A COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO
VIOLENT RADICALIZATION, BASED ON A REAL CASE

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RESUMEN	ABSTRACT

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El estudio de la radicalización violenta presenta varios problemas a tener en consideración. Uno de ellos es la cantidad de variables involucradas, tanto de carácter intrínseco como situacional, que hace difícil establecer relaciones causa-efecto, identificar patrones de radicalización coherentes y, por tanto, predecir de alguna manera el fenómeno. Otro problema es que las disciplinas usadas frecuentemente para estudiar la radicalización violenta, como por ejemplo la ciencia política o la sociología, a menudo dejan de lado el nivel de análisis centrado en el individuo, lo que puede llevar a sobreestimar los factores externos a la hora de explicar cómo el individuo podría radicalizarse. Para abordar el primer problema, se ha escogido un contexto de radicalización muy específico: el del autodenominado Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco (MLNV) durante un determinado periodo de tiempo; mientras que para abordar el segundo se adopta una perspectiva cognitivo-conductual. Desde este enfoque se analizan algunas de las características clave del entorno del MLNV y se identifican los aspectos relevantes que podrían llevar a algunos activistas a comportarse de forma violenta. Con todo ello, se muestra una vía de radicalización coherente y factible a través de la cual ciertos individuos podrían llegar a convertirse en radicales violentos.

ABSTRACT

The study of violent radicalization faces a number of considerable problems. One of them is the amount of involved variables, both intrinsic and situational ones, what makes difficult to establish cause-effect relationships, to identify solid patterns of radicalization, and therefore to predict in some way the phenomenon. Another problem is that disciplines frequently used to study violent radicalization, e.g. Political or Social Science, sometimes let aside the individual level of analysis, what may lead to magnify external factors in order to explain how the individuals may become violent. To address the first problem, it has been chosen a very particular context of radicalization, that of the self-styled MLNV (Basque Movement for National Liberation) during a given period of time. To address the second problem, a cognitive-behavioral perspective is to be used. By taking this approach, some key features of the MLNV environment will be analyzed, and relevant aspects that may lead activists to behave violently will be identified. In doing so, a feasible, coherent pathway through which some people may become violent radicals is suggested.

Key words: *radicalización violenta, terrorismo, psicología cognitivo-conductual, ETA, MLNV* [*violent radicalization, terrorism, cognitive-behavioral psychology, ETA, MLNV*]

Introduction

Violent radicalization is a phenomenon as old as mankind itself. However, the current emphasis on its study can be seen as follow-on of the emphasis on studying its elder brother, i.e. terrorism, during the last decade and more. Consequently, it is not rare that the same disciplines that have been traditionally applied to the study of terrorism, mainly Political and Social Science, are now been applied to the study of violent radicalization.

Nevertheless, since violent radicalization is closely related to individual behavior, it is hard to believe that disciplines as the aforementioned ones can cover all the key aspects involved in this phenomenon. In other words; while the relevant level of analysis for the phenomenon of terrorism can be reasonably well explored by using political or sociological disciplines, it is suggested that the relevant level of analysis for violent radicalization, which is more related to the individual level, could be better analyzed by using Psychology, in general, and a cognitive-behavioral approach in particular. Of course, there exists a mutual supporting relationship among all those disciplines.

Considering radicalization in general, the fact is that many ways and mechanisms have been proposed to date. Among them, only those supporting the basics of this study are listed. As such, Taylor and Horgan started from the premise that there is little evidence of distinctive individual qualities associated with the terrorist. [1] In doing so, they emphasize the idea of terrorism as a process instead of a state, what is close to a very basic assumption held here; that of terrorists are not born, but made. McCauley and Moscalenko, in turn, have proposed twelve consistent ways of radicalization, and in particular they have pointed out the link between progressive radicalization and the Cognitive Dissonance Theory. [2] This theory, along with Bandura's Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement, are considered as feasible explanations for the cognitive changes that accompany the individual´s escalation in violent acts. [3] Finally, Bandura's Social Learning Theory will also be utilized to explain early stages of learning violent behavior. [4]

From a technical, cognitive-behavioral perspective, violent radicalization can be considered as a progressive learning process of violent behavior, in which both physical and cognitive aspects, i.e. thoughts, beliefs and feelings, are involved. Adopting this perspective, however, comes with great challenges derived from the complexity of individual behavior. Actually, there are too many variables involved that must be controlled at some extent in order to obtain convincing findings. For instance, ideological or religious extremism, action-reaction dynamics, asymmetry in conflicts, and

repressive conditions, among others, have been identified as contributing factors to violent radicalization. Apart from them, there are also other aspects that correlate frequently with violent radicalization, e.g. grievances or basic needs not met, that may also perform a role in the process. Finally, the individual perception of these aspects, which is subjective by definition, is even more relevant than the fact itself. In the end, it is very difficult to find simple contexts of violent radicalization in the real world.

It is believed, however, that one of these simple contexts may be found in the self-styled *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco* (MLNV, Basque Movement for National Liberation), especially during the period of time from 1987 to 2003. The MLNV, as it is normally accepted, includes the core of the terrorist organization ETA *(Euzkadi ta Askatasuna*, Basque Fatherland and Liberty) and their somehow connected political parties, associations, and other groups, both legal and illegal. The reason by which the MLNV is considered in this study as a particular context of violent radicalization is that factors that in other contexts provoke or contribute to spontaneous violence, were arguably nonexistent in this one. And despite this, during that period of time organized violence were consistently conducted.

The absence of factors that contribute usually to radicalization in other contexts is undoubtedly an interesting starting point for subsequent research. Since violent radicalization keeps being a reality in the absence of those factors, it is fair to attribute the entire phenomenon to remaining ones. After identifying these latter, individual's violent behavior can be interpreted in light of basic principles and theories. In doing so, a feasible, coherent pathway through which some people may become violent radicals can be proposed.

According to the above scheme, some background about the ETA and the MLNV will be initially provided. Then, some key features of the MLNV's youth organizations will be depicted, in search of the elements needed to learn and maintain violent behavior. After that, some reasons why violence-deterring factors may not work properly in this context will be given. And finally, taking into consideration the previous findings, a depiction of last stages of radicalization will be proposed.

The ETA and the Self-Styled Basque Movement for National Liberation

The ETA was founded in July 1959, and defines itself as a Basque socialist revolutionary organization for national liberation. Apart from its political claims, it has been widely known for its ability to carry out assassinations, kidnappings, extortions, and campaigns of urban violence. Ac-

cording to the Spanish Ministry of Internal Affairs, the ETA has been responsible for 829 murderers since 1968. [5]

The ETA has been for a long time surrounded by other groups, organizations, and initiatives. All of them, taken together, are self-styled as *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco* (MLNV, Basque Movement for National Liberation). According to the Spanish Supreme Court, the MLNV was the result of a process called *desdoblamiento* (splitting) that took place in 1974. At that time the two ETA branches then existing, the political-military (ETA-pm) and the military (ETA-m), they decided "[…] carry out a coordinated distribution of responsibilities and tasks between terrorist activity and politics." The purpose of this division was "[…] keeping within the law all those actions different from purely terrorist activity, in order to achieve greater penetration in society and at the same time to limit the effects of police actions on the entire structure". The network of organizations supposedly aimed to conduct legal activities, i.e. the MLNV, encompassed political parties, social organizations, syndicates of workers, etc., and in particular *Jarrai*, an organization aimed to coordinate the young people fully identified with ETA, as well as *Herri Batasuna* (HB, Popular Unity), an electoral platform. HB and its successive denominations, i.e. *Euskal Herritarrok* (EH) and *Batasuna*, competed in the Spanish elections for more than two decades. Its political discourse included ideological coverage and justification for ETA's activity, as well as contextualizing this activity in a supposed political conflict framework. *Jarrai*, for its part, also evolved and changed its denomination to *Haika* and *Segi* successively, while a crescent number of its militants were involved in urban, low-intensity violent activities. [6]

The period of time that has been taken in this case study starts in 1987. By then, the so-called *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación* (GAL, for Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups), which were responsible for 27 murders during the four previous years, had ceased its activities against the ETA environment, and its members began to be detained and jailed. From then to 2003, security forces and justice courts were detaining and prosecuting ETA members and illegal activities according to the Spanish law. Apart from this, there weren't especial action-reaction dynamics that may have contributed to spontaneous violence. As a matter of fact, isolated episodes that happened by then, e.g. the capture of top ETA leaders in 1992, or the precautionary closure of the newspaper *Egin* in 1998, did not provoke any change in trend (Figure 1). Conversely, abrupt changes in the name of murders that took place in 1990 and 2000 can be fairly attributed to the end of the ETA's self-declared "cease of fire" periods.
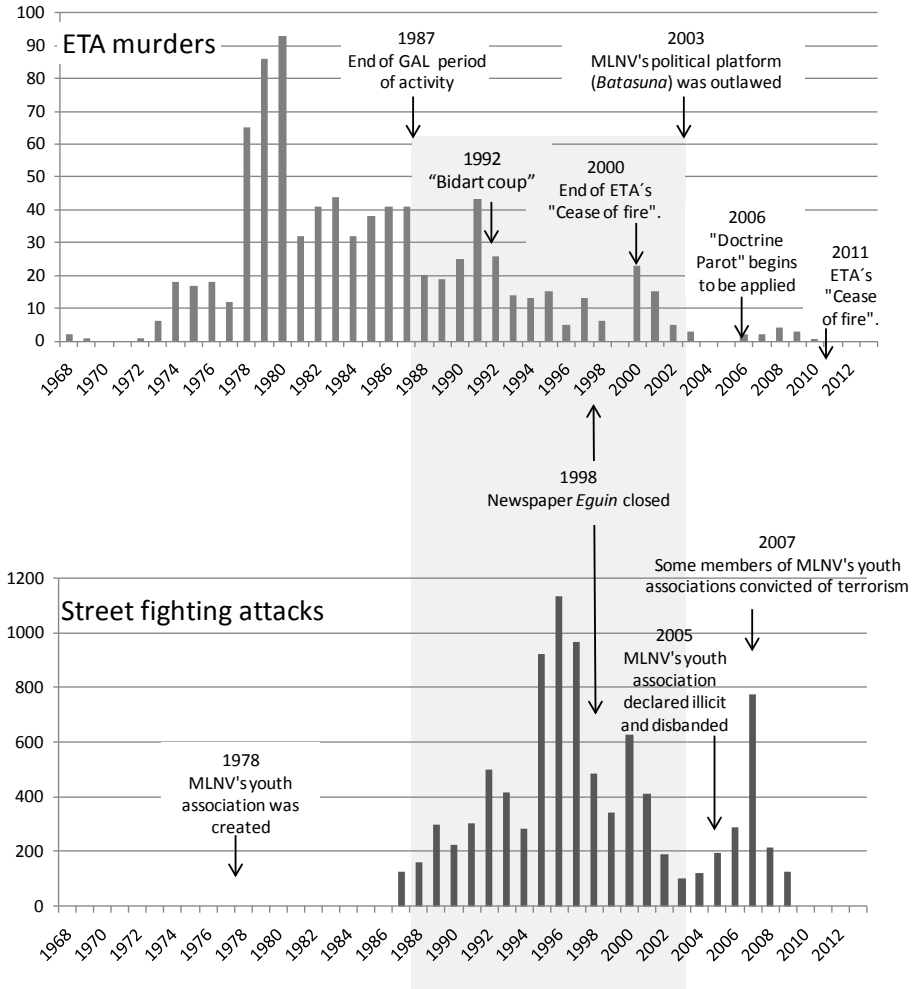
Figure 1. ETA-related violent activity. In highlighted area, period of time from 1987 to 2003. (Prepared by the author based on open sources)

States of emergency or deep economic crisis, also factors that some-times contribute to spontaneous violence, were also nonexistent. The Basque country was by then already one of the richest regions in Spain, it had one of the highest levels of self-government in Europe, and the MLNV´s successive political platforms were participating freely and regu-larly in the elections. Despite of all these facts, during that period of time

more than 400 murders were committed by the ETA and near of 7000 low-intensity violent episodes were reported to be conducted by affinity groups. Of course, strong efforts by the core ETA were made by then in order to promote violence on the streets, especially after the major police operation that took place in 1992, but this is a feature shared in other similar contexts an do not interfere with the particularity of this one when it comes to study the individual phenomenon of violent radicalization.

A stronger posture against terrorism was taken in Spain from 2003 onwards. For example, as a result of the implementation of the known as "Law of Political Parties", the Supreme Court outlawed *Batasuna* and its predecessors that same year. *Jarrai*, *Haika* and *Segi*, for its part, were declared illicit organizations and therefore disbanded by the Spanish *Audiencia Nacional* in 2005. Some of its members were convicted of terrorism two years before. Finally, from 2006 onwards, justice courts were applying strict rules affecting enforcement of sentences for convicted ETA members. Whatever the contribution of all these measures may be, the fact is that the current situation in the Basque Country is by far less violent than it was in past decades. Effectively; the ETA declared a "permanent cease of violence" in early 2011 and prosecution of alleged terrorists is ongoing. Major attacks have ceased and urban violence has substantially decreased. Perhaps this period of time, from 2003 to date, also deserves to be studied in depth. But it is believed that the circumstances involved here are completely different from the ones that are considered in this case study.

Militancy in the MLNV's Youth Organizations: The Success of the Motivating Factors

Some activities in the MLNV's youth organizations, especially violent activities, have frequently been depicted in the framework of a planned strategy complementing other ETA's efforts. Although this is useful when it comes to analyze the phenomenon through political, sociological or even legal perspectives, that depiction is less appropriate when it comes to focus on individual behavior. To understand individual processes of violent radicalization, it is better to put the observer in the individual´s shoes as much as possible, instead of looking at the individual from outside. This approach, however, has additional implications that are necessary to address. In effect; taking into account the subject to be analyzed, which in the end is no other than criminal behavior, the suggested perspective may easily generate misunderstandings. In this regard, just to say that an effort to understand the violent radical's emotional universe does not mean at all justification for the actions committed by that individual.

In order to build a relevant picture of what militancy in former youth organizations inside the MLNV could be, three main aspects are to be depicted here: the range of activities conducted in those organizations, exposure to violence-legitimizing discourse, and finally, low-intensity violent activities.

A wide range of activities: the attractiveness

From an external point of view, violence has been one of the most visible features of the MLNV's youth organizations. However, seeing these organizations as mere associations for radical activists interested only in conducting political claims by violent means, is a simplistic approach. In order to understand the dynamics that may lead individuals to behave violently in this context, it is necessary to take into consideration the rest of non-violent activities, e.g. social and cultural activities, carried out under the wing of those groups.

Functionally speaking, availability of non-violent, interesting activities in the MLNV's youth organizations plays a key role: that of attracting a wide spectrum of people to join the organization, as well as to expose them to its ideology and violent methods to achieve political objectives. As an example of those activities, the so-called *Gazte topagunea* (Youth Gathering) is a popular event held every two years in different Basque towns, which was in the past allegedly controlled and manipulated by the organization *Segi*. The event was usually followed by several thousands of young people, who during some days camped in tents, attended talks, participated in debates, shared meals, enjoyed musical group's concerts, and organized demonstrations. According to key documents seized from captured ETA militants, the strategy applied to controlling youth movements in the Basque country was based on the principle "Wherever any youth movement may exist, drive it; and where not, create it". [7]

Therefore, from an analytical point of view, the MLNV's youth organizations must be seen as common spaces for a broad range of individual profiles, violent profiles included, where a wide range of activities, both legal and illegal, are available. Around all this, the revolutionary socialist ideology that goes along nationalist demands constitutes the component that impregnates everything and helps to identify a clear enemy, a worthy cause to fight for, and the way by which that fight must be conducted. Hence, young *abertzale* militants could be found leading cultural movements, filling concerts of the so-called *rock radical vasco* (Basque Radical Rock), participating in demonstrations that ended in clashes with security forces, or even organizing raids in a downtown to burn buses and destroy urban furnishing.

Justification and exaltation of violence: the reference

Justification for the ETA's violence was also a regular activity within the MLNV. Documents, communiqués, and manifestos were full of references to a supposed political conflict, which the Spanish and French governments allegedly were responsible. [8] Consequently, these governments were also accountable for what they called consequences of that conflict, i.e. the attacks. In this context it is not rare that jailed ETA members, even those convicted of murders with the aggravating circumstance of terrorism, were frequently described as political prisoners. One of the most known examples of media support to ETA activities was the former newspaper *Egin*, closed down by a court order as a precautionary measure, in 1998, for more than one year.

The MNLV's political platforms played also an important role to exalt the ETA and its members. For example, it was frequent during the political meetings organized by the former *Batasuna* that some masked people, allegedly ETA members, broke into the meeting room, read a quick statement, burned a Spanish flag, and then disappeared. As another example, in the Basque towns ruled by *abertzale* mayors it was a common practice to grant the title of *Hijo predilecto de la ciudad* ("Cherished Son of the Town") to convicted ETA members. To finish this list of examples, it may be useful to mention the public homage ceremony paid by *abertzale* leaders to the oldest ETA convict (nicknamed as *Gatza*) in 2006, which had wide media coverage. There, the current situation in the Basque country was compared with that of the apartheid in South Africa, and *Gatza* with Nelson Mandela himself. [9]

Technically speaking, both justification for, and exaltation of, violence are practices that may encourage individuals to conduct violent actions; either directly or through creating models of behavior that may be copied. In effect; veteran activists committing crimes are frequently seen as freedom-fighters by new recruits, eager of imitating what they perceive as heroic actions. This popular learning–from-someone-else concept has a technical elaboration at the Social Learning Theory. [10] It states that for individuals to learn, they do not need to experience directly the consequences of their behavior, but merely to associate some given consequences, in terms of rewards or punishments, with others' behavior.

Low-intensity violence: the practicum

Low-intensity violent activities, the self-styled *kale borroka* (street fighting), in which some *abertzale* radicals were frequently involved, had been always present under the wing of the MLNV. However, from 1990 on,

the number and intensity of these activities experienced a significant growth (Figure 1). This has been attributed to a calculated ETA´s strategy, which was mainly executed by some of the former MLNV´s youth organizations. [11]

Usual objectives of *kale borroka* were State security forces, State political parties representatives, financial institutions, and companies owned by France or based on French capital, among others. Radicals profusely used *Molotov* cocktails, home-made rockets and other projectiles, either directly against the targets or to destroy public facilities. As an example of those actions, on 29 November 1966, a group of radicals stopped a public bus that was circulating across the city of Pamplona. They forced the driver to park the bus at the entrance of the populated *Mayor* Street, blocking the road. Then, they obliged passengers to get out the bus, sprayed flammable liquid over the seats and set it on fire. [12] As an indicator of the relevance of these actions, in 1999, according to the polls, 84 per cent of the Basque population considered that the *kale borroka* was a very serious problem. [13]

The *kale borroka*, in general, was considered as a true school for future terrorists. This consideration, although quite evident by itself, has also a technical aspect that deserves to be explored. Effectively; although violent behavior can be initially learnt by social learning processes, as suggested in the previous section, it probably will be extinguished soon if it is not practiced and then rewarded. In this regard, the *kale borroka* constituted a very particular situation in terms of consolidating violent behavior. This is because, first, it is very easy in this context for individuals to start committing small violent actions, merely by peer pressure, social learning or any other reasons. Second, because factors that may increase the probability for the individual to repeat that violent action in the future, e.g. quick compliments and praise from his comrades, are fully available. And third, because the relative safe environment in which those violent actions are committed, prevents at some extent the appearance of other factors that might diminish that probability, e.g. strong reactions from angry citizens or immediate detention from police agents. Dynamics happening in this closed setting are critically relevant in the whole process of violent radicalization, and can explain the individual´s transition from merely holding extreme ideas to commit violent acts congruently with those ideas.

Militancy as a whole in the MLNV youth organizations: the feeling

The analysis of the previous aspects shows that militancy in the MLNV youth organizations combines violence with utopia and even fun, and the

fact is that and young activists who join these organizations are able to conduct a wide spectrum of exciting activities (whatever that may be) in an organized and safe manner. Violence, objectively speaking, constitutes the key ingredient of this explosive mixture.

From a militant´s subjective point of view, however, the atmosphere inside these groups could be really stimulating, and could provide a powerful, easy way to achieve internal satisfactions. In effect; radical activists involved in this kind of violence do not necessarily think they are behaving as criminals. Rather, they usually look at themselves as fighters for the freedom of his supposedly oppressed people. Additionally, they do not need to study and work for years to start believing they are changing the world. Moreover, since they operate in a peaceful society, they do not have to put their life at risk as it may happen in other conflict scenarios. And at the end of a thrilling day of what they call "struggle", they will be able to have fun with friends and then sleep at home.

Internal satisfactions may become as powerful as external, material rewards, and can explain why people behave sometimes in a given manner without apparent explanation. Feelings of camaraderie and friendship grow quickly in this context, as well as the feeling of belonging, close related to individual's identity development. Once integrated in the radical group, activists know their role exactly and what is expected from them. The activist´s life makes sense into the group, something quite different from the complicated, sometimes unfair rules of the external world. From a behavioral point of view, all this constitutes an accelerated pace of self-realization, especially when alternative, more constructive ways to achieve similar feelings are extremely difficult or require a considerable amount of personal effort.

Internal satisfactions, in general, are not objective data. Therefore, the attractiveness that violence in this context may have for some activists is an idea difficult to be accepted, especially when this ambiance has not been observed and experienced directly. In order to have a first-hand idea on how this feeling may be, it is strongly recommended to have a look into unofficial radical *abertzale* internet sites. [14] A similar position can be found in other authors, who depict that package of activities as "days of spree and fight" and suggest that militancy in those organizations can be very attractive and militants feel themselves as kind of heroes. [15] Testimonies from former ETA members also show this sensation "[…] it is something like very exciting and, certainly, of strong feelings." [16] and, in general, it is a phenomenon that fits well with other findings in different

contexts, e.g. what has been called "bottom-up process" in the framework of recruitment in radical Islamist groups. [17]

The Failure of the Deterring Factors

Despite the potential attractiveness that activities connected with violence may have for some, the fact is that it is not easy to carry out them in regions or countries such as where our case study takes place. In effect, violent conduct is normally pursued by law enforcers and punished with severe penalties. Cultural aspects and psychological barriers also play a role in deterring individuals from conducting violence. Finally, social rejection should also be able to discourage people from undertaking violent activities to some extent. Therefore, the question is why those deterring factors apparently do not work.

A *shield against external influences*

Since violent conduct is regularly pursued and punished, one can argue that social learning mechanisms should be also able to deter radical militants from committing violent acts or, at a minimum, to prevent upward trends in terms of violent behavior. However, some features of this case suggest that consequences of other's violent behavior perceived from inside the group might be less aversive than expected. One of these features was the ETA's ability to maintain leadership over jailed militants, the so called "*frente de makos*" ("jails front"), through the organization *Gestoras pro-Amnistía*. According to the Spanish Supreme Court: [18]

> "[…] from the MLNV' point of view, convicts […] linked to ETA's terrorism are considered as political activists […] ideological allegiance to ETA's policies is essential. This job is done by *Gestoras Pro-Amnistía*, under the coverage of providing humanitarian, individual, family, and juridical assistance […] Days of fight, as well as public events, statements, press conferences, public homage ceremonies, etc. are organized by *Gestoras* into jails, crying against […] the supposed unfair oppression and tortures suffered by ETA's convicts in both Spanish and French prisons."

The ETA's control over its jailed militants, as well as their consideration as an active "front", might feed the perception that, in case of being jailed, the fight will continue in another scenario. Furthermore, the permanent ETA´s call for amnesty as a requirement to solve the "conflict" might make the possible stay in jail to be perceived as a transitory, short stage: [19]

> "To go forward with dialogue, it is essential de-activating all repressive measures […] The current existing repression [in the Basque Country] is absolutely incompatible with a peace process".

Therefore, mere exposure to this ambiance might prevent the social learning mechanisms from being efficient. Natural deterrence, because of supposed aversive consequences of other's violent behavior, does not necessarily have to function properly.

Moral evolution

Cultural aspects and psychological barriers usually play a role in deterring individuals from conducting violence in situations other than self-defense or similar. So, the question is why and how those barriers fail in preventing such "gratuitous" violence, in this case.

An initial explanation of the above can be found in another Bandura's theory. [20] According to him, people avoid behaving in a manner that violates their internal standards because of the expectative of self-sanction, e.g. self-condemnation. However, there are circumstances in which individuals can disengage from those self-sanctions by activating what Bandura called *mechanisms of moral disengagement.* As examples of such mechanisms we have: moral justification, dehumanization, attribution of blame, displacement or diffusion of responsibility, among others. By activating selectively any of them, individuals are able to prevent self-condemnation, and violent conduct is easier to carry out.

Some of the mentioned mechanisms can be identified without difficulty in this case. As an example, the discourse produced by the ETA usually blames and makes accountable the Spanish and French governments for the supposed conflict and oppression of the Basque people. [21]

> "Divided and humiliated, the Basques were not able to constitute themselves freely as a Nation. They were not able to decide freely neither its internal organization nor its relations with the French and Spanish States.
> […] Since [the French Government] rejects all possible solutions to popular vindications, and opposes to any progress in the way of recognition of the Basque people, it assumes the critical accountability of extending the conflict."

As a consequence, the "armed fight" is legitimated as a way to reach justice and true democracy. [22]

> "The current situation in the Basque country is an estate of exception. […] The recent permanent cease of armed activities offered by the ETA was replied by the Spanish government with arrests, tortures and persecutions. Minimal democratic conditions so that a negotiation process can be conducted are inexist-

ent. […] we reaffirm our decision to defend with arms this [Basque] people that they attack with arms."

It is also quite frequent for either victims or supposed enemies to be dehumanized. For instance, regional Basque policemen was dismissively called *zipaioak* (*cipayos* or *sepoies*, was the denomination of local Indian recruited forces during the British Empire) in the MLNV environment, while members of the State security forces were usually called *txakurrak* (dogs). Finger pointing as "torturer" has been also a method also widely utilized to dehumanize law enforcers or even politicians in the Basque country before attacks. These ideas, when are firmly believed, can disengage individuals from their internal standards and avoid that psychological barriers play its natural role. As an empirical support of the above, here are some fragments of a known interview made to a former ETA member by a person who, precisely, that former member had planned to kill in the past: [23]

- PJ (journalist): Who decided that I had to be killed?
- JM (ex ETA member): The commanders of the ETA. […] there were several options on what we used to call "objectives for the ETA"
- PJ: Did you have something personal against me at that time?
- JM: No, no, […] I haven't had anything personal against any of the victims; not at all […]. It was our shared understanding by then that any enemy of the Basque Country was executable.
- PJ: Where did you learn that?
- JM: It was a period of my live that all that stuff seemed to me very attractive […]
- PJ: How would you explain now this to the relatives of the victims you have killed?
- JM: …I wouldn't be able […]
- PJ: Didn't you think on the fact that the person you wanted to kill actually had a family?
- JM: At the time that one is a member of an ETA commando, one doesn't think about these kinds of things. Empathy does not exist. Once it is decided you are an enemy of the Basque Country, you are absolutely executable from that time on.
- PJ: Why are you talking about execution? It would be a murder, in any case…
- JM: Because we are speaking in the language of a terrorist band. That's what you aren't able to understand! […]

Neutralization of social rejection
Social rejection should also be able to discourage people from carrying out violent activities, at least to some extent. This assumption is especially

applicable to cases like this one, where more than 90 per cent of the Basque population by then did not support ETA's violent methods in any case. [24] However, again, it seems that this potentially deterring factor did not work properly.

Lack of social rejection must be primarily attributed to what has been termed as violence of persecution, a part of the terrorist strategy that has been applied in the Basque country during decades. Violence of persecution, basically, was about extending terror to all those that disagreed with or opposed to ETA's principles, either by threats or even physical harassment. Apart from traditional ETA's targets, e.g. security forces and the military, violence of persecution has been widely applied to journalists, academics, politicians, judges, and entrepreneurs, among other groups. As an indication of the impact of this kind of violence, during 2004 in the Basque country 954 people needed to be escorted because of ETA's direct threats, [25] and the number of people that have left the region to date because of the same reason is estimated at a minimum of tens of thousands. [26]

Direct threats and physical harassment are not the only causes for holding back citizens in opposing vigorously violence. Actually, this behavior can be easily acquired by social learning processes. Testimonies of threatened people may illustrate this situation: "The most scandalous fact was the silence of good people [...] colleagues that avoided coming to my office to prevent being contaminated". [27] Polls conducted between 1998 and 2003 show that two of three Basques did not feel totally free to speak about politics, and more than half felt either "very much" or "quite a lot" afraid to participate actively in political activities. [28] The phenomenon, at the social level, is still obvious in some small, isolated Basque villages ruled by *abertzale* councils with a permissive attitude towards radical activities. As an example of this, here is what the mayoress of Pamplona declared not long ago in an interview: [29]

> "Pressure is constant in some small towns. Those who dare to take steps and commit themselves get exposed to continuous offence and to attacks to their properties. People who do not think like them are condemned to silence. Something as simple as buying a particular newspaper can be suspicious"

From Low-Intensity Violence to Major Attacks: The Last Stages of Radicalization

Violent radicalization, technically speaking, is seen here as the process by which physical violent behavior increases, either in frequency or magnitude, at the same time that cognitive-related aspects, i.e. thoughts, beliefs and feelings, evolve in a coherent manner. This process is normally made

of small steps instead of big and quick behavioral changes, by accommodating progressively all those elements each other. At the end of the process there is always a red line to cross, that of committing crime and going into hiding, but in the middle there are many lines to cross.

In order to illustrate the above process, it may be useful at this point to summarize the main findings up to now. On the one hand, conducting violent activities as depicted previously, i.e. occasionally, safely, legitimated by a discourse, and along with other exciting activities, may become a source of internal satisfactions for the activists. On the other hand, factors that might deter activists from conducting such violence, e.g. external influences, cultural and psychological barriers, and social rejection, might have been neutralized to some extent.

Applying basic cognitive-behavioral principles

Once the balance between motivating and deterring factors has been broken, start conducting violent activities in the aforementioned conditions is only a short step away. The same than any other behavior, violent behavior encompasses acts, thoughts and feelings. Violent-related thoughts and feelings can be learnt easily from other violent militants, e.g. merely by social learning, or by assimilating the violence-legitimizing discourse. In this situation, the likelihood that the individual starts committing isolated violent actions, e.g. burning an ATM or throwing a stone to the police during a protest, grows quickly, and the initial reluctance can be overcame easily by situational circumstances, as peer pressure, fear, overreaction, or temptation, among others.

The escalation from committing occasional low-intensity actions to regular involvement in more intense, organized violence can be also explained by using basic psychology. From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, in general, the likelihood that a conduct is repeated in the future is highly dependent on the consequences of that conduct when is released at present, [30] and of course the way the individual associates those consequences. For instance, in case of an activist is immediately arrested and jailed after committing a violent act, he will probably think twice before doing it again. In the case that he is burnt because of manipulating a "Molotov cocktail", he will probably be reluctant to use such a device in the future. Serious psychological shocks as a result of unwanted consequences are also possible, which even may lead the individual to leave the radical group forever. In all these cases, the "punishing" consequences and the circumstances in which they appear can diminish the probability that the activist conducts similar violent acts in the future.

Falling into the abyss

However, unfortunately, punishing consequences are not the rule in this case study. Actually, as explained above, violent activities conducted in these kinds of conditions have many more possibilities of being followed by rewarding consequences than by punishing ones. On the one hand, as said above, quick compliments and praise from his comrades are fully available. Radical activists involved in violent activities are able to obtain, at a very low cost, the feeling of being true fighters for the freedom of his supposedly oppressed people. On the other hand, the conditions in which those violent actions are planned and conducted prevent, at some extent, strong reactions from angry citizens or immediate detention from police agents. As a result, the probability that these violent acts are repeated in the future grows.

A well-structured discourse that justifies violence plays also a key role in this scheme, either before or after the individual commits a violent act. In the first case, exalting-violence discourses can easily generate beliefs and feelings that may function as a true drive so that the individual increases the level of physical violence. In this respect, it seems that one of the ETA members' shared feelings is hatred, precisely. [31] In the second case, after the individual releases violence, this discourse provides all the rationales the individual needs to modify the cognitive aspects of his behavior and make them congruent with his physical acts. For instance, after committing a violent act that may exceed individual´s moral convictions, which may have been caused by situational circumstances, the individual may start believing "they deserved that, after all", or similar things. This psychological phenomenon of "ending up thinking as one acts" has a number of suitable technical explanations, e.g. the aforementioned Bandura´s mechanisms of moral disengagement, or the well-known Cognitive Dissonance Theory. [32]

In any case, either before or afterwards, individual´s moral barriers will fall successively, his new convictions will be more permissive than before, and the individual will be able to conduct increasingly violent actions. From this stage to the moment of being formally recruited and trained to be able to kill people in cold blood, it is only a matter of time, willingness, and ability of the core organization to do so. Once the individual crosses the line of committing crime and goes into hiding, there is no turning back and the organization is the only remaining support for him.

The idea of progressive radicalization, from low-intensity violence to major attacks, can be objected by raising the argument that there is a quantum qualitative leap from occasionally burning ATMs within a group of

radicals to be formally recruited, trained, and tasked to murder people. However, the fact is that real cases that happened in the same period of time can illustrate the intermediate stages of this escalation. For instance, on 22 September 1996, three young people launched *Molotov* cocktails against a police patrol, causing burn injuries to two policemen. [33] As another example, in 1998, around 30 masked young people ambushed an *ertzaintza* (Basque Police) patrol in the city of Guernica. To do so, they burned some trash containers located near the center of the town. When the police arrived, more than 15 petrol bombs ("Molotov cocktails") and home-made rockets were launched at them. [34] Examples like these ones provide evidence that escalation from committing occasional low-intensity actions to regular involvement in more intense, organized violence is absolutely feasible. As a matter of fact, according to some analyses published in the press, which were attributed to security forces, six out of ten militants of the MLNV´s young organizations were eventually fully involved in *kale borroka* actions, and two of these latter joined eventually the core ETA. It has been calculated that 90% of ETA leaders since 2000 come from the MLNV's young organizations. [35]

Conclusions

The study of the MLNV, from a cognitive–behavioral perspective, shows a feasible, coherent pathway through which some people may become violent radicals in the absence of factors that contribute usually to radicalization. It is believed this pattern can be also found in other different environments of radicalization, even overlapping with other dynamics and therefore contributing to the complexity of the phenomenon.

Technically speaking, violent radicalization is seen in this case of study as an individual process where cognitive and physical behavioral aspects pursues each other in a rising trend, internally driven and externally influenced. The role performed by the radical group in this individual process is twofold. On the one hand, it provides the enabling context, i.e. influences, tools and organization, for the individual to get radicalized. On the other hand, it provides isolation and protection from other external influences that may interrupt the process. But in the end, is the individual who radicalizes himself by increasing his violent behavior and modifying his internal moral standards.

This view is fully compatible with existing deliberated attempts from veterans to influence newcomers, as well as with active recruitment practices from the core group. Moreover, the core organization has an unquestionable role in consolidating the last steps leading to individual radicaliza-

tion, i.e. uptake, training and formal affiliation of militants. The problem, however, is that the role of external influences tends to be overestimated when it comes to explain violent radicalization in absence of traditional conflict factors. As a consequence, there are frequent appeals for aggressive recruitment, or even brainwashing practices, perhaps as a way of filling the gaps that always appear when trying to understand so sensitive phenomenon without taking into account the individual's perspective. This is a mistake, and the individual's role and responsibility in his own process of radicalization must not be overshadowed by magnifying external influences.

Finally, there is a key question that arises recurrently when dealing with radicalization: if there is really a mechanism that explains how people can become terrorists, why some do and others do not? The answer to this question, at least for this case study, lies on the fact that the drive for the escalation in violent behavior, i.e. the lack of balance between motivating and deterring factors, is not constant during all process long. In general, the more the individual will progress into violent behavior, the more the deterring factors will gain value in detriment of the motivating ones. Sympathizing with a terrorist group and conducting low-intensity violence, occasionally and safely, may be an exciting endeavor for some activists. But committing major crimes and going into hiding, aside from all the advantages of the welfare state, won't be probably an option for most of them. In a sense, radicalization in developed societies is a race against the social mainstream that leaves many participants in its way.

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