally in this first contested election was a fairly accurate reflection of ETA's electoral support, and it is reasonable to include EE's totals as well, since the party remained chronologically and ideologically close to its ETApM roots, which continued to engage in some clandestine activity.

In our opinion, the subsequent electoral results are more difficult to analyze. In the May 8, 1983, election, EE received 85,450 votes, while HB's total had declined slightly to 170,536. Stated in terms of percentage of the electorate, however, the combined vote of EE and HB represented only 14.8 percent of the total ballots cast, since the electorate had expanded. This prompted some observers to declare that ETA's popular support was waning. Those inclined to do so, however, were forced to reassess their thinking after subsequent elections. In the June 22, 1986, contest, HB received 231,722 votes and EE, 107,053. Since it is difficult to regard the EE totals as a surrogate ETA vote by this juncture, it is well to restrict the analysis to the former. Even so HB's considerable gains gave it 17.7 percent of the total vote—or more than the combined percentage for HB and EE in 1983. In the election held on June 20, 1987, for seats in the European Parliament, HB extended its absolute and relative gains to 251,463 votes and 19.4 percent of the electorate, respectively. In Gipuzkoa, in fact, HB received 85,381 votes—the largest total of any political party in the province.

At the same time it is legitimate to question the makeup of the current

⁶ The following electoral statistics were extrapolated from the chart published in the July 12, 1987, issue of the newspaper *Egin*.

support for HB. If the party had provided a reasonable litmus test of ETAm's political strength in 1979, the same may not be said for the 1987 results, when HB attracted a protest vote divorced from the issue of ETA and even Basque nationalism per se in both the Basque Country and (to a lesser degree) on the wider Spanish political scene. Thus, HB today enjoys the support of some ecologists (possibly stemming from ETA's success in stopping the construction of a nuclear power plant at Lemoiz), gay rights supporters, feminists, and punk rockers. Similarly, in the 1987 European parliamentary election, HB received 111,189 votes outside of the Basque Country, including 39,692 in Barcelona Province, which permitted its candidate, Txema Montero, to win a seat in the international body. Consequently, HB was drawn increasingly into a broader political arena with an agenda that sometimes transcended Basque issues. While it managed to assume a seat in the European Parliament, its application for membership in Europe's Rainbow Coalition was rejected despite its close associations with West Germany's Green party. To HB's chagrin, EE was admitted in its stead.

In the most recent European parliamentary election (June 15, 1989), the most salient political fact in the Basque country was the abstention of 43 percent of the electorate. Consequently, HB's total support, like that of all of the other political parties, declined in absolute terms to 185,215 votes. Its relative support of 19.4 percent of the total vote cast was identical to that of the 1987 election, and HB continued to receive the highest total in Gipuzkoa. Conversely, HB's support outside of the Basque Country eroded noticeably to 84,528 votes, including only slightly more than 15,000 in Barcelona.

The prior discussion illustrates the difficulty of determining support for ETA by reading the results for Basque elections. There is, however, another confusing factor. Whether at the ballot box or in public opinion polls, support for ETA is intertwined with reactions to the organization's *ekintzak* (actions) and is therefore considerably more mercurial than that of the standard political parties, which have stated platforms and structures. It is one thing to relate to a party's principles and identifiable cast of characters and quite another to opine about a shadowy organization whose trademark and very survival ploy is anonymity. Hence, ETA is "personified" for electoral and public opinion purposes through *ekintzak*, whose very nature means that they quickly acquire a life of their own and rapidly culminate in historic "triumphs" or "tragedies," with profound internal and external consequences for the organization.⁷

⁷ It may be that ETAm's increased propensity for such *ekintzak* is related to a desire to demonstrate a capacity for spectacular action at a time in which the reinsertion program has proven attractive to some operatives, France's extradition program has removed a safe haven, and there is a felt need for credibility as a "dangerous foe" in the current negotiations with the Spanish government. There is also a sense in which the internal logic of political violence requires escalation. The death of an individual *guardia civil* or ETA operative no longer has the same impact and, hence, symbolic value, in either the Basque Country or a Spain inured to such events by nearly two decades of ongoing political violence.

It is probably accurate to state that the assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco was received positively—not only across much of the Basque political spectrum but also within certain sectors of Spanish and even international public opinion. Conversely, the kidnapping and eventual killing of the Basque industrialist Berezadi in 1976 was condemned in most Basque circles and heightened the internal debate within ETA over the use of violence and (a few months later) resulted in the disappearance of the moderate leader “Pertur,” who was presumed to have been killed by the hard-line faction. More recently, there was the death of “Yoyes,” a high-ranking female leader of ETAm, who left the organization, lived for several years in Mexico, and then, upon her return to the Basque Country, was gunned down in a public plaza while walking her baby. Although the killing was presumably a message to other ETA activists who were considering the government’s offer of “reinsertion,” the event was roundly criticized. Finally, two ETA bombings in 1987 (at a shopping center in Barcelona and a military barracks in Zaragoza) indiscriminately killed many bystanders, which prompted enormous public demonstrations against the violence (involving hundreds of thousands of participants). ETAm stated that it had not intended to produce civilian casualties in the Barcelona case and claimed that the authorities had botched the situation when given advance warning. Nevertheless, the recently elected HB representative to the European parliament, Txema Montero, denounced the bombing as “multiple murders,” while refusing, however, to speak out in Strasbourg against “terrorism.”

ETA as a Concept

Whether implicitly or explicitly, both specialists and the common man tend to measure the relative strength of “political” phenomena in terms of numbers of adherents, their vote-getting capacity, and the sympathy inspired within the general population for their goals. Since there is clearly a political dimension to ETA’s activities and goals, it is not surprising that an instrumentalist approach dominates the analyses of it. It is equally important, however, to recognize that ETA differs in certain qualitative respects from all the other organizations within the Basque political spectrum. ETA is largely irredentist and uncompromising in principle, whereas compromise is generic to the conventional political process, particularly within democracies. When conventional political parties state their goals, no matter how ambitious, they are likely to be suffused with several elements which include ploys, wish-list desires, and political posturing. In short, the stated goals are as much of a stance as a demand, a gambit in a game (albeit a serious one) which is characterized by the interplay of conflicting goals and the resulting compromises.

To enter into play at all is tacit recognition that the end result is likely to differ from each participant’s initial proposal but will incorporate elements from the several conflicting viewpoints. There is also tacit recognition that the

political process is diachronic: While stating one's demands, each participant agrees to exercise at least a modicum of restraint and patience, thereby permitting proselytization and debate which, if not always absolutely peaceful, is at least largely nonviolent in nature. This may be contrasted with ETA's presumably non-negotiable demand for the Basques' self-determination of their own political destiny. The operative political slogan then becomes *Euskadi ala hil* (Basque Country or death). Framed in such terms, the call is not to political activism but rather to armed struggle and possible martyrdom. Compromise in such a context is not only anathema, it is tantamount to treason. Hence, one can ask legitimately whether ETA is capable of genuine concession as part of a settlement or is simply proffering some sort of cosmetic solution to enable Spanish officials to dissimulate their capitulation to ETA's demands.

The main anomaly, however, is that ETA is as much a concept as a structure at this historical juncture, since ETA represents the crossing of a conceptual Rubicon for Basque nationalism in which the goal is total independence and that this justifies the means. Consequently, ETA's violence actualizes the most radical Basque separatist approach and thereby becomes a part of each Basque nationalist's consciousness (as well as that of his enemies) by entering into each actor's political calculation (if only to be rejected by many).

Indeed, even those who eschew ETA's goals and tactics, such as most Basque government officials and members of the moderate Basque Nationalist Party, find the organization's existence useful in their own dealings with Madrid; for there is a sense in which ETA provides the teeth for what would otherwise be merely a barking dog. Moderate Basques are in essence able to tell Madrid, "You can negotiate with us or cope with ETA." Therefore, while ETA itself is not disposed to compromise, it has certainly been a major factor in the post-Franco political process. In fact, while it is a somewhat moot point, it is intriguing to speculate whether there would even be an autonomous Basque region today in Spain had ETA never existed.

ETA as a concept, then, transcends any particular Basque political organization—including that of ETA itself.⁸ We have already noted that individuals can enter or leave ETA, and that factions within it are quite capable of schism over ideological and tactical differences. It is possible for any person, faction, or even generation of ETA's activists to effect a settlement, change tactics, abandon the struggle, and so forth; however, it is equally true that ETA is now a genie liberated from its bottle—a force that is as much potential as actual.

⁸ Indeed, it is interesting to note the semantic confusion that pervades both the scientific and popular literature in this regard. Despite the fact that from an organizational standpoint there have been several ETAs over the years as the result of internal factionalism, there is a general tendency to refer to "ETA" in monolithic terms. Reference is clearly more to the ETA as concept rather than as structure.

As such it is a "model" that may be activated at any time by present or future generations of disaffected Basque nationalists, and the efficacy of the organization does not totally rely upon numbers of adherents and their sophistication. It is obvious that some types of military calculations would consider cadres of well-trained and armed activists as having greater potential for violence than a handful of immature, poorly equipped individuals, but it is equally true that the latter may inflict symbolic wounds which are all out of proportion to their sheer numbers and sophistication.⁹

We might ponder two examples from ETA's own history to illustrate the point. First, the Spanish police imposed a "state of exception" upon the Basque Country in the early 1970s that suspended most civil liberties. The ensuing roundup of ETA suspects ensnared many activists and dealt a near-mortal blow to the organization as constituted at that time. By 1972–73, there were only four *liberados*, or full-time activists, operative in the Spanish Basque provinces; and the organization had undergone a major schism. "From out of nothing," however, ETA reemerged as a major force during the next year and a half and produced over fifty *ekintzak*, including the highly sophisticated assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco. The second example concerns the formation and activity of one ETA unit. In late 1975 a group of four idealistic youths (between sixteen and eighteen years old) lied about their ages during repeated attempts to enter ETA. Eventually, they were accepted into the organization. They spent a week in the French Basque area taking a crash course in weaponry and tactics, and returned to their homes. During the next year they conducted about three-fourths of the *ekintzak* in Gipuzkoa. They kidnapped one man and collected a ransom, robbed several banks, stole three tons of explosives from a nearby quarry, and attacked presumed informers, killing one of them.

Their most consequential act was the kidnapping of Berezadi, the Basque manager of the Sigma factory in the nearby town of Elgoibar. When the action was approved from above, they placed the victim under surveillance for two weeks. Since they planned to intercept him on the highway on his way home

⁹ We would argue, however, that it is precisely the propensity to apply a military equation to such situations that contributes to lack of understanding of them. Given the array of forces (the absurd disparity between the military capacities of the Spanish state and a tiny organization), the ETA activist's role assumes a dimension beyond mere military service to include the possible, even probable, mantle of martyrdom. He is also as much a self-styled avenging angel as obedient soldier, which places him beyond the pale of conventional military confrontation in which opposing forces attempt to inflict sufficient pain and hardship in order to secure capitulation. For the ETA activist, cessation of hostilities is possible only if the goals are attained or the perceived approval or mandate from a significant proportion of the "people" is withdrawn.

This distinction between activist and soldier is germane to other contexts as well. During a recent spate of IRA actions in which British and Ulster Defense Force military personnel were killed in Northern Ireland, England, and on the European continent, it was estimated that there were only sixty hard-core IRA operatives and a support staff of 200 (*London Sunday Times*, August 7, 1988, p. A15.)

from work, one of the youths had to apply for a driver's license. The kidnapping went smoothly, and Berezadi was installed in the attic of an unused farmhouse of Itziar owned by the family of one of the kidnapers. The event dominated the Spanish media. Interior Minister Fraga Iribarne took the hard line that the authorities would not negotiate with terrorists. Berezadi's in-laws, who owned Sigma, equivocated over the ransom demands.

Meanwhile, in Itziar, Berezadi and his captors became close, engaging in many friendly political discussions, card games, and so forth. The victim became the group's cook. He was kept under constant surveillance but was not abused in any fashion. Captive and captors alike were confident that the affair would end happily and made plans to meet subsequently to have a dinner together in France to celebrate his release. The youths took turns going to the local bars to enjoy the television coverage that riveted the attention of the Spanish nation. They could scarcely contain their amusement at the irony of hearing their fellow villagers speculate over the whereabouts of Berezadi.

However, as the stalemate dragged on, the situation became more desperate. Finally, one day the mother of the boy in whose farm Berezadi was being held happened to enter the ground floor. She heard noises upstairs and confronted her son, who confided in her. While she grappled with chagrin and indecision, the word was communicated to France that the haven was no longer safe. ETA quickly convened its ruling committee of six members to decide whether or not to kill Berezadi. At first the voting was deadlocked three to three, with the respective factions led by the moderate "Pertur" and the hardliner "Apala." On the third ballot one of "Pertur's" supporters abstained and the order went out to Itziar to kill the victim, since failure to do so would damage ETA's credibility. Berezadi was executed—ironically at a moment when, unbeknownst to the kidnapers, his family was on the way to France with the ransom payment. The death caused great consternation in the Basque Country and eroded some of ETA's popular support. It may also have been the deciding factor in making the division irreconcilable between "Pertur" and "Apala," eventually culminating in the split between ETAm and ETAp.

The point of the two examples is to underscore the extent to which ETA is capable of rising out of its own ashes, so to speak, and the degree to which the activities of a handful of inexperienced, immature, dedicated individuals can influence the political process, resulting in errors as well as successes of historic proportions. We might further note that ETA as concept has acquired its own legends, myths, and martyrs after nearly three decades of existence. Each *ekintza* has the potential of becoming a kind of morality tale with its own heroes and villains. The ritualistic dimensions of the drama enhance its symbolic impact. The fascination of the more mundane process of political compromise pales by comparison. Hence, a single bombing by ETA has much greater potential of making the pages of the *New York Times* than do the results of municipal elections in the Basque Country. More importantly, it is

also much more likely to challenge each Basque citizen with hard choices regarding the ultimate political destiny of his or her homeland and the legitimate means of achieving it.

CONCLUSION

The seemingly senseless killing of Berezadi poses the question "as to why was he slain"; yet this is not properly a causal query but rather the expression of a conundrum.¹⁰ According to the literature, a central feature of terrorism is that it is "random," "indiscriminate," and "unpredictable"—that is, a behavior governed by the element of chance. At the same time, students of terrorism are primarily concerned with the search for the functional "causes" that can be understood as efficient or final ones. If terrorism is characterized by what Weber termed "chance causality" (1949:182), then granting priority to the search for instrumental causation is logically erroneous. We believe that the phenomenon is best understood instead as ritual action and as such is not governed entirely (or even predominantly) by instrumental means–ends considerations. ETA's *ekintzak*, of which Berezadi's killing is an example, are ritualized actions in that they are condensed events, as well as public performances, in which chance plays a key role. Action for action's sake becomes quintessential to small militant groups and acquires a momentous efficacy that far surpasses its own instrumentality. As if by magic, each action, in its renewed challenge to authority, signals a new beginning which promises to trigger a revolutionary process aimed at transforming everything. These actions are therefore not intended as parts of sustained and cumulative processes but are thoroughly discontinuous sacrificial acts governed by the ritual premise of marking a qualitative transition to a different order.¹¹

Since Aron defined terrorism as an action whose "psychological effects are out of proportion to its purely physical result" (1966:170), it is standard to characterize it fundamentally as a manipulation of the psychology of violence through the fear aroused in potential victims. Terrorism and ritual sacrifice share the fundamental trait that the victim (who condenses the purpose and meaning of the action) is innocent.¹² The election of Berezadi was random,

¹⁰ For further discussion of ETA violence as a Basque cultural conundrum, see Zulaika 1988.

¹¹ There is a subtle distinction to be made here between terrorist acts and agendas. Terrorists are also capable of committing the error of military calculation in assessing the efficacy of their struggle. The successful action may beget new ones in the belief that it is possible to "turn up the heat" on the enemy to force capitulation. The individual action may appear to be part of a larger agenda in this regard; however, it is the very nature of terrorism that it is the act rather than the agenda which inspires fear. Neither the number of the terrorists nor their capacity to influence (let alone control) events outside the context of the particular terrorist act command respect. Hence, the modern cliché that "we will never negotiate with terrorists" is simply a way of stating that we will never confer upon them the legitimacy that negotiation implies.

¹² This is essential to ritual sacrifice. Some societies resort to the institution of drawing lots to assure the ritual innocence of the victim. To kill someone for an offense is an act of justice; to kill someone to placate an angry god is a ritual sacrifice in which the innocence of the victim has to be made patent through random selection.

and his killers knew he was personally blameless. Such purposelessness regarding its victims makes terrorism into a seemingly incomprehensible phenomenon, in which the individual innocence or guilt of the victim or executioner is superseded by decisions obtained at a higher structural level and in which a logic of chance frames the context of ritual action. Finally, as we discussed earlier, social scientists have utilized such concepts as dream states and mana in order to coin categories and elaborate explanatory theories that were later found to be deficient and therefore abandoned. The category of "terrorism" is one more example of conceptual objectification of a psychic state of sudden momentary fright. The comparison with the history of some anthropological categories prompts us to question whether the real theoretical issue is not that of simply dropping the category altogether as unsound.

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