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THE TRACES OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN THE GENERATION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION TACTICS IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY: FROM TOBERAK TO LIP DUB*

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Abstract | How do the traces of local culture and folklore influence the “invention” of new social protest tactics? Taking the Basque case, I propose that the native culture leave its imprint on novel tactics of protest through (a) processes of creative collective agency where traditional practices are updated by protesters, within (b) social structures that shape the bases of the political conflict. The empirical study of a recent case of tactical innovation is proposed: the protest lip dub. This consists of a choreographed group performance carried out over a musical track, which is recorded and posted on the Internet for political protest. Setting out from a qualitative visual methodology (Lindlof), I study the contextual and symbolic elements in two concrete cases of protest lip dubs produced in the towns of Durango and Heleta in 2012 in favor of Basque political prisoners’ rights. I examine the cultural traces left on these innovative collective action tactics by the Basque traditional rituals involving dance, music and theatre, and I compare them with other cases of theatricalized Basque rituals like the toberak (charivari). As a result, the protest groups creatively update folkloric elements and adapt their form, but not their primary social function, to political action in the present.

Résumé | Dans quelle mesure les traces de la culture locale et du folklore influencent-elles l’invention de nouvelles tactiques protestataires ? L’article suggère, à partir du cas basque, que la culture locale a laissé son empreinte sur les innovations tactiques protestataires par le biais (a) de création de formes d’action collective réactualisant des pratiques traditionnelles (b) au sein de structures sociales engagées dans la structuration du conflit politique. L’analyse empirique se base sur le lip dub protestataire, une innovation tactique en contexte basque, consistant en une performance chorégraphique menée sur une bande son, enregistrée puis diffusée sur internet à des fins politiques et protestataires. À partir de la méthodologie visuelle qualitative de Lindlof, deux cas de lip dubs protestataires produits dans les villages de Durango et Hélette en 2012 en faveur des droits des prisonniers politiques sont examinés. L’article s’interroge sur les traces laissées sur ce répertoire d’action par des répertoires rituels traditionnels comprenant danse, musique et théâtre. Les lip dubs sont ainsi comparés à d’autres formes basques de rituels théâtralisés comme les toberak (charivaris). Au final, les groupes protestataires mettent à jour de façon créative des éléments de folklore en ajustant leur forme, mais pas leur fonction sociale originelle, à l’action politique contemporaine.

Keywords

Political protest, repertoire of action, ritual, nationalism, Basque politics

Mots clés

Protestation politique, répertoire d’action, rituel, nationalisme, politique basque

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1. INTRODUCTION

How do the traces of native culture and folklore affect the “invention” of novel social protest tactics? In this article, taking the Basque Country as the geographical reference, I defend that the influence of traditional practices over tactical innovations¹ occurs through (a) processes of creative cultural agency carried out by protesters, within (b) social structures that shape the bases of the political conflict. To tackle this matter and examine it in detail, I propose the empirical study of a recent example of tactical innovation in the Basque Country: the *protest lip dub*². This consists of a choreographed group performance carried out over a musical track, which is recorded and posted on the Internet. In this article I focus on *lip dubs* made in the Basque Country for political demands or for reasons of political protest.

In this paper I analyse two concrete cases of *protest lip dubs* produced in the towns of Durango and Heleta in 2012 in favor of Basque political prisoners’ rights. I set out a qualitative visual analysis of them based on Lindlof (1995) to try to establish some key points about the process of creating novel methods of collective action (hereafter CA). Attention here is given to the recovery of folk practices from the past for the political demands of the present. I defend that in this process the traditional

1 When a new method of demand and/or protest arises, then we talk about a *tactical innovation* (McAdam, 1983; Morris, 2003). This involves the discovery (or rediscovery) of a new form of protest which, in order to spread quickly, must be easy to adopt, in line with the moral viewpoint of the actors, and apparently successful in achieving its aims (Morris, 2003). These methods and tactics of protest compose the repertoires of collective action used by social movements (Tarrow, 2004; Tilly, 2007).

2 A general definition of *lip dub* can be found in Wikipedia, where it is described as “a type of video that combines lip synching and audio dubbing to make a music video. It is made by filming individuals or a group of people lip synching while listening to a song or any recorded audio then dubbing over it in post editing with the original audio of the song” (Consulted on 6 August, 2014 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lip_dub). When this is carried out in a group with the goal of making a political demand or protest, then it is known as a *protest lip dub*. *Protest lip dub* can be considered to be a tactical innovation in that, since 2010 for the Basque case, they have been set up as a novel method of making political demands and protests (Del Amo, Letamendia, Diaux, 2014).

practice's *form*, which is visually explicit, is creatively recovered in the novel method of protest and configured as a symbolic reference and distinctive badge of identity; but its background is not, given that its original social *function* is changed and adapted to contemporary political demands.

As well as the new *protest lip dubs*, characteristic of *Hegoalde* – or the Southern Basque Country, under Spanish administration - in recent years other theatricalized and visually explicit expressions of demand have emerged, as is the case in *Iparralde* – or the Northern Basque Country, under French administration - with events such as the *tobera mustra*³. These, which are updated folkloric events, show certain characteristics in common with recent innovations such as *lip dubs*, for example, the dramatisation of the political action and the visual profusion of native cultural symbols. In this way, cultural references from the local tradition and innovative forms of political action become intertwined in the contemporary Basque political scene, where a combination of old and new repertoires of CA is encountered. To look at all of this in greater depth, let me start the article by bringing theory to bear on the relationship between ancient Basque cultural traces and contemporary contentious political activity.

2. POLITICAL PROCESSES AND THE RECOVERY OF ALTERNATIVE TRADITIONAL COSMOVISIONS

In the Basque Country, the nostalgia transmitted by the old *legend of Kixmi* – nostalgia over the loss of an ancient world inhabited by mythological beings – has gone through a 180-degree turn in recent decades. This legend, transmitted from generation to

³ The *tobera* is a popular ritual, a dramatised event in which, traditionally, community punishments were imposed on behaviour considered to be deviant. These have been modernised as the *tobera mustra*, daytime festivals with a dramatised simulacrum of the process, a parade and dancing, which together can be organised as tools to make political demands (Itçaina, 2012).

generation in rural areas, referred to the definitive disappearance of a past time ruled by spirits and magical beings closely linked to the rural setting. The legend of Kixmi narrated how the *gentiles*, the name used to refer to certain extraordinary beings in Basque mythology, disappeared with the coming of Christianity (Altuna, 2007). The *gentiles* were on occasion represented as savage humans of enormous strength who lived in the mountains; at other times they lived in the caves; and sometimes they were even considered to be the first blacksmiths, millers or builders of the cromlechs. The last survivor of the *gentiles*, “[whose] eyelids they raised with an oven spatula so that he could see the stars [...] said: *the human race has died out and the dogs have arrived*, in reference to the decline of paganism and its world and the coming of Christianity” (Barandiaran, 2007: 144). A great glow in the sky announced the coming of Kixmi, the name used by the pagans of the Basque lands to refer to Christ. Since then the *gentiles* have lain buried in the *Jentilbaratza* or “garden of the *gentiles*”.

Throughout the XXth century, the oral transmission of the old Basque mythological legends seemed doomed to disappear: industrialization and the urbanization of the rural areas, where the practices and tales of magical beings had a greater presence, brought the definitive erosion of these old pagan beliefs. Previously, Basque mythology and Christianity had coexisted in a precarious and unequal balance; but with the modern processes of industrialization, of migration from the countryside to the city, as well as the diffusion of the mass media, the mythological traces of the past were no longer passed from generation to generation (Altuna, 2007). Nonetheless, these traces of the past became the object of research by anthropologists like Caro Baroja and J.M. Barandiaran, amongst others, who delved into the “immaterial remnants of a past whose memory has reached us in the form of legends, traditions, beliefs, customs and religious and magical practices” (Barandiaran, 2007: 9).

However, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, these processes of loss of local cultural references were inverted. In the Spanish State, the decline of Francoism brought uncertainty over the future, political destabilization, and the perception amongst different actors of a greater capacity for materializing their political projects. In terms of political sociology, one could say that there was an opening of the Political Opportunity Structure, POS (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Tarrow, 2004). In this context, at the same time as deep socio-political conflicts, a powerful protest cycle took shape in the Basque Country. During these years, together with an active process of assertion by the Basque National Liberation Movement, there was a resurgence of autochthonous cultural practices and events, which had been repressed under Francoism. A new aesthetic sensibility arose in civil society, reflected in the “New Basque Song” or the attempt to create a Basque collective artistic front (Letamendia F., 1994). Similarly, there was a recovery and strengthening of traditional dances, rites, music and verse recital, as well as of the Basque language, *Euskara*. Mythological elements also acquired a greater presence. Thus, even the nostalgic message transmitted by the legend of Kixmi changed its meaning, adopting a hopeful ending. With the end of Francoism, the *Olentzero*, considered in some legends to be the last of the gentiles, awoke symbolically from his thousand-year lethargy in the mountains. From then onwards, the *Olentzero* became established as a magical character who distributes presents on Christmas Day in the Basque Country. In Iparralde these processes also find reflection in the revitalization of traditional cultural and ritual events like the *tobera mustra* (theatricalized parades), the *Besta Berri-Fête-Dieu* (Corpus Christi celebrations) or the *ĩnauteriak* (carnivals); in this way we find a selective rediscovery of the ritual link in the last decades of the XXth century (Ikardo and Itçaina, 1998).

In the Basque Country we can thus observe how contemporary political projects, like the *abertzale* (patriot) project, involve

references to, and the updating of, elements present in popular culture. This indicates that every socio-political project with a unifying vocation requires a cultural frame that gives it consistency; it requires a symbolic universe that gives it meaning and with which people can identify. The most evident cases of this are provided by states, around the “nation” in which is supposedly based their political structure. Such frames are formed, amongst other things, by complex interactions and assemblies involving past and present cultural elements, which are socially (re) interpreted and constructed. But these autochthonous cultural elements are not only linked to national political projects, they also shape certain expressions of political action like the repertoires and tactics of protest. In this respect, an idea I wish to underscore in this article is that the link between local culture and political agency can be transferred to the forms taken by the repertoires of CA of social movements.

3. THE LINK BETWEEN TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND THE GENERATION OF CA TACTICS. RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND METHOD

The idea that I am proposing has previously been set out by authors like Charles Tilly or E.P. Thompson. From different perspectives, both linked rituals and activities from autochthonous culture with the dynamic of social movements (Thompson, 1992; Tilly, 2007). In this text I wish to insist on the processes in which new repertoires of contention are created, on the *generation of novel CA tactics*; and on how the latter are linked to local culture. That is, I wish to examine how autochthonous symbols and practices influence the “invention” of new tactics of protest. For this purpose, I analyse with visual qualitative technics the case of *protest lip dub*, a contemporary Basque example of tactical innovation (Del Amo, Letamendia, Diaux, 2014). I will explore the way certain characteristics of traditional culture are updated by

political actors and how the cultural agency takes place in this process.

I set out from the premise that processes of cultural agency are inserted in contexts that define relations of power. In situations of political contention, as in the Basque pro-independence case, a large part of the social and political movements, since they are alternative agents to the *status quo*, also tend to posit alternative cosmovisions to the hegemonic ones. Processes of cultural agency are thus not merely symbolic, nor do they take place in a material vacuum. They occur within structures from which relations of power emerge, which define different degrees of access to material resources between authorities and activists. In this way, these structures define forms of power and social control, but also sets of opportunities for agency. Therefore, the proposal I am setting out in this article is that the generation of repertoires of CA occurs: a) according to collective processes of agency, which can be creative and transformative, and which on occasion can materialize through processes of cultural and symbolic readaptation; b) within social structures that shape sets of opportunities, which at the same time restrict and define the conditions of possibility for collective action.

The analysis of how a novel form of protest, Basque *protest lip dub*, is currently generated will serve for examining these ideas. Onwards, as a way of ordering this text, the work is divided into different parts. In the first place, I set out a theoretical model on how tactical innovations are generated in differentiated contexts. This model covers three dimensions that interact dialectically: specific social structures, which both restrict and make possible the creation of forms of CA; ritualized practices of autochthonous culture, which influence CA; and processes of creative and transformative agency by political actors. In the second place, I examine the broader context of the contemporary “cultures of mobilization” in which the dynamic of *protest lip dub* emerges. In this point, and above all starting from the feature of the wave

of social protest that began internationally in 2011, attention is directed to determining whether the forms of the repertoires of CA are currently undergoing changes, and what these changes are. In the third place, on the basis of the qualitative visual analysis based on Lindlof (1995) of two selected concrete cases, I try to establish what traces of folklore – if indeed there are any – we can identify in *protest lip dubs*, and in contemporary Basque repertoires of CA in general, and how they mold innovative forms of protest. I also try to answer the question of whether the implementation of *lip dub* as a theatrical form of political protest has influences and similarities with other traditional types of ritual events like *tobera* -or Basque *charivari* (Itçaina, 2012). Finally I will propose some reflections about the potential theatricalization of the new forms of political protest, the creative cultural agency applied to CA tactics, and the influence of traditional local practices on them.

4. THE “INVENTION” OF REPERTOIRES OF CA. CREATIVE AGENCIES WITHIN STRUCTURES THAT ENABLE AND RESTRICT

The Basque *protest lip dub* can be considered a tactical innovation of CA (Del Amo, Letamendia, Diaux, 2014). Thus, let me start with a theoretical model about how novel tactics of CA are generated. The forms in which conflicts and collective demands are expressed vary across space and time. Throughout the course of history, different societies in different periods generate and adopt distinctive forms through which groups of people make political assertions. The last two centuries of history have been marked, as Tilly reminds us, by a unique form of political contention: that of the social movements, equipped with an entire modern repertoire of action (Tilly, 2007; Tilly and Wood, 2010). According to Tilly, in the transition towards the modern repertoire of CA, old actions of local and particular protest progressively give way other more cosmopolitan, modular and autonomous actions. As it is modular,

this modern repertoire is adaptable to the most varied contexts, and it is also recognizable, both by the activists who employ it and by the authorities to whom protest is directed. Some of its expressions that have spread world-wide are demonstrations, strikes or barricades. Moreover, on the other hand, groups of people have progressively developed novel methods of protest. These are the tactical innovations of which Basque *protest lip dub* serves as an example. Such innovations, in the most successful cases, can end up being incorporated into the regular repertoire of CA of movements – and if they are not successful, they just disappear after a short period of time.

With respect to the generation of novel forms of collective protest, as I said before I defend the idea that innovations occur according to two factors: a) thanks to cultural processes of creative collective agency; and b) within structures that at the same time restrict and enable CA. Let me start briefly with the second factor, with the role played by social structures in the generation of repertoires of CA; and then we will see in depth how creative agency is produced culturally and the influence of traditional practices on this process.

4.1. Structures in the generation of repertoires of CA

Historically, the generation of the principal tactics of CA runs in parallel with a specific structure, which defines restrictions while enabling their emergence. We can see that with the “invention” of barricades as a repertoire of contention, closely linked to the emergence of urban structures in the Paris of the XVIth century (Traugott, 2002); with the appearance of modern strikes, that runs in parallel with the spread of industrial capitalism (Lefranc, 1975); or with the emergence of demonstrations and the implantation of modern national state structures in the 19th century (Tilly and Wood, 2010). The fact that over the last two centuries these structures –urbanization, capitalism, national

state- have spread throughout the planet might in part explain the global and modular character of the modern repertoire of CA with tactics like barricades, strikes or demonstrations. It can be argued that specific forms of CA emerge linked to conflicts whose nature is defined by structures that expand globally. Thus, if the structural nature of certain conflicts (urban, capitalist, or nationalist conflicts) is global, concurrently a global paradigm of social mobilization is also installed: the modern repertoire of CA, composed of tactics like barricades, strikes or demonstrations.

Nonetheless, in places and contexts with different cultural characteristics, even the standard modern repertoire of protest is adapted and expressed in different ways. For example, forms of demonstration vary according to place; from the banner behind which a group of people march without any further distinguishing marks, to demonstrations that include different symbols and colors in their ranks, to those in which individuals carry their own placards. The forms taken by strikes as well – authorized, spontaneous, “wildcat” – or even barricades – with or without fire, strategic, purely symbolic – vary depending on the intensity of the conflict and the institutionalized cultural practices of the place where they are carried out. Thus, the “cultures of political mobilization” of each place are in part determined by characteristics of the local culture.

The combination between local cultural and global structural characteristics is also present in the generation of contemporary tactical innovations like Basque *protest lip dub*. In this case, one of the structures that has undergone a striking change in recent decades is the communicational structure. Nowadays, alongside the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially the worldwide spread of Internet, a culture of mass media convergence has arisen, in which there is a crossover of popular and corporate media (Jenkins, 2008). In this new context Castells (2012) underscores the transformation

that has occurred in socialized communication: the passage from mass communication – exemplified by the television and its unidirectional message – towards mass self-communication, exemplified by Internet and mobile networks, in which subjects can construct their own networks of communication. This “has widened the possibilities of autonomous action of social movements, the subjects of social transformation” (Castells, 2012: 12). In this new communicative-technological context, *Youtube* emerged on Internet in 2005, a website where any user can upload and watch videos on the Net. *Protest lip dubs* are configured as videos that make use of this new communication tool to raise political demands. In this way, besides being a protest act in itself, *lip dubs* manage to overcome the filters that the mass media had imposed until recently in order to spread its message. Thus, from a dialectical perspective, while the present communicative structures involve new forms of social control – such as a greater capacity of control over the users of telematic networks, they also offer new and revolutionary forms of resistance and agency. One of the many examples of the latter is the generation of *protest lip dub*.

4.2. Local culture and collective action

Having reviewed the role of structures in the generation of repertoires of CA, I will now focus on the influence of local culture on the forms of mobilization. I will set out from the idea, expounded by Tilly, that the activity of a social movement is inspired by the local culture. As I observed above, in the establishment of the modern repertoire of CA, the old actions of local protest – characteristic of Europe in the XVIIth century – progressively gave way to other more cosmopolitan, autonomous and modular actions (Tilly 2007). However, this author insists that in the establishment of the modern repertoire of CA the potential process of uniformization of social protest runs up against the influence of the local culture. This leaves its distinctive imprint on protest actions. Local songs, dress and symbols impose their

own cultural sense, derived from the practices of the past, on social movements. This makes the demonstrations and demands of social movements understandable to the local public. The modular character of the repertoire of CA develops along with the capacity to adapt to different contexts; but there is no perfect uniformity of protest in different contexts. Each place has specific cultural characteristics, which is also true of the forms of CA (Tilly 2007; Tilly and Wood, 2010).

In this respect, authors like E.P. Thompson (1992) underscore the importance of traditions and ritual popular events in the formation of the social movement; such is the case of *rough music*⁴ and the early formation of the English working class. Events like rough music had a special relevance in the early formation of the working class, insofar as some of their ceremonial practices were incorporated by the first workers' organizations. For example, the blasphemies and ceremonies of the first clandestine unions (like the Luddites) arose from the influence of different groups of rituals like *rough music*. There is thus a link between local ritual practices and the activity of social movement. Later on, when the organizations of the workers' movement become better organized, more sophisticated and politically aware, there was a decline in the influence of these ritualized forms of local tradition (Thompson, 1992). Creativity is an element that I believe should be underscored in this and other cases –as we will also see with the *protest lip dub*- where local ritual practices are transferred to the repertoires of action of social movements. We shall now consider how this occurs in detail.

4 According to Thompson (1992), the events termed *rough music* are a ritualized form of noise-making habitually found in English towns until the 19th century. In these events, a group of people made a racket, which on occasion took a musical form with tambourines or horns. The aim of these actions was to show hostility towards, or mock those who offended against certain communitarian norms. Acts of *rough music* are characteristic of societies where justice is not totally delegated or bureaucratized, but enacted by, and within the community. They constitute forms of social self-control and discipline towards certain types of violence and antisocial offence.

4.3. Creativity and forms of collective action

For there to be an *innovation* in any aspect of life, it is necessary to *create* something novel. *Creativity* could be defined as an idea or action that is new and valuable, and that requires a social evaluation that considers it as such (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). This is a notion that can be applied to the repertoires of CA, if we consider these latter to be learned *cultural creations* that emerge from the struggle (Tarrow, 2004). For its part, “creativity in capital letters, [is] the type of creativity that changes some aspect of the culture” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998: 46), which is why it is applicable to cultural creations like the repertoires of CA. Thus, the psychologists Gardner (1995) and Csikszentmihalyi (1998), setting out from the socio-cultural character of creativity, propose a *systems model* to tackle it. According to this model, in creative works there is a dialectical and interactive process amongst three elements: the *individual talent* of people who materialize novel and valuable ideas or actions; the *field* or discipline in which this creative work is inscribed; and the social *setting* that evaluates the work.

If we apply these three elements of the model, in first place we find that we are dealing with a specific *field* in this article: that of the tactics of CA of social movements. In this field, creative actions are those that incorporate novel forms on its margins; tactical innovations that alter the characteristics of the current standard repertoire of CA. A second element of the model is that of the *setting* in which creativity takes place. When a field shows a highly organized structure – the sciences for example – the *setting* is formed of judges and institutions that evaluate the creative idea and determine whether or not it is novel. In cases where such structuring does not exist, as in the repertoires of CA, identifying creative and innovative phenomena is more complicated. Nonetheless, innovations in the methods of protest occur, as the first modern demonstrations or strikes were in their time, or as with present-day *protest lip dubs* in the Basque case.

In these cases there is no judge or institution to evaluate the efficiency and originality of the novel methods of CA, but there is a social evaluation of the new tactic of protest. If the social movements consider the new form of mobilization to be suitable, legitimate and useful, they can then incorporate it into their repertoire of action. In this way, popular legitimacy performs the role of “judge” within the *setting* that determines whether or not the innovation in CA is correct.

Thus, the *field* and the *setting* must be appropriate for a creative phenomenon – as a novel method of protest like *lip dub* – to be able to spread; but it is individuals, *creative people*, who devise innovations in each of their fields. In the case of repertoires of CA, since it is a question of collective actions – carried out as their name indicates by *groups of people* – there is no tendency to single out one individual as the creator of an innovation. The generation of the innovative activity might take place in a joint way; meaning that it is generally not possible to identify a single individual, were this case, as the *inventor* of the initiative. What is more feasible is to identify the social movements that promote these creative actions and the motives for the latter. In any case, although they are anonymous, what we can deduce from this model is the key role of the *agency of creative people*, who generate novel ideas that, if they are put into practice, can give rise to tactical innovations. Thus, the capacity of agency of people – through their capacity to *create* individually and collectively – emerges as a key mechanism for producing novel CA tactics and short circuits in the reproduction of the system. Creativity is therefore found to be indisputably linked to the generation of repertoires of CA.

So, having examined the different dimensions through which the generation of repertoires of collective protest occurs, I will now examine the broader context of the contemporary “cultures of mobilization” in which tactical innovations like

protest lip dub emerge. I will deal with the characteristic forms of contemporary social mobilization in which the emergence of *lip dub* is inscribed, both at the international level, and in the Basque Country in particular.

5. CONTEMPORARY CULTURES OF MOBILIZATION AND BASQUE TACTICAL INNOVATIONS. BEYOND THE MODERN REPERTOIRE OF CA?

In the Basque Country we are witnessing a double process that is having an impact on the forms of CA. On the one hand, we find changes in the expressions of the political contention defined by the centre-periphery cleavage, marked by the end of ETA's armed activity in 2011 and by the decrease of direct street confrontations between the authorities and pro-independence activists. The repertoires of CA are increasingly defined by symbolic actions. Parodies and other types of symbolic and visual protest actions are currently proliferating in the Basque Country (Letamendia A., 2013). Thus, in parallel with other aspects of the social, we are facing a growing *visuality* of protest events; there is a proliferation of actions where images and explicit symbolism have a central value. *Protest lip dubs*, as we shall see, are a good example of this.

On the other hand, we face a process of international diffusion of social protest, which from 2011 onwards crystalized in contexts as diverse as the Arab countries, the “indignant” protesters of 15-M in Spain, or the activists of Occupy Wall Street, amongst many others. A distinctive form of CA that emerged in this context was collective encampments in public squares; the persistent occupation of the public space. In these cases, the paradigm of the form of mobilization seems to shift, in part at least, from the streets to the squares, and from the format of the disciplined march to the public assembly, where there is collective deliberation and decision making.

Besides, in countries like Spain new methods of social protest emerge –like the *escrache*, imported from Argentina, a collective non-violent act of public condemnation of people (like political leaders) considered to be responsible for the situation denounced. The nature of these kind of novel actions incorporates some of the characteristic elements of the pre-modern forms of collective protest, such as a communitarian sanction involving a collective physical presence in front of the home of the person denounced. On the opposite side, in the example of *lip dub* and other theatricalized forms of CA, there is a risk of a “spectacularization” or “simulacrization” of the protest; typically post-modern aesthetic characteristics. These are indications that perhaps point towards future forms of mobilization that go beyond typically modern forms⁵.

With respect to *protest lip dub*, there is no way of knowing whether this is a successful innovation in CA that will come to form part of the regular repertoire of Basque social movements, or whether, on the contrary, it will disappear in a few months as a method of protest. What can be asserted is that, in its emergence, it incorporated characteristics of this double process of the forms of contemporary protest that we are discussing. On one side, it exhibits a highly visual, parodical and symbolically explicit nature (one that can be recorded on video cameras, making it immediately exportable throughout the world via Internet). On the other, it is a collective occupation of the public space for the time the event and its recording last. And this is a duration that can last for several hours, since several shots are generally taken,

5 We find other recent cases of innovation in the Basque tactics of protest, the most notable of which is the *Herri Harresi* (Popular wall). On 19 of April 2013 in a square in the Basque city Donostia, hundreds of seated people formed a cordon with their bodies – a “popular wall”- around 6 people the police wanted to arrest for membership of *Segi*, the Basque pro-independence youth organization banned by Spanish justice (*Gara*, 19/04/2013). A similar logic has been proliferating in the Spanish state since 2011, in a deep neoliberal socioeconomic crisis, with groups of people employing non-violent forms of resistance to try and prevent the police from evicting impoverished people from their homes (Pastor, 2014).

and the participants have to get ready and position themselves each time the event is recorded.

This is therefore the broader context of the contemporary forms of mobilization, where tactical innovations arise, and in which we can discern some pre and post-modern characteristics. From this contextual starting point, we shall now empirically analyse Basque *protest lip dub*, and try to establish in detail how cultural agency takes place within it, focusing on the updating and (re) appropriation of the traces of popular culture and folklore.

6. CULTURAL AND FOLKLORIC TRACES IN FORM OF PROTEST. VISUAL ANALYSIS FACTS ABOUT BASQUE PROTEST LIP DUB

The analysis of Basque *protest lip dub* that I propose is based on the interpretative paradigm (Lindlof, 1995). Through study of two *protest lip dub* videos selected from Youtube web, I will attempt to interpret the visual texts in correlation with a constant reference to the social context and the relations of power in which they take place. The intention is to focus on the culturally sited/contextualized communication and examine its political signification. The two *lip dubs* I shall study were elaborated during 2012: concretely, one of them was realized on June in Heleta (a small village in the North Basque Country, or Iparralde, belonging to France); and the other was carried out on December in Durango (a town in the South Basque Country, or Hegoalde, belonging to Spain). The choice of the Durango video is due to its being the Basque *protest lip dub* made in 2012 most viewed on Youtube. The choice of the Heleta video is due to its being carried out in Iparralde, in order to observe whether the fact of the different institutional context (another state) is significant for its form. In essence, through the analysis we will see now it can be said that the patterns of the event in both cases are very similar.

Besides, in the two cases we are facing protest events promoted by *abertzale* (patriot) organizations in favor of Basque political prisoners' rights.

The study of the two *lip dub* videos is based on the qualitative method of analysis proposed by Lindlof (1995). According to this author, there are several stages in the analysis of texts, in this case visual ones, of data inserted in an inductive process. The first stage to be realized, once the videos to be studied have been viewed several times, is that of codification; to begin to establish the codes and categories for organizing the data. At this level, a differentiation must be made between two levels of codes. Those of the first level are descriptive codes – simple, concrete, clichés – about people, conduct, events, setting, or activities. These are the basic descriptive characteristics that we can directly observe in the videos. Next comes a step that requires a greater degree of interpretation, which is that of establishing the second level codes. These latter must be based on the descriptive codes of the first level; and it is from here that cultural and theoretical categories start to be constructed. The second order codes can be conceptual, relational, contextual, referring to beliefs or cultural practices. Lindlof recommends taking note of elements like the themes dramatized by participants, conflictive situations, recurrent elements, conditions that evoke actions, expressions of how participants view themselves, or ritual acts of communication that incorporate beliefs and cultural processes. In this way, categories are constructed that, setting out from a purely descriptive basis, involve interpretation based on the cultural or political context in which the (visual) text is inscribed.

Once we have constructed the categories of the first and, above all, the second order, they are once again tested against the videos we are analysing: new characteristics or aspects of the videos that had not been perceived initially are grouped in each category. Progressively, as the visual data are classified, the defining

properties of each category are established; the category thus becomes a theoretical and conceptual construct. Lindlof (1995) warns about the point at which a “theoretical saturation” of the categories occurs, when the data of the visual texts no longer contribute anything new. Then a process of reduction takes place, which involves synthesizing the most relevant terminology and focusing only on the most useful categories for our research aims. In this article, the emphasis is placed on the selective adaptation made of elements of popular culture and folklore in *protest lip dubs*. It is from this point on that the explanation emerges, which is the theoretical effort to understand the coherence and meaning of the action of the case studied. Finally, as a conclusion to the work in its totality, the theoretical construction is elaborated, based on the results of the analysis carried out. There I will expose some reflections about the role of cultural agency in the creation of CA tactics, the new theatricalized forms of politics, and the potential similarities with another cases and ritual events like the contemporary *tobera* –or Basque *charivari* (Itçaina, 2012).

6.1. Lip dub videos for analysis

[Video 1: Durango protest lip dub, called “U12 Bilbora: MobiLIPDUBzioa Durangon. Preso eta iheslariak herrira!” \(on Youtube\)](#)

Date of analysis and visits: Retrieved on 20 May, 2014. 178800 visits.

Description: this is a choreographed video carried out in December 2012 in the Basque town of Durango, in the Southern Basque Country, in which hundreds of people participated. In this *lip dub*, by means of a Basque music track, the aim was to dramatise popular support for political prisoners.

Image 1: Durango protest lip dub



[Video 2: Heleta protest lip dub, called “EHZ 2012 Herrera Lipdub” \(on Youtube\)](#)

Date of analysis and visits: Retrieved on 20 May, 2014. 7995 visits.
Description: this *lip dub* was carried out in the small town of Heleta, in the Northern Basque Country, by the *abertzale* (patriot) leftist movement. In this case the political demand also referred to the Basque prisoners, showing solidarity with them and denouncing their treatment and situation in prison.

Image 2: Heleta *protest lip dub*



6.2. Visual analysis and theoretical interpretation

Following the model of analysis proposed by Lindlof (1995), in the first place we will focus on the first order, descriptive codes, both for *lip dubs* in general, and for Basque *protest lip dubs* in particular. Next, we will try to establish the second order, conceptual and theoretical codes, through interpretation of the first order codes. As I have said, attention will be focused on folkloric and traditional elements updated in the *lip dubs*. The results of the empirical analysis that I then go on to present are in part based on two earlier research projects on the phenomenon of *lip dub* as innovative method of political protest (Del Amo, Diaux, Letamendia, 2012; Del Amo, Letamendia, Diaux, 2014).

6.2.1 First order codes: description

We will now consider the first order, descriptive codes. Before focusing specifically on the *protest lip dubs* made in the Basque Country, we will apply these first order codes to the general phenomenon of *lip dub* as a novel video format that is spread over the Internet. These are the first order characteristics to be underscored:

- Visuality, images, color: these are videos in which there is a continuous exhibition of explicit images. A high degree of visuality is reflected, involving colored images through which the participants in the event are seen.
- Direct expressiveness: the expressive and emotional function takes precedence in *lip dubs*. The striking and explicit visuality of the message seeks to reach the spectator directly and immediately. In the majority of cases, this emotional appeal is based on forms that are sung and danced, expressing positive states of enjoyment. Thus, the exhibition of happiness and an optimistic tone tend to be a constant in *lip dubs*.

- Instantaneity: as they are recorded on videos and uploaded onto the Internet, ICTs enable the instantaneous diffusion of the information. In this way, the big mass media's selection filters on information are bypassed, and people in different places in the world connected to the Net are able to observe the event.
- Dynamism of the images and realization: choreographic movements are carried out in *lip dubs*, and there is a proliferation of tracking shots. The images tend to be high quality, and great care is taken in the realization, which involves a screenplay, rehearsal, direction, production and diffusion of the event.

Having applied the first order, descriptive codes to *lip dubs* generically, we will now apply them to *protest lip dubs* made recently in the Basque Country. These are the most notable characteristics:

- Profusion of symbols: a great quantity of visually explicit symbols, representing different political demands, appear in Basque *protest lip dubs*; independent of the specific cause.
- Characteristic musical repertoire: use is made of songs in *Euskara* (Basque language) in the videos, and there is a convergence between the musical and the linguistic, which is something constant in Basque *protest lip dubs*.
- Theatricality, disguises, dance: we find ourselves facing theatricalized, sung and danced forms of CA, which are recorded on video. Characteristics are thus shown that are strongly related to a parodic, dynamic and ludic spirit.
- Individual-collective focus: the images of the *lip dub* constantly combine close-ups with group shots, staging a type of "pass the baton" amongst participants. The singular is thus combined with the communitarian in a cooperative register.

- Basque ethnic elements: there is a notable presence of dress, musical instruments and characters from Basque popular tradition, folklore and mythology.

In Basque *protest lip dubs*, the (re)adaptation for protest purposes of traditional, folkloric and mythological elements from popular culture, as well as a symbolic appeal to the communitarian link, of which the individuals form part, provide us with some clues about how selective cultural agency occurs. In order to go more deeply into this, and continuing the model of analysis proposed by Lindlof, I will now try to contextually interpret the characteristics I have underscored, and thus establish the second order codes of Basque protest lip dubs.

6.2.2. *Second order codes: interpretation*

- Emotional appeal: the emotions and feelings of the people taking part in the event are emphasized, through the aesthetic combination of music, symbols, colorful images, and even the fact of being able to see the faces of the people taking part in the *lip dub* interacting affectionately. This involves interpellation, seeking an emotional connection with the spectator, beyond the rational element of the message. The current changes in the forms of the Basque political conflict, in which forms of direct political violence are tending to disappear while there is an increase in symbolic and parodic practices, fit in with this characteristic.
- Representativeness: the vocation to include and represent the whole “catalogue” of social movements is shown: we see for example symbols of national liberation, feminism, squatters, trade unionism, defense of the Basque language, youth, ecologism or internationalism. Emphasis is also placed on representativeness with the presence of people belonging to different generations (children, youths, adults,

elderly people). An attempt can thus be seen to widen the range of participation and to stage support for the causes of different movements and generations, showing a plural, inclusive and integrating nature.

- Tradition and modernity: while the *lip dubs* themselves are an exercise in adapting novel technologies, there are references to Basque traditional and ethnic elements in all of them. The memory of tradition is fused, updated and communicated in lip dubs.

- Integrating spirit: there is a staging of cohesion in diversity and a union of collectives in harmony, stressing both the individual and the communitarian at the same time. The communitarian link acquires a cooperative character through the images, where individuals “pass the baton” in the tracking shots.

- Alternative cosmovision: each movement is given voice in the *lip dub*, its moment for launching its message and demand. At the same time, linked with the idea developed at the beginning of this article, an alternative cosmovision of the ensemble is staged; an alternative world with pretensions of universality is visualized. Mythological beings appear explicitly in the videos, as Basque Cyclops called *Tartalo* (in Video 1, Durango) and giants (in Video 2, Heleta).

- Connection with local popular culture: there is an appreciable aspiration to represent Basque identity in the videos, from folkloric elements to those of music and dance. Thus, traditional dances and other expressions of local culture appear in both analysed *lip dub* videos, as a distinctive and explicit element of collective identity.

From my point of view, these are some of the keys to the message and the (self)representation that the *lip dubs* seek to

transmit. Similarly, the process of cultural agency, through the reincorporation and adaptation of elements of popular culture and folklore, is present in the generation of *protest lip dubs*. By means of the analysis made, I believe that there are several ideas we can recover. On the one hand, one can see how symbols, which are abundant and refer to different issues, finally put across a message of the unity of the different struggles of the mobilized community. This message of popular unity rests on references to elements of the local culture, as occurs with the exhibition of popular music and traditions. This is a popular culture that is fused and adapted in a protest register; it is also a ludic culture as is reflected in the profusion of disguises, theatricality and the central importance of autochthonous dances. Similarly, these are indications suggesting that some of the contemporary Basque forms of collective protest have a more parodic, visual and festive character.

On the other hand, recognizable individuals appear in the *lip dubs*; but their action takes place within a broader community of which they form part, and which raises concrete political demands. In the representation of the *lip dubs*, the community is thus configured as an agent with political will. It should be noted that the political demands raised in the cases analysed, like the defense of the rights of Basque prisoners, take place, as I have noted, within a structural conflict defined by the centre-periphery cleavage, which still generates tensions in Basque society today. This is therefore the political context in which the process of cultural agency takes place in this case; an agency directed to the conscious recovery of local practices and symbols, adapted to the political demands of the present. To give consistency to all of this, an appeal is made to an alternative cosmivision; a cultural frame is acquired that provides consistency to the political project and impregnates the form of political action itself. The connection with local traditional culture is thus not made in a conservative register, but quite the opposite. We are facing the

symbolic construction and collective creative representation –by explicit visual signs- of a global alternative to existing hegemonic structures: the existing nation-states (Spain and France), the contemporary functioning of political economy (Capitalism), the patriarchal system (Patriarchalism), and even the religion that is currently predominant (Catholicism).

7. POPULAR CULTURE AND NEW THEATRICALIZED FORMS OF POLITICS: FROM *TOBERA MUSTRA* TO *PROTEST LIP DUB*

Through *lip dub* we are verifying how theatricalized forms of political action are currently being generated and spread in the Basque Country. But not only in Hegoalde (belonging to Spain), where the political conflict has been harder, spread symbolic and theatricalized forms of politics; in Iparralde (belonging to France) we can observe similar processes. In North Basque Country there was a resurgence in the 1970s of a renovated version of *tobera mustra* (Itçaina, 2012), the Basque *charivari*. The *charivaris*, to which Thompson (1992) was alluding with English rough music, are rituals that take place in different parts of pre-industrial Europe. As in other ceremonial forms of festivals and celebrations, in these popular events there is a display of symbolic representations of conflictive power relations and social relations in general. Informal politics makes an appearance in the *charivaris*; in them, popular forms, practices and expressions are displayed on the margins of legitimate politics.

In Iparralde, nonetheless, the most explicit protest version of politics has only recently acquired a central dimension in this type of ritual events, due precisely to the weakening of custom in its original form (Itçaina, 2012). For the case of the *charivaris* of *Lapurdi*, in Iparralde, Itçaina (2012) proposes to reread its history as a partial superimposition of three dimensions of politics:

the native, original dimension, that of *sanction by custom*, in which ritual establishes mechanisms for imposing norms and sanctioning social deviation at the level of small towns; the dimension of the *sanction of custom*, in which there are signs of political intrusion, where the state and its laws try to combat the *charivari* as an abuse against the freedom and independence of the citizens; and the dimension following World War II, when the *charivari* parades reemerge at the price of a radical modification of their original motivation. In this most recent stage, there is a strong intrusion by politics and collective demands (like the *abertzale* ones), through new theatricalized ways of action.

The theatricalized form of action as a political tool, creatively and collectively constructed, of this latest phase of the *charivari* parade (the *tobera mustra*) is a common characteristic of the *protest lip dub* we have been analyzing. There are however evident differences between *lip dub* and the *tobera mustra* as forms of political action. Thus, unlike the *tobera mustra*, *lip dub* is strictly developed on the basis of a song; it is prepared expressly to be recorded and uploaded onto the Internet; and it is devised by a specific social movement, for a specific moment in time and with a very concrete political claim. Besides, unlike the *tobera mustra*, which is generally carried out in a specific town by its inhabitants, *lip dub* has a more massive and plural vocation (like so many other forms of mobilization that attempt to reflect the social strength of their demand), and as seen in the analysis only incorporates some concrete elements of traditional culture and folklore -it is not in itself an updated event of folklore.

Nonetheless, in spite of the differences, the use of collective action in a parodic and ludic form as a method of raising political demands is something common to these two cases, and in part defines some of the distinctive characteristics adopted by contemporary expressions of collective protest. At the same time, autochthonous connotations are very present and visually explicit

in both the *tobera mustra* and *protest lip dubs*. It could be argued that the *form* does therefore show several common elements in the contemporary *tobera* and *lip dubs*.

Conversely, the explicit political *function* of both contemporary *tobera* and *lip dub* is different from original social function of traditional ritual events like the *charivaris* of Iparralde. The character of sanctioning individual acts, in the case of the ancient original *charivaris*, which punished behaviors judged to be socially deviant, was part of communitarian control. In *protest lip dubs* the wager is made in political form, and the recipients – where there are any – tend to be the authorities or other power structures. In any case, the present-day political readapted representation of the communitarian character of the original ancient rituals, which carry a unitary message within a world impregnated with an alternative cosmivision, seems to shape some forms of political action of contemporary protest. For the case of the Basque Country it can therefore be said that there is a transfer of forms, rituals and explicit symbols –but not of the original function- from traditional popular culture to the more novel CA tactics. These traces of popular culture and folklore shape contemporary tactical innovations of CA; and are dramatized and (re)adapted in some of the newest expressions of political actions and demands.

8. CONCLUSION

By means of the qualitative visual analysis of Basque *protest lip dubs* it has been shown how the process of agentive (re)adaptation of traditional cultural elements into contemporary political demands occurs. Thus the traces of traditional folk practices mould the form of certain present-day tactical innovations, such as *lip dubs*, that have a strong explicit visual and symbolic component. These folkloric traces act as a cultural basis upon

which new CA repertoires are created. In this respect, the model set out at the beginning of the article regarding how the traces of traditional practices influence tactical innovations is reinforced. According to the model, this occurs through (a) processes of cultural agency, in which the group creatively updates folkloric elements and adapts their *form* to political action in the present – but not its original social *function*; within (b) deep structures that organise the bases of the contemporary political conflict, which in this article are related to conflicts resulting from the centre-periphery cleavage, in which Basque pro-independence demands confront the interests of already established nation-states.

It should be pointed out that the traces of traditional Basque culture present in some of the most recent CA tactics, represented by a group and, in many cases, dramatised, are combined with new elements, such as those resulting from the possibilities of ICT. In this regard, on the Basque contemporary socio-political scene, old and new repertoires of CA seem to be combining subtly; from the emergence of folk events such as the *tobera mustra* (traditional practices that have been updated) to *lip dubs* that are made possible by the Internet; and from typically pre-modern community punishment characteristic of emerging protest actions such as *escraches* to audiovisual political action that occurs in the virtual world of the Net. This same combination of old and new repertoires can be observed in specific locations; this is the case with Heleta, where, as well as the *lip dub* carried out in 2012 and analysed in this article, in 2003 a *tobera mustra* event was organised (Itcaina, 2012).

The nature of novel CA tactics like *lip dubs* and renewed ritual events like *tobera mustra* shows certain tendencies, such as, in the Basque case at least, a greater theatricality and visibility of political action. In these events, the explicit forms of folk practices are creatively readapted to the demands of the present. However, there is no way of knowing whether these trends – theatricality,

visuality, explicit symbolism- will become stronger over time, or whether, on the contrary, more confrontational and material tactics of CA will return over the medium and long term. It is precisely the capacity for creativity and agency of the people that will determine the nature of future CA repertoires.

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