



The Catalan Artists' Involvement in the Pro-independence Movement

Zaangażowanie katalońskich artystów w ruch proniepodległościowy

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Abstract


This article examines the involvement of artists in the pro-independence movement in Catalonia. First, to provide context, the author discusses the history of Catalonia, focusing on the conflicts with the Spanish state and on the five instances throughout history when the region proclaimed independence. The article shows how stories from the Catalonia past are present in people's everyday lives and influence their sentiments. The author also tries to find an answer to the question of how artists became involved in the pro-independence movement by taking a closer look at both the art and political engagement of the artists representing different generations and genres during the period in question.

Keywords: Catalonia, pro-independence movement, separatism, artists, activism

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje kwestię zaangażowania artystów w ruch proniepodległościowy w Katalonii. Dla wprowadzenia w kontekst wydarzeń, autorka rozpoczyna od przedstawienia historii Katalonii, skupiając się na jej konflikcie z Królestwem Hiszpanii i pięciu momentach historycznych, gdy Katalonia ogłosiła niepodległość. Artykuł przedstawia, w jaki sposób przeszłość jest obecna w codziennym życiu Katalończyków i jak wpływa na ich postawy. Autorka stara się także wskazać, jaką rolę odgrywają w tych procesach artyści i jak rozpoczęło się ich zaangażowanie w ruch proniepodległościowy. Czyni to poprzez przedstawienie artystycznego i politycznego zaangażowania artystów reprezentujących różne style i pokolenia.

Słowa kluczowe: Katalonia, ruch proniepodległościowy, separatyzm, artyści, aktywizm

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Introduction

“Nation” is a term that scholars find hard to define, or at least they find it hard to agree upon the definition of. Apart from scholars, lawmakers also use the term in their own way, finding definitions that suit them best. Usually, a nation is understood as a group organised in its own state (e.g., according to the Preamble to the Polish Constitution of 1997). But there are also other similar terms in use. For example, in the Spanish Constitution, Catalans are described as a “nationality”; therefore, their cultural separateness is recognised (Myśliwiec, 2014). In Section 2 of the Spanish Constitution from 1978, we read:

The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards; it recognizes and guarantees the right to self-government of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed and the solidarity among them all.

In Europe, the idea of a nation is linked to the idea of the nation state. The concept is based on the right of people to self-determination. Hence, it comes as no surprise that some groups (often those recognised as minorities) claim to be a people and, consequently, have a strong desire for self-determination.

There are many scholars concerned with nations and nationalism. For example, Déloye, drawing upon Ernest Renan, names some of the characteristics that constitute a definition of a nation: “Concern for reciprocity, interdependence, loyalty, organic solidarity, empathy, the valorisation of individual sacrifice for the benefit of the national collectivity (*pro patria mori*): these are the constitutive elements of this ‘abstract patriotism’ [...]” (Déloye, 2013, p. 3). The author goes on to describe “abstract patriotism” and Renan’s idea of the “everyday plebiscite”:

[...] abstract patriotism’ that unites and connects those who see themselves as participating in the ‘everyday plebiscite’ [...]. The approach in terms of ‘banal nationalism’ is therefore an invitation to see nationalism as more than something imposed from above upon a passive and credulous public for ideological and political reasons. (Déloye, 2013, p. 3)

Hence, we are invited to analyse nationalism as a bottom-up phenomenon and to try to understand how it evolves. In scholarly literature, attention has been paid to artists who create works in support of a particular ideology.

Nationalism is one of the most popular among them. It is the reason why it is still relevant to analyse the subject today. In the following article, I try to find an answer to the question: How do artists in Catalonia influence the pro-independence movement? In my hypothesis, I assume that they do this mainly through their art but also through their personal engagement in politics. The aim of the article is, therefore, to analyse the ways in which artists in Catalonia support independence. In the analysis, we should keep in mind that the idea of secession from Spain is nothing new in Catalonia, and its symbols are a part of everyday life, as demonstrated later. Throughout the years, the support of artists for the independence movement changed, but it remained one of the pro-independence movement's characteristic features. In the study, I focus on the period from 2009 to 2020 (the period of the Franco regime shifted the focus from independence to freedom and later, autonomy, but around 2009 the idea of independence grew stronger). As the analysis focuses on the intersections between political science and cultural studies, the study is of an interdisciplinary nature.

Artists and nationalism in Catalonia

Art and artists can be seen as facilitators of social movements and change. Antoni Martí Monterde states that “[...] if we must imagine an independent Catalonia, we must also imagine independence for the various fields: their autonomies and heteronomies, their complicated modulation in relation to the international literary field” (2013, p. 67). Following this thought, if we are to imagine an independent Catalonia, we have to imagine every part of its culture as independent. This task is not hard. Media, literature, music – these are all produced in Catalan. Moreover, various Catalan artists played, and often still play, an important role in the Catalan pro-independence movement.

But first, we need to take a look at nationalism in Spain, which assumed a different form than in the rest of Europe. Ludger Mees writes, “I have described the Spanish history of the 19th century as a ‘Spanischen Sonderweg’, a *particular Spanish way* towards the building of a modern nation-state.” This way was *particular*, since it was exactly opposite to that of other western states:

During the last decades of the century, when the western world entered a phase of extreme internal nationalism and external imperialism, Spain was degraded from being the most influential colonial power in the world into a nearly bankrupt third- or fourth-class state with tremendous internal problems of legitimacy, identity, penetra-

tion and participation, according to the terminology used by Charles Tilly in another of his already classic studies. (Mees, 2004, p. 317)

It is not only the history of Spain that makes Catalan nationalism different but also the history of Catalonia itself. In fact, each region of Spain developed on its own (Antczak, 2008). Spain itself was mostly agricultural, while Catalonia, with its port in Barcelona and proximity to other European states, was an entering point for the new European ideas. Therefore, Catalonia was always ahead of the rest of the country. Laura Desfor Edles writes about the importance of Catalonia's industrialisation:

Both Catalonia and the Basque Country have rich autonomous histories, cultures, and languages; and both resisted centralist, Castilian domination throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. In the mid-1800s, the Basque Country and Catalonia became Spain's most industrialized areas, which brought a surge of Spanish immigration. In both the Basque Country and Catalonia, ethnic nationalist movements emerged in the late nineteenth centuries [sic], in conjunction with both industrialization and immigration. (Edles, 1999, p. 315)

Resistance to centralisation does not have to be manifested through political actions and wars – it can also be shown in the preservation of one's regional culture and traditions. Thus, any non-dominant culture (including minor cultures) is always political, as it exists independently from the “national” culture, preserving the separateness of a group in relation to the dominant culture. As it has already been suggested, “[m]inor literature can describe sites of experimentation that allow readers to think outside or beyond existing identity formations organised around the nation state” (Laurieb & Khana, 2017, p. 3).

The 20th century made us well acquainted with the fact that there is more to the arts than just their decorative, aesthetic aspects. The arts shock – they make us ask questions and search for answers, even in its popular (pop-art) variety. But artists do not communicate with their audience through art alone. Media, especially social media, provide us with an easy access to the artists themselves and allow us to communicate with them, get to know them better, and learn about their opinions. This type of communication between artists and fans has never existed before and is peculiar to the 21st century. It empowers artists, who see that their voice is not only being heard but often also powerful (Nouri, 2018).

Esteladas in Palau

It is 26 December 2012, and Catalans are celebrating Saint Stephan's Day. In Palau de la Música Catalana, in Barcelona's historical city centre, Orfeó Català, a choral society, is having its traditional Sant Esteve concert, as it does every year on that day. Like the previous year, the last song performed is "El Cant De La Senyera"¹ (Song of the Flag), an informal Catalan anthem often sang after the official "Els Segadors" (The Reapers) during the events. Just like the previous year, the entire audience rise from their seats; some of them putting their hands over their hearts. But this year is special because, for the first time, *esteladas*² (Catalan independentist flags) appear all around the audience and the choir, covering the stage and the auditorium. Once the music ceases, people begin to clap their hands and shout: *In... Inde... Independencia!* This was the first but not the last time this occurred during the Sant Esteve concert in Palau.

"El Cant De La Senyera" is a very special song for Catalans. Its lyrics and music are very proud. It refers to values such as freedom, faithfulness, and sovereignty. "La Senyera" starts off with: *Au, germans, al vent desfem-la en senyal de llibertat*, which translates: 'Come, brothers, to the wind, let's unfurl her as a sign of freedom'.

What happened in Palau in 2012 had never occurred before. It was the result of years of autonomy-related debates that brought no answer from Madrid. The support for independence grew, and events just like the one described above, when people have expressed their support for secession during non-political events, have become more frequent. Over the years, more and more celebrities and artists have supported the cause.

But to understand Catalonia and its push towards self-determination, it is necessary to understand Catalonia's history. The Catalan State or the Catalan Republic was proclaimed five times under different circumstances – in 1641, 1873, 1931, 1934, and 2017. Each of those stories is engraved in Catalan towns, but aside from Catalans, not many people can read the symbols that tell us about Catalan history.

¹ The song was composed by Lluís Millet to accompany Joan Maragall's poem and was dedicated to Orfeó Català, a choir dating back to 1891 founded by Lluís Millet y Amadeo Vives and residing in Palau de la Música Catalana.

² While *senyera* is a traditional Catalan flag (four red stripes on the golden background), *estelada* is its independentist version, with a blue triangle attached to the shorter edge and a white star in it. *Estelada* was designed by Vicenç Albert Ballester, inspired by Cuban and Puerto Rican flags, in the beginning of the 20th century. *Estelada* now has two versions – *estelada blau* (with a blue triangle and a white star) is a symbol of independentism, while *estelada vermella* (with a yellow triangle and a red star) is associated with the left.

Catalan history in the City

Going back to the beginning of Catalan history, we can see that Catalonia has a long history of self-governance. It was united by a personal union (which is not considered a full unification) with Castille in 1469 through the marriage of King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castille, later called the Catholic Monarchs. The aim of the marriage was to join the units in the *Reconquista* (the period when Hispanic kings intended to reclaim the Peninsula from its Muslim rulers).

Catalonia has always had a substantial autonomy. Between the 13th and 18th centuries, the Catalan Court (Les Cortes Catalanes) functioned as a medieval type of parliament. Les Cortes Catalanes gave its name to many streets and squares in the region, reminding people about the history of self-governance. The Court was not only an advisory body but one that could create laws and influence politics.

Nationalism in Catalonia is also different from the nationalism of other groups. As a result of years of self-governing and autonomy, the idea of independent Catalonia became part of the public space. Nationalism in Catalonia is a part of everyday life. The phenomenon explained by Yves Déloye:

To be sure, national narratives have been represented and disseminated on a large scale by novels, operas, paintings, and engravings, historical works scholarly and popular, and in the form of school textbooks, as well as by street names, statues in public spaces, public commemorations, the construction of historical monuments, new festive calendars, et cetera. What matters in this incomplete list is the constant ‘advertising’ effort that accompanies the promotion of the ‘national habitus’, especially in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The daily affirmation of national identity, which is revealed in particular by the study of the media of mass communication, becomes *an active social co-production of a commonplace national identity* that combines not only the work of nationalization carried out by nationalist elites but also the everyday activity of identifying, receiving, and reappropriating undertaken by the populations concerned. (Déloye, 2013, p. 3)

Most tourists who visit Barcelona want to see and take a picture in front of the Arc de Triomf, situated in the very centre of Barcelona. Next to the Arc, usually bypassed by most pedestrians, stands a monument dedicated to Pau Claris i Casademunt – a famous Catalan who proclaimed the Catalan Republic in 1641 during the Catalan Revolt (against Spain) in 1640–1659, also called

the Reapers War (Guerra de los Segadores). Claris was the leader during the Reapers War, a conflict that was a result of discontent caused by the presence of Castilian troops in Catalonia during the Franco-Spanish War. The Catalan Revolt is the main topic of the Catalan anthem – “Els Segadors” – which is a call for the reapers to stand against Spain (called an enemy in the song) and “cut off the chains”. Spaniards are referred to as “so conceited and so arrogant”. *Ara és hora* was also used as a slogan during the Junts pel Sí campaign in 2015 (Pobóg-Lenartowicz, 2016, p. 28). It can be understood as a call to action – now is the time to stand against Spain (again).

The War of Succession was another important moment when Catalonia stood against the rest of Spain. After the death of the heirless king in 1700, the Habsburgs and the Bourbons claimed rights to the throne. As a result, Catalonia fought against Spain and finally lost after the Siege of Barcelona.

From the Arc de Triomf, a passage leads to the Parc de la Ciutadella, the only remains of the Ciutadella – a castle built after the thirteen-month-long Siege of Barcelona to control the city after the War of Succession.³ The Ciutadella was destroyed by the citizens of Barcelona. We can learn about this history in the nearby El Born Cultural Centre, built between 1874–1876 to serve as a market. During renovations, it was discovered that underneath lied the ruins of a neighbourhood that had existed there previously but was levelled later on, so that the Ciutadella could have been built. The story says that people were not only instructed to leave their houses but also to raze them leaving only one metre of walls to be used as foundations for a castle. The archaeological discovery was made between 1994 and 2007, so the story is still vivid for Catalans.

The Cathedral is another spot often visited in Barcelona. It is not hard to spot the hollows in its walls. They are marks left by cannonballs used by the Bourbon's (Philip V of Spain) army during the Siege. Between the Cathedral, situated in Gòtic Quarter, and the Ciutadella Parc, there is a small square next to the basilica of Santa Maria del Mar called Fossar de les Moreres. Most tourist simply walk past it, as there is nothing but a red arch with a torch near the top. Fossar de les Moreres (Hollow of the Mulberries) is where the defenders of the city were buried. The square was designed by the award-winning Catalan architect Carme Fiol i Costa. Every year on 11th September, Barcelonians come to the Fossar to pay tribute to those who died defending their city. The 11th September is a national day of Catalonia called *Diada*. Although it is a very festive day, it commemorates the fall of Barcelona in 1714. Since 2010, pro-independence protests have been organised on this day.

Carrer de la Diputació is a street name related to independence, too. It runs across the entire city, beginning close to Plaça d'Espanya and finishing near the

³ Ciutadella was not the only castle controlling the city. There is another castle on a hill nearby – Montjuïc – and its cannons were famously directed towards the city.

Torre Agbar. Diputació, in turn, is the institution that proclaimed the independence of Catalonia in 1873 during the First Spanish Republic.

The name of Francesc Pi i Margall, who was the president of the First Spanish Republic, also reminds people of those times. It is important to remember that Catalan nationalism is not the only movement that has strong roots in Catalonia. Republicanism is another, as monarchy has not been popular in Catalonia for a very long time now. And we have many accounts of Catalonia standing against the Spanish monarchy. Joan Cortada – a Catalan writer – campaigned for the independence of Catalonia and helped bring about the events in the 19th century (Obtułowicz, 2007, pp. 19–20).

The passage that leads us from the Arc to the Parc is named after Lluís Companys i Jover, a Catalan lawyer and politician, who has streets named after him in almost every town in the region. Companys was one of the first leaders of the Republican Left of Catalonia (Esquerra Republicana Catalunya), an independentist party established in 1931. In 1934, Companys became president of the Generalitat de Catalunya and proclaimed the Catalan State. Companys was executed in 1940 in Montjuïc castle. Three years prior, in 1931, Francesc Macià i Llussà proclaimed the independence of Catalonia (Edles, 1999, p. 320). Macià has a square named after him, crossed by the Avinguda Diagonal.

Briefly, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) was a conflict between the republican left and right-wing monarchists, with both sides allying with other groups. Catalonia as a region was pro-republican and has remained so to this day:

[...] in Catalonia, three new sacred symbols were melded to Catalan nationalist mythology as a result of the Second Republic and the Civil War: (1) the notion of a modern, legitimate, autonomous government (symbolized by the 1932 Autonomy Statute and the Generalitat); (2) a genuine national hero (Macià, the first president of the Generalitat); and (3) a national martyr (president of the Generalitat, Lluís Companys). (Edles, 1999, p. 326)

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is probably the most famous book about the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia. The author went to Spain to fight against Franco.

Franco's regime and Lluís Llach

In Poland, most people believe that “Mury” is an original song by Jacek Kaczmarski. The truth is that Kaczmarski adapted Lluís Llach's anti-Francoist

protest song “L'estaca” and replaced the metaphor of a stake with a similarly used one of a wall. Llach supported the pro-independentist movement for years – he was one of the most important artists who backed the Junts pel Sí campaign in 2015. He even became a candidate and was elected from Girona's list. His presence brought something special to the movement. When he entered the stage during events, people would immediately start to sing “L'estaca”, and the crowd would become very emotional, remembering the times when they stood against Franco's regime. The band La Trinca also supported Junts pel Sí during the campaign (and their drummer also became a candidate). During the event opening the campaign, they performed the song “Volem pa amb oli” (We want bread with oil) – a popular Catalan song known in various versions, the most popular ending with a warning that if the singer does not get the bread, they will not be quiet. This time, at the end of the performance, when the audience was singing along, the band changed the lyrics to “We want independence”. La Trinca and Lluís Llach both represent Nova Cançó (New Song) – a movement created in the 1950s that united artists against Franco's regime.

“Junts anirem més Lluny” was the main song created for the Junts pel Sí campaign in 2015. The song was performed by various Catalan artists. The band was created by four musicians: Pemi Roviroa (Lax'n'Busto), Jimmy Piñoli, David Abarz, and Èric Vinaixa, while the song was sung by Lluís Llach, Joan Dausà, Ivette Nadal, Arneu Orriols (Okey Ok), Josep Maria Mainat (La Trinca), Pemi Fortuny, Caïm Riba, Cris Juanico, Èric Vinaixa, Èric Vergés (Els Catarres), Jan Riera (Els Catarres), Roser Cruells (Els Catarres), Natxo Tarrés, Roger Farré, Juanjo Muñoz (Gossos), Salva Racero (Lax'n'Busto), Quim Mandado (Ex-Sangtraït, Los Guardians del Pont), Bikimel, Joan Masdéu, Joan Reig (Els Pets), and a children's choir. In the music video for “Junts anirem més Lluny”, we can see that Llach plays an important role – the song begins and ends with him singing, and throughout the video, we see him greeting and hugging people.

The song is based on the second part of Llach's song “Ítaca”, first published in 1975 on the album *Viatge a Ítaca*, in which Llach also collaborated with other artists. The music video ends with Llach quoting a poet – Miguel Martí Pol – whose poems he would often use as lyrics. Llach says: “To say how I see the future I will use a short phrase from Miguel Martí Pol ‘I see it bright and possible. I see it bright and possible.’”⁴

“Possible” was an important word in the campaign. Paul Romeva⁵ said those words at the end of a spot called “Sí, tot és possible” (‘Yes, everything is pos-

⁴ Original wording: “Per parlar de com veig el futur, faré servir una petita frase d'en Miguel Martí Pol: El veig lluminós i possible. El veig lluminós i possible”. Author's translation.

⁵ Raul Romeva is one of Catalan politicians who spent two years in prison without a trial and was later sentenced to 9–12 years in prison for organising the referendum.

sible'). There are two versions of the video with the same footage and different speeches in the background (Artur Mas, leader of CiU, and Oriol Junqueras, leader of ERC). The video shows an elderly man who is listening to the speech. He stands up, takes a chair, and leaves his flat, only to put the chair outside and stand on it. In the next scene, we can see other people, including Llach and other candidates, doing this against different backgrounds. These backgrounds are not random – we can see walls of the Cathedral with holes from cannonballs and ruins in the El Born cultural centre. Mas says: “I ask you, let’s have the same attitude of combat, revolt, if you want to, but above all – self-affirmation, will, faith in the future that we had on that historical day of 9th of November 2014 [...] liberty of the country.”⁶

The pro-independence movement today

As we can see, the idea of independence is nothing new in Catalonia, but during Francoist regime it was gradually replaced by a discussion of autonomy. The shift occurred around 2009 when Partido Popular⁷ challenged the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia of 2006 in the Constitutional Court of Spain, and the matter of independence was again on the table. According to Joan Marcet:

It all seems to have started in June 2010, with the Constitutional Court sentence (STC 31/2010) that blocked the reform of the 2006 Statute of Catalonia. Though hindsight reveals clear precedents in political attitudes that surfaced a few years prior, the paradigm shift in Catalanian politics began with the November 2010 elections. It would continue for five years before culminating in the electoral and political repositioning of the established and emergent political forces in the Catalanian party system (Marcet, 2019, p. 5).

The discussion later developed into numerous protests that were organised, including the one on 11th September 2012 during the celebration of Diada de Catalunya (Catalan National Day).⁸ It was organised under the motto *Catalun-*

⁶ Original wording: “Us demano que el 27 de setembre tinguem la mateixa actitud de combat, de revolta si voleu, pero sobretot d’autoafirmacio, de voluntat, de creure en el futur que varem tenir en aquella jornada historia del 9 de novembre de l’any 2014. [...] llibertat pel pais”. Author’s translation.

⁷ Partido Popular is a right-wing party with a direct origin in Franco’s organisation. PP governed Spain between 2011 and 2016.

⁸ *Diada de Catalunya* is a Catalan national day established in commemoration of the fall of Barcelona after the Siege of Barcelona (the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714).

ya, nou estat d'Europa ('Catalonia, a new state in Europe') by the Assembla Nacional Catalana (Catalan National Assembly – ANC) in Barcelona. The estimated number of participants was between 600,000 and 1.5 million (the overall population of Catalonia amounts to 7.7 million inhabitants).⁹ It was the last of a series of protests called *Marxa cap a la Independència* ('The March towards Independence'). Marcet summarised it by saying:

The political parties, especially those that had traditionally been central in the Catalanian political system, found themselves overwhelmed by the citizenry. On several occasions (July 2010 and September of 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), citizens filled the streets to protest ad hoc or as part of new political and civic movements. [...] At most of these events, indignation at being treated as objects overlapped with the desire to be recognized as subjects capable of expressing their own opinions. In the more multitudinous protests, the generic 'right to decide' demand acquired a specific meaning in slogans favouring Catalanian independence. Thus, in a short time, the bridge was crossed: from the possibility of perfecting autonomy to independence as the sentiment and the will of a very significant segment of the Catalan population. (Marcet, 2019, pp. 8–9)

There were pro-independence protests on 1th September over the previous years, but with far fewer participants (around 10,000). They continued to grow each year, culminating in over one million people joining the protests in the streets of Barcelona every year.

It is not possible to introduce all the artists involved (also because for ten years, during each *Diada* protest, there were various artists performing across the region, often spontaneously, and especially in Barcelona, including marching bands from different towns), but I would like to analyse some of the more interesting names.

Elections in 2015 and Els Catarres

In 2015, Artur Mas, the president of Generalitat, called for elections and asked all the participating parties to decide if they wanted independence or not. This way, the elections took on the role of a referendum. There were, in fact, several local referendums held since 2009 and a large one in 2014. Ac-

⁹ The estimation varies according to different sources.

ording to Spanish law, the Catalan government does not have the power to call a referendum. Thus, after several petitions to Spanish authorities, the Catalan government decided not to organise a referendum itself but to give all the possible tools to the people, so they could organise it themselves. The referendum of 2014 saw over 80% of people voting for independence and a turnout of 40%. This referendum led Artur Mas to call for elections. Those took place on 27 September 2015. There were seven lists presented, two of them were pro-independence – a far-left CUP and Junts pel Sí, a centre-left coalition created by the Democrats of Catalonia (DC, Demòcrates de Catalunya), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya), and some other smaller organisations. After the votes were counted, Junts pel Sí announced its victory in front of the El Born Cultural Centre. The victory was only partial. The independentists gained 72 out of 135 seats (62 Junts pel Sí and 10 CUP) but only 48% of votes.

A coalition with CUP was the only chance Junts pel Sí had for a majority, but it was not sure if the two sides could agree upon it. CUP is a radical left-wing party, while at the time, a significant part of Junts pel Sí were liberals from the former Convergència party. It was possible that new elections would have been held in 2016. The compromise was reached, and as a result, Artur Mas did not get re-elected as president of Generalitat. Charles Puigdemont, candidate number three on a list in Girona province, who until that point was a president of Girona, took his place. Meanwhile, eight CUP politicians were instructed to vote with Junts pel Sí on topics related to secession. Mas has left his mandate as an MP and decided to focus on taking the CDC out of crisis.

During the campaign, Junts pel Sí was designed to look like a vivid, spontaneous social movement. It used bright, pastel colours, and its posters and campaign spots were full of everyday people, nature, and sun reflections. A part of it was *M'hi apunto* campaign where people could “appoint themselves” as candidates. The goal was to reach 100,000 people registered as candidates. On the real list, among the candidates there were many famous people who supported the campaign and presented themselves in elections, like the musician Lluís Llach, football coach Pep Guardiola, writer Josep Maria Ballarín i Monset, Els Pets’ drummer Joan Reig i Solé, Èric Vergés i Pascual from a band Els Catarres, popular chef and book author Ada Parellada i Garrell, actors Sílvia Bel i Busquet and Montserrat Carulla i Ventura, journalist and writer Jaume Cabré i Fabré, a musician from the popular band La Trinca Josep Maria Mainat i Castells, and Salvador Cardús i Ros, a sociologist, journalist, and writer.

Els Catarres is a pop-folk band formed in 2010 by Èric Vergés, Jan Riera Prats, and Roser Cruells. Their first big hit, “Jennifer”, came out in summer 2011 and is a love story about a Catalan boy, who describes how Catalan he is in every possible way, yet has fallen in love with Jennifer – a girl from Castell-

defels.¹⁰ The story refers to various places, traditions, famous people, and even political parties – the protagonist lists all the typically Catalan things he does, including listening to Lluís Llach in his car, having a Catalan flag on his balcony, voting for *Convergència*, and even having erotic dreams about Jordi Pujol, a CDC politician and former president of *Generalitat*, who was in office between 1980 and 2003.

The band does not only sing in Catalan about being a Catalan, but they also collaborate with the *Institut Ramon Llull* – “a public body founded with the purpose of promoting Catalan language studies at universities abroad, the translation of literature and thought written in Catalan, and Catalan cultural production in other areas like theatre, film, circus, dance, music, the visual arts, design and architecture” (*Institut Ramon Llull*, n.d.).

The band has often expressed their support for the independence of Catalonia, and fans often bring *esteladas* to their concerts and chant *In... Inde... Independència!* The band also supported the *Junts pel Sí* campaign in 2015 (Èric Vergés was even a candidate on the list in Barcelona). Their song from 2013, “*Invencibles*” (*Invincible*), was used on various occasions during the campaign, including during events. The band would also post on their social media channels about their political views. Pictures from their concerts with *esteladas* were shown on their website.

On election day in 2015, each member of the band posted pictures of themselves voting. Each photo’s description had a hashtag *#ViscaCatalunya* (‘long live Catalonia’). The descriptions read:

We vote. We vote with joy. We vote for creating. We vote with courage, without fear, without threats we open eyes to a better future. *#ViscaCatalunya*. (Els Catarres, 2015a)

Always with a big smile! Because with joy and love that brought us here we will build a new future among us. Let’s go [for] it! *#ViscaCatalunya*. (Els Catarres, 2015b)

From abroad. I voted by e-mail. It looks like the world was waiting for this historical moment. For those who fought before us and for those who will come after us and won’t have to! Today we make history! *#ViscaCatalunya*.¹¹ (Els Catarres, 2015c)

¹⁰ *Castelldefels*, referred to in the song as “*Castefa*”, is a part of a “red ring” – towns surrounding Barcelona that were a destination for thousands of migrants from southern Spain in the 1950s and 60s.

¹¹ Author’s translation.

The trial and Pol Peiró i Navarro

Born in 1994, Pol Peiró i Navarro is a young artist from Premià de Mar. Although he is mostly known for his abstract art, in 2015 he started drawing the pro-independence protests and their protagonists – regular people, activists, and politicians. His art became popular when he started publishing his works on social media and tagging politicians. He would often give the portraits he drew to the people the art represented. In 2006, he held an exhibition in Premià de Mar.

Peiró has also designed the covers of several books, including Artur Mas's (former president of Generalitat) *Cap fred, cor calent*, Màrius Carol's (*La Vanguardia's* director) *El Camarote del Capitán*, and Gemma Aguilera and Jordi Turull's *Persistim* (Turull is one of Catalan politicians sentenced to 12 years in jail for organising the referendum on the independence of Catalonia in 2017).

Dibuixos per la República is Peiró's project, which he started in March 2018 (*Dibuixos per la República*, n.d.). The artist replaced the light yellow and blue sketching technique he had previously used when drawing the protest with dark watercolours on a bright yellow background. Peiró publishes his art on his Instagram account. The *Dibuixos per la República* project also has its own account under the same name.

The aftermath and Pablo Hasél (Pablo Rivadulla Duró)

Pablo Hasél is a rapper known for his activism. Politically, he represents the far left. Hasél is not pro-independence per se, but he believes it helps the communist cause. As he explained in a comment on Instagram in 2015: "I am communist, not nationalist, and as a communist I always search for what benefits the working class. The independence benefits it because it weakens the Spanish State and that favours the revolutionary movement and therefore the working class" (pablohaseloficial, 2015).¹² It is worth mentioning, especially for a reader from eastern and central Europe, that communism in the Peninsula is often seen differently than in the countries that have experienced it in the past. It is associated strongly with an anti-Francoist force. Hasél has attended pro-independence

¹² Original wording: "Yo soy comunista, no nacionalista, y como comunista siempre busco lo que beneficia a la clase obrera. La independencia la beneficia porque debilita al Estado español y eso favorece al movimiento revolucionario y por lo tanto a la clase obrera." Author's translation.

protests and commented: “Today at a rally for the right to decide. A fascist tribunal cannot stop people’s will” (pablohaseloficial, 2014).¹³

In 2014, Hasél was sentenced to two years in jail for glorifying terrorism, in particular for publishing materials on the organisation called GRAPO.¹⁴ That did not stop him, and in December 2015, he wrote on his Instagram account:

Spanish legality has no legitimacy. Firstly, because it is antidemocratic and does not defend people’s interest. Secondly, because it was born out of fascism and has never broke away from it. The Catalans, we decide with a majority that we want to break away from a fascist state and if that state does not respect it, the disobedience is not only legitimate but essential.¹⁵ (pablohaseloficial, 2015)

In 2020, he was sentenced to another 6 months in jail for assaulting a TV3 journalist and spraying him with cleaning fluid, which resulted in the said journalist being injured, and another two and a half years for assaulting a witness in a trial against an officer of the municipal police.

On 16 February 2021, the rapper was arrested after barricading himself with his supporters at the University of Lleida (BBC, 2021). His arrest was followed by protests all around Catalonia. Over 200 artists, including Javier Bardem and Pedro Almodóvar, signed a petition asking for Hasél’s release.

This was not the first time a rapper in Spain has been imprisoned because of their song lyrics. It is believed that the first time since the restoration of democracy in 1977 that a musician was imprisoned for their lyrics was in Valtònyc’s case. In 2012, José Miguel Arenas Beltrán Valtònyc, who was 18 at the time, was arrested. Valtònyc is a Mallorcan and Catalan Independentist and referred to communist, anti-capitalist republican, and anti-fascist ideology in his lyrics. He was not well-known until the arrest. According to the court, the lyrics praised terrorist organisations like ETA and GRAPO. In 2018, the rapper fled the country to avoid serving the three-and-a-half-year prison sentence. After

¹³ Original wording: “Hoy en la concentración por el derecho a decidir. Un tribunal fascista no puede frenar la voluntad de un pueblo.” Author’s translation.

¹⁴ GRAPO was an anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism organisation with origins in the Organisation of Marxist-Leninists of Spain (OMLE). Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre (The First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups) took its name from the events of 1 October 1975, when four Spanish policemen were killed. In the 1970s, the group organised several terrorist attacks and kidnappings. GRAPO shares a flag with Partido Comunista de España (Reconstituido).

¹⁵ Original wording: “La legalidad española no tiene legitimidad alguna. Primero porque es antidemocrática y no defiende los intereses del pueblo. Segundo porque nace del fascismo y no rompió con este. Los catalanes decidimos por mayoría que queríamos romper con el Estado fascista y si el Estado no lo respeta, la desobediencia no sólo es legítima sino que es imprescindible.” Author’s translation.

Spain issued an EU-wide arrest warrant, a judge in Belgium, where the rapper resided for the time, decided against the extradition (BBC, 2018).

Conclusions

The Catalan history of self-determination and rebellion against Spain lives within Catalan cities. Their residents are reminded of that history every day when walking down the streets. It is not surprising that the sentiments those stories inspire are used by politicians, and people are reminded of them during the pro-independence campaigns.

But those stories of rebellion also live in art and are given voice by artists. In a region as small as Catalonia, artists have no choice but to live close to their audience. There is no artificial “bubble” created by the industry. Living a rather normal life among regular people, the artists have a chance to hear their voices and make them stronger by introducing these voices in their art and getting directly involved in politics. And because of that, artists representing different generations and genres are all united for the same cause – the independence of Catalonia.

Having witnessed the events of 2017, the lack of dialogue between Barcelona and Madrid, and the cruelty of Spanish police, we can predict that myths will arise from those events and fuel generations to come, just like the Siege and the story of Ciutadella invigorates people living today.

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