

The dominant narrative

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The analyses of the growth of pro-independence sentiment in Catalonia in the past few years have all agreed on the main triggering and dynamic forces. These are, in a more or less chronological order: the popular consultations that began in June 2009 in Arenys de Munt; the ruling, one year later, by the Constitutional Court against the Catalan Statute approved in 2006; the mass demonstration in July 2010 against that ruling; the creation of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) in March 2012 after months of preparatory work; the turning point of the huge demonstration on September 11 2012; Mas' shift towards sovereignty within CiU, triggered by that demonstration; the initiative and enormous ability for coordinating and bringing about events and reaching out to a broad spectrum of society demonstrated by ANC, Òmnium, and the combination of associations and citizens; the systematic continuation of an intransigent, threatening, and rejecting attitude by the Spanish State; the encouraging success of the mobilizations for the Catalan Way (the human chain) in 2013 and the huge V in 2014; the accumulation of public support for the Catalan people's right to decide; the political agreement at the end of 2013 to hold a consultation; the act of democratic disobedience against the State, despite all the limitations, demonstrated during the consultation this past November 9th...

The fact that this effervescent growth of sentiment had not been anticipated --less a few exceptions such as by Carod in his book "2014"-- has meant that attention is focused on the recent factors that have directly stimulated the huge popular participation in the process. But this view, focused so closely on the political present and its most notable milestones or on the economic crisis and its devastating effects, has meant that, on the other hand, other fundamental historic and political factors have been left in the background. Those more long-lasting and slower-evolving factors, the more structural ones that had created the conditions that in the end made possible the rapid deployment and sudden growth of the movement. For this reason, for the evidence of imbalance between the immediate and determinant factors, it is not a coincidence that "La formació d'una identitat" ("The Formation of an Identity"), by Josep Fontana, is deservedly one of the most bought books and most frequently given presents these days. A historical perspective and theoretical reflection could contribute to an evaluation of politics in these most decisive moments.

Identity --individual or collective-- is a permanent process of construction and readjustment of meaning. Faced with rapidly developing social movements, like the Catalan push for independence, the advantage of having good narratives of the here-and-now is that the majority of people involved find the explanation that gives meaning to their chosen life path. The general narrative includes the reference points that went along with and influenced particular decisions, the readjustments of one's own identity. The narrative of the immediate past highlights some events that have just been lived, emphasizes the value of one's own role, and reaffirms the connections between the people and the movement. The risk is that, if too disconnected from a broader historical perspective, certain relevant events are restrictively attributed to purely circumstantial causes or to the exceptional importance of certain decisions, proposals, events or leading roles.

It would be good if the dominant narrative on the Catalan process could gain heft and adopted broader interpretive contexts. It should incorporate a wider range of views and analysis and consider the vicissitudes of the political and intellectual standardization of the Catalan pro-independence movement. It should assess the social and cultural transformations that, in the span of a generation, have provoked the displacement of the old ruling classes and the emergence of new social players in a position to lead the process. We should avoid the temptation of simplicity in exchange for recognition of complexity, and drop the metaphor of a single tree trunk for that of a bundle of reeds.

In the aftermath of 9N, and with all positions inventoried, Catalan politics seems to be temporarily trapped in the moment and the space of tactics. For this reason we must raise our eyes and take in a wider field of view--both backwards and forwards. We must widen and update the perspective from which we view things, and on where we want to go. And we must let the strategy dictate and re-orient the tactics. Now we must obtain a democratic mandate to continue moving forward, and this mandate is only possible via elections. This is where we are, expecting those elections --and to win them.

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