The nationalist ‘position’ in the peace process in Spain: linguistic roots of argumentative relevance

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Every negotiating process entails the ‘building’ of negotiating positions. This is the case not only because of the need of understanding the negotiating process itself, but because the actors of the negotiating process perceive their own actions in those terms. In other words, the cognitive background of the agents in a negotiating process has a causal efficiency in their behaviour during the process. That means that the cognitive background allows an explanation of the behaviour while it can’t ever predict the outcome of the negotiation itself.

Therefore, it’s important to understand the negotiating position of the part to get an idea about which negotiating developments could be possible and to predict, as long as possible, the confrontation points, the issues under dispute, to be resolved, or not, by the negotiating process.

Such an effort of previous understanding of the ‘positions’ is particularly crucial in the case of nationalist ideologies, moderate as radical. The issue is that both varieties of nationalism share the same world of beliefs about national identity and about the link of the individuals with this nationality. Both types of nationalism coincide basically in the metaphoric or symbolic system through which they conceptualise its embedding in society. They solely differ in their
political strategies to make real this social thinking: the radical or violent nationalism makes use of armed struggle as a political ‘argument’; the moderate nationalism tries to profit the judicial and democratic resources to reach the same aim.

Of course, there are differences between both types of nationalism not only of a strategic nature, but of degree of commitment or linking with the symbolic world characterising the nationalist ideology, but those differences are not perhaps relevant to the very understanding of the ‘position’ with which they confront the negotiation with the ‘State’. Moreover, it should be properly understood that, under the negotiating position of the Spanish State, it might be similar mechanisms (linking with ‘Spanish’ nationalism) that nourish the Basque nationalist positions. In particular, in the Spanish case, it can’t be discarded that what is stated as a ‘defence of the prevailing Constitution’ by the central government (or ruling powers) might be but a rhetorical, argumentative, disguise of a nationalism prisoner of the very same metaphoric concept of what a nation is and how the individual is related to it.

Whatever the case, the conceptual and symbolic web of Basque nationalism, as its self-perception, will define the scope of possible points of convergence in negotiation. In turn, it can be asserted that other points will keep excluded from the negotiating space right for those conceptual reasons. Then, is particularly interesting to analyse how much the negotiation is not only possible by political or strategic reasons, but in terms of internal criteria to the nationalist ideology itself, internal criteria that constraint the future outcomes of the negotiation.
A central issue in the conceptual web of Basque nationalist ideology - in fact in all nationalism - is the question of identity. In this case, the identity is not only an identity imagined - construed, narrated - in ethnical terms, but, in a significant way, in territorial terms as well. While not explicit at the present state of the negotiating process with the terrorists, it is an issue undergoing the negotiation with that group and in the relations with the rest of nationalist parties in the Basque country. And the reason is that the conceptual web that nourishes the nationalist ideology is essentially the same: there is an identifying linking with a history (actually a myth, a reconstructed or invented history), a culture (stereotypically defined), a language (artificially reconstructed) and a territory (conceived in the integrity terminology). All those ways of identification are reflected in linguistic statements (formulae) that express an identical cognitive system.

It's possible to analyse those linguistic formulae within the frame of the contemporary theory of metaphor, aiming to reveal this cognitive system. The analysis will be in fact focused on two fundamental issues: 1) the metaphoric system that underlies the nationalist identification with a territory and its (possible) experiential embodiment, in the sense characterised by G. Layoff and M. Johnson (1982); 2) the ways in which such a cognitive system contributes to set out the nationalist position, whether violent or not in the negotiating process with central political powers.

An appropriate answer to the first issue would contribute to reach a better insight of the enigma (mystery) of nationalist ideologies. To rationalist minds, such an enigma might be roughly stated as follows: how is it possible that
rational beings reach their identity through a symbolic and emotional identification with a land (history, culture, language...)? How is it possible that such identification is opaque to rational argumentation?

As for the second issue, it is clear that only the understanding of nationalist positions (with the aid of the strategic and rhetoric aspects that contribute to define it) could be a solid base to carry on a negotiating process that should pursue a balance or agreement, satisfying both parts, even symbolically.

When one tries to grasp the root or foundation of a ideological system, as nationalism, what is relevant is the productive mechanism of a concept, as the concept of nation, and a set of cognitive or affective relations between this concept and the persons for which it is alive, i.e., it rules or guide their behaviour in different scopes, either emotional, communicative, social or political.

Now then we have actually a theoretical frame more accurate, in my opinion, than any other former psychological frame to understand the underlying cognitive mechanism of the nationalist ideology. It is cognitive linguistics; more concretely, the contemporary theory of metaphor (G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, 1982, 1999; G. Lakoff, 1987, 1993). As it is well known, the epistemological stance of the cognitivist theory – in Lakoff and Johnson variety – contends that the abstract concepts are built in general through a series of cognitive mechanisms from experienced concepts, that is, linked, above all, with the own bodily experience and its actions. The building mechanism are of a different sort (image schemas, conceptual blending, figured inference..) but Lakoff and
Johnson assure, among them, an essential role to metaphor. In this theory, metaphor is the main mechanism of epistemic access to abstract realities. Through metaphorical mappings we understand and conceptualise realities that are not directly experienced, beyond the senses. Lakoff and Johnson have done a fair amount of analyses, describing the metaphorical nature of some abstract concepts, including the concept of argumentation (Lakoff y Johson, 1982; E. Bustos, 1996). In their last book (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999), the analysed concepts are relevant philosophical concepts for the issue at hand, the cognitive structure of the nationalist ideology.

An essential component of any nationalist ideology is identity. To the nationalist, the nation gives identity to individuals; individual persons belong to this identity. Belonging to a nation not only identifies but also, by the same reason, it distinguishes, it allow think about other people as the others, which not only are different from you, but they constitute a potential menace to you as well.

Now, how is this identity constituted? which is its nature? Some scholars of nationalism (as M. Billig, 1995, Banal Nationalism, 60 passim) have doubted that there is something like a psychological state, which might be isolated as ‘identity’. They have consequently proposed to split this apparent concept of identity in a few components: “An identity is not a thing; it is a short hand description for ways of talking about the self and community. Ways of talking, or ideological discourses, do not develop in social vacuums, but they are related to forms of life. In this respect, ‘identity’, if it is to be understood as a form of talking, is also to be understood as a form of life” (M. Billig, op. cit., 60). This
assertion, of a wittgenstenian flavour, can be reversed; the ways of life, and the corresponding ways of talking, do not develop in a psychological vacuum. They require the construction of concepts, or more complex cognitive structures, that do not pop out from vacuum, but from the ways in which individuals experience a reality, they categorise it and include within their beliefs, even in the form of a theory. As M. Billig says: “there is no nationalism without theory. Nationalism involves assumptions about what a nation is: as such is a theory of community, as well as a theory about the world being ‘naturally’ divided into such communities. The theory does not need to be experienced theoretically. Intellectuals have written theoretical tomes about ‘nation’. With the triumph of nationalism, and the establishment of nations across the globe, the theories of nationalism have been transformed into familiar common sense” (M. Billig, op. cit., 63)

A cognitive explanation, making use of the contemporary theory of metaphor and embodied theory of mind, has to begin from two general assumptions about explaining the concept constitution:

- the ‘theory’ has to be experienced, ‘felt’, contrary to what M. Billig says about nationalism. That is, it should be acquiesced that the cause of the extremely wide spread of the nationalist conception is the fact that it is closely linked to the way in which the relations between individual and nation are felt. In other words, such relations are not simply a new logical or conceptual net, an abstract structure in which the experiential structure is emptied.
- Concepts are not spontaneous cognitive deeds, so to say. They do not come from nothing. They are grounded in other concepts or experiences formerly elaborated, that sometimes belong to a preconceptual layer and that often are tied to image and sense-motor schemas. Ultimately, an abstract cognitive construct is linked with the experience and embodied, that is, associated with the unfolding of emotions and other modulating mechanisms of information processing (P. Ekman and R. Davidson, eds., *The nature of emotion*, 1994).

Accepting these assumptions, which is the obvious hypothesis to understand the cognitive foundations of nationalism and its discursive unfolding? It is quite clear that we need to come back to the concept of identity, but in its individual dimension. It seems quite sensible to consider that the concept of national identity – in fact maybe any concept of collective identity – could be causally related with the concept of individual identity.

The concept of individual identity, and related concepts as the *inner life* concept, have been analysed, in the frame of the contemporary theory of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999) through its relationship with the notions of subject and self. Actually, the self is the place of identity, but this identity can be only understood in relation with the notion of subject. What follows is a correspondence among metaphors concerning the individual identity and national identity. This correspondence shows how the concept of individual identity play the source role to give structure to the concept of national identity.
**General frame**

**Subject has Self**

A person > The Subject
A Person or Thing > A Self
A Relationship > The Subject-Self Relationship

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 270)

The Subject > A People (ethnic community)
The Self > The Nation
The Subject-Self Relationship > The People-Nation Relationship
According with the projection of this metaphor, just as the subject has an identity assured by a self, the people or ethnic community has, or should have, a nation, that is the place of the identity of the people, of its distinctive characteristics from other peoples or ethnic groups. This relation is typically construed as **belonging**: just as the subject has a self, the nation **belongs** to a people. And this belonging is not simply formal or logical, but semantic. The nation must combine, in its ‘essence’, in its ‘personality’, the set of stereotypes through which the individuals pertaining to a collectivity (tribe, etnia, people...) perceive themselves. In some occasions, this essence is the outset of having a specific language, as in the Basque Country case. The language can be considered then, metonymically, as the expression of this identity.

The relations of belonging and control of the self are transferred in the following way:
II

*Self control is the control of an object*

A Person  >  the Subject

a Physical Object  >  the Self

Control relationship  >  Control of the Self by the Subject

Noncontrol  >  Noncontrol of the self by the Subject

(Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, 270)

the Subject  >  the People

the Self  >  the Nation

relation of control  >  the People has a Nation

noncontrol  >  the People hasn't a Nation

*Self control is Object Possession*

A Person  >  the Subject

A Physical Object  >  the Self

Possession  >  control of the Self

Loss of Possession  >  Loss of control of the Self

the Subject  >  the People

the Self  >  the Nation

control of the Self  >  sovereignty

loss of control  >  lack of sovereignty
As it is obvious, in these metaphors the relationship between the people and the nation is expressed. Just as the subject has to have a self, and control it to reassure its identity, the people has to control its nation, that is, has to exert the sovereignty. The lack of sovereignty is felt, psychically, as an absence of control of the self.

As you can guess, it is particularly important the projection of the metaphor of the locational self:
### III

**Self control is being in one's normal location**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Person</th>
<th>&gt;</th>
<th>The Subject</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal Location</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a Normal Location</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>Being in Control of Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Being in a Normal Location</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>Not Being in Control of Self</td>
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(Leff & Johnson, 1999, 274)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Subject</th>
<th>&gt;</th>
<th>The People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Self</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>The Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a Normal Location</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>Having a sovereign territory</td>
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This metaphor grounds, and make understandable, not only the territorial hopes of nationalist ideologies, but it also allows to grasp the sense of the own’s land, the land of the ancestors. Just as the self experience the alienation, of being strange, when it is in an alien place, out of its natural location, so the nationalist can only think its own land tied to a concrete location, a land in which its identity can not find obstacles. Lacking a natural place, the nationalist will wander for foreign lands, in a endless search or recuperation of this place.

But, being general this kind of metaphorical projection, as it is, the main thing to be stressed, in the case of the nationalist ideology, is the fact that this intended natural location of the people is a territory that must coincide in its limits, contours or borders, with the nation, that is with the self. Many nationalist ideologies, including the Basque one, can not be understood without acquitting this identification between nation and territory, between self and natural location of the self.

Finally, I will suggest another projection that has to do with the way in which the relations between nation and people are conceptualised in their diachronic, historical dimension:
The essential Self (Nationhood) Metaphor

N(H)=Historical Nation
N(V)=Virtual Nation
N(E)=Essential Nation
S(E)= External Self
S(I)= Internal Self
S(A)= Authentic Self
Just as there exists an internal self within the external self, the self of social appearances, there exists an authentic nation as well, that it is hidden inside of the external nation, the nation with its concrete historical circumstances. In general, the real nation is spurious, it never coincides with the authentic nation. By virtue of historical events, this nation could be impure, but polluted by alien factors. So, the invasions, the migrations or simply the cultural blending are causes, from the nationalist point of view, that contribute to mystify the authentic nation. The frequent racist connotations of the nationalist Basque movement -from the outer racism of its founding father, Sabino Arana Goiri, to the xenophobia of ETA, blaming the `invaders´ of aids or drug plagues- can only be understood in this context. The nation, as the self, can suffer a degradation process that is then a loss of identity process. But the internal self, the impure nation is only virtual, not historical. To make real this concept, the nationalist must appeal to the essential nation fiction, this imaginary entity that can partially coincide with the virtual (and historical) nation.

The sense of the nationalist political action will be thus to get a coincidence between the internal nation and essential nation, getting rid of the elements that make the nation impure. The imagined community, the regulative ideal of the nationalist, will consist in a perfect coincidence between the internal nation, the nationalist community itself, and the essential nation, this literary fruit of political poetics. Nowadays, the political appeals to make or build Euskadi are shared by the right and left wing of the Basque nationalism. This tension between the historical nation, real and imperfect, and the imagined one
gives sense to nationalist political action in the Basque Country and, at the same time, to its negotiating 'position' with the Spanish State.