

# CATALONIA AS A CIVIL SOCIETY

**T**here is no doubt that Catalonia is made up of many things. But if there is anything that identifies it and differentiates it within the context of Spain, it is the consistent, persistent fact of its being a society of people. More than anything else, over and above anything else, Catalonia, as a cultural and historical reality, as a people, is, can only be described as, a civil society.



This fact is not an insignificant one. Nowadays, the factors in a modern society which are most highly valued by all are, on the one hand, differentiation, and on the other, co-existence. In my opinion, this is exactly the case in Catalonia, precisely because, above all else, it is a society of people: a society of people and, as such, different from others; a society of people and, as such, able to co-exist with others.

Modern Catalan historiography has —with excessive ideological content, in my opinion— centred on the question of whether present-day Catalonia was created by the bourgeoisie or by the popular classes. The debate centres around the arguments of bourgeois industrial revolution or anarchist tradition. What no-one seems to question, however, is that, whether popular or bourgeois, Catalonia is an independent product of its own population's social demands. And here the bourgeois and the anarchist arguments go hand in hand and are both equally valid. Language, and its cultural expression in the form of linguistic culture, culture derived from and supported by language, is a powerful differentiating factor in Catalonia, they say. But an even more powerful differentiating factor, although less often mentioned, is Catalonia as a society of people, and its cultural expression, this time in the anthropologists' sense of the term, of a culture derived from and built on the members of the society themselves.

It is possible to imagine the loss of the language of Catalonia. In this purely hypothetical case, it is probable that Catalan society itself would eventually reconstruct it. Long experience of a history of aggression against the language on the part of political power and of a civil resistance able to reconstruct and recreate new splendours guarantee this. On the other hand, if the Catalan people's society as a culture were to be lost, it is difficult to imagine that the language would be able to reconstruct it. Whatever the linguists say, Catalan can be spoken with a strange accent, that is to say, with a different way of perceiving and evaluating the stimuli received by a given society, which is how, as a society, it is born and constituted.

My intention is not to confront culture as a linguistic cultural expression and culture as an anthropological cultural expression thus defined. I simply wish to take a fresh look, from a different viewpoint, but one which, in my opinion, is more valid, at this important fact that Catalonia is a society made up of people, by nature open to differentiation and co-existence. I believe that Pla meant precisely this when, pointing at the fields

of the Empordà, he said that Catalonia had been created by notaries public.

Also, I look at it in this way for another reason. This Catalan civil society, which for so long has shown its consistency and its persistence, is today besieged by a serious threat; that of its own political autonomy. I am not, of course, opposed to this autonomy, only against a certain way of understanding it, against the temptation to plan the structure of Catalonia as a political superstructure, substituting civil society, through political mimicry of the Spanish context, in which Catalonia —the resistant Catalan society— has always managed to survive. Barcelona should not be turned into a political imitation of Madrid. What should be done, on the other hand, is to teach Madrid from Barcelona —or better still, from Catalonia— to plan and reform its policies and put them at the service of the civil society so as to strengthen it. Less ministries and more civil agencies would be my formula, my ideal model for Catalan political administration.

Some people with nationalist outlooks misunderstand my words, because they share the Hegelian concept that a nation's single purpose is to be the embryo of a State. Either we become a state or we cease to be a nation, they think. To me, this argument smacks of the disquisitions of the nineteenth century canonists, who regarded the Church as a perfect society, and for that reason wanted to make it conform to the model of the modern State. But historically the Church has always been more consistent —apart from older— than the modern State. And one could preach something similar in the case of nations. The concept of State is much more recent than that of nation. In my opinion, the concept of Nation is an essentially civil concept (in terms of cultural anthropology), is earlier than that of State (in terms of time) and more consistent than that of State (in terms of social applicability). History, recent history, is full of examples of this. That is why I put the more rigid nationalists' arguments back to front. Either Catalonia/nation is a civil society or it ceases to be a nation. It could even cease to be Catalonia.

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