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Catalonia: Independence in History, Rhetoric, and Symbolism

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CATALONIA: INDEPENDENCE IN HISTORY, RHETORIC, AND SYMBOLISM

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Abstract

This paper discusses why Catalonia should be an independent state through its history with independence and its historical and modern-day use of rhetoric and symbolism. By delving into the history of the region and digging into the unique qualities of the region, we examine how Catalonia has drawn a line between itself and Spain. Historical attempts at independence, the Catalan language, use of mythology and legends – otherwise described as Catalan rhetoric – as well as the use of symbology are all outlined in this paper and reviewed in the context of how contemporary Catalonia is making another grab at liberation. Catalonia and the Spanish government's behavior is compared to that of the similar case of the United Kingdom and the European Union. This essay reviews the current standing of Catalonia's political scenery and social, day-to-day scenery and ends on the potential of what may occur in Catalonia's future.

Keywords: Catalonia, Catalan independence movement, independence movements, historical rhetoric, symbology

CATALONIA: INDEPENDENCE IN HISTORY, RHETORIC, AND SYMBOLISM

INTRODUCTION

When a country is independent, it has developed its own norms, values, economy, and politics. Independent countries are not ruled by any other country and have their own government that decides how their country is best and most efficiently run. They have their own traditions and national holidays, their own myths and legends, and maintain that they are not dependent on any other countries for their practices. They can trade with other countries, declare war, and decide how their people survive. What it comes down to is how well a country can thrive on its own and whether it can stand on its own two feet – so to speak. Catalonia – its people, its leaders, its government officials – believes that it is one of those countries, that it should be independent.

An independent Catalan nation was first conceived during the 9th century, however, at the time the nation of Catalonia was not only an autonomous nation, but it was also initially known as Barcelona; the integration of this nation into what would become Spain did not occur until 1469. (“Catalonia Profile – Timeline.”) While the notion of independence is clearly not a new one to the region of Catalonia, the country was not able to regain its regional autonomy until the death of Francisco Franco; and even with the death of the notorious dictator, Catalonia still battled against the restraints of its host country, Spain, that did not allow it to gain full independence. Catalonia revived its vigor for sovereignty beginning in 2012 and culminating in a referendum in 2017, with Spain still displaying unabashed reluctance to allow Catalonia any freedom. (“Catalonia Profile - Timeline.”) Catalan citizens seem to share a cultural sentiment – at least among those who are pro-independence – that too much of Spain’s societal infrastructure is reliant on the resources of Catalonia. Spain’s actions to maintain their hold on Catalonia indicate

that the country does, in some ways, utilize Catalonia for stability and that the addition of Catalonia allows Spain to manage a cohesively functional nation.

Catalonia has a certain historical repertoire with independence, despite that, its own progress as an independent region cannot be ignored. The Catalan language, the specific Catalan values that have developed over time and concentered themselves into the culture, and the identity of resilience that has shaped the region and the people over time and led to a rich culture and successful area. Historical recollections of Catalan rhetoric have revealed that the region has had multiple myths and legends to reference for inspiration that have woven themselves into poetry and literature of Catalonia. While those stories are looked to and revered, the newest pro-independence movement has brought new key historical figures into the limelight and created a new narrative for them to also be revered.

In the most recent construction of Catalonia's independence movement, Catalan citizens have created symbols and spread political rhetoric, allowing them to garner national and international attention as well as brand themselves among their own communities. These symbols have taken form in Catalonia's coat of arms, a yellow ribbon – symbolizing the wrongfully jailed leaders of the pro-independence movement whose fates are constantly hanging in the balance, evolving into the symbol for the pro-independence movement in its totality– and a red and yellow striped flag of anti-independence supporters, representing their belief in the Spanish constitution and the Spanish government. Catalonia's battles with independence throughout history and its use of rhetoric to amplify the significance behind the symbols its citizens sport have created a complexly laid out obstacle course. Catalonia's appetite for independence can only be quelled with the engagement of all members of society, from government officials to activists to politicians to citizens.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before delving into the revolution that takes place in the Catalonia of 2012, we first must examine the roots of Catalan culture and history so that we can understand what lies at the heart of the movement and what truly constitutes the argument for Catalan independence. Before Spain could absorb Catalonia, it had been an independent nation and existed freely until the mid-twelfth century; at this point in time, Catalonia had entered “an equal partner[ship] in a confederal union with Aragon,” a medieval and early modern kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 18). Through their alliance with Aragon, Catalonia was able to expand its territory, increase its military presence, and function as an economic, political, and cultural exchange channel for Europe and the Iberian Peninsula of the Middle Ages. Catalonia, even in these pre-modern times, was known for its relations being based on negotiation – a term that would later be known as *pactisme* and would become an essential part of Catalan values (Woolard, 2018, p. 15).

A union between the kingdom of Aragon and Castile – another neighboring kingdom, yet it highly contrasted Catalonia – emerged and formed the state of Spain in 1469; Catalonia, having suffered from plague and war, was spiraling into rapid economic and demographic decline (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 18). A compromise surfaced where Catalonia would retain “its own independent institutions, currency, customs and tax system...and Catalan remained the official language” (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 19). However, even with all the benefits of this agreement, Catalonia still endured political consequences and continued to wane economically. While the Catalan peasantry made an attempt at gaining independence during the war between Spain and France in 1640, a true attempt to revolt against Spain took place in 1714 in the War of the

Spanish Succession, which pitted “Britain and its allies against France and Spain” (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 19). Catalonia was, unfortunately, crushed in their endeavors and faced the “Decree of Nueva Planta,” which essentially removed Catalan political institutions and imposed Castilian laws, absolutism, and centralism (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 19).

Revisiting the foundations of Catalan culture and ideals, pactism – also known as *pactisme* – and associationism – also called *convivencia*. In his analysis of Catalan values, Hargreaves describes pactism as the “notion that rules are made by free agents entering into contracts of their own accord and that social life is based upon bargaining and negotiation between them,” which contrasts the norm of “unilateral violence and imposition” (2000, p. 20). Negotiations, bargaining, and agreements became an integral part of Catalan systems, especially their political and economic structures. The societal values of property, traditional economics, and the family unit came to be known as the *mas* and was – as Hargreaves claims – “the backbone of the Catalan pre-industrial world” (2000, p. 20).

These institutions – and the formed idea of *pactisme* – were jeopardized with the Decree of Nueva Planta. *Pactisme*’s accompaniment is most likely the reason why Catalan culture has been able to withstand the test of time as well as the severe blows it has sustained to its societal development; *convivencia* is defined as how “catalans have found their collective identity by habitually falling back on the institutions of civil society,” which has led to traditions and festivals continuing as a part of Catalonia’s cultural experience rather than as folklore or something to only be discussed of as a past part of Catalan history (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 21). *Convivencia* is seen very clearly in preservation of Catalonia’s core four virtues of *continuitat* (enduring difficult work over a long period of time), *mesura* (maintaining an unbiased and fair view), *ironia* (a good sense of humor), and *seny* (commonsense) (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 22).

LANGUAGE

While Catalan culture is strongly rooted in these specific verbiage – and sentiments behind these words – the country’s sense of identity is strongly linked to its unique language, Catalan. In Hargreaves’ book, *Freedom for Catalonia? : Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity and the Barcelona Olympic Games*, he affirms, “the strong attachment to the language and its identification with being Catalan has made it the single most important rallying point of Catalan nationalism” (2000, p. 20). Amado Alarcón brings to light the importance of language, especially in Catalonia, when he cites Castells 1997 and argues that “language is an important asset in the information economy and also a marker of identity.” (2011, p. 1) Not only has Catalan been a defining point in and of itself in Catalonia’s historical records, but the political, economic, and social scapes of the country have been influenced by language as well. Ever since the birth of Spain that integrated the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, and Catalonia, the use of Catalan had dwindled and did not resurface until the movement driven by Catalan intellectuals known as the “Renaixença” (Alarcón, 2011, p. 2). The Catalan language suffered a decrease in use with the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship, which banned the use of Catalan in public and highly restricted its use in publication (Alarcón, 2011, p. 2). Even with its medieval history, Catalan remains an essential part of Catalan society in the modern day. Alarcón claims that “being able to demonstrate understanding, speaking, and writing skills in Catalan is essential for applying to jobs in the public sector...and often also in jobs in private companies” (2011, p. 3).

In *Language, Migration, and Social Mobility in Catalonia*, Alarcón emphasizes that language is a critical part of societies that base any part of their identities on their language and that “minority groups, the most deprived sectors of the population will experience increasing

difficulties in finding the money and time to invest in the study of the dominant language” (2011, p. 7). In essence, the continued presence of Spain will dominate over the Catalan culture and, ultimately, lead to an extreme loss of Catalan language, culture, and society altogether, creating a mishmash of predominately Spanish culture with small inklings of what is left of Catalonia’s origins.

WHY CATALONIA REVOLTED

While most of this historical background seems to simply be a recollection of Catalonia’s struggles to maintain its culture and values, it speaks volumes as to what differentiates Catalonia from its host country of Spain. It is crucial to understand that Catalonia originated as its own unique nation and that it was absorbed into Spain in attempts to ameliorate the damages of war and plagues; it is unknown if this merger was intended to be permanent, but it has been made clear by the citizens of Catalonia – the majority being supporters of the independence movement – that, regardless of past intentions, gaining independence is the most beneficial adjustment to their relationship with Spain. Catalonia has experienced a series of volatile historical events that have debilitated the country from freeing itself from Spain’s grasp – from the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714 to Francisco Franco’s dictatorship that spanned 36 years; Catalonia made attempts to seek out its independence but was met with brutal consequences each time. In this more modern and seemingly civilized era, Catalonia again reached for its independence, but openly and without the guise of a war or a political distraction. The differences between the regions of Spain and Catalonia are seen in the most minute of details: in language, culture, norms, values, and mannerisms. From the proud terminology used to describe the most

fundamental attributes of a Catalan citizens to how they approach social mobility and globalization, the delineation between the two countries is stark.

A more in-depth look at the motives behind Catalonia's independence movement is explored in *Language, Identity, and Politics*, an article by Kathryn A. Woolard. Woolard's vivid description of the movement "in September 2012 when an estimated 1.5 million demonstrators marched in Barcelona in support of sovereignty" begins to show the more academic side of political rhetoric surrounding the independence movement (2018, p. 1). Not only does she communicate the electric atmosphere of the protests and record shockingly high voting margins, but she also introduces the more conventional logic behind the protests that stem from the country's history, summarizing it as "essentialist nationalism that clings to ancestral roots and mother tongue" (Woolard, 2018, p. 2). Using powerful imagery and compelling ethos to corroborate what almost feels like her own recollection of an independence protest in Catalonia, Woolard expresses the importance of Catalan history in the independence movement as well as the core value of language and linguistic identity.

In her conclusion, Woolard lays out five factors that continue to fuel the proverbial fire of the Catalan independence movement. The first of these is – unsurprisingly – the political-historical context, involving "the legacy of Franco's repression" and the negatively skewed-branding of Catalan rhetoric (Woolard, 2018, p. 16). Going along with the theme of political-historical context, she also emphasizes the socio-economic framework that has given Catalans a reputation of high societal status. She separates the third and fourth factors into the "unequal distribution of the two languages across social spheres" – referencing Catalan and Spanish – and "structural linguistic factors...play[ing] a small role in mitigating conflict" though both of these reasons deal with the commonality of Spanish in the region and how they affect the

independence movement (Woolard, 2018, p. 16). In his book on *Secessionism: Identity, Interest, and Strategy*, Jason Sorens points out that “secessionism must draw on more than cultural differences like language – sovereignty must be economically and politically appealing for the citizens of a region” (2012, p. 19). In the case of Catalonia, we see a mixture of both the cultural differences as well as the political and economic disparity.

Sorens later claims that “national secession almost always has an ethnic character: both identity and interest are essential for national secessionism,” to which I would contend that Catalonia shows both (2012, p. 19). Woolard argues that Spanish is the more dominant language over Catalan – even in Catalonia – and because this does not truly affect routine life of the working class, it creates little incentive to support independence; however, Woolard goes on to say that the similarities of the two languages allows for “more acceptance of Catalan immersion,” which ensures that Catalan continues to subsist and creates a sense of flexibility for the language to be used in educational and employment settings (Woolard, 2018, p. 16).

Woolard’s fifth and final factor in what “bolsters sympathy for the independence movement” is what she calls “the elastic nature of Catalan social identity” (Woolard, 2018, p. 16). In what I think may be the most compelling part of her argument, Woolard claims that Catalonia has moved away from traditional linguistic integrity, and by changing linguistic ideology, have allowed the Catalan identity to become “more fully accessible to new speakers” (Woolard, 2018, p. 16). As we have seen, simply being able to speak the Catalan language is an enormous part of the Catalan identity and by creating a more inclusive identity, Catalan citizens have effectively rallied a larger mass of supporters.

HISTORICAL USE OF RHETORIC

Rhetoric and symbolism have long been a method of maintaining nationalism and preserving the pride of independence felt by the Catalan state, mainly through stories of uplifting the people and justice for the region. While the Catalan flag, anthem, and national holiday all serve as well-known indicators of Catalonia's stance as an autonomous community, it is the cultural storytelling – pieces of history buried in Catalan records – that are responsible for pushing its political agendas forward. According to Giovanni Cattini's article on *Myths and Symbols in the Political Culture of Catalan Nationalism (1880-1914)*, Catalan intellectuals purposely dispersed the legend of Wilfred the Hairy, a count of Barcelona who “won independence for the county of Barcelona and acquired its coat of arms in a battle fought against the Normans in support of the Holy Roman Emperor” (2015, p. 449). Supposedly, in the legend, the Holy Roman Emperor searched the battlefield for Wilfred to reward him with the freedom of the county as well as to commend him for his military background and “created what would become the future Catalan flag by touching Wilfred's wound and drawing his four bloody fingers over the wounded man's shield” (Cattini, 2015, p. 449).

Although this myth has been confuted, it still maintains an abundance of authority not only on how people sentimentally view Catalan independence, but on the literary pieces and cultural elements of the country, inspired by the legend. Cattini points to the poet Joaquim Rubió i Ors, historian and novelist Antoni de Bofarull, and politician and writer Victor Balaguer, who were all influential in their respective fields and highlighted the legend of Wilfred the Hairy in their literary pieces (2015, p. 449-450). Clearly, though the legend nothing more than an imaginary part of history, people – even intellectuals of the higher ranks of society – still hold onto the myth, using it to bolster spirits and talk of deserved independence. Wilfred the Hairy

became a symbol of liberation and freedom for Catalonia, especially because of wild used coat of arms – which was remarkably used in Catalonia’s most recent independence movement; by giving independence a vessel – making it into a person who can be looked to for inspiration – motivation, and fuel the fire behind the movement, supporters of the crusade for independence become more ardently invested in either becoming such a prolific symbol or following one.

A more realistic symbol of independence is argued to be Josep Moragues, replacing the previously, more popularly known Rafael Casanova. In her article, Kathryn Crameri explains how both Moragues and Casanova fought in the War of the Spanish Succession and while she does not discredit his involvement in the war, she outlines how Casanova does not symbolize the Catalan movement because of his higher status, detachment from the rest of Catalonia – only representing Barcelona –, and how his memory has become an “institutional and political routine, rather than a catalyst for spontaneous public celebration” (Crameri, 2011, p. 55). While Casanova certainly accomplished his goals during the war, he became associated with Catalonia’s stance as an autonomous community, whereas Joseph Moragues is depicted as “hero and martyr” (Crameri, 2011, p. 56).

Moragues was a peasant with no former military training who rose through the ranks and served a general during the War of the Spanish Succession, working alongside the English – who would later betray him – and recruiting men to his Catalan army to continue working against the French. Moragues fought as a part of the resistance – so that Catalonia would become independent until he was captured and brutally executed as an example (Crameri, 2011, p. 57). Crameri asserts that “one of the fundamental reasons for his elevation to the status of a Catalan martyr” was that Moragues not only fought for Catalan independence with an unmatched vigor, but the manner in which he was treated – his rank ignored, tortured for information, dragged

through the streets, “garroted, quartered, and then his head was displayed in a cage – for twelve years” (Crameri, 2011, p. 57). While these historical figures are actual people who fought in the War of the Spanish Succession, they are also representations of the struggles that Catalan citizens have been subjected to in the face of abuse and injustice; their stories act as allegories for the domination that Spain maintained over them throughout their battles with their host country for freedom.

The stories, myths, and legends passed down routinely through the Catalan community – about either fictional or real characters – have allowed for Catalonia’s citizens to remain hopeful towards the idea of liberation. Having a story to maintain the culture and identity of Catalonia has provided an outlet for the Catalan people to express their frustration, their faith, and their confidence in what lies ahead for them. It connects them through a shared piece of history and allows them to establish a foundation of that differentiates them from Spain and gives them a unique history. In the most recent independence movement, we have seen an emergence of a new ‘Moragues’ in the jailed Catalan pro-independence politicians. Instead of myths and legends to encourage support, we now see ribbons, hashtags, and mottos brashly painted on signs, representing the same values, identity, and beliefs that used to and continue to lie at the center of Catalan culture; we see the traditional coat of arms and a flag fashioned for the independence movement, both of these examples combining the more modern fashion of protesting with the more customary symbols of a country.

MODERN DAY RHETORIC AND SYMBOLISM

Similar to the pro-independence heroes of Catalonia’s past liberation movements, the country’s most recent attempt at separation has brought many key leaders into the spotlight –

from Quim Torra, Carles Puigdemont, Clara Ponsati, Jordi Sanchez, Jordi Cuixart, and Oriol Junqueras are only a few of the names that are popularly thrown around. The apex of the controversy over Catalonia's independence has shown itself as the referendum that took place in October of 2017, where pro-independence political parties of Catalonia unanimously agreed to declare independence from Spain but were met with the harsh consequences of the Spanish government suspending Catalonia's regional autonomy (Blakeley, 2018). This referendum effectively created more hostility over the hot button topic of independence and, unfortunately, set the movement back further as Catalonia's autonomy was a step towards independence. The Spanish government's control over Catalonia's freedom makes the independence movement an extremely sensitive and difficult obstacle course to maneuver – every play must be to the Spain courts' liking, except for the end result.

The independence referendum was organized in resistance to the authority of the Spanish government and led to the indictment of 12 leaders of Catalonia; and in November of 2018, "...Spain's attorney general formally charged [him and other] secessionist leaders with rebellion and misuse of public funds, among other crimes, for their role in the referendum...that had been declared unconstitutional..." (Minder, 2018). The original charges were much harsher and more misleading, since the crimes did not involve any kind of violence. However, these leaders, being indicted and treated unfairly in the eyes of pro-independence supporters, have become the new Wilfred the Hairy and the more modern versions of Josep Moragues. Their defiance in the face of repression and continued commitment to the separatist cause – despite the potential consequence of up to 25 years in prison – allows them to carry on the Catalan independence culture, adding to the historical record of Catalan martyrs that fought for liberation.

While their referendum might not have been successful, they were effectively able to enthuse and incite more attention from the Catalan public to support the pro-independence cause. In addition to their stories being spread by articles and word-of-mouth, the jailed Catalan independence politicians have been given a literal symbol – a yellow ribbon. As it is described in the article, Catalan president seeks way around independence symbols ban, the yellow ribbon is “a symbol of protest against the imprisonment and trial of separatist leaders for their role in a failed attempt to declare independence in 2017 – along with the message, “Free political prisoners and exiles”; the yellow ribbon was then replaced by “a white one with a diagonal red stripe – still a subtle nod to separatism as it was used in the past by a grassroots pro-independence group” (2019). The use of ribbons and mottos allows for Catalan citizens to mobilize and visually support the pro-independence movement while bringing urgency to the crusade. Though it may be cruel loss for the leaders of the movement, the people they were able to persuade carry the torch with their words, media presence, visual representations of advocacy, and masses of people.

While the yellow ribbon has been claimed by pro-independence supporters – for its protest of “the jailing...of rank-and-file independence leaders Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart” and since becoming “a symbol of solidarity with all the independence figures who are in prison awaiting trial” – the so-called unionists have also taken to a symbol. In Hedgecoe’s article, he claims that those who believe Catalonia should remain a part of Spain use the “red-and-yellow striped Spanish flag” (2018). These symbols have become an important piece of Catalan identity to the point where people where ribbons and wristbands almost like they would wear an iconic or well-known brand. Hedgecoe reports in his article that “a man attacked a woman whose children had been removing yellow ribbons from the railings surrounding...[a] park, leaving her with a

broken nose” and as a result “unionists have presented this episode as an example of the independence movement’s violence” (2018).

The vandalism of symbols and emblems as well as the removal of those symbols is eliciting an increasingly emotional response throughout Catalan society. Reportedly, unionists were much less vocal about their support against the pro-independence movement, but after the 2017 referendum, there has been a drastic increase in actions taken to remove, vandalism, and slander the symbols of the independence movement. The symbols no longer are just a mere representation of Catalan society, they are becoming a very divisive piece of the community and are causing a rise in violence. The use of symbols in daily life has started to create an apparent line across Catalonia and struck through to the heart of Catalan citizens. The yellow ribbon represents the liberation movement and those who fight for a chance to sit among government officials to engage in a civic discussion as to how independence can be achieved and participate in democratic practice that the Spanish government claims to exercise. While the red and yellow striped flag symbolizes the adhering to the Spanish constitution and steadfastly obeying the articles that have led the country in times of need and political discourse. The symbols have become a means of encompassing entire ideologies, movements, people, and leaders in a shape and color that instantaneously allows other citizens to know your political perspective.

CATALONIA’S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT COMPARED TO BREXIT

In the book, *Secessionism and the European Union: The Future of Flanders, Scotland, and Catalonia*, Duerr discusses what exactly is holding Spain back from giving Catalonia independence and what actions can be taken. Besides the fact that Catalonia is effectively “one of the economic engines of Spain,” it is one of Spain’s 17 autonomous communities, so similar to

the 16 other communities, it has its own norms, values, social and economic systems (Duerr, p. 104, 2015). Catalonia believes that it has developed – economically, socially, and politically – past its attachment to Spain and that it can thrive as a country. Unfortunately, the Spanish Constitution “notes in Article II...that the Spanish state is indissoluble, which essentially means that Catalonia cannot become an independent country – it is forbidden” (Duerr, p. 104, 2015). As discussed earlier, this article completely disregards any semblance of democracy by forcing constituent communities to remain a part of Spain, regardless of how the people of the state feel about being attached to their host country. Duerr goes on to give an ultimatum that Spain is faced with and explains that “a government can either grant a mechanism to peacefully secede, or it can block secession” and that it is up to the government of the country as to what the fate of the autonomous community is (Duerr, p. 104, 2015). Since having Catalonia as a part of Spain brings a major economic benefit, Spain is more reluctant to give up its control over the autonomous community. In addition to that, the lure of one autonomous community gaining independence could potentially tempt the others that are more detached from the Spanish community – for example, the Basque Country of Spain in the Galicia province. While heated dispute continues to rage on between the Spanish and Catalan officials, Catalan citizens are fueled by the popularity and successes of other independence movements, such as Brexit.

Catalonia’s independence movement is paralleled to the popular and frequently referenced in conjunction with independence: Brexit. Brexit is an ongoing debate in whether the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. Unlike the Catalan independence movement, referendums – or public votes – have been encouraged and agreements have been negotiated as to how trade, law enforcement, safety, access to utilities – such as water, electricity, and gas –, and regulations will operate in the new country. In Cetrà and Harvey’s article, they outline the

very stark differences between the United Kingdom's civil exit from the European Union and the tug-of-war that appears to be Catalonia's struggle for freedom. They label the section describing the position of Spain's government as "Resistance" as opposed to the title for the position of the United Kingdom's government, "Accommodation" (2019). Cetrà and Harvey explore the Spanish government's strongest argument as a point of contention that "the Spanish constitution enshrines the indivisibility of the Spanish nation and establishes that national sovereignty belongs to the Spanish people as a whole" (p. 610, 2019). Throughout the article, the authors maintain that the Spanish government remains unyielding to the notion that a referendum of any kind would be considered an illegal event and would violate national sovereignty. And yet, the Spanish government claims that the unity of the nation is the most foundational principle of Spanish democracy. However, despite their declarations of democratic practices, the Spanish government ensures full use of law enforcement and ignores the will of the people – the Catalan people, who they deem to be Spanish citizens – in order to enforce the will of the state, which suggests quite the opposite of a democratic practice.

The Spanish government's practice of democracy is completely contrary to the true nature of democracy, but in order to maintain control over Catalonia and to condition the citizens of Spain outside of Catalonia, the administration forces its own agenda and throws the label "democracy" on top to disguise true intentions. Whereas, in the case of the United Kingdom seeking independence from the European Union, the United Kingdom was encouraged to hold a referendum. Cetrà and Harvey claim that "the UK government allowed the Scottish parliament to organise and hold an independence referendum in September 2014" which is ultimately due to the fact that the European Union views referendums and calls for independence as reason "to engage the civil service and the public in debate" (p. 613, 2019). Brexit is a true expression of

democratic practice, allowing citizens to freely express their political sentiments through votes and political parties. By respecting the rights of the United Kingdom, the European Union creates a more cooperative agreement with a likely favorable outcome, meanwhile the strained relationship between Catalonia and Spain creates a hostile battleground that cannot lead to a peaceful nor productive resolution.

CATALONIA'S CURRENT STANDING

Since the referendum in October of 2017, Catalonia has seen a volatile chain of events, continuing to clash with Spain over independence. The back-and-forth between the Catalan and Spanish governments has led to a tumultuous gray area – it is extremely unclear as to whether Catalonia will be successful in their campaign for liberation. The most recent reports of governmental action deal with the bans on and imprisonment of Catalan independence leaders. In one article by Jon Stone, European parliament elections forced Spain's highest court to void a ban on Carles Puigdemont – one of the most well-known leaders of the independence movement (2019). This headline makes the top news surrounding the independence movement because “it might allow Mr. Puigdemont and his colleagues to ultimately return to Spain under the protection of European parliament legal immunity, if they are elected” (Stone, 2019a). While Catalan citizens have taken up the reins of protesting and spreading as much information as possible, real change can only be seen if elected officials are given a rightful place in higher offices and allowed to debate and create policy on behalf of the citizens they represent. Additionally, this inspires hope for the other detained pro-independence leaders as it brings more attention to their individual cases and hopefully creates reason enough to reconsider the penalties of their actions.

However, while it seems there is a positive light being cast on the independence leaders, another article – also written by Jon Stone – on Spain’s prime minister’s refusal to meet with Catalan independence leaders “on a visit to the protest-hit region”, which created new animosity between the two sides (2019b). The heated debate that was at the center of this hostility was Pedro Sanchez – acting Prime Minister – called on Quim Torra – the pro-independence regional leader – to condemn the violence displayed by protestors, however, Mr. Torra claimed that he had always and continues to condemn all violence and went on to criticize Mr. Sanchez “for failing to enter into dialogue with pro-independence focus” (Stone, 2019b). Though it seems that there is very clear divisiveness between Sanchez and Torra, they obviously represent their states on a smaller scale; Sanchez’s prerogative is that of the Spanish state, which is to hold onto Catalonia for as long as possible. In order to do so, Sanchez creates as much distance between himself and any talk of independence.

Yet, in another twist in events, Pedro Sanchez’s campaign to govern, remaining in his position as the Spanish prime minister, wound up needing “the support of smaller parties to govern because it did not win an absolute majority,” and the smaller parties that were needed used their political capital to negotiate in hopes of trying for another Catalan referendum and freeing the imprisoned independence leaders (Stone, 2019c). Clearly, despite the very clear notion that referendums are “illegal” and that Spain does not want Catalonia to separate, Catalonia’s will as an autonomous state cannot be ignored without consequences that disrupt the normal conduct of Spanish governmental procedures.

Furthermore, the Catalan people are becoming increasingly restless with the denial of their rights and the tactics the Spanish government continues to use avoid independence talks. We see the literal clash of government and the public in as described in an article by Joseph

Wilson. Wilson contends that “thousands of pro-independence protesters angry about Spain’s Cabinet holding a meeting in Catalonia blocked roads across the region...and clashed with anti-riot police in its capital,” which included “grassroots separatist groups and unions” who were able to voice their disapproval and “disgust” at Prime Minister Sanchez’s decision to meet in Barcelona (Wilson, 2018). While the Catalan regional government throws its support behind peaceful protests, the pro-independence organizations are amassing incredible numbers of citizens and demanding to engage in the civic process with the Spanish government.

This is continuously seen in the marches that draw thousands of citizens to the streets and in the emergence of activist support that citizens rally behind. Duncan highlights a protest where “thousands of supporters of Catalan independence marched on Madrid to support politicians and activists who are on trial for their role in an attempt to secede from Spain” (2019). Notice how both articles stress that thousands of citizens are gathering; Duncan’s article claims “organisers said 120,000 people marched in Spain’s capital” – this is no small protest and not an issue that the Spanish government can afford to ignore (2019). Not only is the relationship between the public and government strained and affecting the political lens of society, but it is leaking over into the social functions of the broader community. In Jack de Menezes’ article, he describes how a soccer match – one of the biggest sports in the country – as was interrupted as pro-independence protesters disrupted the match with inflatable balls that read “youngster, the republic needs you” and “sit and talk” (2019). What really reveals itself as critical to the pro-independence cause is the message that the protesters wrote. While they did interrupt the match, they did so in an attempt to catch attention and to demand attention to the Catalan independence movement. Their actions did not cause any harm or fatalities and their message simply called for

discussion among the government officials and called more citizens to action, creating larger numbers to support the movement.

CONCLUSION

Catalonia struggles with the idea of independence. It always has. The only time Catalonia had truly been free was previous to the twelfth century. Its independence had been taken away because it was necessary at the time; the country struggles economically and with an uncertain political standing, independence could not be afforded. A union between three medieval kingdoms created Spain, but the emergence of Catalan culture came in the form of ideology, with beliefs in *pactisme* and *convivencia*. These ideals gave the Catalan people something to steadfastly rely on, in addition to the Catalan language that has endured centuries of evolution. The language, culture, norms, and traditions of Catalonia have differentiated the region from the rest of Spain from the beginning of its dependence on the Spanish state. After its original absorption into Spain, Catalonia has continuously fought for liberation, despite the fact that the original agreement appears to be that the kingdom of Catalonia entered more of a partnership than under a dominating state. Catalonia launched liberation movements during the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714 and felt the fury of Francisco Franco's oppressive hand during his 36 year dictatorship; and despite the region's failures, the culture and language and the people of Catalonia managed to subsist with an unrelenting loyalty to the Catalan identity.

Catalan independence culture has survived through the rhetoric that has circulated in the region's history, from the myths and legends to the very real historical figures that fought for the same reasons as those current activists and politicians that are becoming historical figures themselves. The most recent of Catalonia's attempts at freedom came in the form of an illegal

referendum and controversial symbols that are beginning to rip tears in the cultural tapestry that has allowed Catalonia and Catalan culture to thrive for so long. And the pro-independence Catalan citizens are reaching a unanimous feeling of low morale in the face of successful independence movements such as the politically popular Brexit – where the United Kingdom is in discussion with the European Union on the topic of separation. While Catalonia has certainly had complicated and challenging history in relation to Spain, actions are becoming violent and citizens of Spain and Catalonia are unsettled and irate at the behavior of the Spanish government, the Catalan government, and their fellow citizens.

Though Catalonia may not be ready for independence, the Spanish government's claims of democracy are evidently untrue, and the Spanish government remains uncooperative. The protestors, the activists, and the citizens all ask a simple request of the Spanish government: to engage in the civic discussion. The benefits of at the very least discussing Catalonia's independence – and participating in politics, the very reason for government – highly outweigh the current disadvantages that Spain and Catalonia are experiencing. Catalonia's rhetoric, symbolism, and history have all made and continue to make major contributions to the independence movement. As for the future of Catalonia – whether or not Spain will cooperate in liberation talks –, independence is achievable. Catalonia has experienced no shortage of unpredictable events, but it is vital that the country – the activists, the politicians, the citizens – use their political capital, their strength in numbers and culture, and their resilience to show the authority of an independent state to prove that they can be liberated, free, and separate.

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