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**CATALONIA: THE TRADITION OF MODERNITY**

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**(Draft, not to be quoted without the author's permission)**

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**FOREWORD**

The modern nation is at the core of our shared loyalties. It is also the home of our common discontents and delectations. On closer scrutiny, however, we see that states, not just nations, are also part of that core. But states are dry, uninspiring entities. When dealing with that crucial component of modern civilization, the nation-state, we tend conveniently to underplay the first element of the compound noun, the nation, in favour of the second, the state. For nations are alive, primordial, and sacred. Not so states. When we speak of a nation-state we assume that it is the nation that legitimizes its state, not the state the nation.

Countless people in many countries readily assume that each state contains one nation, and that each nation has given rise to its own state. There are nevertheless exceptional places where this is not so. Great Britain is one of them. Its citizens have come to assume the existence of a British nation which stands over and above its several member nationalities without obliterating them. Today's nascent European Union is another case in point, albeit in the making. The improbable claim, elicited by its more

chauvinistic foes, that the Union poses a threat to the continuity of Europe's ancient nations is shown to be groundless by the stubborn persistence of many small, vigorous and likewise venerable nations within several strong and centralized European states. Catalonia is one of them.

One knew in the past about the internal ethnic, linguistic and economic diversity of states. Such diversity was often explained away as the natural manifestation of regional differences. When, especially after the First World War, some of those 'regions' asserted their will to either give themselves a state structure, that is, to run their affairs under their own sovereign government, or to obtain at least some form of home rule, their aspirations could no longer be ignored. The notion that existing states were necessarily the political expressions of single, underlying nations, became untenable. Cultural and ethnic identity as a source of nationhood, and nationhood, in turn, as a source of statehood, became unexpected and crucial components of the political discourse of a 20<sup>th</sup> century no longer able to accommodate the nation-state verities that had reigned unchallenged over the political arrangements and conflicts of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Whatever the causes of the Great War, its first shot in 1914 was fired by a nationalist desperado in the name of his stateless nation.

Let me leave aside the troubled and often tragic outcome of these developments in Central and Eastern Europe, whose ultimate solution has still not been found. Western Europe has been much luckier, although as both Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom and the Basque Country in Spain and France show, the Western path to a peaceful integration of ethnic identities and nationalist feelings into the lives of our advanced, democratic polities still leaves much to be desired. There are some hopeful signs that such conflicts may soon end, but the worrisome fact is that they are still there, within the democratic framework of Western European countries such as ours, endowed with free civil societies.

I shall come back to this question -the proper and civilized integration of 'stateless' nations into a democratic polity- at the end of my brief and necessarily sketchy reflections on Catalonia. It is my contention that much could be learned by Europeans, not excluding the British, from Catalonia's current form of integration within Spain. Catalans often envy that trait of British political culture whereby Scots, Welsh and English all feel British while remaining loyal to their respective nations. With the exception of a small independentist minority, most Catalans would like to see themselves as part of a similar larger unit. But they know that in many parts of Spain such

conception is rarely held: there is still a widespread - though by no means universal- refusal to accept wholeheartedly the consequences of a 'British' conception of Spain. There is still much resistance outside Catalonia to admit the notion that the Spanish Constitution itself explicitly recognizes: that Spain is made up of several nations and regions. According to the Constitution, Catalonia is a nation or, as it literally states, a nationality.

In which way is Catalonia a nation? Let me avow openly that I do not know. As a jobbing sociologist perhaps I ought to, let alone as a Catalan. (Perchance my ignorance in the matter disqualifies me as both). The fact is that the more social scientists delve into this most puzzling entity, the nation, the less they seem to be able to come to sound and definite conclusions. It is true that a few of them have produced impressive treatises and theories about nations and nationalism. Yet, our uneasiness lingers. All we can say is that nations are sets of shared beliefs about the nature of a given people and its alleged right to form a distinct political community. We also know that those intangible shared feelings do sometimes produce tangible results -a public administration or certain economic structures, say, or a political movement claiming self-rule or independence for a given territory. However, that is all that can be ascertained. The fact remains, though, that we cannot do without that unreliable notion.

I shall therefore leave at the outset any pretence to describe my own Catalan nation as possessed of some timeless essence or as blessed by certain objectively sacrosanct qualities. It lacks both. I shall instead describe some of the developments that have led many Catalans to believe that theirs is a distinct country, a nation, that is. I shall also consider how it has come to be integrated into a larger polity and economy. In so doing, I shall also attempt to convey some of the chief features that characterize Catalonia as a distinct universe within the Iberian and European worlds to which it belongs. All I can do is to pray that my own tribal loyalties do not impair the fair presentation of the facts.

### **The historical roots of an open society**

Catalonia today is the result of a series of historical processes which have, each, in turn, left a very strong

imprint on its present society. A forceful feudal past, a distinct language; a period of decline and relative isolation after the Renaissance; its permanent integration (and later, subordination) into larger political units in Spain; the development during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries of its own bourgeois and industrial revolution; and the rise in its midst of a great and cosmopolitan city, Barcelona; a remarkable ability to assimilate and integrate a massive influx of immigrants. These are some of the most outstanding features of the past that have shaped that small, modern, industrious and indeed very traditionalist Iberian and Mediterranean country.

For a Northern European Catalonia lacks exoticism. It is the South of the North. It is definitely not the South. Piedmont and Lombardy share the same quality, though their political, economic and cultural integration into their own larger state, Italy, differs considerably from Catalonia's corresponding relationship to Spain. The 'Western European' nature of Catalonia was noticeable from the outset of its history as a distinct society. The earliest Catalans -in contrast with other Iberian peoples- were semi-independent, peripheral and somewhat unruly vassals of the Frankish kingdom. (Catalans have always been seen, to this very day, as an unruly lot by the several central governments under which they have lived. Some may think that a wholly undeserved reputation, for they are also reputed to be a pretty reasonable people. Are not Catalans notoriously inclined to negotiate peacefully and patiently everything under the sun? Granted, on the issue of their right to run their own affairs they tend to be a bit stubborn, and occasionally, I am afraid, even excruciatingly adamant. Yet, if they possess a saving grace in this irritating matter, it is that they abhor getting violent about it).

One of the reasons why the country lacks exoticism is invisible. It lurks behind the industries, the prosperity and the urban landscape of modernity that are everywhere present in Catalonia. It lurks too, behind the distinct language of the people, the most obvious outward sign of Catalan culture and identity. It is Catalonia's ancient feudal past. Europe was forged by feudalism as much as it was shaped by Roman law and Greek rationality and secularism. Europe's *paradox of modernity* lies buried in our common feudal past. Oversimplifying matters, the paradox consists of the curious fact that, by and large, the greater the degree of feudalism achieved in the past by a given European kingdom or principality, the greater its later capacity to evolve naturally, as it were, towards modernity. Thus, the more thoroughly feudalized a society became during the Middle Ages, the deeper was its transition to full modernization.

Feudalism meant, of course, a world of lords and vassals, and included in its features not a few barbarous ones. But it also entailed beliefs in the rights of members of each estate and laws that protected the respective specific liberties and privileges of individuals according to their station, as noblemen, farmers, freemen of cities, clerics, serfs. Every English schoolgirl or boy is taught how the rights and liberties of Magna Carta slowly (albeit painfully) spread to the entire population in the kingdom, how the privilege of the few ultimately became the rights of the many. They learn how, through time, the House of Commons grew in power and influence and became, finally, a home for democracy.

The Catalans gave themselves a Magna Carta, their greatest legal document, the *Usatges*, eighty years before King John was forced to sign England's owninly not a lesser document. In fact, as historians everywhere are keen to point out, and as the very title of the Catalan foundational charter indicates -its full title being *Uses and Other Rights of Catalonia*- it clearly refers to a long established situation, to an already pre-existing and well-rooted common law. Catalan society -together with Normandy, Southern England, Burgundy, and a few other areas- was one of the most 'feudal' parts of Europe. It grew as a polity jointly ruled by a medieval parliamentary system and by a sovereign prince -the Count of Barcelona, later also King of Aragon- who had to negotiate with his barons at every step, or face their ire. To complicate things further there was a permanent lobby of relatively independent farmers -the often powerful owners of the *mas* or *masia*, or manor- and a set of powerful urban and merchant classes, as well as the city guilds. The Medieval stock exchanges of Perpignan, Valencia and Barcelona, and much of the architecture of the period - the great Medieval shipyards of Barcelona, rivalled only by the Venetian Arsenal- are splendid witnesses to new pre-modern mentality that eventually grew within the Catalan world of the age. (Significantly, Catalan civil architecture is as outstanding as the extraordinary Romanesque and Gothic religious monuments).

Barcelona, like Genoa -its traditional maritime competitor and enemy in the Western Mediterranean- grew into the hub of a commercial and territorial seaborne empire. It was built by sailors, merchants, artisans, adventurers and bankers -the *taula de canvi*, or exchange bank, was one of the oldest credit institutions in Europe. The routes and trade linking Catalan dependencies -Majorca, Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, as well as several ports and enclaves in Greece and the Levant- were ruled by a legal code, a 'law of the seas', the *Consolat de mar*, produced by Catalan lawmen. The Catalan 'sea code' was copied and used everywhere in

Southern Europe and became one of the earliest legal statute books in international law.

The most outstanding legacy of that remote period for present-day Catalonia was, no doubt, the development of the so-called *pactist mentality* of its people. One must tread very carefully when dealing with matters of national character. Thus, it could well be that Catalans are no more prone to strike deals and arrive at negotiated accords between themselves, or between their political representatives and other governments, or indeed with anybody in sight, than are, say, the Dutch or the Swiss, let alone the Anglo-Saxon peoples. It could also very well be that they are seen as pact-prone, pragmatic (as well as particularly inclined towards achieving lucrative deals) more by contrast with their neighbours than because of anything else. Yet, the fact remains that such contractual patterns of behaviour and the values and mentality behind them -which clearly took shape during the Middle Ages- have come to belong to the Catalan character in the eyes of most observers, at home and abroad. If there be a 'Catalan ideology' cutting across party, politics and belief, it is the notion that we Catalans, under a veneer of (some claim, somewhat childish) romanticism are not only a proverbially hard-working lot, but also a bunch of pragmatic utilitarians, always ready to strike deals with all and sundry. Voices are often heard, however, claiming that such opinions are somewhat unfair to our numerous poets, artists and day-dreamers -certainly no less abundant than our businessmen- and of course to our occasional and often colourful fanatics. (The latter, let me hasten to say, are, as good Catalans, mostly harmless). At any rate, this proverbially businesslike or even, supposedly, materialistic nation quarrels much more about ideas and national symbols than anything else.

Besides our language and keen contractualism the Catalan Middle Ages bestowed upon later centuries another gift: the strength of our civil society. The nobility eventually vanished, the guilds became obsolete, but the tendency to associate freely in order to form the most varied alliances for the cultivation of group interests has been flourishing to this day. Catalans get together into artistic, sporting, collecting, thespian, musical, choral, educational and, of course, festive, associations with considerable glee. Their vigorous folklore and popular activities -remarkably alive for such a modern society- faithfully reflect the associational spirit of the country and its unambivalent love of tradition. Both the national dance, the *sardana*, and that quintessentially Catalan popular competition, the *castellers*, or human castles, require intense collective cooperation, discipline and of

course, rivalry between towns and villages. Both are, though only apparently, the least individualistic activities conceivable. Yet, especially the *castells* and their *castellers* who build their astonishing human towers, are highly competitive. Their continued success has always depended on the devotion of local people, forming and maintaining their teams all year round. Some consider it a pity that the media, especially television, as well as commercial and official sponsors have now fallen upon them like birds of prey.

Although, as I have just pointed out, the remote roots of Catalan contractualism and civil society lie in Medieval culture later events may have accentuated them. Thus, the profound diffidence with which a remote monarchy and its agents and viceroys came to be seen -together with the two devastating wars waged by a basically Castilian government against Catalonia, one in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the second during the early 18<sup>th</sup>- reinforced the people's trust in their own, informal and unofficial institutions. The later inefficiencies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century public administration in Spain intensified the feelings of distance between the people and the state, a phenomenon shared by the all the other Southern European societies. Catalans often sought refuge in their own civic life and traditions and saw the state as an alien and irksome body.

A prosperous and strong civil society, as much as the reign of democracy, is the hallmark of a thoroughly modern, civilized society. Tyrants and dictators do not like autonomous and lively civil societies, for they are the expression of an open world, inhabited by free, enterprising, and proud citizens. Catalans have always been keenly aware of the benefits to be reaped from possessing such a civil society. Nevertheless, some Catalan analysts have exaggerated the range and vigour of contemporary civil society in their own country. Thus, today, a thriving civil society exists everywhere in Spain: some regions, such as Andalusia, where it was proverbially said to be 'weak' or even non-existent -save for traditional popular fraternities and guilds- show that the situation, fortunately, is no longer so. There is little doubt, however, that Catalan culture today continues to be profoundly grounded in the European traditions that turned the country, in modern times, into a relatively more tolerant, pluralistic and undogmatic universe than other closely-related societies. That was why Catalonia managed to remain a relatively open society even after the devastation of the Spanish Civil War, under the crust of General Franco's seemingly endless dictatorship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **An industrial revolution in Southern Europe**

Modernization has transformed the world. Its early origins are to be found in the European South during the Renaissance, especially in Italy. The reasons why most of its thrust moved first to the Atlantic seafront -to Seville, Lisbon- and across the Alps to Northwestern Europe, to the Low Countries, England, Northern France and Germany, are fairly well-known. The South then seemed to slip back and decline. We are familiar with some of the causes of this northward shift of the modernizing fulcrum. One of the them was the collapse of Mediterranean trade and the closure of overland routes to the far East by the expansion of the Ottoman empire. The event direly affected the until then thriving Principality of Catalonia, including its cultural and political extensions to the South, along the Valencian coast and on the Balearic islands. The simultaneous consolidation of the massive Spanish European and overseas empire run from its Castilian centre further marginalized Catalonia and reduced it to a purely defensive position within the Hispanic monarchy.

Catalonia's lack of direct participation into the main overseas policies of the Spanish crown, as well as its treatment by the government as just another territory under Habsburg rule, with a status somewhat similar to that of the Spanish Netherlands or the the Duchy of Milan- accelerated its political and economic decline. Nothing could be more telling of this situation than the fact that only at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century were Catalans allowed to trade freely with Spain's overseas colonies. Earlier on, the total abolition of Catalonia's political, legal and civic institutions in 1714, at the end of the war waged by both France and Spain against the Principality -as part of the vast European conflict known as the War of the Spanish Succession- might have spelled its further and complete decline. Yet the contrary was the case.

There is no doubt that in many ways the great defeat of 1714 was an unmitigated disaster for Catalonia. To this day, Catalans, forever keen to show a surrealist sense of humour, celebrate the anniversary of that defeat as their national holiday. Some claim that Catalonia is the only country whose official national day celebrates both defeat on the battlefield and the complete loss of sovereignty. That may go some way to explain why one of the chief founders of surrealism, Salvador Dali, was a Catalan.

Occasionally, certain defeats and devastations, however, actually unleash unexpectedly pent-up forces. The fact is that the social structure, the mentality and the economy of Catalonia were sufficiently 'modern' by the time



of the 1714 fall of Barcelona and the fortress at Cardona to be able to recover economically. Soon after the defeat Catalan society witnessed an intense process of capital formation and early industrialization. That eventually led to the development, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of a specifically Catalan bourgeois, capitalist and industrial revolution.

This is not the place for a detailed description of the momentous event. Let me point out, instead, that the transformation was an essentially local affair. (Though the industrial revolution as such, which had begun in England, was evidently also a Europe-wide event). Foreign investments in Catalonia and know-how played their role after the first local takeoff, and so did Spanish protectionist measures and tariffs, which turned the rest of Spain and its still significant overseas colonies into the captive market of Catalan industry and trade. Nevertheless, as industrial historians have been able to show, Catalonia, together with Lombardy and Piedmont, was one of the very few regions in the entire Mediterranean basin where a strictly autochthonous transition from a non-industrial to an industrial world took place. (During the crucial early stages of this process Northern Italian industry seems to have been more dependent on Austrian and Swiss capital than Catalonia's growth was on investment from countries beyond the Pyrenees). In other words, modernization was essentially led by the Principality's own bourgeoisie and by its merchant and manufacturing classes. The transition to modernity was also based upon a growing industrial proletariat but it was made possible, above all, by a disciplined, skillful and hard-working class of mechanics, artisans and workers. Like their distant brethren in Lancashire and elsewhere in a handful of other European regions at the time they provided the crucial human skills needed as well as the right attitudes.

Visitors to today's Catalonia need not be industrial archaeologists to recognize the relics of the transformation, even if they do not visit the old factories or warehouses that have now been transformed into industrial history museums or public buildings. They only have to contemplate the city of Barcelona itself, with its magnificent grid-iron structure and its vast avenues, still somewhat futuristic at this turn of the century, more than one hundred and fifty years after it was planned by the architect Ildefons Cerdà, faithfully expressing the vision of the Catalan *bourgeoisie conquérante* of the age. The also visionary quality of another famous architect, Antoni Gaudí, also inextricably linked to the rapid mutation of Barcelona into a true modern metropolis is perhaps even more telling. For Gaudí, more than anyone, combined in his interpretation

of architecture a profound, obsessive even, preoccupation with tradition -he was a fervent, conservative and mystical Catholic- with a futuristic will. He came from the small Southern Catalan city of Reus, whose other great modern son, General Prim, tried to give Spain an enlightened, liberal and progressive government and was assassinated for his pains. Reus, then and today, may be said to be the epitome of that Catalan way of conceiving modernity as a project essentially inspired by tradition or, as one might also put it, by a modernity transformed in the main tradition of the country. By the end of the century Reus' tiny bourgeoisie exported everywhere its wines and created the first industrial agricultural farms in Spain, while the din and bustle of its factories could almost be heard from the staid, quiet and monumental city of Tarragona, the provincial capital, not many miles away. To cap it all, the locals later built an airport. Not to be outdone, further to the North, the factory owners and industrialists of another proud small city, Sabadell, also built theirs.

For all its merits the Catalan capitalist and industrial revolution was an essentially circumscribed event. In a way again very much similar to that of Northern Italy case, it failed to spread to the rest of Spain: for a while it became an essentially Catalan affair. Later, also the Basque country in the North, developed its own industrial society, based on its iron ore and also on the iron and steel industry, and spreading into a powerful banking system. Together, and for a very long time -well into the middle of the 20th century- both areas, Catalonia and the Basque Country, became the only wholly industrialized societies of the Iberian Peninsula. This had two important sets of consequences, which had momentous repercussions for the history of modern and contemporary Spain.

In the first place industrialism, and to a large extent, modern capitalism, became essentially enclave phenomena in Spain. Most of the country was thus destined to remain 'backward' and agricultural for a long time, well after the end of the Civil War in 1939. Exceptions to this were, of course, often quite significant: Asturian coal mining was to play a crucial role in many confrontations and in the ideological polarizations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so much so that the miners' revolt of 1934 and its repression by a young and brutal General Franco foreshadowed the tragedy to come two years later. For its part, the centralist character of the Spanish state assured that the Madrid stock exchange was never going to lose its pre-eminent role. While the Milan bourse managed to become the greatest stock exchange in Italy, the Barcelona one soon slipped into its notoriously permanent second place. The Madrid financial

bourgeoisie was yet another factor of modernity outside the Catalan and Basque enclaves. And so was, also in Madrid, in a very different sphere, the progressive and exemplary reforming intellectual community represented, towards the end of the century and until the advent of the Republic in 1931 by the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and the liberal intelligentsia of the capital in general. Catalonia was certainly never the sole centre of modernization. The 'enclave' nature of modernity in Spain remains true, and has lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This phenomenon is now, of course, a thing of the past.

Secondly, the fact that industrialization became circumscribed to two ethnically very different areas of the territory meant that the process increased, rather than diminished, economic, political and even cultural differentiation within Spain. Catalan nationalism, and later Basque, found in the internal dynamics of the area, as well as its much higher standard of living, the strength it needed to consolidate itself as a hegemonic political force. We already know that the notion that modernization as a unidirectional stream, making us all more like each other and bringing down all barriers in its wake, is a naive one. The Catalan example proves that modernization is an essentially uneven process. It can also intensify and exacerbate differences: it may even and provoke serious cleavages as it spreads. It proves also, as it does in much larger and powerful, though equally traditionalist, countries, such as Britain, that tradition and modernity do not necessarily contradict each other. In those societies, they overlap. One feeds the other.

### **The Catalan Labyrinth and the Spanish Tragedy**

Catalonia occupies a relatively small part of the territory of Spain. Its share of the economy, however, continues to be considerable, if compared with its relatively small population. (It has only 6 million people, though about 8 inside or outside the borders of the Principality, speak the language today). The Spanish state's tax revenue from Catalonia is also far greater than its investments in it, that is, it is larger than it ought to be even if one took into account the notion that richer regions within one single state must indisputably contribute to a common fund for the assistance and development of the poorer ones. (No one in Catalonia seriously questions this solidarity principle, the so-called 'inter-territorial' redistribution of the national wealth and resources). Such

imbalances, together with what many Catalans feel to be a chronic incapacity by central governments and some Spanish-wide parties to understand the rightful aspirations of the Catalan people for home rule and the active protection of their linguistic and other cultural rights, continue to be permanent sources of tension, irritation and misunderstandings. They are the staple of political debate in Catalonia and constantly manage to find their way into the political discourse of Spain.

These issues are objectively important: politically they are only overshadowed by the lingering problem of terrorism in the Basque country or, occasionally, by crucial economic issues such as Spain's very high rate of unemployment. (Unemployment, one of the highest in the European Union is now finally coming down, spurred by the current wave of prosperity and remarkable rate of economic growth with low inflation which has helped Spain join EMU without any major difficulty nor the need for political favour from more powerful nations within the European Union). However, they are felt as especially important outside Catalonia itself only because the Catalan government over the last 15 years has been in the hands of a nationalist coalition whose good-will, assent and cooperation has been needed first by the Socialists and then by the Popular Party that rules Spain today, in order to be able to govern. As could be expected, this has allowed the successive coalition conservative governments led by the President of Catalonia, Jordi Pujol, to extract some benefits for what is now, according to the Constitution, the Autonomous Commonwealth of Catalonia. President Pujol has stubbornly hammered away on the Central Government with what he sees as the chronic grievances of Catalonia, until they have been perceived by it as real and worth listening to. Many people in Spain, however, have reacted with impatience and irritation at such claims. The image of Catalonia in Spain has thereby not always improved.

Catalans tend to worry a lot about what they see as an unfair image of their country within Spain, leading to these misunderstandings as well as to the constant need to fight for those things which they consider their elementary rights and their natural due as a distinct people. However, they - and Spaniards generally - often forget the situation was far more complicated and dangerous in the past. They often forget that we have reached a level of civility, democracy and progress that were until recently very rare in Spain. While all I have said about the democratic, peaceful and businesslike mentality of the Catalans appears to be true and that, therefore, no unwarranted idealization has blurred my own vision, they have not always been immune to serious confrontations and deadly conflicts. Catalonia has been

subject, in the past, to very severe strains, during which the proverbial mentality and civic culture of its people broke down or simply disappeared. So did in quite a few other advanced Western societies undergoing the dislocations of capitalist, nationalist and industrial expansion, but that is no excuse to ignore them. The industrial revolution left its own terrible scars upon Catalan society. Violent confrontation between the Catalan proletariat and working classes and their bosses, the latter often having recourse to the military and the Madrid government for help during the 19th century was a typical and recurring situation. It culminated during the 1909 Tragic Week, when industries in Barcelona went up in flames and urban warfare reminiscent of the Paris Commune left no room whatsoever for social harmony. The event was followed by a period of class warfare degraded into sheer gangsterism, between 1919 and 1925, the so-called *pistolerime* years. Gunmen paid by industrialists and entrepreneurs killed working class and trade union leaders, while the latter found their own agents and responded in kind.

The 1936-39 Spanish Civil War was, of course, another recent period of strife during which the political culture of the Catalans all but evaporated. International (often ideological) confrontations aggravated existing tensions within Spain as well as specifically Catalan conflicts. The entire war became an almost labyrinthine entanglement within Catalonia. A civil war within the general civil war -waged between the revolutionary parties in Catalonia- and the unholy alliance of a considerable part of the Catalanist (not always separatist) bourgeoisie with the Franco forces are only part of the complex picture. The story has been told a few times -movingly and soberly by George Orwell in his unforgettable homage to the Catalan people- and does not need to be retold here.

Let me only point out, however, one element of Catalan political life in the recent past that goes to strengthen my main argument about the contractualist and moderate temper of the country. Catalonia was, for a very long time and up to the end of the Civil War, one of the chief centres of world anarchism. Being Catalan, however, it quickly evolved towards anarcho-syndicalism, co-operativism, industrial self-management and other, highly constructive, expressions of libertarian culture. The now classical distinction made by Gerald Brenan between the chiliastic and utopian anarchism of Andalusia and the level-headed, though openly anti-bourgeois and non-nationalist character of Catalan libertarianism, still holds. Anarchists, belatedly it is true, defended the Spanish Republic against the fascist and military uprising in Barcelona and then massively and spontaneously went to the Aragon front to save the

supposedly 'bourgeois' republic, while one of their number, a woman, Federica Montseny, joined the Catalan government as a minister. (Not bad for the inveterate foes of all states and governments). Their enemies within the left, the Communists, also showed a very pragmatic and moderate attitude. The Catalan Communist Party, recognized by the Komintern as a sovereign national party, separate from that of Spain, always showed a remarkable spirit of cooperation with all democratic forces, even under the terrible years of persecution under Franco. Its members were at the forefront of so-called Eurocommunism, having first strongly opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Communist Party is now a small, but strategically significant one in Catalonia, allied to the Greens.

These examples about the moderate and strongly reformist nature of Catalan forces can be extended to the right. Well before the peaceful conquest of democracy by the Spanish people, an event in which the role of the Catalans has been second to none, the Catalan Christian Democrats (the small, well-disciplined and ideologically progressive Democratic Union of Catalonia) and later the new conservative nationalist party *Convergència Democràtica*, showed much skill in cooperating with non-Catalan forces. Their policy has always been that of incrementalism. Their possible and remote aim may well be independence within Europe, but their loyalty to the Crown and the Constitution has been explicit, undeniable and firm. Ever since the advent of democracy in 1975, Catalonia has been a tower of strength for stability and unity in Spain. Has this been the result of characteristic combination of Catalan pragmatism with idealism? Those who have not understood the nature of the mixture have often levelled an accusation of duplicity against Catalan nationalists. More often than not it comes from Spanish nationalists themselves -both in the Popular and in the Socialist Party, the two large parties of government in Spain. Yet, many Catalans seem to relish the delights of their own ambiguity -not duplicity- pointing to their own history. They believe that it has served them, and Spain, well.

### **Infelix Catalonia, felix Hispania?**

Catalonia's contribution to the prosperity of Spain has been considerable. Historically, its role as one of the main Iberian centres from which modernity -in art, science, industry and trade- spread to the rest a great European country such as Spain can hardly be exaggerated. For a very

long time indeed, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Spain was in the throes of decline. Thoughtful Spaniards suffered from a bewilderment caused by the tragic 'lack of fit' between its culture and political structures on the one hand and those of the rising modern world Spain itself had once, paradoxically, helped set in motion. To a modest, but for Spaniards crucially significant extent, Catalonia saved the day by showing that Spain, too, was a country capable of progress and modernization by dint of its own means and initiative. Much later, Catalonia's contribution to the definitive triumph of democracy was equally important.

The image of an *infelix Catalonia* is in some ways correct if one speaks of the past. No people whose language has been banned from all schools, universities, the press and radio under a clear policy of cultural genocide as Catalonia's was from 1939 to 1975 can be a happy one. Spaniards often fail to understand what irks the prosperous Catalans, what can possibly be the reason for their continuous complaints about 'centralism' and 'economic discrimination' against them. In so doing they show a 'materialistic' view of human affairs that is more pronounced than the one they themselves imagine the Catalans possess. Yet, in the strict sense of the word, Catalonia has ceased to be *infelix*. In the same sense that Spain itself is today far more *felix* than ever before.

Once upon a time, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to 1939 Catalonia became an obsession in the political and economic life of Spain. Catalonia's persecution as a nation was part of that war's calamitous legacy: Franco himself was obsessed with Catalan 'separatism'. Fortunately it no longer plays that dismal role. Apart from the continued presence of political terrorism in the Basque country, Spain is now a modern, urbanized, deeply democratic and prosperous country, with many new centres of development and several other problems to worry about. A strong and enthusiastic member of the European Union, Spain's worries -such as unemployment, which is especially high- are very similar to those of its neighbours in the Continent. Spain itself, like Catalonia yesterday, has become far less exotic than it used to be.

One of the reasons why 'the Catalan problem' has ceased to occupy the centre of preoccupations of all Spanish governments in the recent past has been the happy political formula found for the governance of such ethnically complicated nation of nations. The considerable autonomy enjoyed by Andalusians, Galicians, Navarrese, Canarians, and every other regional or ethnic group, but very especially by Basques and Catalans, is not part of the problem. On the contrary, it has proven to be a large part of the solution. No danger of Balkanization whatsoever exists, for Spain is a

very ancient European monarchy, one of the historical founders of the modern state and home to the European invention of the seaborne empire.

There must be something to the political formula found by contemporary Spaniards in their efforts to re-structure their country on the basis of a semi o quasi federal order, in which asymmetrical devolution processes to the different regions and nationalities have taken place so successfully and imaginatively. The unity of Spain, as the history of Catalonia itself abundantly shows, has been endangered only when the rights and life of its different components has been threatened by the central government. Catalonia is part of the essential and rich diversity of the Hispanic universe. Spain is inconceivable without Catalonia, just like a Europe without the Iberian world would make no sense at all. We all need each other because we have been made by each other. And we continue to be made by each other. The future needs us to stay different and united.

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