

# Language and culture

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## TRANSLATION

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In historical expressions of what it is to be Catalan, aside from political and economic motivations, the cultural factor has always stood out. The many traditions of Catalanism, since the Renaixença, have always incorporated in their ideology a defense of the Catalan language and a set of cultural expressions as foundations of the nation. And during the ethnocide of the Franco era, with institutions abolished and production systems destroyed, when the survival of the nation seemed lost, language and culture became the material shelter for the conscience of this defeated subject group.

Throughout the debates of the Congress on Catalan Culture (1975-1977), the doubt was how to strengthen the language and culture if we didn't have the indispensable tools to do so, and whether it was possible to take steps, in an organized way, from the essential attitude of resistance towards the no less essential and urgent tasks of opening up, extraversion, and broadening of registers. It would require a shift from automatic defensiveness to a renovating affirmation. Despite all the shortcomings and problems, this was the most decisive leap that Catalan culture has made in the last four decades. A leap that no other comparable European culture, marginalized and stateless, has managed to make. Now, however, to strengthen internal diversity and confront the challenges of globalization, we need a state of our own. We urgently need to have a state and its attributes in cultural matters at our disposal.

The culture "made-in-Catalonia" has continued to incorporate –by becoming plural and complex– the various origins and affiliations of its inhabitants. Having our own state would give us the tools for promoting, making accessible, and making available our distinctive language and culture. But it should not make us less open to outside influences, nor less able to synthesize contributions of all kinds. Quite the opposite. The nation is us, with everyone's individual baggage. And the Catalan nation --in its transition towards a new popular hegemony-- can only be a process of aggregation, open and inclusive, in a state of change as constant as the permanent will to renew it. To this end, many social prescribers have already taken on-board the idea that the political project of Catalanism is not identity-based, and that Catalan culture is, in its essence, a culture of choice and invitation. In any hypothetical political future, it seems to be well established that to be or feel Catalan is and will be a right, not an obligation. Like speaking Catalan, or being part of the Catalan culture. This elective character is the key that differentiates the Catalan process from the imperious character adopted by traditional states when they have used specific cultural and linguistic heritages to shape, unify, and impose their nations and identities.

On the Catalan horizon of the democratic revolution now underway-- assuming that the majority cultural consensus is maintained and that the necessary institutional power and resources exist-- there is a clear opportunity to strengthen the Catalan language as a distinctive language and a means of community cohesion and identification. Public policies in this area face the challenge of making Catalan and our cultural heritage available, always and for everyone. And, at the same time and in parallel, guaranteeing the element of choice. This choice is a distinctive characteristic trait --and a historical conquest-- of Catalonia as a global

nation.

The cultural ecosystems of nation-states are, above all, systems of reproduction --and of domination-- directed from the state to construct and hinge a nation. But the current situation in Catalonia is the opposite: we are trying to build the state from the nation. In Catalonia, the old ruling classes lost control of the definition of the nation some time ago. And its displacement by broad sectors of the middle and working-classes has coincided, logically, with a redefinition of the national project (the nation under construction). The Catalan system of communication and culture, then, must be able to act rather as a system of transformation, one able to submit itself to criticism and update the old traditions and to stimulate and bear new ones.

The project of Catalanism is not about the nation-state anymore. The goal is a Republic that must shield and protect the rights and freedoms of its people. And in the phase that has now begun for clarifying what the future political expression of the Catalan people's sovereignty will look like, culture appears to be the best opportunity for formulating an advanced model of shared citizenship and for fully opening the range of ways to connect and interpret the national identity.

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(1) N.T. Catalonia's Renaixença was an early 19th-century romantic revivalist movement in Catalan language and culture.

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