

How to resist fear. ETA terrorism and Basque Socialism, 1995-2011

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to show the emotional impact of ETA terrorism on the PSE-EE militancy during the years of the socialisation of suffering, 1995-2011. To do so, we will use the theoretical-methodological tools provided by the history of emotions. It will be seen how emotional suffering greatly shaped the socialist experience in this period, whose experience has been codified with elements such as pressure and social isolation, threats and aggressions, or the lack of freedom of movement (due to the obligation to carry an escort). This emotional suffering was a constitutive part of the culture of resistance that Basque socialism redefined at this time -and linked to the resistance carried out by the socialists in the years of the Franco dictatorship-. In this redefinition, the strategies to overcome fear were the political commitment, anger, and courage, a feeling of pride for fighting against ETA, and strong group solidarity. These elements partly explain why the PSE-EE could survive and why its members continued to carry out their political work.

KEYWORDS: political violence; ETA terrorism; PSE-EE history; history of emotions; oral history; resistance.

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Título traducido: Cómo resistir el miedo. Terrorismo de ETA y socialismo vasco, 1995-2011.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este trabajo es mostrar el impacto emocional del terrorismo de ETA sobre la militancia del PSE-EE durante los años de la socialización del sufrimiento, 1995-2011. Para ello, se usarán las herramientas teórico metodológicas de la historia de las emociones. Se verá cómo el sufrimiento emocional fue uno de los aspectos que marcó la experiencia socialista en esta etapa, cuya experiencia se ha codificado con elementos como la presión y el aislamiento social, las amenazas y agresiones o la falta de libertad de movimiento (por tener que llevar escolta). Asimismo, este sufrimiento emocional fue parte constitutiva de la cultura de la resistencia que en estos momentos el socialismo vasco redefinió -y que enlaza con la resistencia llevada a cabo por los socialistas en los años de la dictadura franquista-. En esta redefinición, se articularon mecanismos para hacer frente a ese sufrimiento, como el fuerte compromiso político, la rabia y el coraje, un sentimiento de orgullo por luchar contra ETA y una fuerte solidaridad grupal. Estos elementos explican en parte por qué no se produjo una desmovilización política y por qué esta militancia continuó desarrollando su labor política.

PALABRAS CLAVE: violencia política; terrorismo de ETA; historia del PSE-EE; historia de las emociones; historia oral; resistencia.

“In the face of fear, commitment.” During an interview, these words were spoken by a Socialist member who had held institutional responsibilities during the years of ETA terrorism. They were not empty words but condensed a whole lifetime of experience, many emotions, and more than 30 years of history of the Basque Socialist Party.

Founded in 1979 as PSE-PSOE,¹ this was a key party in the restoration of democracy in the Basque Country. The party’s position on the losing side in the Spanish Civil War led it to be outlawed and repressed—with a significant number of its members assassinated or imprisoned—forcing it to operate underground during the Francoist dictatorship. After Franco’s death, the new political era ushered in by the Transition also enabled the legalisation of the party and the beginning of its political pathway in democracy. However, one of the greatest dangers facing the new democracy during this period was the existence and virulence of terrorism, particularly that of ETA (Portillo, 2018, p. 31).² ETA, created in 1959, sought the independence of *Euskal Herria* (the greater Basque Country region) by defending a singular interpretation of the history of this region – an interpretation inaugurated by the founder of the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party), Sabino Arana – and by drawing on decolonisation movements, applying all of this to the Basque case (Fernández, 2021, p. 64).

In 1968 ETA carried out its first killing, and from that point on, the escalation of violence not only continued but intensified during the period of democracy. In fact, the years of the Transition were deadly, with a total of 132 killings only in 1980 (Fernández and Jiménez, 2020, pp. 439–443). In terms of the impact of this terrorism, these were not easy years for the victims, who were mainly members of the FCSE (State Security Forces), businessmen, or people accused by ETA of being “informers” or “collaborators” with these forces. During these years, a discourse of hatred towards these individuals materialised in their stigmatisation and rejection, while a narrative emerged that justified these actions with the idea that “they must have done something,” branding them as “collaborators” with the state security forces or “snitches” (Castells, 2017, pp. 352–353; Leonisio and López, 2021). It was in this context that the tragic relationship between ETA—or branches related to it—and

the PSE began, as in 1979 the first PSE supporter was killed by terrorist bullets: Germán González, a member of the PSE and the UGT (General Union of Workers), worked as an electrician and had played an active role in the campaign for the Basque Statute of Autonomy.³ The motives for the killing remained murky, as ETA claimed that it was because he was a “collaborator.” Nevertheless, this event marked the beginning of the harassment of the PSE, triggering the spreading of fear among party members who until then had felt safe in the belief that their shared anti-Francoist position with ETA offered them a certain degree of protection (Hidalgo, 2020). At the same time, the concept of resistance was redefined and once again became a central element in the construction of identity in this political culture. In these early years of democracy, ETA (m and pm) and the CAA⁴ killed three Socialists: the aforementioned Germán González in 1979, and in 1984, Vicente Gajate and Enrique Casas, a municipal policeman who had formed part of the pre-autonomous government management of Rentería on behalf of the PSE, and the secretary general of this party in Guipúzcoa and a Basque parliamentarian, respectively.⁵ Both assassinations had a profound impact on Basque Socialist activism, and until the mid-1990s there were no new assassinations, although the harassment and threats continued.

By 1995 there was a substantial change in the impact of ETA terrorism. The group’s internal weakness (due in part to the fall of its leadership in Bidart in 1992) and the institutional fight against terrorism resulting from the Ajouria Enea Pact (1988), together with cautious protests against the terrorist attacks (notably from the peace organisation Gesto por la Paz, founded in 1986),⁶ led it to change its strategy. Between 1992 and 1993, ETA undertook a period of reflection and devised a two-pronged strategy: targeted attacks and social intimidation (using street violence, known as *kale borroka*), to spread fear throughout Basque society and force those the group called “enemy forces” to leave the Basque Country (González Calleja, 2012, p. 473). Thus began the so-called “socialisation of suffering,” the theoretical corpus of which (not the concept) appeared in the *Oldartzen* communication from Herri Batasuna in 1995. In fact, this party acted as the political arm of the terrorist organisation, and its youth section focused on tasks such as threats, harassment, or logistics, which not only strengthened ETA’s solid social network (González Calleja, 2012, p. 539) but also contributed to the hegemony of radical Basque nationalism in the Basque public space. For the

1 Founded as PSE-PSOE (Partido Socialista de Euskadi- Partido Socialista Obrero Español/Socialist Party of the Basque Country–Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party) until 1993. That year it merged with another party, *Euskadiko Ezkerra* (Basque Country Left), giving rise to the current PSE-EE (Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra/Socialist Party of the Basque Country–Basque Country Left). It is important to note that Euskadiko Ezkerra had been in its origins the political branch of ETApM (military-political ETA), a terrorist group that dissolved in 1982. From that moment on, EE was an important element in discrediting the terrorism of ETAm (military ETA). For this process, see Fernandez, 2013; Fernández and Hidalgo, 2022.

2 José María Portillo (2018, p. 31) underlines the important “relationship between violence and politics at the founding moment of Basque autonomy”.

3 *ABC*, 20-10-1973.

4 ETAm (lasted until 2011), ETApM (lasted until 1982), and CAA (Comandos Autonomos Anticapitalistas, which lasted until 1981).

5 González and Casas were killed by the CAA, Gajate by ETAm.

6 Irene Moreno (2019, p. 280, annex 2) cites 84 demonstrations against terrorism in 1994, a figure that nearly doubles in 1995 to reach 1,516 and 2,007 in 1996 and 1997 respectively, dropping to 652 in 1998.

latter objective, the group mainly carried out actions of street violence or *kale borroka*,⁷ which gave them significant public visibility while increasing the feeling of fear and intimidation among society as a whole. Not surprisingly, fear was a daily reality for part of society,⁸ and this is largely explained by the existence of the violence of persecution (Casquete and Alonso, 2014, p. 74). This violence, based on *kale borroka*, then began to follow a strategy of attacking non-nationalist political parties (PP (Partido Popular), PSE-EE, UPN (Unión del Pueblo Navarro) and UA (Unión Alavesa), which became priority targets for the group. Although politicians had been assassinated in the 1980s—for example, the campaign against the UCD (Union of the Democratic Centre) during the Transition or the killing of the Socialist Enrique Casas, among other cases—now the threat extended to the entirety of political membership and all the lower institutional ranks, such as city councillors.⁹ The danger increased to the point that from 2001 onwards, all PSE-EE public officials required bodyguards to take office; even so, during this period eight Socialists were assassinated, several more faced attacks or assassination attempts, and countless others suffered psychological consequences due to the pressure and threats (Alonso, Domínguez and García, 2010; Fernández and Hidalgo, 2022).¹⁰ These years can thus be described as the “years of lead” of Basque Socialism (Hidalgo, 2019). It is this period and this specific collective the focus of our research.

We, therefore, present a study of the emotional impact of this terrorism on PSE-EE activism, and we do so by using theoretical and methodological tools of the history of emotions and by relying on oral history as the main source. While this subject has been barely addressed in the field of historiography,¹¹ in-depth and rigorous studies in the fields of sociology, political science, criminology, and social psychology have shed light on the impact of ETA terrorism and the role of emotions in this regard, paving the way for the present study.¹² Moreover,

we consider oral history to be a privileged source for accessing the details of this experience, as it offers us access to lived experiences and emotions, both of which are not always captured in other types of documentation. In this respect, the historian Luisa Passerini, in her study of the impact of fascism on workers in Turin, argues that oral history offers access to a more complete reality, to mentalities, and ultimately to the everyday life of a culture (Passerini, 1987, pp. 1 and 8). Likewise, the historian Enzo Traverso stresses the importance of listening to individuals who have experienced a given event or context, as doing so offers historians “elements of factual knowledge inaccessible through other sources but, above all, it can help to restore the quality of a historical experience” (Traverso, 2007, p. 17). For this reconstruction, we consider an appropriate methodology to be that of the *life story*, consisting of open interviews in which the interviewee shows his or her subjectivity and describes what the most significant moments and elements have been for him or her (Bertaux, 2005, pp. 65-67). In this way, we can access the mental and symbolic universe or the power relations of a given collective, since we are less concerned with individual memories than with the collective memory of this political culture, which has been constructed through collective consensus, taboos, and forgetting.¹³ We also consider it fundamental to access individual memories to reconstruct collective memory, in this case, that of Basque Socialism, given that individual experiences acquire meaning in the collective context (Losi, Passerini, and Salvatici, 2001, p. 13).

THE SOCIALIST EXPERIENCE OF THE VIOLENCE OF PERSECUTION. EMOTIONAL SUFFERING

The Socialist experience of ETA violence is as varied as the people who make up this collective. However, we can identify some patterns and shared experiences that allow us to understand the evolution of this political culture during this period, in which a main common factor is *emotional suffering*. We consider this to be a key explanatory element in historical and, above all, political processes, for as historian William Reddy (2001, p. 129) observes, it is “an acute form of goal conflict, especially

7 According to Luis de la Calle (2007, p. 434), the confrontational tactics of *kale borroka* were an ideal strategy for radical Basque nationalism to achieve political gains.

8 The peak of the population that considered terrorism a problem occurred between 2000 and 2002, years that coincide with the peak of the population that was “very or fairly” afraid of participating in politics in the Basque Country. Data from Euskobarómetro collected in Llera and Leonisio, 2017, pp. 19 and 22.

9 As for *kale borroka* attacks on the headquarters of political parties, it is illustrative to note that these places were the second most targeted (accounting for 17% of the total number of acts), only behind bank branches (*Crónica de VascoPress*, 12-I-2015). A complete list of *kale borroka* acts between 1990 and 2000, used as a reference in this work, can be found in Calle, 2007, p. 436.

10 Not counted here are 11 other killings, such as that of Maitte Torrano and Felix Peña after the attack on the “Casa del Pueblo” Socialist headquarters in Portugalete in 1987, or that of people close to the PSE-EE.

11 Hidalgo, 2018.

12 Among the existing studies, the following are particularly relevant to the topic of study proposed here. In social psychology,

Javier Martín-Peña (2013) has studied the psychosocial consequences of the threat of ETA and the process of victimisation; in political science and sociology, we have the work of Izaskun Sáez de la Fuente (2012) on the impact of terrorism, as well as that of Luis de la Calle and Ignacio Sánchez Cuenca (2004) on how ETA’s targeting of victims changed in the mid-1990s. The work of Gema Varona (2009) stands out in the field of criminology. Nearly all of these studies include the oral testimonies of victims, which help to enable a better understanding of the phenomenon.

13 On collective memory and the power of the group in the activation of individual memories, we follow the perspective of Halbwachs, 2008, pp. 26-29. On forgetting and the need for it in the construction of memory: Augé, 1998.

that brought on by emotional thought activations. Political torture and unrequited love (both in the western context) are examples of emotional suffering.” In this case, emotional suffering would not only be a constituent part of the Socialist experience of ETA violence but would also drive the search for spaces to alleviate such suffering. As we shall see, such spaces would be found within the party, in shared sociability and, above all, in the feeling of a shared experience in which the belief of being on the “right” side of history would have significant weight, even becoming intertwined with the party’s own history. This emotional suffering would also be a constituent part of the political culture of resistance.

To understand this emotional suffering, we will first describe the types of violence that the supporters of this party have codified as such. In addition to killings and attacks, there was social control, isolation and social pressure, the necessity to be under escort, the impossibility of a normalised daily life, and the enormous emotional suffering derived from all of this. In this regard, several social psychology studies show that ETA deployed a progression of violence during this time that went from psychological to physical, evolving from coercion/intimidation/extortion/threats (psychological aggression) to attacks on property/physical aggression/bombing/kidnapping/murder (physical aggression) (Martín-Peña *et al.*, 2010, p. 113), a sequence that matches the experiences presented here. It should be noted, moreover, that many people suffered several of these forms of aggression simultaneously, which led to cases of multiple victimisation, very common in the Basque context in general¹⁴ and in that of Basque Socialism in particular.

Social control is one of the mechanisms used by terrorists to spread fear in a given society. The Basque case was no exception, and in fact, a whole process of social control was developed there, enabling the socialisation of suffering to continue. It is worth pointing out the geographical context, which features varied demographics and three large cities (with the metropolitan area of Bilbao home to almost half of the Basque population) as well as numerous small and medium-sized towns, with the province of Gipuzkoa being the best example of the latter. Above all, it was these smaller towns that became social laboratories where ETA tested the possibilities of this strategy. As mentioned, the 1990s saw an increase in the dynamics of a whole social mass of sympathisers entering into collaboration with terrorism, who were not themselves part of the group but could carry out tasks such as transmitting information on potential targets or basic logistical work—“militant work,” as it was referred to in *Oldartzen* (Herri Batasuna, 1995, p. 24). This phenomenon was particularly important in attracting young

people to the terrorist organisation, resulting in a large pool of fresh recruits. Consequently, the feeling of social control was sometimes almost absolute, as local youth, whom everyone knew, were often those who could potentially collaborate. In the case of Andoain, a medium-sized town in Gipuzkoa, where conditions were ideal for the socialisation of suffering to spread, a Socialist councillor, Estanis, described the well-oiled machinery of social control:

First, in 1997, they made a mistake and burnt the neighbour’s car instead of mine. Then they painted a graffiti message of ‘we’ll get you’ and told me that they were not going to get it wrong. In March 1999 there was another attack with Molotov cocktails on my balcony and that same night they set my car on fire. They also set fire to my daughter’s car because they said she was the daughter of a Socialist leader. (...) The control they had was terrible. The most violent attack came in 2003. My young daughter was alone studying. We had closed the balcony because we had been attacked before. But she went out to smoke a cigarette and left the window a bit open. It wasn’t long before they threw a couple of Molotov cocktails at her. They destroyed the house and almost burnt her inside.¹⁵

Note the short time lapse between opening a window and leaving it for a couple of minutes and the impact of the Molotov cocktail. The conclusion is clear: someone was always watching and waiting with the weapons of attack. Another particularly problematic area was Mondragón, a town in the province of Gipuzkoa with a strong *abertzale* (radical Basque nationalist) influence. Paco, a Socialist councillor from this town, gave the following account of how social control was implemented:

In every place there was someone who reported everything, the informer on duty, who watched, as in the case of Isaías, who knew when he went out, how, and who monitored him and who probably lived in that area. That was kept very much under control. There were many of them and they had control over a lot (Paco, interview, 2015).¹⁶

Paco’s allusion to the possible collaboration of neighbours in the perpetuation of killing is not by chance, as various sentences have pointed to the “necessary collaboration” of sympathisers of the terrorist organisation for terrorist attacks to be successful.¹⁷

14 All these forms of violence have made the Basque phenomenon, in the words of Gema Varona (2009, p. 412), one of the most paradigmatic cases of multiple victimisation, as there are individuals who have suffered more than one attack, those who have survived an attack and require bodyguards, those who after the killing of a family member find themselves insulted or threatened in the street...

15 Interview with Estanis Amuchástegui, 5 October 2018, conducted by Raúl López Romo. Quoted in López, 2019, p. 162. News article in *El País*, 18 -XI- 2003.

16 Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted by Sara Hidalgo.

17 For example, in the case of the killing of Miguel Ángel Blanco, a crucial element was the “necessary cooperation” of a Herri Batasuna councillor, Ibon Muñoa, who provided logistical support to the terrorists, *El País*, 11-10-2003. Additionally, two unregistered members of ETA (considered to be “law-abiding” citizens) provided information to the terrorist organisation on Joseba Pagazaurtundua, before his killing in 2003, as can be seen in the sentence issued by Spain’s National High Court, *El País*, 16-03-2015. The study *Historia y memoria del terroris-*

The certainty that social control was so widespread led most members to take measures of self-protection to hide their affiliation from society, as this Vitoria-based party official says: “Switching to become sympathisers so as not to appear on the membership lists and to receive notifications in white envelopes without a logo. It was also necessary to use initials to identify the collection of membership fees (CEF). They preferred that neither the postman nor the clerk at the corresponding savings bank knew their political affiliation” (Idoia, interview, 2015).

In addition to this social control, and intimately linked to it, was social pressure. This occurred above all in the public sphere, and its aim was to single out individuals for social isolation and exclusion, while also instilling fear to achieve political demobilisation. In this regard, social psychologist Susan Opatow (1990) says that these dynamics lead to what she calls moral exclusion, produced “when individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply” by a given social group. In this case, the individuals who would be perceived as outside the boundary were the members of the PSE-EE. This social pressure had significant leverage through *kale borroka*, since this violent and, as we have seen, very widespread tactic was intended to discourage citizens from approaching Socialist offices or representatives—and judging by the limited turnout for party campaigns or social activities, such as rallies or events, it often succeeded in doing so. The previously mentioned example of Andoain also illustrates the social pressure created when the most sacred space for a person’s privacy, the place where they feel safe, is being watched: their home. Indeed, attacking private homes was part of this strategy. There are many examples of such attacks, ranging from direct attacks to threatening letters or parcel bombs sent to one’s own home. For instance, two bullets were left at Isatsu’s front door as a warning, and Carlos, a Socialist councillor, was sent a letter holding him responsible for the separation of ETA prisoners, and warning him that “those who play with fire will burn” and “you are going to pay dearly,” along with a drawing of a bomb exploding and the word “boom.”¹⁸ In another case, journalist Gorka Landaburu, a Socialist supporter in Zarautz, received a parcel bomb that exploded and left him with serious physical injuries.¹⁹ Terrorists would also phone private homes at odd hours to make threats and then hang up, or even publish the home phone numbers of those under threat, as was the case in Andoain.²⁰ The message they wanted to send was clear: we control your private space, your privacy, your movements, your fami-

ly and, in short, all aspects of your life, and we will put pressure on you through this sphere.

Heated arguments during town council meetings were another of the most common mechanisms of social pressure. The newspaper archives of the period are full of news items on this subject, and it is one of the topics that is most frequently mentioned in interviews. Mari Carmen, a councillor in Elorrio, a town in Bizkaia with a strong nationalist slant, recounts the problems that arose during the council meetings, with a good number of *abertzale* supporters berating her, not allowing her to speak and threatening her: “It was turmoil, because you were just a few metres away from them, and although you were afraid you could not let it show” (Mari Carmen, interview, 2017), while noting that some councillors needed to take tranquilisers before the meetings began. In her case, , as many as 80 people were shouting at her, insulting her and even spitting at her.²¹ Paco, a councillor from Mondragón, recounts that “they would stand behind us, surrounded us and were constantly threatening us, ‘son of a bitch’ and all that,” a story similar to that of Izaskun, a councillor from Pasaia, an average coastal town in the province of Gipuzkoa: “the public would get behind us, crouch down behind us and say ‘we’re going to kill you, you bastard, you bitch’” (Izaskun, interview, 2015). Often the pressure linked to the council meetings began before arriving at the town hall—the persecution was such that they would wait for me in the corner of the town hall before the council meetings, (...) it was hell” (Mari Carmen, interview, 2017), says Mari Carmen—which made these sessions even more complicated from a security and psychological point of view.

Social pressure was also apparent during local patron saint celebrations which, given their importance in the struggle for the hegemony of public space, are discussed next. According to historian Manuel Montero (2014, p. 145), in this period such celebrations were turned into collective gatherings marked by the vindication of the Basque language as a mode of public expression, the organisation of indigenous sporting events, the use of traditional dress, and “doctrinal sacralisation,” including the vindication of ETA prisoners and the right to self-determination. The festivities were a stronghold of radical Basque nationalist youth, events that symbolised their power in the street and where *kale borroka* actions were not uncommon, as news archives from the time show.²² For this reason, they were highly problematic spaces, often resulting in altercations with the police. This situation led many Socialists to be excluded or to exclude themselves from such celebrations, deciding not to attend so as not to put themselves in danger. Among the former was Goyo:

mo en Euskadi cites the importance of these collaborators who used “informal channels” to provide ETA with information on possible targets, which ended up on the so-called “blacklists” (Pérez, 2021, p. 493)

18 Letter of extortion to a Socialist councillor. Archives of the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism.

19 *El Mundo*, 16-05-2001.

20 *El País*, 9 -III- 2003.

21 *Europa Press*, 21/03/2010.

22 Numerous cases can be found in news archives, such as: “Altercados en las fiestas de Vergara,” *El País*, 4-06-2001; “altercados durante las fiestas patronales de Vitoria,” *El Correo*, 15-09-2009; “La kale borroka pone en jaque las fiestas de Bilbao,” *ABC*, 21-08-2010; “La kale borroka reaparece en las fiestas de Zarautz,” *El Correo*, 12-08-2010.

I have taken bodyguards to the Historic District during the Bilbao festivities. And my bodyguards told me no, that we should not go in. And I have entered on occasion, because my family, my aunt and cousins, were part of a celebration troupe, and instead of entering where everyone else does, I had to enter through the back of the San Nicolás church, which is where the *txozna* [bar] was. And they took me straight into the kitchen, I could not stay at the bar. That is violence, because I was not able to enjoy the festivities.

Among the latter, those who excluded themselves, we find Raúl: “Here in Amurrio, the celebrations start on August 11th and end on the 17th, so I decided not to stay for the festivities, to go on holiday during those dates. When this happens [the threat of ETA], your behaviour patterns change and you might not go out anymore for late nights or to certain places” (Raúl, interview, 2016).

The most obvious consequence of this reality was the heavy psychological and emotional toll taken on those who faced threats, which contributed greatly to the emotional suffering caused by this phenomenon. For Goyo, a councillor in Bilbao, there is no doubt that “the worst thing was the social pressure” (Goyo, interview, 2016). One of the most important consequences of this social pressure—and not surprisingly, one of its objectives—was to prevent targets from living a normalised life in order to achieve political demobilisation. Thus, it was not unusual for those under threat to lose friendships, be ignored by neighbours, or be jeered at in the streets, especially in small and medium-sized towns, where control and pressure made daily life very difficult for these individuals.

Towards the end of the century, the situation became increasingly dangerous. The year 2000 marked the beginning of what we have called “the years of lead” for Basque Socialism (and for all non-nationalist Basque politics, as were the members of the Partido Popular, which experienced a similar reality), as the pressure, threats and number of attacks soared. From then on, all non-nationalist Basque political parties were in ETA’s sights, with all the ensuing consequences. In 2001, ETA assassinated Froilán Elespe, a Socialist councillor in Lasarte-Oria who did not have a bodyguard, and a few months earlier the group had attempted to assassinate the councillor of the same party in Ordizia, Iñaki Dubreuil, who survived.²³ It was then that the executive committee chaired by Nicolás Redondo required all its public officials to be accompanied by bodyguards,²⁴ which caused considerable personal difficulties for those under escort and hindered the party’s establishment, as evidenced by the fact that resignations took place precisely for this reason. In 2002, there were 963 people accompanied by bodyguards due to the threat of ETA in the Basque Country, in addition to 11,483 law enforcement officers (not including mu-

nicipal police officers), who were frequent targets of the organisation (López, 2015, p. 85).

The obligation to have bodyguards had a heavy impact on all Socialist members. On the one hand, it impinged on the most basic aspect of human beings: their freedom. On the other hand, it had serious collateral effects on various areas in the personal sphere, such as family (young children, partner, parents...), friends, and daily routines. The impact on individual freedom was one of the most important sources of emotional suffering. It is crucial to remember that these were cases of anonymous individuals, not frontline politicians, with normal lives and a mental universe in which it was hard to imagine security arrangements of this kind: Isatsu was a cattle farmer, and he would watch over the cows in the mountains with two bodyguards; Patxi was a gardener, and he would cut grass and tend gardens with two bodyguards; María Jesús worked as a clinic assistant, and she also performed her job under escort; these were people who mostly did not consider the possibility of having bodyguards. In this respect, we have the testimony of Edu, a council member in Álava, who stayed at home for several weeks when he was informed of the need for bodyguards, as he could not understand the obligation to have someone watching him from two steps behind, to whom he also had to report all his movements: “Me with a bodyguard? No way, I saw it as something alien to me, it didn’t fit in my line of reasoning, I worked and then collaborated in the party but to be under escort? No, it didn’t fit, it was like another burden” (Edu, interview, 2016). Having escorts was also an intrusion into a person’s privacy, as they knew everything about the private life of their charges, including their movements, their diet, their consumer tastes, their friendships, etc. In this regard, Marian, a councillor in Iurreta, describes the impossibility of shopping or buying certain items (in her case, she bought underwear when she was on holiday so that the bodyguards would not see what she was purchasing), or how during the years she was under escort, she did not go out to celebrate her wedding anniversary with her husband in a restaurant but instead celebrated at home (Marian, interview, 2016). Izaskun, a councillor in Pasaia, summarises this aspect as follows: “[The problem] is not that you are with two people at all times but the constraints put on your life” (Izaskun, interview, 2015).

Having bodyguards not only restricted individual freedom but also had important collateral effects on the individual’s close circle. Those who had young children, for example, were strongly impacted, as it was difficult for them to hide this reality from children, who would ultimately realise what was happening and might then suffer psychological consequences. The most common strategy for parents was to tell their children that the escorts were friends, that they would look under the car to see if there was a cat—when they were really checking for explosive devices—or the parents would make up an excuse to justify not going to a festive event that could be dangerous. “My children didn’t know who they [the bodyguards] were until they were 12 or 13 years old. [I told them that] they were colleagues. I had to trick them. When I went to

23 Before the PSE-EE, the PP (People’s Party) had already suffered a wave of assassinations among its councillors, with a sharp peak between 1997 and 2001, and had already implemented a policy of mandatory bodyguards for public officials. The experience of both parties was quite similar in regard to terrorism.

24 *El País* 27-06-2001.

the car, the same thing: ‘Wait here a little while, I have to check if a cat has got under the car’” (Josean, interview, 2015). Even so, children would eventually realise the truth and ask their parents about it, something that in all cases has been described as a cause of suffering. Isatsu recalls the impact of his six-year-old son telling him that he knew that the escorts were not friends: “My son said to me, ‘I’m going to ask you a question, are these people who go with you bodyguards?’ And I asked him, ‘Why are you asking?’ and without saying anything, he backed away and said, ‘Just for asking why I’m asking, that means I’m right’. And that hurts you a lot more, that they see things that you didn’t realise were happening” (Isatsu, interview, 2015). In his case, he affirms that this reality did not provoke significant psychological consequences for his children. The same was not true for one of Josean’s two sons, who at the age of 12 asked their father about his safety: “They said to me, ‘*Aita*, you have bodyguards’, and I explained to them as best I could, and one of them became very ill, he started vomiting, he went to bed vomiting, he couldn’t go to the *ikastola* the next day, and the whole week was terrible. And he spent the whole week saying to me, ‘*Aita*, why do they want to kill you, if everybody knows you?’ That was the phrase. He didn’t understand. What happened next? The kid became fearful for me. He lost his whole personality, you could say, in fact, he is still in treatment, because of me, because he was afraid that they would kill me. He missed the whole year of school” (Josean, interview, 2016). This last consequence, that of missing school and even failing, has been described by some interviewees as relatively common, although definitive figures are not available and further research would be necessary.

In addition, having bodyguards affected sociability, with all the repercussions this could entail in certain periods of life. As a result, young adults suffered from not being able to socialise in a normal way at a vital stage in which this is fundamental (Hidalgo, 2021). Jesus, a councillor in Lasarte-Oria, a medium-sized town in Gipuzkoa, recalls the anguish of lost friendships: “I had a place rented with friends, where I went at weekends. One day the *Nagusi* of the *Ertzaintza* [police chief] in Hernani called me to tell me (...) that I had to leave. That was in 2008, I was 26 years old. I started crying, (...) I had to abandon the place and I was left without friends” (Jesus, interview, 2019). For his part, Raúl describes how he had to travel alone to basketball games from Amurrio, where he lived, to Vitoria, as nobody wanted to go in his car and with his bodyguards; he also decided to miss out on his town’s patron saint festivities to avoid possible problems (Raúl, interview, 2016). This undoubtedly affected people’s life trajectories, as in many cases it was difficult for them to find a partner or have certain experiences, as Goyo says: “I was single and during all that time, it was very difficult to be able to meet someone and have them join you in the car that would take you there and back, with two other people, right? It changes you a lot, a lot” (Goyo, interview, 2016). For Rafaela, this meant that her sociability and emotional life were linked to fellow party members: “Some of us say, ‘we get together and re-

produce among Socialists’ but it’s true. In the end your boyfriend or girlfriend is a Socialist, you marry a Socialist” (Rafaela, interview, 2015).

Another of the key issues of this period was the political implementation of the party. ETA’s objective was none other than to make the party disappear, and to this end it deployed the mechanisms mentioned previously. For this reason, the survival of the party was a matter of great concern to those who were in leadership positions, those who drew up candidate lists, and so on. There were often personal problems and individual situations that could have an impact on the functioning of the organisation: for example, members whose partner or parents asked them to leave the party; those who became depressed and ended up resigning because they could not lead a normal life and were constantly being singled out in their town; or those under fear and stress caused by the situation of constant threat. Some public officials wanted to leave their posts, and in fact, in some cases they did; here, the role of the party was fundamental, giving encouragement, providing support, and alleviating a psychological situation that at times of maximum violence was extremely complicated. In this context, when elections were held, drawing up electoral lists was not always easy, as Miguel, mayor of Renteria, recalls: “It is true that for many colleagues, when the term of office is over and you try to draw up a new list for the town council, it is difficult. People are not willing.” Moreover, the lists were often made up of the same names as in the previous term, as nobody wanted to step in, and others stayed on due to family pressure. This is how Txarli describes it:

The possibilities for the party to develop have been very limited, very difficult. Every time we had to draw up a candidate list to stand in municipal or regional elections... we had to convince people and then they had to convince their families. Moreover, very difficult situations arose, because some of the people we wanted on the lists ended up backing out, above all because of their families. [...] There were real dramas. I have had to make many lists, and it was very complicated, because you were putting the person whom you approached in a difficult situation in terms of having to prove their worth, and from the point of view of sensitivity and tact it was very complicated, as they could end up leaving the party because they felt that you had made an invitation that they had not been able to respond to and now they felt uncomfortable around you. [...] It was very complicated to carry out political work (Juan Carlos).

Speaking from the perspective of those on the candidate list, we have the account of Edu, a councillor in Ermua, a medium-sized town with a Socialist majority, who describes the public and private situation of this phenomenon:

In 2003 I reached an agreement at home [having served as councillor since 1995] that I would not stand for election as a councillor again, and one day Carlos [Totorika] called me and told me he had bad news, that one of the candidates had dropped out. And I said, ‘Don’t mess with me, don’t do this to me, ask me to do anything else’, [...]. Your family and friends say, ‘Listen, is it worth it? That’s enough, you’ve done it for

12 years, let someone else come.’ Because in the end the family also suffers, your circle suffers, and although nothing has happened to me, what if it does? And especially at that time, when it affected us closely. So if you step down, you have a certain relief, escape.... Then internally, there’s the political family, who say, ‘Why change the lists if you’re already screwed? Why screw the others?’ (Edu, interview, 2016).

In addition to the problems of the lists, when elections were held it was difficult to distribute party propaganda, or to hold open events in the streets. It was even more difficult for passers-by to approach the party—something essential to the work of a town politician—because “we had such a police cordon that the cordon itself acted as a barrier for those who wanted to get close,” recalls a party official from Álava province (Juan Carlos, interview, 2017). Political events, therefore, were almost always closed and restricted to members, and this “made it very difficult to work” (Idoia, interview, 2016).

ETA terrorism has undoubtedly been a major handicap in the electoral implementation of the PSE-EE but it is also true that a significant part of the population did vote for the party during elections, although they did not attend campaign events. In fact, electoral support for the party increased as the period progressed, reaching its peak between 2007 and 2009.²⁵ This example shows how the party, despite everything, was able to survive, present its candidates, and win institutional positions, including the *Lehendakaritz*a or presidency of the Basque Government, in 2009, with Patxi López.

TABLE 1. Election results of the PSE-EE, 1994-2009

Elections	PSE-EE
Basque Parliament 1994	12
Municipal 1995	240 (total councillors in the Basque Country)
Basque Parliament 1998	14
Municipal 1999	243
Basque Parliament 2001	13
Municipal 2003	296
Basque Parliament 2005	18
Municipal 2007	332
Basque Parliament 2009	25

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from *Resultados electorales*, Euskadi.eus at <https://www.euskadi.eus/web01-aphautes/es/ab12aAREWar/?locale=es>

²⁵ The reasons for the increase in electoral support were not exclusively related to terrorism but also influenced the economic situation, the electoral results of the PSOE in Spain or the electoral results of nationalism, among many others. Yet, an analysis of those elements would go beyond the scope of this article.

In accounts of this experience, emotions have not always been verbalised in the same way but certain patterns can be identified. Anger or weariness at the very existence of terrorism was the most common aspect described. “It is a rotten experience [the existence of terrorism],” says Esther Cabezudo, a councillor in Portugalete, a medium-sized municipality of Greater Bilbao, who suffered an attack that almost ended her life in 2002.²⁶ Many day-to-day institutional situations triggered “rage” and even “disgust” for Javier, a councillor in Vitoria (Javier, interview, 2016). “Well, with a lot of rage. Contained rage, because in the end you have to keep your composure,” says Izaskun when recalling that period (Izaskun, interview, 2015). “You live in a state of alertness, fear and exhaustion,” says Raúl, the only Socialist councillor in Amurrio, a small town in Álava (Raúl, interview, 2016). For his part, Miguel, mayor of the Gipuzkoa town of Rentería during this period, points out the emotional journey from fear to acceptance: “There is fear, there is anguish, there is resignation,” before affirming that in the end, they would still go on (Miguel, interview, 2015). And this is precisely the question we are going to analyse next: why did they continue? For those who did not abandon their political activities or institutional positions, what drove them to continue?

“IN THE FACE OF FEAR, COMMITMENT.” STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME FEAR

The reasons why someone might continue an activity despite it being against their interests are varied, although we know that the emotional component plays an important role. Emotion is intrinsically linked to the objectives of individuals, and the decisions they take are not merely the outcome of rational deliberation but also the emotions generated by their objective, as noted by sociologist Randal Collins: “The dynamic is primarily emotional; individuals ‘decide’ which coalition they will give a show of support to, insurgent or status quo, not so much by calculation of costs and benefits but by collective emotional flow” (Collins, 2001, p. 41). This could explain decisions that at first glance do not seem to be in a person’s best interests, such as joining a political party persecuted by terrorism. In addition, it is worth remembering that people attach emotions to an idea, an object, or a person, and relate to them through these emotions. This object, moreover, is intentional in nature and embodies complex beliefs, as philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2008 pp. 49-52) observes. In the case that concerns us, this perspective enables us to analyse how Socialist members relate to the party’s ideals and how the emotions that these ideals generate influence their beliefs about the party, an analysis that will allow us to better understand the personal decisions taken by these individuals. This idea is relevant to the subject at hand because many of the councillors were not professional

²⁶ *El País*, 28/02/2002.

politicians but dedicated themselves to politics in their free time, and despite the danger and the upheaval this caused in their lives, they continued. And they did so because a series of feelings and emotions drove them, helping them to navigate a turbulent path marked by terrorism in which they created a political culture of resistance, where emotional adherence to their political militancy was key to ensuring that no mass demobilisation could threaten the survival of their political project. One Socialist put it plainly, “You don’t do it for the eighty euros, you do it out of emotions” (Isatsu, interview, 2016), alluding to the allowances that many received for attending council meetings, the only payment for their work as councillors.

Among these emotions, which we will analyse next, were rage, anger, commitment, pride, and group solidarity. Rage and anger at the situation were some of the most important mobilising emotions. “I continued out of anger, because I didn’t want them to win,” said Soledad, a councillor in Plasencia de las Armas-Soraluze, a small town in Guipuzcoa, where she was the only Socialist representative and on the brink of leaving, deeply depressed due to the social pressure (Soledad, interview, 2019). Raúl, for his part, says that “humanly speaking, you do think about it [leaving because of the pressure] but it would have meant that these guys were going to win and I wasn’t up for that. I’m quite stubborn, I wasn’t willing to give them that pleasure. And I wasn’t willing to give up” (Raúl, interview, 2016). The decision to continue was linked precisely to this sense of duty of representing the voters, of having been elected at the ballot box and having the moral obligation to fulfil the role, as Isatsu reflects: “The feeling we had was that what we were defending was so important that it was not just our political position but the idea that everyone could defend their political position, including Herri Batasuna” (Isatsu, interview, 2016). For her part, Esther, a survivor of a bomb attack in 2002, says that it was rage that enabled her to continue after almost losing her life: “When they do something like that [the attack] to you, at least in my case, I say, I’m going to stop. But in the end, no, because then they win, you feel even worse and you continue to go on. [...] It makes you want to fight even more” (Esther, interview, 2016). Among Socialist party members, the idea of the need to run for office and win institutional positions was deeply rooted, and to do so, it was necessary to overcome the fear of terrorism: “The only way was to be in the institutions and defend democracy, because in the end it meant defending freedom, defending the democratic system” (Arritxu, interview, 2019).

This strong commitment is intimately linked to a sense of pride in not abandoning the project in difficult times. “You go out there afraid but you go out to defend your convictions, to fight for what you believe in [...]. I feel proud to have been a member of parliament, to have been in the parliamentary seats, and to have fought against the scourge of ETA. That is the greatest pride of my life” (Paco, interview, 2015). Isatsu also connects it to pride as a citizen and as a parent, for having been there

at that time and being able to transmit to his children a sense of pride in their father, “There is the feeling of looking your children in the eye, and telling them that when things were good I was a councillor, and when things got complicated, I didn’t walk away and leave my colleagues to be killed” (Isatsu, interview, 2016).

This idea of commitment, moreover, ties in with the party’s historical memory. As mentioned previously, after the Spanish Civil War the PSOE was not only outlawed but its members were either killed or imprisoned, or lived through the dark years of Franco’s regime in hiding. It was in this context that an early culture of resistance was forged, with figures such as Ramón Rubial, an officer in a UGT battalion during the Civil War, arrested after the fall of the Northern Front in 1937 and imprisoned until 1956. On the subject of this experience, he stated that “the mood of the people inside the prisons was not one of resignation but of active resistance [...]. It might seem crazy that, after suffering a military defeat, we had the energy to create organisations. We set them up to boost the morale of the prisoners, first of all, and also to organise support for incoming fighters.”²⁷ This active resistance continued in the following years, keeping the party alive and organising essential clandestine work (Mateos, 1993).

This experience of survival, resistance, and resilience that allowed the PSOE to survive during the dictatorship was passed on to younger generations, who in some ways saw it as a model for their own resistance to ETA terrorism. Isatsu made the following link between the memory transmitted through the party and his own political activity:

You know that you are doing it for something big, that everyone can defend their ideas, including those who want to kill you. What you think you are doing is so big that you don’t question how much you are getting paid for it. I mean, the people who were in the civil war, which then became a dictatorship... (Isatsu, interview, 2016).

Josean, a councillor in Erandio, an industrial town in Greater Bilbao, knew the anti-Francoist Socialist leader Ramón Rubial, and links his decision not to leave politics with the strong emotional impact Rubial’s experience had on him: “[When thinking about leaving or resigning] I look back on many comrades and Ramón Rubial, who was in prison for twenty-some years” (Josean, interview, 2016). For his part, Goyo also highlights the influence of his grandfather, an anti-Francoist fighter who was imprisoned for years, on his political training and his commitment throughout the period of terrorism. Arritxu, the granddaughter of a man who was executed and daughter of a UGT trade unionist during the dictatorship, clearly links her own resistance to that of her father and grandparents: “It has a lot to do with my family background, on my mother’s and father’s side. On my mother’s side, my great-grandfather was executed in the war. And on

²⁷ http://www.ramonrubial.com/03_represionP.asp

my father's side, my grandmother went to Barcelona from San Sebastián in 1936 with my young father, because her husband had gone to the front and spent eight years in a concentration camp. And my father joined the UGT in the sixties; he was imprisoned in Carabanchel. And I think because of all of that, unintentionally or unconsciously, you carry a legacy from the past, and it made me think of militancy as something natural for me. At home it was always there, and so I thought, 'now it's time for the same thing'" (Arritxu, interview, 2019).

Nonetheless, the feeling of pride has its reverse in shame. This is a complex issue to study, as it is rarely mentioned in oral accounts and is very difficult to find in other sources. What is certain is that most interviewees claim that no one resigned because of pressure from ETA but newspaper archives indicate otherwise. After the breaking of ETA's truce in 1999 and the spate of killings that followed, a total of 17 PSE-EE councillors decided to resign from their posts²⁸—in other words, nearly 7% of the total number of public officers—and in April 2001, after the assassination of Manuel Indiano of the PP in Zumarraga, all five PSE-EE local councillors resigned. Both examples illustrate the extent to which social pressure could have an effect. This reality has hardly been mentioned in interviews, and the hypothesis that we can suggest is that the collective memory of the party has constructed a heroic story, in which everyone formed a compact, united collective, and resignation was not considered, although further studies on this subject would be necessary.

Another element that contributed greatly to the creation of this political culture of resistance was the group solidarity and networks of sociability that the party built to alleviate the psychological exhaustion caused by the phenomenon of terrorism. As we have seen, social pressure and isolation were central phenomena in the experience of terrorism, and consequently, in many cases party members saw their social relations, friendships, and even family disappear, causing great emotional suffering. The party therefore acted as a source of psychological support for its members, offering comfort and encouragement. Not only did fellow party members attend potentially problematic town council meetings to support fellow councillors who were sometimes the sole party representative there but lunches or dinners were organised to socialise, encouragement was given on a personal level, and measures were taken to provide support, including financially, after attacks.

The most critical moments were usually those following an attack or an assassination. When this occurred, calls would be made in the early hours of the morning to the general secretaries and organisers, who would immediately go to the scene. Paco recalls the following experience from his perspective as general secretary of the Mondragón group: "There was an attack and a lot of us colleagues immediately gathered there, and we stayed and spent the whole night talking" (Paco, inter-

view, 2015). Newspaper records abound with this type of news, of party officials appearing late at night at the sites of terrorist attacks—typically the private homes of members and party headquarters—and even on important holidays such as Christmas Eve.²⁹

Other times and places of tension, as noted earlier, were town council meetings, where the lone Socialist councillor was often subjected to insults, threats, or even aggression. When a "hot council meeting" was anticipated, or in other words, a session where potentially problematic issues were to be debated—motions concerning ETA prisoners, cases of detention or torture, petitions to condemn ETA for an assassination, for example—the party mobilised its supporters, who appeared as members of the public at the council meetings. "We would go if something was happening, for example in Rentería, to support our comrades" (Paco, interview, 2015).

Organising opportunities to socialise was also fundamental, as the need for bodyguards and the ongoing social pressure made it impossible to socialise normally, and even led those affected to exclude themselves to avoid potentially dangerous situations. This resulted in complicated psychological dynamics, where depression or anxiety were common, and it was then that these moments of personal closeness became all the more necessary. This is how Jesus remembers his years as a young man under escort, with hardly any friends or social life, and the emotional lifeline that was provided by the Socialist Youth organisation, which held many events: "Socialist Youth helped us a lot, because we went to national conferences and that helped us greatly because we would go without escorts. After all, we were young and we didn't have the means to travel around every weekend. So going out like that was very good for us and we felt very welcome by the rest of the Socialist Youth of Spain" (Jesus, interview, 2019). Raúl, a young man, also describes how he hardly socialised at all in his municipality, doing so instead with young peers from neighbouring towns such as Llodio or Arrigorriaga (Raúl, interview, 2016). Meanwhile, Isatsu recalls how some institutional bodies outside the Basque Country would help

29 Some examples: the attack on the Balmaseda Casa del Pueblo (Socialist centre) on Christmas Eve 2007, when a bomb exploded at dinner time. *El Mundo*, 25/12/2007. In other cases, attacks could occur late at night, such as in the Socialist headquarters of the Bilbao neighbourhood of La Peña in 2008, when a bomb exploded at 5:00 a.m., after the police had been alerted, *El País*, 18/04/2008; that of Rentería, where one of its 27 attacks took place at 4:30 a.m., *El País* 06/09/2003; or that of Andoain, also in 2003, *El País*, 26/07/2003. It should be noted that Socialist offices became targets of *kale borroka* in the strategy of the socialisation of suffering, and they were therefore heavily armoured. Private homes were also targeted, such as that of councillor Antonia Landa, from Andoain, whose home was attacked with an incendiary device in 2003, *El País*, 26/07/2003, or Jesús Oficialdegi, a councillor in Rentería, who experienced an attack on his house in 2006 and had to put out the flames himself with his fire extinguisher until the police arrived, *El País*, 22-03-2006. In all these cases, party officials and members were there to accompany those affected, whatever the time.

28 *El País*, 29 -I- 2002.

to offer support in this regard. In his case, he recalls that “the government of Castilla la Mancha invited those of us who were under a lot of pressure” and the group spent a day there (Isatsu, interview, 2016).

On top of all of this, interpersonal relations were fundamental to the survival of the party and its institutional positions. Often, it was members or party officials who accompanied and provided psychological support, encouragement, and comfort to those who represented the Socialist party so that they would not be left alone. For example, Soledad suffered severe depression when she took office as a councillor in Plasencia de las Armas, an average town in the province of Guipuzcoa, and shut herself in at home for a few months. She was on the verge of resigning but psychological support from the organising secretary in Guipuzcoa and a fellow member of the group helped her to carry on (Soledad, interview, 2019).

All of these emotional mechanisms gradually reinforced a political culture of resistance, which ultimately became a powerful symbol for members who were often tired and worn out but continued nonetheless to run for office and carry out their political project.

CONCLUSIONS

We have depicted the emotional journey of Basque Socialism in the face of ETA terrorism during the years of the socialisation of suffering. On the one hand, rage and pain—in other words, emotional suffering—but at the same time a spirit of resistance and resilience, full of emotions such as pride, adhesion to the ideals and the party’s own history, group solidarity, and commitment to the people. All of these elements shaped the political culture of resistance that endured throughout the years of ETA terrorism and explain, in part, how the party survived in such an adverse context, with eight deaths and hundreds and hundreds of people extorted, how its candidates were able to run for office, and why these people continued to stand for election despite the threat. Let us conclude with one member’s explanation about the impact of terrorism and the party’s capacity for resilience: “I can’t explain how we managed to pull through the way we did as a party. On the one hand, there was the rage and the pain, which is a given but on the other hand the strength and integrity, I think it was amazing, and above all a union that was unbreakable, and that was what made it possible for the party to have councillors in the important cities but in the small towns, too.”

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