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# Strategies of psychological terrorism perpetrated by ETA's network: Delimitation and classification

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This paper defines and analyzes the harassment perpetrated by ETA's terrorist network in the Basque Country, providing a taxonomy of its strategies of psychological violence. The usefulness of this taxonomy has been tested and contrasted by means of a content analysis of 19 testimonies of persons who were the victims of violence by the terrorist network. The taxonomy of strategies of psychological violence is made up of four dimensions that emphasize the actions on the context of the persons affected, and on their emotional state, cognitions, and behaviour. Results show the predominance of emotional and cognitive strategies. Intra-observer and inter-observer reliability analysis in coding showed a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of .92 and .87, respectively. The psychological violence analyzed in this study reflects a form of psychological terrorism that harasses and persecutes a specific sector of the population.

*Estrategias del terrorismo psicológico aplicado por el entramado de ETA: delimitación y clasificación.*  
Este estudio delimita y analiza el acoso aplicado por el entramado terrorista de ETA en el País Vasco, aportando para ello una taxonomía de sus estrategias de violencia psicológica. La utilidad de la mencionada clasificación ha sido probada y contrastada mediante un análisis de contenido de 19 testimonios de personas que han sido víctimas de la violencia del entramado terrorista. La taxonomía del conjunto de estrategias de violencia psicológica está compuesta por cuatro dimensiones, que enfatizan respectivamente la acción sobre el contexto cercano del individuo, sobre sus emociones, sus cogniciones y sobre su misma conducta. Los resultados muestran la predominancia de las estrategias de tipo emocional y cognitivo. El análisis de la fiabilidad intraobservador e interobservador en la codificación mostró un coeficiente Kappa de Cohen de .92 y .87, respectivamente. La violencia psicológica analizada en este estudio refleja un tipo de terrorismo psicológico que acosa y persigue a un sector específico de la población.

The interest of social scientists in terrorism has been growing from the recent proliferation of terrorism in the world. The events of September 11, 2001 in the USA, the Madrid March 11, 2004, and the London July 7, 2005 bombings, and Mumbai, 2008, amongst others, are extreme examples of the social relevance of the issue.

Terrorist violence has evolved over time, according to Spencer (2006), in terms of organization, types of violence and targets, and the concepts of «new terrorism» and «old terrorism» have been devised to reflect the evolution of terrorism characteristics. «New terrorism» according to Crenshaw (2000) refers to groups such as Al-Qaeda which seek to transform the world with a religious motivation using indiscriminate attacks against targets. «Old terrorism» refers to groups which seek political power, national liberation, discrimination of its targets, and a way of communicating a message to a wide audience using violence, trying to provoke terror to extend influence.

Despite some difficulties in defining a phenomenon as complex as terrorism, there is some basic agreement: for instance, when the combination of violence and threat perpetrated by individuals or groups is used as a means which can start a terror process, usually with political ends (Schmid & Jongman, 1988; Ganor, 2005). So, the strategic use of terror is relevant to achieving the objectives (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006).

The study of terrorist violence has usually been focused on physical violence, which usually is characterized by the perpetration of bombings, assassinations or kidnappings (Mahan & Griset, 2008). However, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), there is a growing recognition among researchers and practitioners of the need to include and research a form of violence that does not necessarily result in injury or death. Thus, strategies of psychological violence (PV) may also be perpetrated, through the threat of physical violence acts together with coercion and intimidation. For instance, threats (including death threats) can be seen as a potential traumatic experience (Nijdam, Olff, de Vries, Martens, & Gersons, 2008). The study of this kind of acts which place a substantial stress on individuals, families, communities and health care systems worldwide, represents an area of research which may provide some benefits (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, & Zwi, 2002). In this way, this paper proposes to delimit the harassment and PV

forms or strategies perpetrated by the ETA terrorist network in the Basque Country context, proposing a taxonomy of the mentioned violence behaviours.

The acts of PV can be seen as a form of instrumental violence, which according to Rodríguez-Carballeira, Almendros, Escartín, Porrúa, Martín-Peña, Javaloy & Carrobles (2005) may be a tool designed to dominate, both to submit or to exclude the person involved. According to Imbusch (2003) these PV strategies are based on words, gestures, pictures and symbols in order to subject the person by means of intimidation and fear. For instance, an image with a death threat in a specific context may inflict fear or even publicly signal the target. When referring to PV, it is necessary to emphasize that these strategies are forms of systematic intimidation which are different from isolated acts of violence.

An example of settings where politically-motivated violence have occurred, is Northern Ireland, where has been perpetrated intimidation or vandalism, which has been barely studied (Bruce, 1997). Or also in Turkey, where was perpetrated collection of considerable funds, using intimidation from people of Kurdish origin living in eastern and south-eastern Turkey (Roth & Sever, 2007). Settings as organized crime, frequently use these strategies, using intimidation for impose their rules (McIllwain, 1999; Paoli, 2002). Apart from these criminal groups, in other quotidian settings of interaction, according to Rodríguez-Carballeira et al., (2005) may be used PV, as for instance couple violence, cults, mobbing, or bullying, among others.

The consequences derived from terrorist violence over victims, may range relevant syndromes, in the case of physical violence, as acute stress disorder in the short term, and posttraumatic stress disorder in the longer term (Danieli, Brom, & Sills, 2004). Victims may share group characteristics, such as an ideology, ethnic group or religion, which may be the basis for their selection. So, members of the same group are also kept in a state of fear. PV achieves a higher level of terror when interacts with physical violence, directed repeatedly and unpredictably against the target. According to Nijdam, Olf, de Vries, Martens & Gersons (2008), in their study of threat, close protection and its consequences, traumatic experiences such as threats are unpleasant, causing feelings of intense helplessness, affecting on professional practice, private life, health and safety.

*ETA's terrorist network in the Basque Country*

A form of the mentioned evolution has taken place in «classic» terrorism such as that of ETA in the Basque Country. ETA began as a national liberation movement in the context of Francoism in the Basque Country in Spain. After the dictatorship, the violence continued as a war of attrition against the Spanish state with the aim of establishing a Basque state. From here on, the military leadership of ETA was located at the apex of a complex movement of organizations (Shabad & Llera, 1995). Violence of ETA was supported by a series of organisations grouped together under the term MLNV (Basque National Liberation Movement). The consequence of this was a progressive strengthening of this civil structure (Shabad & Llera, 1995; Tejerina, 2001). This network acts as the infrastructure to ensure ETA's continuity (Funes, 1998). Since the 1990s, the violent methods of ETA's organizational structure evolved towards a more relevant role of its network and a new kind of violence based on the harassment of its targets as well as physical violence. This network is made up of people who

support the organization in the role of collaborators and sympathizers, who might give direct and indirect support to the activist or cells, respectively. The so-called *kale borroka* (street fight) is an example, fundamentally involving young people who support the terrorist group, and sometimes framed as part of the MNLV with a strategic organization (Alonso & Reinares, 2005; Bartolomé-Gutiérrez & Rechea-Alberola, 2006).

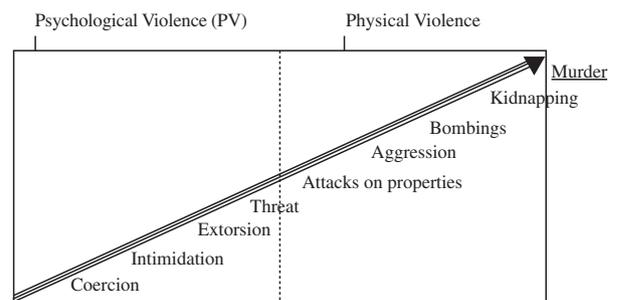
According to De la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, (2004) the strategy termed by ETA as the *socialization of suffering* chose new and wider sectors of society to be signalled as potential targets. The discourse that justifies and legitimizes violence against others might facilitate a person being designated as the enemy on the part of the ETA network (Sabucedo, Rodríguez, & Fernández, 2002; Sabucedo, Blanco, & De la Corte, 2003; Van den Broek, 2004; De la Corte, Kruglanski, de Miguel, Sabucedo, & Díaz, 2007). The targets, according to Echeburúa & de Corral (2004), selected in function of their profession, ideology or belonging to certain political parties, might be considered as sub-humans by ETA.

*The types of violence perpetrated by ETA's terrorist network*

ETA's violence may be classified by physical and PV types, which may form a continuum, taking account that people who has suffered physical violence, often also has suffered previously PV (Figure 1). While physical violence has been perpetrated both inside the Basque Country and in the rest of Spain, PV has essentially been perpetrated inside the Basque Country. Physical violence has consisted of murders but also bombings, for instance, against official buildings, amongst others. According to Llera & Retortillo (2005), groups that perpetrated *kale borroka* and persons in the ETA network have been involved in the Basque Country with bomb-making, aggressions, attacks on properties and PV, principally using threats, insults and coercion (Bartolomé-Gutiérrez & Rechea-Alberola, 2006).

Using this strategic change in violence perpetrated, ETA has created an atmosphere in the Basque Country of threats to achieve a state of continual fear, as well as signalling, persecuting and isolating certain people (Pereira, 2004). This has been termed as *violence of persecution* (Gesto por la Paz, 2000). According to Buesa (2006), ETA has also extorted to business people, supported by attacks to people and their properties, extending threats to some small businesses and liberal professionals.

PV strategies have serious consequences for the victims' health and their social-environment, causing anxiety, depression, continual stress, uncertainly and a significant change in their daily life, and according to Nijdam, Olf, de Vries, Martens & Gersons (2008) disrupting the ordinary existence by causing psychological and physical effects.



**Figure 1.** Continuum in the violence acts perpetrated by terrorist network

The study of these forms of violence should be looked at accurately from a social and academic viewpoint because it seriously disturbs the daily life of a considerable number of people and has not given been much attention to this violence. Based on these arguments, the general aim of this paper consists of defining and analyzing harassment and PV strategies perpetrated by the terrorist network in the Basque Country. The use of this form of violence involves a type of political persecution, using the perpetration of *psychological terrorism*. From these antecedents, two specific aims have been proposed: 1) To construct a taxonomy of PV strategies perpetrated by the terrorist network, with its operational definitions, from a psychosocial approach 2) To contrast and validate the taxonomy constructed using a content analysis of testimonies, of individuals who have suffered this kind of violence.

## Method

### *Development of PV taxonomy*

An extensive review of the studies on this issue was made along with seven face-to-face interviews with targets of the terrorist network's violence. From all of this, the PV strategies involved were identified, grouping them from a psychosocial approach, covering both direct aggressive behaviours (towards their emotions, cognitions or behaviour) as well indirect behaviours (towards the elements of the situation or closely context of the person). A taxonomy of PV strategies was developed with its own operational definition. A sample of testimonies was coded in the taxonomy using the content analysis technique.

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 19 testimonies, both audiovisual as written, which were selected from public documents, such as documentary and interviews in magazines, newspaper and material of associations of victims of terrorism. All testimonies were on people who have been targeted by ETA or affected by the harassment perpetrated by the network in the Basque Country. Content analysis of publicly available existing data, lets a first approach to a topic which sample represents a hidden population who are frightened of talking about this situation. Probability method sampling would require a very wide sample of persons in order to ascertain a percentage of victims in society. Considering the very sensitive nature of the issue and according to Pereira (2004) the increase in attitudes of distrust, the sampling here was done using the non-probability method.

### *Unit of analysis*

According to Holsti (1969) the units of analysis are defined as a specific segment of content that is characterized to ascribe it to a specific category. The PV actions or strategies employed by the terrorist network in their different forms were defined as units of analysis.

### *Codification*

Audiovisual testimonies were transcribed completely and then inserted together with the other documents in an ASCII file for

content analysis. The codification and grouping of the units was made using Hyperresearch 2.8 software. Rules of presence and absence were used and the frequency of the categories was quantified in each unit of analysis in the testimonies. Units of analysis were coded by two observers in order to verify the concordance or reliability. Instructions to qualify the observer and to codify were written.

### *Coder reliability*

Intra-coder and inter-coder reliability was carried out in order to verify the concordance in the process of fitting the violent acts to the categories. Kappa Cohen's was employed as a reliability coefficient using SPSS-17 software.

## Results

The first results obtained consist of a taxonomy of the harassment and PV strategies perpetrated by the terrorist network in the Basque Country, separating it from their consequences. The taxonomy of PV strategies (see Table 1) is integrated into psychosocial dimensions that include the person's social environment, and emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects, in line with other research which has looked at PV perpetrated by manipulative groups, gender violence or mobbing (Rodríguez-Carballeira et al., 2005; Escartín, Rodríguez-Carballeira, Porrúa, & Martín-Peña, 2008).

The taxonomy is subdivided into six types of abusive strategies. Each category has its own operational definition, and is labelled as a function of the acts which predominate in each of them. The first three categories refer to indirect strategies related principally to aggressive behaviour towards the environment of the person affected: number 1 refers to activities aimed at isolation; number 2 refers to obtaining information on different aspects of the person; and number 3 refers to economic extortion. By contrast, the last three categories, focused more closely on direct aggressive behaviour, refer to components or strategies of abuse that emphasise, respectively, elements of an emotional (4), cognitive (5) and behavioural (6) nature.

Frequency of content analysis results are shown, parting from the mentioned analysis of testimonies and sorted into descending order (see Table 2). Some literal examples of testimonies are shown. *Emotional abuse* in the first subcategory, refers to ways of frightening the person or his/her social-environment by means of death threats unless he/she give up a job or leaves his/her town or city, amongst others. «I received a letter in which they threatened to kill me if I did not stand down as a councillor»; «When two keys to my house appeared with two death threats, I logically suspected some of my neighbours might be involved»; «I have four 9 mm parabellum bullets (munitions used by ETA) which they left for me in my home letterbox twice». Second sub-category is formed essentially by different forms of verbal abuse: «I find myself walking past a particular bar (refers to bars which ETA sympathizers frequent), and hearing somebody say —there goes that bastard—».

*Stigmatization* consists of acts perpetrated fundamentally in a public space with the aim of marking out a person. This may involve graffiti, pictures, banners or other forms in public places, designating the person as an «enemy» and as a «target» of the terrorist network: «I frequently received insults in the street...».

*Table 1*  
Taxonomy of psychological violence strategies perpetrated by the terrorist network in the Basque Country

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Person's context | <p><b>1. Isolation and social exclusion</b><br/>To ignore the person and to encourage his/her ostracism in the social environment.</p> <p><b>2. Control-surveillance of daily activities</b><br/>To seek or obtain information about the daily activities of the person, information capable of being used as a form or pressure or for later violent actions.</p> <p><b>3. Economic extortion</b><br/>To demand economic contributions in the form of donations made under pressure or by means of extortion.</p>  |
| Emotion          | <p><b>4. Emotional abuse</b><br/>Actions directed at influencing the feelings and emotions of the person, especially to intimidate and despise the individual.</p> <p><b>4.1. Threat</b><br/>To intimidate the person to warn him/her of the harm that will occur to him/her or to his/her environment, by means of diverse forms of intimidation, whenever this is verbal, gesture-based, written or others.</p> <p><b>4.2. Contempt, humiliation or reject</b><br/>To attack the person by showing contempt and rejection towards him/her, by means of insults and other disqualifications.</p> |
| Cognition        | <p><b>5. Stigmatization</b><br/>To publicly mark out or name the person by mean several actions that label him/her as an enemy.</p>   |
| Behaviour        | <p><b>6. Restrictive actions of freedoms</b><br/>To besiege the person in different places of spaces by mean of actions directed at restricting his/her freedom of behaviour.</p>   |

Though these acts can entail other strategies, as a threat, they have a wider impact because the person is stigmatized in the presence of neighbours, workmates or classmates, and society: *«My name was written in insulting banners at the Faculty in which I studied».*

With *Control-surveillance of daily activities* the target is usually informed by the Security Forces that he/she has appeared on a list of targets of the terrorist network. Some collaborators or even sympathizers may obtain information on the target which could be used to aid future acts of violence. These collaborators may be from his/her neighbourhood or work, among others. This, together with being a potential target of the terrorist network, may cause uncertainty: *«Some of my neighbours try to get information on potential targets to pass onto the terrorists. The police told me that a shop assistant of a greengrocer's close to my home was doing this».*

*Restrictive acts of freedoms* may also include elements of other strategies, but here the nuance consists of putting pressure on the target through the presence of people. This pressure may be applied by a public demonstration or protest march in front of the person, thus restricting their freedom. *«The radicals (referring to ETA sympathizers) gathered in front of my home»; «...A dozen or more young radicals arrived, and they insulted and threatened me, and placed a banner against the doorway of my home».*

*Economic extortion* has been principally perpetrated against Basque business people. This strategy is usually carried out by sending letters in which ETA demands money for its «cause»: *«I noticed some mail on the table. One of the letters caught my attention. I opened it and read it. It was from ETA. They demanded that I paid them 138,000 euros.»* This strategy makes the security of the person conditional to his/her properties or the security of his/her relatives: *«That night I arrived home and found another letter from ETA. This time, the sender was from my daughter.»* \* (\*The address of the daughter was written by ETA).

A strategy of *isolation and social exclusion*, attempts to ostracise the target and encourage his/her isolation in society. Sometimes by means of intimidation of persons of his/her social-environment: *«We often went to a bar. We thought they were friends..., we used to have a good time, we used to drink a few*

*beers there... the night began there... and then one day, we were taken to the back room of the bar. They told us they had received a letter threatening to burn down the bar if they continued to sell us beers».* The frequency of this was the lowest. It is important to point out that in small towns or villages where the terrorist network's sympathizers may be predominant, it is easier to control and encourage the isolation of the person.

Intra- and inter-coder agreement in the codification of violence strategies (Table 2) is a good level of reliability of the data under consideration.

Discussion

This paper is focused on the PV strategies perpetrated by ETA's terrorist network in the Basque Country, proposing a taxonomy which contributes towards improving knowledge, and defining the so-called *violence of persecution*. This taxonomy defines the

*Table 2*  
Coding frequency, agreement rate and Kappa Cohen's intra- and inter-coder reliability. Testimonies, n= 19

| Categories   | Coding frequency | Agreement rate % |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| 4. Emotional abuse                                 | 17               | 94.1             |
| 4.1. Threat  | 12               |                  |
| 4.2. Contempt, humiliation or reject               | 5                |                  |
| 5. Stigmatization                                  | 14               | 78.6             |
| 2. Control, surveillance of daily activities       | 10               | 100              |
| 6. Restrictive actions of freedoms                 | 4                | 75               |
| 3. Economic extortion                              | 2                | 100              |
| 1. Isolation and social exclusion                  | 1                | 100              |
| Units of analysis coded                            | 48               |                  |
| Agreement rate over all codes                      |                  | 89.4             |
| Inter-coder reliability for all codes              | $\kappa = .87$   |                  |
| Intra-coder reliability for all codes <sup>1</sup> | $\kappa = .92$   |                  |

Note: Codes are sorted in descending order of frequency.  
<sup>1</sup> Test-retest with an interval of month

strategies which can be perpetrated by the activist cells but also by its network. This classification embraces a wide range of its strategies, directed towards the person and indirectly towards its social-environment from subtle to blatant methods.

The results obtained highlight these harassment strategies as essentially formed by threats and intimidating acts, which underlie the proposed taxonomy. However, its characteristics, interaction, perpetration towards the target, and also towards the persons of the socio-environmental surroundings, facilitate the harassment.

By using several testimonies of victims, the usefulness of the proposed taxonomy in this study is shown. It permits a first hierarchy of the relevance of the different forms of terrorist PV. The frequency obtained emphasises *emotional abuse*, *stigmatization* and *control strategies* which coupled with the use of murder might increase the terror process. According to Gesto por la Paz (2000) the possibility of harassment ending with the harassed person murdered reinforces the strategy of persecution.

Stigmatization is facilitated by labelling the target as an enemy of the terrorist network, which might result in the later perpetration of violence and important consequences for the person. According to Ibarra (2001), this may be preceded by speeches and propaganda campaigns which can dehumanize the target group, followed by specifically signalling individual persons.

The person who belongs to a group at risk might change to being a declared target of the terrorist network by means of a *control strategy*. This is possible from the information compiled on the target from the networks, and so collaborators and sympathizers are important to the structure of the network. According to Pereira (2004), the information needed for ETA to commit a murder can sometimes come from the neighbourhood where the murdered person lived.

*Restrictive actions of freedoms* and *isolation* obtained a low frequency, and probably represent the least explicit or blatant strategies in the testimonies. *Economic extortion* probably scored low because business people who suffer from this strategy, are often uneasy about giving their testimony because of the fear of suffering reprisals if they denounce their situation publicly.

The targets of ETA's terrorist network in the Basque Country might be harassed by means of PV strategies. It will be necessary to know in each case their intensity (partial or complete) and frequency (occasionally or usually). This PV might be perpetrated in their town or neighbourhood, because they express their opposition to ETA or also because they belong to a group (political, professional...) considered as an enemy by ETA.

From here, the resulting consequences will essentially affect the direct victim but also his/her social-environment. These effects entail continual stress in view of the uncertainty of the harassment acts, important changes in daily life. The continuing threat and protection which often is necessary, constituting a constant chronic stress (Nijdam, Olf, de Vries, Martens, & Gersons, 2008). This situation often creates a sense of exhaustion, and when it is continued, some people decide to go away of Basque Country (Pereira, 2004).

The evolution of ETA's structure -both its cells and its network- has facilitated a new form of violence in the Basque Country. This

aggression has changed towards continual harassment reinforced by selective physical violence. According to De la Calle (2007) the new terrorist network strategy of *kale borroka* violence including PV now plays an alternative role as a complementary tool to terrorist murders.

From here, new groups have been victimized by pressuring Basque society and creating insecurity and fear. The terrorist network has tried to discourage people who express their opposition to the organization, using a legitimization discourse of intimidation and blackmail (Van den Broek, 2004). This makes terrorism a social communication mechanism, aimed at modifying behaviour by combining coercion and persuasion (Schmid, 2004).

Through the use of terrorist violence in the Basque Country, a coercive message to the society is sent out, using several mechanisms, including the *mass media*, so that the terrorists' aims are accepted. Society can be frightened into becoming the next target of the terrorist network and as a consequence, to keep silent in the face of the state of violence. In other settings in which PV is perpetrated, such as bullying in the workplace, witnesses of violent behaviour might remain silent for fear of becoming targets (Beasley & Rayner, 1997). This kind of «social silence» in the Basque Country may accomplish wider isolation and a loss of social support for victims. This silence according to Funes (1998) makes many Basques keep their opinions about ETA to themselves because nobody is really sure who really supports ETA and who does not.

In a different way to other forms of terrorism, ETA relies firstly on the support of a very considerable social network structure in the Basque community, and secondly through the «social silence» of a significant part of that frightened society. What it seeks is the unidirectional exclusion of the targets considered as enemies by ETA, using violent acts and the psychosocial consequences resulting from it. For the terrorist group, the identification of a group as the enemy facilitates the dehumanization of people who belong to it (Rodríguez-Carballeira, Martín-Peña, Almendros, Escartín, Porrúa, & Bertacco, 2009).

This research contributes by means of a psychosocial approach to a multidisciplinary phenomenon. Some of the limitations are the number and type of the analysis of public testimonies which cannot be representative enough, but enable an initial study of a reality which is very difficult to access. The resulting practical implications are focused on facilitation in order to make future awareness-raising plans with the aim of de-legitimizing the violence. Future research should continue to investigate the phenomenon of harassment and PV perpetrated by the terrorist network in the Basque Country. To this end, as is suggested by Lum, Kennedy & Sherley (2008), theoretical aspects should be contrasted in an empirical way as is proposed here.

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