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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FROM POLITICAL RADICALNESS TO CITIZEN PARTICIPATION? Current reconfigurations of the Breton movement.

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ABSTRACT: This article aims at analyzing the recent mutations of the Breton repertoire of contention. To do so, it proposes to look at the example of an association called “*Dibab*”, which praised participatory democracy by organizing local votes on nationalitarian topics in small Breton towns during the year of 2015. Having a look at the trajectory of *Dibab* activists shows that many of them had started their militant career years ago, and were familiar to more radical pro-independence organizations. How do these activists have managed to play with different political strategies without losing their ideological frames? How have they expressed different kinds of commitment through their political practices and discourses? Observations, document studies and semi-structured biographical interviews disclose that the construction of a new participatory ideal by radical Breton activists does not prevent them from being multipositioned in the militant field, widening their action spectrum by doing so. That is why the Breton repertoire is better understood as a *continuum*. Indeed, long term processes and the juxtaposition of different spaces of mobilization must be taken into account in the analysis.

KEYWORDS: Brittany, nationalitarian movements, regionalism, political violence, participation

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1. Introduction

During the summer of 2014, about fifteen¹ left-wing Breton activists launched an association called *Dibab* (“choice” in Breton). The organization then organized a series of advisory local votes, targeting inhabitants of twenty small rural towns. The locals were asked to answer whether they would support the territorial “reunification” and political autonomy of Brittany or not. One year later, in November 2015, confronted with decreasing participation and the defection of many of its members and supporters, the association was put into dormancy.

Dibab’s campaigners were also long-time political activists. Six of them were simultaneously members of center-left parties like *Europe Écologie Les Verts* (EÉLV) (two members) or *Union Démocratique Bretonne* (UDB) (four), but most of them (officially ten) belonged to *Breizhistance*, a radical left-wing ethno-regionalist organization.

The latter is known in Brittany for having replaced another party, *Emgann* (“combat”) in 2009, after *Emgann* suffered from social disqualification. The reason for this were the presumed sympathies of *Emgann* campaigners with political violence. Indeed, some of its members were suspected to have played a role in the bombing of Quévert on the 14th april 2000, until they were exonerated by justice.

A former *Emgann* activist writes 15 years later that *Dibab* is the expression of “*active Breton democracy*”². Praising the values of citizen participation may seem quite surprising at first sight coming from people claiming themselves to be radically against the state institutions. Which social mechanisms allowed *Breizhistance* activists to convert themselves to the practice of “*votation*” and what does it reveal about the mutations of the contemporary Breton repertoire of contention?

Participatory democracy practices such as unofficial local referendums³ have recently emerged as new strategies for nationalitarian⁴ movements: Basque activists created the *Batera* platform in 2002, demanding more autonomy for the French Basque country, while Catalan independence campaigners organized a self-ruled independence referendum in 2014, which was declared illegal by the Spanish government, leading to the political events of 2017. However, this democratic turn has not been subject to much research in the field of regionalism and nationalism studies yet.

¹ I will give more details later about how complex it was to count the activists, given that the participation in *Dibab* was often volatile.

² “*Dibab, c’est la démocratie bretonne en marche*”, he writes in a programmatical book published in 2015.

³ Called “*votations*” in French.

⁴ Contraction between “nationalism” and “minoritary” (Kernalegenn, 2005).

In that respect, the Breton case is remarkable in Western Europe. First, it is less visible than other textbook cases within the nationalist and regionalist spectrum, like Wales or Scotland. Secondly, the Breton movement takes place in a specific territorial organization, the centralized French Nation-State inherited from the French Revolution. This centralist ethos lets local government exist only insofar as a Nation-State rule allows it to, which raises tensions between local arrangements (like in Alsace or Corsica) and the French territorial ideology. In the French context, the Corsican and Basque cases appear to be more influential on decision-making than the militant Breton configuration. Besides, their history with political violence is less marginal than in Brittany, which the peace process of June 2015 in the French Basque country accounts for.

If the Breton nationalitarian⁵ revival in the “1968 years” (Fillieule and *al.*, 2018) disclosed an assertive connection between different spaces for mobilization, like environmental demonstrations, protests for social justice, and linguistic claims (Kernalegenn, 2005), this regional tradition of mobilization has decreased today, as specific regionalist demands have gradually been taken into account starting from the late 1970's (Kernalegenn, 2018). However, diffuse regionalist ideas keep playing a role in the Breton political balance of power, as part of a large register of resilience (Offerlé, 2008) in Brittany.

On this political scene, *Dibab* is a modest, rather confidential participatory experience, although its founders claim to be inspired by Scottish and Catalan separatist processes. As an expression of “quiet politics” (Culpepper, 2010), this case is highly emblematic of the latest tensions and patterns of renewal within the Breton repertoire of contention. In that sense, the use of the microscope (Sawicki, 2000) helps the researcher to have a more comprehensive view on the big picture.

Theoretical background:

This article will refer to sociological studies of political violence (Nieburg, 1969, Sommier, 1998, Sommier, 2013, Créttiez and Sommier, 2012), following their ambition to de-specify the social concept of violence in the general spectrum of dynamics of contention, and in relation with the model of participation.

⁵ « Nationalitarian » is a translation of the French adjective « nationalitaire ». « Nationalitaire » is a contraction of « national » and « minoritaire », referring to national minorities in France. The expression is used by French sociologist Michel Bassand to describe « movements which we shall call ‘nationalitarian’ to differentiate them from the 19th-century nationalist movements. They are based on a search for identity, a more or less clearly defined desire for autonomy and sécession and the questioning of a given social order, generally Nation-States. » (Bassand, 1975 : 1). Considering that this research takes place in a French context, I will use this term rather than the more general « ethno-national ».

I propose to question the social effects of nationalitarian political violence on the collective trajectory of the radical independentist left, on the other organizations of the Breton movement, as well as on the effects on the relations between them all.

Exploring the dynamics of engagement, I will pay attention to activist careers understood as processual tools. Indeed, the Chicago school-inherited concept of career has the advantage of taking both structures and strategies into account (Darmon, 2008). I intend to follow Muriel Darmon's use of careers as sociological tools to stand guard against the phenomena of "biographical illusion" (Bourdieu, 1986) in the informants' discourses. The notion of biographical illusion is also relevant with regards to Annie Collovald and Brigitte Gaïtti's continuity hypothesis ("*hypothèse de continuité*") (Collovald and Gaïti, 2006 in Fillieule, 2012), explaining that social actors experience their career exits as part of a logical progression of positions occupied in the social space. This hypothesis allows (de-)mobilized individuals to experience their exits more easily by creating consistency, if not in their biographies, at least in their narratives.

Focusing more specifically on the case of former *Emgann* activists who participated in *Dibab* in 2014, the article asks to what extent these trajectories embody a "repertorial" turn in the Breton movement⁶. Researchers often assume that after the failure of political violence in Brittany, many activists turned to the cultural sphere rather than maintaining a strictly political activity (Créttiez, Sommier, 2002). Nevertheless, my study focuses on actors who kept positioning themselves in the field of what is perceived and constructed as specifically political (Arnaud, Guionnet, 2005), thus reformulating the modalities of this positioning. Career exits or perpetuations will hence be studied in relation to the different sociological definitions of "de-radicalization" (Cronin, 2006, Sommier, 2013) and radicalness. The latter being often used as a normative label, I will also pay attention to des-identification phenomena (Goffman, 1963) performed by the activists.

The persistence of a political engagement after the decline of radical methods will be looked into with the help of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's concept of commitment (Moss Kanter, 1972). In her case study about communities and communes, Rosabeth Moss Kanter asks the following question: how can commitment – an important but under-researched concept- be built and maintained? (Moss Kanter, 1972 : VIII). She defines commitment as a phenomenon situated "at the intersection between the organizational requisites of groups and the personal orientations and preferences of their members" (Moss Kanter, 1972 : 66).

⁶ Traditionally called "Emsav" by researchers (Nicolas, 2012) as well as many activists. Both words will be used in the article.

Commitment is a powerful mechanism that drives the actors into investing their time, energy and affects to maintain a group. It also explains why certain militant groups do not disappear but transform and adapt themselves to a changing context. Such resilient groups have been called abeyance structures by the American political scientist Verta Taylor, who looked at the renaissance of the feminist movement in the United States in the 1960's after a period of discretion (Taylor, 1989). Indeed, she describes the trajectory of a feminist network which, when in shutdown, tends to retract and value private practices more than political ones. Affective economy mechanisms allow the group to survive before coming back to the political arena several years later, without having deeply modified its constitution.

This attention paid to affects and to the economy they engender within activist groups leads us to also consider the concept of moral economy of protest (Thompson, 1963, Scott, 1976). First mentioned by E. Thompson to evaluate the importance of norms and values in the rebellions of socially dominated groups, traditionally viewed through the only prism of materialism, the concept was then widened by James Scott in order to explain the emergence of subjectivity in social conflicts and give political credit to the "weapons of the weak". This concept is useful to explore the moral universes of the activists, and to apprehend the different steps of their careers with regards to their tensions and contradictions.

The norms and values of a society constitute a constraint that weighs on the protesters' repertoires of contention. Repertoires have been defined by Charles Tilly as the set of various protest-related tools and actions available to a movement or related organization in a given time frame (Tilly, 2008). He distinguishes two major repertoires of contention regarding the evolution of protest in France from the 17th century to today. The first repertoire of contention is characterized by the investment of local spaces and by the recourse to local authority figures. The second repertoire is organized at the national scale and is rather emancipated from traditional authorities and temporalities. A posterity for this typology can be found in Michel Offerlé's study of the repertoire of employers. Moreover, Michel Offerlé invites us to consider the international circulation of repertoires of contention, which is heuristic in the case of regionalist claims.

Research methodology:

The political organizations to which *Dibab* members belonged did not exist as such in 2000, apart from the UDB. That is why four biographical semi-structured interviews with *Dibab* activists also part of *Breizhistance* are the main source of this study, as *Breizhistance* carries the *Emgann* inheritance in the Breton movement today

(Nicolas, 2012). These activists are the best placed to have been touched by the repercussions of violent activism in Brittany. They have thus found several ways of handling its social memory in their militant careers. I also conducted other interviews with (three) members of the UDB (ethno-regionalist left), *Europe Écologie Les Verts* (EÉLV) (French Green party) (one), *Parti Breton* (PB) (ethno-regionalist right) (one), *Breizh Europa* (ethno-regionalist center-right, scission of the PB) (one). The member of the PB encountered was also a participant in the *Bonnets Rouges* movement, a group created after the French government's attempt to initiate a new tax on transport-induced pollution. These interviews with secondary actors helped me sketching a more complete picture of *Dibab's* direct political environment and understanding the connections of *Dibab* with the larger landscape of Breton activism. Moreover, several observations were carried out during demonstrations, public meetings and votes organized by activists. This fieldwork study regarding *Dibab* was part of a wider empirical research about reunification of Brittany, that is why I conducted fieldwork between September 2014 and May 2016. Within this period, *Dibab* was only active during a year (September 2014 - November 2015). Some interviews with activists were therefore conducted after the platform was put into dormancy.

By questioning the trajectory of the Dibab platform, the goal of this article is to retrace the conditions for the production of a renewed Breton activism, aimed at embracing a new type of legitimacy based on participation.

After having examined militant trajectories marked by a dialectic relationship between radicalness and de-radicalization, I will move on to the construction of an “exemplary” repertoire of contention by activists willing to reconfigure their relation to institutions. Then, the trends of continuity at the core of this collective trajectory will be highlighted.

2. Discontinuous trajectories, late militant recompositions

Sociologists like Xavier Créttiez and Isabelle Sommier (Créttiez and Sommier, 2002) refer to the repertoire of regionalist protest movements in French territories – Corsica, Basque country - as a violent one. They reproach its participants of sometimes confounding identity and violence (Créttiez and Sommier, 2002 : 27). I propose to question the category of violence by re-situating it in its social context and in relation with other modes of operation. Harold Leonard Nieburg explains that no violence is political *per se*:

only its social effects are political (Nieburg, 1969). It is thus only *a posteriori* that political violence can be analyzed.

In Brittany, the 1990s were marked by the transition from what Xavier Crétiez and Isabelle Sommier describe as “goodwill terrorism” (“*terrorisme bienveillant*”) (Crétiez and Sommier, 2002), characterized by a misdirected anticipation of the supervising and policing measures, to more substantial risk taking and professionalization of the activism. This mutation of political violence was characterized by the organizational change of the concerned groups. The rather unstructured *Front de Libération de la Bretagne*⁷ (FLB) moved up to hardened activism with the creation of the *Armée Révolutionnaire Bretonne* (ARB). This process reached boiling point at the end of the 1990s with the case of the Plévin explosives. Numerous Breton activists were arrested, suspected to have provided logistical help to a Basque commando of *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*⁸ (ETA) (Nicolas, 2012). The cycle of violence was interrupted in the aftermath of the Quévert case. In this bombing on a Mac Donald’s restaurant in Quévert on April 19th, 2000, a young employee of the restaurant died. Although no organization claimed responsibility for this event, suspicion weighed on the ARB. First, the justice system credited the ARB for the bombing during the processing of the “*Attentats Bretagne*” file. This file covers the 1993-2000 period and examines several cases of pro-independence political violence in order to find potential connections between them. A first study of the file results in the incarceration of several *Emgann* activists, including the party’s spokesperson. Because of its porosity with the ARB, the political party *Emgann* was heavily marginalized after the bombing, and some of its leaders’ pre-trial custodies lasted several years. During an interview, a *Dibab* activist who joined *Emgann* in 2000 explains: “*I arrived just when Quévert occurred, a complicated time, but in this way, I learned a lot, this complicated context formed me in a militant way, it is clear. It means we supported the prisoners, we knew that struggle was a thing that could bring us to jail. Then what happens is that Emgann focused on the support for prisoners: you have almost all the political bureau in jail.*” Likewise, a former *Emgann* activist, now a *Breizhistance* member, insists on the role played by the defense of the accused in the demands of the radical Breton left of the 2000’s: “*so, and then it was the CARB, mostly, the Coordination Anti-Répressive de Bretagne, the defence of Breton political prisoners*”.

Pro-independence left-wing activists tended to reorientate their activities mostly for practical reasons: they had no time left for activism other than supporting their

⁷ The Front de Libération de la Bretagne (FLB) was a Breton group which committed several bombings from 1966 to 1971, praising independence of the territory.

⁸ *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) was an armed organisation claiming the independence of Basque country, officially dissolved in 2018

comrades in jail. This changing field of action participated in a pragmatic de-radicalization process. Indeed, an organizational turn to new operatory modalities is one of the conditions for deradicalization as underlined by Audrey Cronin (Cronin, 2006 in Sommier, 2013). The others are the arrest of the organization's leaders, the decline of popular support, the relative failure of the founders to hand over the organization to potential successors and the importance of targeted repression. Furthermore, the possibilities of a "soft" exit for radical activists, like the opening of a negotiation phase with the authorities or a political victory cannot be envisaged for *Emgann*, considering the toughening of nationalitarian violence in Brittany, and of the increasingly repressive apparatus targeting the activists. As Doug Mac Adam notices, the logics of high-risk engagement are not different from the ones of more common forms of engagement (Mac Adam, 1987, in Sommier, 2013). It is thus the latter that produces the former. Therefore, the Breton mobilization should be examined with attention to activists' careers as well as the broader mutations of the political context in Brittany.

The liberation of incarcerated activists once found innocent of the crime reconfigured their type of commitment. How do they perceive their exit from a hardened activism strongly shaped by repression? If *Emgann* condemned the Qu'évert attack, the left-wing campaigners for independence were not the only ones to be marked by the incident. With the end of nationalitarian violence in Brittany, activists got (self-)reflexive about the changeover of a political structure to another, has shown by Isabelle Sommier: "One has to note that the progress of the protestation cycle can be followed in successive repositionings of the ones and the others with regards to violence, it is also and by the rereading of the latter that it finishes"⁹ (Sommier, 1998: 16).

The reflexiveness of Breton activists regarding violence and its social effects has contributed to redefining the place of the organizations in militant spaces. It has also affected discourses held by the organizations and their members in the medium term, as well as discourses that external groups produce about the *Emsav*. During our field research, mentioning the question of political violence in Brittany was not easy, and resulted in a few reactions from the informants who were reluctant to put into words episodes of violence and repression that could have heavily affected their biographies. However, these processes built a backdrop that unfolded all along the field research.

Although this part of Breton history may be heavy to carry, it does not automatically prejudice the *Emsav* activists: sometimes it even rewards them. Indeed, while questioning representatives in different towns where *Dibab* votes have been organized, we found

⁹ « Il faut noter que si le déroulement du cycle de contestation peut être suivi au gré des repositionnements successifs des uns et des autres vis-à-vis de la violence, c'est aussi dans et par la relecture de celle-ci qu'il s'achève. » (Sommier, 1998 : 16)

that some local representatives fully supported the participatory democratic procedure put forwards by the activists they had met, using the argument that “[they] prefer people to spend their time organizing local votes rather than setting bombs in Mac Donald’s¹⁰”. A kind of moral agreement thus guarantees the proper functioning of this common work between local representatives and radical activists. As long as it works, the moral economy in which *Dibab* votes take place is protected. This repertoire change of independence campaigners is hence lauded by a part of the institutional political field.

To promote *Dibab*, radical left-wing independence campaigners often work with elected representatives of different political hues, only a minority belonging to parties of the *Emsav*. Within the platform itself, the *Breizhistance* campaigners interact with the more moderate ones of the UDB and of EÉLV - the latter having the particularity of being organized at the national French scale, not without internal tensions¹¹ sometimes. Moreover, *Breizhistance* activists, who cultivate a revolutionary type of militant *praxis* tend to import it into *Dibab*. *Dibab*’s spokesperson explains for instance: “for me, a rather so-called revolutionary activist, I don’t forget that comrades of mine die across the world, get tortured while they act, and so on, so the energy I spend acting, I know that it has nothing to do with the actions other comrades across the world use in their struggle, so it means an important commitment. And this, however, I know all of us do not share the same vision of militant commitment within *Dibab* and that it sometimes brings certain frictions, but then, they are clearly surmountable”.

The degree of appropriation of the platform varied depending on the political party of the activists. Surprisingly enough, activists whose ideological convictions were far from *Dibab*’s rhetoric -compared to UDB or EÉLV members- were the ones who invest the most energy in the organization of votes. Although *Breizhistance* members were not familiar to participatory techniques, they were deeply committed to *Dibab* and did not hesitate to dedicate a non-negligible amount of time and energy to their cause. On the contrary, EÉLV and UDB activists cultivated a more distanced approach, although they claimed to admire the commitment and discipline of their *Breizhistance* partners.

In that respect, I divided *Dibab* activists into three circles. Ten activists at the beginning, less than five at the end made up the very core of *Dibab*. This first circle supervised all the local votes and the communication work. They were intensely invested in the association, ready to leave the partisan field behind to organize more votes, of which they

¹⁰ Interview with the mayor of a town which hosted a *Dibab* poll.

¹¹ A *Breizhistance* activist tells for instance that when a member of the UDB came to help them canvassing in their town, tensions quickly **arose**. “It is where we saw the difference”, she explains. “G. did the campaign with them, at the end of the day, he could not anymore, he said: “he had to stop talking, he was only **saying bullshit!**”

expected a lot. These activists mainly came from *Breizhistance*, but also a little bit from the UDB. The second circle was constituted of activists who did not participate in the genesis of *Dibab* but offered some of their time at a given moment to prepare the votes and animate the meetings. Activists of the second circle all suspended their associative activity in September 2015 to start working on the electoral campaign¹² of their respective political parties, UDB and EÉLV. The third circle included *Breizhistance* members or sympathizers who occasionally helped organizing a vote as a service to their comrades, without truly believing in the participatory practice or investing themselves in the association.

This overinvestment of *Breizhistance* campaigners can also be explained by political reasons: at the launching of *Dibab*, *Breizhistance* was going through a phase of difficulties, with little mobilization of its members and no electoral perspective. The new political initiative was seized by the activists as a way to reconvert their militant capital (Matonti, Poupeau, 2004) at limited costs. But their tight commitment also brought them symbolic retributions (Gaxie, 1977) that *Dibab* activists from EÉLV or the UDB were less socialized to obtain. Indeed, *Breizhistance* activists, especially former *Emgann* members can be compared to the communes and communities analyzed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (Moss Kanter, 1972). In these groups, committed people are willing to do what the structure demands, even – and maybe especially – if it requires a high degree of renunciation to other relationships or activities: “*when a person is committed, what he wants to do (through internal feeling) is the same as what he has to do (according to external demands), and thus he gives to the group what it needs to maintain itself as the same time that he gets what he needs to nourish his own sense of self*” (Moss Kanter, 1972 : 66-67). In that sense, radical left-wing activists constitute a collective entity characterized by a specific moral economy (Thompson, 1963; Scott, 1976) which infuses its actions with moral bases.

3. The costly construction of an “exemplary” repertoire

As a major frame of reference in public policies since the 1990s, participatory democracy refers to all the consultative or deliberative processes summoning the “citizen” to give their opinion on one project or another. French political scientist Rémi Lefebvre writes : “*Under the “local participatory democracy” label, procedures, techniques, and unequally important proceedings, punctual or permanent, which share the common goal*

¹² On the 6th and 13th December 2015, regional elections took place in all the French regions.

to essentially “associate” citizens to political decision-making¹³ (Lefebvre in Pasquier and *al.* 2011 : 157). Without offering an alternative to the current representative system, participation can tend to deconflictualize local politics, by constantly searching for consensus (Neveu, 2011). One can consider it as a modern version of the weberian notion of exemplarity (Weber 1996 in Renou and *al.*, 2018), which describes the practice of a demanding life potentially leading to salvation. Envisioned as an “*alternative way for politicization*”, exemplarity can be applied to diffuse and be socially perceived as moral ways to do politics: one must set an example for the others. Then, even political opponents to nationalitarian thematics carried by *Dibab* could not but praise the civic aspect of the process.

It is not only in the 2000’s-2010’s that the Breton repertoire has fluctuated between collective protest and institutionalization of its organizations and their members. Indeed, at the turn of the 1980s one can also observe a phase of professionalization for activists who had begun their militant career in the previous decade. Indeed, the progressive specialization and increasing legitimization of militant organizations affects their discourses (Kernalegenn, 2018). As mentioned, when the social context becomes unfavorable, the Breton movement turns to a more diffuse kind of activism, for instance by supporting the development of immersive Breton schools. This repertorial turn can be considered as part of an abeyance process where committed activists do not give up on their practices or beliefs when the outside context gets more hostile, but set up mechanisms of resilience such as the promotion of interpersonal affective ties which help the group to reappear on the political scene years later. Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s explains: “*a cohesive group has strong emotional bonds and can withstand threats to its existence; members “stick together”*” (Moss Kanter, 1972 : 69). The tighter the commitment binds its participants together, the longer the group can last.

During the decade between 1990-2000, armed struggle became progressively marked with social illegitimacy in Brittany, while new frames of reference started to establish themselves in political life, such as the search for proximity (Le Bart and Lefebvre, 2005), or participatory democracy. As reckoned by David Snow and Robert Benford (Snow and Benford, 1988), the success of a framing process depends on its capacity to resonate with the cultural ground in which it unfolds. Keeping its political capacity (Pasquier, 2004) as a structure requires adaptation to the expectations of Breton society. This new discursive repertoire inscribes itself in a mutation of the militant moral economy (Thompson, 1963 ; Scott, 1976) of the Breton movement. Participation has then become a new norm

¹³ « Sous le label « démocratie participative locale » coexistent des procédures, des techniques et des démarches d’inégale importance, ponctuelles ou permanente, dont l’objectif commun est d’« associer » de manière générale les citoyens à la prise de décision politique » (Lefebvre in Pasquier and *al.*, 2011 : 157).

and value which weighs on the activists' decisions regarding the repertoire of contention they may use.

The 2010s were years of unitary militant work for the radical pro-independence left. At that time, *Breizhistance* talked the rest of the *Emsav* into working on different collective projects. The goal was to put forward linguistic, territorial and autonomy claims on the political Breton scene. It is in this way that *L'Appel de Pontivy* ("the Call of Pontivy") was produced and signed by ethno-regionalist partisan and associative organizations covering a large political spectrum (from extreme-left to moderate right organizations): *Breizhistance*, *Ai'Ta*, *EÉLV Bretagne*, *Kevre Breizh*, *Mouvement Bretagne et Progrès*, *Parti Breton*, *UDB* and *44=Breizh*. Although it led to the creation of the platform "*Libérons les énergies en Bretagne!*" ("Free energies in Brittany!"), nothing concrete was organized in the aftermath to keep this platform going. By being progressively more open on other militant perspectives, getting to work with activists with different social trajectories, radical activists have widened their values systems, reshaping the moral economy that bound them.

"I insist on claiming that the pro-independence left claim the paternity for equally *Dibab* and the *Call of Pontivy*. This has clearly been the continuation of the observations we could conduct in *Catalonia*", declares a *Breizhistance* activist, revealing thereafter the importance of the international circulation of repertoires of contention (Offerlé, 2008) between nationalitarian movements in Western Europe. It is therefore meaningful that the participatory practice of local vote was implemented by my informants in 2014.

In effect, 2014 was a pivotal year for nationalitarian European movements. On the 18th of September 2014, the referendum on Scottish independence was held. As mentioned, on the 9th of November of the same year, Catalanian independentists launched a self-organized vote on independence, non-recognized by the Spanish State. It is also in the French Basque country that *Dibab* initiators found an inspiration in the unitary "platform" called *Batera* ("together"), created in 2002. One of its activities consisted in locally consulting the citizens by installing unofficial voting stations outside official ones during regional elections of 2010, with the support of 90 mayors. Therefore, it is no wonder that *Dibab* members emphasized their international inspirations in their communication for the general public, as shown by a flyer inviting people to attend the association's launching meeting: "*democratic experiences in Scotland, Catalan countries, the Basque country... and Brittany?*".

The weight of international or inter-regional observations has contributed to the creation of coherence in the use of participatory technologies shaped by a citizen and civic discourse for activists whose ideology encourages total rupture with the institutions of representative democracy, market and state. Moreover, the year 2014 inscribed regional

issues on the national political agenda with the government project of a territorial reform redrawing the regions. The premises of this reform drove the *Emsav* organizations into a strong militant investment characterized both by unitary initiatives, such as three demonstrations organized in Nantes in 2014, and attempts to differentiate themselves with new projects like *Dibab*. This cycle of contention (Tarrow, 1988) resurrected the old *Emsav* wish to re-unify the official Breton territory by adding the department of Loire-Atlantique to it. In the summer of 2014, the *Emsav* was split between two strategies. For the center and the right of the movement, the best way to proceed is to apply pressure on local representatives whereas left-wing groups prefer to hold local votes on this topic. The activists' adjustment to the constraint of exemplarity is thus to analyze in the wider context of national and international political structure of political opportunities.

Nevertheless, this favorable background for transmission of militant technologies does not mean that regionalist movements can be simply transferred from a European region to another, one particularity of regionalisms being precisely their will to defend unique characteristics of a territory and its inhabitants. During the interviews, not all activists agreed on the advantages of comparing their movement to Catalan or Scottish ones. However, they had the same opinion concerning the perverse effects of a too strict comparison between Catalonia and Brittany: "*We are not at all in the same ratio of power regarding Catalonia, it is so far from us*", explains A. "*We cannot be compared to what we take example from*", says J. However, results won by the Catalans to their self-ruled referendum are well perceived by *Dibab* members.

For *Breizhistance* campaigners, endorsing a militant role shaped by a participative *illusio* can rather be described as an identity dissonance than as a logical follow-up of positions. However, individual reconversions are experienced as part of a long-time commitment more than as biographical ruptures. Therefore, it is not certain at all that *Dibab* campaigners coming from *Emgann* and *Breizhistance* perceived their trajectory differently than in a linear way, confirming Annie Collovald and Brigitte Gaïtti's continuity hypothesis (Collovald and Gaïti, 2006 in Fillieule, 2012). However, there was on their part a will to "des-identify" themselves from their independentist label, which has only little social legitimacy or audibility. In this way, the choice of the participatory register by *Dibab* functioned like a desidentification marker (Goffman, 1963) for these activists concerned about getting rid of their categorization as extreme-left independence campaigners.

Difficulties in keeping up with consistency and operating identity negotiations were not the only hurdles met by the activists. They also suffer from double binds from militant organizations. Binds that are put on them as individual actors inserted in a plurality of social spaces. "*It is clear that we are in a kind of compromise, of course. Otherwise, we would have organized votes about "do you want a free and socialist Brittany?"*" asserts

Dibab's spokesperson, also a *Breizhistance* activist. During observations and interview situations, the most radical militants, even too young to have participated in *Emgann*, did not hesitate to express their reservations regarding participation techniques.

Once the vote in Saint-Herblain - the biggest town to host a *Dibab* vote - was over, one of its organizers got out of the voting station and yelled with resentment: "*once again, it is not today that we will free Brittany!*". The participation rate in Saint-Herblain, one of the last towns where *Dibab* organized a vote, was only 3%, whereas the first *Dibab* vote had got 26%¹⁴ of the locals inscribed on electoral lists to vote (in the small town of Saint-Viaud). Although the desire of distancing himself from the public discourse of the *Dibab* association was clear, it was not expressed that easily during interviews. This discrepancy shows that conflict within *Dibab* was never violent nor open but resulted in latent tensions to which the activists responded by setting up individual mechanisms of resistance to disappointment (Fillieule, 2005).

Since the recent social history of *Emgann* is hard to put into words for the informants, mechanisms of dissonance were shut down or understated during conversations with the researcher. It is often the members of other parties than *Breizhistance*, like the UDB, who disclose the different methods used by their pro-independence comrades: "*You see, for example, F., he had bumped into a journalist who covered Notre-Dame-des-Landes*¹⁵. *When she saw him doing that, she had seen him six months ago throwing cobblestones on cops, and six months after that, he is organizing votes in a small town with the mayor, she says to him: but you settled down, you grew up!*".

In that respect, the impossibility of collecting direct discourses regarding the uses of politically violent strategies sheds light on a real methodological hurdle for the researcher, also revealing the social discredit of different levels of political violence today in Brittany.

4. A repertorial *continuum*. Reformulating nationalitarian activism.

First, Isabelle Sommier (2013) has remarked that de-radicalization processes can be diverse and do not necessarily happen simultaneously. For that reason, an individual or an organization can de-radicalize their ways of action (by renouncing to the use of political violence, for instance) without abandoning their ideological radicalness. In a

¹⁴ Participation rates were summed up in a chart online on their website *Dibab.bzh*, and then removed from it.

¹⁵ Town in the department of *Loire-Atlantique* which was characterised by a political conflict between opponents and partisans of an airport project finally abandoned in 2017.

fluctuating political context, actors tend to replace radical registers of action by hardened ideological frames (Sommier, 2013). “*I remain deeply anti-capitalist, deeply independentist*”, asserts a *Breizhistance* and *Dibab* member. Militant multipositionings of the informants explain the absence of these two ideological features inside the *Dibab* program. “*We have invented the plurality of associative offices*” summarized a *Dibab* activist, also a trade union activist and 2015 regional elections candidate.

It is indeed through other militant organizations that activists put into words and into action their social project for the reunified and autonomous Brittany they wish to see. In that respect, *Dibab* activists were also members of one or several other collectives, whether it is trade unions – the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) or the Breton *Sindikad Labourerien Breizh* (SLB, “Breton workers union”) –, *ad hoc* collectives created for a specific mobilization – mobilization against territory planning projects for instance – or political parties, as mentioned. The activists thus used classical methods of the workers movement in France (demonstrations, strikes) when they appeared under the label of a political party like *Breizhistance*, whereas their actions and interventions in *Dibab* were strictly confined to the participatory register.

When I mentioned the possibility that potential *Dibab* “voters” might be curious of *Dibab* members’ political opinions, an activist told me that he would postpone these questions to an ulterior moment of sociability. It is after the public speech that the political project of each activist is evoked, preferably over a drink. “*What matters is really to make them understand there is a space where we stand as Dibab, and a space where we are out of Dibab, and there, we do whatever we want*”, he declared.

Within the same theme, the reunification of Brittany, a range of strategies can be unfolded by the same individuals, in different places and at different times, according to the different groups to which they belong. It is in this way that an independence activist justified their participation in *Dibab*: “*to me, it was rather that, it was talking about it in different manners*”. Although there was a generational difference within the platform-between *Emgann* former members or sympathizers and younger *Breizhistance* members, it did not match a clear line between the ones who would want to des-identify themselves from *Emgann* and the others. More accurately, the activists have chosen to explore new ways of action, keeping in mind that, as explained by Florence Johsua, new ways of being an activist have been found within older militant habits (Johsua, 2011¹⁶).

Starting from September 2015, with regional elections on the horizon, the activists have disinvested themselves from *Dibab* to prioritize the election campaign. Engaged on

¹⁶ “*C'est en effet au sein d'un ancien militantisme que se sont inventées de nouvelles manières d'être militant*” [“*it is indeed within an old activism that new ways of being an activist have been invented*”] (Johsua, 2015 : 19).

four distinct campaigns *a minima* in favor of the autonomy of Brittany, they switched from the position of comrades to the position of opponents within the political arena. This dialectical tension between associative and partisan engagement also expressed a feeling of commitment to the political party that *Dibab* as a platform, even though representing an attractive political outlet, had not managed to generate in such an intensive way. The activists have thus appropriated the electoral game without hesitating to criticize its rules, particularly the double ballot rule. Participation in the elections was nothing new for the former *Emgann* members who already presented candidates to several local elections, allying themselves to parties which are organized at the scale of the state, such as the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR) or EÉLV.

During the summer of 2015, no *Dibab* vote was organized. It was indeed a phase during which *Dibab* activists planned a third wave of votes expected for the beginning of fall and their political strategy for regional elections all at once. These elections were marked by a division within *Breizhistance* members along two political lines following the administrative territorial breakdown of Brittany. On the one side, *Breizhistance* activists in administrative Brittany defended a radical campaign, demanding anti-capitalism and independence with the list "*Bretagne en Luttés – Breizh O Stourm*" ("*Brittany in Struggles*"). On the other side, activists who run the election in the department of *Loire-Atlantique* (administratively in the region of *Pays de la Loire*) chose to integrate a center left-wing list called "*Choisir nos Régions et réunifier la Bretagne*" ("choose our regions and reunify Brittany"), led by a former EÉLV member. From this, a real dilemma within revolutionary independence campaigners can be pointed out: if some of them place their will to reunify the territory before their social beliefs and regular militant methods, others are more uncomfortable with the idea of sweeping radical markers under the carpet.

Let us here underline the fact that even though the platform was progressively decommissioned by its initiators, all divided into different political unit, including within *Breizhistance* itself, there were still dynamics of affective economy and militant commitment at work among *Dibab* activists. Indeed, the social configuration of militant groups in the *Emsav* allowed them to transfer their political competences to other spheres like the electoral one, hence benefiting from alternative sources of gratification. This configuration change is minor when we consider the fact that *Dibab* members, and especially *Breizhistance* activists were still part of the same community afterwards, where the same commitment mechanisms continued to be impelled: "*emotional commitment becomes commitment to a set of social relationships. The individual commits himself to the group as his primary set of relations; his loyalty and allegiance*

are offered to all the members of the group, who together comprise a community" (Moss Kanter, 1972 : 72).

Questioned on their next militant perspectives, a *Dibab* member, ex-*Emgann*, asked themselves : "maybe we're gonna quit this side which is a little formal, a little of democracy, of responsibility and stuff, to be in a clash that might take a little more direct form". He referred to a social movement then happening in France, in which many former *Dibab* campaigners were involved. The mobilization against the so-called "Loi Travail"¹⁷ thus allowed the left-wing Breton activists to get back in touch with the tradition of nationalitarian Breton left.

The radical left was not the only fringe of the *Emsav* to envisage confrontation with the authorities. In the second half of 2013, a popular movement emerged in Brittany marked by its heterogeneous aspect, reuniting business leaders and workers threatened by unemployment, political parties of the right and the left: the *Bonnets Rouges* ("Red Capes") movement. The latter was notable for its actions of degradation and sabotage on highway gates aiming at withdrawing a special tax for trucks engendering, sometimes violent confrontations with the police (Rabier, 2015). Using methods borrowing from the first and the second repertoires of contention¹⁸ typologized by Charles Tilly (Tilly, 1984) the mobilization quickly merged with nationalitarian regionalism. Resorting to practices usually classified as pre-modern is not new for nationalitarian - and social - movements, as has been shown by Xabier Itçaina (Itçaina, 2012) in his study of the Basque movement. The "reuse of seemingly obsolete forms of contention within modern collective action" (Favretto and Itçaina, 2017 : 4-5) is interesting to the extent that it invites us to pay attention to phenomena of continuity within repertoires of contention.

Although a minority of *Dibab* activists I interviewed disapproved of the lack of ideological clarity within the *Bonnets Rouges* movement, UDB and above all *Breizhistance* campaigners participated in the demonstrations even though their voice remained a marginal one within the *Bonnets Rouges*.

Furthermore, the older actors of the independence movement are not the only ones to evoke the social memory of violent action and of its repression in Brittany. Younger activists from recently born left-wing organizations of the *Emsav* also refer to it. In effect, the group of young activists *Dispac'h* ("revolution"), created in March 2018, regularly publishes ephemerides on its *Facebook* page to commemorate the past. Attacks

¹⁷ This law changing the general working conditions in France was carried by minister of Labour Myriam El Khomri, under the François Hollande presidency, and met a fierce opposition.

¹⁸ This is particularly striking in the case of the *Bonnets Rouges* mobilization, which carried a localized component reminding us of the pre-modern rural mobilizations: the red cape refers for instance to the 1675 "Papier timbré" revolt in Brittany, during which Breton farmers refused to pay a tax on stamped paper.

committed by the ARB as well as the trials of presumed ARB members are mentioned. A non-negligible part of *Dispac'h* activists know about the history of *Dibab* as well as the history of the ARB. Two of them also participated in *Dibab*. When national radio station *France Inter* requested the older militant generation's opinion regarding the emergence of a new group at the radical left, the view of a former *Emgann* spokesman was solicited, and the report was entitled "*the return of Breton independence movement*"¹⁹. But former *Emgann*, *Breizhistance* or *Dispac'h* activists are not the only ones who cultivate the memory of the ARB. In effect, a member of *EÉLV* and *Dibab* tells us: "*before you had the bombs, and the bombs would impose something*"²⁰.

Without elaborating rough separations – violent/non-violent action, institutional/protest action – on categories that appear to be porous and built by their contexts, one can conclude with Sidney Tarrow that conventional and heterodox forms of collective action generally progress in parallel (Tarrow in Sommier, 2013), as they are drawn by fluctuating moral economies of protests. It is in the actors' trajectories and their ways of performing them that this *continuum* is embodied.

5. Conclusions

Retrainings in militant trajectories do not obey to a monocausal logic. Although *Breizhistance* activists within *Dibab* have benefited from gratifications produced by a renewed repertoire centered on citizen participation, they have also experienced its specific access costs. Indeed, the political socialization of my informants is constituted of revolutionary and pro-independence discourses, confining them to a certain marginality in the Breton political field. The decline of the social acceptability of nationalitarian violence after the Quévert bombing is undeniable. However, one cannot safely assume that the activists went from a radical discourse encouraging political violence to a depoliticized lexicon which would be easier to combine with the state institutions. As previously noted, militant careers are read as a *continuum* by the activists. Strategies of tinkering with coherence are thus to be especially analyzed for they disclose a lot about the difficulties to adapt oneself to participatory practices when one is not socialized to it.

Moreover, repertorial shift is not a synonym for deconflictualization. Being multipositioned in the militant space is for the activists a way of reducing dissonances

¹⁹"Le retour de l'indépendantisme breton", *Le Zoom*, radio programme *France Inter*, 06/07/18.

²⁰"*Avant, tu avais les bombes, et les bombes, ça imposait quelque chose*".

created by the organizational deradicalization of the Breton movement at the turn of the 2000's. Informants can therefore confine their revolutionary and pro-independence thoughts in certain militant spaces, without necessarily reneging them. Furthermore, this game on different ranges of collective action invites us to analyze the *Emsav* repertoire as a whole unit.

For instance, the 2013 *Bonnets Rouges* movement has shown that new forms of conflict politics are able to resurrect in each movement. The Breton movement can hence be considered as an abeyance organization (Taylor, 1989). In that perspective, it appears useful to question the appropriation of participation by activists that the effects of political violence made their marks on the long term. Therefore, I tried to understand how their ideological convictions were articulated with the practice of voting by drawing a rough cartography of the different militant spaces they invested in. Far from being a mere anecdote, the story of *Dibab* thereby partially illustrates repertorial recompositions of the early 21st century Breton movement.

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