



NATIONAL



## The 'kale borroka' in Catalonia

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Critic and writer

*It is a problem of definition. What can be understood by “kale borroka”? The expression usually refers to street violence practised by members or sympathisers of the Basque nationalist who are integrated into the left. A definition that has been gradually perfected with the aim of encompassing the amplitude and complexity of the phenomenon.*





Jérôme Ferret, professor of Sociology at the University of Toulouse and researcher at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, defines the idea of *kale borroka* as “intimidating street violence”. The novelty: the French sociologist distinguishes two fundamental types of *kale borroka*. Namely: the *kale borroka* “spectacular of sabotages, spontaneous or organised direct attacks against banks, cars, buses, containers, etc.” and the *kale borroka* “silent, routine, unspectacular, unseen, daily, of indirect attacks, insults, psychological pressures, ridicule, rumours, graffiti, malicious comments, harassment, which creates a climate and an obligatory silence, which prohibits certain spaces and discussions” (*Crise sociale, question nationale et violence urbaine. Retour sur la mystérieuse Kale Borroka en Espagne*. CEIC papers number 84, September 2012. Universidad del País Vasco).

Jérôme Ferret’s definition leaves no room for doubt: the *kale borroka* has already been installed in Catalonia. The facts are conclusive.

According to the first defining type, in Catalonia exist a spectacular *kale borroka*: 1) because there have been sabotages in the roads, in transport or in the economy with the so-called campaign of “strategic consumption” against the “Spanish oligarchy represented by some companies of the IBEX 35, BOE and ‘Palco del Bernabéu’, among others, which have supported the repressive strategy of the Spanish state against the Catalan people and their yearnings for freedom” and against which it is necessary to “strengthen the commitment of consumers and companies with our economy without political interference”; 2) because there have been attacks to banks, the throwing of stones at buses, as well as the burning and overturning of containers, to which should be added, among other actions, the attempted blockade of the Palace of Justice of Barcelona, the attempted assault on the Parliament of Catalonia, the harassment of the Barcelona Police Headquarters with the slogan “pim, pam, pum, que no quede ninguno”<sup>1</sup>, or the throwing of artefacts of a diverse nature –stones, fences, bars, paint cans, eggs or spits– against the Forces of Law and Order; 3) because there have been verbal aggressions against citizens and informants who are told – “why don’t you leave?”– to leave Catalonia.

According to the second defining type, in Catalonia there is a routine *kale borroka* –in this case, it can be seen and heard– that is perceived in the propaganda without a solution of continuity of the public and private media that commune with the cause (they have described a convicted and confessed terrorist as a “*Gran Reserva* of independence” and as a “historical of combative independence”); the

\* Translation by Blanca Domínguez.

<sup>1</sup> “Pim, pam, pum, que no quede ninguno” is the ETA’s canticle used by the CDRs against Spanish Civil Guard in order to drive them out of Catalonia.



► **In Catalonia there is a routine *kale borroka* that is perceived in the propaganda of the media that commune with the cause; the psychological pressures, the insults, the yellow ties, the tweets, the whatsapp messages; the torchlight processions that recall the supremacist movements of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

psychological pressures, the insults, the yellow ties, the tweets, the whatsapp messages; the torchlight processions that recall the supremacist movements of the first half of the twentieth century. A routine of independence that has given rise to the so-called “spiral of silence” – it is not advisable to express oneself in public in a hostile atmosphere – by means of which an important part of Catalan citizens are freed from secessionist pressures. A form of stoic resignation and a way of going unnoticed. And it is better not to frequent certain places. Nor should we confess behaviour from the heart of independence and then retract, as Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) had to do in the Puigcerdà vandalized by slogans and ties on the last 1st of October.

With regard to what has been said, Jérôme Ferret considers that “the recent evolutions –2012 and 2013– show that there is a Catalanist violence identity” (*Crisis social, movimientos y sociedad en España hoy*, 2016)

At this point, it is worth to ask about the causes of *kale borroka* in Catalonia. One can speak of the historical tradition of nationalism prone to institutional disloyalty that sometimes uses violence (the 1934 coup d'état as a prototype), or of the impulsive reaction to the collapse of a “process” that generates frustration and hatred, or of the weakness of a movement incapable of escaping fiction and deception in order to settle into reality.

Another cause to consider: what an pro-independence person might call “the lessons of history in the liberation of oppressed nations. An article by the historian Jaume Sobrequés i Callicó is worth mentioning. Let's get on with it. The “armed struggle” has been discarded –although it has achieved “long or medium term liberating results”– because “at the beginning of the 21st century” it cannot be “considered a model to follow”. Discarded the “resistential violence of an immense effectiveness...The liberation of Catalonia cannot be limited...to some people frequently filling their mouths defending, without nuances, tactics contrary to violent actions, without rethinking what non-violence means, in the case of Catalonia, as a way of achieving separation from Spain and recognition of the democratic rights of our people”. He continues: “It is therefore necessary to look for other manifestations of ‘peaceful’ violence, of intransigent vindication, of the fierce defence of one's own national rights”. Plus: “delimiting the border between the two forms of



Fuente: Twitter

violence –that which is neither convenient nor viable and that which contains the liberating germ– is the great objective not only of the Catalan politics of the independence parties, but also of the massive actions promoted by the powerful civic organisations, which have taken root with force in the daily life of Catalonia...The times of the new ‘violence’ have arrived” (*¿Qué violencia*, El Punt Avui, 22/9/2019).

To these interpretations should be added the psychosocial approach to ideological-political radicalization, which states that, in a polarized society, one group interprets reality to the exclusion of the Other. A polarization, linked to “extremism” and “is often accompanied by the creation of prejudices and stereotypes”. It generates “a climate of insecurity, instability and tension does not favour the functioning of a democratic State”. In sum, a behaviour that would have to do with social identity and the importance attached to belonging to the group (Jorge Torres-Marín, Ginés Navarro-Carrillo, Marcos Dono y Humberto Manuel Trujillo, *Radicalización ideológico-política y terrorismo: un enfoque psicosocial*, 2017).

In any case, it should be remembered that the philosophy of the *kale borroka*, as well as the path leading to the proclamation of the Catalan Republic, is already *in statu nascendi* in the document of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) *Hoja de ruta 2014-2015*.

This document warns that, “Catalan society must be prepared and willing to act in any of the scenarios that may occur” to make a reality of an “unstoppable” and



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“irreversible” project with its “final destination and the ways to get there”. On the understanding, “only with the constitution of the Catalan Republic will we have the possibility of progress in all fields”. The Declaration of Independence will be followed by “acts of exercise of sovereignty” such as the “control of large infrastructures and borders -ports, airports-, public security, communications, etc.”.

A tweet from Arran after smearing the residence of a judge: “We make our own the words of Argala: ‘People do not practice violence for the sake of doing so. [...] Popular violence is always defensive against the violence of the exploiting class, and therefore completely legitimate’” (November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

A tweet from CDR Catalunya on the day a judge of the National Court agreed to imprison the seven arrested for crimes of belonging to a terrorist organization, manufacture and possession of explosives and conspiracy to wreak havoc: “Until they are all free: burn the streets! (September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

What does the “revolución de las sonrisas” say in the face of the *kale borroka* or those arrested for alleged membership in a terrorist organization? Some keep quiet. Others show exquisite prudence. Those from beyond deny, show solidarity and protest. And the latter– the pro-independence groups of the Parliament of Catalonia and the President of the Generalitat– pull the detainees shouting “freedom”. It is a symptom. It is a sick society.

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