

Exile in Mexico and Catalan identity. Catalonia in the imaginarium of first generation exiles in Mexico (1939–2005)

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1. Introduction

An analysis of the perception of Catalonia among the world of political exile. The selected setting is a broad spectrum of the initial group and the first generation of Catalans in exile in Mexico, which took in a significant contingent in 1939. Using a dual method – in-depth interviews and closed questionnaires – relationships were established with around a hundred exiles in Veracruz, Guadalajara and Mexico City in 2005. All of them were interviewed as a means of obtaining personal impressions, real-life testimonies and perceptions of opinions and feelings. The interviews formed the basis of the radio programme, *Veus de l'exili* (*Voices from Exile*), divided into 35 chapters. Recordings of the exiles themselves were used as a testimonial documentary representation of exile alongside the historical account. In 2006 complete transcriptions of the accounts of some twenty interviewees were gathered in the book of the same name. Using both of these resources – original interviews and publication in a registered source – life experiences and perceptions were evaluated in order to situate and fix the identity of Catalan origin in a remote setting. It gives a diverse and complex image, which has undergone a process of fixation and evolution up until the time of the interview, seventy years later.

<i>Visc absent</i>	“I live absent
<i>De l' hora que passa.</i>	From the hour that passes
<i>Com tu, record;</i>	Like you, memory;
<i>Com tu,</i>	Like you,
<i>Esperança.</i>	Hope”.

Agustí Cabruja (1951)

2. Aim

Our aim is to provide some references of a biographical nature which can help to configure the notion of Catalan identity, where language, history and culture conform the essential traits in accordance with the memory of a nation that was independent until the loss of its national rights in 1714. This, while bearing in mind the relationship of the preceding two centuries, whereby a pact of ties with the Spanish Crown enabled Catalonia to preserve legislation, currency, etc. in a relationship that was not exempt from occasional bellicose conflicts.

3. Origin of emigration to Mexico

Lázaro Cárdenas, the popular president of contemporary Mexico, established a juridically clear, diplomatically active and socially generous policy for taking in the losers of the Spanish Civil War. Narciso Bassols, of Catalan origin, Gilberto Bosques, and a long list of Mexican diplomats in the United Nations and, above all, in France, established the conditions of departure and helped to carry them out. Although refugees arrived in many countries, in small numbers as passengers on transoceanic voyages or occupying whole ships, like the famous Winnipeg of Chile, Mexico's case is different, as often the voyages were loaded with hundreds of passengers each time and such voyages were frequent occurrences in the period 1939–1940. Thus Veracruz saw the arrival of at least two dozen vessels full of Spanish refugees. The ships of mythical names – Nyassa, Serpa Pinto, Ipanema, Laredo, Sinaia, Mexique... – are evoked by the thousands of protagonists in such a unique life experience as is represented by exile; much harder than emigration – where there is the possibility of return – and which often concerns the individual, while exile is a one-way ticket for all of the family.

4. L'Orfeó Català (Catalan Choral Society)

In Mexico there was a notable Catalan entity, the Orfeó Català (1906), which was extraordinarily revitalized with a series of activities, a bulletin, choir, social club, etc. and which became a meeting point. Some Catalans, who had been economic emigrants, had amassed grand fortunes, such as Artur Mundet, and had found their place in society. The newcomers and their predecessors helped each other and established ties, and in some cases their descendants became ministers or occupied important positions, such as Jaume Torres Bodet or Narcís Bassols, who adopted the names of Jaime and Narciso respectively, according to the use of the country that had taken them in. The presence of the Republican government and that of the Generalitat, with ministers and senior posts such as the president of Parliament and others gave rise to the election of the presidency of the Generalitat taking place in Mexico in 1954. When the refugees arrived in Mexico they found the warmth of Catalan solidarity or brotherhood. Hence, at the Orfeó, the restaurant offered them food and they were given a temporary free membership card, which enabled them to enjoy the same rights as any other member. Due to the large number of exiles the sections were imbued with new vigour, especially the choir and the theatre, and others were created, such as culture and relations.¹

5. The contingent of refugees

The *Diccionari dels Catalans d'Amèrica* talks of a total figure of six thousand Catalans² taken in by Mexico. More precisely, despite the difficulty of gathering accurate data, Dolors Pla states that the most numerous contingent of Spanish people was of Catalan origin, and af-

1 Miquel Martí i Soler, *L'Orfeó Català de Mèxic (1906–1986)* (Barcelona: Curial, 1989).

2 *Diccionari dels Catalans d'Amèrica* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992), vol. 4, p. 107.

ter her work studying the 5,434 records of the CTARE –Technical Committee of Aid to Spanish Republicans – she noted that 954 of these corresponded to Catalans, in other words 17.55%. This is the highest percentage from the Spanish territories. These 954 correspond to 1,384 people who arrived accompanied by others, with only 319 arriving unaccompanied. This is a very important data. Being alone often meant marrying a Mexican, while being married and with one or two children constituted a family. Looking at the records, says Pla,³ is looking at an intellectual exile – teachers, journalists, writers, etc.– which would be an exile of knowledge. Absolute figures talk of 24,000 exiles in Mexico, some 15% of the French total. Rubio states that Catalans constituted 36%, or 8,400. From Pla's percentage, and with some reservations, we could deduce that there were some 4,700 Catalans. Therefore we are working within a range of between four or five and eight or nine thousand Catalans. Hence a round figure of six thousand is often employed.

6. Fact-finding

In the year 2004 we came into contact with the world of exile in Mexico. The following year a joint initiative by the Generalitat de Catalunya, Catalunya Ràdio and the Memorial Democràtic made it possible for us to travel around the central part of the country. This initiative also counted with the collaboration of the Direcció General de Cooperació, from the Catalan government, with the ministers Joan Saura and Joan Carretero. In the background was the Orfeó Català (Manuel Gaya and its president Torroja), with the constant liaison of its director, José M. Murià, son of the exiled Catalan Josep M. Murià, and who at that time was at the College of Jalisco. From the coast of Veracruz to the lands of Morelia, we focused our attention on the central part, Jalisco with Guadalajara and the capital or Federal District of Mexico, as the centre from where

3 Dolors Pla, María Magdalena Ordóñez, “El exilio catalán en México: Algunos números y un perfil”, *El exilio catalán en México. Notas para su estudio* (Mexico: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1997), pp. 13–41.

we could carry out in-depth interviews with more than 50 exiles. The result was a book with some twenty⁴ interviews and a radio programme of some importance.⁵ Previously there were three works that had been based on series of interviews. The first was a notable work by Joaquin Mortíz,⁶ and the second was a compilation of those elaborated by Dolores Pla, who edited a selection of the different interviews she carried out, and which is also of great social interest.⁷ Both compilations are characterised by the use of in-depth interviews, presented in the format of uninterrupted speech and narrating whole life trajectories, the first one of Spanish women and the second gathering testimonies from any gender. The eleven, published as a volume by Dolores Pla, are a selection from the notable Archivo de la Palabra, compiled by the Mexican INAH under her direction. Here we include two from Pla's volume and the remainder are our own unpublished interviews.

Concepció Baixeras (Barcelona, 1925) states:

At first you feel that you have two mother countries. First, that which you always think of returning to, and then, as time passes, that in which you live. Then it is the one that you adopt, of your own free will; in this case, Mexico, for me. The journeys I made to Spain were important for me to feel more Mexican. When I went the first time I felt so strange! And I arrived at a conclusion about one thing: that I'm neither from here nor from there, as the song goes, and that's the worst thing about it all. Distance makes all that seem idyllic, and then you see that it is good, but it's not what you thought it was. You start to realize that what you live, what you feel, are really here. Not like going to another place, no longer yours, yours is this. Without a doubt my life is here.

Pascual Casanova Rius (El Vendrell, 1909):

But I knew that I was never going to return definitively, because there were practical and sentimental reasons, and, of course, economic ones too. How could I go back there after twenty years? What would I do there? Exercise my profession? Impossible.

- 4 Josep M. Figueres, *Veus de l'exili. 20 testimonis de la diàspora catalana* (Valls: Cossetània, 2004), Mexican translation titled: *Voces del exilio. 20 testimonios de la diáspora* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009).
- 5 Broadcast by Catalunya Cultura in the winter of 2005 and in the spring by Catalunya Ràdio with the 35 hour-long chapters uploaded to the radio channel's website.
- 6 Joaquín Mortiz, *Nuevas raíces. Testimonios de mujeres españolas en el exilio* (Mexico: Planeta, 1993).
- 7 Dolors Pla, *El aroma del recuerdo* (México: INAH, 2003).

Twenty years had passed, there were other lawyers who came after me. And what's more, I had settled down here in Mexico, I had got married, had children, so that for me Catalonia and Spain had already finished, my life was already completely transplanted and rooted here. [...] We Catalans are Catalans everywhere and forever, I can synthesize this thought with some little verses from a popular Catalan song which goes: "Dolça Catalunya, patria del meu cor, qui de tu s'allunya, d'enyorança es mor". (Sweet Catalonia, home of my heart, whoever from you strays, from yearning dies).

Josep Maria Murià: (Barcelona, 1907):

Our children are Mexican, real Mexicans.

Rosa Maria Durán (Barcelona, 1927):

The thing is that at first all we exiles thought that it was temporary and that we would soon return. When the war ended everyone thought that Franco would go, but it didn't happen like that. I think my parents still felt as if they were in Barcelona. For them Mexico was an idealized country, not a real one. They were living in a kind of invented Barcelona, the time came when the dream was over and they came face to face with reality. [...] The only sense of unity was at the Orfeó Català and even that was very relative, because everyone had to struggle for himself, and the time came when exile was a refuge for preserving one's identity. But the demands of life made us stop thinking like exiles and integrate, because we couldn't live inside a bubble. [...] Either way, Mexico was the country that opened the doors to us, which took us in, where those that arrived as youngsters grew up, which enabled us to lead a normal life and to defend ourselves, and to do what we might have done in Catalonia, in other words to have a home and have children and have a permanent refuge. It was the country that had given us every possibility and it took us in with warmth and admiration.

Josep Ribera (Terrassa, 1932):

There is a phrase that states that exiles that last for more than ten years do not exist. An exile makes sense for a few years, maybe for up to ten years. Our exile had conditions, it isn't an exile of a few people, it is almost a whole people expelled en masse. I believe that that's the starting point and it lasts while it lasts. The exile ends with the end of the Republic and the Generalitat in exile. That's why in my hall I have a plaque commemorating the exile of the Catalan Republic. [...] There are things for which people fight and which have not been resolved. Our lives were changed like a sock and there are things that haven't changed, which haven't occurred, so that maybe only theoretically speaking the exile lives on and continues in the meaning of some things – the Catalan Republic for example – and there are things which we must continue fighting for".

Maria Antònia Freixes (Barcelona, 1915):

“I was working day and night, all the hours that I could. I slept four or five hours a day and I worked Saturdays and Sundays. That was my way of living in exile, completely unattached, for example from the *Orfeó Català* of Mexico. Even so, I feel Catalan and Mexican. Mexican because it is the country where I could work and be free, things which were difficult to achieve. And, above all, when they ask me where I’m from, I say: “A Catalan from Mexico, in other words, above all I’m Catalan, but from where? From Mexico. As simple as that. I have lived virtually my whole life here, I love the country very much and I have brought up my children, who are Mexican because they were born here, but I have never forgotten Catalonia”.

Pilar Fournier and Marina Fournier (Dominican Republic, 1946) (Guatemala, 1949):

– I live here, in Mexico, and I love this country, but I don’t really feel at home. I feel Catalan.

– I do feel Mexican. I love Spain, I don’t know whether the imaginary one, the one that I know, the one it is now or the one it was before. I love Europe and I would love to live in Barcelona, but in Mexico I have my daughters, my acquaintances, my family, and I wouldn’t leave all that. Besides, I really like the indigenous culture. I like living here, although it’s obvious that I would also like to have two or three months every year to go to Barcelona. What’s more, I feel that I form part of an important group of exiles; we are exiles too, because we don’t have roots where we live.

The last is Ramon Xirau (Barcelona, 1924):

After sixty years in Mexico – now seventy already – the exile is never forgotten, but it is looked on with a certain calm and distance. Life has passed and exile has become something not of the present, but rather something more historical.

The sample lays out for us the central lines of consideration of identity in the first generation: belonging activated by memory and the relationship with other members of the group, and gratitude to the host country.

7. Culture, in other words identity

We are more familiar with cultural and social acts. Art exhibitions, different cultural activities like the Jocs Florals (flower games) – a noteworthy festival – as well as the publication of materials such as magazines and books, and conferences, debates and talks. Intellectual activities which, albeit without a large audience, a few thousand people, could be multiplied by the intellectual component. All were assiduous readers of others' writings and they were times of uncertainty and curiosity until 1947, which marked a turning point. The war had finished and the United States took a stance towards Franco's authoritarian regime.

Thus comes an exile which will have to deal not only with material subsistence but also with how to overcome earthly difficulties. The mother country, that idealized Catalonia, will elevate it. We are faced with a professional and human condition of the whole group of exiled Catalans with significant intellectual formation. Creative activities would flower, above all literary ones and those based on the word – writing – rather than on material complexities – sculpture, architecture, etc. Hence journalism excels for its multiple value: short texts in comparison to more sophisticated ones of novels, ease of access to the platform or medium (a magazine compared to the theatre for example), and the immediacy and interest of the readers. Many journalists went on to Mexican headlines. Homesickness remained in private life. Pau Casals responded to a journalist's question if he missed Catalonia, answering that he thought about it every minute, constantly.⁸

This Catalan culture would not be expressed in schools, as Catalans would collaborate with general Spanish schools, and despite the abundance of Catalan school teachers and University professors no Catalan centre would be formed. What's more, Catalans actively participated in the constitution of the Spanish schools. We do not know if the lack of funding of the Catalan government contributed to this, or whether it was a conscious decision adopted for practical reasons related to identity, in order to facilitate access for their children to their new country,

8 Josep M. Figueres, *Pau Casals: Pau, pau i sempre pau. Escrits i discursos* (Barcelona: Angle, 2010).

in the belief that the Catalan language would be learnt at home. Here to guide the analysis of Catalan behaviour we take a look at the most relevant cultural productions: magazines and books.

Table 1. Catalan magazines in Mexico⁹.

.1939	<i>Revista dels Catalans d'Amèrica</i>
.1940	<i>Butlletí d'Informació Interior</i>
.1940	<i>Catalunya</i>
.1940	<i>But.</i> de la Comissió Catalana del Partit Comunista Mexicà
.1940	<i>Butlletí d'Estat Català</i>
.1940	<i>Informacions de Catalunya</i>
.1940	<i>Juliol</i>
.1941	<i>El Poble Català</i>
.1941	<i>Recobrament</i>
.1941	<i>Boletín de Información de España Popular y Cataluña</i>
.1941	<i>Butlletí de l'Agrupació d'Amics de Catalunya</i>
.1941	<i>Full Català</i>
.1942	<i>But. d'Inf. del Moviment Social d'Emancipació Catalana</i>
.1943	<i>Butlletí d'Informació de la UGT a Catalunya</i>
.1942	<i>Butlletí del Partit Socialista Català</i>
.1942	<i>Solidaridad Obrera</i>
.1942	<i>La Humanitat</i>
.1942	<i>Full Català</i>
.1942	<i>Lligam</i>
.1942	<i>Estat Català</i>
.1943	<i>La Nación Catalana</i>
.1943	<i>Unió General de Treballadors de Catalunya</i>
.1943	<i>Orfeó</i>
.1943	<i>La vaca cega</i>
.1943	<i>Revista de Catalunya</i>
.1943	<i>Quaderns de l'Exili</i>
.1943	<i>El Be Negre</i>
.1943	<i>Cartes Obertes</i>
.1943	<i>Esforç</i>
.1944	<i>Enllà</i>
.1944	<i>Democràcia</i>

9 Based on the work of: Robert Surroca, *Premsa catalana de l'exili i de l'emigració (1861–1976)* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 2004). Extension of Robert Surroca, *Prensa catalana en México (1906–1982)* (Guadalajara: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2000). Revised with: Joan Crexell, “Premsa d'exili a Mèxic durant el franquisme (1939–1976)”, *Orfeó Català*, 27 (1994), pp. 29–32.

.1944	<i>Catalònia</i>
.1944	<i>Nova Era</i>
.1944?	<i>Catalunya d'avui</i>
.1944	<i>Lletres</i>
.1944	<i>Nueva Etapa</i>
.1944	<i>Treball</i>
.1944	<i>Senyera</i>
.1945	<i>Vida Catalana</i>
.1945	<i>La Rambla</i>
.1945	<i>Joventut Catalana</i>
.1945	<i>Democràcia</i>
.1945	<i>Servei de Premsa del CNC</i>
.1945	<i>Catalunya d'avui</i>
.1945	<i>Gasetta Literària Catalana</i>
.1945	<i>Butlletí del Casal Català</i>
.1946	<i>The Catalan Community of Mexico</i>
.1946	<i>La Nuestra Revista</i>
.1946	<i>Las Españas</i>
.1946	<i>Endavant</i>
.1947	<i>Butlletí Interior</i>
.1947	<i>Butlletí de la Unió de Periodistes de Catalunya</i>
.1947	<i>Butlletí pel Manteniment del PSUC</i>
.1947	<i>Butlletí Interior del Partit Socialista Català</i>
.1948	<i>Cròniques</i>
.1948	<i>La Rambla Española</i>
.1950	<i>Sembra</i>
.1953	<i>Butlletí d'ERC</i>
.1952	<i>Pont Blau</i>
.1952?	<i>Butlletí Converses de Taula Rodona?</i>
.1953	<i>Butlletí del Consell Nacional Català</i>
.1953	<i>Consell Nacional Català</i>
.1953	<i>Butlletí (ERC)</i>
.1954	<i>Mural</i>
.1955	<i>La Nova Revista</i>
.1955	<i>Solidaridad Obrera</i>
.1955	<i>Casal Català</i>
.1955	<i>Difusora del Libro</i>
.1955	<i>Consell Nacional Català</i>
.1956	<i>Butlletí d'informació. II Conferència Nacional Catalana</i>
.1956	<i>Gasetta de Lletres</i>
.1957	<i>Boletín de Informaciones Quincenales</i>
.1957	<i>Meridià</i>
.1957	<i>Unió dels Socialistes Catalans</i>
.1957	<i>Butlletí de la UGT</i>
.1958	<i>Servei d'Informació</i>

.1958	<i>Veu Catalana</i>
.1958	<i>Carta Setmanal (Unió dels Socialistes catalans)</i>
.1958	<i>Servei per a la Premsa Catalana</i>
.1958	<i>Fascicles literaris</i>
.1959	<i>Butlletí d'Estat Català</i>
.1959	<i>Juventut de l'Orfeó Català</i>
.1960	<i>Comissió Nacional de Planejament</i>
.1960	<i>Estudis i Documents</i>
.1960	<i>Horitzons</i>
.1960	<i>Front Nacional de Catalunya</i>
.1961	<i>Esquerra</i>
.1961	<i>Butlletí del Centre Català de Guadalajara</i>
.1962	<i>Nous Horitzons</i>
.1962	<i>Orfeó Català</i>
.1964	<i>Butlletí d'Informació dels Països Catalans</i>
.1964	<i>Xaloc</i>
.1976	<i>Butlletí de l'Orfeó Català</i>

A wide range of publications, fundamentally literary and political, and for the most part associative, in Catalan, with a touch of humour, and with the backing of the unusual Tísner. Journalists and editors as a whole provided opinions for the major parties and unions – ERC, PSUC, CNT and UGT – and with the driving force of numerous devotees like Josep M. Murià, who managed to edit a monthly bulletin for 15 years.

8. Publishing houses founded by Catalans or with their participation

The editorial world had two major areas: the publication of works in any guise – self-publishing, new publishers, etc. – and the creation of editorials or collections. Avel·lí Artís, father of the popular Tísner and an exile too, was a noteworthy editor. Not surprisingly some names resounded more than others when comparing, for example, the publisher of a single title in Catalan and that of more than 50 titles, in what was a unique adventure for a collective which in no case exceeded ten thousand members.

Table 2. Catalan publishers editing books in Catalan.

Martí Rouret	1954	Edicions Costa Brava
Miquel Ferrer i altres	1939	Ed. Atlante i Club del Llibre Català
M. A. Marín i altres	1940	Edicions i impremta Minerva
Bartomeu Costa Amic	1942	Ed. Costa-Amic
Avel·lí Artís Balaguer	1944	Edicions Catalònia
Fidel Miró	1944	Editories Mexicanos Unidos
Joan Grijalbo	1946	Ed. Grijalbo
Agustí Bartra	1946	Col·lecció Lletres
Joan Grijalbo	1949	Ed. Atlanta
Antoni López Llausàs	1950	Ed. Hermes
Ramon Fabregat	1952	Edicions Catalanes de Mèxic
Ramon Fabregat	1955	Ed. Xaloc
Claudi Fournier	1958?	Editorial Fournier

In her publication study catalogue Teresa Férriz¹⁰ counts 43 publishers, although 29 of these had just one title and the sum total of another 7 was just 19.

The publishers with most publications are:

Xaloc	9
Lletres	9
Ed. Catalanes de Mèxic	7
Catalònia	19
Costa Amic	11
Biblioteca Catalana	37
Club del Llibre Català	16

Therefore there are 43 publishers for a total of 156 titles, which shows the dispersal, breadth and collective will to publish. From 1948 publishing plummeted and did not exceed five titles per year, when previously the total was considerable, with 26 titles in 1946 and 18 in 1947.

10 In addition to the works of Albert Manent and Teresa Férriz of interest is *Literatures de l'exili* Barcelona, IRL i CCCB, Diputació de Barcelona, 2005 and, especially: Julià Guillamón, *El dia revolt. Literatura catalana de l'exili* (Barcelona: Empúries, 2000).

9. Editorial motivation for publishing in Catalan in Mexico

When Bartomeu Costa Amic found out that Franco's followers burnt almost twenty thousand books in front of the Barcelona church Santa Maria del Mar he asked the Washington Library of Congress for micro-films and re-edited works from these classics in a new collection. The anecdote is relevant in that it shows us the reason for motivation: survival of the collective vein. This would be the first feature of Catalan identity in exile, the will to be despite personal desires, as for example a non-reader or someone with financial difficulties. Priority is given to the act of being able to develop support for culture through every person's position, as an author, editor, reader or distributor, and all such elements exist in the Catalan collective in Mexico.

10. Production and consumption

Mexico is the place in the world where Catalans best organized themselves and where there was the greatest production and consumption of periodical publications, books and activities, such as the Jocs Florals. This flowering resounds with quality. There are writers who direct literary publications, like Agustí Bartra, Vicenç Riera Llorca, Jaume Miravitles, Pere Calders, Josep M. Poblet, and Josep M. Murià. And journalists, many journalists: Josep M. Francès, Pere Matalonga, Lluís Aymamí, Avel·lí Artís Gener, Manuel Valldeperes, Joan Sales Francesc Aguirre, Àngel Estivill, Agustí Cabruja, Pere Foix, etc., plus a long list of cultured people who could be classified as erudite, researchers or experts in their subject, such as J.M. Miquel i Vergés or Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer. There are names of international renown such as Pere Bosch Gimpera, a prestigious professor as well as newspaper columnist, or Joaquim Xirau Palau, illustrious professor and notable thinker.

However, we cannot separate them so clearly, seeing that those who do not write verses and political editorials write novels and stories or opinion articles. Names such as Anna Murià, journalist, the first to edit

a newspaper in Catalan and a quality narrator, would be a good example. Other names stand out, such as Sales with *Quaderns de l'Exili*, with thousands of copies sent free of charge to anyone who requested it, or father and son Artís, editing *La Nova Revista*; Manuel Valldeperes edited the newspaper *La Nación* but also collaborated with *La Humanitat*; Pere Foix, author of the biographies of Cárdenas and Juárez, and the novel *Catalunya símbol de llibertat* (1942); and Avel·lí Artís Gener, journalist and writer, author of *556 brigada mixta* (1945), and a notable force behind the renovation of Mexican television. There is a very rich bibliography, and some debate whether it is Catalan literature about exile or Catalan literature from exile. Whatever, works such as *El retorn* (1942) by Josep M. Poblet, *Xabola* (1943) by Agustí Bartra, *Els supervivents* (1950) by Pere Pagès "Víctor Alba", *Les òlibes* (1954) by Agustí Cabruja, *Tres* (1962) by Rafael Tasis, etc. demonstrate the good moment that Catalan writing was experimenting in the 1930's, and which the military uprising decapitated. We could also write the same about other fields such as memoirs, with names like Amadeu Hurtado, Artur Bladé i Desumvila, Domènec Guansé, etc., and poetry with Bartra and Carner, to works on a broad subject matter as narrated in detail by Albert Manent.¹¹ Here we cite only the *Història de Catalunya* (1940) by two exceptional names, Ferran Soldevila i Pere Bosch Gimpera. All of these books edited in Mexico, among many others, show an extraordinary vitality.

When the Catalans arrived they found warmth and a welcome and the most motivated, not knowing what else to do, worked in culture, as writers, editors, professors or journalists. Many of them integrated completely into Mexican society because they knew the language and access to the superior cultural position was easier for the Spanish. in a "superior" position to that of the indigenous people and the native Mexicans. Whoever could patronize acts did so, for example Costa-Amic subsidized the special edition of the *Revista de Catalunya*. Others edited their books, hence the self-publishing author, and many participated selflessly in cultural activities. This helped them to feel fulfilled. A grocery store was enough to maintain the chief editor of a monthly magazine, who was the Minister of Finance. Moreover, the governor of the Bank of Spain, Nicolau d'Olwer, worked as a proof reader before occupying

11 Albert Manent, *La literatura catalana a l'exili* (Barcelona: Curial, 1976).

a senior position in the local bank. Both of them, and many others, participated as editors and writers as well as consumers. They consumed not for pleasure but for militancy. What had to be done was done. The exile carries his country in his suitcase and it needs defending; in Spain persecution was attempting to erase Catalonia from the world, and in order to defend it language, literature and culture had to be protected.

11. Chronology of the exile

We would classify the exiles' attitudes in three stages: 1939–1945; 1946–1974; and after the death of Franco. The first could be called transitory, awaiting the end of the dictatorship. In the second stage decisions were made, some returning and others taking part in the new reality (work, marriage or children's schooling or work, etc.). In the third stage the feeling of political struggle disappeared and only the personal experiences remained.

The first stage goes from arrival, generally in 1939–1940 until the end of the Second World War. It is a period of wait-and-see in the hope that the dictator would be ousted by the democratic forces overrunning Europe against the Nazi totalitarian. The second stage is made up of a series of parentheses represented by the exile who does not even empty out his suitcases for the sake of not wasting any time. This is akin to a provisional attitude towards the home and other things, manifest in the expression "It's hardly worth it, for the time we're going to be here".

The disillusion coming in the 1950's meant it was time to make a decision and this feeling would be synthesized in 1962 when the magazine *Orfeó Català* made its appearance. The publication is more than just a bulletin for cohesion, rather it aspires to be a platform for Catalonia in Mexico. The opening editorial says:

We want our spokesman to reach wherever there is a Catalan far from his mother country, so that, with the *Orfeó Català* in his hands, he would feel inside himself, – if it was asleep or doused by time or distance – the stirring echo from the voice of our blood, the call of the language and the cry of the land, prime exponents of the Catalan character.

In other words, an aspiration that together Catalans make up the essence of being Catalan. However, businesses make their demands, children have to study, activities are shared openly with Mexicans, and only in the fairly uncommon case of marriages between Catalans does the language continue, and with it traditions, gastronomy, special festivities and customs. The social base gets smaller, singles get married to Mexicans, children attend schools, although many have gone to Spanish schools but none to Catalan ones. This detail, especially bearing in mind the large number of Catalan teachers, is symptomatic of a desire for integration into Mexico, and to avoid an enclosure like the Chinese or other ethnic groups who enclose themselves geographically, socially, and in terms of family and work. In general the Catalan is individualistic, dynamic and hardworking, constant and extraordinarily responsible and conscientious. A great asset for any employer. It is not surprising that with such a background they are successful when professionally prepared. The price to pay is integration in a new society and absolute loyalty to the new nation. The Catalan never renounces his own but ties grow weaker generation after generation as Mexican blood enters the family.

During the 1940's and 1950's the acts were to a full house, but in 1971 the entity had to move its central office due to the avalanche of new members. Specific festivities were celebrated: 14th April, 11th September, and the anniversaries of the deaths of Macià and Companys. Other festive occasions were Sant Jordi, Mare de Deu de Montserrat, Christmas and Epiphany. Other get-togethers could be added at random, perhaps to dance *sardanes*, a chestnut and *panellets* evening on the other side of the ocean or maybe just for a football match or other activities such as theatre evenings (in 1951 three new theatrical productions!), concerts and choir singing, conferences, etc.; all demonstrating a significant momentum. The diversity of members and the collective initiative encouraged airs of renovation in the activities, which could be a sardana-based festivity or a recital of Raimon with the edition of a commemorative record. After Franco's death democracy in Catalonia was added to the picture, bringing with it the weakening of the feeling of struggle and the return of the most determined, although others, such as Tísner and Calders, continued to vie for the *Catalan-ness* of the offspring that were becoming Mexicanized. The weak demographic base, without new blood, made it impossible for the Catalan

collective to be imbued with new life. Catalan culture would be damped and weakened. The failure of the chair in Catalan culture (1984) between the UAB of Barcelona and the UNAM of Mexico would be the swan song of a glorious entity at a low ebb due to the lack of a demographic base and a project suited to the new circumstances.¹² Nevertheless, a very versatile centre and the continuity of the new generations with the choir, with young Mexicans singing in Catalan, Catalan classes for those interested in learning the language for different reasons, and the support given to different initiatives, pave the way for adaptation, however complex, to the modern day.

In other words when Catalans arrived in Mexico they did not disperse at random, but were rather taken in by an existing community, organized through their own centre and with a will to continue. Many took up residence near the centre, in a way that conferred the neighbourhood with a certain Catalan air, and even today there is still the odd establishment going by the name of “La Catalana” or similar.

12. Identity and exile

Identity could be defined as the traits that conform a differentiated and specific personality. In some cases it will be religion and certain customs, in others certain clothes and traditions, and in others a way of behaving and interpreting life. In the Catalan case the traits that conform identity are easily defined: language, culture and mentality. Hence the feeling of no return, not due to the impossibility of entering Catalonia but rather of going back to the Catalonia that once was – free and Catalan. Franco converted the country into provinces that were subjected to absolute state control and deprived them of Catalan attributes. The exiles responded by refusing to return, and if they did so in isolated cases it was to keep their children Catalan or to die in Catalonia, or for subsistence or other reasons.

12 When we presented the programme *Veus de l'exili* the youngest member of the public was about 50 years old and the total public consisted of about 30 people. The common phrase was: “Time does not forgive”.

13. Feeling of struggle and rebellion, which we detect in many of the interviews

They aspire to *preserve their identity* through actions of a cultural nature, organizing prominent activities such as the Jocs Florals, or even just a play where a teacher lends the furniture for props, and a novelist is the director of a motley group of actors. In addition to the desire to be there is also a feeling of rage, which in extreme cases can lead to suicide. Dolores Pla found three suicides among the families of the forty testimonies she interviewed, a very high index, and in some cases we find serious mental illnesses or, more commonly, depressions or sorrow. One lady told us, after sixty five years of exile: '*Every day when I get up I look at the picture of Arbeca that hangs on my wall and I cry like a baby.*' This is surely not just for the landscape, the food, the way of being, the absence of family and friends, but also for the idealization of the world left behind.

A second characteristic to add to the *rage for the difficult situation of family members in Catalonia and for the social, cultural and political panorama of the land left behind* would be the nostalgia that would never be appeased. According to a poet and newspaper editor, Josep M. Murià:

the nostalgia, the bitterness of being far from the mother country is enormous, and even more so for those of us who came to the Americas than for those who stayed in France, because from there one breathes a certain proximity, a close contact; communication is faster, people come and go, the telephone, correspondence... From France one does not feel the distance so much, this enormous distance that there is between continents. Our pain of separation is greater.¹³

Nostalgia, the first characteristic of the new situation, was combated with work, especially after 1945 when the geopolitical circumstances made the exiles realize that returning would be neither easy nor immediate. At that time Mexico offered a future and good living conditions, couples could have a maid, something reserved for the elite in Catalo-

13 Dolores Pla, "Interview with José María Murià", *Els catalans exiliats a Mèxic* (Catarroja – Barcelona: Afers, 2000), p. 284.

nia, and with their work they could afford a house in an urban setting. Therefore, those who settled in quickly lived very well. Integration is a fact. Ferran de Pol¹⁴ dedramatizes the situation:

Dear friend: My sincere sympathies go out to you; living with a person who is homesick, who is homesick to the point of dying, as you say, must be the harshest of ordeals. I recommend, however, that you do not take “to the point of dying” too literally. Of all the feelings that are exaggerated – and almost all are exaggerated –, yearning is the easiest to inflate. [...] The morality that I mentioned would be as follows: if politicians, writers, peasants, workers, teachers, etc., if our men yearned less after their personal positions, their own works, their own utterances, their personal vanities, and, when yearning after everything they used to be, to do, to say, in benefit of their mother country, they promise deep down in their hearts to be it, to do it, to say it, exile would have been a school of new action and novel thought. Do you not agree, friend, that if our men buried their nostalgia for the past forever and applied all of their capacity for faith and love towards a noble future, dignified and open to sacrifice, they would be honourable men? If so, blessed is the pain of ignorance, and forever blessed is yearning.

Centlapatl, 23rd July 1944.

Dolors Pla meditates about the book *Diccionario de los catalanes en México* (1996) when it remarks on the data of 647 Catalans of the approximately 4,800 that it considers arrived in Mexico. She reports that such data refer to what could be called the elite. Albeit noteworthy, this elite kept itself on a rather discreet plane, with the crux of social mobility deriving from popular mass, or what Pla calls the common exile. In effect, we encounter qualified workers who arrive in a country with a very low cultural and educational level, which leads to all the manual workers finding a good job, better than what they had before. Exiles get access to ownership of the workplace, to good housing and schooling for their children and as a result they identify with the new place. Memories are already Mexican. Maintaining identity was the most relevant activity, seeing that it was carried out as a social complement, people met up with their friends and companions in exile and participated in recreational activities. Hence the existence and revitalization of the Orfeó Català with a dynamic choir, a faithful following and a selection of activities of all kinds, from the sections of hiking, sardanes or the library.

14 Ferran de Pol, “L’enyorança”, *Quaderns de l’exili* (1944), p. 6 and following.

Language, of which we have seen some manifestations in books and magazines, becomes the supreme trait of identity.¹⁵ When it disappears identity disappears with it, although some traces remain, often only in a food or detail or gastronomic rarity, or in names, such as Montserrat or Jorge, but the Catalan entity has faded. Writers alone cannot maintain the language without popular support, and this would be forthcoming. At the Orfeó Català the festive occasions were packed full with public, and magazines, books and acts were not only commercial products which had to be paid for, but also products with a seal of identity, which consequently were preserved, acquired, supported, or otherwise aided and conserved.

Language forms part of identity, foreign historians like Pierre Vilar, anthropologists like Claudi Esteve, in an intuitive way, every Catalan knows that one is Catalan because one speaks Catalan. Identity is the language. Without language it does not exist. Some publications reached a hundred issues – Xaloc, Pont Blau... – while others, such as Quaderns de l'Exili, were sent to thousands of exiles free of charge. So we are not talking about minority and symbolically representative phenomena, but rather ties among a collective which, expelled from their land, must settle down in a new land and setting, and while earning a living must also relocate outwards socially and inwards emotionally.

Hence this community of language; in exile the Catalans move outside the orbit of exceptional situations¹⁶ and show gratitude towards Mexico for its hospitality and in particular to Cárdenas, with homage and constant reminders of his attitude. The Catalans participate in the sphere of work and not, initially, in that of Mexican politics. They would take action against Spain for its repression of Catalan identity and strive to preserve Catalan culture by disseminating it among Mexicans with initiatives in Spanish as reported by Prócoro Hernández,¹⁷ in order to divulge their own identity.

15 Claudi Esteve, *La identidad catalana contemporánea* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), considers that of the traits that could configure a Catalan identity language is the principal one, and the second is history –as the expresión of a collective will.

16 A Catalan community in the forest like that narrated by Jordi Soler is not normal: Jordi Soler, *Los rojos de ultramar* (Madrid: Santillana, 2004).

17 Prócoro Hernández, *Veus de l'exili a Mèxic. Una catalanitat a prova* (Barcelona: Pòrtic, 2000).

14. Integration in Mexico

Work and/or marriage for the parents and studies and friendships for the children mean that, immediately for some and more gradually for their descendants, there is a diversity of processes sharing common traits, and that these are slow, difficult and complex. A different mentality will make it hard for the majority to make friends, unlike marriages which are abundant, although professional, academic and cultural relationships start developing. The Catalans gradually integrate into Mexico, but never into the groups of the Spanish in Mexico. Ties with their land will be through earlier Catalan friends or through cultural contact with products – books and magazines – or with activities. The children of exiles feel Mexican and have only heard talk of Catalonia, and the literary, political, theatrical, musical or social activities would feel remote to them and so they would become progressively detached. They would love Catalonia, but from a distance, while Mexico is close. On marriage, with Mexicans, the process of substitution of identity is fulfilled thanks to work. Sometimes the process takes place in the course of a single lifetime. We know the expert historian Dolores Pla who left for Mexico in the 1960's, not out of political exile, and who now writes to a Catalan in Spanish, with which she expresses herself more naturally than in Catalan. The surroundings, a mixed marriage and work configure a very clear process of absorption. The open attitude of Mexico along with the Mexican bonhomie greatly facilitated this integration.

In 1965 Josep Ribera i Salvans, an industrial engineer, edited the book of poems *Sense paraules*. He would also be a dynamic promoter, president even, of the l'Orfeó Català, and on our second journey to Mexico in 2005 he wrote us the following dedication:

To our friend Josep M. Figueres this old edition which is a purposeful demonstration of the persistence of our culture while in full exile in Mexico. With affection.

In other words, the Catalan turns into a promoter and editor as an author. He is the priest or vestal who preserves the flame. In the preface Pere Calders says of this work: “a reflexive attitude that is very much ours, very Catalan”. We repeat that Catalan identity goes with the cul-

ture. This book of poetry is not a book where melancholy, sadness or yearning reside: there is a global feeling of country. We will not find an imaginary dimension of the distant country. Reality is accepted, its ideal is protected while living and working in the new one. Life will go on. Ribera, married to a historian, Margarida Carbó, also daughter of Catalans, continues using Catalan with naturalness and will transmit it to his children. This is different behaviour compared to a mixed marriage where language and identity is lost in the second generation. The process of integration is not the same for those who marry a Catalan as for those who do not, or for those who arrive with their family, even grandparents, as in the case of José M. Murià, compared to those who marry a Mexican. Overall it is a source of strength for the first three decades and then a weakness thereafter.

Identity, the awareness of belonging to a specific group, will mark the Catalans in Mexico in a mutant process of adaptation. In general it will be maintained whole in the first generation and will become diluted in the second. It will evolve to absolute identification with the new receptor identity and towards a simple recall of origins in the third generation. We have lengthy introductions to the subject and we will not protract them further.¹⁸

18 In particular: Artur Bladé, *De l'exili a Mèxic* (Barcelona: Curial, 1993); Vicenç Riera, *Els exiliats catalans a Mèxic* (Barcelona: Curial, 1994).