

Catalonia Dreaming

The Rise of Catalan Mass Secessionism, 2010-2015

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ABSTRACT

What is happening in Catalonia? This is a commonly asked question, abroad and in Spain. Even Catalans are often bewildered by the fast tide of events surrounding the pro-independence movement and its contradictions. Local answers not only tend to be partial, and loaded with special-pleading, but present a complexity of intricate detail that is hard to follow for anyone not in living in Catalonia and very attentive to the flow of politics in the media. Spanish observers, as a rule threatened by ongoing events and therefore hostile, simplify to an extreme that can be obtuse. The author, not a native Catalan, is an historian specialized in the study of Catalan nationalism. He has taught in Barcelona universities for more than forty years, usually in the Catalan language. Contrarian by nature, he has tried hard to remain outside the partisan trenches, to avoid both the pressure of the often heavy-handed nationalist lobby and the counter-pressure that marks the discourse of persecution of the most outraged Spanish opposition. In his contribution here, Enric Ucelay-Da Cal presents a narrative in terms of party politics and the social trends that political organizations try to channel and represent.

Keywords: Nationalism, Catalan Independence, Spanish politics

RESUMEN:

¿Qué está sucediendo en Cataluña? Es una pregunta común, en el extranjero y en España. Incluso los catalanes están a menudo desconcertados por el rápido ritmo de los acontecimientos que envuelven el movimiento a favor de la independencia y sus contradicciones. Las respuestas locales no sólo tienden a ser parciales, y engañosas, sino que además se presentan bajo la complejidad de un detallismo intrincado que resulta difícil de seguir para cualquier persona que no resida en Cataluña, y que además no esté muy atenta al flujo de la política en los medios de comunicación. Los observadores

españoles, por regla general sintiéndose amenazados por acontecimientos en curso y, por lo tanto hostiles, simplifican hasta un extremo que puede resultar obtuso. El autor de este trabajo, un catalán no nativo, es un historiador especializado en el estudio del nacionalismo catalán. Ha sido profesor en las universidades de Barcelona desde hace más de cuarenta años, por lo general en el idioma catalán. Opositor por naturaleza, se ha esforzado por permanecer fuera de las trincheras partidistas, para evitar tanto la presión del a menudo estricto *lobby* nacionalista y la contra-presión que marca el discurso de la persecución de los más indignada oposición española. En su contribución para esta pieza, Enric Ucelay-Da Cal presenta una narrativa en términos de la política de partidos y las tendencias sociales que las organizaciones políticas tratan de canalizar y representar.

Palabras clave: Nacionalismo, independencia catalana, política catalana, política española

RESUM:

Què està succeint a Catalunya? És una pregunta comuna, a l'estranger i a Espanya. Fins i tot els catalans estan sovint desconcertats pel ràpid ritme dels esdeveniments que envolten el moviment a favor de la independència i les seves contradiccions. Les respostes locals no només tendeixen a ser parcials, i enganyoses, sinó que a més es presenten sota la complexitat d'un detallisme intricat que resulta difícil de seguir per a qualsevol persona que no resideixi a Catalunya, i que a més no estigui molt atenta al flux de la política en els mitjans de comunicació. Els observadors espanyols, per regla general sentint-se amenaçats per esdeveniments en curs i, per tant hostils, simplifiquen fins a un extrem que pot resultar obtús. L'autor d'aquest treball, un català no natiu, és un historiador especialitzat en l'estudi del nacionalisme català. Ha estat professor a les universitats de Barcelona des de fa més de quaranta anys, generalment en l'idioma català. Opositor per naturalesa, s'ha esforçat per romandre fora de les trinxeres partidistes, per evitar tant la pressió del sovint estricte lobby nacionalista i la contra-pressió que marca el discurs de la persecució de la més indignada oposició espanyola. En la seva contribució per a aquesta peça, Enric Ucelay-Da Cal presenta una narrativa en termes de la política de partits i les tendències socials que les organitzacions polítiques tracten de canalitzar i representar.

Paraules clau: Nacionalisme, independència catalana, política catalana, política espanyola

*If I didn't tell her,
I could leave today.*

(From the hit psychedelic-pop song, “California Dreaming”,
written by John and Michelle Phillips,
released by “The Mamas and the Papas”, December 1965)

Catalonia -whatever that may mean- is a society, like so many others, with a gleaming outside presentation and a bitter inside viewpoint, which is supposed only to be picked apart in private. When private discussion is made public, somebody always feels hurt and offended. So be it. In any case, the fact remains: Catalan politics is subjunctive in the extreme. What is not -what remains “the impossible contrary to fact”- is insisted on, as if it were “real”. This insistence goes much further than merely what could be or what could become. People act as if what might be, though it isn't, should be. The English-language tradition is strongly empirical, without a subjunctive tense to speak of, and this distinction is lost in translation.

1. A Contrast of Nationalisms

The cohabitation of Spanish and Catalan nationalism is like a bad marriage. There is, to say the least, a lot of bickering, some yelling and shouting, some tears. Some look forward to a separation, others worry about the effect all the fighting might have on an extended medley of friends and neighbors. Perhaps all nationalisms that share a space are in a troubled relationship, but Catalan-Spanish nationalist conjugality has been, at least since the turn of the twentieth century, notoriously distant from wedded bliss.

The most aggressive Spanish nationalism (*españolismo*) was emerged unitary in the face of Cuban separatist nationalism during the war years on the island, from 1868 to 1898. But also hardline Catalan nationalism -like other centrifugal impulses against Spanish centripetal compulsion- arose in parallel to the successful Cuban divorce. The dominant trend in Spanish nationalism is the achievement of unity. Spanish political happiness is understood to be attained through unanimity of all the parts of Spain: unanimity is sameness, oneness. But sameness is by no means a new idea nor is it a Spanish monopoly. Catalan nationalism relishes its own specificity, its own natural wholeness or totality, and proclaims its so-called “differential fact” (i.e., the fact of being different from Spain). Its discourse has insisted -for some time- on being willing to accept inclusion in Spain as long as it could deny its “Spanishness”. But the Catalan appeal for a complete split was always, until now, the ideological (much less

practical) demand of a tiny minority, too small to have a serious impact on electoral politics. For the last century and a half, most Catalan nationalist formations have yearned for what in matrimonial terms, was a “legal separation”, living apart but with common vows still binding. The appeal for an open denial or annulment of the shared tie with Spain was only for extremists. Since 2010-2012 and up to the present, this situation has changed drastically. Now, according to the varied opinion polls over the last years at least a full third –sometimes quite a bit more- of interviewed opinion manifests itself in favor of a break-up with Spain. This has changed many long-term aspects of Catalan nationalism itself, including some of its more enduring cultural or geopolitical traits.

Catalan radical nationalism has always sustained that the Catalan nation could just walk out of Spain, of the Spanish relationship, just like that, with no cost. How could freedom not be for free?

More moderate tendencies have confided in a double and perhaps somewhat contradictory program. Basically, there have been two traditional tenets. One holds that a Catalanocentric reform of Spain as a clearly would be for the better. The oppressive centralism symbolized by the capitality of Madrid could be switched with great advantage to Barcelona. The port city, on the Mediterranean instead of the middle of Spain’s bleak central plateau, would focus the parts to reinvent a new whole. Historical regions would make over three centuries of sterile centralism, and bring forth a variety and wealth of federal states with a new, more genuine sense of union. Thus, the ever-frustrated “second city” of Barcelona would come into its own and realize its sense of self.

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1.1. The “Fact of Difference”

Catalan nationalism as a whole has remained addicted to a founding dream precisely as regards Catalonia’s sense of selfhood. The Catalans, it is held, are practical, hard-nosed, attuned to business, instead of dreamy and presumptuous, like the Castilians at Spain’s core. The power, wealth and resiliency of Catalonia’s civil society would revamp all Spain with better business practice, more participatory customs, and a sense of the organized resistance to the abuse of power. In this somewhat optimistic perspective, Spanish administration, forever lazy and corrupt, inefficient and addicted to bureaucratic red-tape, would be loosened up by the Catalan combination of greater results and less pomp, and turned into a working federation, open to the future.

Daydreaming perhaps, but taken for fact –the “differential fact”- by the Catalan nationalist tradition. It is less true today than it was fifty, not to say a hundred years ago, when Catalan habits, etiquette, timing, and so forth, were markedly

different from its arch-rival, Madrid, the center of statehood of Spain. Now, in the twenty-first century, Catalans are much more like other Spaniards than they used to be, thanks to the constant compression brought about by united cultural markets world-wide.. They have been fused into a standard pattern, unified by TV and the digital world, by new teaching patterns like AVCE, or the mobility of low-cost flying. Precisely because they are now so much more similar, the difference in language preference -their own Romance language, Catalan- and the dream of independence take on much greater powers of attraction. If you're visibly different in custom and speech, there's no urgent need to state the obvious, but that is no longer true.

In turn, local discussion is conditioned by repetition. What is felt inside, and is intangible, is more important than what is factual, tangible. As in so many other places, contradiction is not appreciated, agreement and harmony are considered best. External communication is achieved through the power of visual image. To begin with, most creative work is not carried out in Catalan, nor is it even dependent on language. The two most important Catalans by the standards of world recognition in the twentieth century were two painters, Dalí and Miró, whose work communicated speechlessly. So does the work of the architect Antoni Gaudí, so popular with tourists today.

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The alternative to sight -for all Spanish cultures, not just Catalan- is the Law. This is Roman Law to be precise, in its Catholic re-reading, under which the Legal Code itself and the wording of its norms are much more important than any “fact”, much less “the Truth and nothing but the Truth” of the Protestant, Anglo-American Common Law tradition. What counts -as in the Papist Church- is the dictate of the Institution, higher than the individual, which interprets the correct reading of the Code.

1.2. Language as Proof

Unlike some of the other smaller European nationalisms, Catalan nationalists, with astonishing ingenuousness, compared themselves with France or Italy (countries with ten times the population of Catalonia, each with their own internal contradictions not always perceived by Catalan nationalism). The nationalists never caught on, as the conviction of their own native superiority made them blind to the need for communication and adequate distribution of their own literature in translation, instead of overvaluing their own words as such, in the original language. By the early twenty-first century, however, the emigration of Catalan academics to posts in literature departments throughout European and American universities brought commentary and translation to the fore. But not criticism. There was -and still is- no awareness that repetition of tired formulae

regarding national excellence was (and is) no more than stale propaganda. Only a lively critical ambient would provoke serious interest both outside and inside Catalonia.

Internationalization was composed by many factors of outside origin. The annexation of East Germany by the Western Federal Republic in 1990 had the unexpected side-effect of ending any pretence by French to be a world-language. German pretensions confirmed English as a hegemonic means of expression, which meant cultural generational change for Catalans, as until then, cultural Catalans used French as a third language. Breaking the spell of France, of Paris, as a window on the world, looking to London or especially New York, meant that the effort of writing science or other research in Catalan was effectively pointless. This major shift meant the end of any power for the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, and the take-off of high-quality medical-biological research, or the growth of computer software innovation, produced directly in English. This was the real, substantial break with the past, while, in the 1990s what could be termed the “losers” were calling for a monolingual Catalan Catalonia, to the exclusion of Spanish and anything else. With a militant misunderstanding of the Sapir-Whorf thesis in cultural anthropology, they called for “the right to live in Catalan”.

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What they really meant was that the use of Catalan, despite all the public funds addressed to linguistic immersion in schools, the money thrown at Catalan public broadcasting, and the heavy subsidization of repetitive cultural research on Catalan specificity, the language itself was in clear, perceptible regression. It is important to stress this point, as, since that time, Spanish nationalist agitation has breathlessly stressed the endangered nature of Castilian, and its hypothetical elimination from Barcelona streets and the lesser cities and towns. Nothing could be further from the truth. Spanish use remained expansive, and non-indigenous Catalan speakers preferred to use Castilian (and read it, for that was worth), rather than absorb the increased Catalan production. Admittedly, the nationalist “old-boy network” favors its own, and tends to exclude considered as “hostile”. This a common enough way of behaving in Spain -though usually carried out in terms of religious adherence (Catholics vs. anticlericals) or of political party affiliation or sympathy. It might be unpleasant to dissidents, but it should not be confused with “totalitarian linguistic control”.

Again, despite their negation, facts are stubborn. In Spain as a whole, even as illiteracy was effectively wiped out in the last decades of the twentieth century, readership has remained unhappily stable: for more than four decades since the 1970s, approximately 50 % of Spaniards of both sexes do not buy nor read one book per year. Such a pattern –despite the pretensions of Catalan nationalists– thrives in Catalonia, where people are proud to say that they have never read an

entire book in their lives, and that they passed their entire schooling without any effort in this sense. Obviously this behavior responds to a world trend, reinforced by the expansion of internet after the key years 1994-1997, built up on the previous experience of video games. Today (2015), the use of smartphones is generalized, and, ten years after 2004, when to be initial access to “social media” was established (Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Instagram, and their competition). Present use -or rather abuse- is so extreme so that there is an avowed problem of digital addiction, and many spend four or more hours per day obsessing with their cell or tablet. But for a society in which nationalism was linguistically legitimated, the result was devastating to the aspirations of collective selfhood. Nevertheless, it should also be remarked that accordingly, today, Catalonia lives in what some sociologists optimistically call an “attention society”. Despite its name, the “attention society”, consists being literally deperdent on constant new stimulae, is marked by radical, unthinking, responses -like tweets- and a very short attention span. What is bought and sold is mass attention, intended for the advertising which pays for “free” services, and such a predisposition marks new political attitudes. The immediacy that sustained digital interaction provides has become second-nature, as is required from everything, including the public handling of complex social issues. The ultimate result is an extremely high level of contradiction, simultaneous with low frustration tolerance. These conditions are perhaps common enough in any post-industrial, postmodern context in a world of Baumanian liquidity, but nonetheless Catalonia is therefore highly stressed. Further, serious attention to content is not a high social priority. In general, as the French critic Yves Michaud observed (much to Bauman's anger), where social intangibles liquify, ideas -the arts in the first place- simply vaporize.

1.3. Collective Inclusive Selfhood

The communications revolution in its full impact in the second half of the twentieth century changed the cultural anthropology of Spain. First, the steady impact of foreign tourism melted the rules of traditonal society. Then,by the 1980s, speed dominated, even as it increased the general rythm: thruways, airplane connections, bullet trains, made movement cheap and comparatively easy by the early twenty-first century, an acceleration obviously hastened ever more radidly by the generalization of cell phones, smartphones, portable computers, and tablets.

Increasingly, the different nationalities, and as well Castilian diversity, have blurred. By the turn of the twenty-first century, clear distinctions, that still were very visible (and audible) only thirty years before have become indistinct. Paradoxically, however, the effect of blurring has increased the call for differentiation. Everywhere this has led to literally brand new “invented

traditions”, celebrations, pastimes and social rituals which, although quite recent, perhaps only forty years old, are sincerely believed to be ancestral, with origins lost in the mists of time. The similarity between these activities in one place and another is striking, but the local inhabitants are firmly convinced that their festivities are utterly unique, and furthermore an expression of “identity”, a much abused term misused by academics, politicians, ideologues, and ordinary folk.

In the nationalities within Spain with strong nationalist movements (Catalonia and the Basque Country, as opposed to Galicia), the adherence to the primacy of their specific language has become a collective obsession. If, anthropologically, most Spanish citizens are alike, what makes a Catalan different? Reduced to the minimum, the last core is the fact that the people from that territory speaks and reads the Catalan language. (Nonetheless, it should be added that Basque nationalists have a complex split between “racial” ethnicity which is exclusive, and “normalized” language –called Batua- which is potentially inclusive, but that contradiction will not be explored here).

Having largely lost the social traits (work ethic, business orientation, specific grupality and pattern of family ties) that made them “different”, Catalans are reduced to their own language as an affirmation of separateness and specificity. This preoccupation leads to an immediate contradiction, since Catalan is not only spoken in Catalonia, but also in the region of Valencia (the Spanish provinces of Castellón, Valencia proper and Alicante) as well as in the Balearic Islands. Other territories have areas that speak Catalan, such as Aragon, with a borderland to Catalonia where the idiom is used. Also across the French frontier, Catalan is also spoken in principle, in the border Department of Pyrénées Orientales, a part of Catalonia until 1659. The traditional language there is in extremely marked regression. There is also a town in Sardinia where Catalan survives, almost at the point of extinction in the 1990s, until air tourism from Barcelona saved it from disappearance.

So Catalan nationalism during most of the twentieth century was ideologically divided between partisans of the “Catalan Countries” (Països Catalans) and those who considered the survival of a strict Catalonia quite enough of a program. The question here was “normalization”, i.e. the establishment of a linguistic standard, and, perhaps the progressive stamping out of linguistic “barbarism” (barbarisme), the mixture of Spanish usage with “correct” Catalan. Loyalty to the language of identification, however, does not translate into serious reading. Rather, more is produced than is consumed, without an export outlet. This becomes a social attitude of a sort: Spanish speakers resent, often quite bitterly, that Catalan speakers can communicate in something else, but it never occurs to

those who object that learning to understand or read Catalan, which, unlike Basque, is a Romance language similar to Castilian, is not really that much of an effort.

If language is at the heart of Catalan nationalism of all stripes, so it is in its implications. Hostile critics have considered it a “demographic nationalism”, but rather than race, the nationalism expresses the irritation of Catalan speakers much nonplussed by immigrant non-Catalan speakers.

The preoccupations with language and its survival lead in turn to a variety of nationalist options, which often find it hard to agree on any given point. In recent times, the protagonism of philologists and sociolinguists as the “organic intellectuals” of nationalism has done little to ease structural disagreement, as the language specialists change the rules of “correctness” in both spoken and written idioms in ways that, for example, make television lessons from twenty-five years ago, be now not just outdated but flatly considered wrong. It has never occurred to the nationalists, who do not need such programs and so ignore them, that such failure to agree –or to agree to disagree– pushes some away from the language, and in general does nothing to help make its use profitable to learn for the immigrant or the outsider. As, increasingly, there are more and more outlanders coming in, this is not a moot point.

1.4. The Background of Catalan Nationalism

Such an unsteady approach to basics has made Catalan nationalism very loose in its proposals. Depending on spoken when, nationalism could be understood as regionalism, autonomy, federalism, as well as separatism. To cover this broad spectrum a generic cover was needed, and so, from 1880s onwards, the terms “Catalanism” became too standard. Originally, the word meant either a scholarly interest in Catalan lore, or, in Spain, a Catalan turn of phrase. Then the word became explicitly political, to highlight the latitudinarian sense of a patriotic sentiment that could be shared by many, in different ways. In fact, the appeal of full independent statehood was traditionally not a popular electoral stance, with weak ideological elaboration. The main appeal of radical nationalism, a late off-split, was its social role as a rite-of-passage for young males, a socialization between early adolescence and marriage, which for most ended such male-bonding. Females became relevant in radical nationalism only in the 1980s, and from then on have had major leadership roles, as sex patterns changed drastically throughout the society.

To begin with, the basic vocabulary of Catalan politics does not exist in the English language. Neither “Catalanism” nor “independentism” appear in U.S. or

British dictionaries, unless they've been revised in the last year.

“Catalanism” was a political neologism of the 1880s, quite comparable to the usage of “Americanism” in United States. In the United States, the term originally was British, from the eighteenth century, and referred to turns of language that were inherent to English as spoken in North America. Then it became the name for any student of affairs in the States. Finally, “Americanism” was politicized in the heady days of American “nationalism” before the War of 1812. So it was with “Catalanism”, which referred to expressions that were “catalanisms” in Castilian Spanish, then by extension, to any student or scholar of Catalan literature or Catalan subjects. Finally, it meant an all-encompassing political dedication to the homeland. This was the hallmark of Valentí Almirall, a federalist who broke with his mentor Pi Margall, and used the term in the early 1880s to gather and unify support for a Catalan-language press and for unitary political initiatives, until he theorized his idea in a lengthy book, *Lo Catalanisme*, published in 1886.

Almirall was blind-sided by his conservative allies, really opponents, and ended his career bitter and disillusioned (he died in 1904). But his coined expression “Catalanism” was a stunning success for well over a century. Accordingly, the discourse of “Catalanism” made nationalism seem lite rather than classic, easy to take for anybody. Until the perceived shift in 2012, “Catalanism” was a generic term, which stood for nationalism or patriotism. It encompassed all the possible juridical varieties: regionalists, autonomists, federals, confederals, radical nationalists and cultural nationalists, pro-independence activists and mild sentimentalists, all could be Catalanists. The term was all-inclusive. From this latitudinarian permissivity, “Catalanism” derived its allure and strength. Within its broad confines, anybody could find his or her place. As Pujol’s famous slogan, endlessly repeated by all, put it: “Anyone who lives and works in Catalonia is Catalan”; this was ultimate “Catalanism” in action.

It should also be stressed that, thanks to the ideal of “Catalanism”, Catalan nationalism traditionally had an affirmative civic tone rather than harsh sneer of ethnicity (although, in private, the latter would appear, to show it remained hard and latent beneath the surface smile). However, Catalan ethnicity was vague at its most stern, the topos being that the Catalonia is a “land of passage” through which many peoples have left their mark over the century. The desire for the affirmation of difference (“*el fet diferencial*”, literally, “the differential fact”) has tended towards the use of the language and the recognition of the correct ranking of cultural values by the nationalist tradition. A due acceptance of the implicit hierarchies of the “Catalan society of families” by outsiders settling in Barcelona was required, and the affirmation of an alternate hierarchy based on the state or on Madrid’s protagonists would immediately set off a fierce response.

The reply, in personal terms could be frontal, but preferred to be sly, with letter-writing campaigns, and similar mechanisms to smear any individual who broke ranks or tried to show his or her importance without due deference.

From the foundation of the non-partisan and apolitical nationalist entity called the “Catalanist Union” (Unió Catalanista) in 1891 onwards, the idea of a transversal, latitudinarian meaning characterized the idea of “Catalanism”. Even the split in 1904 between the “interventionist” Regionalist League or Lliga Regionalista, which channeled conservative political nationalism and national-republicanism did not erase the sense of a common cause. The Lliga led the movement until the Spanish military dictatorship of 1923-1930, but it stumbled in 1931. The new Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (or Republican Left of Catalonia, or ERC) created in March 1931 as the fusion of radical nationalists (Estat Català, or “Catalan State”), republicans (Partit Republicà Català, or Catalan Republican Party) and a vast host of local federal and national entities in metropolitan neighborhoods and small cities, towns, and villages, retained the same sense of a generic “Catalanism”. Even though the ERC led the overthrow of the monarchy in 1931 and controlled the Catalan autonomic government established provisionally and then de jure in 1932 with Spanish parliamentary approval, the “government party” retained the sense of a common and shared purpose, despite the hostility between left and right. The rise of both socialists and communists in the 1920s and 1930s had a strong national-marxist component, which, when the swerves and curves of ideological revolution imposed themselves, still left remnants after the Civil War of 1936-1939.

The anticlerical and revolutionary murders of 1936-1937 in the republican zone (including Catalonia), so shocking to Catholic world opinion, were traumatic for the Catalanist conservatives who fled sure death to Franco's cause. Similarly, the wartime and postwar legal murder of leftists by the newly forged Franco dictatorship, so shocking to global progressive opinion, were searing to the republican “red” exiles who escaped or survived, including the left Catalanists. It took two to three decades to begin to overcome the blame, the hatred, the one-sided justifications that the revolution, the executions, the mutual accusations of “reds” and “fascists”, and the conflict of battle and bombardment had left behind. The late 1960s and early 1970s represented a phase of re-encounter and recovery, in which Catalan Catholics, to cite one very representative example, took on the guilt for the cruelties of 1936-1937 with the argument, born of the Second Council Vatican (1962-1965), that the Roman Church had failed Catalan workers in its evangelical function, and a guilt that hence morally justified their sacrifice and martyrdom. After the heady intoxication of the world-wide 1968 youth explosion, which made ultra-leftism a serious intellectual fashion, a space for mutual concession was born. This consensus between the Catalan left and right together

against the heavy weight of the aging Franco tyranny served to reinvent Catalanism, now redolent of the sympathetic themes that derived from “Popular Front” ideology and the new social Catholicism. Reinvented or revived, the new Catalanism overrode bitter tropes from the republican years, the civil war, and the more “fascist” ostentation of the long, ongoing Franco years, as it absorbed them, turned them inside out and then fused them into a wonderful fictional past, a shiny, pretty version of the Catalonia of the 1930s, in which everybody was a hero or heroine, except those who did not fit the dream, namely the pro-Franco, pro-Spanish language, pro-Spain rightwing, increasingly isolated and disconcerted by the decline and disappearance of the régime, and the alignment of first the Church and the the Monarchy with the enemies of Franco (who died in 1975).

In short, nationalist presentation preferred the fiction of omnipresence to völkisch aggression. It wanted to confirm in everybody’s mind what the historian and liberal politician Michael Ignatieff, Canadian of Russian origins, has called “the fantasy of belonging”.

2. Jordi Pujol and National Charisma

“Pujolisme”, the particularly successful brand of Catalan nationalism led by Jordi Pujol, was in many ways surprising. To begin with, the success of Pujol himself as a charismatic figure was in itself a sort of contradiction: short, fat, balding, a terrible speaker, he did not fit the image of a powerful leader. But he has a shrewd personality and a prodigious memory, and could address by name militants in small towns, ask them about family members, and also produce an emotionally intense synthesis of Catholic traditionalism with socialdemocracy, rural resentment of metropolitan Barcelona and a dream of collective development. He was -and maybe still is- expert in managing mixed opposites. Despite a strong disdain for immigrants. In his early writings, he presented them as coming from an inferior, de-structured rural and backward Andalusia to the vertebrated coherence of Catalan industrial society. Nevertheless, Pujol could coin slogans about “all Catalans” from wherever living in Catalonia, therefore granting the “newcomers” (*nouvinguts*) his blessing. The proviso, about “those who are willing to learn Catalan”, was discreetly underplayed.

The pattern Pujol established counted on the overrepresentation of the agro-urbanized interior against Barcelona, left in the hands of the Left, especially socialists as communist strength wore down. Urban middle class support in the big city, however, assumed that the left-wing majority could be ignored in regional elections, in which there was high abstentionism in the metropolitan “red belt” of working-class suburbs. Pujol obtained and retained a consistent majority in the

Catalan regional government, based on reasonably stable votes and stable alliances. As Pujol could not fully foresee, this game might work as long as the middle class existed, remained firm.

The key was double: the calculated limits to nationalist ambition, balanced by the inability of Pujol's anti-nationalist enemies to come together in a coalition because of their left/right enmity. Pujol would not call for independence or appeal to secessionist sentiment, though of course he might subsidize –which some disclaimer or other- those who did. His opponents might detest him but their capacity for overwhelming his narrow base –approximately just under some 45-49%, often lower- was undermined by the impossibility of the local representation of the hardline Spanish right (Partit Popular, the Catalan representation of the Partido Popular or PP) joining with the socialists (and the more radical left) against “pujolism”. The leader, for twenty-three uninterrupted years regional president, turned the historical republic-nationalist presence of the Esquerra Republicana (ERC), dating back to the 1930s, into a protest party, apparently incapable of a strong showing beyond a “Pujolista” link. He balanced against ERC the other remnant of the thirties, UDC, the conservative nationalist and Christian Democratic party, into a “federation” with his own “Democratic Convergence” (CDC) party, to form CiU, “Convergence and Union”. Thus through absences, alliances and exclusions, Pujol ruled with a certain confidence in his continuity as long as his enemies did not make “impossible” agreements “against nature”.

Pujol could count on the success of the ambiguity of “Catalanism” to reach a broad consensus of voters and supporters. His call was moderate, and assured the defense of the language through “linguistic immersion” in schools (i.e., teaching done in Catalan) and a strong public television and radio combination to forestall the pressure of Spanish media. So Catalan functional illiterates did and do not read; those who do, and, having received higher learning, wish to write received public backing for the nationalist message, even if nobody read their tomes, wise and weighty or light and clever, the result was the same. Allegedly, “everybody was happy”.

The long term result was a sort of institutional diarchy, in which the “Pujolistes” held the regional government, and made the rules, while the socialists controlled the Barcelona municipal government, as well as the lesser cities of the metropolitan area (L'Hospitalet, and smaller centers), with the budgetary weight such town halls implied. Nevertheless, with the Catalan Parliament in his control, it was Pujol who made the rules. Accordingly, in 1987, he dissolved the “Metropolitan Corporation” that controlled services in the urban area, on the grounds that it was a Franco-derived institution (which was true), and that it threatened to become a counter-power to the autonomous government (which

was doubtful). Pujol then created “comarcal councils” for the more or less traditional sub-districts of Catalonia in direct contraposition to the Spanish institutional system of four Catalan provinces. During the 1990s, the “pujolistes”, with broader nationalist support, kept up a stubborn campaign to legally eliminate the provinces and assure their replacement with the “*comarques*”, a push that finally petered out, ultimately unsuccessful.

2.1. Pujol Forever

In the meanwhile, Pujol had backed the socialist central government against the Army and its administrative role, and profited in power from the suppression of the military provincial governments (*Gobiernos militares de provincia*) which could annul the parallel “civil governments” (*gobiernos civiles*). In many ways, the traditional, historical opponent of Catalan nationalism was the Army, being since the Cuban wars of 1868-1898 the chief expression of unitary Spanish nationalism, a position logically reinforced by the Franco dictatorship. After the disgraceful failed coup in February 1981, with the seizure of the Spanish parliament on TV, its loss of non-professional power was clearly to Pujol’s advantage. With linguistic agitation (*La Crida* or “The Call”, begun in 1981 but most active from 1984 to 1990, its complete, long winded name being *La Crida a la Solidaritat en Defensa de la Llengua, la Cultura i la Nació Catalanes*) and the pressure surrounding the 1992 Barcelona Olympics (“Catalonia is a Nation”, as a slogan, along with “Freedom for Catalonia”, both in English for TV coverage visibility, on posters in the stadium stands), Pujol could promote extreme ideological aims, but always in a limited manner, while indirectly funding radical nationalists. These in turn finally gave up on the mirage of Basque terrorism, turned pacifist, and allowed ERC to become an “independentist” party that picked up the more politically inclined radical nationalist support.

What seemed like clockwork machinery was really a delicate balance held in place by Pujol’s talent, and his network of faithful helpers. He was always careful, of course, to promote and then demote any heirs that became too powerful in their own right. Eventually, however, age caught up with him, and he was obliged to pass on his mantle, which finally, in 2003, fell upon the shoulders of Artur Mas. This was not altogether to Pujol’s liking, and the old boss continued to encourage a certain family continuity through his sons, until money scandals after 2014 - which he was forced to admit to- made direct succession definitively impossible.

Pujol was not a strategist, even though he thinks himself a significant intellectual and especially an outstanding historian (if unpublished, beyond his speeches and talks). Once he achieved the main goals that were the common nationalist objectives in the 1960s -mass media and education in Catalan-, Pujol had no

clear aim. Wisely, he refrained from an open pro-independence position and instead close to appear as a statesman in Spanish politics, backing in the Madrid parliament first the last Socialist government in 1993-1996 of Felipe González and the first Partido Popular term under the singularly unpleasant leadership of José Maria Aznar in 1996-2004.

Whatever his limitations as a strategist, however, Pujol was a superb tactician, and consolidated his own power and the leading role of a strong Catalan government through the 1990s. But by the turn of the twenty-first century, Pujol's own position within “his” party, CDC, and in the governmental coalition, CiU, was increasingly questioned. The shift in 1996 from backing socialist “Felipismo” to the extreme conservative Aznar was shocking to many; more so, when, in his second tenure, during 2001-2003, the PP had an absolute majority in the Spanish Parliament and accordingly discarded Pujol like used rubbish. Much more important, however, was the awareness that the remedies for the illness of Catalan nationhood had not worked to produce a homogeneous nationalist polity, happily reading and writing in the Catalan language. “Linguistic immersion” in schools merely inverted the traditional linguistic scheme in an altogether unpromising way. Up to the Civil War and then Franco, Catalan was the basic popular language, even in Barcelona, while Spanish was the *langue du pain*, what was spoken by obligation, for jobs, especially in public service. Catalan nationalists expected a spiritual awakening after the harsh Spanish dictatorship, but what they got was a bureaucratic bloom, while ordinary young people in metropolitan neighborhoods and in the network of lesser cities, of immigrant parents, now could speak Catalan, but simply chose not to, except when necessary. Now Catalan was the idiom of jobs, of civil service, and Castilian the talk in the streets and shops. After Pujol's convoluted position –nationalist official culture but indulgence towards Spanish (especially Andalusian) immigration-, it became evident that more was needed than education and radio-television. “The Call” sprang up literally –*La Crida*- to press for a monolingual Catalan society, and “pujolism” backed such initiatives as far as it could (when it did not invent them outright). But, in a digital world, the appeal of “living in Catalan” (a disingenuous spin on the Sapir-Whorff thesis in the linguistics of anthropology) seemed distinctly narrow-minded. “The Call” and its successive echoes made noise, but did not change social behavior, nor improve the percentages of real (as opposed to official) use of the Catalan language. The rise of so-called “social media” –Facebook appeared in 2001, Twitter in 2004- only reinforced the sense of failure. The enormous surge of immigration from outside Spain, around a million people to Catalonia between 2001 and 2006, from Northern Morocco, from Latin America (especially Ecuador and the Dominican Republic) definitively closed the subject of monolingual and radically exclusive nationalism.

Catalonia was still a comparatively isolated area in the late 1960s and early 1970s, despite the exceptional nature of Barcelona as Spain's “second city”. The waves of immigration in the nineteenth century were from neighboring territories, notably Aragon. The two great tides in the twentieth century, up to the 1930s, and then in the 1950s and 1960s, came from more agrarian Spain, beyond any familiarity with Catalan language use. Nevertheless, the power of nationalism in the Pujol years (1980-2003) was based on a nationalist selling-point that (in Pujol's phrase) “A Catalan is anyone who works and lives in Catalonia”. This meant that those in poorer areas who simply tried to get ahead would not be bothered, as long as they sent their children to Catalan-language public schools, which they universally did. The invisible sub-text, which implied verbal skill in Catalan, remained the key to promotion and civil service access, at a time when bureaucracy grew at a fast rate. The hidden secret of Spain's apparently easy transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1975-1982 was an effective income-tax law, applied and obeyed, which gave government the ability to please all sectors, from Franco fascists to the extreme left, that guaranteed pensions to the first and university (or other administrative) jobs to the latter. This also meant that there were resources sufficient to fund the basic demands of Catalan and Basque nationalists (among others) within a framework of regional autonomy, counterbalanced by the regionalism of Castilian Spain.

This strength of resources, after entry in NATO in 1982 (subject to a plebiscite held in 1986 by the socialists, which some observers considered a “surrealistic referendum”) and also into the EEC in 1986, was quickly backed up with European investment in infrastructure and the concession of soft loans which invisibly built up public debt, as in other European periphery states. Such social wealth, lasting for two generations, was taken for granted, until by 2005 Spain seemed to have attained “normal” wealth, and had become a “rich society”.

The generational changes of the so-called “Transition” period and of the democratic monarchy had hidden costs, of course, many of which would become visible after the “Great Recession” which began in 2007-2008. For the time being, the major impact was on the expectations of earlier age groups. Non-Franco or anti-Franco persons in their fifties circa 1975 expected to inherit a social or political position for which they had waited all their lives. Such reward was not forth-coming. Instead, younger persons, in their thirties and early forties, brusquely pushed them aside. When, by the mid 1990s, the children of the winners had come of age, their position was not assured, as that of their parents had seemed to be. Their younger siblings were –and still are– devastated by the “Recession”, which has been socially lived as a full-scale depression

2.2. The Fall of Pujol and the Rise of Mas

The result of all these changes was the fall of Pujol in 2002. He was replaced in CDC (and therefore in CiU) by the latest of Pujol's lieutenants, Artur Mas. Square-jawed, with chiseled features and a wavy head of hair, Mas was clearly more attractive physically than Pujol, who –as his detractors delighted in indicating– resembled “Master Yoda” from the filmic *Star Wars* saga. Mas spoke better English than Pujol, which underlined the generational change (Pujol speaks excellent German, as a product of the *Deutsches Schule* in the 1940s, and of course French, which, until the early 1990s, was the standard foreign language for Spanish-speaking, bilingual Catalans). Mas' command of English made the new president a consistent favorite of the international press, and may have given Mas the perception that the old “medium is the message” core of Catalan linguistic nationalism could be exported to gain outside backing. Pujol, probably a shrewder politician, was never so sanguine about foreign support for some kind of action against Spanish unity.

By the end of the 1980s and through the 1990s, Catalans aspired to become Catalan civil servants, as opposed to Spanish bureaucrats, paper-pushing in the Catalan language, rather than doing innovative business start-ups, or beginning small commerce or production based on new patents. One sign in the late 1980s was the rapid expansion of NGOs, which are actually a form of private bureaucracy, imbued with a sense of mission of “public service” in another sense of term. This was a major social change in a social pattern two centuries old. It also negated the until then firmly held Catalan belief that private firms, and in general the particular concerns that made up the texture of civil society were intrinsically well-run, while public administration was woefully inefficient. As an argument, it made sense: probably the lethargic slowness of “red tape” in the traditional Monarchy (“palace affairs go slowly” is a well-worn Spanish proverb) had encouraged the conviction that Hispanic genius lay in improvisation. But the “dead hand” of a new Catalan public establishment showed that Catalans were just as prone as any other Spaniards to prefer cozy, lifetime sinecures to private-sector jobs, that were daily disappearing. The hidden pretensions of nationalist rule were also indicated by the fact that the official translation of Generalitat “councilor” (*conseller*) into English was the exalted title of “Minister”, perhaps a bit out place.

The eventual fall of Pujol came through the union of opposites. First, there was the correlation of interests in CDC and the CiU coalition that somewhat abruptly moved the president out (by then Pujol was over 70 years old), and, though discomfited, Pujol held the conviction that he would be followed by one of his numerous sons. Mas eased himself into the succession. Then the impossible

happened: the outliers joined together against and threw the pujolists out of power. ERC had always snubbed by CDC and UDC, and so relished its revenge. Needless to say, the socialists of PSC were pleased, as were the “post-communists plus greens” of ICV (“Initiative for Catalonia”, a coalition formed in 1987 of the historic communist party, the PSUC -Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, founded in 1936-, with a radical nationalist-left alliance, and a dissident communist party, which split off in 1999, after the IC had devoured the rising green movement -the “Verds”, in Catalan- to finally become ICV).

This was really when Mas came into the movie as the genuine protagonist of the Catalan national cause, although in fact he had been there for years, being chief councilor of the Catalan Generalitat under Pujol from 2001 to 2003, having previously run the so-called “ministries” of Public Works (1995-1997) and Finance (1997-2001). Already proclaimed the next candidate for president in 2002, the lesson of defeat was burned into Mas with bitterness in the Catalan elections of November 2003.

In any case, Mas had managed to intrigue against Pujol and succeed him (even though the former president, played the family option and encouraged his son Oriol to keep bidding for his succession until the latter was forced out of politics by a personal corruption scandal in 2013, and then general revelation of his family's overseas dealings in 2014). But the Catalan system of entrenched family networks produced a surprise: the heir of one of the greatest names in Catalan literature, the grandson of the poet Joan Maragall (who died in 1911 at age 61), managed to displace Mas in 2003.

2.3. Mas Humiliated by Maragall

Mas' resolution was hardened by the succeeding years by his years as “Head of Opposition” the Catalan parliament, which his considerable ambition took as a personal humiliation. He was an irritable presence during the years when socialist leader Pasqual Maragall seemed to dominate everything with his 2006 statute proposal, which glowed with the unusual support of the central government. All hopes were pinned on the statute, for hadn't the friendly, somewhat inane socialist prime minister Rodríguez Zapatero said he would back any statute that the Catalan parliament voted? All the dreams of every faction were stuffed into a politically impossible document, which was consequently doomed to failure. This package-stuffing was to a great deal a manoeuvre of Mas, pushing against the nationalist credentials of ERC. Mas had put two and two together: he had to persevere in the Pujolist dream, but he could thrust it past the socialists thanks to the nationalist weakness of ERC, which, under any circumstance, could not oppose more power given to the Generalitat. When the

Left literally imploded between 2010 and 2011, the disillusionment and the weight of the crisis swept away the nationalist-regionalist soft version of “Catalanism” and became a call for hard, tough independence. Mas believed with fervor he had found a tiger he could ride, to take him anywhere, for as long as he wanted.

Pasqual Maragall, an economist with much experience in urbanism and Barcelona city administration, had become the key socialist as mayor after 1982. He was the designer of the urban triumph of the 1992 Olympics. Secure in his national inheritance, Pasqual had nothing to prove. He delighted in informality, and was quite willing to ally himself with formerly pro-Franco Catalans and press to make over the somewhat dingy industrial port, by promoting hitherto little-known branding, using the then virtually unknown figure of Gaudí.

As someone versed in an economics-oriented perspective, Maragall intuitively understood the implications of a rapidly increasing rhythm of de-industrialization, and saw that this could only be answered by heavy investment in tourism, to take advantage of Barcelona’s seafront, lost under train-tracks and grimy small industry. Teaming up with the very conservative Antoni Samaranch, a Catalan and, most conveniently, president of the International Olympic Committee, Maragall obtained the 1992 Olympics, and proceeded to reinvent the entire urban shoreline by “opening Barcelona to the sea”. The city became prime investment beachfront, instead of a grimy industrial port. The construction helped an economic upturn, and the successful image sold on worldwide television turned Barcelona into a tourist focus in increasing and expansive success that has been maintained right up to the present.

In short, Maragall became a winner. As his star loomed, Pujol’s dirty-tricks team got to work cutting this dangerous opponent down to size. The main tool was a wicked campaign of innuendo, word to mouth, contrasting his carelessness in style and scant memory for people to Pujol’s unerring, elephant-like memory for the names of friends and enemies). Perhaps more than some other societies, Catalans love to hear dirt about leaders. Envy is omnipresent, like sand in teeth during a beach picnic. Despite the smears, he was tapped to be candidate for president of the Generalitat. He was the logical choice as leader of the Catalan socialists, a natural replacement for the wooly leaders (Joan Raventós, “Raimon” Obiols) that had unsuccessfully controlled the PSC. Maragall then led the socialists against Pujol and failed. Pasqual -as he was familiarly known-challenged CiU in the regional elections held in mid-October 1999, and though he technically “won” in the sense that he had a larger popular vote, Mas was able to scrabble together a coalition and rule, despite Maragall’s protests. Much irritated by his electoral defeat in terms of parliamentary seats against his greater electoral vote (which at first he somewhat ridiculously refused to accept) and then

by his years as “Head of Opposition”, the socialist leader recovered his style, manoeuvred ably, won the next elections in March 2003. Again, like in 1999, he had a majority of votes, but now enough socialist parliamentarians to negotiate with other parties. He formed his Tripartite coalition, to the fury of Mas.

The theme of presidential continuity was a key theme after twelve years of socialist rule, and Aznar made a point of standing down after his second term, American-style. Other United States political gimmicks like primaries were picked up, despite their difficult application to a totally different party system. In a similar American vein, there arrived an insistence, not at all successful but nonetheless persistent, that a winner-take-all system should cap elections, instead of European-style complex coalitions of lesser parties. After a certain tantrum surrounding his “stolen victory”, Maragall carefully prepared for the next visit to the polls, and then moved quickly to forge a heretofore impossible combination: the pro-independence ERC with the “post-communists-plus-greens” of ICV, all around a triumphant socialist center, while the socialists also controlled Barceona city hall. The defeat in 2003 stunned the CDC and UDC militants in the CiU nationalist coalition, who found themselves out of power for the first time in thirty-three years. How could such an outrageous event have happened? Worse still, the socialists did not just conquer the Generalitat, they continued to run the Barcelona municipal government, and that of many other cities besides, starting with Barcelona's neighboring L'Hospitalet, the second largest city in Catalonia. Having dumped Pujol, Mas and his faithful found themselves, as the phrase then went, facing a what locals termed a “long crossing of the desert”.

2.4. Instant Replay

There is a curious –and subtle– coincidence between Basque and Catalan nationalism. Each movement, taken as a whole, both envies and disdains the other, which it basically sees as a clumsy and comfortable rival. The rivalry is long standing, as is the misunderstanding, dating back to the organized origins of both movements at the end of the nineteenth century.

The subtlety lies in the sustained disconnect. Both nationalisms may make similar moves, but always at different times and with differing rhythms. Approaches of the one to Madrid, to Spain as a whole, come counter to the initiatives of the other: when one wants to leave, the rival is acting as if it wants to be closer. Coordination, outside of the links of a very few wild extremists, have been hard to forge and harder still to sustain. Both movements pull in contrary directions. Development history was a contrast: coal and iron communities versus textile communities, a late and traumatic change in heavy industry,

without a clear urban focus (Bilbao remains a conglomeration of towns), as against an early take-off, a century before, in light production, but with an unquestionable metropolitan center like Barcelona, a rival to Madrid. Basques think of their territory as separate parts that coincide with Spanish provinces, while Catalan nationalists think of Catalonia as a whole, split by four “outside”, Spanish provinces. The only similarity between the Basque Country and Catalonia comes from a century of local civil wars, the up-county mountain against urban centers, inserted into the larger and broader scheme of Spanish internal fighting.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that during the first decade of the twenty-first century, Catalonia was understood as well adapted to Spanish politics, its “State of Autonomies” not quite a federal system but with some semblances. Meanwhile, from 2001 to 2009, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV in its Spanish initials) was launched on a difficult and stubborn attempt to force a new relationship between “Euskadi” (the official name of the Basque Community) and Spain.

This is not the place to trace the intricacy of the Basque nationalist game plan, which had (among other levels) a strictly Basque dimension, in which the PNV tried to domesticate Basque nationalist terrorism, the ETA (known by all for the initials of its Basque name for “Euskadi and Freedom”), and its welter of support front organizations. The PNV intention was to disarm the terrorists by leading out front “the national fight” against Spanish centralism. Factions strongly favorable to an understanding with the “armed struggle” groups pushed out Basque president José Antonio Ardanza and brought to the foreground as his replacement, Juan José Ibarretxe, who took office in January 1999.

Quickly, Ibarretxe began to design an ambiguous revision of the Basque autonomy statute, which by 2003 had become a proposal for a “Free Associated State” (a surprising formula for those who know Puerto Rico under American control, which has such status in Spanish since 1952). This “Ibarretxe Plan”, as it slowly unfolded, polarized a Basque society already split wide open by terror tactics and police response, in an unending back and forth, with the corresponding civic demonstrations. The 2001 elections were bitterly contested, but won by the PNV and Ibarretxe, which then began to pressure in earnest.

In late 2003, the conservative PP Aznar government replied by making the convocation of plebiscites not authorized by the Spanish parliament a criminal offense punishable with jail. A year later, the “Plan” was pushed through the Basque chamber, and was sent to the congress in Madrid, where the socialists under Rodríguez Zapatero, elected in March 2004, were now in power. The proposal was defeated in 2005. Ibarretxe then convoked Basque elections in April

2005, as a “civil plebiscite” to back his initiative. Ibarretxe’s nationalist coalition won, but what then? The Spanish government was deep in secret talks with ETA, which had pledged a truce. When ETA reneged, Spanish courts finally came down hard on the political wing of the terror group, which progressively lost importance without quite falling into disintegration. Ibarretxe then, in the midst of this dynamic situation, in September 2007 announced a “hoja de ruta” (i.e., a “ground plan with steps”, in Spanish) to achieve the “respect due to the will of the Basque Nation”. The push and shove with the Constitutional Tribunal, closed a year later by September 2008, brought the “Ibarretxe Plan” to a halt. New elections in 2009 gave the PNV a clear plurality, but a coalition of the socialists, the PP, together with the visibility gained by a new anti-nationalist player, UPyD (about which more below), a split-off with a locally charismatic female leader who bolted socialist ranks, with a harder stance than the socialists on “nationalist excesses”, but without the rancid conservatism of the PP. A stock party candidate, a socialist named Patxi López came to power, with a characteristic Spanish surname representative of Spanish labor immigrants in the highly ethnicized Basque context. Ibarretxe retired from politics. His PNV successor, Iñigo Ukkullu, president of Euskadi after the October 2012 Basque elections, had taken an explicitly cool stance towards anything the Catalan nationalists have done thereafter.

The Catalan nationalist game plan after 2010 has had much similarity with all this posturing, with “dignity” as the code word instead of “respect”. Of course, absolutely no Catalan nationalist will accept that there is any similitude –or even comparability– between the Basque “Plan Ibarretxe” and the pro-independence adventures of Artur Mas. The Catalan “full de ruta” and the Basque “hoja de ruta”-as can be seen- obviously have nothing in common. Why Catalan nationalists chose to repeat a campaign that had clearly failed is a question to be answered. An attempt at an explanation will follow, but basically in the Catalan case, the changes seem to have come from the unexpectedly public reaction towards independence as a magical solution, although of course crowds can be mobilized in many, many manners and ways.

3. The Implosion of the Left and Dissatisfaction Channeled into Nationalism

The desire for independence is a sign of recently-acquired wealth. Not the fat cat, nouveau riche kind of excess money which just wants to show off, in the style of “conspicuous consumption” first theorized a century ago by Thorstein Veblen. The late Jane Jacobs, perhaps America’s top urban critic, who became a Canadian refugee from the U.S. after political persecution in the late 1960s, pointed to the inherent kind of separatism she could observe in the 1970s and 1980s, as the so-

called “Quiet Revolution” which made Quebec wealthy as a society annulled all sense of “French Canada” and brought on the plebiscites of René Levesque in 1980 and then in 1995 under the leadership of Lucien Bouchard. Jacobs was talking about the transformation of a poor, conservative Catholic, primarily agrarian society into an urbanized, city-oriented social network, which now looked around and found itself well-to-do, but reacted with fear and resentment at having to share its new-found “Quebecquois-way-of-life” with other provinces.

But there is a further twist. Recent research into Yugoslav Republics in the 1980s shows an initially similar pattern. But say Slovenia or Serbia as extremes, with Bosnia-Herzegovina in between, were faced with impoverishment through inflation and then sudden recovery in 1990 under the federal leadership of Ante Marković (apparently guided by “economic shock guru” Jeffrey D. Sachs, in a case that worked). Then, as recovery began to fade in 1991, and the basic dysfunction of the economy became slowly visible, dissatisfaction grew apace, and found in nationalist appeals a cure-all remedy that seemed new and fresh after the stale, repetition of socialist-liberal civic options, that droned on in new variants of the *langage de bois* of the Communist era. In the 1991 elections, the nationalist platforms won, and more reasonable civic options collapsed. The end result would be confrontation, and, ultimately civil war, abetted to in common by naked Slovenian secessionism and angry Serbian centralism.

In Catalonia, this process of transformative dissatisfaction took the form of the political implosion of the socialists and the post-communists. During the 1980s and 1990s, Catalan politics were a delicate equilibrium between the nationalists, who controlled the regional government, or Generalitat, and the socialists, who held fast the provincial administrations or Diputacions (in the four provinces that make up Catalonia since 1833 in Spanish organization) as well as the municipal government of Barcelona, with a budget of considerable size. Voters –to the frustration of Pujol in the Generalitat and of Maragall in the mayoralty- liked the balance, which up to a point kept both sides in check. Early on, Pujol shattered the “Metropolitan Corporation” of shared services that had been set up in late Franco times, which gave the socialists a clear domination in the metro Barcelona area. The Pujolists, further tried to gut the Provincial Diputations of any power, and set up an alternative form of local administration, based on the Ancien Régime, eighteenth century *veguerías*. Obviously the redundancies produced by the 1977-1978 settlement in Spain offered complex layers for graft.

The 2003 regional elections finally permitted an alliance of ERC “Left nationalists”, socialists and post-communists to govern in the regional parliament and in the Generalitat, as well as in the Barcelona town hall. The Tripartite, under Maragall, finally had it all. They squandered their opportunity,

and, after two terms, lost the Generalitat, and with two ridiculous socialist mayors (Joan Clos during 1997-2006, Jordi Hereu, 2006-2011), both silly and posturing political figures, the nationalists in turn, by Xavier Trias of CDC, who from 2011 to the June 2015 municipal elections, had the double package of regional and major city government. Then nationalists in turn squandered their opportunity, and lost the mayoralty to a confused leftist coalition led by an anti-forclosure activist, Ada Colau, in a vague relation with Podemos.

When the 2008-2009 “crisis” (as it is commonly referred to in Spain) put the general sense of wealth on a minimal threshold well below the heretofore imaginable, the effect was, first, confusion and depression, and then anger. Social debate in 2006-2007 considered that a real-term minimum wage (not the legal limit, which was lower) for university graduates that hovered around a thousand euros a month was a scandal. This, for example, was the standard payment for a university instructorship per course taught. By 2010, this “salary” was down to 300 euros, and the very idea of earning a 1000 euros was literally mouth-watering. In sum, foreigners don't see Catalonia, they see Barcelona, the model urban development, the turn-around city that remade itself over with the 1992 Olympics. Visitors perceive a vibrant cosmopolitan community, mobbed by tourists, marked by luxury shops and up-to-date hipster attitudes. But they ignore the down-scale slide. At the time of closing, the Barcelona press (*El Periódico de Catalunya*, 28 November 2015, ps. 36-37) reports that “deep poverty” now affects about 12% of Catalans, and that the risk of impoverishment for Catalan middle class has gone up from 2013 (when it stood at some 27.1%) to 37.7% for the following year. The worst affected are the young. Long term unemployment, at 15.1% of those without jobs in 2008, just before the so-called “recession” hit, is now at an appalling 58.9% in the third trimester of 2015. Another newspaper adds that a very recent report by the Association of Savings banks affirms that university graduates can expect some ten years of short-time “temp” or junk jobs before being able to stabilize a longer work contract [*20 Minutos*, 1 December 2015, p. 14]. Of course, these are all basically international trends: the impartial Pew Group, a social analysis center, has just announced, in mid-December 2015, that the “middle class” has ceased to be the majority grouping in the U.S. [*Time Magazine Online*, 13 December 2015].

In other words, the “revolution of rising expectations” (a concept made common by U.S. modernization sociologist Daniel Lerner in the 1950s) had sustained social aspirations and the dream of broad-scale social ascent from the late 1960s, the end of the Franco régime onwards, and through the years of the “Democratic Transition”, was stopped. The impetus had been kept up during the long socialist years (1982-1996), and under the Aznar governments. The Transition had been achieved by reliable income tax, and then European funds for

infrastructure as of the mid-1980s, and finally with an uncontrolled housing boom -especially in coastal areas- under the conservatives in 1996-2003. The return of the socialists in 2003, as a result of conservative mishandling of the first major jihadi fundamentalist terror attack in Madrid was positive reinforcement to prove “rising expectations”, as was the socialist overthrow of the nationalists in Catalonia that same year. The surge of immigration fueled the sense of mass entitlement. Then the bottom fell out of everything.

Barcelona, as counter-capital to Madrid in Spain, always had a “glass ceiling” in terms of social ambition, not just in the wellknown feminist sense, which remains largely true in business, less so in politics, most visibly among nationalists, with strong female leaders among radical nationalists, notably Carme Forcadell in the *Assemblea Nacional Catalana* (ANC, founded in April 2011) and Muriel Casals in *Òmnium Cultural*, but even in the Mas cabinet. The point about a generic “glass ceiling” is that it is easy to achieve a certain level of success and recognition, but very hard to rise above that relatively low and common position of “visibility”, i.e., in what Oscar Wilde famously called “a kind of ostentatious obscurity” in his essay “The Decay of Lying” (1891). Then, in 2009-2010, this general level of “ostentatious obscurity” dropped, and hard, with a bump.

The process of abrupt stop to a sense of general “rising expectation”, coincided with the failure to push through in Spain the vast demands included in the 2006 revision of the autonomy statutes, which included what amounted to an unlimited and unrealistic wish list. When this was turned down by the higher courts, the sense of betrayal was palpable: the social protest in 2010 was the harbinger of the 11 September 2012 eye-popping demonstration, with its infinity of lone-star pro-independence banners and almost no strict Catalan flags per se. Nationalism had overtaken social or civic organization, and replaced it with a dream, impervious to any argumentation other than assent. At the same time, The socialists imploded, became reduced to their hard core, and the post-communists did even more so. The outcome was simple. Nationalism took over their space, and thus unbalanced the traditional, long-standing equilibrium between left and right. However, this nationalism had to be new, fresh, different. If Catalan, it would be explicitly pro-independence, with nothing of the footsy-playing and shilly-shally style of *pujolisme* and its “fish in the basket” policy (*peix al cove*) of negotiating little advantages through parliamentary blackmail, one by one. Nor would it be the standard radical nationalist groups, the heirs of the PSAN (Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional dels Països Catalans, or “Socialist National Liberation Party of the Catalan Countries”) or the MDT (Moviment de Defensa la Terra, literally “Movement in Defense of [Our] Land”) with their out-moded communist ideology and imagery covering their dreams of urban guerrilla resistance, that past reminiscences from the European terrorism

of the 1970s ultimately looked back to the Estat Català of the 1930s. Both organizations went into conventional electoral mode by the turn of the twenty-first century, but they had no relevance except as reference points. The new Catalan independence demand would have to be a groundswell that overpowered traditional parties from the left, and turned Mas into a figure of almost absurd desperation. But -surprise- it could also be the presentation of a clear Spanish nationalist alternative, clothed in the language of the left (rather than the Franco right, and Falange). This would be Ciutadans, or local versions, in coalitions, or Podemos, about which more later.

3.1. The Left Undergoes Intense Compression and Leaves Politically Unoccupied Space

In Western, post-industrial societies, based on the idealization of choice, it has become comfy to speak of “identity”. This is in practice a foolish buzzword, born of the confusion of the 1990s, as marxism folded (after so many years in the intellectual limelight, since 1968), feminism triumphed, and the multiple varieties of gayness (GLTB and further possible nuances) followed in the feminist wake. A new term was needed to conjoin all forms of protest: poverty and “class”, as the rich became richer, national or ethnic subordination or segregation, as cosmopolitanism spread, or the enforced social invisibility of women and “sexual minorities”, as the code of male, macho supremacy faded. The new term was of course “identity”. The problem is that the new usage implied the existence of a definitive something outside of the individual which defined him or her. And there is no something, beyond identification, either of the individual and his or her choice, or of the presumptions and prejudices of others in society regarding that person and his/her classification.

The immediate effect of this new theme of the 1990s was the legitimatization of nationalism as a protest vehicle rather than as a vehicle for defensive political control. That too, of course, remained but the traditional ideologies of protest – the multiple socialisms and “workerisms”- tended to crumble in the post-communist wave of optimism, with the confirmation of neo-liberal verities that consecrated the 1980s nostrums of the Thatcher-Reagan “counter-revolution”. The impact of the so-called “world recession” after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 left scant discourses of protest that did not invoke the anarchic spontaneity of street violence such as made itself visible on television and the web in the actions against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in November 1999 and against the 27th G8 Summit in Genoa in July 2001. This made trashing luxury storefronts and spectacular squats with nose-ringed squatters in the forefront as the main forms of action, scarcely an effective

platform for sustained political activity. In Spain, protests in 2011 against the Rodríguez Zapatero socialist government's inept handling of the economic situation, especially regarding students, had their spell but could not maintain their impulse. There was a self-conscious attempt to recall the 1968 revolts in youth manifestoes circulating in February 2011, and street actions could be quickly pulled together through cell phone messaging, but a sustained effort was something else again. New left parties accordingly arose after 2012. In Catalonia, this frustration moved into the transformation of nationalism as it has been until up to the 15-M incidents.

It should be stressed that by 2003, Catalan socialism was brain-dead. The PSC (*Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya*, literally, the Party of the Socialists of Catalonia, in the plural, to reflect the considerable number of “sensibilities” it encompassed at its foundation in 1978) included numerous lucid intellectuals in its ranks and among its followers; during the last thirty or so years, it was in fact the party of the intelligentsia, but as an organization it had become dysfunctional and corrupt. Its allegedly “federal” relationship with the Spanish socialists, the PSOE was a source of unending internal and external friction in a Catalan context. Its message by the 2003 elections, despite its success, consisted of meaningless code-words and hollow rituals, made palatable with standard crowd-pleasers like giant paellas for a multitude, the bulk of which tended to wander off at speechifying time.

The post-communists were not much better off. As has already been remarked, creating “Initiative for Catalonia” in the late 1980s, allowed the communists to swallow up “Nacionalistes d'Esquerra”, as it had historically done before, and then to absorb and annul the various Green (*Verds*) factions, so as to become ICV in the mid-1990s. But this modernization or revamping of “the Party” had wiped out the old-left content of the Communist PSUC, a historical “unified socialist party” from Stalinist times which had modernized itself into a new left refuge in the 1970s, at the end of the Franco régime and during the early “Transition”. By 2003, only just a bit “pinker” than the Catalan socialists (but not by much), “Initiative” faced the same problem of lack of content as the socialists, and disconnection from the unions (the socialist UGT -General Workers' Union in its Spanish initials- and the communist *Comisiones Obreras* or “Workers' Commissions”) which were in free fall themselves.

Maragall tried as president to impose himself on the hard and fossilized PSC, which had its force in Barcelona and its metropolitan area, in the latter space in competition with the post-communists. Maragall's position viz-à-viz the PSC was basically that of an acknowledged chief who was nevertheless not obeyed and considered a kind of outsider. As a result, Maragall's attempt to renew or enliven

party discourse was rejected as “*maragallades*” (an untranslatable Catalan expression that perhaps could best be captured in Monty-Python-speak as “Maragall’s silly gestures”). This internal rebuttal worked against Maragall’s authority, as it jived with the vicious CiU whispering campaign lasting many years, which accused him of being a closet lush. In fact, he did not drink, but simply had some signs of early onset Alzheimer’s (a condition which is not even an indication of political failure, as the example of Ronald Reagan shows). That the attack was fake did not mean that it did not work socially.

In any case, Maragall was demoted by the PSC aparatchiks in October 2006 (officially the next month), and he was replaced by a vague and inarticulate militant from the Lower Llobregat socialist heartland, José Montilla, whose main distinction was the fact that he was himself an immigrant rather than a native-born Catalan. This was proven by his atrocious spoken Catalan, cruelly ridiculed in the most characteristically spiteful Catalan way (see on Youtube back episodes of the TV satirical program “*Polònia*”, the name an irony on the Tripartite weight of the left, allegedly like communist-run Poland, as well as an evident allusion to the nineteenth century insulting reference to the Catalans a “*polacos*” -literally, Poles, from Poland- an obscure insult that survives today). Montilla governed in cheerful disharmony from late 2006 to late 2010. The result was that, by the next regional elections, on 28 November 2010, the left had simply collapsed inward, and in its place there remained an empty space, waiting to be filled. Why this disaster? Most observers blamed the irrelevance of socialist recovery proposals expounded by the leadership of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at a Spanish state level (Zapatero was prime minister from April 2004 to December 2011), and the general disharmony shown by the Catalan Tripartite cabinet during its years in power.

Mas, however, had a huge satisfaction. In the 1 November 2006 voting for the Catalan parliament, *Convergència i Unió* had produced a replay of Maragall’s higher voter turnout with fewer than the necessary deputies, as in 1999. Given alignments and alliances, being the most voted party meant nothing: pluralities got you nowhere. In the 28 November 2010 elections, the high CiU vote (higher than in 2006) swept the field. But the problem of the imbalance between number of electors and number of deputies became a sore point, even in Spain politics, between the two-party contenders, the socialists and the Popular Party conservatives. Both, when out of power due to coalitions, demanded a winner-take-all system, but they contradicted themselves as soon as they could muster a majority alliance.

3.2. Mas Takes Over

Only the nationalist ERC survived the electoral debacle of the three parties in coalition, in part because of the internal system of leadership, somewhat chaotic seen from outside, but which permitted the shedding off of one chief when his usefulness was at an end, and replace him with somebody else. The durability of the Esquerra was duly noted by its nationalists rivals.

Of course the nationalist coalition was also worn-out and tired, with respective networks of pujolista believers and Christian democrats mired in graft to levels that defy credibility (in late 2015, Pujol, who had by then acknowledged having large sums salted away abroad, was accused of possessing, with his family, an astonishing two-and-a-half billion euros). But the two terms out of office –from 2003 to 2007, and on to 2010– considerably stimulated their creativity. CiU efforts had concentrated in pressuring ERC to the outer limits of the political imagination, simply by adding improbable demands, one after another, onto the revised Estatut. By its very nature, ERC was obligated to oblige. Given Spanish socialist prime minister Rodríguez Zapatero’s careless promise to back any statute that Maragall might present for approval to the central parliament, the Catalan socialists were disarmed, unable to trim the more extreme demands, and, anyway, their local power bosses, safe in their municipalities, cared relatively little for “national” Catalan politics, given that their voters notoriously tended to abstain from regional elections, and participated only in municipal and Spanish legislative voting. Thus ERC had to maintain its nationalist “street creds” –its believability– under stern CiU presence, while remaining locked in the allegedly “un-natural” embrace of socialists and post-communists. So ERC simply racked up CiU nationalist demands, and the unsteady equilibrium of the Tripartite coalition made the left tacitly accept what amounted to CiU blackmail.

Once back in the saddle again in December 2010, after the regional elections, CiU and Mas understood that the coalition needed a serious face-lifting. There are indications that Pujol and Mas, with close advisors, met some time around the Partido Popular electoral victory in the general elections that swept Rodríguez Zapatero and the Spanish socialists from power at the end of 2011, to assess just how to ratchet up the level of assertive nationalism. The Constitutional Tribunal, as was to be expected, rejected aspects of the top-heavy 2006 statute project, as the PP clearly expected. Then Mas –or Mas with Pujol– had a revelation. This move was presented to many persons by delegates from the new CDC foundation CatDem, presented as a “space for dialogue”. The delegates would smoothly say: “The President has perceived that there will be a Nationalist turn (un gir nacional)”, or words to that effect. Truthfully, although there had been a significant demonstration in Barcelona in mid-July 2010, with the significant

slogan “We Are a Nation. We Decide” (“*Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim*”), against the Constitutional High Court ruling which had considerably reduced Catalan ambitions, and which had been announced at the end of June, it was easy not to take very seriously the presidential announcement that was so discreetly divulged. There were then a lot of large demonstrations in Barcelona, all with a relative frequency. It was easy to underestimate the message. This time, it was different.

3.3. Rajoy as the New Focus of Negation

A good part of the difference can be attributed to the conservative Partido Popular cabinet that took over after their December 2011 electoral triumph, under the diffident leadership of Mariano Rajoy. According to one version, the “world recession” began in the suburbs then fastest-growing city in the U.S., Las Vegas. Bad loans for property buyers helped set off the panic that uncovered the esoteric “financial products” that had been touted as a sure thing by investment banks over the previous years. All Spain spent the Aznar years living on a PP-invented high of cheap credit and wild construction, a policy thereafter maintained by Zapatero's socialists. When the international panic eventually hit Spain, the entire country fell like a house of cards. A century-old network of local public entities, provincial savings banks and municipal credit and loan associations folded, uncovering many seams of smelly crony deals and naked corruption. As local financial institutions collapsed, the over-extended called in loans, which naturally led to a wave of foreclosures: it is estimated today, in late 2015, that some 80% of the empty apartments in Spain are currently held by the banks that survived the crack-up. To understand the social implications of this dynamic, it should be pointed out that, in Spain, the handover of a mortgaged property under foreclosure does not annul the original loan, as it does, for example, in the United States. Undoubtedly, the Zapatero socialists underestimated the “world recession” and the devastation it would cause in Spain: in 2007, there was actually a government surplus in public income, and Zapatero unwisely decided that a 400 € return package to some thirteen million taxpayers would serve to pick up the flagging domestic market in 2008. It didn't, and by 2011, the pain at street-level was very real. The socialists had confirmed their reputation for dishonesty, already established in the 1990s. The hurt among the voting public led to the unpalatable choice of voting in the conservative PP, with a landslide absolute majority.

Under Rajoy, the conservatives imposed radical cuts in public spending, especially visible cutbacks in public services by then -in place since the Franco years- very much taken for granted. Salaries plummeted, as did buying power. This affected different areas in opposite ways. The more agrarian areas tended to

back the PP no matter what. Other zones could be bought off for a time, or punished according to their political orientation. The Valencia region -then solidly in PP hands- wallowed in sleaze, bribery, and absurd building deals backed with public funds, while the long-established easy public money hand-outs run by the socialists that kept the the Andalusian agro-towns socially quiescent were uprooted by anti-corruption investigations, currently with two successive regional presidents under indictment. By the 2015 municipal elections, the bigger cities and towns led the rebellion against the PP, which has proved to be an unstable and divided horde of very diverse interests, rather than a coherent party. Rajoy has shown himself to a timid leader (and an embarrassing public speaker) but some of his team of executives, like his spokesperson, the dumpy but lively Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, more than make up for his lack of projection. Further, Rajoy gives proof of being a calculating, canny politician, easy to underestimate. But he is certainly hard to like, outside of certain Spanish heartlands, where his popularity seems genuine.

3.4. The Idea of Protest Negative Voting

In Catalonia, the dislike came quickly, after a very brief honeymoon between the Catalan PP and Mas. The signal of street-level nationalist complaint and anger was a protest plebiscite initiative that took place against Zapatero. The action began, seemingly without any hidden hand and with certain spontaneity, in the coastal hill town of Arenys de Munt, above Barcelona, which in the summer of 2009 organized a protest “consultation” (*consulta*, in Catalan) on the matter of independence. The voting, held two days after the symbolic 11 September celebration, set off a wave of reactions, most in support and enthusiastic. The fact that neo-falangistas protested -however trivial their demonstration- only made things better from the organizers' point of view. This was an open call for voting as a form of civil disobedience. The Arenys movement went forward, was imitated elsewhere, and not much happened beyond the town giving itself a monument - inaugurated a year later- for its gumption.

But the idea of protest voting also caught on with anti-nationalists, explicitly with the feeling of going beyond the socialist party, now considered worn out. This sense of civic resentment and a rejection of politics-as-is led to the rise of protest parties: *Unión Progreso y Democracia* (Union, Progress and Democracy” in Spanish, better known by its initials UPyD) in 2007, which quickly peaked and was limited by excessive protagonism of the founder, an anti-nationalist and socialist activist Rosa Díez in the Basque country, who broke with the PSOE for its soft policies on Basque nationalism. And a rival force, similarly regional in origin but with Spanish-level aspirations, *Ciutadans* (“Citizens”, in Catalan), founded in 2005-2006 in Catalonia, as an anti-nationalist and post-socialist force,

which rejected CiU hegemony and socialist concessions to nationalism. The resentment against “conventional politics” (still Zapatero, but by then Mas) was spread by the 15-M movement in mid-May 2011, which culminated prophetically in a mass demonstration surrounding the Catalan parliament (similar human chains had been linked around the Chamber of Deputies, in Madrid, so this was not a merely Catalan rage). Finally, in January 2014 on a Madrid-Andalusian axis, various young poli-sci university professors and their associates established *Podemos* (“We Can” in Spanish, with a clear neo-Obama ring), which did surprisingly well in the European parliament elections in May 2014 and then in the May 2015 municipal elections throughout Spain. An allied coalition to Podemos now controls the Madrid municipal government, but also, with a different coalition, that of Barcelona. The current matra, therefore, is that classic two-party politics is over as far as Spanish politics is concerned.

The 28 June 2010 demonstration was significant, for being revealing of collective attitudes. The details of the Constitutional Tribunal’s scissor work were distinctly abstruse, and so did not form the true sense of the protest, nor the cause of the genuine indignation manifested in a large demonstration with a crowd unquestionably in the hundreds of thousands (if perhaps not the million participants that any “*manifestació monstre*” or really big mass demo claims in Barcelona or indeed all Spain). What provoked popular outrage was the retouching or manhandling of a legal text that the Catalan parliament had approved and which further had been passed in referendum, on 18 June 2006.

3.5. Nullification as a Guide

Catalan federal feeling, for want of a better expression, -i.e., the role of Catalonia and/or Barcelona in Spain- has a visible confusion between federalism, which ultimately means a strong central government over that of the participating states or provinces, and confederation, which implies the superior sovereignty of the part over the whole. This is by no means a new phenomenon. In the nineteenth century, Catalan federals loved “Honest Abe” Lincoln, the Emancipator of slaves, but unconsciously used and defended John Calhoun’s quite contrary ideas. Almirall broke over precisely this issue with the charter founder of the Spanish federal movement, Francisco Pi Margall, a Catalan, but one who lived out his political life in Madrid. In turn, Almirall’s rivals and enemies found him too federal and consistent for their conservative and clerical taste in Catalan exceptionalism.

The current conflict, like others before invoked with frequency (like the 1934 constitutional crisis and October revolt in Barcelona), all go back to the Calhounian notion of nullification. The particular entity (to use Almirall’s

language, the particularisme) always has the right to check general measures when these are imposed within its borders. But differently, what Catalonia decides should not be adrogated by any other authority. This (racial slavery aside) was the legal issue on which the South seceded and on which the Confederacy stood, and lost, in 1861-1865. The North Unionists won, and, twenty-some years later, in the mid-1880s, the term “unionism” was borrowed in Great Britain by Liberals that bolted from Gladstone to reform the Conservative Party against Irish Home Rule. Today, in Catalonia, “unionism” is an angry insult hurled by pro-independence nationalists at those who are not in agreement with full separation. “Nullification”, on the contrary, is a foreign concept, known only to those who are familiar with U.S. history. But the political sense of the term -and of the legal cause for which South Carolina fought so aggressively, beyond the crudeness of the “peculiar institution” inherent in agrarian capitalism in the Americas- remains quite present in Catalonia today.

Nullification is a core juridical question, that marks the dividing line on the hazy border between federation and confederation. Politics is famously the art of the possible negotiation despite deep disagreement. But nullification is notoriously a spoiler argument, which establishes a take-it-or-leave-it position, pushes practical questions into the background, and makes issues emotional, here-I-make-my-stand and do-or-die.

Mas had understood that CiU, or simply CDC, had an option to play which had not been used in the past. CDC, and the CiU coalition, had been ultimately “Spanish” organizations, despite their staunch Catalan nationalism. They had never tried to occupy separatist or independentist political space, a political and ideological sector that everybody (or at least anybody who counted) considered a ridiculous and postering minority. It was time for a major shift. One sign, easy to miss, was the intense activity of the private nationalist entity Òmnium Cultural, set up in the late Franco period, in 1961, by various Catalan moneymen with a strong ethnic bent. The visibility of Òmnium, previously somewhat invisible was a real signal.

The 11 September holiday in 2012 was thus a dividing line in the development of Catalan nationalism. Mainstream nationalism, heretofore reasonable and regionalist in outlook became pro-independence with a vengeance.

4. Mas in the Fast Lane

Mas wanted to play for high stakes; he wanted to bet high. His problem, as a gambler, however, was that he was plagued by consistent bad luck. He could read the signs and the faces, but things just did not play out right.

The enthusiasm for the “Arab Spring” of the 2011 led throughout Spain, and in Catalonia, to the 15-M (15-May) street occupation movement, also called the “Moviment dels indignats” (in English, “The Movement of The Indignant”) which took over the main squares of Madrid and Barcelona, in that order. Despite the key Madrid street dynamic, Mas was convinced that there would be a significant “shift in national attitudes”, and sent out messengers to all possibly interested persons of influence regarding what would become Generalitat policy. In fact, the 11 September demonstration in 2012 was public certification of a very basic change in popular nationalist attitudes. But the 15-M movement’s assertive and angry protests in Barcelona, on 15 June 2011, were aimed directly at the Catalan Parliament and its elected representatives as the source of all evil, which was a harbinger of future distress. Even during the street actions but especially after arrests, protesters laid blame on provocateurs from the Generalitat police.

Mas ignored the 15-M protest (in fact, considered it quite subversive) and took to heart the 11 September demonstration the following year, which was unquestionably spectacular. He then gambled heavily on support, and called spot elections for 25 November of that same 2011, hot on the colorful show that television coverage had carried across the country: bright flags with stars and hundreds of thousands of starry-eyed people, families with children enjoying a balmy late summer’s day on the Mediterranean, in a festive mood, with smiling, teasing defiance. Mas was convinced that he could win big with the happy crowds in mind. He didn’t.

The mass line (no pun intended) during the 2012-2013 season was the “Catalan Peoples’ right to vote”, specifically in a referendum. This was pushed in the successive gimmicks that the Assemblea Nacional Catalana thought up for the following 11 Septembers, in 2013 and 2014. Then came the success of the Maidan Square protest in Kiev, with the overthrow of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, and the resulting civil war in the East Ukraine: this was an area which could ambiguously be considered South Russia. Any Russian government would maintain the soft borders and the fictions that Soviet leader Khrushchev set in place in 1954, under the Soviet Union, so long as the border republic remained in a Moscow-centered orbit. The political success of a west Ukrainian nationalist program in the Kiev revolution set off a harsh Russian response. In this move, Russian Republic president Vladimir Putin knew he could count on support even from the bulk of opponents to his hard-line régime. With naked Russian backing Crimea set up a protest administration, held a secessionist plebiscite, and split off from the Ukraine. Already in early March 2014, both German premier Angela Merkel and United States’ president Barack Obama stated separately that Crimean referendum -held on 16 March- was “illegal” and that any further such actions in the Donets Basin would go nowhere,

even as trade restrictions were imposed by the United States and the EU on the Russian Federation, which responded with barriers of its own (some of which hurt Catalan agriculture and business rather badly). British prime minister David Cameron agreed with his colleagues, as did, needless to say, conservative PP Spanish premier Mariano Rajoy. So much for the Mas argument about the Catalan right to a referendum.

4.1. The 9-N “Referendum”

Despite the limits imposed by previous legislation against Ibarretxe, invoked by the courts, Mas prevailed with his referendum. It was held on 9 November 2014, as a “civic demonstration”, based on “the democratic right to vote”, and indeed votes were cast in special cardboard containers, as the legal ballot boxes could not be used. Since Spain has held “surrealistic plebiscites” and Catalan nationalism has developed an addiction for direct democracy, the results were held up in scorn by opponents, who naturally did not participate. Proponents, who did, in turn logically produced a vast majority, in representation of themselves. The confrontation went on.

The “9-N” convoked by the Generalitat and which the Spanish high courts (Supreme Court and Constitutional Tribunal) revoked, produced a pantomime vote, which no one was going to take seriously except ardent pro-independence voters. Certainly no foreign power was going to back Catalan radicalized nationalism. The “geopolitics” of the Catalan situation were inherently unfavorable. In the 1930s, Catalan nationalists could evoke the rivalry of the French Third Republic and Mussolini’s Italy as trumps against Spain. But in the twenty-first century, only France was left, and despite its numerous past invasions up to the middle of nineteenth-century and the formal pacification of the Pyrenees border, there was little likelihood of French “protection”. To begin with, such a step would shatter the EU, which was a “club of States”, not of peoples. As in the 1930s, who gained from the breakup of Spain? Not France in any case, as any changes south of the Pyrenees border would provoke serious fissures in France itself, and in addition, now fragment the European Union itself.

Despite the 9 November charade, the new line became “the right to decide” (el dret a decidir) as an inherent democratic principle. But by 2014, the vague, pleasant-sounding but insubstantial arguments offered by Mas spokespersons were of increasing irrelevance to any of the powers, regardless of the special pleading. The sweetness of the “Arab Spring” had turned sour: Egypt was again under military rule with a mere façade of parliamentary government, which was fine by Western standards, given that vicious civil wars now devastated Syria and Libya. There was scant interest in the breakup of Spain, which in this increasingly

bleak international context seemed more positive as a stable state with secure armed forces –willing to help in NATO missions– than as a shattered hulk, dangerously embittered within itself, and open to further fragmentation. With the memory of the long-lasting Yugoslavia wars (from 1991 to 2001) outside the EU's borders, the last thing anybody with public responsibility in Europe or North America wanted (or wants) is any kind of civil war within the Union. Catalan nationalists could get isolated spokespersons –a few United States congressmen here, a Danish windy parliamentary hoping for a nice solution there– but that did not amount to any serious support, although it logically made Madrid more and more nervous. Since the Rajoy government was quite inept in its PR handling of any difficulty –a long and lovingly retained PP tradition–, the tendency for Spanish nationalists to run off at the mouth (or the keyboard) was a natural outcome. Visceral anti-Catalan tweets burn on the social media, and appear to justify the Catalan call for independence in the face of such ardent hatred, decked out in conservative media and radio/television roundtables with some astonishingly absurd conspiracy theories.

This thriving negative reply was in fact Mas' only boon in the gamble he was playing. The summer of 2015, as the constitutional confrontation between Barcelona and Madrid dragged on (and signs of flagging spirits and tiredness began to show in pro-independence ranks, at popular level) there came two serious blows. At a local level, investigative judges revealed a much deeper, richer level of corruption surrounding Pujol and CDC, so much so that the standard coalition partner UDC, led by Duran Lleida, Mas' eternal rival, bolted from the coalition. Given the notoriously dirty past of the Catalan Christian Democrats, this was a warning of graft and profiteering iceberg of which only the ugly tip was visible. The mess (whether or not the investigation was pushed from above in Madrid) spoiled the Mas argument that Catalonia had to split off from the filth that was Spanish politics, with the socialists mired in all manner of payola in their Andalusian fiefdom and the PP conservatives rolling in the muck in Valencia, Murcia, Extremadura and the Madrid municipality and autonomous region. Conservative Catalan nationalism was clearly up to its ears in the sludge as much as any other established party, including the Catalan socialists. This hurt many deeply illusioned voters who had dreamt about an equalitarian Catalonia marked by fiscal justice: the Gracia neighborhood, for instance, in the summer of 2015, was marked by messages hanging from balconies calling for a Free Catalonia in which “little people” are not crushed by the abusive wealthy.

Furthermore, the central government chatter during 2015 about GDP signs of improvement and macro-economic gains meant little to potential voters, as street-level household budgets remained hard pressed, income was low, unemployment stubbornly high, and the incitement to consumption lay basically

stagnant, except when commerce engaged in exaggerated discount sales. Were that not enough, many were sufficiently shrewd enough to understand that Spain's general trend of recovery was in itself a bubble, based on low prices for petroleum and other similar resources. Crudely put, what was bad for the Russian economy was good for Spain.

4.2. The Summer of 2015

Durring the summer of 2015, there developed an emotional pandemia of raw political optimism among nationalists converted to “*independentisme*”. There was much talk and press columnist chatter about The Day After, when, with the clear manifestation of “the Catalan people's collective desire for independence”, Spain would automatically yield. In the hot days of July and August, everybody of course was asking the same: What shall happen? Everybody, that is, except for the vast horde of true believers who were convinced that The Sea Would Part. Such enthusiasts assured all and sundry that any words to the contrary were mere scare tactics, to be disdained. At the same time, Mas clearly expected to be arrested (at least that is what he was telling foreign diplomats in private this last summer); indeed, he seemed be actively working towards that objective, a situation which paradoxically might be in his favor in the long run. Accordingly, the figure of “martyr-president” Lluís Companys was trotted out, in TV specials on the Catalan channel and in similar press materials and books previously commissioned and now published, to remind faithful Catalans that they (or at least their grandparents) had been there before: Companys rebelled against the conservative Republican government in October 1934, led the the suppression of the military revolt of 1936, and was executed by the triumphant Franco régime in 1940. During October, the month in which Companys had been summarily tried and shot, the theme became quite repetitive, as if preparing public opinion for a similar punishment. This was notforthcoming, at least not yet.

Many former “*pujolistes*” (however much disgusted with the money scandals of the Pujol family) cheerfully remained within the lone star fold, and were not going to follow Duran Lleida (or the candidate Ramon Espadaler) and the UDC in the defense of new found *seny* (a Catalan term for the most hard-nosed kind of commonsense). So of course did the faithful followers of Mas. But, in the meantime, left independentist opinion began to form, pull together and congeal. Leftist pro-independence voters would be damned if they were going to vote again for Mas. As a result, in the 27 September 2015 elections, called familiarly the “27-S”, without any absolute majority, the decisive voting plurality was not the coalition of Mas and his CDC with the now independentist ERC and a few stray agitators “from civil society” (ANC, Onnium Cultural, entities which, from being satellites of Mas, have become his guides). Quite the contrary, the deciding bloc

are 10 check deputies of the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP, or *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular*). The CUP is a highly significant grouping, as its program is the same as that of the new right in Europe, but it is on the extreme ostentatiously Leninist left. The CUP calls for separation from Spain, and independence, but also from the EU. The difference is that the CUP –and the Catalan scene in general– in pro-refugee and pro-peace (and, accordingly, anti-Daesh, but without fighting). This serves as a useful contrast between the seemingly consistent contrarian nature of Catalan politics and what happens as a rule elsewhere in Spain or on the Continent. In the words of political commentator Ian Bremmer, writing for *Time magazine* in early November 2015: “The political formula for riling up citizens of E.U. countries against the idea of European government is simple. Begin with the unpopular power of faraway institutions to regulate life at home. Add a financial crisis and economic slowdown and tell your tax-payers that their hard-earned euros will be used to bail out other countries. Throw in hundreds of thousands of Middle Eastern refugees and the demands of other countries that you welcome ‘your share’ of them. Then watch the votes come in.” In Catalonia, this populist reaction is on the left, not the right.

The second event that shook the Catalan and Spanish political scene in the late summer of 2015 was of course the massive *Völkerwanderung*, the “barbarians” who massively entered the European “empire”, at about 769,000 strong between August and October. The pacific, pleading but forceful Syrian “invasion” of Europe has shaken the EU to its very foundations. The lazy imperial pattern of expansion that had marked the Union since the mid-1980s (when Spain entered) indicated that when there was some major structural doubt about what “unity” meant, the debate was solved by bringing in some other border country, with much the confident tone of late Romans letting in some Latinized Germanic tribe begging for sanctuary inside the military limes, as wild and savage warriors threatened them from behind. The recently accessed allies –included in NATO for full measure– are now trying to dictate policy to the Western powers that make the core membership of the EU from their eastern perspectives, with their loathings for Russians and Moslems (referred to with disgust as “the Turks”). In France, Germany and Italy, this can mean a sharp rightward turn, as when, in mid-November 2015, after the Paris terrorist outrages of Friday the 13th, French president Hollande declared his own “War of Terror” in terms markedly similar to George W. Bush in the United States after “9/11” in 2001, the traumatic airborne attacks on New York and Washington DC. The United Kingdom is marking its distances from the EU, and may even leave, with Cameron aping in reverse the Gaullist hostility to Britain in the 1960s.

4.3. An Anti-Climax and an Epilogue, While Waiting for a Climax

As events unfold while this essay is being written, again Mas has continued to suffer from bad luck, the curse of the unsuccessful politician, but one beyond rational analysis. There was a saying in mid-twentieth century United States –say in *Mad Men* lore and the corresponding Madison Avenue-type ad-agency jargon– that suggested, that when in doubt on public policy, just “run it up the flagpole and see who salutes”. Who salutes is Mas’ dilemma. So is who doesn’t.

The underside of the principle of self-determination is assured recognition for statehood, “states” being simply those entities which are recognized as such by other already recognized states. This criterion remains quite valid today. With no outside geopolitical backing, there is no real brake on any Spanish central government intervention that cites and exercises its power to impose an exceptional state of emergency on the region and suspend the Catalan autonomous government. The only limits were shame: it would be shocking to Europe to do so. But would it be so now, in late 2015, after the 13 November yihadi killings in Paris, with France under what is implicit executive martial law? Were this not enough, at the electoral moment of September 2015, Mas (and Oriol Junqueras, current leader of the ERC) gleefully ridiculed Rajoy when he stumbled stupidly in an interview, not realizing that, if Catalonia became independent, its citizens would –at least at first– legally retain Spanish citizenship, Spanish pensions, and Spanish EU rights. But, though PP spokespersons never tried this spin, if independence is merely an external frame, and political content –i.e., the population– remains Spanish, what difference does so-called “independence” make?

The 27-S elections proved an impasse. With voter participation at a high around 75%, the alliance of CDC (UDC bolted and destroyed the old coalition) with ERC, and with Òmnium (an electoral first) and the new ANC, won an important plurality, 62 seats in the Catalan parliament but with only 47% of the voters. The ultra-leftist assembly coalition –the CUP– won 10 seats, and the rest were for socialists (lost 4, has 16 deputies), PP (lost 8, has 11) and Ciutadans, become the successful newcomer to second place with 25 deputies, 16 more than before. UDC disappeared.

The CUP, which claims to date back directly to the mid-1980s, had been a small minority –3 deputies– in the previous Catalan legislature, but had made itself highly visible with their t-shirts and un-political appearance: in one parliamentary episode in committee, a leading CUP deputy, David Fernández, had taken off his sandal, said, “So long, gangster!”, while he symbolically threatened a dishonored and corrupt Spanish figure –Rodrigo Rato, former PP minister and former head

of the International Monetary Fund, under investigation for a major banking scandal- with hurling it at him, as had famously been done by a local journalist with a shoe in an Iraqi press conference in Baghdad in 2008 held by the then United States president George W. Bush. Such antics played with a television-internet audience not comfortable with Mas and his crony connections, but which wished to express an aggressive protest by voting independence. The “Popular Unity Candidacy” did very well in the municipal elections of May 2015, generally left-leaning in its overall results. The CUP attained several hundred municipal councilmen throughout Catalonia, and three in the Valencia region, which served to make clear its pancatalan credentials. The CUP is “independentist” with a vengeance, from Spain, from the European Union, from the euro, and for international (and local) capitalism. The result in the 27-S showdown was a 10 deputy plurality for the CUP (a gain of 7 deputies), which held the decisive balance between Junts pel Sí (“Together for Yes”), the CDC-ERC-Òmnium-ANC coalition, and the “unionists”: the PP (who obviously were against Mas and independence) the socialists, as well as the more ambiguous ICV-Podemos alliance (with other left or communist remnants), which accepted the idea of “the right to vote” (i.e., a plebiscite) but not the accompanying details.

In the event, Mas partisans rubbed their hands with glee, for, although the votes for Mas and his allies (basically CDC plus ERC) had decreased the number of deputies, the ten CUP members gave the pro-independence cause an absolute majority. The CUP however has proved a spoiler, happy to back the announcement of an independence proclamation on 9 November, they stoutly refused to vote for Mas as president, leaving him to hang in the wind as acting chief executive and a complete lame duck. For a month negotiations have gone nowhere. The Junts pel Sí coalition is a Mas-led alliance, and the CUP says, literally, that incumbent president stinks with graft. During November, neither side has yielded, and the hung negotiation seems to point to new Catalan elections in 2016, pending the results of Spanish legislative elections, convoked for 20 December of 2015. So the election results seem to show that even if “independentism” has swept away soft and easy-going “Catalanism”, as this author has argued before, the differences between left and right pro-independence options remain clear and sharply defined.

As the 20 December legislative campaign gathered speed, the key theme in fact has seemed to be political corruption. Throughout the lesser urban centers of Spain, the PP spoils system and its pay-out mechanisms have soiled the conservatives, but there remain important areas of gratitude or dependency, comparable to long standing socialist payola in the South. In Catalonia, Pujol, the founder of CDC, has succeeded in befouling himself and his family so as to literally become an unmentionable figure. This has left pro-Mas nationalists with

a lame appeal to forget the past in name of a “future that begins now”, in oft-repeated words of Carme Forcadell, elevated after the September voting to the improbable post of President of the Catalan Parliament.

The central government in PP hands had been smart enough not fall for the anticipatory bait of a Mas martyrdom in the Companys mold, and it did not apply the law in an overly strict manner, but, beyond refurbishing the existing legal tools for suspending an autonomous community government, and reminding the Catalan government of its financial strength, it has preferred to show itself disposed to wait out any presumable “Free State” shenanigans, which, as it has happened, have not come about so far. But the PP also faced considerable Spanish pressure to discipline the “traitors”, and depending on what political theatre might be played, it could prove impossible for the central authorities to remain passive. Rajoy chose to wait for the results of Spanish legislative elections, which he dated for five days before Christmas in 2015. On November 7, the Catalan caretaker government under Mas formally announced in parliament, through its plurality, with CUP support, its intention of separation from Spain, and was immediately denounced in high court -the Constitutional Tribunal- for this action. The annulment was forthcoming for the Tribunal with unusual diligence.

The situation has degenerated so far that for two months since the 27-S elections, the Catalan government continues in caretaker functions under Mas, as the Junts pel Sí group has not been able to convince the CUP to accept Mas as president. Given the financial squeeze, the Catalan government, despite its official declaration of a stated willingness to disobey Spanish law on November 7, is now taking the Spanish government to the Supreme Court -lesser than the Constitutional Tribunal- for restricting its funding. This is not seen as contradictory by the supporters of Mas. In the middle of the ongoing stalemate between the defenders of Mas and the purists of the CUP, there is talk of recreating a new nationalism, a novel and uncontaminated party that might serve to shed the dirty past of the now discredited Pujol. Before the 27-S, the nationalist split-off from UDC that supported Mas called itself Demòcrates de Catalunya (“Democrats of Catalonia”), a title somewhere between the Christian Democrat tradition and the Italian post-communist force, now the the reinvented backer of ruling premier Matteo Renzi, called the Partito Democratico, established in late 2007, before Obama, but still in a Neo-American mold. The proposal that Mas should turn the electoral mix of Junts pel Sí into something more substantial, perhaps some sort of “Democratic Party”, was given a push by the candidacy for the upcoming 20 December elections, called officially Democràcia i Llibertat (DiL, or “Democracy and Freedom”). The proposal that Mas should turn the electoral mix of Junts pel Sí into something more substantial, perhaps a Partit dels Demòcrates de Catalunya (“Party of the

Democrats of Catalonia”), a title halfway between the ex-Christian Democrats of DiL and the Italian post-communist force, now the reinvented backer of ruling premier Matteo Renzi, called the Partito Democratico, established in late 2007, before Obama, but still in a Neo-American mold.

4.4. Two Representative Opinions

To view the balance of the stalemate and the countervailing positions and tensions in Catalan society, two quotes may serve. One is by Enric Hernández, director of *El Periódico de Catalunya*, the left-leaning, traditionally pro-socialist, writing on 29 November. Hernández speaks of a “Catalan agnosia”, referring to a perception deficit which makes it impossible both to recognize previously perceived stimulate or to learn new ones. Says Hernández (translated from the Catalan language edition): “For some years, Catalan politics suffers from a severe episode of agnosia which makes it incapable of recognizing reality. The chasm that opens up between what is said and the facts is so vast, that two months after the 27-S, those who with [only] 47.8% of the [total] vote considered their plebiscite won, are still incapable of forming a government.” And the forces who went together to the autonomic elections, to [better] optimize their results and begin their disconnection from Spain, now will run separate candidacies in the [upcoming] Spanish elections with the same programs.”

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The other is by the official biographer of Pujol, Manuel Cuyàs, director of the stalwart pro-Mas, pro-independence daily *El Punt Avui*. In his column of 1 December, he admitted that: “The “process” has been a parade of *ingenuïtats* [naïve or unworldly events], in some of which I recognize that I shared. Since we were right [in requiring independence], it would be granted to us; since the [Spanish] state would feel trapped, it would yield; since Europe would understand us, we could count on its support; since we would present ourselves together, “Together for Yes”, we would obtain an absolute majority; since we filled the streets, we would impose ourselves on those who stayed at home...[sic]; since the CUP coincided on the matter of independence, a government which in “eighteen months” would work to achieve it would be a fact.” Sadly, Cuyàs concludes, it has not been so.

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