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Nationalism and Public Opinion in Contemporary Spain: The Demobilization of the Working Class in Catalonia

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between nationalism and public opinion in the region of Catalonia in contemporary Spain. It analyzes the interaction of the climate of opinion, expectations, poll results, and political action. This holistic approach permits a conclusion that successive Catalan governments and the political class, in an effort to solidify their foothold in and emerging democracy, have been successful in creating a climate of opinion that has encouraged the nationalist part of the Catalan population, concentrated proportionally in highest socioeconomic strata, to be actively involved in politics, while at the same time demobilizing a significant part of the working class, the sector of Catalan society most resistant to nationalism, by ignoring other social problems.

Introduction

“Should I remind them that the boy was a blue-collar worker: that is to say, a person who

doesn't do dialectic ostentation, a man with other problems?"

(Juan Marsé, *Last evenings with Teresa*, 1966)

The recent literature on Catalan nationalism is prolific and its production has intensified with the devolution of power to the regions of Spain that took place during the transition to democracy following Franco's death in 1975. Most studies acknowledge the historical reality of oppression during the Franco dictatorship of some cultural groups, including the Catalans, as a prelude to arguments supporting more autonomy, if not outright independence, for this region. As such, most of these studies focus on historical justifications, social aspects and the vindications of Catalan politicians to support the legitimacy of more self-government.

Nonetheless, most of these approaches justifying the idea of Catalonia as a "stateless nation" have shown significant theoretical and interpretive biases. First, most emphasize the strong sense of identity of the Catalans (Keating, 1996; Conversi, 1997; McRoberts, 2001; Gibernau, 2006), but fail to mention that the same surveys they cite show the percentage of the population that feels some kind of Spanish-Catalan dual identity is majoritarian and never dips below 67 percent. Second, they focus on the positive attitude of the Catalan population toward more self-government (Lancaster, 1997), but avoid factors like the negative reactions of citizens to, for example, the implementation of linguistic policies that prioritize the Catalan language over the Spanish language in the public sphere (Martínez-Herrera, 2002).

Most of these works end up at least partially mystifying Catalan nationalism through the use of expressions such as "organic community," "core values," and "consensus" (Miley, 2007, p. 3). They ignore the social conditions under which public opinion is formed and do not take into

consideration relevant aspects such as the dominant climate of opinion, the expectations of the Catalan people, the level of political participation of the citizenship, and the social relations of power. Furthermore, although the variables of birthplace and native tongue would seem to be the most relevant when analyzing attitudes toward Catalan nationalism as demonstrated in surveys, the usual emphasis on the distinction between “Catalans” and “immigrants” has tended to denaturalize the debate and offer a slanted view of the situation. As an example, no Andalusian would argue seriously that he/she feels in a foreign land when working and living in Catalonia. An additional lacuna is the fact that, due to the time context, most of the existent analyses still rely on data from the decade of the nineties and have not been able to evaluate the repercussions of events as important as the approval of the third Statute of Autonomy in 2006.

Theoretical framework

This paper argues that the post-Franco nationalist Catalan political class can be understood as a top-elite movement that has marginalized at least half of the Catalan people – mostly those whose first language is Spanish and those from lower classes – from the political and public sphere. This marginalization has come about in two ways. First, through the creation of a social “false consensus” (Ross, Greene, and House, 1977), a perception theory that refers to the tendency of individuals to see their own behavioral choices and judgments as common and appropriate to existing circumstances. This false consensus effect explains why, although a majority of Catalans don’t feel nationalist, they do not take an active role in opposing Catalan nationalist policies under the assumption that nationalist sentiment is overall aspirational, positive and ultimately necessary to integrate into Catalan society. Moreover, this

paper argues, this false consensus has been reinforced by a “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) generated by a nationalist climate of opinion that has contributed to maintaining dissident opinions hidden.

Second, the increasing demobilization of this segment of the Catalan public opinion and electorate demonstrates that the political discourse of the major Catalan parties, mostly focused on identity issues, has generated alienation among these strata of the population. This fact was evident in the last referendum to approve the third Statute of Autonomy in 2006: popular participation barely reached 50 percent and only 33 percent of the entire electorate voted for it. This result, on an issue as crucial as the level of self-government in a highly politicized region, should be considered together with the low levels of political participation in Catalonia in general (60 percent participation on average in regional elections). The theory of a disconnection between the political elites and a large part of the electorate parallels explanations given for low levels of participation in American elections in the past. If historically one of the main complaints of American voters was that politicians ignored the real interests of the lower 60 percent of the economic strata (Avey, 1989), in the case of Catalonia we find a political party system that has clearly privileged identity issues over social issues. This reality sends a pessimistic message about the level of influence that the climate of opinion can exert upon public opinion and the demoralization that the inattentiveness of the political class to the real concerns of the population can cause among the citizenship, thus ultimately less likely to manifest their own opinions.

This paper argues that the public opinion phenomenon in Catalonia cannot be explained relying exclusively on poll results. It is only when we analyze and integrate other public

opinion components (social, informational and experiential) that we can interpret the public opinion dynamics in the region.

To analyze the relationship between the climate of opinion and the level of political involvement of the Catalan population, this author uses the multidimensional model of public opinion analysis developed by Jacob and Michal Shamir (2000) in their book *The Anatomy of Public Opinion*. This model not only relies on the analysis of the distribution of attitudes obtained in the polls but also on the climate of opinion, expectations, public speech and political action.

In their study of the changes of the Israeli public opinion with regard to the devolution of the “West Bank” territories during the nineties, Jacob and Michal Shamir (2000) analyzed the following four facets:

- The *climate of opinion* that describes the most permanent values and a system of goals creating consensus among the members of a society. In order to assess the dominant climate of opinion in Catalonia, this paper examines the role of the media in setting a public agenda where an identitarian frame is used to explain and interpret Catalan reality.
- The *prospective-informational facet* looks at the impact social and political events have on people’s lives and in shaping the population’s outlook at any point in time (Shamir & Shamir, 2000). This facet embodies general aspects like the content of mass media discourse as well as a social impact analysis of other factors, such as the effects on the population of the implementation of linguistic policies to promote the Catalan language in the public sphere.

- The *evaluative dimension* assesses personal attitudes and values as they are commonly picked up by opinion polls. This section of the article examines the results of recent polls regarding identity issues, political orientation and voting attitudes, among other factors.
- The *behavioral facet* emphasizes the public manifestation of public opinion and its communicative nature. This section applies two perception theories, “the false consensus effect” (Ross et al., 1977) and “the spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann, 1984), to explain the low level of voter participation in regional elections and the referendum for the third Statute of Autonomy.

Methodology

For the purpose of obtaining information to evaluate the convergence and divergence of the four public opinion facets detailed above, the authors have collected, analyzed and interpreted data from numerous secondary (official, academic and media) sources in different fields (media studies, political science, sociology, etc...). Included are the main sociological statistical surveys implemented in Catalonia by the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió (“Center of Opinion Studies”), an organ of the Catalan autonomous government dedicated to implementing polls and surveys analyzing the political and social evolution of Catalan society.

Catalonia is a highly politicized region where politics and identity play a key role in the content of the media industry. It is perhaps symptomatic of the state of public opinion in Catalonia that in the thirty years that nationalist issues have monopolized the public agenda, extensive research on media coverage of Catalan nationalism is scarce. For example, between 2004

and 2006, there were 67 dissertations on the topic of communication in Catalan universities and only one treating the topic from the point of view of the media coverage of the President of the *Generalitat* (Catalan Government) during the electoral campaign (Moragas i Spa, Civil i Serra, Reguero i Jiménez and Sedó, 2007). Nevertheless, there are partial analyses in these dissertations about how the regional government has extensively used the public media over the last thirty years to create a strong identification between nationalism and citizenship in Catalonia. The most common has been the use of tactics of national territorial socialization that question the legal frame of Catalonia as a region within Spain.

TV3 [the main public broadcast channel] not only contributes to shore up the nation, but also to construct the myths and symbols of nationalism and to socialize them as those of all Catalonia. TV3 is more than a television station, since it not only aspires to entertain or inform, but also to nationalize.

Thus if the objective is to construct the *Paisos Catalans* [Catalan countries], the weather maps will reflect these territories; if Catalan must be the only language of the country, the soap operas show a country in which –ignoring the socio-linguistic reality- no-one speaks Castilian. (Santamaría, 1999, pp. 50-51; as cited in Etherington, 2003, pp. 265-266).

As explained in the Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (CCMA) [Catalan Corporation of Audiovisual Media] website, the Catalan government – with the objective of helping consolidate and expand the use of the Catalan language, culture and identity – owns the main media conglomerate operating in Catalonia. CCMA is a public broadcast service in Catalan with six television broadcast channels, including the flagship TV3; four radio stations, including audience leader Catalunya Radio; and the Catalan News Agency (Agència Catalana de Notícies), among other companies. CCMA's 2,000 employees are equivalent to approximately 25 percent of the entire audiovisual sector in Catalonia, which employs 8,063 people (excluding the film and video industry) (Estadística de l'audiovisual a Catalunya, 2007,

p. 89). The importance of the public sector in the creation of opinion is also supported by the fact that CCMA's TVC (Catalonia Television) outsources numerous productions to other companies in the region that depend on public funds for their survival (Baró & Cubelles, 2006).

The market advantages CCMA enjoys in terms of budget and human resources shape the map of audiences. The public broadcast television and radio networks lead audience rankings with levels of penetration of 90.6 and 56.1 percent respectively (Baròmetre de la Comunicació i la Cultura, 2008). Furthermore, as in the rest of Spain, it is necessary to emphasize that the Parliament of Catalonia elects the board of the CCMA and, subsequently, it is a highly politicized media conglomerate.

With regard to television consumption patterns, the combined audience of the two main public channels, TV3 and KC33, represents 25 percent of the total. This data acquires even greater relevance where public opinion is concerned if we take into consideration that TV3 offers twice as many news shows as the rest of the national channels (55.6 percent) (Prado, Delgado, García, and Larrégola, 2007).

The public radio broadcast system, Catalunya Ràdio, also clearly leads audience rankings with 564,000 listeners, or approximately one third of the entire audience (Martí, 2007). As part of its mission to promote the Catalan language, the Catalan government also offered important subsidies to RAC1, the third most listened to radio, to the tune of 700,000 Euros between 2005 and 2006 (Ferreirós & De Angelis, January 22, 2008). In practice, these numbers allow one to conclude that the regional government directly or indirectly controls 50 percent of the radio landscape in Catalonia. It is important to emphasize that radio in Spain

differs from other countries in that it is a much more opinionated media than television and dedicates considerably more space and time to opinions and political information through newscasts, talk shows and audience phone-ins.

The influence of the printed press on the climate of opinion in Catalonia is minor compared to television and radio. As in the rest of Spain, the level of penetration of newspapers among the Catalan population is one of the lowest among OECD countries (Baròmetre de la Comunicació i la Cultura, 2008). Nonetheless, the newspapers are highly influential among elites and communication professionals. There are two key characteristics to keep in mind about the Catalan press landscape (González Cabezas, 1995, p. 97). The first is the high level of politicization: the two main regional newspapers, *El Periódico de Catalunya* and *La Vanguardia*, which together account for approximately half of the Catalan newspaper readership (Barómetre de la Comunicació i la Cultura, 2008), each clearly support a political party: respectively, PSC, a branch of the Spanish Worker's Socialist party, and *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), the main conservative Catalan nationalist party (González Cabezas, 1995, pp. 97-98). The second characteristic is the press' dependence on public funds via direct subsidies: during the biennium 2005/2006, *El Periódico de Catalunya* received 1.43 million Euros from the regional government, and *La Vanguardia* 674,000 Euros (De Angelis, September 2, 2008). Furthermore, institutional publicity represents a second substantial source of public funding for the Catalan press. The regional government, the main advertiser in Catalonia, spent almost 10 million Euros advertising in the regional press in 2007 alone (Anguera de Sojo, July 28, 2008). Yet perhaps the most remarkable fact with regard to the influence the Catalan government yields over the press is its 20 percent ownership of *Avui*, a Catalan-only

newspaper. This is a case unique in Europe.

The Catalan government has used its direct control of the public regional media conglomerate and its indirect sway of private media through the allocation of subsidies to create a strongly identitarian climate of opinion. Perhaps the best example of this media pressure was seen recently in the simultaneous publication in 12 Catalan newspapers of a united editorial called “La dignidad de Cataluña” (The dignity of Catalonia), a journalistic resource usually reserved for situations of national emergency such as a *coup d’état*. Conceived as a way to intimidate the Spanish Constitutional Court in case of an eventual cutting of the new Statute of Autonomy, this editorial was an example of the instrumentalization of the Catalan newspapers by the regional government.

In addition to the creation of a nationalist climate of opinion through the use of media that emphasizes the existence of a *Catalan problem* within Spain, the Catalan government has employed a strategy of occupying the public sphere and generally demotivating those citizens without an identitarian concern. This strategy involves the strong display of an autonomous government apparatus with the purpose of establishing identification between nationalism and well-being. This capillary process is described in the following section.

Expectations and Prospective Information Sources

A nation-building process

All of the various post-Franco governments in Catalonia have strived for “nation building.” In practical terms, this has meant restoring everyday use of the Catalan language as well as creating a national identification and self-governing institutions (Martínez-Herrera, 2002, p. 430). These policies were implemented as soon as the regional institutions were created in

the years following Franco's death. The second Statute of Autonomy of 1979 acknowledged that Catalonia had its own historical, cultural and linguistic personality within Spain. This Statute provided Catalonia with the greatest self-government of its history, a unitary government, its own parliament, and competencies in education, public order, health, transport and communications. The Statute was reformed in 2006 and approved again in a referendum. This third Statute expanded the competencies and in many aspects implied a bilateral *de facto* relationship between the regional government and the national government of Spain.

In their daily lives, Catalans have become accustomed to identifying with the regional political structure by voting in regional elections, paying regional taxes, being subject to regional regulations and being represented abroad by regional institutions (Martínez-Herrera, 2000, p. 429; Díez Nicolás, 1999). Since its inception, the Catalan government has pursued a localized replication of the powers and symbols of Spain's government. Catalonia has its own police force, sends officials to visit foreign countries, and possesses ornamental signs such as a flag, a national anthem, and so on (Moreno, 2001, p. 101). Furthermore, regional institutions have not only promoted the Catalan identity but also supported and, to a certain extent, tried to control the entire civil society. Indeed, most cultural activities and numerous organizations within Catalan society have come to depend in one fashion or another on support from the Catalan government and local authorities (McRoberts, 1996, pp. 116-122). This has strongly affected the climate of opinion since many of these organizations work to develop studies, publish materials and organize events to promote the Catalan identitarian justifications. This occupation of the public sphere by different means has aimed to generate

among the public opinion the perception that not only does the government support the “nation-building” process but the citizenship as a whole. A good example has been the recurrent utilization of the Barcelona soccer team as a platform for nationalist vindications. One of the most memorable uses of synergies by different civil society associations happened when, in the middle of a soccer match, the *Coordinadora de Asociaciones para la Lengua Catalana* (Coordinator of Pro-Catalan Language Associations) walked onto the lawn to display a huge poster in favor of the promotion of the Catalan language and a map in which other regions appeared as a part of the *països catalans* (Vázquez, October 10, 2005).

One of the regional government’s strategies has been to emphasize a sentiment of grievance among the citizenship. The topic of the fiscal deficit that Catalonia has with the rest of Spain, according to which Catalonia receives much less from the central government than their total contribution to the Spanish Treasury, has received extensive coverage in the local media. Thus, and despite the fact that the local empowerment has brought a renaissance of the *cacique*, or provincial political boss, phenomenon (Reid, 2008), Catalans express a high level of satisfaction with their regional institutions. Even among non-nationalists, 95 percent say they believe more decentralization leads directly to a higher quality of life (Lancaster, 1997).

An elitist discourse

There are, however, other factors that, although more subtle, may have contributed to alienating a significant part of the population from the public sphere and the civic life. Among these factors are persistent inter-class differences, and the effects of the implementation of linguistic policies in Catalonia.

Regarding the first factor, the analysis of different segments of Catalan society has

demonstrated that the nationalist movement can be best understood as “ethnic”, “an elite-led, ‘top down’ project” (Miley, 2006, p. 3). Awareness of Catalan identity tends to be much more developed among those born in Catalonia, whose “mother tongue” is Catalan, and among those with higher levels of education and elite professional positions such as teachers or politicians (p. 3). In fact, the sentiment of alienation from politics of a large percentage of Catalan voters can be better explained by socioeconomic status than by place of origin. Although the percentage of the Catalan population born in other parts of Spain has decreased considerably in the last 30 years from 39 per cent in 1975 (Conversi, 1997, p.191; as cited in Rebagliato, 1978, p. 256) to 33 per cent in 2006 (Idescat, 2006), the percentage of people who declare in polls that they are uninterested in politics, approximately 50 percent, or have abstained in regional elections and referendums, 40 per cent (Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió, 2007), has remained consistently high relative to populations in other Spanish regions.

If we take into consideration some key socioeconomic indicators related to health and education, we can infer that the high percentage of the Catalan adult population that feels disconnected from politics can be understood as a sign of frustration with an identitarian discourse that doesn’t address their real problems. For example, the Public Health Agency of Barcelona documented that between 1993 and 1995 the difference of life expectancy between men could differ by 10 years according to their socioeconomic status (Borrell & Benach, 2006). A report by the Program For International Student Assessment (PISA), diagnosed Catalonia as one of the Spanish regions with the most direct links between a parent’s income and the possibility of going to college (2003). Thus, between 30 and 35 percent of Catalan parents in the middle or upper middle class send their children to private

schools, which enjoy the highest public subsidies of Spain, while most working class families send their kids to public schools with one of the lowest public expenses per student (Navarro, February 1, 2005). Although there are other data, such as the distribution of income, that place Catalonia in accordance with European standards (Cordero, May 28, 2007), these key qualitative indicators reflecting such different levels of mortality and education according to social class of origin clearly underscore the existence of a social gap. Indeed, the absence of social data is a characteristic of the Catalan media, which prioritize identitarian topics over other social issues due to the previously discussed power of the Catalan elites to configure the public agenda. A clear example of this was the level of attention paid by all Catalan media to the denial by the International Federation of Hockey of a Catalan national team and, in contrast, around the same time the media silence concerning the two aforementioned reports illustrating the existence of broad class inequalities in the Catalan society (Navarro, February 1, 2005). This disproportion becomes even more significant if we take into consideration that 70 percent of the Catalan population define themselves as working class (Institut d'Estudis Regionals I Metropolitans de Barcelona, 2004).

The implementation of identitarian linguistic policies

Joan Maragall, a former President of the Catalan government, once called the Catalan language "the DNA of Catalonia" (Barbeta, November 28, 2004). Indeed, the implementation of laws to foster the use of Catalan in the public sphere has been an axis of regional politics (Martínez-Herrera, 2002, p. 447). And yet, controversy met the approval by the Catalan parliament of both the Law of Linguistic Normalization in 1983 and the Law of Linguistic Policy in 1998, both of which promoted the use of Catalan in the public sphere including in

government offices, educational institutions, as the means of social communication, in cultural industries and in business. The Statute of Autonomy states that Spanish and Catalan are the official languages of Catalonia, but the two aforementioned laws prioritizing the use of Catalan effectively acknowledged that Catalan in fact held an inferior position to Spanish in Catalonia despite its use by the government and many media (McRoberts, 1996, p.145). Nonetheless, considering that Spanish is the first language for 53 percent of the Catalan population, versus Catalan for 40 percent (Idescat, 2003), the reaction against the imposition of Catalan as the sole language – for instance, in schools – has not been as strong as might be expected. The reason may well be that for a majority of Spanish speakers accustomed to seeing the greater social and economic status of Catalan speakers. Catalan-only education represents a vehicle for social progress. Some parents certainly have experienced the frustration that their children have not been able to receive their education in their “mother tongue” or that the rate of school failure for this reason is higher among Spanish speakers (PISA, 2003), but the mobilization capacity of this segment of the population has been very limited. Although a new political party, *Ciutadans de Catalunya* (Citizens of Catalonia), and a civic platform, *Convivència Cívica Catalana* (Catalan Civic Convivence), were born in the last 10 years to protest the lack of recognition Catalan institutions give to the bicultural and bilingual nature of Catalan society, they are still relatively marginal movements in numerical terms. *Ciutadans* obtained three delegates of 135 total in the Catalan parliament in the last elections while the main accomplishment of *Convivència Cívica Catalana* was the gathering of 50,000 signatures in support of the defense of education in children’s mother tongue and bilingualism in schools. Although not irrelevant, neither accomplishment points to any sort of popular revolt against identitarian and linguistic policies. Moreover, the process of creation of the political party

Ciutadans de Catalunya can be understood as another example of how Catalan society is structured according to elitist bases since, far from being considered a grassroots movement, this new party was founded by a group of well-known Catalan intellectuals who felt the necessity to protest against the official identitarian policies.

Attitudes and behaviors

In 1979, 68 percent of the Catalan population felt only Spanish or as Spanish as Catalan: 35 percent identified themselves as Spanish only or more Spanish than Catalan, and 33 percent felt equally Spanish and Catalan (Martínez-Herrera, 2002, p. 435). In 2007, only 50 percent felt only Spanish or as Spanish as Catalan, while the other 50 percent felt more Catalan than Spanish (30 percent) or only Catalan (20 percent) (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2007).

It seems clear that since 1979 the Catalan parties have been successful in forging and strengthening a Catalan identity among the population. During the last 30 years “more Spanish” identification has decreased while dual Spanish/Catalan and “more Catalan” identification has grown (Martínez-Herrera, 2002, p. 436). This evolution of sentiment about identity can be explained by the hegemonic role of the Catalan government as the main provider of services for Catalan citizens, the holder of Catalan symbols, and the guiding force behind the climate of opinion created by the regional media.

If the word consensus was widely used during the transition period to democracy in Spain to describe the necessity for the different political factions to try to see eye to eye on matters, in Catalonia this word has had an additional connotation meaning a need to combine efforts around the reinforcement of the Catalan identity. While the benefits of this doctrine were evident for Catalan elites who stood to gain more of a foothold as political and economic

leaders in this new society, the benefits were not so clear for Catalan residents born outside the region or for non-elites. In this sense, the role of the regional government and the media was decisive in generating the perception that the development of the Catalan identity and self-governing institutions was a substantial part of the democratic process and, thus both appropriate and desirable. This situation has been defined as a “false consensus effect” (Sherman, Presson, and Chassin, 1984; as cited in Glasser & Salmon, 1995), since the necessity of social support and validation by a significant part of the population, comprised mostly but not entirely of people born outside Catalonia, would have led them to view tacitly the promotion of the sentiment of Catalan identity.

There are also indicators that allow one to infer the existence of a “spiral of silence,” (Noelle-Neumann, 1995), or the use of public opinion as a tool of social control. This would suggest that in order to be accepted as “plain Catalan citizens,” a significant percentage of the population born in other parts of Spain would have softened their positions against nationalism or at least adopted a passive attitude. A “spiral of silence” may have been manifested during the referendum campaign to vote the third Statute of Catalan Autonomy as a result of a concerted action by almost the entire political spectrum, the media, and the business community (which signed a petition endorsing the new document) to generate a favorable climate of opinion.

Catalan entrepreneurs put aside their traditional prudence and aligned themselves squarely with the Catalan government supporting a document that talked of Catalonia as a “nation,” a concept not welcomed by the rest of Spaniards who are, after all, the biggest market for Catalan companies. The consequence of this entrepreneurial positioning was a boycott of

Catalan products by many Spaniards. It should be acknowledged that a significant part of these Catalan entrepreneurs might have experienced at least a sentiment of apprehension with regard to the consequences that a different attitude could have for their relationship with the Catalan government.

Something similar can be said about the main Catalan newspapers that signed a united editorial affirming that the Statute had “enjoyed overwhelming social and political support” (La Vanguardia, 2009) by the Catalan citizenship. Only a third of Catalans voted on the new Statute, and only 37.5 of them say they think of Catalonia as a nation (see table 1), one of the most controversial issues of the new Statute. This case represents a classic example of what Floyd Allport (1937, p.12) called “journalistic fallacy,” or the tendency to confuse public opinion with the presentation of opinion by the media when trying to capture public sentiment.

Table 1: Catalonia: A Region or a Nation?

Region	52.7
Nation	37.5
Other	8.0
DK/DA	1.7
TOTAL	100

Source: CIS study 2410 (2001)

The analysis of the behavior of Catalans in political surveys prior to the referendum and their levels of voter participation also illustrate a willingness by many to express opinions similar to the ones perceived in the climate of opinion and hide their disconformities. For example, despite the fact that in polls implemented a few days before the referendum, 97.7 percent of the Catalan electorate said they knew about this new document, and 86.9 percent said they were sure or very sure of voting, the level of participation was only 49.6 percent (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2006a) (see table 2).

Table 2: Referendums for the Statute of Autonomy

<u>Year</u>	<u>Abstention</u>
2006	50.59
1979	40.66

Source: Statistical Institute of Catalonia

These figures suggest that a considerable number of Catalans did not go to vote but answered affirmatively to the survey because they understood that to go to vote was in agreement with the perceived climate of opinion. Moreover, the 74 percent of Catalans who voted in favor of the new law, roughly 36.6 of the entire electorate, is a percentage that coincides with the size of the professional or upper-middle class in the region (Navarro,

February 1, 2005).

The “spiral of silence” translates into political apathy and a demobilization of a large percentage of Catalans. An analysis of the profile of those who abstained in the referendum vote shows a strong correlation between degree of disinterest with regard to politics and identitarian issues (more or less equivalent in Catalonia) and identification with the working class and with Spain as a primary community of reference. A total 60 percent of abstentionists said they felt either as Spanish as Catalan (40 percent), more Spanish than Catalan (10 percent) or only Spanish (10 percent), a number that was 50 percent in the same survey for the entire population (Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió, 2006b). A majority of the abstentionists (72 percent) had at least one parent born outside Catalonia, while only 27.7 percent had two Catalan-born parents. Only five percent of the abstentionist’s parents had college degrees and at least half primary studies (Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió, 2006b). This correlation of data permits the conclusion that as a reaction against the dominant nationalistic climate of opinion an important part of the population has simply dropped out of politics. This segment probably expressed more interest and support for the new Statute in polls than they ever felt. Indeed the index of participation obtained in the referendum not only diverged substantially from the polls prior to the votes, but also from all the levels of abstention reached in any Catalan elections in the region’s post-Franco history of local Catalan elections (40 percent as average) (see table 3).

Table 3: Elections for the Parliament of Catalonia

<u>Year</u>	<u>Abstention</u>
2006	43.22
2003	36.62
1999	40.1
1995	36.01
1992	45.02
1988	40.59
1984	35.67
1980	38.56

Source: Statistical Institute of Catalonia

The hypothesis of a spiral of silence as a prior step to political demobilization can also be understood by examining the priorities of the Catalan society as a whole. When asked about the main problems that afflicted Catalan society during the months prior to the approval of the new Statute, a majority of Catalans ranked issues related to nationalism, relations between Spain and Catalonia, and the crisis of Catalan identity, 13 and 14, respectively, on a list of 18 items, far behind the problems of housing, lack of infrastructures, and immigration (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2006a), issues that – not surprisingly – affect the working class the most. Levels of electoral abstention in Catalonia have been substantially higher than in the rest of Spain, with 26 percent in general elections and 35 percent in local elections (Boix & Riba, 2000, p. 98). Inequalities are no less marked in the rest of Spain, but lacking the identitarian

factor the political discourse probably responds somewhat better to the demands and real problems of the citizens.

Since traditional interpretation associates political demobilization with less urbanized and developed areas, Catalonia becomes even more exceptional within a Spanish context since it is one of the most urbanized and developed Spanish regions. Moreover, Catalonia, like the rest of Spain, lacks the barriers that affect voter participation in other countries – such as voter registration in the United States. Subsequently, the political demobilization of the working class in Catalonia only can be explained through a double sentiment of alienation: on the one hand, the adverse climate of opinion created against those who oppose the official, elite-sustained identitarian policies; on the other hand, those, practically the same segment of the population, who feel ignored by the political elites and for whom, after a long period of unresponsiveness, mobilization has become that much more difficult (Avey, 1989, p. 125).

The approval of the third Statute of Catalonia, after 30 years of autonomy, seems to consolidate a division between the interests of the political, economic and cultural elites and a significant part of the working class that, unconcerned with issues of identity, feels excluded from the political discourse.

Concluding remarks

The class-vindictive discourse of the Catalan left during the Franco regime switched to a nationalist discourse in conjunction with the traditional Catalan right after Franco's death in 1975. The expectations of an important segment of the Catalan population, mostly working class and Spanish speaking, were frustrated by the absence of a majoritarian political option more concerned with social issues. In addition, the climate of opinion generated by the

regional media, whose informational context is identitarian, has contributed to the political and civic disillusion of this part of the population.

An analysis of the public opinion facets permits us to infer that the nationalistic discourse of the successive regional governments was successful in creating a climate of opinion that affected citizenship in two ways: first, by solidifying and mobilizing that part of the citizenship with the strongest sentiment of Catalan identity; and second, by demobilizing the rest of the population more concerned with other social problems.

Unfortunately, studies on Catalan nationalism have tended to adopt a top-down paradigm, focusing on the political vindications of the ruling class and the climate of opinion created by the regional government, and minimizing other factors such as the social and political circumstances that affect public opinion. Ultimately, this analysis illustrates that traditionally one of the main problems in analyzing Catalan nationalism has been the unempirical assumption of its theoretically “civic” nature, which has led to its consideration as a mass movement. Nevertheless, the analysis of the public opinion dynamics acknowledges the existence of a significant part of the society that, unidentified with Catalan nationalism, feels marginal to the political discourse.

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