

**KELLOGG-KROC UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT  
PROJECT REPORT**

**FROM GUNS TO GOVERNMENT: EXPLORING THE TERRORISTS' TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY**

KATIE HAUSWIRTH

In May 2007, with the aid of a grant underwritten by the University of Notre Dame's Kellogg and Kroc Institutes, I traveled to Spain to conduct research on the Basque separatist group Euskadita Askatasuna (ETA) for my senior thesis, entitled 'From Guns to Government: Exploring the Terrorists' Transition to Democracy'. The principal objective of my visit was to enhance the quality of this ongoing learning experience through 1) personal contact with academic specialists in the field of Basque nationalism, and 2) investigative research in Spanish libraries, particularly those specializing in Basque literature. The trip to Spain also served as a crash-course introduction to the historical legacy of Basque nationalism and the sociological impact of ETA's campaign on Spanish society.

My visit began with a brief stint in the capital city of Madrid. Based on the recommendation of Kellogg fellow and sociologist, Robert Fishman, I had contacted a few of the country's notable scholars of Basque nationalism in advance and was able to secure an interview with sociologist Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca Rodriguez at Madrid's Juan March Institute for Social Research. Professor Rodriguez, though a specialist in terrorist violence, proved to be a wealth of knowledge on the separatist group ETA. Much to my satisfaction, the scholar was kind enough to provide both technical advice – such as where to find additional resources, the variety of information produced by the terrorist organization itself, etc. - as well as a more comprehensive view of ETA in the wider context of Basque nationalism and contemporary Spanish political culture. Furthermore, Professor Rodriguez entertained 1) a critical comparison of ETA and its political vehicle, Batasuna, with Ireland's Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its counterpart, Sinn

Féin, and 2) a discussion regarding the relevance of international actors on the mainstreaming process. This dialogue provided meaningful insight into topics of study that have been debated in recent media and will constitute focal points in ‘From Guns to Government’<sup>1</sup>.

The second leg of my stay was spent in the northern city of Bilbao, located in the heart of the Basque region. While there, a great deal of my time was spent conducting searches and research on the history and ideology of the Basque separatist movement and its unique separatist/terrorist component as it is embodied in Euskadita Askatasuna. To this end, the Bilbao Municipal Library and Euskaltzaindia Azkue Biblioteka – a Basque language and reference library – provided a great deal of rare and useful information. A true testament to its unique geographic and cultural environs, the Basque library proved particularly invaluable in regards to the diversity of its volumes, which document ETA’s founding moment and provide a thorough account of the Basque movement’s evolution and the rise of its corresponding terrorist component.

Apart from the city’s libraries, I spent a portion of my time in Bilbao exploring the more overt aspects of Basque nationalism as manifested in the collective’s distinguished language, sporting traditions, cultural heritage, and historic pride. I had the pleasure of touring the Basque cultural museum, rummaging through the local bookshops, passing time at Basque cafes, and conversing casually with locals. Inevitably, these various cultural interactions were instrumental in re-couching the subversive connotations oft-associated with the Basque movement in much more rational, approachable, and nationalistic tones.

In retrospect, the most rewarding dimension of this research trip was indeed its particular blend of academic and cultural immersion. In preparation for my visit to Spain, I set aside time

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<sup>1</sup> “Spain and ETA: Ceasefire no more”, *The Economist*, June 7, 2007 edition

to familiarize myself with the historical legacy of ETA and become informed, generally speaking. I also made note of target-areas and themes as well as questions pertinent to my research topic. Yet, despite these preparations and in light of the thesis being at a rather early point in its gestation, my naïve understanding of the various dynamics at work in the terrorist-afflicted or otherwise temperamental Spanish state became apparent within a day or two of my arrival.

As I submerged myself in the rich cultural life of the Basque region and accumulated a greater range and wealth of knowledge of the legacy of the Basque people, broadly, and ETA, specifically, the various themes that had been reviewed in study began to weave themselves together in a more coherent vision of Basque nationalism and separatism. Because I was able to contextualize the learning process, my visit to Spain, however brief, marked the jettisoning of a highly peripheral set of notions and the adoption of an overall more informed, well-rounded perspective. It is this expanded vision that will ultimately lend itself to a more robust and in-depth analysis of the linkages between terrorist groups with territorially-motivated ideologies - in particular, the IRA, Hamas, and ETA – over the course of the coming year as this thesis takes shape.

Ultimately, it is with utmost gratitude that I express my thanks to the Kellogg and Kroc Institutes for funding this research expedition. Ironically, on the day of my departure from Spain, the group in question – ETA – announced an end to its formally acknowledged cease-fire with the Spanish government<sup>2</sup>. Despite the potentially devastating consequences of a failed peace process, this turn of events begs the question, “what next?”. It is with this thought and the unease of an ill-suited response in mind that my thesis proposal was formulated. It is my hope

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<sup>2</sup> “Basque Separatists Call Off Cease-Fire in Spain”, *The New York Times*, June 6, 2007 edition

that in the coming months, answers lying wait in academia might shed light on an otherwise dimly illuminated path to future and enduring peace.