

# INDEPENDENCE IN CATALONIA?

## A proposal from the perspective of social ecology and libertarian municipalism

**Catalonia: an important and worrying event, but (perhaps) hopeful.**

### I) The scenario

Although the events in Catalonia are also part of a dynamic of identity radicalisation that is characteristic of a historical moment in the modern world, they are part of a historical substrate that is very different from that of other countries in Europe and the world. Catalonia, Galicia and Euskal Herria are among those geographical places where the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula, throughout history, have opposed the most tenacious resistance to the centralism and absolutism of the Spanish monarchy. On the one hand, from the very beginning, its most deprived and exploited classes, together with the peasantry, have been deeply rooted in their natural and traditional communities within a specific bio-regional framework, and they have jealously preserved and defended these roots, naturally forming a specific people, cultures and informal nations. This is very different from the birth of Catalan nationalism in the middle class at the end of the 19th century, when capitalism was established, a phenomenon shared by other parts of the world. But Catalonia stands out above all for having been, in history, one of the places that has demonstrated the strongest capacity of workers resistance to the brutal advance of capitalism and, subsequently, for its great revolutionary achievements under the libertarian insignia in 1936. While in parallel the Catalanist movement continues to progress in the middle classes and contaminates the entire bourgeoisie, the powerful workers movement continues along its own path in all lucidity. Thus, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1934, when Companys of the Esquerra Republicana party proclaimed "l'Estat Catalá", the CNT reaffirmed its position by declaring that "... for the mocked people, for the exploited, there can be no difference between the rulers... all of them are fascists when it comes to defending the privileges..." But after the 1936 coup d'état and in spite of the heroic popular resistance, in 1939 Franco's fascism spreads to all of Spain, carrying out his "peacemaking mission" (the one of the cemeteries, Bernanos would say) for 40 years, which consisted in ending the workers and peasants movement, which would constitute a real class ethnocide. However, it must be emphasised that the Franco crusade, far from being unilateral, was supported by a part of the Catalan bourgeoisie, such as the March Bank, and by the Church. Even afterwards, despite the bitter labour struggles, the modern capitalist mode of production and the resulting consumer society would have to deal with overcoming this tradition of resistance to

capitalism and, a fortiori, rejecting any revolutionary perspective.

Despite the homogenising effect of the dictatorship, Francoism in Catalonia has not succeeded in eradicating resistance to hispanisation. At the end of the transition, as in other areas of cultural resistance, Catalonia reaped the fruits of this resistance, obtaining its own government and an "estatut" which was strengthened thanks to the generosity granted by the national parties in exchange for several successive electoral supports. Part of Catalan culture has been preserved to a certain extent, and Catalonia has even been able to make its own language predominant once again, but the evolution of capitalist logic and its categories (the state, merchandise, abstract work, value, etc.) has caused the same devastation as elsewhere, both in Spain and in Europe and the rest of the world (densification, etc.). But unlike other countries, the social body, consciously or not, retains the legacy of the wounds caused by the civil war and Francoism, wounds that are still open and which are an integral part of our responses to conflicts throughout the Spanish State. It is this substrate that will help us to understand the situation currently experienced in Catalonia. We will begin by discussing the economic context of advanced capitalism in which we find ourselves completely immersed.

## **II) The general context of a capitalist society**

Let us not lose sight of this lucid statement by one of the most conservative and illustrious politicians of the French Socialist Party:

« Of course, there is the economy and unemployment, but the most important thing is the cultural battle, it is identity ». Manuel Valls, April 4, 2016

**Wherever we are in the world, the process of modern identities can only be understood if it is embedded in the logical functioning and dynamics of capitalism.**

In the pre-modern era, the social subject was previously and unambiguously codified in the social context of predominantly communal and peasant societies, divided into orders and castes. It is the very opposite today for the modern subject who must constantly reaffirm an identity which, far from being ascribed to him in advance, is obtained through a coercive and compulsory task, in the form of self-discipline which internalizes the obligations of the formative context, which the subject confronts and reproduces. In this sense, the form and identity that the subject takes, in societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails, appear as a gigantic collection of solely functional identities, the primary and fundamental form of which is individual identity. This first situation has a double, a compensatory and necessary abstract

projection that manifests itself through the adherence of capitalised subjects to vast collective identities (football teams or political parties, nation, homeland, etc.). But contrary to what happened in precapitalist societies, which were united at the local level in communities of mutual support and often in confrontation with the masters, these new entities, now abstract, are characterized by a lack of tangible, direct and empathic social links between individuals. Thus, the capitalist nations also have, today as they did yesterday, an internal spring embedded in the form of the modern subject.

### **III) Crisis ideologies and the experience of the modern subject**

To make up for this absence, the ideologies of capitalism's crisis ideologies, the subjective adherence of the modern subject to the nation, under its modern face of neo-nationalism, is based on the experience of this "monetarized" subject. Shaped by capitalist social relations and the ideological superstructure promoted by the advertising industry, the subject is structurally engrossed in a *potential omnipotence*, since money is supposed to allow everything. The qualities of money, the subject makes them become his own and these are also his essential strengths. Especially among the most disadvantaged classes, but not only, it also enables them to realize their total powerlessness in the face of their concrete relationship with the society that faces them, and this gives them their dynamic without them being able to intervene in a concrete way. The ideologies of capitalism's crisis ideologies are based on this structural contradiction, this fundamental frustration. And it is the adherence to these vast abstract collective entities that allows the subject to forget the feeling of his own inferiority, and this is what Erich Fromm identifies as the "collective crisis narcissism".

### **IV) Capitalism and identity market.**

Wars were thus the most tragic result of this "collective narcissism of crisis", which has never ceased to grow stronger in times of crisis, under the mask of identity and patriotism. This logic manifested itself in Africa in the context of modern capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of ethnic identities, followed closely by the Arab world with the Islamic resurgence, followed by a surge of nationalist passions and hatred in post-communist Eastern Europe, the war of Yugoslavia marking the brutal and dramatic climax. Nationalism continues to run its course in the very Catholic and conservative Poland, as in Putin's Russia or Orban's Hungary.

At the end of the self-sustained multiplication of fictitious capital from the 2000s onwards and the collapse of post-Fordist prosperity in the very core zones of advanced capitalism, a tide of identity intolerances was created, eager to establish a

homogeneous cultural and ethnic order. Once again, the demands "France to the French", "America first", "Britain first", etc., are being heard along with their respective instructions in favour of an alleged "homogenization of the national labour force".

This new "mass production and these invented traditions", as Eric Hobsbawm calls them, feeds the identity market upstream, at a time of economic crisis when competitiveness is more acute than ever and wastepaper contracts are multiplying. In this supermarket of identity, we find a wide range of everything that can please everyone in their individuality, giving them the illusion of having a choice. Religionism, neo or micro-nationalism, separatism, identity populism, and even the most sophisticated products of post-modernism, such as the highly sophisticated "ethno-differentialistic" neo-racism of extreme right-wing extremism or the concepts formulated by the left, such as "clash of civilizations" or "dialogue between civilizations", are thus offered to us.

**Despite its specific features, as mentioned above, Catalonia is no exception to this logic of uprooting and producing abstract functional identities that emerged at the end of the 19th century, along with the sedimentation of capitalism.**

## **V) Catalonia**

In Catalonia, a vast majority have chosen to wear the nationalist costume with typical enthusiasm, but with a left-wing connotation, even if we cannot ignore the right-wing nationalist movement and its underlying patriotism. All this by the mere fact of calling the future state a "Catalan Republic", facing the Spanish monarchy, polarizing the two nationalisms on the one hand and, on the other, with the help of the brutal repression of the central state, reviving emotion through remembrance and reopening the wounds of Francoism and the civil war. The reality is that the actors of abstract collective entities, from left to right, are only the officials of capital in its decomposition phase. Far from opposing it, they swim in the middle of its current. How could it be otherwise when all, even the most hardened "anti-capitalist" independence fighters, are content to turn around in the mould that has been affected by capitalist play? Create another State, a Catalan State, "but a just State, capable of distributing wealth fairly"? In other words, simply reproduce the main component of capitalism: the state. **Moreover, protectionism and "regulationism" still being nationalistic ideas, they have never been and will never be able to oppose, simply because they are Catalan, this inherent and structural destructive nature of capitalism, which imposes "growth or death", regardless of the regulatory efforts made.**

## 1) The "unexpected" eruption of the Catalan narrative

*« We live in a world of continuous present where the past does not exist, where everything begins and ends in the spectacular moment. » Guy Debord.*

Although it is fairly easy to understand that Spanish patriotism has infiltrated almost the entire Spanish state, thanks to the nation-state brand and its vast ultra-nationalist past and its intense social and media cultural deployment, it is generally more difficult to understand **how the Catalan bourgeoisie was able to achieve this in Catalonia in such a short period of time.**

Undoubtedly, this political void in the context of the aforementioned context of an advanced capitalism in crisis has facilitated the arrival of this Catalanist narrative, encouraged for a long time already by a cultural substrate comprising, for example, language and their own mythical history. The clumsiness of the central government, heir to Franco's legacy, combined with a good dose of fascism, also played a decisive role in strengthening the "Catalan Parliament" and giving it an aura of victimisation. But we cannot underestimate the long process of elaborating the Catalan narrative, several years of persistent excitement of the nationalist fibre to broaden the basis of Catalan independence. Perhaps the most important part here is the symbolic and emotional part, the one that maintains the nationalistic exaltation over the years through the anthem "Els segadors", the flag of the "estelada", the sardanas still danced, the commemorative feasts like the Diada with its independentist and interclassist connotation because it brings together the whole nation, **all classes mixed**, in memory of the defeat of the bourbonian troops of the current king of Spain's predecessor, Felipe V. This story thrived with the help of intelligence, imagination, perseverance and well-chosen strategies. Finally, over the last few years, great skill has been deployed in **using the media to sharpen nationalistic emotional fibres, to the point where the most recent, subversive and radical facts of a broader political spectrum, of the assembly type, are no longer remembered.** Thus, the sectors most determined to set up decision-making assemblies, to create hyphens, concrete links and direct democracy have been relegated to the past, as was the eminently emblematic action of "encircling Parliament" during the summer of 2011. But not only did they manage to make people forget these facts, but they also managed to completely reverse the meaning of the dispute. In September 2017, **the demonstrators finally fought for the same institutions against which they had fought six years earlier.** Forgotten also the fact that CiU (Convergència i Unió) supported the "gag law" in July of the following year at the "Cortes españolas" (the Parliament of the central government) in addition to sponsoring the Mossos (the Catalan police, one of the pillars of Catalan nationalism). Even more frightening is the fact that the brutal repression of the 15M by the Mossos on the plaza of Catalonia in Barcelona, the death of Andrés Benítez in the Raval as a result of the same Mossos, and Esther Quintana, who was seriously wounded, were forgotten. **On this**

**same plaza of Catalonia, so recently, the crowd went out to applaud them, to ask for their full autonomy (in relation to the other national police forces) and to erect one of its head officers as a hero.** We cannot, for our part, forget that the gatherings of the Indians or the 15M movement were a predilection to introduce the nationalist theme, which sprouted among the least needy activists, and therefore the least concerned about social inequalities. Thus, caught between **the repression, the eruption of Podemos and Catalan nationalists, the 15M movement weakened.** The Catalan Independence story reached its apogee with the Islamist attack on the Ramblas of Barcelona, during which, for a few hours, the Mossos were the only protagonists, attributing to the Govern the status of a state in its own right. The process is well known, the very one based on fear and death, which induces the submission of the population in exchange for the protection and tranquillity that the state is supposed to provide. Despite the support of the central government, the Govern won the media **by posing as the sole protector, ousting the central government, as if it were already the proto-Catalan state.** The less visible face of this proto-State is that of its underlying modern post-fascism, its neutralisation of public space and the expulsion of everything that is considered subversive, delinquent, or to put it in a post-modern metaphor, as a "social residue".

## **2) *The Final Stocade***

**Another good contribution to the Catalanist narrative, of a sophisticated nature, was the assimilation of the "right to decide", in the image of the ballot boxes, which were seen as the basis of the democratic process, defending the freedom to vote with obstinacy, insistence and overthrowing the whole apparatus of government to promote this way of doing things.** It is this whole set of immensely emotional elements that broke out in Catalan society on 1 October last year, when the people were encouraged to vote in favour of the referendum and to go out and vote en masse. For the first time in the history of this country since the transition, the repressive forces of the Spanish State have brutally prevented the use of the hidden ballot boxes, which they had to frantically search for the days before, in sheer loss. Defying the whole police deployment, after a rocambolic journey from China to France, after confiscation and duplication usurpation? On the day of the election, however, the ballot boxes were present in the polling stations. This point, marked by the Govern on 1 October, generated immense enthusiasm, **an exaltation of the feeling of justice rather than nationalism, without any doubt. For many Catalans, these two feelings would become one and the same. From that day on, nationalism would rhyme with justice and dignity, like an echo of revenge to all Franco's repression, and for many, perhaps, to the destruction of Barcelona in 1714.** The Catalan people went to vote en masse, peacefully and resolutely, despite and perhaps because of the brutal repression by the Spanish state police and the fact that the Mossos were discreet. The Govern, having betrayed no one, thus reaffirmed itself and was able to claim a certain "legitimacy".

## **VI) An opportunity for our emancipating political project of libertarian municipalism in this period of tension**

First, strongly denounce the repression carried out by the Spanish State and the hatred it encourages against the Catalan people.

As far as the nationalist strategy is concerned, we cannot deny that the vote on 1 October was a success and a mistrust of the Spanish State. In fact, for the first time it represents an attempt to break the 1978 regime as a political pact of oblivion and, from there, an open door to the hope of breaking Franco's legality. But this tactic of complete disruption must not obscure the essential point: **that any modification of the constitutive processes, whether they are the product of independence or a left-wing movement, must be accompanied by a radical change in the material relations of capitalist production, without which it is useless.** It remains to be seen whether independence would lead to economic improvement for the most deprived, but at best it would not mean much more than maintaining an illusion. Ultimately, independence would not save us from widespread corruption or the collapse of the future. It is the characteristic of meaningless policies and professionals from all political parties, on either side of the nationalist borders, to ask "voters" to mobilize in the name of a shared abstract concept, that of **an interclassist "national union", always in favour of multinationals (with or without the "CAT" label, from Catalonia)**, the bourgeoisie and employers, regardless of whether they are We will be here to support all initiatives to denounce the 78 regime, but our efforts cannot be short-term or be recovered or exploited within restricted borders. The liberation of the Catalan people will also depend on the liberation of other peoples, to whom the internationalism of our liberating will remains a priority to which we will not give up.

Likewise, we do not share and will not allow ourselves to be drawn into proposals aimed at taking advantage of the mobilizations and exaltation that are present to give them a twist of violent revolt, sometimes referred to as "revolutionary dynamics". We know that this adventurism, dear to some left-wing movements, and even libertarians, can only lead to an impasse if it is not based on a solid social construction beforehand, and on self-management policies rich in an emancipatory culture, with a political spiritual imagination charged with ethics, and a total affinity between ends and means. However, we will not fail to seize these opportunities to open loopholes that, as local processes, will in turn open doors to other truly emancipatory perspectives.

Viewing this situation, and the fact that neighbourhoods, villages and other actors remain very active, we would like to state clearly our stance in these times of tensions

and convulsions, but also of questioning, because **they represent an opportunity for reflection, dialogue and proposals that bring rupture and hope...**

We refuse to fall into this pessimistic demobilization, which consists in asserting that, under the current conditions and "in the case of the present conflict, the possibilities of a change of emancipatory character are strictly null and void".

We cannot deny the loopholes opened in Catalonia, even if it were only a blow to the monolithic abstract political imagination of the so-called transition within the Spanish state. It is already a great deal, and we cannot deny that the greatest merit of independence is that it has lifted the veil on the myth of the rule of law.

We are clearly opposed to the Spanish state and its legality, as the heir to a Francoism that has never before been judged or condemned, and as the centrepiece of both national and transnational capitalism. Of course, this latter imperative will certainly be taken on board by the Catalan proto-state, but we are still a long way off.

Opposing the Spanish state on the basis of the will of another state is not only unattractive, purely and simply adventurous, and doomed to failure, knowing that the great losers will be the lambda citizens, the most deprived. We know that we are a minority in the minority and that we will have to make a transition between flags of all kinds, those that reproduce the bewitching fashions and hymns of the entertainment society. These imaginary identities that prevent us from discussing together, we who are aware of the political pitfalls, all tendencies taken together, held by the capitalism of state institutions.

**But we also know that the contradictions of the opposing discourses allow us to enter into their interstices, with the firm intention of widening the debate and ensuring that our political proposals - anchored in pre-capitalist practices - are exposed, as well as the present struggles and alternatives.** Our proposals, in addition to digging deep historical roots from which we must draw the most authentic ones and draw inspiration from them, precisely within our Catalan people, are also based on a radical analysis of what capitalism represents today. Social ecology analyses the most fundamental components of capitalism in order to uncover the pitfalls in which we must not fall, those components which, because they belong to capitalism, would serve no other purpose but to deceive the people and renew capitalism, in the end, to strengthen it. For example, the financiers and their finances, so criticized by many supposed anti-capitalists, are not the cause, but the crutches of the market society which, without finance, would have collapsed. Basically, what lies ahead behind the financial crisis is nothing more than the exhaustion of the fundamental components of capitalism, such as commodification, labour, value and money, which underpin all capitalist structures, and the state as a key element. Having taken note of this structure and its deadly dynamic, Social Ecology suggests that we should not be blinded by nationalism or any other "entertainment". It warns us of the gradual impoverishment of the most disadvantaged and the triple collapse that is fast approaching: energy, food and climate. But it also contains a coherent policy tool, and not only to avoid the pitfalls. It aims to bring together the ends and means to prevent aberrations, and to ensure that human societies do not clash with

each other, but rather celebrate their differences as true wealth, practice mutual support among themselves and ensure that their communities are integrated into the ecosystems of their respective "bio-regions". This political tool, named, according to the different places, "libertarian municipalism", "communalism" or "democratic confederalism", starts from the smallest political territory, on the principle of assemblies of streets and neighbourhoods in villages and cities. Study groups will have to be set up beforehand to have a map of all the characteristics of the site, whether historical, geographical, ecological or economic, taking into account all the political forces involved and the social and natural potentials. With a good knowledge of the historical and cultural background, social and political terrain of these study groups, they will be able to connect with individuals and social groups who are more aware, but often disappointed in politics, and to highlight **the nonsense of scorning and abandoning the political landscape**. To show that delegating one's own power to professional political groups or structures is nothing more than abdicating and favouring the current destructive system. On the contrary, libertarian municipalism marks a break with the normative framework of representative democracies, a unique path imposed to prevent any real change and questioning of capitalism. Thus, the libertarian municipalism proposes to operate with the cultural charge proper to the "Catalan Països" and with a deep knowledge of their history of resistance to capitalism and their revolutionary proposals. With this rich substrate, the libertarian municipalism appeals to the most conscious and determined individuals and groups so that the streets are no longer open to nationalistic ghosts but truly ours. This is where we can, in practical terms, from the base, from the grassroots, bring together all our concerns and proposals in order to expose them, highlight them and strengthen them in the smallest possible political space. This political space is also the self-coordinator of groups, both demanding and alternative, of all aspects of life. By allowing the districts to unite and the confederation to coordinate the federations, we can create a real political and social force on an international scale, able, by bringing together the ends and means, to establish the foundations of a new world. Thus, the libertarian municipalism opens a new stage to dismantle the current institutions and promote a direct democracy that will start from the streets, neighbourhoods, villages and decentralized cities.

If we have anything to learn from the current effectiveness of independence activists, it is this ability to recreate a narrative, starting from a tangible reality, to revive the mythical-political power of the people that was once ours, that of libertarians.

With libertarian municipalism, unlike the political parties, nothing is programmed in advance. While knowing that the road will be long, especially because of the urgency of the challenge and because we will all travel it together, the libertarian municipalism still has something that no party can offer in these times when the end of the world is easier to imagine than the end of capitalism. Libertarian municipalism, like the democratic confederalism in Rojava or Zapatistaism in Chiapas, offers us this story and this power made possible by an attainable goal, a credible spiritual political imaginary, that of a world that can hold many other worlds, that is to say a mosaic of peoples united in diversity and in symbiosis with nature.

**And now, let initiatives flourish!**

**Long live the Catalan people and the other peoples of the Spanish state and the world!**

**The organizing group of the 2nd international meetings on Social Ecology of Bilbao, the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.**