THE DISPUTED NATION: CATALAN AND SPANISH NATIONALISM THROUGH THE LENS OF DOCUMENTARIES

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THE DISPUTED NATION:
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by

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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Approved by:
Dr. John McCall, Chair

Graduate School
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER                     PAGE
LIST OF FIGURES             ii

MAJOR HEADINGS

HEADING 1 – Introduction and My Positioning ........................................ 1
HEADING 2 – Historical Background .......................................................... 4
HEADING 3 – First Set of Documentaries: Setting the Stage Before the Referendum .... 8
HEADING 4 – Second Set of Documentaries: After the Referendum ...................... 23
HEADING 5 – Nationalism ............................................................................. 33
HEADING 6 – Ritual as Nation-Building ......................................................... 48
HEADING 7 – Conclusion .............................................................................. 54

REFERENCES .................................................................................................... 59

VITA .................................................................................................................. 61
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1 – Map of Spain. Catalonia is the orange region in the northeast (upper right)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2 – Screenshot from Adéu Espanya? showing the poem by Joan Maragall</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3 – Screenshot from Adéu Espanya? using Playmobil toys to explain the history of Denmark and Greenland</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4 – Screenshot from Adéu Espanya? showing Montserrat mountain, a “place of memory” of Catalonia</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5 – Screenshot from Hola, Europa! contrasting the “experts” and the “working folk.”</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6 – Screenshot from Hola, Europa! showing the monumental title introducing the section justifying that Catalonia’s telecommunications system could operate without Spain</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7 – Anonymous speaker at the beginning of Dissidents, in the shadows to presumably protect her identity</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8 – Image from the beginning of Dos Cataluñas with crowds of demonstrators waving the pro-independence Catalan flag, the estelada</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9 – The Guardia Civil attempting to remove Catalan voters from the polling stations on 1-O</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10 – Catalan independence supporters triumphantly singing Els Segadors after the results of the referendum were announced</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11 – Scene from La Gent de l’Escala, when the Guardia Civil are physically removing the Catalans from the staircase</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12 – Maps with red dots showing the Catalan independence voters and blue dots representing the Guardia Civil as they draw closer and try to find their way into the school</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13 – The traditional Catalan flag, the senyera, on the left, and the pro-independence version, the estelada, on the right</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION AND MY POSITIONING

As someone who has lived in or been connected to Catalonia (a region, a nation, and an autonomous community, in northeast Spain, Figure 1) for 29 years, I watched with trepidation as the pro-independence movement came to a head on October 1, 2017. On that date, a referendum on independence was held by the Catalan government, even though it had been declared illegal by the Spanish government. There have long been yearnings for independence among some Catalans, but in the first 20 years or so after Spain emerged from the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), the Spanish government had managed to give this region enough authorities to keep these sentiments in check. However, when Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s conservative government (2011-2018) started stripping Catalonia of these authorities in an overt effort to “Spanishize” it, some Catalan politicians and members of civil society began to push in earnest for independence and create both a rhetoric and mass actions to build momentum around the pro-independence movement.

Figure 1. Map of Spain. Catalonia is the orange region in the northeast (upper right).
This paper examines five documentaries made over the course of eight years, from 2010 to 2018, with the goals of tracing how the arguments on Catalonia’s independence from Spain evolved to culminate in the “illegal” referendum, identifying the counter-discourses from Spanish nationalists, and examining the referendum itself, which sheds light on the connection between nation-building and ritual. The first three documentaries are from before the referendum held on October 1, 2017 (henceforth, 1-O, as it is called in Catalonia): two were created by TV3, the Catalan public television channel as part of its program Sense Ficció in 2010 and 2013; they essentially espouse arguments as to why independence makes sense and is feasible, clearly on the Catalanist side. The other one was produced by a pro-Spain group in Catalonia called Sociedad Civil Catalana in 2016 and features interviews with anti-independence and anti-Catalanist Catalans who felt intimidated by the surge in Catalanist sentiments. The last two documentaries are from 2018, one year after the referendum, and they primarily show footage of it; one purports to be a neutral account of that day, while the other was made one year afterward, with a clear urge to revive the horror and yet poignancy of the events that transpired that day.

I start with a historical overview of Catalonia and Spain that provides a backdrop to the current situation. I then discuss the two documentaries from 2010 and 2013, which were laying the groundwork for the future independence referendum. After that, I summarize the anti-Catalanist video and also situate it within the debate on what constitutes nationalism: the Catalanists who want their own nation-state or the Spaniards who want Spanish cultural assimilation? I then discuss the last two documentaries from after the referendum. Throughout this discussion, I not only situate the documentaries ideologically and theoretically but also discuss some of the filmic techniques used to support the agenda of each video. Finally, in the last two sections, I connect all five documentaries to different forms and versions of nationalism.
and identify elements of ritual found in the two documentaries from after the referendum. In the conclusion, I attempt to summarize the issues and dilemmas raised by these documentaries.

To be transparent about my own position on this issue, I should state that I speak both Catalan and Spanish and have Catalan family members and friends of all political stripes in Catalonia and Spain. I personally sympathize with some Catalans’ yearning to shed the yoke of Spain, which they perceive as less authentic (as a “nation of nations,” a modern, invented pastiche) and more centrist, absolutist, and backwards than Catalonia (I agree with the latter position). However, I do not believe that independence would necessarily benefit Catalans. Furthermore, given the fact that many Catalans and/or residents of Catalonia are not actually in favor of independence, I doubt the prospect has much real potential at this point in time, especially since Rajoy was ousted and subsequent leaders are more moderate and willing to engage in dialogue. Finally, however, I do believe that Spain should allow Catalonia to hold a referendum on independence, just as the U.K., Denmark, and Canada have allowed Scotland, Greenland, and Quebec to do, although I believe this bid is likely to fail and would thus lay to rest—at least temporarily—these independence claims. I also believe that Spain’s strong-arm tactics on 1-O unwittingly unveiled the fact that the conservative heirs to the Franco dictatorship are distressingly alive and well in Spain.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In line with Benedict Anderson’s assertion that despite the fact that “nation” is a modern concept, it is built upon a purportedly ancient past (Anderson 1983), Catalans date their nationhood back to the eleventh century with the first Count of Barcelona, Guifré el Pelós (Wilfred the Hairy), who reigned over the entire Spanish March (a buffer zone between Charlemagne’s territories north of the Pyrenees and the Moors on the Iberian Peninsula). Under various geographic and power configurations, Catalonia retained its own rule even when the Crowns of Aragon-Catalonia and Castile merged in 1469 via the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand, who later went down in history for financing Christopher Columbus’s voyage to the “New World” (Sabaté 2010). In this dynastic union, which “created a joint Spanish state but not a unified nation” (Payne 1971), each state retained its own laws and customs, a delicate balance that remained in place until centuries later, when Charles II died without heirs in 1700, unleashing the War of the Spanish Succession, in which the European powers vied for hegemony over Spain.

The Catalans supported the losing Habsburgs, and in the new centrist Bourbon monarchy the Catalan-Aragonese institutions were abolished and the Catalan language was banned for the first time in education, the public administration, and legal matters (Vila-Pujol 2007). Barcelona resisted defeat during a one-year siege, a source of pride even today; somewhat paradoxically, this defeat became not only Catalonia’s national day but the source of its anthem, Els Segadors (The Reapers, after that conflict, which is locally called the Reapers’ War). Yet the power dynamics in Spain shifted with the Industrial Revolution in the mid-nineteenth century. Catalonia was among the first regions to industrialize, bringing it power and prestige and giving
it the impetus to standardize Catalan and make it a language of culture and literacy through the annual *Jocs Florals* poetry/prose contest and a burgeoning series of Catalan-language newspapers and books within the Catalan cultural and national *Renaixença*, “a rebirth of Catalan vernacular literature [whose roots] were part of the general awakening of romantic cultural nationalism and regionalism found in widely scattered parts of Europe” (Payne 1971). This laid the groundwork for the standardized language and print capitalism that Anderson views as the bedrock of nationalism, and indeed dovetails with the period when the first Catalanist movements emerged, marked by the first Catalan-language newspaper, *El Diari Català*, published by Valentí Almirall in 1880, and his book *Lo Catalanisme*, “the first categorical expression of political Catalanism” (Payne 1971), in 1886.

Despite achieving institutions of self-governance such as the Mancomunitat (Commonwealth) in the early twentieth century, the outcome of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), with Catalonia once again on the losing side, put an end to any vocal claims on behalf of Catalan language and culture, which were harshly repressed by the Franco dictatorship for approximately 40 years. Simultaneously, because Catalonia remained an economic powerhouse within Spain, Castilian-speaking “immigrants” from other regions flooded into Catalonia, particularly the main cities such as Barcelona, in the search for jobs and a more prosperous life (Vila-Pujol 2007).

At the end of the dictatorship, with the 1978 Spanish Constitution and Catalonia’s Statute of Autonomy, Catalonia regained some measure of independence in matters like education, the media, healthcare, and the local police force, and it implemented successful cultural and linguistic revitalization efforts after four decades of repression, leading to widespread knowledge
and use of the language that had been repressed and only kept alive within families and in underground circles for four decades. The delicate balance between Catalonia and Spain has taken another turn since 2005 with the Catalan Parliament’s desire to enact a new Statute of Autonomy, which would expand the regional government’s powers, recognize Catalonia as a nation (within Spain), and give the Catalan language primacy over Castilian in Catalonia (Politico 2018). In 2010, the new Statute of Autonomy was largely rejected by the Constitutional Court of Spain, leading to the first mass demonstration in Barcelona with the slogan “Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim!” (We are a nation. We decide!). Further demonstrations ensued the next year after the election of a new conservative, (Spanish) nationalist Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, whose government continued to encroach on Catalonia’s spheres of autonomy and deny the rhetoric of Catalonia as a nation, further exacerbating tensions and heightening pro-independence sentiments.

In 2015, a new Catalan president, Carles Puigdemont, was elected on a largely pro-independence platform. In 2017, the Catalan Parliament officially called for a referendum on secession from Spain to be held on October 1 of that year. Spain’s Constitutional Court ordered the referendum suspended, yet it was indeed held on October 1, 2017, with 43% voter turnout and over 90% in favor of independence (Frost 2008). It should be noted that many eligible voters who identify more with Spain than Catalonia did not vote because the Constitutional Court had declared the election illegal, so it would be inaccurate to say that 90% of Catalan voters wanted Catalonia to be an independent country. Yet at the same time, many voters who had not planned to vote changed their minds at the last minute when they watched with outrage as the Spanish government sent a shipload and caravans of heavily armed Guardia Civil (a Spanish paramilitary police corps) to Barcelona to seize the ballots, stop the voting, and close the polling stations. On
the day of the referendum, the Guardia Civil unleashed violence against nonviolent voters and poll organizers, which went viral in the social media as it was happening. Indeed, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International both claimed excess force was used during the election, while on the following days, unapologetic for the violence, King Felipe of Spain called the Catalan voters “disloyal” to the country, and pro-independence leaders were jailed or went into exile. This is the backdrop to the documentaries I watched of the events before, during, and after 1-O.
I discovered the first two documentaries, one from 2010 and one from 2013, in Kathryn Crameri’s book *Goodbye Spain? The Question of Independence for Catalonia* (2014). Given the date of this book, it was clearly written in the throes of Catalonia’s clashes with the Constitutional Court over the new proposed Statute of Autonomy, and just before Puigdemont was elected president of Catalonia with an overtly pro-independence platform. Therefore, Crameri bears witness to the surge in pro-independence sentiment and probes the roots of that sentiment and the arguments bandied in favor of independence. The two videos she references which I watched are called *Adéu Espanya?* (Goodbye Spain?) and *Hola, Europa!* (Hello Europe!). They were both produced by the program *Sense Ficció* on TV3, the Catalan government-sponsored channel, and they are both exclusively in Catalan, meaning that, like most TV3 programs, they are solely meant for a Catalan audience. They are the bookends of a trilogy which also includes a middle installment, *El Laberint* (2010), which “acknowledges the complexities of Catalonia’s relationship with Spain” (Crameri 2014, 103) since the creation of the autonomous region after the Transition to democracy. However, it seems to have been taken down from the TV3 website and I have been unable to watch it. This is a shame, because while both *Adéu Espanya?* and *Hola, Europa!* are essentially talking points on the reasons why independence is not only feasible but almost inevitable, according to Crameri, *El Laberint* does not project “an overriding assumption that independence is the best solution to [Catalonia’s] problems” (103). Thus, it would have served as an interesting counterpoint to the sense of the “inevitability” of independence, as it is presented in *Adéu Espanya?* and *Hola, Europa!* The third
documentary from prior to the 2017 independence referendum is called *Dissidents. El preu de la discrepància a la Catalunya nacionalista* (Dissidents: The Price of Dissent in Nationalistic Catalonia, 2016). This was made by the organization Sociedad Civil Catalana, whose stated mission is to defend pluralism and free political expression in Catalonia; however, in reality it is common knowledge that it is an organization of citizens of Catalonia who are pro-Spain and anti-Catalanist, and therefore against Catalan independence. This film was made a year and a half before 1-O, when tensions were already high, and it discusses the perceived perils of not being a Catalan nationalist in Catalonia.

*Adéu Espanya?*

*Adéu Espanya?* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ky2mof8JDDc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ky2mof8JDDc)) (Genovès, Adéu Espanya? 2010) borrows its title from an 1898 poem by Joan Maragall, a Catalan poet who was part of the Renaixença, the Catalanist cultural movement that sought to equip the Catalan nation with a literary corpus, particularly through the annual *Jocs Florals* poetry/prose competitions in the late nineteenth century. The poem (Figure 2) is a plaintive cry mourning Spain’s abandonment of the Catalans:

*On ets, Espanya? No et veig enlloc.*
*No sents la meva veu atronadora?*
*No entens aquesta llengua que et parla entre perills?*
*Has desapè d’entendre an els teus fills?*

*Adéu Espanya?*

(Where are you Spain? I can’t see you anywhere.
Can’t you hear my voice resounding?
Don’t you understand the language that I speak amidst peril?
Have you forgotten how to understand your children?)
Goodbye Spain!

Figure 2. Screenshot from *Adéu Espanya?* showing the poem by Joan Maragall with the Barcelona airport in the background.

This poem was written in the midst of crises of the Spanish state, such as the final crumbling of its empire with the loss of Cuba and the Philippines, and the Catalanists’ first successful ventures into the public sphere. Maragall was questioning how exactly Catalonia fit into Spain, casting it as an orphaned child abandoned by its parent. This sets the tone for a documentary whose main purpose is to show how Catalonia is just another in a line of stateless (or formerly stateless) nations, namely Greenland, Scotland, and Quebec, all of which have been allowed by their states (or former states) to determine whether they remain part of that state or gain independence from it. The film skips back and forth between these four nations, covering issues like economics; population, geographic size, and number of inhabitants per square kilometer; and history. Indeed, the documentary seems to be answering questions about the
feasibility of Catalonia’s independence that it never actually asks, but which seem to serve as its justification and main argument, namely:

Isn’t Catalonia too small (geographically and demographically) to be a state? (Answer: no, it’s bigger, more populous, and/or more densely populated than its three counterparts.)

Is there really a legal way for Catalonia to gain independence when this way is not stipulated in the constitution? (Answer: Yes, no constitution – including those of Denmark, Great Britain, and Canada – contains the mechanisms for part of a country’s territory to secede, but, essentially, where there is a will there’s a way.)

What country would allow one part of it to secede? (Answer: Denmark, Great Britain, and Canada have allowed the Greenlanders, Scots, and Quebecois to vote on secession, even though only Greenland voted to become – and has become – independent from Denmark.)

Does Catalonia have a strong enough economy to be independent? (Answer: Definitely! It’s economy is not reliant on Spain.)

The film then discusses the history of all four nations, reaching far back into the past, demonstrating Anderson’s contention that nations today are justified precisely by harking back to their ancient past. When discussing this history, the filmmaker made the curious choice of using Playmobil toys to reenact historical events (Figure 3). As Crameri says, “the idea of using toys might give the impression of trivializing important events” (2014, 108), and it certainly seems like a jarring choice that does nothing to support the seriousness of the film’s claims. However, it may also be a decision to soften the earnest tone of its claims and make them more accessible – and even fun and appealing – to a broader audience.
Figure 3. Screenshot from *Adéu Espanya?* using Playmobil toys to explain the history of Denmark and Greenland.

This ancient history then segues to a more recent explanation of the process leading up to the independence referendums that they have all held except Catalonia, which Greenland carried through with the cheery blessing of the Danes in 1979. In all three cases, the film shows interviews with politicians from both the peripheral nation and the center, who in all cases agree: 1) if the nation wants independence, it will get it; 2) even if a mechanism for independence is not contained in the country’s constitution or the EU regulations, it can be invented; the constitution serves the people, not vice-versa. Although it is not overtly stated, the film’s implication is that this is a normal process in normal countries with subnations within them, and therefore it should be a normal, unquestioned possibility for Catalonia. Interestingly in retrospect, the film seems to assert that the EU would support Scotland’s independence, as it did Greenland’s, the implication being that it would support Catalonia’s as well. Furthermore, it notes that Scotland has its own
mission to the EU (just as Quebec has a Ministry of International Relations), whereas it states that Catalonia is not even allowed to have “official” international relations. However, after the 2017 referendum, the EU did not support Catalonia’s declaration of independence, most likely because it was held without the permission of the EU member state, Spain.

It is interesting to take note of the arguments and discourses used. One recurring part of the film is the use of a kinship model of nationality. As one speaker says, “it’s like a marriage. If one member wants to leave it, it would be violent to force them to stay together.” This romantic or primordialist model of Catalanism and its limited utility today will be discussed below, which is why it is surprising to find it used as a supposedly valid argument for independence. One prominent Catalan intellectual interviewed is Montserrat Guibernau, a professor of Political Science at Queen Mary University of London, who has written extensively about the “inevitability” of Catalonia’s eventual independence from Spain. She frames the problem pragmatically, as “there’s no other way out” of the “democratic deficit” in Spain but independence. She further claims that Catalans in favor of independence are “bona gent” (good people) who are being “forced” into that option because of Spain’s refusal to engage in dialogue over the issue, a curious claim that seems aimed at countering an unspoken contention that some people view these Catalans as “bad people,” as indeed they have been portrayed in some Spanish press.

Indeed, affect – whether with a kinship metaphor or otherwise – is constantly used to pull at the Catalan audience’s heartstrings, not only through kinship metaphors and emotional language but especially through images: the film is replete with majestic shots of iconic places in Catalonia like Montserrat, the Pyrenees, and the Mediterranean, and Barcelona (Figure 4), as
well as castellers or human tower builders, an iconic Catalan cultural phenomenon. After building its arguments on why Catalonia should vote on independence as the natural next step, and why this makes sense given what has happened in other stateless nations in Europe, the documentary concludes with what could be considered a roadmap: a brief outline of the next steps to be taken to reach this vote, seven years before it actually happened, although in reality a different path led to its consummation.

Figure 4. Screenshot from Adéu Espanya? showing Montserrat mountain, a “place of memory” of Catalonia (Balcells, 2008).

**Hola, Europa!**

*El Laberint* (the film that seems to have been taken down from the website) was released just a few weeks after *Adéu Espanya?*, and three years later TV3’s program *Sense Ficció* aired the third documentary in its series, optimistically entitled *Hola, Europa!* ([https://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alacarta/sense-ficció/hola-europa/video/4562951/](https://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alacarta/sense-ficció/hola-europa/video/4562951/)) (Genovès, Hola,
Europa! 2013). *Hola, Europa!* starts with and repeatedly shows stunning shots of nature scenes from all around Catalonia, along with the main cities which are the capitals of the four Catalan provinces (Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, Tarragona) and shots of “regular folk,” all smiling into the camera, many of them in uniforms denoting their working-class status (which contrasts starkly with the well-dressed talking heads) (Figure 5), and some even in romantic old jobs which hardly exist anymore yet hark back to a bucolic rural past, like shepherds. Interestingly, most of the commentaries by the speakers do not show the person talking but instead focus on these shots of common folk, cities, and beautiful scenery. As Crameri comments, “the shots of Catalonia’s landscape, cities, and people… seem designed to prime the viewer to have positive feelings towards the pro-independence arguments to follow” (2014, 110). Curiously, even though the director is a woman, Dolors Genovès, only two of the 18 “experts” are women.

Figure 5. Screenshot from *Hola, Europa!* contrasting the “experts” and the “working folk.”

Fortunately, this film has no Playmobil animations as her previous film did, but it does use an awkward device of monumental titles introducing each section, designed to look like they are
carved in stone or another material associated with the background scene, emerging from the landscape or descending from the sky to announce each new theme (Figure 6). Likewise, between the main sections are shots of the four provincial capitals, thus covering the entire country, from nature to each province, ensuring that all viewers (most likely residents of Catalonia, since again this documentary is wholly in Catalan) find themselves represented in it.

Figure 6. Screenshot from *Hola, Europa!* showing the Foster Tower overlooking Barcelona and the monumental title introducing the section justifying that Catalonia’s telecommunications system could operate without Spain.

Just like *Adéu Espanya?*, this film also seems to be refuting implicit arguments as to why Catalonia cannot be independent that are never actually uttered, but which the audience has clearly heard many times. It begins with a voice intoning the names of all the presidents of Catalonia, from the early twentieth century until today (with the natural gap of the Civil War and the Franco dictatorship), and the claim that they have all tried to work with Spain, to find
Catalonia’s “fit” (*encaix*) within Spain, leading to the main questions the documentary seeks to answer: Has Catalanism failed? Or has the Spanish state failed? All the experts were “selected for their authority to refute common anti-independence arguments” (Crameri 2014, 110). Because this film takes a clear stance in favor of independence, these experts make some fairly dramatic and unsubstantiated claims, such as that Spain is an industrialized country yet still mired in the *Ancien Régime* in which the Catholic bishops still hold unofficial status as civil authorities; that after the expulsion of the Jews, anti-Semitism was replaced with anti-Catalanism; and that there is “grotesque asymmetry” in Spain because Spain asks Catalonia for loyalty but shows it no loyalty in return. These arguments are clearly meant to appeal to viewers’ affect, in this case anger and outrage at being stuck in such a retrograde country. This is reminiscent of Crameri’s discussion of the use of affect – negative affect in this case – as another way of rallying nationalist sentiments; specifically, she discusses how the term *espoli fiscal* (fiscal looting) is bandied about to rile people up and make them indignant at Spain’s supposed misuse of the taxes it collects from Catalonia (Crameri 2014, 71). The different speakers also repeatedly mention the *fet diferencial*, the vague but omnipresent phrase referring to what makes Catalonia different from Spain, as a reality that justifies its independence.

Many of the speakers say that what Catalans want is the right to decide (*el dret de decidir*) on their own future, and the documentary then goes on to discuss all the different obstacles to Catalonia’s independence that have been suggested and refute them one by one. In this sense, a great deal of the information found in *Adéu Espanya?* is repeated here, such as why Catalonia is economically capable of being independent and how this could be legally possible. It brings up the issue of Spanish people boycotting Catalan products – which has, indeed, happened since 1-O – but counters this with the contention that recently the markets for Catalan
products have shifted largely abroad, and the fact that any boycott would be mutual and therefore bad for both countries. It also mentions anti-independence arguments like how multinationals might leave Spain, the financial sector might suffer, the telecommunications and water supplies might be jeopardized, and the cost might be too prohibitive, but then it shoots down all these objections one by one.

Just like *Adéu Espanya?, Hola, Europa!* also provides a roadmap for independence, in this case with a step-by-step guide. As it says, the movement should start from civil society (as it did). The Parliament of Catalonia should then approve a consultation/referendum (which it did), which “has to be recognized by other countries. If not, it won’t go very far” (it was not, and neither did the independence declaration). A vote should then be held (it was), in which 50% voter turnout would be acceptable (that was not reached) and 51% of the votes had to be in favor of independence (of the low voter turnout, over 90% were in favor). Finally, the Parliament of Catalonia should then unilaterally declare independence, and the rest of the world will decide whether they accept it. In hindsight, this roadmap is interesting, and somewhat tragic in its naïve optimism. It is almost like the experts were wishing away the existence of Spain and assuming that countries around the world would ignore the wishes of their peer country, no matter how retrograde, because it is an internal issue and Spain is a democracy. Furthermore, after the declaration of independence, some multinationals (and Spanish companies) did leave Catalonia, and the European Union did not support Catalonia in its declaration of independence. As Albert Balcells (Balcells 2008) explains, “the Europe of the European Union is the Europe of and for the states… It is not the Europe of the stateless nations, not even the Europe of the regions with
legislative power [like Catalonia]”1 (10-11). Thus, not only was the European Union deaf to Catalonia’s claims, ultimately, like the poem at the beginning of Adéu Espanya? bemoans, Spain, in fact, was doing nothing to keep Catalonia; Spain “imposes itself, doesn’t reach agreements;” and yet the community of nations and supranational entities like the EU supported Spain, and Catalonia’s bid for independence was ultimately quashed.

Dissidents. El preu de la discrepància a la Catalunya nacionalista

Dissidents. El preu de la discrepància a la Catalunya nacionalista (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_M2VuTprs8) (Jurado 2016) is a documentary that also predates the referendum by a year but provides a clear sense of the opposition to the Catalan independence movement within Catalonia, a group whose voices are admittedly silenced or muted quite often. It is a series of interviews with experts and laypeople who live in Catalonia but identify as Spanish or as Spanish speakers, or are against Catalan nationalism and feel oppressed, marginalized, and/and discriminated against because of their stance. This documentary is in both Catalan and Spanish and therefore is clearly targeted at a bilingual audience in Catalonia.

Despite the ostensibly “neutral” mission of Sociedad Civil Catalana, the documentary begins in high drama with a poem by W. H. Auden (translated into Catalan) shown in white letters over a black background, in eerie silence. The poem is entitled “There Will Be No Peace,” and it is worth repeating here:

You must live with your knowledge.

1 “L’Europa de la Unió Europea és la dels estats i per als estats... No és l’Europa de les nacions sense estat, ni tan sols la de les regions amb poder legislatiu...”
Way back, beyond, outside of you are **others**,
In moonless absences **you never heard of**,
**Who have certainly heard of you.**
Beings of unknown number and gender:
**And they do not like you.**
W. H. Auden, “There Will Be No Peace” (emphasis added)

This sets up the frightening scene of living in a place where you are disliked by unknown Others, by that hostile “imagined community” to which you do not belong yet in whose midst you dwell. The drama continues with people talking about the discrimination and recriminations they have faced for opposing Catalonia’s independence or further encroachments of Catalanism, especially linguistic matters in education and the media. They are in the shadows, as if their identity is being protected to prevent retaliation (Figure 7). After this introduction, the spotlights are theatrically turned on with dramatic sound effects to reveal their faces, implying their courage at being willing to show their faces to that hostile “Other.” The background audio as this happens is a fiery speech in Catalan by the former president of Catalonia, Jordi Pujol, speaking to cheering throngs, a sound clearly meant to resemble a Hitler rally in the unsettling extremism it seeks to evoke. The documentary then intersperses interviews with “everyday people,” especially educators and journalists (employed by the Catalan government), as well as scholars and politicians, to provide both subjective traumatic stories of the lived experiences of everyday citizens and “objective” information by experts.
The film alleges that the Catalan education system and media have been co-opted by the pro-independence gang, which has snuffed out any dissent through intimidation. The speakers’ incendiary accusations include that Catalanists are totalitarians; that the Catalan identity proposed by the pro-independence movement is “exclusionary”; that the Catalan government has forced thousands of Spanish-speaking teachers out so they don’t “contaminate” Catalan youths; that the Catalans are rewriting history; that the Catalanists are using bots and fake ID’s on the social media to intimidate and harass non-Catalanists in Catalonia; and that Catalanists accuse non-Catalanists being pro-Franco, a galling accusation to most. Many of the speakers say that while Catalans claim that their rights are being violated by Spain, the people whose rights are actually being violated are non-nationalistic Spanish-speaking Catalans and residents of Catalonia, who are citizens of Spain yet are not allowed to be Spanish. The documentary
mentions a special report on Catalan journalists commissioned by the Catalan government which rates their Catalan-language diction and political affinity, and the negative career consequences and social media trolling of those who do not measure up. Likewise, the educators mention dismissals if they disagree with Catalan-only education. In short, the Catalanists are depicted as extreme, dangerous fanatics who zealously seek one goal and will raze anyone who disagrees with them.

What is fascinating in this documentary is how the interviewees clearly support Spanish nationalist claims while disputing the Catalans’ similar claims; they accuse their fellow Catalans of precisely the same oppression that the Catalans accuse the Spaniards of. Given these contradictory claims, it seems that nationalism, or whose nationalism, or what kind of nationalism, is at the heart of this issue. This will be discussed in depth in section V.
When I searched for documentaries about the referendum, I was trying to find several perspectives: the Catalanist side, a neutral portrayal of the events and positions neutrally, and one made from the Spanish vantage point. However, I was only able to find the first two since no documentary about the referendum seems to have been made from the Spanish side. This in itself is a telling “ghosting” of the event, or perhaps the non-event, in Spain which reflects the televised remarks of the Deputy Prime Minister of Spain Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría on the day of the referendum: “No ha habido referéndum” (“There has been no referendum”), and the Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy: “Hoy no ha habido un referéndum de autodeterminación en Cataluña” (“Today there has been no referendum on self-determination in Catalonia”), apparently a coordinated strategy of the central government to undermine the legitimacy of the referendum by erasure. Indeed, in a newspaper article about the making of Dos Cataluñas, when the directors were asked if there was anyone who didn’t want to appear to share their opinion, they answered that neither the Deputy Prime Minister nor the Prime Minister answered their requests for interviews (Netflix estrenará el documental ‘Dos Cataluñas’ el próximo otoño 2018).

I watched a total of eleven documentaries on Catalonia’s independence referendum ranging from 6 minutes to almost 2 hours, all available on YouTube or Netflix. To reasonably tackle this project, I chose one film from the pro-Catalan and pro-independence point of view and one with a more neutral portrayal of that day, although I mention one other as a minor source of historical information on Spanish nationalism for comparative purposes. It is important to note, however, that dividing Catalan and Spanish public opinion into three neat categories is a vast oversimplification of the situation, as many people in both Catalonia and Spain have more
nuanced opinions on the issue of Catalonia’s independence. Nonetheless, because the public discourse tends to be very polarized, and because such nuances are beyond the scope of this paper, I describe the documentaries as pro-independence or neutral. Below I provide a brief synopsis of each video with my analysis of its ideology and the filmic techniques used to enhance this vantage point.

**Dos Cataluñas**

*Dos Cataluñas* (Netflix España) (Álvaro Longoria and Gerardo Olivares 2019) is a bilingual film which shows footage in both Spanish and Catalan and presents both sides of 1-O. This feature-length documentary includes a mix of:

- archival footage providing the background to the referendum;
- footage of newscasts on election day and afterwards, featuring politicians and journalists from both sides speaking both languages;
- professional footage of the events on 1-O from the many journalists, both local and international, whose cameras were set up in anticipation of drama after the Guardia Civil were sent to Catalonia;
- cellphone footage taken by Catalans showing the organization of the polling stations, citizens voting (often jubilantly, taking smiling selfies with the people around them cheering), then the Guardia Civil coming to the polling stations, using violence to push through the crowds of Catalans protecting the ballot boxes, and seizing and removing them, as well as many of moments of solidarity and community, with chants of “*Votarem*” (We will vote) early in the day and “*Hem
votat” (We have voted) later, and small and large crowds breaking out in renditions of Els Segadors;

- interviews with Catalans who participated in the elections, Catalans who did not and disagreed with it, and both Spanish and Catalan politicians; and
- written captions throughout, narrating the events of the day and their aftermath in chronological order.

The directors say they wanted the audience to reach their own conclusions (Netflix estrenará el documental ‘Dos Cataluñas’ el próximo otoño n.d.) by showing just the facts, as emphasized by a Daniel Patrick Moynihan quote shown in a caption at the beginning of the film: “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.” Despite this attempted neutrality, I believe this documentary is slightly skewed to the Spanish side because it has more Spanish than Catalan interviewees, and because the very title, indicating a fracture within Catalan society, is an unproductive trope that doesn’t begin to explain the complex, muddy reality. Then again, a Spaniard might say the same about the Catalan side, which may well be a positive commentary on its neutrality and a reflection of my own allegiances. The filmmakers say that they’re “both from Spain, though neither consider themselves Spanish” (Netflix estrenará el documental ‘Dos Cataluñas’ el próximo otoño n.d.), a somewhat perplexing remark given that emotions on this issue are high in both Spain and Catalonia. In short, the film can be said to be an effective neutral-ish overview of the situation, a fast-paced and somewhat mind-boggling onslaught of juxtaposed chronological images and footage from both sides.

The film opens with several scenes in different places at different times with masses of pro-independence demonstrators as far as the eye can see singing the Catalan national anthem,
Els Segadors, all spliced seamlessly together (Figure 8). It then follows with shots inside the Parliament of Catalonia on the day that it approved the referendum, which juxtaposes the “two Catalonias.” First, Catalan president Puigdemont says, “The fundamental guarantee which gives sense to any system is that citizens may decide, and that decision is not a crime.” After that, it cuts to Inés Arrimadas from the anti-independence Ciudadanos party saying that the referendum was “…illegal, irregular, and what we have seen today is insane. With a majority of seats and a minority of votes, you’re trampling on the rights of a majority of citizens represented by the opposition.” As she is speaking, the camera cuts back to Puigdemont shaking his head in disagreement or disbelief, and when Arrimadas finishes her speech, her entire party gets up and leaves the parliamentary chamber to protest the illegal referendum by refusing to even honor it with a vote. It then cuts to Rajoy, the prime minister of Spain, saying that the referendum is “hurried, sloppy, and illegal, [and] will not be held,” a promise or a threat, depending on who is receiving the message.

Figure 8. Image from the beginning of Dos Cataluñas with crowds of demonstrators waving the pro-independence Catalan flag, the estelada.
The next scene is the departure of some of the 10,000 Guardia Civil troops sent to Catalonia to prevent the referendum; they are leaving a town in Spain with citizens lined up on the sidewalks cheering them on and saying, “Go get them!” (the pro-independence Catalans).

Fast-forward to the day of the referendum, and the same guards dressed like stormtroopers from Star Wars, except in black uniforms, every part of their bodies concealed and armored, pointing machine guns and raising batons in a threatening manner towards the crowds of citizens in Catalonia, who are nonetheless taunting them or refusing to move. At this point, mayhem breaks out, with the guards beating the Catalan citizens with batons to get them out of the way and shooting warning shots in the air so they could seize the illegal ballot boxes (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The Guardia Civil attempting to remove Catalan voters from the polling stations on 1-O (https://theintercept.com/2017/10/01/spanish-police-beat-catalan-voters-deepening-divide-threatens-spain/).
And so the film goes on, contrasting one side with the other: footage of a Catalanist politician followed by footage of a Spanish one, both sides claiming they are morally and legally right, while the other side is not; shots of Catalans, post-vote, a collective mass emotionally singing *Els Segadors*, hands extended overhead in triumph and power, juxtaposed with the Spanish politicians claiming that absolutely nothing had happened that day (Figure 10). Just as in *Dissidents* but in the opposite sense, the Catalans accuse Spain of being a dictatorship, while the Spaniards discuss the “indoctrination” of Catalan youths into what one speaker called “Catalan supremacy.” The film continues after the referendum, covering the “preventative” prison sentences of the government leaders involved in it, and one commentator near the end of the film concludes “how spectacularly unnecessary this whole mess is and how easily it could have been avoided,” although it is unclear whether he is accusing one or both sides of this mulishness.

Figure 10. Catalan independence supporters triumphantly singing *Els Segadors* after the results of the referendum were announced.
La Gent de l’Escala

La Gent de l’Escala (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONMZK0mMUy8) (Francesc Escribano and Jordi Fusté 2018) was released one year after the referendum, almost to the day, and is built around the scenes of violence captured by Catalans’ cellphone cameras at one particular school that served as a polling place in a working-class neighborhood of Barcelona on 1-O. This particular footage appeared in every single video I watched as the most graphic example of the gratuitous violence waged by the Spanish state against nonviolent Catalan citizens. The documentary gets its title, which literally means “The People on the Staircase,” from the fact that when the poll workers and voters at that school got word via social media that the Guardia Civil were coming, they sat down, packed tight on the staircase just inside the school door to act as a human shield to prevent the Guardia Civil from reaching the auditorium on the floor above, where voting was taking place. The cameras of onlookers from the second floor caught footage of the Guardia Civil kicking and pushing people off the staircase, and even pulling one woman off by her hair (Figure 11). This documentary was made almost one year later by one of the TV channels funded by the Catalan government; a journalist tracked down those “people on the staircase” and interviewed them, juxtaposing their recollections with the footage, and then their reactions to the footage one year after the fact, to chronologically narrate the events of that day.
Figure 1. Scene from *La Gent de l’Escala*, when the Guardia Civil are physically removing the Catalans from the staircase.

This documentary in no way purports to be neutral. It is clearly pro-Catalan and anti-Guardia Civil and Spanish government, and although it makes no explicit claims regarding independence, the choice of topic and interviewees, coupled with the complete lack of representation of the other side, mean that it is pro-independence, or at least pro-referendum, *pro-dret de decidir*. The documentary uses many techniques to create Anderson’s “imagined community” of Catalans pitted against the enemy: the Guardia Civil, representing the Spanish state. One of the tactics it uses to build suspense, and almost fear (because all viewers know what the outcome will be – the entire film is in Catalan and therefore geared to a Catalan audience), is a series of maps with dots showing the locations of the Catalans and the Guardia Civil (Figure 12); what start as distant dots as the Guardia Civil disembark at the port gradually draw nearer to the school, causing a looming dread in the viewer, which is no less and perhaps even heightened because we are aware of what is coming, until the violence finally breaks out. Likewise, the
interviews are often set to pensive, melancholy music which highlights the words of the interviewees, many of whom were traumatized by the violence they experienced that day. As each interviewee speaks emotionally, the footage is shown at the particular moment when they were being roughed up or brutalized, their bodies circled in red onscreen so viewers can identify them, almost a voyeuristic way to gain audience sympathy and spark outrage.

Figure 12. Maps with red dots showing the Catalan independence voters and blue dots representing the Guardia Civil as they draw closer and try to find their way into the school.

This documentary also shows many scenes of community bonding, such as chants not only of “Votarem” and “Hem votat,” but also of “Som gent de pau” (We are peaceful people), clearly establishing Catalan identity in opposition to the violent Spaniards, represented by the Guardia Civil. To me, the most striking part of this video is the fact that when asked, many of the interviewees say that while they don’t regret voting, they’re not sure they would have participated in 1-O if they had known the violent reaction of the Guardia Civil, evincing their trauma. Yet somewhat contradictorily, when discussing the day there is a palpable sense of nostalgia, of cherished communality, of having bonded with each other and truly brought that community together. They mention the “caliu de la gent, el sentiment” (the warmth of people,
the feeling), and the heroism of the community and political leaders who organized the referendum, leading me to believe that in the long term, the Guardia Civil’s harsh reaction did more to cohere Catalan society than a milder reaction would have.
In this section, to discuss and identify the main trends in these documentaries, I will examine the notion of nationalism, particularly relying on Benedict Anderson’s definition and description in *Imagined Communities* (1983), and then furthering that discussion with Michael Billig’s concept of *Banal Nationalism* (1995) as a way to compare the “hot” nationalism in Catalonia with the “banal” nationalism in Spain, and to trace them historically. I will also bring in Kathryn Crameri’s take on banal nationalism in the article “Banal Catalanism?” (2000). I will bring in Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s version of history in *Silencing the Past* (1995) and Albert Balcell’s *Llocs de Memòria dels Catalans* for a brief discussion of different versions of history depending on who writes it, attending power differentials and history as a non-objective account.


Benedict Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community [that is] both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1983). This provides one explanation of Catalans’ claims for sovereignty, a sovereignty they had in the distant past, lost in 1714 at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, and have continued to win back and lose to varying degrees since then. Anderson evokes this imagined community via print capitalism with the image of anonymous people who do not know and cannot see each other but are aware that they are all
silently, solitarily, reading the same newspaper with the same news in the same language every morning, binding them together in an invisible web of complicity. Thus, the *imagined* essence of the community is that the members do not actually know everyone, but through shared actions and experiences they imagine the community into existence. While the title of *La Gent de l'Escala* literally means “The People on the Stairs,” it actually indirectly evokes this tight-knit imagined community with a play on words: in ordinary parlance, *la gent de l’escala* is all the people who live in your building, the people you greet in the elevator, borrow an egg from, and go to homeowners’ meetings with, that is, not members of a nameless, faceless imagined community but a true, daily, face-to-face community. The title of the documentary plus the intimacy of the interviews in the film enhance the sense that these could be the folks who live in my own building, *ergo*, they are my community, and I could have been in their shoes had I been in the wrong place at the wrong time. As the speakers in that documentary say somewhat wistfully, what they will always remember is the real sense of community they had on 1-O, the sense that those folks they unconsciously rubbed shoulders with on staircases and in supermarkets were now individuals with whom they felt strong bonds. Hence, the very heroism and trauma of the event, in their eyes, helped render this imagined community real.

As mentioned above, one of the essential features of any nation is its claims of ancientness, the fact that the nation “loom[s] out of an immemorial past” (Anderson 1983), naturalizing its existence. Appadurai calls this the “paradox of constructed primordialism” (Appadurai 1990) given that like most nations today, Catalonia did not exist 1000 years ago with this name and self-awareness as a unique community. According to an expert interviewed in *Dos Cataluñas*, Catalonia has wanted to politically detach itself from Spain eleven times in history. The political nation that, according to Catalans, dates back almost 1,000 years first disappeared
in 1714, but as a cultural and linguistic nation it has never disappeared. Lévi-Strauss says that there is an exclusionary component of nationalism; that a nation is defined by what it is not, its opposite or opponent, in this case Spain. In some ways Spain’s periodic repression of Catalonia has probably done more to bind Catalans as an imagined national community than a more laissez-faire policy would have. Indeed, a speaker in *Dos Cataluñas* says that since Rajoy had come to power, there had been a huge rise in pro-independence sentiments in Catalonia, from 17% to 48%, precisely because of Rajoy’s unwillingness to make concessions. Yet according to a speaker in *Dissidents*, Catalan politicians are the ones who wield the us-versus-them rhetoric to “other” dissidents.

This brings up the issue of history: whose history gets told, and where? In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (Trouillot 2015) examines history-making as an exercise of power. In this he concurs with Albert Balcells in *Llocs de Memòria dels Catalans* (Balcells 2008), who says that “both memory and history are selective” (11).² Trouillot provides extensive evidence that the old adage that history is always written by the winners is, in fact, true. And this becomes clear in the speakers from both sides in *Dos Cataluñas*, and in the historical sketch of Catalonia in *Adéu Espanya?* Not surprisingly, the history told by the Catalans to support their ancient past stands in stark contrast to the history told by Spaniards. In another Spanish-language video I watched for background, *Historia de la nación y del nacionalismo español* (History of the Nation and of Spanish Nationalism) (Andrés de Blas and Jesús de Andrés 2014), Catalonia is simply not mentioned as a nation, and the

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² “Tant la memòria com la història són selectives.”
Spanish historians interviewed call Spain one of the oldest states in Europe, dating from the late fifteenth century, clearly referring to the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand. The Catalan version of that history is that Ferdinand (Fernando in Spanish and Ferran in Catalan) was a Catalan who may have married Isabella of Castile but sagely ensured that the Catalans were allowed to retain their traditions, their legal organization, and their sovereignty. So, what the Catalans see as a dynastic merger that left their nationhood intact, the Spaniards view as the dawn of Spain and the erasure of Catalonia as a political nation. Balcells warns that, “we have to acknowledge that inasmuch as history is interpretation, it would be hard for everyone to agree with the same interpretation, no matter how contextualized and well-documented it is” (13).³ As Trouillot says, “history is always produced in a specific historical context. Historical actors are also narrators, and vice-versa” (22), demonstrating that both sides tell their versions of history, which are “right” within the historical (and cultural) context in which they were written. This thus justifies Spain’s claims that Catalonia’s independence would be a total anomalous breach in a centuries-long history, yet simultaneously and paradoxically the Catalans’ claims of independence as simply the logical next step in its history, a return to sovereignty. We actually witnessed Trouillot’s notion of silencing history in action on the day of the referendum by the aforementioned comments of the Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister of Spain that “There was no referendum,” thus ensuring that from the Spanish side, nothing happened that was worth being recorded in the annals of history, whereas from the Catalanist side 1-O was a

³ “Cal reconèixer que a la mesura que la història és interpretació, difícilment tothom estarà d’acord amb la mateixa interpretació, per més contextualitzada i documenta que estigui.”
momentous day when the Catalans finally spoke out to overcome their entrapment within an oppressive state.

Regarding Spain today, the same Spanish historians in *Historia de la nación y del nacionalismo español* discuss Spanish nationalism as pluralistic, a nationalism in which many different identities and ideological stances can fit. This claim is clearly disputed by pro-independence Catalans, who believe their rights are being trampled on. The Catalans openly acknowledge that they are nationalists, while the Spaniards believe their stance simply reflects reality, a given, an example of Michael’s Billig’s “banal” nationalism, as I shall discuss below. Yet as Pablo Iglesias, the head of the left-wing populist party Podemos says in *Dos Cataluñas*, there are different kinds of nationalisms: the chauvinistic reactionary type, and the international, socially conscious type. Clearly to him, Catalan nationalism is the latter while its Spanish counterpart is the former. Yet that is countered by the speakers in *Dissidents*, who claim that their rights are being trampled on by the narrow chauvinism of the Catalanists, as proven by the fact that they are unable to freely express their dissent. In fact, one speaker in *Dissidents* claimed that the Catalans are reinventing history and the past, the product of a toxic Catalan nationalism that is impoverishing the culture by refusing to allow anything Spanish; he then asks the rhetorical questions, “Who is violent? Who is totalitarian?” His answers are clearly the Catalans. Finally, the speakers in *Historia de la nación y del nacionalismo español* also contrasted Spanish nationalism during the Franco dictatorship, which was fascist and militaristic, with Spanish nationalism today, in which Spain is divided into autonomous communities that “give peripheral nationalisms some self-determination” (I can only imagine the Catalans’ reactions to being called a “peripheral nationalism”), which in his mind is sufficient, so why are the Catalans complaining? In short, I believe that one speaker in *Dos Cataluñas* summed it up the best by
saying that “The nationalist always thinks the other is a nationalist, that he’s not a nationalist.” This confirms Trouillot’s contention that aspects of history and culture are cherry-picked to support one’s own nationalism as natural, versus the other’s, which is constructed and therefore false. As Appadurai says, “one man’s imagined community is another man’s political prison” (Appadurai 1990), precisely the Catalanists’ feelings as they sought to throw off the Spanish shackles once and for all on 1-O.

So, whose nationalism is “right”? Will the real nationalists please stand up? And is nationalism in any form acceptable? In Banal Nationalism (1995), Michael Billig makes the case for “hot” versus “banal” nationalism. The term “nationalism” is often used pejoratively (as it is in Dos Cataluñas and Dissidents), to refer to fanatics seeking to rend the order of a country asunder. This is Billig’s “hot” nationalism. However, he argues that nationalism is built into our very identities, associated with our nations, the organizing unit of the international order today. Just like Anderson, Billig also asserts that this seemingly “natural” division of the world into nations is neither natural nor eternal but a creation of the past several hundred years. Crameri (200) describes banal nationalism as being “squarely based on an accepted rhetoric which takes the nation as a given and the allegiance of all citizens for granted” (146), the perfect description of the Spaniards, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. In solid nation-states, banal nationalism includes flags flying in front of banks, post offices, or gas stations; the deixis regularly used to talk about “us” and “them,” which goes virtually unnoticed; and the language and content of newspapers, which talk first and foremost about “our” country (think of the Olympics). He claims that this nationalism is so everyday, so banal, that it ceases to be visible, and we are unaware of its power to influence the way we see the world. Thus, when the Spaniards in films such as Dissidents disparagingly discuss Catalan nationalism because, after
all, Catalans are a part of Spain, they do not seem to realize that both Catalonia and Spain are constructed nations with their own nationalisms, but that this nationalism is banal in Spain because as an actual nation-state, it has no need to exhibit a “hot” nationalism.

Interestingly, at the time Crameri wrote her article “Banal Catalanism?” in 2000, Catalonia itself had fully plunged into banal nationalism with the concessions it had won from the Spanish government in areas such as culture and education after the Transition from the dictatorship to democracy in its first Statute of Autonomy. She says that while some more fervent nationalists were dismayed at the apparent cansament (weariness, fatigue) with “hot” nationalism, it came about because “in granting the statute of autonomy the Spanish state was not merely being seen to be supportive of Catalan culture in some abstractly beneficent fashion but in fact was giving substantial autonomy in cultural matters and handing over political powers in areas which are not purely cultural and which, in more centralized Western countries, are normally retained by the state” (Crameri 2000, 147). As a result, symbols of Catalan nationalism like the flag, hung alongside the Spanish flag, no longer packed the powerful punch they did in the dictatorship. In short, with the concessions granted, Catalans fell into the sort of complacency or nationalistic torpor that is the breeding ground for cool or banal nationalism. However, writing in 2000, she noted that all it would take to revive the latent “hot” nationalism was for the Spanish government to start retracting these concessions, as indeed it did in 2006. As she says in her conclusion, “Of course, nothing said here denies the potential of ‘banal’ nationalisms to become ‘hot’ again if circumstances permit or require this” (155), a prescient description of precisely what happened, leading to the situation today.
Crameri wrote *Goodbye, Spain?* in 2014, shortly after the first two documentaries, *Adéu Espanya?* and *Hola, Europa!*, were made. She makes interesting arguments for what Catalanism actually is today, and why those documentaries overtly evoke rational arguments while only covertly or subtly citing identitarian or sentimental arguments. In this she echoes Kathryn Woolard’s distinction between authenticity and anonymity in her study of shifting attitudes towards the Catalan and Spanish languages in Catalonia, *Singular and Plural: Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia* (2016). During the dictatorship, the Catalan language (and, we can add, culture) had become regionalized, viewed as a “territorially rooted linguistic identity framed as authentic and natural to Catalonia” (Woolard 2016: 40), as the standard language ideology deemed that Spanish was the natural, banal national language. As Crameri (2000: 153-4) put it, during this period, Catalan language and culture were viewed “as some kind of quasi-mystical force which expresses the Catalan soul and its unique relationship with its territory”. Thus, Catalan language and culture were related to what Woolard calls “authenticity,” or particularism, an essential, primordial part of the Catalan identity and therefore not for outsiders (2016: 24). At that time, Catalan was often referred to as the *llengua pròpia* of Catalonia and the Catalans, that is, their own language, an inherent, inalienable part of the Catalan identity, which needed to be reasserted under the restored freedom, just as Catalan culture expressed the *fet diferencial*, or what makes Catalonia unique, especially from Spain, which also arose repeatedly in *Adéu Espanya?* This was no doubt due to the threat from the Spanish state: it was essential to protect what was unique about Catalonia’s language and culture while it was menaced by the behemoth of Spanish.

However, as Catalonia emerged from the dictatorship, during which millions of Spaniards had “immigrated” to Catalonia, the original strategy of appealing to the authenticity of
Catalan language and culture, making them something that was explicitly not accessible to outsiders, became a constraint. Therefore, the challenge after autonomy was to transform the Catalan language from a “private marker of authentic ethnolinguistic identity to a more anonymous, universally available public language” (Woolard, 2016:10) and to spread Catalan culture to anyone living in Catalonia: the paradigm shift from authenticity to anonymity. Crameri draws an interesting parallel between the use of the Catalan language and its flag, the senyera. Whereas during the dictatorship, the senyera was illegal and dangerous, a sign of “hot” nationalism, during the transition it became a “joyous rallying point for those who had waited so long to be able to display it proudly” (2000: 148), merely another banal symbol. Likewise, during the dictatorship Catalan had to remain a private, hidden language, whereas upon autonomy it was held up as the shining symbol of Catalan identity. Yet as the years wore on, just as the senyera became banal as it was flown everywhere, often alongside the Spanish flag, so Catalan language and culture became banal, as the former was spoken everywhere and by most everyone: a shift from purism to cosmopolitanism. Once this balance was upset after 2006, the senyera once again became a potent symbol. In fact, a pro-independence version of it, called the estelada (based on estel, the star that was added), can be seen on balconies, streets, polling centers, and people’s clothing and accessories in Dos Cataluñas and La Gent de l’Escala (Figure 13). Interestingly, as nationalism in Catalonia was “heating up,” in 2016 the Spanish government forbade Catalans from carrying the estelada to a football match, alleging that it is a symbol that may “incite, foment or help violent or terrorist behavior”⁴ (Duran 2016).

⁴ “inciten, fomenten o ayuden a la realización de comportamientos violentos o terroristas”
In line with Woolard’s arguments, Crameri contrasts previous rationales for independence based on ethnicity/identity (the primordialist argument) with more modern ones based solely on economic pragmatism, as clearly evinced in Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa!. Catalan identity became available to anyone who “felt” or “wanted to be” Catalan (instrumentalism), thus expanding the pool of possible Catalans. As one Catalanist politician succinctly put it, Catalanism now “comes from the head and the pocket, rather than the heart” (Crameri 2014, 55). She interestingly notes that Catalan ethnicity is considered “thin,” in the sense that it “organizes relatively little of social life in action… especially now that Catalonia is so ethnically diverse” (11), a contention that contrasts starkly with Llobera in Foundations of National Identity: From Catalonia to Europe, who believes Catalan ethnic identity to be a driving force in the country. As Llobera contends: “I would say that the spirit of the nation is what gives people their sense of being, their authenticity; it is changeable, but it also shows continuity” (Llobera 2004, 5). He equates nationalism with a kind of kinship writ large and cites Geertz’s primordialism: group identity is a priori, ineffable, yet coercive, and affective, and this naturally leads to national sentiments. Thus, Llobera’s view of nationalism is clearly the
affective, heartfelt legacy of the Romantic tradition: “The concept of love of country draws its strength, its character and its imagery from the familial and religious spheres. Love of country is extremely possessive and requires absolute loyalty” (31). He even extends the kinship metaphor so far as to say that “when reference is made to Catalonia in Spain, the point is made that you cannot have two mothers; you are born only in one country that is your true mother” (55), a clearly affective appeal for the naturalness and inevitability of Catalan nationalism. As mentioned above, this kinship metaphor also appears in Adéu Espanya? with the speaker who compares the bond between Catalonia and Spain to a marriage: “If one member wants to leave it, it would be violent to force them to stay together.” Yet in addition to the fact that more pragmatic than emotional arguments are used today, Crameri also points out that positive and negative affect cut both ways: each nationalism describes itself positively and the other negatively: “Are Catalans industrious and entrepreneurial or moneygrubbing? Is Catalan nationalism inclusive and civic or exclusive and ethnic? Is the Catalan language a way to integrate into Catalan society or an enforced social, political, and economic barrier?” (71).

Indeed, while pulling the positive affective heartstrings of the Catalans, Llobera turns this on its head when alleging the reasons Catalonia must detach itself from Spain: “the Catalan case shows that while history was written by the winners, that is, a crypto-fascist Spanish nationalism bent on eradicating Catalan separatism, the losers manage to preserve their ethnic national identity” (118, emphasis added). This not only echoes the emotionally loaded language of one speaker in Hola Europa!, who cited the “grotesque asymmetry” between Spain and Catalonia, but it also concurs with Trouillot’s contention of how history is written, in this case from the Catalanist viewpoint, while clearly appealing to emotions instead of the “rational” arguments that predominate today. Nadia Lovell (Lovell 1998) mentions that “notions and
feelings of collective belonging are mobilized at particular times, and on the instrumentality of such feelings and making explicit particular aspects of collective identities and claims on territory” (5), thus connecting emotions and territory. Crameri cites debates which now consider territory more important as a basis for political legitimacy (i.e., independence or sovereignty) than ethnicity or kinship; that is, territory is a “post-ethnic substitute” (Crameri 2014, 11). As proof of this, she noted how Catalanism waned considerably between the first post-dictatorship Statue of Autonomy in 1978 and the proposed newer one, and how the keen sense of Catalanism and pro-independence today truly emerged with force after the Constitutional Court rejected Catalonia’s expanded authorities on many matters (education, media, language policy). In the revision of the statue of autonomy in 2004 to 2006, the Spaniards only allowed it to say that Catalans viewed themselves as a nation as opposed to that Catalonia is a nation, sparking the conflict. Nonetheless, the switch from Catalanism as ethnicity to Catalanism as mere location, and the use of pragmatic arguments like economics as opposed to identity, have led Spanish nationalists to “seize on the discordant notes in this narrative as proof of the illegitimacy of the whole Catalanist project” (Crameri 2014, 38). Yet the importance of affective ties is clear in the nostalgic sense of community togetherness forged on 1-O that the interviewees in La Gent de l’Escala repeatedly mention, while the power of the primordialist and kinship emotional appeals ring through the scenes of “regular folk” and beloved landscapes, the wellspring of the Catalans, in Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa!

Getting back to Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa!, Crameri says that recent pragmatic political discourse seeks to make Catalans aware of their alternatives; that is, that there has been a shift in Spain’s policies, with no apparent (satisfactory) solution, and therefore independence is one solution. She shows how “between 2000 and 2013, a series of simplified messages about
independence has been generated, transmitted, and widely accepted… even in some cases by Catalans who did not support independence,” an echo of the pragmatic (i.e., economic) motives cited in these two documentaries. Interestingly, for this very reason, that is, to enlist the support of people who are unsure about or against independence, the issue has been reframed as the “right to decide” (dret de decidir) as opposed to the right to independence. A notable Catalan historian has described the phrase “right to decide” as “a comfortable refuge so as not to have to call things by their name” (Crameri, Goodbye, Spain? The question of independence for Catalonia 2014). Yet indeed the “right to decide” is now the hegemonic discourse that has usurped identity or language, and it figures prominently in Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa! as the argument in favor of the referendum, especially the former: Scotland, Greenland, and Montreal have been allowed to decide on their political futures; why can’t Catalonia?

With regard to the “simplified messages” about independence cited above, which are clearly evinced in Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa!, Crameri says that “behind this process lies a stress on the rationality of the idea of secession, distancing the pro-independence movement from sentimental or identitarian arguments, which are often instead attributed to the anti-independence constituency” (54), again highlighting the shift from authenticity to anonymity, purism to cosmopolitanism. However, the problem with underscoring the rationality of the arguments is that “the doxa of rationality and democracy allows those who argue against these statements to be easily dismissed as irrational and undemocratic, without needing to engage in detail with their arguments” (70). As Puigdemont says at the beginning of Dos Cataluñas, “The fundamental guarantee which gives sense to any system is that citizens may decide, and that decision is not a crime.” Thus, any Spaniard who debates the rationality of that argument must, in Catalanists’ view, be irrational and undemocratic. Indeed, despite the fact that this book was
written seven years ago, this perfectly captures the tensions in Spain today: both sides are so
convinced of the rightness and rationality of their arguments, as seen in the speakers on either
side in Dos Cataluñas and Dissidents, that they disdainfully dismiss the other side, hindering any
progress on the matter, which is clearly real and will not simply vanish.

Anderson discusses the importance of language in creating the imagined national
community, especially poetry and song, and in particular the national anthem. As he says, “No
matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of
simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same
verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance” (Anderson 1983). Therefore, anthems
become another way of creating the imagined community. What is captured in all the cellphone
footage of 1-O in Dos Cataluñas and La Gent de l’Escala, without fail, is not only violence but
also community solidarity, especially groups of Catalans at the polling stations or on the streets
singing Els Segadors. They may be doing this in a circle at the polling station, holding hands as
the Guardia Civil seizes the ballot boxes, or jubilantly at a polling station the Guardia Civil
didn’t reach, where the votes were able to be cast and counted. At the end of Dos Cataluñas, the
footage jumps from site to site as the overwhelmingly positive results of the vote are announced.
One scene that is repeated in different locations is a community organizer standing on a balcony,
overlooking throngs of Catalans anxiously awaiting the results. When they are announced
(usually over 90% in favor of independence), the audience on the streets claps wildly and then
euphorically breaks into Els Segadors, often in an almost trance-like state, arms waving in the air
and the crowd swaying in unison.
When discussing the emergence of nationalism, Anderson claims that in some respects it replaced religion as what people believe in, as the community for which we are even willing to die. And religion requires rituals and rites of passage. At several points, the events of 1-O evoked not only ritual and rites of passage but also even trance-like states, revealing this connection between nationalism and secular religiosity.
The first scenes that evoke a kind of heroic deed, shown in both Dos Cataluñas and La Gent de l’Escala, is citizens bringing the ballot boxes to the polling stations. Both films show dark, quiet streets in a usually busy city at around 5 a.m., the stillness giving a sense of suspense and foreboding of what is going to happen. A person is filmed at home, clearly a small, modest home, getting out of bed, brushing their teeth, getting dressed, and pulling a plastic bin wrapped in a black garbage bag, the ballot box, out from their closet or under their bed. Then they sleepily make their way by car to the polling stations as the dawn begins to lighten the sky. There, despite the early hour, they are greeted with a gauntlet of fellow Catalans, who likely spent the night there to keep the Guardia Civil out, cheering as the person makes a mad dash with the ballot box from their car into the polling place, like heroic yet beleaguered Olympic torchbearers being cheered as they enter the stadium. In fact, Barcelona hosted the Olympics in 1992, and this was a seminal moment when the city and Catalonia as a whole regained their national pride after the oppression of the dictatorship and announced their existence to the world. It put Barcelona on the global map, and its opening and closing ceremonies were quite pointedly in Catalan, not Spanish. Therefore, it is not surprising that this nation-building event is echoed in the latter-day “heroes” running with ballot boxes, not torches, into the polling places, lest the Guardia Civil come and seize them, getting a hero’s welcome as they risk their lives for their nation.

The entire series of events on 1-O almost perfectly fit Victor Turner’s structure of rites of passage, which he claims takes the participants from one social state to another with the goal of effecting social change (Turner 1969). While Turner discusses rites of passage in terms of individuals, in this case the “individual” is writ large, to the body politic of Catalonia, part of
which bound together as a single entity during this crucial rite of passage. Turner breaks rituals down into the previous structure, then the liminal stage, which is when communitas or anti-structure is created, and finally reincorporation. The first phase symbolizes “the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of social conditions (“a state”) or from both” (Turner 1969, 94). During the liminal stage “the characteristics of the ritual subject… are ambiguous; he [sic] passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (94). This liminality is necessarily ambiguous: “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95). The third phrase is reeducation or reincorporation, in which the passage to the new state is consummated.

Connecting this with 1-O, the initial structure is clearly the previous state of Catalonia, (willingly) part of Spain, or perhaps without yet feeling the urgency to confront the issue of independence openly. In the second stage, liminality or anti-structure, an alternative social reality can be invented, and society can be reimagined. In Catalonia, this came to a head on 1-O, the day of the referendum, when the Catalan people (who voted) were in an ambiguous middle state, neither (in their minds) part of Spain yet not sure of the outcome, which if positive would make a declaration of independence possible. However, this liminal state actually began earlier, when the Parliament of Catalonia declared that it was going to hold the referendum, despite the fact that the Spanish government had declared it illegal. From that moment on, Catalonia was suspended in this state of liminality, “betwixt and between,” neither (willingly) part of Spain nor yet its own independent country. And this is precisely when the community began to bond around the logistics of the elections: sites, ballots, personnel.
This liminality is echoed, too, in the insecurity yet excitement at the beginning of the day on 1-O, the sense at dawn that something big was looming ahead, as shown in both *La Gent de l’Escala* and *Dos Cataluñas*. Turner also mentions the *communitas* that develops among the people experiencing liminality together, forging an unbreakable bond. On 1-O, this liminality would entail the uncertainty of voting, the ritual of counting the votes, the crowds waiting around to hear the results and then coming together, swaying, some crying, some laughing and whooping, all singing *Els Segadors* in unison, a moment when they are “born” anew as Catalan citizens. As Turner says of this stage, “among themselves, neophytes [the Catalans, in this case] tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized” (95). This is readily visible in the videos, and the participants in *La Gent de l’Escala* also mention that sense of community as one of the best things about that day. The *communitas* that is formed within this liminal stage “emerges where social structure is not” (126), in that “betwixt and between” state, as were the Catalans on 1-O, after deliberately rejecting the structure of the Spanish state to plunge into this limbo, not knowing how or where they would emerge on the other side. This reflects the potentiality of ritual, the question of its outcome; as Turner says, “communitas also has an aspect of potentiality; it is often in the subjunctive mood” (127), meaning that the “what if” is greater than any certainty, as was clearly the case on 1-O.

Turner discusses the liminal nature of movements that “arise in times of radical social transition, when society itself seems to be moving from one fixed state to the other” (133), an apt description of Catalonia from 2006 until its bid for independence on October 1, 2017. Catalan culture is fairly class- and image-driven, but this idea of *communitas*, when classes disappear and people merge into an amorphous whole, came to the fore on the day of the referendum, when
neighbors who barely knew each other fused into a collective body, as recounted in *La Gent de l’Escala*. As Turner says, “spontaneous *communitas* has something ‘magical’ about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power” (139), and the heroic depiction of the participants in the 1-O polling places certain confirms this magical view of their (super)powers that day, while the triumphant renditions of *Els Segadors*, the crowds swaying in unison, was the ultimate expression of the feeling of endless power, anticipating (though erroneously) their soon-to-be triumph as an independent nation.

The last phase in Turner’s analysis of ritual is reaggregation or reincorporation, where the participants are reintroduced into society with a new social status. This is the tricky part of analyzing 1-O through Turner’s ritual lens. In Turner’s view, the person who reincorporates into the structure is changed, has a different status. However, because independence was ultimately shot down by the Spanish state and the referendum leaders (both civil and political) were punished with imprisonment and fines (or escaped them via exile), 1-O could conceivably be viewed as a thwarted ritual because that reincorporation with a different status (independent statehood) was not ultimately achieved. However, my impression is that the participants in 1-O would disagree with this, in that their standing up to Spain and declaring their intentions gives them—among themselves—a new status, a new pride, a buoyed sense of courage. In fact, two speakers in *Dos Cataluñas* recount one of the Catalans’ victories on 1-O, even if they did not achieve independence. Pablo Simón, a political scientist, describes this victory as follows:

What proves that the [Spanish] government never imagined the impact of all this is that the government representative ordered the police to stop intervening mid-morning. And therefore they understood that *their actions had been very questionable* and that they hadn’t got the results they were hoping for. [emphasis added]
This quote is illustrated with images of Catalans chasing the Guardia Civil as they retreat, perhaps unaware of the government order and feeling that they are using their power to force them out, chanting “fora” (get out) and “assesins” (murderers). As Simón goes on to say, “There is no way you can spin, inside or outside of Spain, baton charges against people who are voting. There is no discourse, no way to tell it in a credible way.” Likewise, Ignacio Escolar, founder of eldiario.es (online newspaper), also discusses the Catalans’ “victory” in exposing the Spanish state for what it is: a relic of its dictatorial past:

People voting, a lot of elderly people, children, and guys dressed like Darth Vader with their batons, pushing and so on. It was a complete disaster. Especially because for the [Spanish] government, it was a disastrous day because they weren’t able to avoid the two photos they wanted to avoid: the one of people [Catalans] voting normally, which happened and there were people who voted, and the one of the police restraining the voters, which also happened.

This sense of a new status, a new pride at standing up to the oppressor, is particularly salient at the end of La Gent de l’Escala, as the interviewees discussed what happened next: they went home with a renewed sense of community, now actually knowing la gent de l’escala, the imagined community now a real community with names and faces. In Dos Cataluñas this is shown by the events that transpired after 1-O, as the Catalan government actually declared

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5 In fact, no lives were lost on 1-O.
independence, a move that forced many members into exile and sent some to jail. Even though the referendum did not achieve its goal of independence for Catalonia, if we recall that Anderson considers nationalism essentially cultural, not political, then it did achieve its goal: Catalans successfully bound together to defy their oppressor. David faced Goliath, and the Catalans who participated in the pro-independence movement reached a new state of collective being with a new sense of meaning and purpose and a new religion: the religion of a free and independent Catalonia.

Interestingly, writing four years after the referendum, with all the lawsuits, exiles, prison sentences, and social upheaval resulting from 1-O in the interim, things have calmed down and the issue of independence is not as “hot” as it was in 2017. Turner does state that the “spontaneity and immediacy of communitas – as opposed to the general political structure – can seldom be maintained for very long” (132), and that all communitas starts in spontaneity and eventually “declines and falls” into structure and law (132). In the case of Catalonia, it’s a symptom of the gradual downshift from “hot” to “banal” nationalism. Indeed, this denouement also supports my contention that while what occurred on 1-O was perhaps not a classic example of Turner’s ritual, it certainly has the initial structure, liminality, and communitas, and even the reaggregation or reincorporation in the sense that the Catalans spoke out, and were heard, even though their desires were not honored and the declaration came at a steep political cost for its civil and political leaders.
HEADING 7

CONCLUSION

The battle between Spanish and Catalan nationalism is a clear instance of a trend that Anderson identified in recent history: nationalisms being challenged by sub-nationalisms that “dream of shedding their sub-ness one day” (Anderson 1983). In Catalonia, sub-ness was never accepted (just as it would never define itself as a “peripheral nationalism”) and has long been contested. Indeed, gaining independence from Spain, the usurper of its rights, is a longstanding effort that has been “hotter” or more “banal” depending on the political juncture. As Appadurai says, “for polities of smaller scale, there is always fear of absorption by polities of larger scale, especially those that are nearby” (Appadurai 1990). Catalanists are happy to be European citizens but have been threatened by being permanently engulfed by Spain for more than three centuries.

The issue of Catalan nationalism inevitably brings up questions of the other sub-nationalisms within Spain today in Valencia, Galicia, and most notably the Basque Country. While neither Valencia nor Galicia have strong movements that “dream of shedding their sub-ness,” in recent history Basque nationalism in Spain (just like Catalonia, the Basque-speaking land spans Spain and France) has been as strong if not stronger than Catalan nationalism yet took a different path at a different time. Basque nationalism also emerged in the late nineteenth century, when its local laws (fueros) were abolished, “but replaced… with a special regime of autonomous taxation - the concierto económico - for Navarre and the three Basque provinces” (Payne 1971), leading to fiscal advantages which tempered any resentment; in contrast, when Catalonia’s laws had been abolished a century and a half earlier, no compensation was provided
and the resentment lingered, especially after Catalonia became one of Spain’s economic powerhouses in the Industrial Revolution.

Just like the Catalans, the Basques were on the losing side of the Spanish Civil War, and the Basque language and culture were banned during the Franco dictatorship, although by then, unlike Catalan, Basque was no longer spoken by many Basques, and there was not a strong Basque literary tradition. After the death of Franco, the Basque bid for independence was channeled through ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or Basque Homeland and Liberty), a terrorist organization that caused death and destruction throughout Spain, prompting a widespread rejection not only in Spain in general but also in the Basque Country. ETA only ended its actions in 2011, when it was allowed to become a political party. Therefore, “while the Basque case has been, for many years, a history of violence, the Catalan case has been overwhelmingly peaceful” (Errasti-Lopez 2019). Interestingly, this was right about when Catalan “banal” nationalism started to heat up and turn towards independence. Part of Catalonia’s claims were precisely that just as the Basque Country was gaining further powers of home rule, the Spanish government was trying to strip Catalonia of the authorities it had been transferred in its rejection of the proposed 2006 Catalan Statute.

So why was the Basque Country given more authorities while the Catalans were being stripped of them? Perhaps it may have to do with the fact that the Basques have always been viewed as the “local aliens” in Spain, given the fact that their language is not Indo-European and they are considered the remnants of an ancient people. As Payne summarizes, “the origins of the Basques remain shrouded in mystery. They are evidently descendants of one of the primal population groups of the peninsula that largely resisted Romanization” (Payne 1971). In contrast,
the Catalans are considered the recalcitrant siblings, fully incorporated into the Iberian, Roman, and Bourbon worlds of Spain since they emerged as a nation and therefore expected to act accordingly. Likewise, after an aborted attempt at a reform of the statute of autonomy and a referendum on self-determination in the Basque Country from 2001-2005, “the majority of Basque political representatives are endorsing a reform strategy while the majority of Catalan representatives have been supporting a break-up strategy” (Errasti-Lopez 2019). That is, instead of backing down and trying to find the path of compromise the Catalans are still trying to get more home rule, and indeed as seen in Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa!, may claim that they have sought a dialogue with Spain, to no avail. Finally, while the Basques blame their failure to gain independence on internal reasons, Catalonia still blames Spain. Indeed, “as a result of this failed attempt of reforming the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, the majority of Catalan citizens claimed, both through demonstrations and at the ballot box, that they wanted the freedom to decide on their relationship with the Spanish State [the dret de decidir]. In the Basque case, the possibility of reform is still a potential path to explore” (Errasti-Lopez 2019). Therefore, the issue of Basque independence is tabled for the time being, while for many Catalans it is still an active desire.

The ground for this desire was laid and fertilized by the rhetoric visible in first two videos, Adéu Espanya? and Hola, Europa!, which sought to “prove” that not only was Catalonia part of a community of nations-within-nations that have the right to decide on their own political future, but its independence is feasible politically, economically, culturally, and demographically. Yet they further appeal to Catalans’ sense of rootedness in their geography and history to pull at their heartstrings and evoke affect as a way of defending its independence.
Indeed, everything goes back to Anderson’s imagined community seeking its own sovereignty. Yet who deserves sovereignty? Who constitutes a nation? The contested nature of competing nationalities is illustrated when comparing the claims aired in Dissidents with those in Adéu Espanya?, Hola, Europa!, and La Gent de l’Escala. After all, nationalism is a mindset, a cultural construct, and ultimately a heartfelt allegiance. The documentaries with actual footage of the day were an emotional watch for someone with strong ties to Catalonia. As one interviewee in Dos Cataluñas said, the events of 1-O were “much more a question of the heart than the head,” reflecting the role of nationalism as the new religion, the new cause worth risking one’s life for, and bringing up the question of affect in nationalisms, an interesting research topic that has barely been addressed.

There is a widespread lack of understanding of the Catalans’ claims, both in Spain and in other European Union countries. The Catalans live in a democracy; many powers have been devolved to their local government; they are free to speak their language, name their children what they want, go and do as they please. Why are they so recalcitrant? Why do they endlessly harp on the issue of independence and the oppression of Spain, even though the country has been a democracy for several decades now? One interesting insight would be to bring in the model of colonialism. Catalonia became a “colony” of Spain in 1714, a particularly harsh and violent form of colonialism, with the elimination of the local culture and language, and this was reprised during the Franco dictatorship in the twentieth century, which is still within the living memory of the participants of 1-O or has been recounted to them by their parents and grandparents. Catalonia was stripped of its laws and language both times, the ultimate violence against any nation. Spain may be a democracy, yet few colonial outposts wish to remain part of their
colonizer, even if it is a democracy, and any form of colonial coercion casts doubt on the voluntary nature of that democracy.

Sovereignty is a common desire among groups who feel themselves united as a people and is one of Anderson’s definitions of a nation: a group that wants to correspond to a government and rule itself. Indeed, Anderson (Anderson 1983) identifies two factors as the causes behind the rise in nationalist sentiment in Spain’s Latin American colonies several centuries ago: “the tightening of Madrid’s control and the spread of the liberalizing ideas of the Enlightenment in the latter half of the eighteenth century” (50). These were precisely the roots of nationalism in Catalonia in the late nineteenth century as well. More recently, when Madrid once again tightened its control in the early 2000s, it should come as no surprise that this raised the alarms among Catalans that they were heading towards a regression to an earlier, more oppressive time. Seeing the Catalanists’ claims through the lens of colonialism, with Catalonia as having been colonized (and duly repressed) by Spain, may shed light on the enduring survival of Catalanist claims and fears. Perhaps if Spain could acknowledge this, reconciliation would be possible. As Crameri discusses at the end of her book (Crameri, Goodbye, Spain? The question of independence for Catalonia 2014), the way to resolve long, complex ethnic problems is to “stop trying to discredit nationalist claims about the historical legitimacy of their nation… and instead properly acknowledge the validity and depth of their national sentiment” (149). Catalonia and Spain have not managed to reconcile these competing nationalisms in over 300 years. The unanswered, and for now unanswerable, question is whether reframing the issue as colonialism would make Catalonia’s claims clearer or inspire outright rejection of historical revisionism in Spain.
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