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## City between a Striped Flag and a Bisected Banner: Contested Imagination of Barcelona between Catalan Nationalism and Anarcho-Syndicalism in Twentieth Century Spain

Seonghek Kang



1937 Pavilion of the Second Spanish Republic & reconstruction, photo courtesy of Biblioteca del Pavelló de la República<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: The Catalan Question and the Legacy of 1936

In 1992 during the preparations for the upcoming summer Olympics, the Barcelona city council ordered construction of a rectangular edifice in a working-class neighborhood of Horta. With large, semi-transparent glass windows covering steel staircases, this structure was a replica of the pavilion of the Second Spanish Republic featured during the 1937 Paris Expo. Among the artworks that the wartime republic presented in the Expo was a mural titled *El Segador* (the reaper) by Joan Miró. The painting featured a Catalan peasant signified by wearing a traditional *barretina* and wielding a hand-scythe in reference to the seventeenth century Revolt of the Reapers (*Guerra dels Segadors*) against the Habsburg Spanish monarchy, enshrined as one of the cornerstone events within Catalan nationalist historiography. Although Miró's mural could not be restored unlike the rest of the edifice, the 1992 re-erection of the 1937 pavilion (now a library and education center) nonetheless offers a snapshot of how the premodern, modern, and

<sup>1</sup> M. Lourdes Prades Artigas, "80è aniversari del Pavelló de la República," 2017, CRAI Biblioteca del Pavelló de la República, <https://bibrepublica7.wixsite.com/pavellodelarepublica>.

contemporary pasts join together in the Catalan nationalist historical imagination.<sup>2</sup> In 1937, Miró's depiction of a Catalan peasant rebel asserted that Catalonia's commitment to the values of democracy and political liberty was pre-rooted in its seventeenth century, premodern national past. Consequentially, the recreation of civil war-era pavilion in the city celebrating its post-dictatorship development delivered the additional message of continuity of democratic spirit in Catalonia from the Second Republic period to the present.

Elsewhere in Spain outside Catalonia, however, the similar homage towards the republican precedent in the history of democratic governance and constitution in the country were much less frequent and less assertive. During the Spanish democratic transition, one of the key agreements of the fiercely contested process of post-dictatorship political reconstruction was the Pact of Forgetting (*pacto del olvido*) regarding the atrocities of the Franco regime.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the historical memory of the Second Republic and political conflicts during its existence leading up to the civil war remained a sensitive topic of public discourse wrapped in the collective trauma among the era's survivors. These precarious discursive conditions had the societal effect of prolonging the former regime's official views characterizing the republican experiment as an inherent chaos doomed to failure from start. This meant in practice, there was little public recognition of the Second Republic as the direct predecessor in the history of democratic governance in Spain throughout the initial years following the transition.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere outside Catalonia the advent of a democratic constitution was celebrated in such explicitly historicized connection to the Second Republic. Eventually, it took the consolidation of restored Spanish democracy through trials such as the 1981 coup attempt (23-F), and the passing of a generation for the public attitude towards the once-too-sensitive republican past to change. In contemporary Spain, the legacy and meaning of the Second Republic to the present society are lively debated, if still inescapably controversial and polemical topics of public and intellectual discourse. Meanwhile, as the Spanish public of the twenty-first century began to engage more openly with its troubled recent past, the debates regarding Catalan nationalism and independence simultaneously emerged as one of the most con-

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Eaude, *Catalonia: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 133-49.

<sup>3</sup> A vast topic in its own right, for notable reflections regarding the historical memory, Pact of Forgetting, and reverberations of the legacy of the past in contemporary Spain, refer to Ismael Saz Campos, "El pasado que aún no puede pasar," in *Fascismo y franquismo* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2004), 269-81. Jo Labanyi, "Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain: The Difficulty of Coming to Terms with the Spanish Civil War", *Poetics Today* 28:1 (April: 2007): 89-116.

<sup>4</sup> Paloma Aguilar and Carsten Humlebaek, "Collective Memory and National Identity in the Spanish Democracy: The Legacies of Francoism and the Civil War," *History and Memory* 14, no. 1-2 (Fall, 2002): 144-46.

troversial political questions of today.<sup>5</sup> The case of the Expo pavilion in Barcelona thus is a reminder of the interconnections between ideological divisiveness and contested communal identities that culminated into a civil war in 1936, and continues to impact the present throughout the course of Spanish history.

Recognizing the legacy of the civil war and the “Catalan Question” as a case of conflicted history shaping the present-day political and national debates, this article explores the evolution of the Catalan nationalism during the early twentieth century in relations another competing ideology, the anarcho-syndicalism.<sup>6</sup> The cross-examination of the literary-historical narratives, party pamphlets, and political figures’ testimonies will demonstrate that during the republican 1930s, the rivalry between the Catalan nationalists and the anarcho-syndicalists in the shared world of Barcelona went much further than the clash of incompatible ideologies. Observing the period from Bourbon Restoration (1874) over the advent of the Second Republic (1931) to the civil war, the discourses regarding the civic and historical identities of Barcelona according to the respective movements reveal a deeper division. What had lain at the heart of rivalry between the nationalists and the anarchists was the conflictive ways of imagining Barcelona as a conceptual borderland separating Catalonia from the rest of Spain based on class, urbanistic, and cosmographical divisions that formed the core of each movement.

As the Catalan independence movement after 2000s escalated to greater intensity within the political landscape, the scholarship concerning the national identities in Spain naturally grew significantly in reaction. Commentators from diverse, interdisciplinary backgrounds ranging from historians to legal scholars have offered analyses of the issue from variety of perspectives including, but not limited to economic, pan-European, institutional, juridical, and more. However, despite the expansion of literature concerning the Catalan independence movement, it remains questionable whether the discourse has still sufficiently reflected the holistic, historical contextualization surrounding the nationalisms and regional identities in Spain. For example, among the political-scientific literature examining the Catalan Question through policy and legal studies, many have limited themselves to focusing on a monolithic framework privileging the economic power-relations between the regional nationalists and the national government as the primary lens of analysis. This tendency reinforces the self-perpetuating binary view of nationalist politicians in Barcelona and national politicians in Madrid as

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<sup>5</sup> For further overview surrounding the evolution, debates surrounding, and meaning of the historiography of the civil war within Spain from a contemporary perspective, refer to Julián Casanova, “Historia, memorias y usos políticos de la Guerra Civil,” *El País*, July 17, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> As for the Catalan Question as both a contemporary political issue and a terminology, refer to Juan Andrés García Martín, “The European Union, Spain, and the Catalan Question: An Affair Beyond the Spanish Border?,” *Europe Now*, February 1, 2018. José E. de Ayala, “La cuestión catalana: origen, desarrollo, y perspectivas,” *Cuadernos Iberoamericanos* 8 (2020): 42-64.

unproblematically representing each of Catalonia and ‘Spain’ as one-dimensional monoliths. References to the overarching historical background of the issue and intersections with other Spanish political debates complicating such clear-cut boundaries thus far has been regrettably uncommon. Insofar as the Catalan Question’s overlap with the conventional left-right ideological division in the wider Spanish national politics is concerned, many studies do not venture beyond superficially contrasting the rightwing hardline *españolista*, stance as opposed to the left’s somewhat less overtly hostile attitude.<sup>7</sup>

Greater incorporation of the historical contexts particularly in relation to the legacies of the republican and the civil war period can significantly enrich the scholarly and public discourses regarding the Catalan Question today. A subject that has never been and probably never will be free from political partisanship, the inherent divisiveness of the Spanish Civil War as a theme nonetheless also contributed to the diversification of perspectives of examining the conflict and its long-term legacies.<sup>8</sup> For example, scholars of the Spanish women’s experiences of the war began to incorporate more deeply the perspectives of Francoist women and/or those whom identified primarily with the local nationality beyond the self-consciously politicized women and high-profile female politicians of the republican camp.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the studies concerning the Spanish colonial conflicts in North Africa have provided important new revelations about the interconnections between Spain’s domestic sociopolitical tumultuousness and its external, imperial crises.<sup>10</sup> Among those expanding subdisciplines of Spanish Civil War scholarship,

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the important English-language scholarly literature regarding Catalan nationalism as both historical and ongoing subject of debate are, Albert Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism: Past and Present* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 114-122, Fernando León Solís, *Negotiating Spain and Catalonia: Competing Narratives of National Identity* (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), Montserrat Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism: Francoism, transition, and democracy* (New York, Routledge: 2004).

<sup>8</sup> The historiographies of the Spanish Civil War, its memory wars, and the accompanying anarchist revolution are too vast to be recounted in depth here. Some of the more recent works treating the topic are, Chris Ealham and Michael Richards, “History, memory and the Spanish civil war: recent perspectives”, in *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, eds. Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-12; Julián Casanova, “Republic, Civil War and Dictatorship: The Peculiarities of Spanish History”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 1 (2017): 148-56; and Assumpta Castillo Cañiz, “Anarchism and the countryside: Old and new stumbling blocks in the study of rural collectivization during the Spanish Civil War,” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 29, no. 3 (2016): 225-39.

<sup>9</sup> Miren Llona, “From Militia Woman to Emakume: Myths Regarding Femininity during the Civil War in the Basque Country” and Victoria L. Enders, “Chelo’s War: Late Memories of a Falangist Woman,” in *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion*, ed. Aurora G. Morcillo (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 179-213, 437-67.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, “Military Memories, History, and the Myth of Hispano-Arabic Identity in the Spanish Civil War,” in Morcillo, *Memory and Cultural History*, 495-533 and Sebastian Balfour,

one movement in particular stands out in importance within the wider history of popular radicalism in Catalonia: anarcho-syndicalism. Despite Barcelona's status as the historic Catalan capital, in the early twentieth century leading up to the civil war it was the anarcho-syndicalists organized around *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* who commanded the most support among its inhabitants rather than the local nationalists. Therefore, to understand how Catalan nationalism evolved into its contemporary significance throughout the prolonged course of regime changes, civil war, social revolution, and dictatorship, one must account for its relationship with a historically rival ideology that opposed all nationalisms. This conundrum of the anarcho-syndicalist preeminence over the Catalan nationalists in their home ground in turns offers a lens for more coherent understanding of the complex intersection of social classes and political identities within various nation-building projects of the twentieth century Spain.<sup>11</sup>

Industrialization and an emerging cosmopolitan urban culture of Barcelona influenced crucially both the Catalan nationalists and anarcho-syndicalists who shared the view of Barcelona as a conceptual frontier essentially distinct from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. However, whereas the former saw Barcelona as an ancient capital of a historic nation partaking in the advancements of European high modernism, to the latter, the city was the microcosmic blueprint of an upcoming revolutionary utopia superseding all national distinctions. The fundamental and irreconcilable differences over what kind of frontier Barcelona constituted had put the two movements on a collision course which over decades would finally reach the point of civil war within a civil war by 1937. Though the anarcho-syndicalist-Catalan nationalist rivalry emerged from the fertility of Barcelona's cultural terrain enabling variety of interpretations of the city's character and destiny, politically it had the disastrous effect of ultimately helping the triumph of yet another, third way of imagining Barcelona; the Francoist vision of 1939. Analysis of this long-term development can provide insight as to how the culture of conflictive heterogeneity surrounding the Catalan discourses to the present emerged and continues to shape the present. That is to say, the political culture where a multitude of ideological factions each strongly grounded in deontological, mutually incompatible cosmographies clash dynamically over seemingly distinct issues with little room for compromises and negotiations in-between.

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*Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Some of the canonical, landmark works in the history of the Spanish anarchism and the revolution in wartime Catalonia are Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977) and José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, ed. Chris Ealham, 3 vols. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), with more recent additions such as Eulàlia Vega, *Anarquistas y sindicalistas durante la Segunda República: la CNT y los sindicatos de oposición en el País Valenciano* (Valencia: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, 1987) and Danny Evans, *Revolution and the State: Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (London: Routledge, 2018).

## **From Medieval Thalassocracy to Industrial Capitalism: Frontier of Europeanness in the Catalan Nationalist Historical Imagination**

If Catalonia's head start in the industrialization of Spain was the primary socioeconomic factor in the rise of both Catalan nationalism and anarcho-syndicalism, another development at the realm of politics had a similarly common formative impact. This was the failure of the late nineteenth century liberal governments to establish a stable constitutional regime capable of managing the growing crisis of new economic transformations, and maintaining social stability both within Spain and its—decreasing—overseas colonies. After the collapse of the monarchy of Isabel II in 1868, none of the governments until the first Bourbon restoration of 1874 (*Sexenio Democrático*, 1868-1874) successfully lasted more than three years. In addition to the military coups, the 1860s and 70s were also marked by three, four-way internal and external wars involving the Carlists, militant regional autonomists allied to the syndicalist workers known as the Cantonalists, the Cuban and Filipino independence movements, and the colonial wars in North Africa. As initial hopes and optimism showered upon the post-Isabeline liberal experiments were high, the bitterness of popular disillusionment following its failures were only greater. It was in this atmosphere of widespread skepticism regarding the Madrid government's capacity, regardless of constitutional form, to coordinate the stable and modern transformation of Spain that the two movements, one rejecting the idea of Catalonia inside the Spanish nation, the other rejecting all nations altogether came to life.<sup>12</sup>

Catalonia has a long history of self-governance and collective political self-awareness going back at least to the seventeenth century rebellions if not even further back to the medieval Crown of Aragón. However, the emergence of Catalan nationalism in its present form was by no means a preordained development flowing seamlessly from its premodern precedents. On one hand, since the seventeenth century, the distinctive premodern sense of Catalan regional identity was never fully dormant to require revival. On the other hand, however, in the early nineteenth century after the Napoleonic occupation when the Catalan intellectuals “praised their Catalan *pàtria*”, they still typically spoke of it “as a component part of the Spanish whole” without rejecting the peninsular-wide celebratory mood of common Spanish national sovereignty.<sup>13</sup> Only by the 1870s can one denote the formation of political Catalan nationalism in presently-recognizable form advocating full national autonomy within decentralized Spain,

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<sup>12</sup> As for the relative weakness of the Restoration Bourbon Spanish state that, according to the author, “actually avoided such contentious issues as the religious question, nationalism, and educational curriculum”, refer to Enrique A. Sanabria, *Republicanism and Anticlerical Nationalism in Spain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Angel Smith, *The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770–1898* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 28.

or even full independence, structurally organized around public electoral parties and/or political associations.<sup>14</sup> As result, for the intellectual and literary circles pioneering the rise of Catalan nationalism, the weakness of the Spanish central state and its national vision provided the key impetus towards developing an essentially different version of Catalan identity exclusively based on local political traditions. As the late nineteenth century was a period of great romantic nationalist revivalism globally, the drive for conceptualizing a radically different, more modern and successful Catalan political identity fundamentally distinguishable from Spain likewise manifested strongly in the realm of historical literature.<sup>15</sup> It was during this period of the literary and cultural *Renaixença* of Catalanism that the previous, post-Napoleonic ambiance of coexistence between Catalonia as homeland within the wider Spanish polity shifted towards more radical vision of distinction and separation. The declaration by co-founder of the Regionalist League of Catalonia (*Lliga Regionalista*) and future president of the Commonwealth (*Mancomunitat*) of Catalonia, Enric Prat de la Riba in his influential catechistic pamphlet *Compendi de la doctrina catalanista* (1897) demonstrates this evolution.

Distinguishing between the “state” and “patria, a historic, natural, and necessary community... the fruit of the laws that God has subjected mankind to live for generations”, de la Riba insisted that the concept of “*pàtria gran*” that traditionally used to denote the wider Spain in contrast to the Catalan *pàtria petit* was a false category. Spain, rather was merely a state, “a political, artificial entity... created by man” in which the Catalans at the present moment merely happened to reside in. Basing his definition of patria on ethnographic and historical features such as the Catalan language (which he insists is not a mere variation of Castilian, “merely in process of formation” when Catalan “was already in splendor”) and legalistic tradition, Prat de la Riba depicts Spain as a principally Castilian, foreign entity which domination over Catalan is essentially an illegitimate occupation.<sup>16</sup> Establishing the Catalan historical nationality as clearly distinct from the Spanish/Castilian, Prat de la Riba proceeds to outline the essential ‘national spirit’ of Catalans as “pragmatic, utilitarian, mercantile, with open-minded character that is simultaneously decisively liberal, yet traditional.” The Castilians, on the other hand, are described as a nation of fundamentally opposed political traditions, “illiberal, negligent of customs, prone to worshipping written law that... leaves no room for individual initiatives”, whose main industry is politics and military.

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<sup>14</sup> Conventionally, the Centre Català (1882) founded by Valentí Almirall and Frederic Soler is regarded as the first such modern Catalanist political organization. Ibid, 152-62.

<sup>15</sup> A dedicated monograph studying the historical education and nation-building in modern Spain is Carolyn P. Boyd, *Historia Patria: Politics, History, and National Identity in Spain, 1875–1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Enric Prat de la Riba, *Compendi de la doctrina catalanista: treball premiat el 1894 al Concurs Regionalista del Centre Català de Sabadell i aprovat pe la Junta Permanent de la Unió Catalanista* (Sabadell: Impremta de Pere Tugàs, 1894), x-xiii.



Governance of industrious and freedom-loving Catalonia by such different and “inapt” people has brought in “Spanish types such as *torero* and *manolo*” that “nearly destroyed the commerce and industry of Catalonia.” In consequence, Prat de la Riba sternly declares such “Spanish state” governed by the Castilians is “the enemy of the Catalans... which corrupt them from their natural character.”<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the essentialized distinctions of national spirits, the usage of history as Prat de la Riba explained how peoples of such radically opposing inclinations came to share the same state is significant. Giving a brief account of the dynastic union between fifteenth-century *los reyes católicos*, Prat de la Riba recounts that the Catalan part, “the Aragonese-Catalan crown” was “a Mediterranean power of first class in their commerce, naval power, and diplomacy” while Castile was characterized by “anarchy, corruption of the spontaneous masses, nobility that turned into highwaymen, *bandolerismo* and depopulation.”<sup>18</sup> By standards of empirical historical research already available in his era, doubtlessly Prat de la Riba’s assertions were overstretches. Although the medieval Aragonese-Catalan polity was certainly a vibrant maritime power, by the period of the union of the crowns, Castile was undoubtedly by far a larger partner with three times larger landmass, and roughly five times more population. Ironically, this discrepancy of late medieval populations was most likely due to such industrious overseas Aragonese expansionism resulting in much worse exposure to the Great Plague.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the essentialization of Catalan traits setting them apart from the Castile-centered Spain drawn from the medieval history became a lasting and important theme of Catalan nationalism fixated on Catalonia’s historic distinctiveness, and the illegitimacy of the Spanish/Castilian hegemony.

“Eclipsing the fame of Sparta, Athens, and Rome... In thou, Catalonia, there was always an undefeatable bastion of public and civic liberties!”, declared the playwright Victor Balaguer in his multi-volume study of the history of Principality of Catalonia and the Crown of Aragón.<sup>20</sup> The “democratic” and liberal interpretation of medieval Principality of Catalonia’s conciliar system of government, as

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<sup>17</sup> *Torero* and *manolo* refer to literary archetypes characterized as either easy-going and street-smart, or as lazy and unproductive. Ibid, ix.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, xv-xxiii. Those who promoted the appellation, “corona catalanoaragonesa” instead of the more familiar “corona d’Aragó” have emphasized that the political and economic basis of the medieval polity in the eastern Iberia in have been Barcelona rather than the mountainous region of its namesake. The coinage of the term by the nineteenth century Catalan historians henceforth has been a subject of prolonged historiographical controversy. Some meaningful contemporary debates regarding the historical terms are Patricia Blanco, “El “invento” de la corona catalano-aragonesa” *El País*, January 18, 2018 and “El Institut d’Estudis Catalans defiende la expresión ‘corona catalano-aragonesa,’” *El Periódico*, January 23, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (London: Penguin, 2002), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Victor Balaguer, *Historia de Cataluña y de la Corona de Aragón* (Barcelona: Librería de Salvador Manero, 1901), 738.

Balaguer himself cited from William H. Prescott, was not an that the Catalan intellectuals of the Renaixença invented from scratch. However, beyond reinterpreting medieval history as the origin of contemporary constitutional governance, the intellectuals like Balaguer innovated in asserting essential distinctions from whatever they categorized as ‘Spanish’ explicitly from modernizing point of view and aspirations. Refuting other commentators who attempted to downplay the uniqueness of the medieval Catalan conciliar government as mere local manifestation of pan-European feudal contracts, Balaguer insisted, “the origins of the Catalan municipal institutions can be found solely... in the formal character of the Catalans in their innate independence, free and entrepreneurial spirit.” Balaguer’s aspiration for the future of his nation based upon his exceptionalist interpretation of the Catalan past reaches most dramatic point by declaring, “no other country could offer a purer example of parliamentary practices and patriotism”, and that “Catalonia, like England, can serve as a model and a mirror.”<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to his praise for supposedly inherent Catalan affinity towards political liberalism and democratic institutions, the Castilians, “with their irrationality (*sin razon*) and egoistic conduct” are consistently depicted as servile people ruled by oppressive princes bent upon conquering and pillaging from the industrious Catalans. Citing from the seventh chapter of the thirteenth century *Fuero Viejo de Castilla* outlining the proprietorial rights of the landed nobility (*grandeza*), Balaguer claimed that retaining the Visigoth practice of landownership into medieval Castilian legal codes have produced a social system so oppressive that “We do not know of any other legal code of Christendom comparable.”<sup>22</sup> Over and again, Balaguer reinforces Prat de la Riba’s point of the Castilians being primarily—and implicitly only—talented in economically unproductive sectors of military and administration, a trait which inescapably compels them to prey upon the Catalan wealth and tradition of political freedom. Inverting the imagery of supposedly unbroken chain of liberalism and industriousness connecting the Catalans from their medieval past into the present, the Castilians are depicted as a nation immutably lazy throughout the centuries almost as helpless victims of their own inclination.

Balaguer’s account of the origins of Catalan nationhood performs curious mental gymnastics in his account of its early medieval foundations from the *Marca Hispanica* borderland between the Umayyad Caliphate and the Frankish Empire. On one hand, emphasizing the indigeneity of the Catalan nationhood, Balaguer rejected the majority view of his referenced chroniclers that the County of Barcelona began as a direct vassal of the Frankish kings, accusing these views “[falsely] seek to prove that France since time immemorial had dominion and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 743-50.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 353.

lordship over Catalonia.”<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, however, Balaguer was also just as keen to highlight the European origins of the Catalan sovereignty through the repeated digressions and lionization of semi-legendary figures such as eighth-century Otger Cataló originating from “supposedly of the dukes of Bavaria... or of Savoy.”<sup>24</sup> In self-awareness of the boundary between nativism and rigorous scholarship, Balaguer had to admit there was little room for modern sense of ethnic purity in the medieval times, and there were significant foreign influences in the foundation of premodern Catalan polities. Yet switching conveniently to and from romantic essentialist and more level-headed, empirical view of history, Balaguer legitimizes his position with a rhetorical question, “What does it matter... whether he was a German belonging to the army of Charles Martel, or a soldier-adventurer?... Were they [the early Reconquista adventurer barons] not the valiant, the patriotic... and first restorers of the patria?”<sup>25</sup>

The question of the Catalan national origins between Reconquista Iberian indigeneity and the legacy of the old Frankish empire is highly representative of the intellectual dilemma that the Catalan intellectuals faced in envisioning their collective past. Although not every Catalan intellectual shared Prat de la Riba and Balaguer’s tendency to exaggerate and essentialize, they nonetheless agreed on the view of a vibrant, imaginary line connecting the Mediterranean commercial expansionism of the medieval Crown of Aragón to the Catalan present. Moreover, these intellectuals were invested in cultivating a sense of historical Catalan nationality recognizably distinct from Spain which unfortunately in this period had reputations such as, according to Stendhal, a “living representative of the Middle Ages”, indistinguishable from “complete African”. François-René de Chateaubriand infamously summarized this derisive view by describing the Spaniards as “Arabs” who were only distinguished by being Catholics as opposed to Muslims.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, pride in Catalonia’s achievements in high modernist terms such as constitutional traditions and capitalist-commercial development in contrast with the rest of the Iberian Peninsula became the foundation of the Europeanizing element of the Catalan nationalism that can be summed up as, “the only true Europeans in Spain.”<sup>27</sup> Hence, in order to understand the seemingly impossible claim that the first Christian polities of the eastern Pyrenees founded by adventurer-warriors from the Frankish empire were somehow not under the Frankish rule, one needs to read the ideological underlying subtext. And that statement is that the Catalans are one

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 207. As for commentaries regarding *Marca Hispanica* conceptualization of the Catalan history and nationhood, refer to Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism*, 12-17.

<sup>26</sup> Citations of Stendhal and Chateaubriand are borrowed from Nadia R. Altschul, *Geographies of Philological Knowledge: Postcoloniality and the Transatlantic National Epic*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Solís, *Negotiating Spain*, 2.

of the indigenous peoples of Europe with fully independent source of distinct collective identity. Accordingly, the lesson of the national history for intellectuals of the Catalan *Renaixença* was this; Catalonia's future burrowed from its timeless past lied with Europe connected through the threads of entrepreneurialism and parliamentary traditions, away from the backwardness and irrationality of the 'African' Spain dominated by the Castilians.<sup>28</sup> Although hardly unique for the era, the Catalan nationalist intellectuals of the turn of the century hence pursued exclusionary discourse of national self-construction based on racialized derision of non-Catalans.<sup>29</sup> In hindsight, the racism of the Catalan nationalist intellectuals during the turn of the century left an embarrassing legacy that few advocates of greater Catalan autonomy or independence today would like to recall. Immediately in their own times, the racist and exclusionary dimensions would also reap the consequence of another movement benefiting heavily from the alienation of those barred from entering this liberal capitalist modern paradise-frontier: the working-class.

### **Blossoming the “Rose of Fire”: Anarcho-syndicalism and the Frontier of a New Social Order**

As Balaguer's writings testify, the core socioeconomic class whose social mores formed the driving ethos of Catalan nationalism were the industrial bourgeoisie.<sup>30</sup> While initially the *Lliga* partook in electoral alliances with parties on the left, the early Catalan nationalist movement throughout the 1880s and 90s turned largely pro-bourgeoisie in socioeconomic platform and orientation, appealing to “men who aspired to rise into the world of the middle class.”<sup>31</sup> Declaring himself a man “who wish to defend religion, property, and the monarchy”, Prat de la Riba had no reservation about where his sympathies lied in regards to socioeconomic questions unrelated to the Catalan issues. Decrying the essence of proletarian radicalism as “riot and terrorism (*es motín, es terrorismo*)”, he declared, “at the root of all radicalism there is hate, hate for everything different, hate for everyone who is not one of them, therefore deserving of destruction.” As a conscious celebrator of Catalonia's industrial, commercial heritage, Prat de la Riba's ethno-national contempt for the Castilian-Andalusian “*lo torero y la manola*”, and classism

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> As for racist elements of Catalan nationalist discourses relating to the infamous phrase, “Africa starts at the Pyrenees”, refer to Francisco Martínez Hoyos, “El discurso de la hispanofobia: racismo y xenofobia en el nacionalismo catalán”, *Aportes: Revista de historia contemporánea* 84, no. 29 (2014): 183-92.

<sup>30</sup> Joaquín Romero Maura, *La rosa de fuego: el obrerismo barcelonés de 1899 a 1909* (Barcelona: RBA, 2012), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Origins of Catalan Nationalism*, 205.

converge seamlessly throughout his diatribe.<sup>32</sup> Particularly indignant about the leftist anticlericalism, Prat de la Riba's defense of the church "with all its supernatural prestige... with millenarian glory that commanded fervent adhesion of countless thinkers, heroes, and saints throughout the ages, and of races and civilizations" would become one of the most poignantly conflictive issue between the Catalan nationalists and the secularistic far left of Barcelona.<sup>33</sup>

In 1868 when the coalition of liberal and democratic politicians, army officers, and workers overthrew the monarchy of Isabel II, Mikhail Bakunin dispatched his Italian follower Giuseppe Fanelli to Spain bearing the invitation of the First International to the nascent Spanish labor movement. Although this visit is commonly cited as the beginning of the anarchist movement in Spain, autonomous seeds of socialist labor movement with distinctly libertarian, anti-centralist, communitarian overtones had already existed.<sup>34</sup> During the 1850s, worker's mutual associations influenced by Saint-Simon, Fourier, Cabet, and other utopian socialists had formed throughout the scattered, early centers of industrialization and international commerce in Spain such as Valencia, Cádiz, Madrid, and naturally Barcelona.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the revolution of 1868 had propelled many prominent federalist-republican thinkers and agitators such as Francesc Pi i Margall and Fermín Salvochea into national importance and stature. A political philosopher originally from a working-class Catalan family, Pi i Margall who would briefly become the president of the First Republic (1873-74) was also the translator of Joseph-Pierre Proudhon's writings into Spanish. A son of bourgeois family from Cádiz, Salvochea whom upon returning from his education in Britain had also brought his love of Thomas Paine and Robert Owen participated in the revolution of 1868, becoming the mayor of his hometown with the advent of the First Republic. Conflict with moderate republicans such as Pi i Margall,

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<sup>32</sup> Prat de la Riba, *Compendi de la doctrina*, iii. By late 1920s, around 35 percent of Barcelona's population were non-Catalans with the largest numbers coming from Andalusia. Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona 1898–1937* (London: Routledge, 2005): 2-10.

<sup>33</sup> Prat de la Riba, "El radicalismo de la derecha", *La Cataluña* 3, no. 106 (16 October 1909), 633-34.

<sup>34</sup> One historian went so far to criticize the conventional view regarding Fanelli's visit as "some kind of baptism and confirmation" of Spanish anarchism arguing by similar logic, unlike Fanelli who spoke neither Spanish nor Catalan and stayed only briefly, Marx's own son-in-law and Cuban-born, Spanish-fluent Paul Lafargue's much longer stay few years later should have left much more profound impact. Josep Termes, *Historia del anarquismo en España (1870–1980)* (Madrid: RBA, 2011), 54. Others while admitting the preexistence of both socialist and libertarian initiatives in Spain have nonetheless maintained the importance of Fanelli's visit in bequeathing "articulation of scientific worker's movement that connected with [Spain's] internal, conflictive reality." Julián Vadillo Muñoz, *Historia de la CNT: Utopía, pragmatismo, y revolución* (Madrid: Catarata, 2019), 20.

<sup>35</sup> Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero en la historia de España*, vol. 1, 1832–1899 (Barcelona: Laia, 1977), 130-40.

however, led Salvochea and his native city into cantonalist uprising of 1873 that was put down by the army which proceeded to topple the First Republic altogether. During his exile, Salvochea became an anarcho-communist whom after being pardoned founded a socialist journal in his hometown where he translated the writings of Peter Kropotkin. Finally, among the federalist-republican labor organizers introduced to Fanelli in Madrid was a typographer from Toledo named Anselmo Lorenzo, a delegate of the Spanish section of the First International in 1871, then later one of the founders of the CNT in 1910.<sup>36</sup>

It is often said that the Iberian federalist precedent to the libertarian communist movement in its own turn “arose from the traditional Spanish emphasis on regionalism, from the cult of the *patria chica*, and from the resentment of the Castilian domination by Catalonia, Galicia, and Aragón.”<sup>37</sup> Doubtlessly there has been no shortage of both academic and political writings testifying the diversity of regionalisms, and the crisis of central nation-building project throughout the Spanish history.<sup>38</sup> On the surface, it seems self-explanatory that by the nineteenth century’s end few in Spain should have seen the central state under either negligent Bourbon monarchy or chaotic liberal constitutional experiments as a reliable vehicle of cultivating a coherent, stable modern political community.<sup>39</sup> The rise of anarcho-syndicalism likewise was shaped by the central state’s weakness especially over the socioeconomic issues even under liberal and federalist-republican administrations, provoking a nationwide syndicalist and municipal autonomist uprisings during the 1873 Cantonalist Revolt.

Throughout the rest of the century, the Spanish anarchists like their comrades elsewhere in Europe and the Americas pursued the propaganda of deed as the leading revolutionary strategy. The anarchists were responsible for the

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<sup>36</sup> Laura Vicente Villanueva, *Historia del anarquismo en España: Utopía y realidad* (Madrid: Catarata, 2013), 61. Some historians such as George Woodcock and Max Nettlau have claimed that in fact the origins of Spanish anarchism are fully native and go up to Ramón de la Sagra y Peris (1798-1871) a sociologist, liberal statesman, and collaborator of Proudhon.

<sup>37</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1962), 394. Jack White, an Irish Red Cross volunteer of 1936 would go so far to claim it was “the natural nobility of the Catalan people” that had sparked a specifically “Syndico-anarchist” form of “socialist reconstruction... against *Spanish* [my emphasis] and international fascism.” Jack White, “A Rebel in Barcelona: Jack White’s first Spanish impressions”, *Boletín de Información de la CNT-FAI-AIT* 15 (11 November 1936).

<sup>38</sup> Contrary to the prevalent, under-interrogated view that Woodcock typified, even the Castilians conventionally described as the imperial, core nation of centralized, national Spain in this period developed a vigorous regionalist movement with federalist-republican orientation principally around the mythologization of the sixteenth century *Comunero* rebels. For an example, Enrique Berzal de la Rosa, *Los comuneros: de la realidad al mito* (Madrid: Sílex, 2021), 217-88.

<sup>39</sup> For a view of the Bourbon Restoration as a weak state neglectful of national identity-cultivation particularly in questions relating to education and secularization, refer to Boyd, *Historia Patria*, 1-40.

assassinations of high-profile politicians like the prime ministers Cánovas del Castillo (1897) and José Canlejas (1912), and also erected barricades in the streets of Barcelona in “1870, 1874, 1902, 1909, 1917.”<sup>40</sup> Met in kind with increasing repression by the Restoration Bourbon state, the anarchist physical militancy culminated in the Tragic Week in Barcelona of 1909 when a spontaneous, anti-draft, anticlerical uprising ended with over a hundred insurgent workers killed during the uprising, and celebrated anarchist pedagogue Francesc Ferrer i Guardia executed in reprisal. Gradually, it became plain to see that instantaneous physical militancy such as guerrilla uprisings and assassinations could not effectively usher a new age of self-managed society of fraternal equals. The anarchists would have to form a mass-based organization capable of bounding syndicalist labor to the anarchist conception of anti-political polity in order to advance the creation of libertarian society in the realm of everyday social struggle.<sup>41</sup> These endeavors eventually led to the foundation of Worker’s Solidarity (*Solidaridad Obrera*), a federation of trade unions of Catalonia in 1907 that went national three years later, re-founding itself as the CNT.<sup>42</sup>

Scholars such as George Woodcock were right to draw connection between the rise of anarcho-syndicalism with the older traditions of municipal autonomist politics throughout the Iberian Peninsula with premodern origins. However, the crisis of the central state and the resulting popular disillusionment alone do not sufficiently explain why specifically anarcho-syndicalism over other variants of revolutionary socialisms should have grown to such influence in Spain. Nor does it explain the peculiarity of the Spanish libertarian movement’s success in, as we have seen, a historical capital with an articulate, predeveloped vision of belonging to a national community. Proper understanding of how anarcho-syndicalism could grow to the extent of, for example, from 345,000 to 715,000 members in 1918-1919 alone requires an account of firmly local conditions of the world of the turn-of-century working-class Barcelona.<sup>43</sup> Some of the secrets of the CNT’s success were conditions that impacted the anarcho-syndicalists’ typically wealthier, often employer Catalanist fellow citizens alike. Apart from the disillusionment with the

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<sup>40</sup> Eade, *Catalonia*, 227.

<sup>41</sup> Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 138-46.

<sup>42</sup> Strictly speaking, CNT itself initially did not proclaim anarchism, at times contained significant elements that advocated and did collaborate with the state. It was FAI founded much later in 1927 that had set the whole CNT on a committed anarcho-syndicalist track after series of divisive internal debates and splits over the ideological leanings. The internal history of the CNT unrelated to bilateral relations with the Catalan Question leading up to its consolidation as an anarcho-syndicalist organization is dealt in detail in Vadillo Muñoz, *Historia de la CNT*, 91-125. “Solidaridad Obrera” as a name has been used by various organizations throughout the history of Spanish anarchism such as this 1907 predecessor federation, an official CNT periodical, and another, smaller anarcho-syndicalist union existing today independent of the CNT.

<sup>43</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 36.

central state, another such shared factor was Barcelona's cultural cosmopolitanism and integration into wider international networks of ideas, events, and movements. According to Juan García Oliver, the future spokesman of *Federación Anarquista Ibérica*, it was none other than the Russian and Swiss anarchist exiles of 1917 who brought "healthy suspicion of Bolsheviks" to the Barcelona labor scene, and also to the mind of then a seventeen-year-old restaurant waiter on his first strike.<sup>44</sup>

Especially in the realm of public education and mass enlightenment, the emergent libertarian worker's movement found a gap neglected by both the Spanish state fearful of provoking further political instability, and the local bourgeoisie largely indifferent to the proletarian plight. Anarchist engagement with the wider networks of European ideas about social reform and worker's self-emancipation culminated in the establishment of the libertarian school of pedagogy by Francesc Ferrer i Guardia and the Modern School movement. In a country where the youth education truly remained one of the last bastions of clerical entrenchment, the need for a new intellectual system of worldview that distinguished the radicalized proletariat from 'the generic Spaniard' with all his/her association with backwardness was equally urgent to the anarcho-syndicalists as it was to the bourgeois Catalan nationalists.<sup>45</sup> Returning from his Parisian exile spent in the company of figures such as Louise Michel, Elisée Reclus, Anselmo Lorenzo, and Kropotkin, in 1901 Ferrer founded the first of his experimental, libertarian Modern Schools with just thirty students. In its purpose and function, the libertarian education sought to replace the traditional, authoritarian pedagogical model by free, uncoercive self-cultivation of students' intellect according to their internal inclinations with the school's institutional role limited to providing resources and minimally necessary guidance. By 1905, the Modern School movement had grown to over fifty branches in Spain, expanding also into South America and the United States. Despite Ferrer's death by the hands of vengeful Spanish state, his libertarian pedagogy outlived its martyred founder through succeeding anarchist pedagogues such as Ricardo Mella. The success of the libertarian pedagogy in turn reflected the wider success of the libertarian workers' movement reorganizing around the institutions of everyday working-class life such as the education. This libertarian variation of the vision of Barcelona as a frontier set apart from Spain, however, would be firmly drawn by socio-ideological boundaries rather than any ethno-national sense.<sup>46</sup>

Looking back to his youth later during exile, Juan García Oliver also recounted, "If you submit, you can have peace; if you refuse to submit, you'll have to wage war. That is how I viewed things, and in this sense, Spain had long been in

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<sup>44</sup> Juan García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos: el anarcosindicalismo en las calles, en Comité de Milicias, en el gobierno, en el exilio* (Barcelona: Ruedo ibérico, 1978), 25-30.

<sup>45</sup> Boyd, *Historia Patria*, 7-10.

<sup>46</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 40-50 and Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 128-36.



a state of civil war long before I was even born.”<sup>47</sup> Notwithstanding some common historical circumstances, the industrial workers of Barcelona lived in a reality fundamentally different from, and harsher than that of typically wealthier Catalan nationalists. Moreover, this was a reality too transient for any strong sense of national identity to take root in the hearts of the workers whose lives have been torn apart by the viciousness of early industrial capitalism. Demographic history of Barcelona in this period attests to this harshness. The city’s overall population which in 1887 had been around 260,000 in a mere decade doubled to 530,000 by the century’s end. By the wake of the civil war, Barcelona had surpassed Madrid as the most populous city in Spain with over a million inhabitants in the city proper.<sup>48</sup> Yet, the mortality rate remained high around 30% by 1890, nor did the fertility rate of native Catalans before the population boom increase accordingly.<sup>49</sup> This meant that in working-class neighborhoods such as “Gràcia, Sants and Sant Martí” where the population doubled and tripled over few decades, thousands migrated annually to subdivided flats or improvised shanties called *barracas* to live short, brutal lives until they were replaced by thousands more largely from southern Iberian regions such as Andalusia and Murcia ravaged by *latifundista* rural poverty.<sup>50</sup>

Facing this dilemma of the very same capitalist expansion, the pride of European Catalonia also bringing in tremendous number of impoverished outsiders, the mainstream Catalan nationalists responded by mixture of racist and classist rhetoric coupled with authoritarian, class-segregationist urban administrative practices. Earlier thinkers such as Valentí Almirall still had amicable things to say about the Castilians, admitting the creation of real bond throughout the shared history while still emphasizing their racial, essential difference from the Catalans originating from “Semitic elements left by Moors.”<sup>51</sup> As the Catholic and conservative influences within Catalan nationalist discourses grew, however, the new generation of its advocates in the opening decades of the twentieth century became more confrontational in tone. This intellectual rightwing turn of Catalan nationalism fueled demagogic politicians such as Pere Rossell and Narcís Verdaguer openly indulging in the crossover of ‘Moorish Castilian-Andalusian’

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<sup>47</sup> García Oliver, *Eco de los pasos*, 54.

<sup>48</sup> “Serie histórica”, Área Metropolitana de Barcelona, <https://www.amb.cat/s/es/web/area-metropolitana/dades-estadistiques/demografia/serie-historica.html> and Luis Cano, “Así han evolucionado las ciudades españolas: grandes capitales venidas a menos y otras en expansión”, *ABC*, March 28, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Antonio López Gay, “175 años de series demográficas en la ciudad de Barcelona. La migración como componente explicativo de la evolución de la población”, *Biblio 3W. Revista Bibliográfica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales* 29, no. 1098 (2014): <http://www.ub.es/geocrit/b3w-1098.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 4-6.

<sup>51</sup> Valentí Almirall i Liozer, *Lo Catalanisme*, (Barcelona: Llibrería de Verdaguer, 1886), 24.

racism crossed over with classism.<sup>52</sup> Since both the Restoration state and the Catalan bourgeoisie shared the tendency to view the workers' social problems in narrowly punitive terms, urban administrative practices similarly ended up cementing the trilateral alienation between the central state, local nationalists, and the workers. The policing of Barcelona was a notable example among key urban administrative services demonstrating this dynamic of three-way antagonization. As the deficit-ridden Spanish state compensated the lack of professional and effective police force with greater draconian arbitrariness and brutality, the Lliga responded typically by discrediting the state's ability to maintain social order while increasing racist-classist denunciation of working-class unruliness. Abandoned by the Spanish state and despised by the Catalan bourgeoisie, for the workers of Barcelona from all corners of Spain united by life's harshness with only one's neighbors of similar disposition to depend on, the anarcho-communist messages of mutual aid, self-management, and the politics of anti-politics denouncing all national and state hierarchies felt much closer to their reality rather than being a lofty intellectual abstraction.<sup>53</sup> In this manner, the contested imaginations of Barcelona's identity between the libertarian workers and the nationalist bourgeoisie reflected the issue of national identity entangling with deep-rooted class conflict in a society undergoing the crisis of industrial capitalism.

Shocked by the explosive growth of anarcho-syndicalism among their own historic capital's working masses, the Catalan nationalists logically sought to respond by creating their own, rival populist political organizations. Nevertheless, the Catalan nationalist journey away from the pro-bourgeois, socioeconomically conservative tone set by the generation of Prat de la Riba and Francesc Cambó proved difficult and too slow to catch up to the rival movements. The Catalan nationalist attempts to found a political organization with mass appeal comparable to the anarchists and socialists (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) did not crystallize until the advent of the Second Republic. Only in 1931, the first Catalan nationalist party with explicitly leftist, populist platform emerged with the Republican Left (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*) led by Francesc Macià.

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<sup>52</sup> It should be noted in spite of the conservative turn of the mainstream Catalan nationalism, there has always been a minority of leftwing Catalan nationalists as well. By the turn of the century, however, some of even the leftwing Catalanists such as playwright Jaume Brossa or painter Eudald Canivell tends to convert to anarchism altogether while maintaining Catalanist cultural-patriotic ethos. Smith, *Origins of Catalan Nationalism*, 178-80, 190-92.

<sup>53</sup> Chris Ealham notes, "the proletarian city was essentially democratic: none of the *barris* in which the migrants resided were ghettoised, and there were numerous opportunities for newly arrived workers to interact with migrants from other regions and with Catalan workers." Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 15-20, 26-33. The most intensive study of the anarcho-syndicalist ideology in Spain, its core foundations, and analysis of politics of "anti-politicismo" remains to this day José Alvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español (1868-1910)* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1991), 3.

Even the Esquerra, however, was seen really more petit-bourgeois in orientation with only loose leftist credentials in lieu of its character as a coalition of diverse Catalanist tendencies held together by leaders such as Macià and Lluís Companys. Despite achieving notable electoral victories shortly after foundation, nor could Esquerra's pace of growth catch up to the scale rivalling the anarcho-syndicalists and socialists before the outbreak of the civil war in the fateful summer of 1936 completely changed the political landscape in Spain forever.<sup>54</sup>

### **Utopia of No Nations: Cosmography of the Barrio in the Libertarian Social Revolution**

As for the anarcho-syndicalists, from both their lived experiences as workers and from ideological principles, there was little room for harmonious relations with Catalan nationalism. In contrast to intensive Marxist-Leninist investment in articulating theories of socialist nationalism in Soviet Union and beyond, the anarcho-syndicalists traditionally did not entertain any notion of taming nationalism as a political instrument neither in revolutionary Russia nor in Spain.<sup>55</sup> Anselmo Lorenzo, a Castilian founder of revolutionary trade union based in Catalonia demonstrated this as early as 1901. Commenting upon the regional nationalism in both Catalonia and the Basque Country, Lorenzo conceded that both had “deeply-founded, sure reasons to complain against the Spanish state.” Upon closer inspection, however, Lorenzo argued that the cause of the popular discontent was in fact general exploitative dynamics of the capitalism and the modern state which affected all of the Iberian Peninsula, if not the whole world commonly. Furthermore, he insisted, “the true soldiers of the cause can be no other than the workers... who bare the worst parts of it [the capitalist-statist system] all.” In contrast, who were the chief promoters of Catalan and Basque nationalism? “The privileged sons (*los hijos del privilegio*) ... who lash out against the poor devil, the workers in Madrid.” Accusing the Catalan and Basque nationalists of being “agitators of today, but governors for tomorrow” ambitious to found “new, smaller states” no less tyrannical than the existing one, Lorenzo's message that “the workers must not fight for a new class of rulers” became a consistent stance of the

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<sup>54</sup> Enric Ucelay-Da Cal, “Catalan populism in the Spanish civil war,” in Ealham and Richards, *Splintering of Spain*, 93-100.

<sup>55</sup> Nestor Makhno, the leader of the anarchist insurgency in southern Ukraine during the Russian Civil War later during his Parisian exile came to urge fellow anarchists to treat the national question with greater seriousness, but without ever espousing Ukrainian nationalism. Frank Sysyn, “Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution”, *The Ukraine, 1917–1921: A Study in Revolution*, ed. Taras Hunchak (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 287-304. While the case is much less clear-cut among the anarchists and anarchism-inspired revolutionaries of colonial Asia, and Africa, these movements in turn have questionable claims to being specifically anarcho-syndicalists.

Iberian anarchists in regards to the national question throughout their ensuing history.<sup>56</sup>

“If the Spanish centralism is one form of tyranny”, declared an editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera* dated from December 1918, “the Catalan autonomism is yet another one.”<sup>57</sup> Whereas Lorenzo extended some sympathy in regards to what he saw as misgovernment by Madrid over Catalonia, the editors of the CNT’s periodical refused to concede even the conceptual grounds for dialogue by rejecting national identity as a meaningful lens of analyzing and transforming the society altogether. Insofar as the *cenetista* press addresses the Catalans in ethno-national sense, they are associated with the predatory bosses whose political leadership are “plutocrats... with no sympathy for the Catalan worker” than anything resembling a beleaguered nation oppressed by a foreign power. “The reality of nationalism is that in fact... it is not even a sufficient incentive to induce the people to rise up in general struggle.” While admitting that “the questions of language, maternal attachment to the land” consist “primary agenda regarding the freedom of the peoples”, the editorial maintained, “after a river of blood has been spilt”, they had ceased to be the most urgent and relevant question of the day. Compared to the overriding importance of class relations, the national question was interesting to “no one except those engulfed in only one among many aspects of human life and the currents of progress.”<sup>58</sup> Mocking the Catalan nationalists as “the poets singing about nearly-dead emotions (*los poetas de sentimientos ya casi muertos*)”, the editorial proclaimed that “the international problem” of capitalist exploitation “does not recognize any boundary..., and cannot be circumscribed by conventional limits that a handful in positions of leadership want to draw, but only by the whole humanity... as a common inhabitant of the planet.”

The *Solidaridad Obrera* editors seems they were purposefully exaggerating in dismissing nationalism as a transformative historic force as they admitted living through the period of European history when “nationalities are emerging, states are being created, and borders being drawn.” Nevertheless, they espoused that from the perspective of genuine human liberation, these were all false flags. As “internationalists in front of all the patrioticking (*patriotería*)”, syndicalists in regards to the economic problems, and anarchists in the moral ones”, the CNT Catalan regional committee asserted, “if the question [of national autonomy] that the various organizations have wasted time and energy upon has once been meaningful, that is no longer the case.” Careful to not resemble the *españolista* central government in Madrid, the authors acknowledged the importance and power

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<sup>56</sup> Anselmo Lorenzo, “Ni Catalanistas ni Bizkaytarras”, *La Huelga General 2* (November 1901).

<sup>57</sup> El Comité de la Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, “Como el pleito de la autonomía es un pleito burgués, no estamos con el gobierno de Madrid ni con el fomento del trabajo nacional”, *Solidaridad Obrera*, December 15, 1918.

<sup>58</sup> “Independencia y autonomía”, *Solidaridad Obrera*, November 19, 1918.

of “maternal feelings (*sentimientos maternas*)” in regards to one’s language, religion, and customs. Yet, these alone were still not sufficient grounds for a genuinely emancipating mass movement of collective liberation. “Sentiments” were fundamentally something that had equal “tenderness in all languages”, and “of religion and customs, the first is to be abolished; the second to be reformed.” Striking at the very core assumption of ethnic solidarity at the emotive heart of any nationalism, the anarcho-syndicalist paper went so far to suggest that the alien despots faraway can be less insufferable than pettier ones closer at home. “It is entirely possible... the indigenous people of a region could become enslaved even more after regional autonomy has been granted” as long as the changes do not go beyond the fundamentally oppressive structures of the nation-state and the monopolistic capital.<sup>59</sup>

Second fall of the Bourbon monarchy and the advent of the Second Republic in 1931 did little to change the fundamentally uncomfortable coexistence between the Catalan nationalists and the anarcho-syndicalists as rivalling political forces in Barcelona. Beyond the philosophical incompatibility between the two ideologies, another factor fueling the sustained mutual hostility was relations with the Catholic church. Although the Catalan nationalists were broadly laic in social outlook and cultural milieu, they nonetheless rarely espoused any formal opposition to neither the Catholic religiosity nor the church. As the cultural imagination of the Catalan national past was abundant with the iconographies of the Virgin of Montserrat, the royal monasteries of Poblet and Ripoll, the cult of St. George, and the churches of Gaudi, the advocates of Catalan national identity and autonomy had more reasons to view the influence of the Catholic church as an advantage rather than an obstacle. Given the tolerant sociocultural ambiance of Barcelona towards personal liberty then as now, even at the level of individual conduct there was little incentive to abandon religion formally when it was feasible to simply ignore the inconvenient parts of the church’s social teachings.<sup>60</sup> The Catalan nationalists’ connections to the Catholic church in fact would become even more important in future during the Francoist dictatorship when the religious literature and sermons became a sanctuary of Catalan national-linguistic expressions too delicate to openly crack down for the otherwise virulently *españolista* regime.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> “Ni con uno ni con otros”, *Solidaridad Obrera*, December 16, 1918. The CNT’s taciturn recognition of Catalan “indigeneity” in this context, however, is also significant.

<sup>60</sup> Ucelay-Da Cal, “Catalan Populism,” 100-102; Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism*, 30-32; and Eade, *Catalonia*, 35-50.

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed account of the role of the Catholic Church as refuge of Catalan nationalism during Francoism, refer to Andrew Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War: Reconstructing the Nation* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 66-95.

Meanwhile, the sociocultural relationship of the industrial working class with the church was drastically different, and this discrepancy transplanted deeply into the fervently anti-religious agenda of the anarcho-syndicalists. Differing perceptions and experiences based on class-based social dispositions played an important role in this dynamic. In a country where the church still held jurisdiction over many essential social services that elsewhere in Europe was increasingly becoming the secular state's domain, little stood in the way of the wealthier citizens seeking more laic private education, studies abroad, and private nannies for their children. Working-class families, on the other hand, unsurprisingly were far more regularly victimized by abusive and under-qualified church members in "schools, hospitals, workhouses, orphanages and borstals" with little avenues of escape or justice. Therefore, once the social tropes of 'church-burning godless reds' and 'child-beating obscurantist priests' became a self-regenerating, mutually referential dynamic, the vicious cycle of resentment and mistrust between the church and the radicalized proletariat only worsened.<sup>62</sup> The conservative Catholic Catalans naturally sought to break the anarcho-syndicalist hegemony on the Barcelona labor scene by creating their own labor organizations based on class-collaborationist, corporatist models such as the Carlist-leaning *Unión de Sindicatos Libres* (1919). These endeavors, however, scuttled in the face of CNT's counter-mobilization, *pistolero* retaliatory terror, and political missteps and miscoordination during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, failing to peel away the Barcelonese working class from the anarcho-syndicalist militant anticlericalism.<sup>63</sup> Foreseen by Prat de la Riba's aversion against the leftist anticlericalism, the differences over the religious question eventually exploded violently in the summer of 1936 when the anarchist-led counter-insurrection stalled what was supposed to be a decisive military coup d'état into a protracted civil war, unleashing power-vacuum in Barcelona that channeled into a full-blown social revolution.

Traditionally, both the defenders and critics of the 1936 libertarian social revolution characterized the rearguard terror during the wartime Barcelona as largely products of frenzied, uncontrollable mob. However, recent researches about the patterns of anticlerical attacks significantly complicate this conventional view.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Chris Ealham, "The myth of the maddened crowd: class, culture and space in the revolutionary urbanist project in Barcelona, 1936–1937", in Ealham and Richards, *Splintering of Spain*, 128-30.

<sup>63</sup> A scholar dedicated to the study of Sindicato Libres and conservative Catholic labor organizational efforts commented, "Spanish Catholicism, unlike Belgian, German, French, or Italian varieties, failed to retain the allegiance of even a significant minority of the urban workers." Colin M. Winston, *Workers and the Right in Spain 1900–1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Some of the important literature regarding the nature and character of both the Republican and Francoist rearguard terrors during the civil war are, Julius, Ruiz, *The 'Red Terror' and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Paul

After all, it seems unlikely that a mob blinded by fury would carefully pick out selected artworks according to the criteria set by academic art historians for safe transfer before shooting the priests and sacking the rest of the church as frequently observed during 1936 in Barcelona. Eyewitness Franz Borkenau recalled that contrary to his expectation about church-burnings with “almost demoniac excitement of the mob”, those he had seen were typically controlled, almost mundane affairs. In almost all the cases, there was pre-arranged presence of firefighters to control the perimeters of the fire, and often even art historians sent by revolutionary organizations to assess and conserve the artistic works within the unfortunate churches before burning the rest of the edifice.<sup>65</sup> In 1936 alone, more than two hundred churches across the city were set on fire in this manner, but less than twenty were wholly demolished. Instead, as symbolic statement of erecting worker’s own, laic social order over the ruins of monarchical and religious past, the majority of ransacked churches were converted into community warehouses, schools, theaters, canteens, hospitals, and shelters. More than being mere retaliatory response amidst the ambiance of general panic, the anarcho-syndicalist revolutionary anti-religious violence constituted a conscious ideological enactment just as integral to its character as the collectivization of factories and social services. All these acts represented implementing the proletarian social vision based on the egalitarian, urban political culture of the *barrio* serving as the organizing unit around which industries were collectivized, neighborhood patrols were set up, schools and daycares were provided, and militia columns were levied. During the social revolution in Barcelona, the workers’ self-organized communal institutions installed in burnt-out churches came to symbolize the two, seemingly contradictory sides of democratic popular creativity and terror connected to each other through the cosmography of the proletarian *barrio*.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Triumph of Nightmare and Pained Legacy of a Conceptual Frontier**

In contrast to the violent dynamism of the libertarian social revolution, the Catalan nationalists represented by Esquerra within the Popular Front coalition was nominally leading the Catalan autonomous government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*). However, Esquerra did not have any mass organization with mobilizational power

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Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Collins, 2012); and Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 111-16.

<sup>65</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eyewitness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1937), 70-75. I have capitalized “C” to refer to the conventional meaning of Communists as in Marxists-Leninists pledged to the Comintern in order to avoid confusion with anarcho-communism.

<sup>66</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 117-125 and Julián Casanova, “Terror and Violence: The Dark Face of Spanish Anarchism”, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 67 (Spring 2005): 93-97.

on the ground comparable to the anarcho-syndicalists' mantle of hegemony over the street-politics of Barcelona. Subsequently during the early phase of the war, the Catalan nationalists found themselves sidelined by the workers' militia columns led by joint anarcho-syndicalist and socialist initiatives carrying out the lion's share of defending Barcelona and Madrid. Then as the overall republican wartime situation turned sour, the bilateral relations between anarchist-led *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas de Cataluña* and the Generalitat likewise worsened over the question of the social revolution versus conventional military victory. Pressured by the increasing Communist influence, the republican government eventually suppressed the libertarian workers' communes in the May of 1937 to reimpose the state control over Barcelona with neither the Generalitat nor the CNT, but the Stalinists of the Popular Front coalition gaining the most from the situation. Even the reimposition of the state power in Barcelona, however, was far from securing permanent political unity in the republican rearguard through the final victory of the central government. Well after the May of 1937, many militia columns and communes in the countryside of Catalonia and Aragón held on to the autonomy of action as the republican government gained neither enough time nor resources to completely undo the anarchist collectivization in advance of the Francoist army.<sup>67</sup> Before the Catalan nationalists could entertain any real chance at power in their own nation's capital ahead of both the CNT and the Communists, Franco's army made the contest altogether meaningless as they proceeded to crush the anarchists, socialists, communists, republicans, secularists, and regional nationalists alike.<sup>68</sup> And since Barcelona's integration into the wider world of European modernism endowed its special place in the progressive movements of Spain, the same quality was rendered in the regime's vision as the "the red city, the seat of anarchism and separatism", representing everything sinful about the secularism, socialism, and pluralism of the Second Republic.<sup>69</sup>

The violent discontinuity that Francoism unleashed into the Spanish sociopolitical landscape following the civil war is an adequate point of conclusion for the history of rivalry between the anarcho-syndicalists and Catalanists. In closing the narrative, however, it is worth recalling that despite its severe inhumanity, Francoism ultimately failed in its own self-proclaimed task of permanently eradicating either the anarchists or the separatists. The survivors of the

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<sup>67</sup> French anarchist revolutionary Gaston Leval recalled that after the May Days, 30% among the collectives "were completely destroyed." Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 1975), 629. A detailed and modern account of the history of the CNT from the May Days of 1937 to the defeat of the republic in 1939 especially in regards to the questions of victory in war versus revolution and collaboration with the republic can be found in Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 169-250.

<sup>68</sup> Ucelay-Da Cal, "Catalan Populism," 104-110 and Julián Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 320-35.

<sup>69</sup> Victor Ruiz Albéniz, "El dolor purifica", *Heraldo de Aragón*, February 4, 1939.



Second World War among the ‘Red Spaniards’ eventually emerged with bases in exile communities created through their participation in various resistance movements across the Axis-occupied Europe.<sup>70</sup> Since the regime could hardly touch the dissidents outside Spain once those within were all either dead, in prison, or under surveillance, the Francoist repression machinery amidst the postwar international pressures could not return to pre-1945 level of brutal vigor. These international circumstances in turn enabled the old ideologies that once sparked the revolutionary passions in 1936 to regain a new life underground. Only after the dictator’s death, the frontier character of Barcelona in another reversal of fortunes raised the question of Catalonia’s historical identity and autonomy into an important role bridging the past and present throughout the democratic transition. The incumbent 1978 constitution that partially readopted the 1931 republican Statue of Autonomy hence can be read as a silent nod on behalf the post-Francoist Spanish democracy admitting indebtedness to the republican precedent.<sup>71</sup> And the underlying message in this tacit acknowledgment is this; the recognition of historical pluralism of the Iberian Peninsula, and the rights to regional cultural self-identity and autonomy is an essential criterion in order to complete Spain’s (re)transition into democracy from its troubled history.

In further irony, some commentators regarding social movements in Spain have noted that due to “the crushing by the Franco regime of the old forms of working-class organization”, the Catalan nationalists were able to grow into much stronger position of influence today than before the civil war.<sup>72</sup> There is no doubt much truth to this. Whereas the Catalan nationalism today has the power to generate intense political debates at national scale, the anarcho-syndicalism in Spain never recovered to its pre-Francoist vigor. In contrast to the flexibility of the Catalan nationalists collaborating with both the Catholic church and the left, the CNT throughout the war, exile, and underground found increasingly less room to maneuver for organizational self-preservation.<sup>73</sup> Sidelined during the civil war by the Communists, the anarchist participation in the guerrilla *maquis* resistance after

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<sup>70</sup> Despite the abundance of resistance literature considering both guerrilla struggle within Spain and from abroad, many accounts are segmented into regional or politically sectarian lines. Few works have yet treated the history of the Spanish Republic after its annihilation in the form of postwar resistance in holistic manner. Some notable studies are, Hartmut Heine, *La oposición política al franquismo: de 1939 a 1952* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1983) and Louis Stein, *Beyond Death and Exile: The Spanish Republicans in France, 1939–1955* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>71</sup> For dedicated studies of the contemporary Spanish Statue of Autonomy and its relations to the Second Republican constitutional precedent, refer to Pere Ysás, “Democracia y autonomía en la transición Española”, *Ayer* 15 (1994): 77-108, “El estado de las autonomías: orígenes y configuración”, in *Actas del III Simposio de Historia Actual: Logroño, 26–28 de octubre de 2000*, ed. Carlos Navajas Zubeldia (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2002), 101-25.

<sup>72</sup> Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 36-50.

the defeat ensured they would remain high on the regime's list of concentrated targets. Yet the anarchists naturally had no any foreign benefactors comparable to the sanctuary and support that the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc could provide to the Communists in contrast. On the hill of Montjuic in Barcelona on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1977, estimated three hundred thousand anarchists gathered to celebrate the CNT's re-legalization and first public meeting after Franco's death. Outwardly, the impressive turnout appeared as if the organization preserved most of its strength throughout almost forty years of exile and underground. Thousands more, however, had already died not only in Spain, but in occupied France, North Africa, Norway, and Italy far from home with no great power interested in their survival. In hindsight, this mass meeting intended as demonstration of CNT's resiliency ended up as its last show of force as an organization with nationwide influence and impact.<sup>74</sup> The decline of the anarcho-syndicalist movement from its "heroic years", however, still is a far cry from total death.<sup>75</sup> The common usage of jargon such as '*acción directa*', '*autogestión*', '*grupos de afinidad*' in the Spanish labor scene today even unrelated to anarchism is a testimony to the legacy that anarcho-syndicalists bequeathed to the wider history of labor and social movements in Spain. Making their presence known through *okupa* social centers, traditional labor disputes, and participation in various contemporary social issues such as housing or gentrification, anarcho-syndicalists in Spain today are weakened, but still active. In the footsteps of their ideological ancestors, contemporary Spanish anarcho-syndicalists also continue opposing the nationalisms of both the central Spanish state and the Catalanists.<sup>76</sup>

Lastly, it is worth noting how the discourse of Catalonia as a conceptual bordered was structurally layered so that even antagonistic ideologies could share certain important assumptions while politically opposing each other. For Spain as a straightforward geographic unit, Catalonia was obviously its northeastern borderland with France. The bourgeois Catalan nationalists inverted this view, conceiving Catalonia through historicist elaboration of national past as the southwestern borderlands of Europeanness separated from the backwardness of Spain. Beyond the spatial boundaries drawn along the ethno-nationalist lines, however, the social pressures of industrialization channeled through anarcho-syndicalist imagination produced yet another, radically different vision of a frontier. Through the lens of anarcho-syndicalist revolutionary urbanism, the barrios of Barcelona became an alternative frontier of a new society of proletarian, libertarian social order purified

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<sup>74</sup> Some notable works treating the post-classical history of the CNT in exile and after the 1978 transition are, Octavio Alberola and Ariane Gransac, *El anarquismo español y la acción revolucionaria (1961–1974)* (Barcelona: Virus Editorial, 2004) and Pablo Carmona Pascual, *Transiciones: de la asamblea obrera al proceso de pacto social: CNT (1976–1981)* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*.

<sup>76</sup> Ruymán Rodríguez, "Catalunya y las Anarquistas", *Solidaridad Obrera*, May 25, 2018.

from the corruptions of the older capitalist world including nationalisms. In this sequence, only by examining Barcelona's history through the framework of conceptual boundaries between nationalism and anarchist anti-nationalism the harshness of the Francoist repression becomes intelligible as well. After all, if there had been one view that the rightwing españolista army officers of the 1936-39 could share with both the Catalan nationalists and the anarcho-syndicalists, it was that Spain was defined through Castilian cultural dominance, Catholic imperialism, and agrarian social structure, and Barcelona definitely did not belong to the same world. In a tragic irony fitting of a mass fratricide, the Francoist conquerors hence acted upon the same assumptions, but with only differing interpretations from the two movements; that Barcelona's uniqueness were neither marks of a gifted national character, nor ingredients of a new social order, but sinful deviations in need of cleansing by fire and terror.