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# The aesthetic of radicalism: the relationship between punk and the patriotic nationalist movement of the Basque country\*

CHRISTIAN LAHUSEN

Our time has come Tio/ I'm Basque and I'm proud/ That's enough Tio, say it loud/ I'm Basque and I'm proud! (Negu Gorriak, 1989)

The relationship between popular music and social movements does not in itself constitute an exceptional phenomenon. However, Basque Radical Rock (as Basque punk has come to be called) has emerged as a peculiar phenomenon of the history of political mobilisation in Euskadi (the Basque name for Basque country). This peculiarity is due to the fusion of an eminently anti-establishment music of anglo-saxon origin with a nationalist patriotic movement. The 'alliance' between these two such diverse spheres is the theme of this article. Such an alliance is of interest because it reveals how the discursive and organisational linkages which formed Basque radical rock defined a common struggle shared by punks and nationalist activists.<sup>1</sup>

The study which follows focuses on Basque Radical Rock at the moment of its height, that is the period 1982–89. As the focus of interest is fundamentally punk discourse during this period, the materials used include primary texts, interviews and songs produced by Basque punk musicians.

## **Spain's road to democracy and the Basque patriotic movement**

The death of General Francisco Franco on 20 November 1975 opened the doors to Spain's democratisation but left the country with a number of problems inherited from the old regime. As an authoritarian ruler, Franco had not only been unable to solve most of the social problems generated by a rapidly, modernising Spanish society (including strong urbanisation, industrialisation, crisis in traditional sectors, new inequalities), but his policies had resulted in a strengthening of the general call for genuine change, democracy and political participation. His ambition to challenge and eliminate the diverse nationalist and regionalist movements within Spain had not only accentuated their call for national self-determination but consolidated their alliances and ideological bonds with oppositional groups and organisations within the workers and student movements.

The re-emergence of the Basque nationalist movement in the 1960s around the militant activism of *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA, Basque Country and Freedom) illustrates these developments, as ETA established itself (along with many sympathising and allied organisations) as the umbrella for a diversity of social and political claims and struggles (Sullivan 1988; Ibarra 1989).

The democratic transformation of Spain into a parliamentary monarchy began in 1976, in particular through the formation of a new constitution which aimed at granting the Spanish regions and nations more autonomous jurisdiction over their territories. Eventually, a party system emerged in the Basque country (as in the rest of Spain) which comprised several Spanish-wide parties: the socialist *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (The Socialist Workers Party) in government since 1982; the minority *Partido Comunista Español* (Spanish Communist Party); the rightist *Alianza Popular* (Popular Alliance), later the *Partido Popular* (Popular Party); and the liberal *Centro Democrático y Social* (Democratic and Social Centre). At the same time a number of nationalist parties were established, including the traditional *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (Basque National Party – which later split into PNV and *Euzko Alkatasuna*); then the leftist *Euzkadiko Ezkerra* and the radical *Herri Batasuna* (see Gunther *et al.* 1988).

However, neither the new constitution nor the democratic political system appeased the many divisions and conflicts within the Basque country. The institutionalisation of the heavily disputed, very moderate ‘autonomy statutes’, granted the new ‘Autonomous Communities’ only limited authority over culture, education and finance. This and the election of the PNV and its traditionalist, conservative nationalist programme at the beginning of the 1980s, shaped much of the next decade’s political conflicts. In particular the Basque *abertzales* (i.e. the patriots) opposed the subsequent ‘normalisation of political life’, dominated by a traditionalist programme. In contrast, they struggled for what the political alliance of nationalist *abertzale* organisations, the *Koordinadora Abertzale Sozialista (KAS)*, had demanded since 1976: the legalisation of all political parties, the granting of a general amnesty for political prisoners, self-determination, the withdrawal of all Spanish military forces from Basque country, and support for the Basque working class, and other groups. As a result, since that time the *abertzale* movement has challenged both the Spanish constitutional framework and the conservative Basque government, aiming to conflictualise the ‘Basque national question’ through constant, general counter-mobilisation.<sup>2</sup>

The *abertzale* movement, as embodied in the KAS alliance includes a variety of organisations: the youth formation *Jarrai*, the women’s organisation *Egizan*, the trade union *LAB*, the citizen’s movement association *ASK*, the *Gestoras Pro-Amnestia* who take care of ETA prisoners, and also ETA in unofficial terms. The *abertzales* can be best understood as a social movement with an organised structure and a shared collective identity. Those involved define themselves as an oppressed ethnic community struggling for emancipation and freedom from a Spanish state and society perceived as both alien and ‘colonising’. In turn, *Herri Batasuna* (the name means Popular Unity), presents itself as something more than a classic political party. It is an electoral group which aims to include a variety of positions and programmes, without wanting to forcibly resolve the diversity and possible contradictions between them.<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, the open nationalist and patriotic formula of the *abertzale* programme does not carry with it the exclusion of other discourses, such as the

class struggle. Rather the *abertzales* define themselves as a 'Basque national liberation movement', as the revolutionary and socialist 'patriotic' left. It is because of this that the programme of the *abertzales* movement has established itself as the pivot of generalised mass mobilisation. The opening up of the nationalist movement to embrace revolutionary social struggle paved a way for the incorporation of new groups and tendencies into its actual discourse and general activism. In this way social and political grievances and demands have been captured and encompassed within a framework of ethnic references and organisational relations.<sup>4</sup>

The resulting 'division of labour' between the political-military vanguard (ETA), a political alliance (KAS) and an inclusive force (HB) has been efficient, largely because it did not contradict the communal base of existing social networks (e.g. neighbourhoods, villages, cultural and sports associations, parishes, peer groups). Rather, by turning their grievances into campaigns of patriotic mobilisation it integrated them within a nationalist discourse and patriotic organisational network.

Links with the political positions of punks came to the forefront of the general political situation in the Basque Country as a consequence of the strategies and programmes of the *abertzale* movement. In particular this is due to the *abertzale* movements utopian vision of an independent Euskadi, its unconditional rejection of the present system, its propagation of a Basque counter-cultural ethnic community, and its radical and militant activism. These considerations, however, while they clarify the *abertzale* position, ignore the position of the Basque punk movement, and the question of how a shared discourse formed, from which shared grievances emerged and a common base for mobilisation forged.

### **Social conditions and the punk programme**

Basque punk was a current within youth music. As such it linked a generation of young people between the ages of 16 to 19 by its explicit references to their problems and experiences. The music's original expressiveness centred on the bravery, anti-conformism, dynamism and vitality of youth. It presented itself as an innovative, self-affirming style which sought to differentiate itself from and to challenge the social and cultural order. In this sense, punks wanted to establish a network of bands, magazines, radio stations and groups as a disruptive, sub and counter cultural community which situated itself outside the established social order by defining itself in opposition to it. To a certain extent this is merely a repetition of what other authors have written about punk in other countries.<sup>5</sup> But there can be no doubt that in Basque country the adoption of punk by a broad and determined spectrum of young people was both a stylistic and aesthetic response to the political, social and cultural situation in which they lived.

### **Marginalisation as a social condition**

Young people were hard affected by the economic recession which began around 1974. Unemployment statistics for the whole of Spain showed that the most dramatic changes occurred between 1980 and 1983. While in 1976 one in two young people between 14 and 19 years were employed, by 1984 it was only one in three (Levices Mallo 1986, pp. 34–6). The social situation of these young people reflected

another series of problems. They included police persecution; the difficulty of obtaining advanced study (in particular within Euskadi); the effects of the strong impact of urbanisation and industrialisation; the growth of ghettos; a lack of social integration; of public services; as well as increasing ecological problems.

A large spectrum of Basque youth suffered this marginalisation. However, by adopting the punk 'programme' young people positively identified themselves with this situation of marginalisation and exclusion, turning it into the point of departure for their way of life and their aesthetic programme. Punks negated the idea of incorporating themselves into Basque civil society, in fact they radically opposed it. For this reason Arturo Villate described punk as an 'urban phenomena rebelling against urbanism, against its own environment. And punk focused its activity against urban culture, even though many of its habits were in themselves urban' (Villate 1986c, p. 38).

As a result a great number of punk rock groups emerged in those areas of Euskadi which were exposed to strong urbanisation and industrialisation, to internal segmentation and marginalisation. Two characteristics of modernisation of the social structure of Euskadi are significant in this respect. Firstly, the process of modernisation in Euskadi was accented, and extended and affected almost all the territory of Euskadi. This explains why in so many small and medium sized cities an 'urban' rock and punk music scene emerged (see Blasco 1982b). Secondly, modernisation extended to rural areas, but conserved traditional bonds, associations and values even in the most industrialised areas.

### **Marginalisation as a disruptive project**

This mix of modern and traditional aspects was a characteristic of Basque punk. And while it is a mistake to define punk as traditionalist, certainly traditional aspects are to be found in the favoured 'tribal' way of living, in the idealisation of the 'primitive' and in the celebration of 'the wild' (Villate 1986a, p. 32).

Punk is conscious of the constant robbery of our lives, and only pretends to recuperate what belongs to it: its time, its youth, its energy as long as it lasts. And it denounces the trap everybody else is in. For this reason it cannot accept culture, because it opts for another way of life, a way of life lost in the depths of the past: the return to the tribe. (Village 1986c, p. 39)

Basque punk confronted cultural and political traditionalism, while at the same time expressing strong disbelief in such terms as progress, modernisation and development.<sup>6</sup> The absolute pessimism of punk ('there is no future') and the omnipresence of death in song texts find their roots in this philosophy. A typical punk attitude is expressed by the group *Eskorbuto* (Scurvy)

It's come, it's come, it's come, it's come, it's come, it's come/ the end, the end/ our death, the end/ at last. (Village 1986c)

This pessimistic vision was the result of a belief that despite its fundamental errors and evident decadence, society would do everything possible to survive. In a day-to-day situation of state terror, violence and repression, punks chose anti-conformism and provocation, rebelling against the hated system, state and dominant order. It was this attitude which informed this song of the band *Kortatu* (named after an ETA member killed by the police):

They give us shit in drops/ They have destroyed us like cattle/ How can one get out of here?/  
 Revolution isn't possible . . ./ Only rebellion is left!/ I'd like to change all this/ And think that  
 I didn't live in vain. (Villate 1986c)

Punk songs often attacked the state institutions which represented the system to them and under which punks experienced state control and repression. These included politicians, the military, the church, the rich, and above all, the police ('the dogs'). One example is given by the group *La Polla Records* (Cock Records):

Tell me unemployment/ tell me hunger/ tell me 10,000 pesetas a month/ tell me what you want/  
 You know you'll eat/ because you slap people in the face/ You know who you work for/  
 You buy your tears in the sales

He was a man, now he's a dog/ He was a man, now he's a dog

Always obeying/ you've sold your dignity/ You're just one piece more/ You're my enemy/  
 Thanks to your stupidity/ thanks to your humiliation/ thanks to your damn thanks/ my  
 misfortunes began/

He was a man, now he's a dog/ He was a man, and now he's a dog/ He was a man, now he's  
 a dog/ He was a man, now he's a dog/ He was a man, now he's a dog/ He was a man, now  
 he's a dog (trans note: dog=policeman)

This rejection of the established order demanded distancing from a contagious 'sick or bad body' in order to prevent the danger of polluting the disruptive purity of punk. The distinction was presented as an opposition between 'purity and pollution' (Douglas 1966). For punks society was governed by an unending list of injustices and mistakes (including war, exploitation, repression, poverty). For these reasons they had to stay outside this order while at the same time unmasking and ridiculing it. As the 'system' attempted constantly to corrupt people, punks had to both oppose and expose such intentions to behave in ways contrary to social norms and expectations. And as the 'system' did not stop its repression of all real opposition, punks had to radicalise their position. This form of protest was characterised by what Eder has called 'moral crusades': 'The collective moral protest follows the logic of ritually inverting the official reality. Protect action is nothing else than the inversion of institutional action' (Eder 1989, pp. 185–6, trans. C.L.). Punks expressed their categoric rejection through repeated, ritual inversion of the social order. This inversion was the means by which their own sub-cultural community was re-affirmed and renovated, presenting itself as a reflexive response to the established order.

### **Marginalisation as a sub-cultural style**

Punk music was the chosen means to express the emotions of hatred and rebellion. Punk also understood itself as the direct successor to 'underground' rock, confronting commercial rock and pop, as well as 'symphonic' and folkloric 'degenerations'. In this way it was similar to the pop version of 'New Wave'. For punks, music was the essential way of expressing oneself and relating to others, as well as a means of passing time and being entertained. Performances were of the utmost importance because thereby bands created an atmosphere, agitated and communicated with their public until the point when total communion was reached. As a member of *Barricada* (Barricade) stressed:

We don't prepare anything before hand. The more the public gets involved, the better. Sometimes we come out to play without knowing the order of the songs. We aren't rigid – 50 per cent of the gig depends on the behaviour of the audience (. . .) We try to reach a point of total communication with the public . . . (Kolega 1985, pp. 27–8)

Music was not only a form of entertainment but also a means of renovating and confirming a shared counter and subcultural identity. The development of punk as a proper musical style synthesised and aestheticised the social practises and beliefs of this community. In this way the inversion of the established order became a means of both being re-presented and of re-presenting oneself. In this way social practises and political activism became part of an artistic field regulated by its own rules, inspiration and tastes, compositional techniques, bands and instruments, in a market governed by supply and demand. Punk protest left the field of explicit political speechmaking to focus on entertainment and consumption. As a musician of *La Polla Records* affirmed:

You can't change society, but as it isn't going to change we're going to have a good time with it, and with the idea that we're doing something. We have a fucking good time, it's not worth crying because society in itself isn't worth the trouble. (Blasco 1985, p. 21)

This pleasure did not abandon politics. The re-affirmation of a counter-cultural community was in itself a transgressive praxis, simply because this community presented itself as a reflexive response (a continuous inversion) to the established order. To use Victor Turner's terms, the ritual and festive renovation of the anti- or contra-structure always implied a confrontation with the established structure (Turner 1974, pp. 272–99; 1982, pp. 33, 44).

From the beginning of the 1980s punk formulated an aesthetic discourse of its own, paralleled by the creation of its own organised infrastructure through the whole of Euskadi. In various cities a network of contacts emerged between groups and fans many of whom exchanged names and tapes. Gigs were organised in bars and dance halls, links were forged with anti-military and anti-nuclear groups, with squatters and others. The punk scene grew beyond the local level and achieved increasing visibility. One commentator at the time wrote:

Even though we can't speak of a movement with a clear label we can ascertain that we are witnessing a total music explosion, with groups continually emerging in each neighbourhood and village. At the mass level those which have had the most impact until now have been those with more radical attitudes (*Eskorbuto*, for example). But we mustn't allow ourselves to overlook the broad, second line which continually pushes with great obstinacy, constituting the most brilliant moment of the music of Euskadi (without equal in any other community of the country) (Corral 1986, p. 24).

Within this formation process particular 'organisms' emerged which promoted Basque punk. These included pirate and independent radio stations, record labels (such as Soñua, in Pamplona) and magazines like *Muskaria* (the monthly Spanish speaking 'underground' press of Basque country, with a radical role throughout Spain). At the same time as providing effective promotion for punk outside the country this infrastructure also consolidated the situation at home. This consolidation has had two important effects. On the one hand, it encouraged communication and exchange between different groups and other interested parties. On the other, growing visibility exposed punk to various attempts to classify, reformulate and instrumentalise it.

This dual effect can be best seen at the moment of punks greatest popularity. In April 1983 the first punk 'macro-concert' was organised in Oñati (Guipúzcoa), involving all the most important groups. This concert marked the beginning of a debate concerning the name which should be used to designate punk music. Punk was re-defined as 'Basque Radical Rock'. This was, without doubt, an indispen-

able move which allowed the promotion of punk as a new product both outside and inside Euskadi. At the same time this new definition was a way of stylising and reformulating punk through re-categorisation. This debate responded in particular to the attempts of the *abertzale* position to impose a conception of punk as a music which was simultaneously *radical and Basque*.

### The discourse of radicalism

In the world of Basque punk there has been continuous debates concerning the essence of punk. A recurrent theme of such discussion concerns the compatibility of punk with nationalist positions and programmes, and whether punk can or should take a position of solidarity with the *abertzale* movement. Such debates are extremely important when studying collective phenomena because of the ways in which they expose the existing struggle to validate and legitimise the movement's shape and identity. In this sense, the emergence of punk and its adaption to the social reality of Euskadi was itself a work of social construction. Punk music style resulted from the creation and promotion of its own aesthetic and discourse emerging from a network of association working within a specific set of social conditions, cultural traditions and political conflicts. If we speak of Basque punk, we refer to a 'something' constantly produced and reproduced, not only by particular clothing, music, performances and organisational infrastructure, but also by the *discourse about* clothing, music, performances and the organisational infrastructure. A diversity of actors (bands, audiences, media, record labels, etc.), interests and convictions were involved in this construction process. The *abertzale* project was just one position inside this discourse which tried to impose a particular understanding of punk and thus influence its message.

The analysis which follows focuses on the debate over radicalism, an aspect of the discursive universe of punk which constitutes its pivotal idea and is of direct relevance to its relationship with the *abertzale* movement. Three positions can be distinguished within this debate. The first position, represented by groups like *Eskorbuto* (Scurvy) and *Barricada* (Barricade), is in opposition to all types of social order. They display anarchic disinterest to everything that collective organisation means. The second, exemplified by groups like *La Polla Records* and *RIP*, distinguish themselves from this first position by emphasis on a combative attitude explicitly defined in political terms. The third position, represented by groups like *Kortatu* (later *Negu Gorriak* (Hard Winter)), *Herzainak* (from Ertzainza, the Basque police), *MCD*, *Baldin Bada* and others, placed more stress both on the national question and on open alliance with sectors of the *abertzale* movement. Each group tried to represent punk radicalism with greater loyalty. Analysis of the different positions helps identify the ways in which the national conflict and solidarity with the *abertzale* movement became compatible with the internal discourse of punk.

### The 'anarchic project'

Amongst the first 'fraction', the band *Eskorbuto* clearly represent a categoric rejection. They opposed all political ideology, including the *abertzale*:

We have nothing to do with nazis, with reds – we say what we think is bad about reds – and the same for the fascists. We have our own history. For example, there are police here in Santurce who belong to Herri Batasuna yet they are the most repressive there are. We've





The album *Gora Herria/ Viva el pueblo! (Long Live The People!)* by Negu Gorriak (*Hard Winter*) (formally Kortatu) one of the punk bands who made open alliance with the *abertzale* patriotic movement. The cover celebrating the Cuban Revolution shows affinity with international revolutionary struggle while the eclectic list of guests includes French rock group Manu Chao Mano Negra; Joseba Tapia with traditional diatonic accordion *trikitixa*; the oldest form of traditional Basque oral sung poetry from *bersolari* Jon Maia while sampled sounds include Basque 'new song' singer/songwriters Mikel Laboa and Xabier Lete, Nicaraguan Revolutionary musician Carlos Mejia Godoy as well as Aretha Franklin and others.

encountered these police – they say they are *abertzale* but they're the most repressive – they're even worse than the Spanish police. (Blasco 1983, p. 14)

In the beginning members of *Eskorbuto* sympathised with the nationalist position but then changed their mind. The main reason for this was the complete lack of support they got from the Gestoras Pro-Amnistía (Pro-Amnesty Organisation, who formed part of the *abertzale* movement) when members of the group were imprisoned for insulting the armed forces. In songs and published interviews with them of that period a sympathy for the national independence of Euskadi can be

recognised. For example, the song *To Hell with Basque Country*, proclaims that the Basque Country (a term which represents the actual reality of Basque society) can go 'to hell', but not Euskadi (a term which represents the 'Utopia' of national liberation). Euskadi has to be liberated from the prison of the existing political system:<sup>7</sup>

Oh, people, to hell with the Basque Country!/ Euskadi continues to roll in the Basque labyrinth!/ To hell with the Basque country! (Blasco 1983, p. 14)

*Eskorbuto* later criticised the *abertzale* movement for its lack of active solidarity, in this way drawing a sharp contrast between the radicalism or combativism of punk and the passivity of Basques and of the *abertzales* in particular. As a member of *Eskorbuto* said in interview:

Blasco: 'Isn't there a contradiction with the songs you did before like *Maldito País* (Bloody Country), *Escupe a la bandera* (Spit at the Flag), with *Mierda al país vasco* (To Hell with the Basque Country)?'

Juanma: 'You get so burnt out, the best thing to do is to sing those songs. But then why sing songs like *Maldito País* (Bloody Country) and *Escupe a la bandera* (Spit at the Flag)? Just so that later you get put in prison and no one speaks out for you? You're standing up for the Basque people, you have the balls to sing this, and then when they arrest you in Madrid, the *Gestoras Por-Amnistía* do nothing.' (Blasco 1983, p. 14)

The *radical* position which emerged out of this moment corresponds to the anarchic heart of punk, to its total rejection of the social order and all alternative political systems which were seen as the cause of existing evil (Vallate 1986b, p. 18). Members of *Eskorbuto*, like many other punks, refused to organise themselves as an actual movement. For this reason rebellion and provocation had a primary individualistic touch leading to an arbitrariness in emblems and symbols used. These included vulgar speech, 'unkempt' appearance, unusual pets (e.g. rats), a wide variety of emblems, bright colours, provocative hair styles, etc. Punks wanted to provoke, effectively. They wanted to challenge and affront social expectations and values, and thus identified with an amalgam of counter-cultural tools and practices. This rejection of the prevailing social order included a rejection of the promised, independent Basque national state propagated by the *abertzales*.

There was disjunction between '*abertzale*: alternative order' and 'punk: anti-order'. This set '(alternative) order' and 'anti-order' within the opposition between 'passivity' (:immobile, static and cowardly) and 'radicalism' (:mobile, dynamic, brave). For these reasons *Eskorbuto* opposed redefining punk as 'Basque radical rock' because for *Eskorbuto* truly radical rock is incompatible with any societal project. For *Eskorbuto* radicalism could not refer to any specific struggle, only to a generalised position of categoric rejection. Radicalism was both an anti-social and anti-political project:

RRV (Radical Basque Rock) is a montage by those who invented the term. I think that it's unjust to use the words radical and rock with Basque. We believe that radical rock emerges from a lack of empathy with all types of society, including the Basque. (*Eskorbuto* in Corral 1986, p. 24)

The music of these punk groups was characterised by simplicity, aggressivity and radicalism. Punk was 'simple' because it moved at the minimal level of Western rock. The harmonic structures took the original 'blues' model, (I, IV and V scale), the melodic structure was reduced to a repetition of motifs, the formal structure had clear symmetry. Texts were composed through the juxtaposition of opinions. Songs were short and concise.

The radicalism of this punk style was most prominent in performance style and onstage details. Punk musicians favoured a predominance of electric guitars with disfigured sound, playing simple rhythmic patterns with driving aggressivity, with a rough and unpolished loud P.A. mix and amplification. There was common use of a 'shouting' voice and pronounced often aggressive interaction with the audience, to the extent that members of the audience might go onstage to participate in a band's performance, whether the band wanted this or not. In these ways punk music represented limited rejection of existing music culture. Its musical structure was in a sense a return to base in that it went no further than those structures commonly found in commercial pop and rock.

It was in its performance practice that punk broke with accepted aesthetic practices, involving the forced, violent use of equipment, instruments and musical material. It was as if the musicians were trying to challenge and overcome the limits that the musical structure itself imposed. Any understanding of punk music must take into account the duality between structural simplicity and performative radicalism. These characteristics underlined the importance of concert performances for re-affirmation of a radical counter-cultural community.

### The 'political project'

In contrast to this first position amongst Basque punk musicians another tendency emerged in which conflict with society was defined explicitly in political terms. The group *La Polla Records* exemplify this second position in one of their songs:

We've broken the glasses of the rich/ we've known the police stations/ the churches/ and the banks/ and their homes/ We are poor/ They say/ 'they're criminals'/ What is ours/ is politics/ Hey ho!

On the one hand this song shares the same radical position of generalised rejection as that expressed by the first group of musicians. Evaristo, of *La Polla Records* has said, 'We are political because it isn't possible to be anything else. We are not party political . . . but political in the sense in which politics is life' (Blasco 1985, p. 21). Such a statement demonstrates a programmatic position, not in the sense of defining specific means and strategies but in its understanding of punk sub-culture as a social and political protest movement. For these musicians punk was not merely a loosely linked subcultural community, it was a movement with an organisational base and a political identity which erupted onto the political scene. The artistic work of *La Polla Records* was programmatic because they perceived the necessity of consciousness raising, mobilising and organising. This is how this was expressed by Evaristo:

The words that I sing in gigs are more or less ideas that all punks agree with, but what interests me most is to reach another, different public, who don't share the same opinions, in order to change them. The rest are your colleagues. We ensure that the maximum number of people hear us, and the more there are, the more *radical* we will be and the better we'll express our ideas (author's emphasis). (Blasco 1985, p. 21)

A new slant on the concept of radicalism is offered here: according to Evaristo, punk subculture can effect its radicalism only through its growth and expansion. For Evaristo radicalism is synonymous with power. So, the general rejection was less of a general position, more a programme goal which demanded political organisation and mass mobilisation. One can talk here of expansion of

punk towards political goals, activities, beliefs and groups. For this reason, many 'political' punk groups understood themselves as part of a movement in solidarity with all minority groups oppressed by and opposed to the actual system. This position was manifested in the bonds punk groups made with anti-military and anti-nuclear groups, with squatters. It was manifested also in the great number of songs these groups (as well as the *abertzale* punks) composed for the Red Brigade, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, for squatters, for the anti-NATO campaigns, and in their adoption of a political vocabulary (e.g. use of the word 'revolution'), until then more common in the discourse of left-wing movements. This expansion introduced the punk movement to the organisational fields and discursive universe of movements of the left. This meant they could include and invert the vocabulary, arguments, grievances and symbols of these groups into their own punk discourse and disruptive praxis.

### **The 'abertzale project'**

The final current within Basque punk is defined by groups like *Kortatu* (later reformed as *Negu Gorriak*), *Hertzainak*, *Baldin Bada* and others. In the same way as *La Polla Records*, these groups are characterised by their explicit political position, and by an articulated interest in political mobilisation and organisation, and the complementary expansion of their subcultural frame. What distinguishes these groups from other bands is their self-positioning within the national conflict and their identification with the *abertzale* movement. As mentioned earlier the drawing together of punk with the *abertzale* movement was not motivated by the nationalist dimension of the *abertzale* programme, rather by the strong emphasis the movement laid on social questions.

Sympathies were aroused because the *abertzales* propagated themselves as a revolutionary, socialist and anti-establishment movement. As it formed part of an explicit nationalist programme, it encapsulated the aesthetic and political dimensions of punk within a framework of ethnic references, and a field of patriotic associations. From the moment the *abertzale* movement's interest in the Basque punk movement was awakened, punk music could be heard in the bars of HB. HB supported certain groups, organised their concerts and in general promoted 'Basque Radical Rock'. In these ways HB contributed to the growth of popularity of punk and helped consolidate it as a disruptive Basque youth movement. By situating punk within a system of ethnic identifications and patriotic commitments, the *abertzale* movement exercised a great influence over punk discourse and the message of the music.

A primary result of these influences was punks attitude to *Euskera*, the Basque language. When punk emerged on the Euskadi musical scene at the beginning of the 1980s, the sound of *Euskera* was suspected by the rock community. To sing in the language reminded them of the Basque singer/songwriters who until then the rock community had always opposed. The use of *Euskera* had to be justified as a legitimate or necessary medium within the artistic project of punk style. In publications of the first years of the 1980s several references to this debate can be found, proving that in this period justification for singing in *Euskera* was needed. The adoption of *Euskera* by punk groups was not at all straightforward. Many punks did not have sufficient knowledge of the language to speak and sing in it. Examination of the arguments reveals the internal discourse of the movement. An interview



Negu Gorriak 'Power to the People Tour '91' took them from Oslo, Rome via Berlin, London and Cardiff to Belfast, Dublin, through Paris to Havana and Santiago de Cuba and back to Basque country. According to the tour newspaper produced for fans, complete with cartoons, ads, reviews and international press cutting, in London they appeared with Welsh language political rock band Anhrefn. The band own and run their own record shop Esan Ozenki Records (Say It Loud) in the small town of Zarautz outside Donostia (San Sebastian). The answer 'phone plays Afro-Cuban roots percussion call/response music.

with the group *Zarama* provides some clues:

We oppose the usual way that songs in Euskera are identified with romanticism, gentleness, the countryside . . . Rock, and I believe I could prove this scientifically . . . hits and fits better in Euskera than in Spanish, and the more modern the forms of rock music are, the better . . . If you listen to *Bildur Naiz* many people have said it sounds like English, and that's because it fits damn well. (Arana 1982, p. 27)

*Zarama* distance Euskera from its usual traditional context, bringing it closer to English (the maternal language of punk). Their central argument suggests that modern rock (or as it was later called radical rock) 'hits better' or 'fits better' in Euskera. 'That creates a clash', said members of *Zarama* (ibid). For *Zarama* Euskera

was the ideal language for a style that was both modern and radical. To propose it schematically: 'punk:radical'; 'Euskera:radical'; and in this way 'punk:Euskera'.

In other declarations the same implicit argument is found, but surrounded by another initial argument. Gama, the singer with the group *Herzainak*, learnt Euskera especially to sing punk music. In an interview with *Hertzainak* in 1982, Josu (a member of the group) spoke of Gama, the singer:

'Gama is the only person who has learnt Euskera so that he could play in a punk group'. Gama replied: 'The problem is that in Euskadi if it was to be punk music, it had to be in Euskera. (. . .) Euskadi is the most punk place in the whole world. The energy there is on the streets and continues to exist absolutely everywhere, it will be noticeable even under great stress. That's what we are here for'. (Blasco 1982a, p. 6)

While members of *Zarama* maintained a stylistic affinity between Euskera and punk, Gama's opinion was that Basque punk itself corresponded to a reality in the streets in Euskadi, according to the following formula: 'Basque social reality:radical', 'punk:radical', and for this reason 'Euskadi reality:punk'. It is here that the description of punk in Euskadi as *Basque Radical Rock* is reached, by establishing an essential affinity between punk music, Basque society and language. Radicalism was the bridge (the 'shared essence') which unified punk with what was 'Basque', following the formula: 'Basque – [Radical] – Rock'. Being Basque was compatible, (even kindred) with being punk so that the *abertzale* movement became the 'natural' ally of punks: both represented the radicalness of social reality in 'the Basque streets', and both shared the struggle against the actual system. Yet what characterises this third tendency amongst punk groups is not simply their alliance with the nationalist struggle but their identification with the Basque nationalist community.

These 'patriotic punks' defined themselves and the fundamental conflict in nationalist terms: the opposition between "'Basque Community':present "Spanish State"' became an oppositional analogy between 'Punk:present system'; and the punk subculture was understood as an ethnic subculture struggling against a repressive, imperialist and colonising Spanish state. The band *Negu Gorriak* (Hard winter) proposed this *abertzale* identity to the punk community with great radicalness:

Our time has come Tio/ I'm Basque and I'm proud!/ That's enough Tio, say it loud/ I'm Basque and I'm proud! (Negu Gorriak, 1989)

(Translation note: Tio, which means uncle, is common usage for 'guy', 'mate')

These groups picked up the terminology, grievances, demands, concepts and justifications of the *abertzale* movement, composing a series of songs about the lack of respect for and discrimination against Basque people, the breaking up of their territory, the forced denial of their history (Negu Gorriak, 1989). (For the *abertzales* Basque country also included Navarra – an independent 'Autonomous Community' – as well as provinces in the south-west of France which were used by ETA as a retreat. Support for ETA in this area came under pressure after the French government in Paris started to co-operate with the Spanish government in Madrid in their persecution of ETA members.) Equally, the third world notion of revolutionary struggle for national liberation, used by the *abertzales* and adopted by these punks, inspired them to emphasise the international solidarity in their own programme: from South Africa to Northern Ireland there were nations and people



*Negu Gorriak on stage, from the album Gure Jarrera (roughly translates as 'Our Way of Doing Things'). Members of the band include brothers Fermin and Inigo Muguruza, Kaki Arkarazo, Mikel Bap, Mikel Anestesia.*

struggling for their freedom against 'the new gangsters' (Hertzainak, 1988). *Hertzainak* (1988) sang:

They've taken young Francis Hughes/also his cousin Tom/ Patsy O'Hara, Bobby Sands have come/ and searched for their friends in Boston, Chicago, Saigon,/ in Santiago, Varsovia, Gasteiz/ in Belfast and so many other places on the endless list/ Come all of you who support/ your brothers in the struggle/ You can get used to war/ because war, there is/ Just as the fish needs water/ so the people need you/ As long as our pledge lasts/ the fear will not take hold of us.

The radical rejection of the dominant order defined as both 'imperialist' and Spanish by patriotic punks carried with it an acceptance of the political philosophy of the militant *abertzale* movement. For many punks armed struggle became the legitimate form of self-defence of an oppressed people against a common enemy, the 'colonizing' Spanish state. A great number of punk songs referred to this

subject, although for obvious reasons they rarely explicitly mentioned ETA and the armed struggle. The group *Kortatu* (1985), referred to the daily struggle against the state when they sang 'front line rock' or proposed 'pick up the arms from here and shoot the enemy'. The band *MCD* (1986) sang of the public debate about terrorism, but turned the term upside down following the *abertzale* argument of 'repression versus self-defence':

Terrorist: you fascists/ Terrorist, who is a terrorist? You disgusting fascist/ Who puts me against the wall?/ Who beats me and demands my papers?/ Who imposes a language upon me, customs, a way of being?/ Who forces unemployment on me, to live marginalised?/ Where is your future in the society you have fabricated?/ Who do you think is fighting for you?\*/ The army or the Civil Guard?/ Miracles no longer exist: young blood on the hands/ Now they guide other carts, but they're the same masters/ Don't lower your head like the praying Priests.

(\* This line is a reference to the armed struggle of ETA. The accepted audience response to the next line 'Army or Civil Guard' is 'No, (it's) ETA!'. The response to the end of the next line would be 'Do something, and join!')

These lines demonstrate clearly the mobilising role that punk acquired through positioning itself within the national conflict. The 'calls to the struggle' were directed at the punk community and their supporters. They tried to involve new members in the common 'patriotic' cause, to fight passivity, political and ethnic disinterest amongst punks.

In their song 'Zorabioa', *Kortatu* (1985) sang: 'Stop drinking so much beer and struggle/ You spend the whole day at the bar/ Even though all is lost, you can still disrupt'. In another song *MCD* (1986) affirmed: 'The time has come to not be left behind/ or at any moment they'll laugh at you/ No more dead punkys!!'

The musicians involved in this patriotic project had a different artistic style and exhibited greater professionalism. Essentially the music was more polished: there was greater stress on the voice, more complex musical structures, and a greater preoccupation with technical and instrumental perfection. This had a lot to do with the desires of the musicians themselves. According to *La Polla Records*, 'After four years playing you got the appetite to do things well' (Blasco 1985, p. 21). Groups like *Kortatu* and *Hertzainak* introduced the sound of ska and instruments like the saxophone. They stressed melodic and 'light' aspects of punk music, de-emphasised the 'rough' performance style and the 'communion' of musicians and audience, often by stressing the distinction between onstage bands, professional performance and audience. In this way agitation from the stage became a more directional, refined praxis. This polished and far less radical style was compatible with a political strategy which saw a mobilising potential in the commercialisation of the music. This attitude was common amongst all the 'political' groups: as *La Polla Records* affirmed:

We are very political. To be truly political lets you control a greater number of people so that they listen to you. It's commercial in every sense, if anyone suggests another formula, delighted' (ibid.)

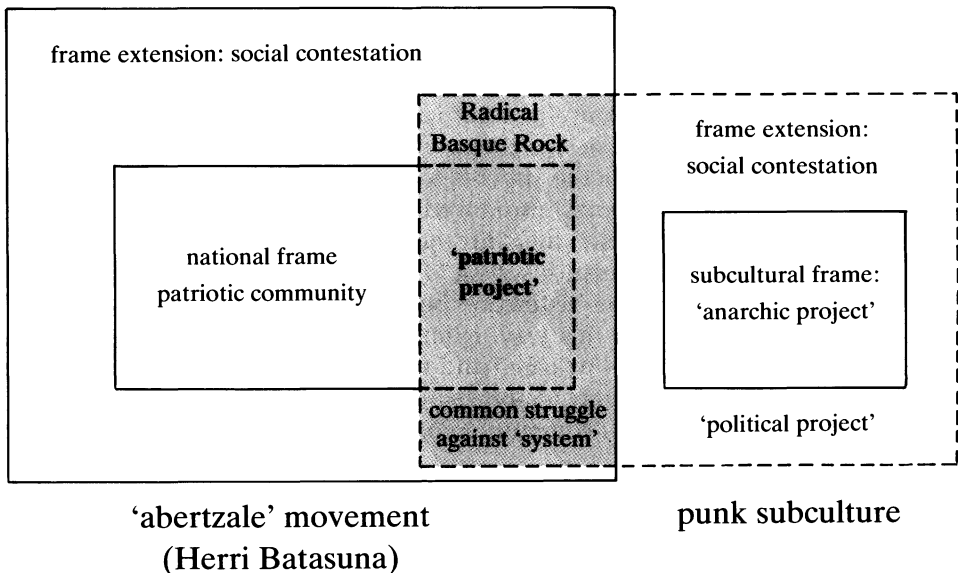
*La Polla Records* insisted, however, that this commercialisation did not imply a dilution of the punk programme, rather it was an attempt to mobilise a greater number of people. They wanted to speak a 'stylistic language' that people could understand, in order to introduce more people to the punk movement while simultaneously re-affirming it. The bands and concerts were to 'awaken' non-punks, to make them see that punk was both radically entertaining and political:



You have to wake people up with a little shake . . . From your situation at a distance, hey! give them a kick and tell them: look Basque, look what is happening, look how dull you are' (ibid.)

These political and nationalist convictions transformed punk groups into supportive mobilising agents. Their preoccupation in the creation of a movement accentuated the agitatory character of their music. In their opinion, political militancy and entertaining youth were intermingled: thus musical consumption was politicised and political activity 'aesthetised'. Passivity was 'dull', 'ridiculous' and showed a lack of the vitality so characteristic of punk, while political militancy corresponded to the stylistic ideals of punk, its vitality, bravery, energy, drive. Slogans such as 'march and fight', 'Euskadi, happy and fighting', used in this context, reflected this union. As a result, political militancy was not only a question of patriotic political programmes, ideologies and convictions, but became a way of life.

It is possible to ascertain in this way that the 'patriotic' bands did not abandon the discursive repertory and symbolic universe of punk. Punk discourse did not change so much in its structure (arguments and concepts), as in the context in which it was located and to which the arguments and concepts referred. In this sense, radicalism could appear either as generalised anarchic rejection of all social order, or as the patriotic rejection of an alien nation state. This latter position responded to the expansion of punk discourse into the world of radical *abertzale* nationalism, to the ethnic markers, identifications, 'patriotic' programmes and associations it proposed.



### Conclusion

As I have shown, the ethnic community defended by an *abertzale* organisation like HB portrayed and defined themselves in such a way as to include and mobilise a broad number of grievances and tendencies. In this sense it also incorporated the discourse and activism of Basque punk. Without doubt, the nationalist mobilisa-

tion was not the consequence of a unilateral strategy by a political organisation over a passive, ill-defined mass: rather it was the result of negotiations, debates and exchange between diverse groups, networks and movements. In particular the nationalist mobilisation of Basque punks was the result of the development of a common 'patriotic' discourse and its viability as a coherent, convincing and appealing political and stylistic project. It was through the development of the shared discourse of Basque Radical Rock that the nationalist *abertzale* movement had access to the symbolic universe and argumentative repertoire of Basque punk which they used and 'invested' into the struggle for the nationalist cause. By expressing their ideals, tastes and habits punks were mobilised.

## Endnotes

\* This article is a reworked, shorter version of an earlier manuscript which will be published by *Inguruak, Revista de la Asociación Vasca de sociología*. For the present text I thank Xosé M. Nuñez, Barbara Bradby and Jan Fairley for their suggestions and criticism, and Maitane Ostolaza Esnal for translating some of the Basque texts. The English translation is the work of Jan Fairley and the author.

1 This phenomena is an essential part of regional and nationalist movements of the Iberian peninsula, see the discussion concerning Galician Celtic folk, Andalusian flamenco, and Catalan singer/songwriters in Lahusen (1991).

2 The English speaking literature on contemporary Basque nationalism is scarce. To name some of the most interesting studies: on ETA and KAS, see Sullivan (1988), Ibarra (1989), Waldmann (1989; 1988); on the PNV, see Darré (1990). An overview is given by Jáuregui (1986).

3 In the cultural field HB integrated various folkloric groups, traditional choirs, singer/songwriters, rock and punks in the political and cultural events they organised. The diversity (not to say the incompatibility) of tastes, styles and cultural origins favoured by HB can be clearly seen in the difference between a traditional choir like *Telesforo Monzon* (the name of a historical, traditional leader of Basque nationalism) and a punk group like *Kortatu*.

4 I have found social movement research of great help in understanding these processes (see the compilation by Rucht, 1991), particularly studies on political mobilisation and 'frame

alignment processes' (Snow *et al.* 1986; Snow & Benford 1988). Here, I define the national community purported by the *abertzale* movement as the essential 'frame', which is amplified and extended. However, this frame is not only a discourse (in this case the communicative reference to ethnic traits and boundaries) as 'frame analysis' tends to argue, but also an organisational field with associational relations and a praxis of political activism. It is not only an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), but an enacted one, which is 'objectified' into identifications, programmes, organisations, statutes, symbols and events.

5 For this I would refer to a series of studies on punk: Laing (1985), Henry (1989), Baron (1989), Lancy & Levin (1985), Roue (1986), Levoices Mallo (1986).

6 The 'patriotic' punk groups were strongly anti-traditionalist, as the songs of *Kortatu* (1986) show: *Aizkolari* (a satire on Basque sports and folklore), or *Jaungoikoa eta Lege Zarra* (a harsh critique of the traditional nationalism of the PNV).

7 This opinion was confirmed in an interview at the time, in which Josu referred to the discussion about the Autonomy Statute and the legal situation of Euskadi within the Spanish state: 'And anyway, whatever they say, "This is Basque country and the Basque country is an autonomy within the Spanish state, and this is Spain". It's Euskadi or nothing, so to hell with Basque country. Euskadi or nothing' (Blasco 1983, p. 14)

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