

The Politics of the Peninsular “Patric”: “In Spain There Are no Political Prisoners!”

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Abstract

“In Spain there are no political prisoners!” Rafael Català, the Spanish Minister of Justice under PM Mariano Rajoy, exclaimed in reply to a Catalan separatist’s demand that he address the numerous arrests that had been carried out after the October 1, 2017 referendum on Catalan independence, on the unlikely charges of corruption, rebellion, sedition and terrorism. The minister was cited by numerous Spanish news media on his denial as well as its corollary – Catalan separatists were bullying Spanish unionists in Catalonia. Yet, Catalan separatism is known for its democratic, pacific character, abstaining from acts of aggression, and this is what earned it the support of many inside and outside Catalonia after the central state’s violent interference with the referendum. It shows pacifism is not only a moral choice but also a strategic device to defend the Catalan cause in a context of structural power deficit which furnishes the Spanish state with most means of oppression such as police, army, judiciary and financial and economic control. I would argue that Spanish nationalist discourse covers up this power imbalance by recourse to a pseudo-democratic veneer which claims victim status but, in reality, serves to impose the Spanish constitutionalist and monarchical order, taking the separatist cause out of the political arena by criminalising it. A further look into events beyond the state of affairs regarding Catalan separatism may even reveal a structural male chauvinist strain in Spanish society which reinforces its authoritarian traits and that I have coined the “patric”.

Keywords: Spanish nationalism, Catalan separatism, historical amnesia, fascist legacy, male chauvinism

Introduction

The former Catalan president and *Pater Patriae* Jordi Pujol held that if you live in Catalonia, live its culture and speak the language, you *are* Catalan. This is a performative and inclusionary rather than an essentialist and exclusionary definition of identity, in line with a more realistic conception of the nation-state as a multicultural land of passage (Cat: “*terra de pas*”) recording the presence of Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Jews, Christians, Franks and Vikings. As the Irish novelist and journalist Colm Tóibín remarked about Pujol’s nonsense approach in matters Catalan,

Pujol’s style was crisp and brusque and businesslike. His speeches lacked flourish, to say the least. His aim at the beginning was, as he put it, to “fer país” – make a country – from the ruins of the dictatorship that had maintained an open dislike for Catalonia and its culture. He defined a Catalan as someone living and working in Catalonia with a view to permanence, thus removing, or at least reducing, the concept of blood or race from Catalan nationalism. (Tóibín, 2018)

Originally from north-western Europe, I have lived, studied and worked in Barcelona for over thirty years so I may identify as Catalan, and do more so than as Spanish for that matter. I also increasingly feel European, whatever that means in this day and age beyond a “question mark” as Julia Kristeva observed in an interview with the Catalan journalist Xavier Vidal-Folch, in reference to the openness of our continental identity as process and always in the making (2008). Where do I stand in relation to my adopted country, a slashed ‘Spain/Catalonia’? In the following I will look at my positioning in the conflict of central and peripheral nationalisms in Spain as it affects Catalonia and argue that an important factor in my taking sides is the underlying battle for democracy and self-determination for the Catalan people, against a central state that is conditioned by the legacy of an authoritarian, absolutist past which forms part of a larger ethnic, classist, male-chauvinist network.

From Holland to Catalonia

Let me start by stating that I do not identify as a separatist per se for the social, political and economic trouble territorial fragmentation may bring. We only have to consider the heart-wrenching, genocidal break-up of the former Soviet Yugoslavia into smaller political entities and the way Balkanisation has long been the blueprint for this area under the enduring influence of the Eastern Question¹, to understand that nationalism can be as deadly as it appears to be life-giving for ethnic² minorities. Yet, despite this *caveat* I sympathise with the Catalan cause of independence for what it may provide in terms of democracy, cultural diversity and non-violent postcolonial deconstruction within the context of a Spanish nation-

¹ The Eastern Question was the reference to the imperial strife between the Ottoman and the Austrian-Hungarian empires, which went back to older conflicts and power balances between Europe and the Near East, and arguably continues in the contemporary debate of Turkey’s access to the European Union. This geopolitical and religious struggle affected countries in the south-east of Europe such as Hungary, Rumania, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and so on, and led to continental tensions. Indeed, WWI started in the Balkans when the heir to the throne of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was shot by a Bosnian revolutionary engaged in a Serbian complot to free the Southern Slav countries from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and form an independent Yugoslavia.

² I do not use “ethnic” in the common, traditional sense of non-European within a continental multicultural make-up but in an all-encompassing way, as culturally different from other comparable groups, that is, British versus Irish, German versus French and so on.

state anchored in an authoritarian past. Let me clarify why. I am an expatriate member of a relatively small European nation and culture, The Netherlands, with a territory as small as Central Catalonia (which does not include the French North Catalonia and the autonomous regions of Valencia and the Balearic Islands amongst others) while boasting 2.5 times its population. Even though it is hemmed in between the powerful national identities of the UK, Germany and France, the Netherlands is a nation-state with the benefits of a well-defined geopolitical organisation, so I think I have an empathetic understanding of the Catalan predicament. I have experienced the “blessing” of a nation, state and language occupying roughly the same territory: it creates a sense of safety, commitment and belonging in Benedict Anderson’s terms – “an imagined political community expressed as deep horizontal comradeship across time and space” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6–7). In these terms, the Dutch may speak informally but affectively of “Holland”, to refer to their country as their home (“*ser pais*” or “being country”), while the Catalans insist on “making country” (“*fer pais*” as Jordi Pujol often had it (Tóibín, 2017)) because they have their nation-state as a project in process.³

The latter does not mean “Holland” is to be taken as a finished identitarian project, a non-conflictive, static, homogenous space of identification. Identity is always in flux and can never be fully fixed, but having an independent, recognized nation-space makes it easier to survive as a small culture. Thus, the Dutch are not that different from larger European cultures either. Like many European nation-states, The Netherlands has a well-integrated native, ethnic minority – the Friesians, with their own culture and a language incorporating Scandinavian and Germanic elements; Dutch is also under serious linguistic pressure from English⁴; we have issues with mass immigration and Islam; we have a large xenophobic party; the Netherlands was a powerful sea-faring empire in times past and so was Catalonia; and so there have been, of course, territorial issues such as Flanders, which formed part of The Netherlands culturally and politically until the Spanish Empire imposed its rule in the 16th century, as it later did on Catalonia in the early 18th century.⁵ And the latter takes us to the central and peripheral nationalisms in the Spanish peninsula, involving foremost the Gallegos, Basques and Catalans.

³ Catalan Separatists also speak of The Process (*El Procès*) to refer to the Catalan nation-building project, as yet a “historical nationality” rather than a nation within the Spanish constitution.

⁴ It can be annoying to hear my compatriots resorting to English expressions where good Dutch equivalents are available, and having to address waiters in English to facilitate communication while in Amsterdam, it is also a bit of a disappointment. Yet, I also understand that higher education and many businesses resort to English as the vehicle language because of its international projection.

⁵ The territorial confusion over the term “The Netherlands” in Spain is paradigmatic for the fraught character of nationhood as the expression of identity, language and territory. Literally meaning “the Low Countries” and translating as “Paises Bajos”, the official Spanish denomination for the country, Spanish people often ignore whether Holland includes or does not include Flanders as they speak variants of the same language. They tend to think the terms “Holland” and “The Netherlands” do not entirely overlap, Holland being deemed the smaller territory, which in present usage is not the case. Rather, the term “Holland” is a synecdochic, perhaps politically-incorrect reference to The Netherlands derived from the two most powerful Dutch provinces in early modern times, North Holland and South Holland, which excludes Spanish-occupied Flanders, nowadays part of Belgium. The latter, in turn, is a conglomerate of three ethnic identities: Dutch-speaking Flemish, French-speaking Wallonian and German-Speaking Eastern-Belgian. What was formerly known as the Spanish Netherlands, from 1579 till 1713, were the Spanish-held provinces located in the southern part of the Low Countries, which roughly corresponded to present-day Belgium and Luxembourg but excluded the “Dutch republic” (Spanish Netherlands, accessed July 23, 2018 at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Spanish-Netherlands>).

The more we move toward Europe as our referential, supranational political structure due to the increasing globalization of people, goods and, above all, capital, the more the concept of the nation appears to lose usefulness and meaning; yet, as smaller regional contexts acquire profile and importance in reply to this process of national deconstruction in favour of a larger superstructure and identity, the more the old nation-state insists on erasing cultural difference by assimilation and reaches back to past models of identification. The imposition of an indivisible Spanish identity to integrate the national territory was first and foremost an imperialist issue that the Spanish Right solved by the sword rather than the word, applying the colonial expertise acquired abroad back home and vice versa. The Kingdom of Castile had its colonies in the peninsula and the Americas, and in the case of the 20th century, dictatorship resulted from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). After the new, illegal head of state, General Franco, had returned from his colonial exploits in Morocco and the Spanish Sahara to impose a fascist regime by force rather than vote. Francoist Spain ended up being a rather pragmatic “semifascist” regime that had moved from being openly repressive and totalitarian to more contained authoritarian by the time of the Generalissimo’s death in 1975 (Solsten & Meditz, 1988). This softening of profile made a peaceful transition to a viable form of democracy possible in the late 1970s, a process formally and definitively brought to a positive end after the unsuccessful coup d’état by Lieutenant-Colonel Tejero in 1981, the intervention of King Juan Carlos in favour of democracy and the landslide election victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) in 1982.

Yet, this is not to say that Franco’s regime had been a painless experience: in Catalonia, many Republicans had been executed, put away or fled the country in the aftermath of the Civil War; the Catalan language was forbidden in its public; institutional uses and no longer taught in school (Miller & Miller, 1996, p. 13); women’s role in society was limited to the family sphere; the church was omnipresent; the judiciary and armed forces were in support of the regime; and leftist activism was purged. Significantly close to Franco’s death and with the regime on its last legs, the young Catalan militant anarchist Salvador Puig Antich was still executed in the Barcelona “Model” prison despite national and international protest and turned into a martyr for the separatist cause. In this context, Catalan culture had been under serious pressure and seen its survival threatened over a period of four decades, whereas Spanish culture thrived. Today the status of Spanish as a language and identitarian sign is very secure with a resilient pool of 46 million speakers in the peninsula alone and an additional 450 million in the Americas due to the process of colonization and its aftermath; so in the light of this and the above, how to understand and justify the current unionist outcry that Spanish is “oppressed” in Catalonia, a small nation of seven million where only half of the population speak Catalan as their first language?

Fascism and Historical Amnesia

To my mind, the latter, somewhat unsettling reversal of minority status owes a lot to political and historical amnesia in that it refuses to recognize the colonial, exploitative nature of the relationship between Spain and Catalonia resulting from a conflictive imperial past that grew out of the absolutist monarchy in the early modern period. This led to the enforced incorporation of Catalonia into the Kingdom of Castile in 1713, which in the War of Succession (1701–1714) failed to support the Bourbon candidate to the Spanish throne. Catalonia’s defeat, impoverishment, loss of rights and self-rule contrast sharply with Scotland, which joined the Kingdom of Great Britain in the same period after an affirmative vote in the English and Scottish parliaments in 1706. This procedure of consensus was recently invoked by British PM David Cameron in the Scottish 2014 referendum on

independence and it has facilitated the general acceptance of its outcome, thus avoiding the tensions inherent in the Catalan case. The latter runs up against the Spanish refusal to acknowledge popular expression by democratic vote with the argument that Spanish identity is overarching and indivisible. It is this relationship of submission to and censorship by Madrid that present-day rhetoric and political action has not been able to address satisfactorily. The “Ley de la Memoria Histórica” or Historical Memory Law passed by the socialist Zapatero government in 2006 seeks to recognize and compensate those that suffered persecution and violence during the Civil War and the following dictatorship, explicitly focusing on the many mass graves and unidentified deaths that still populate the (political) landscape as skeletons in the closet. Yet, the current self-identification of the Spanish Right with individual freedom, rights and democracy feeds on the culture of forgetting this violent past. Thus, the hysterical treatment of the language and identity issue in Catalonia with right-wing accusations of “Apartheid” by heavyweight politicians such as the conservative former vice-president Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría (Anonymous, 2018f) is nothing less than the projection of the Right’s barely-hidden authoritarianism onto those margins of the nation-state that do not identify with the imposition of a pan-Hispanic identity as the overarching political and cultural norm.

Rafael Hernando and Party Opinion

A few telling discursive examples may tease this claim out. Immediately after the Catalan Referendum, the controversial, bellicose spokesman of the conservative People’s Party (*Partido Popular*), Rafael Hernando, accused the Catalan government and people of fascist attitudes and behaviour, which he claimed would convert Catalonia in a powerful stage and platform for the return of Nazi ideology in Europe (Anonymous, 2017), arguing that one would have thought fascism had disappeared in 1945 with the demise of the Third Reich. Yet, it is historical fact and common knowledge that the Spanish Civil War was initiated by a fascist *coup d’état* with German and Italian support that brought down the legitimately chosen Second Spanish Republic in what became the foreplay to WWII. Rafael Hernando cannot be blind to the fact that the Franco dictatorship lasted until the latter’s death in 1975, seeing Spanish fascism outlive Hitler’s by 30 years. Neither can he be blind to the fact that the political heirs to the Franco regime are his own Partido Popular and the insufficiently purged state, church and judiciary in the over-lauded peaceful “La Transición” (transition) to democracy. And last but not least, he cannot be blind to the fact that the symbolic heir to the dictatorial regime is the Royal Family as the Body Politic, once in Italian and Portuguese exile but reinstated by Franco. This may explain why our Bourbon King Philip VI sided with the Central Government in defending the violent repression of the Catalan referendum for independence last October. As the mouthpiece of his party’s official position on matters of government, Rafael Hernando’s historical amnesia is worrying, and it signals that what he denounces is, in fact, too close for comfort.

José Maria Aznar and the Atocha Attack

Rafael Hernando’s line of reasoning has much in common with the reactionary former Spanish President José Maria Aznar’s, who lied to the Spanish nation about the perpetrators of the bloody, traumatic terrorist attack at the Atocha train station in Madrid on the day before the general elections of March 12, 2004. Peripheral nationalism has been used time and again by successive central governments to favour their support and election results, but to no avail this time. Aznar had developed close ties with the Bush and Blair administrations in their War on Terror and was served a violent reaction by Al Qaeda that neither he nor his

cabinet could spin. By blaming the terrorist organization ETA instead and thereby violent peripheral nationalism in the Basque Country, he dug his own political grave. Social media inside and outside Spain quickly put an end to his government's manipulation of the truth, which ousted him in the ballots the following day. Since his undignified deposition, which was emulated by President Mariano Rajoy's fall from parliamentary grace only a few weeks ago, José María Aznar has become an important player in the shadow, heading the influential reactionary think tank FAES.⁶ As such, he denounces what he deems to be a Catalan *coup d'état*, an unlikely but revealing distortion of reality in that the pacific passive resistance of the Catalan independence movement does not bear comparison to the violence and aggression that illegally enthroned Franco's fascist regime in 1936.

Mariano Rajoy and the Corruption of Government

Aznar's intervention was informed by the self-same historical denial and political amnesia as Rafael Hernando's, and executed at an opportune moment: President Rajoy had just been ousted from power as a motion of censure prospered after several high-ranking PP members had been sentenced for fraudulent party funding and corruption. Rajoy and his team followed party tradition in miscalculating heavily when they thought the Gürtel⁷ sentence would be less condemning, and its effects could be contained. With PP's corruption at the highest levels proven before the law, its leader could not stay on any longer and his place was taken by the social Democrat Pedro Sanchez after Rajoy had lost a confidence vote. The political outlook of Spain changed dramatically only hours after the national budget was approved after Parliament's manipulation; it transpired that legal players close to the PP had managed to withhold the Gürtel sentence until the very budget was passed with Basque peripheral-nationalist support that was to guarantee Rajoy's government's stability for the next two years. This foul scheme included one of the judges on the case delaying depositing his vote, which bought Rajoy sufficient time to negotiate with the Basques and secure their support for both the Spanish budget and direct rule of Catalonia through the continued imposition of the Constitutional Article 155. The connivance between politics and the judiciary was blatant, as it has been throughout the Catalan Question at large. Judge Llamela, in charge of the judicialization of the Catalan fight for sovereignty, has been bending the interpretation of the law to suit Rajoy's purposes and politics – and thus has harvested a negative international response, which has allowed former President Puigdemont and other Catalan politicians to evade international search warrants and continue in exile. The fact is that Spain has actually had two recent PP governments falling over corruption, abuse of power, and manipulation and fabrication of the truth, which is onerous regarding the quality of Spanish democracy and those who uphold its prestige most fiercely and firmly – Spanish unionists.

Forever at odds with what he considers Mariano Rajoy's permissive attitude towards Catalan independence, José María Aznar favours a hard-line engagement with Catalan separatism by the full imposition of direct rule through the state of exception, and uses Rajoy's political demise as an opportunity to impose his creed. Nevertheless, Rajoy was, in fact, far from forthcoming towards Catalonia in his politics and decisions. He imposed direct rule while translating all separatist action into punishable felonies and treason; reducing the political to the judicial; and bending the law to his essentialist, reductive vision of Spain. Thus, he

⁶ Fundación para el Análisis y los Estudios Sociales (The Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies).

⁷ The so-called "Gürtel" case involved a group of businessmen and PP politicians in the orbit of entrepreneur Francisco Correa Sánchez, whose surname "Correa" translates as "belt" in English and "Gürtel" in German, thus giving his name to the illegal financing and corruption scandal. On May 24, 2018, the court condemned many of them for fraud, money laundering and bribery (Vázquez, 2018).

marketed a pseudo-democratic discourse of individual citizen rights and freedom by looking at separatism in isolation, taking the Catalan Question out of its larger, peninsular political context, casting Spanish ID in Catalonia as a victim of cultural oppression, and captaining the nation-state's consequential intervention. Ultimately, this criminalization and judicialization have sent democratically chosen representatives and leaders such as the former vice-president of Catalonia Oriol Junqueras to jail and forced others such as the Catalan former president Carles Puigdemont to flee the country.

Pablo Casado and Party Leadership

If Rajoy's approach was considered "too soft," what will await Catalonia if/when Aznar's sycophants come to power? The PP spokesman prior to Rafael Hernando and close friend of Aznar's, Pablo Casado, has just become the party's next leader in a calculated turn to the far-right that bodes little good for Catalan independence initiatives. Casado, a glib, quick-witted politician, has successfully assimilated the unionist victim discourse that the fast-growing new populist party *Ciudadanos* (Citizens) first promoted in Catalonia and later successfully marketed nationally. As a young politician born into democracy and so without the "hang-ups" of the past – he is 37 years old and considered "*desacomplejado*": without any complexes – Casado is unlikely to pursue the exorcism and redemption of Spain's fascist legacy, rather the contrary: he is "a politician who speaks of peaceful renewal but represents the most conservative essence and principles of a party with a serious identity crisis. A sharp swerve to the right" (Anonymous, 2018d). His rookie status and election not only reveal a preference for more extreme positions in Spanish identity politics but also a return to traditional male leadership. In what set out to be a battle for power between two female heavyweights completely changed face when in the party's primaries Casado beat María Dolores de Cospedal, current Secretary General of the People's Party and a loyal adept to Aznar's ideas. He left her far behind in third position while almost equalling the voters' support for the former vice-president Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, who he then beat with an ample majority in the final round. As Natalia Junquera reported, there was no serious intention to promote female leadership:

The new leader of the People's Party [...] denied that "being a woman" was a "merit" or an "electoral argument", and this was the view that imposed itself during the primaries. Santamaria and her allies had presented this issue as an important factor in the vote. "Denying that it would be an extraordinary achievement that a woman became the People's Party's and Government's leader is tantamount to denying reality," [as one of them] said. (Junquera, 2018)

Sáenz de Santamaría, unlike Casado, is not considered a hardliner even if she recently argued that Catalonia's treatment of Spanish(ness) was a form of Apartheid. Yet, if we have a look at Spain's political and cultural history, the opposite comes closer to the truth and we may find Catalan to be the victim of linguistic blackballing as early as the post-1713 period.⁸ We may assume that these conservative politicians' positionings are not isolated, coincidental cases of political amnesia but that, pronounced by key conservative party leadership, they express the denial and erasure of the authoritarian past as a structural problem of conservative Spain, which can only manage its haunting by projecting its sins onto its political opponents. I

⁸ "After the defeat of Catalonia following the siege of Barcelona (1713) in the Wars of the Spanish Succession, the Catalan language was discouraged by an increasingly centralised state, it became increasingly dialectalised and archaic" (Webber & Strubell i Trueta 1991, as cited in Miller & Miller, 1996, p. 115).

would even argue that, conditioned by the balance of powers in the late 1970s, this denial and projection were the necessary conditions upon which Spanish democracy was founded, as it was a project that needed a clean slate and so the Spanish Right to believe itself democratic, free and egalitarian in order to prosper.

Rafael Català and Political Prisoners

So when in April 2018 the then Minister of Justice, Rafael Català, baffled and outraged the independence movement with the statement that, “In Spain there are no political prisoners!”, he was promoting the judicialization of Catalan politics and ignoring the numerous arrests of Catalan politicians and activists on unlikely charges of corruption, rebellion, sedition and terrorism which, as has already become judicially evident, lack substance and cannot bear up to the standards of international law regarding extradition. By taking Catalan activism out of the terrain of the political and criminalising it, the minister equated Spanishness with acceptable, normal behaviour and Catalanness with deviance, which he tied into the fabrication that Catalans were bullying Spanish unionists (Anonymous, 2018a) – that is, the Catalan separatist as the violent, dangerous, savage Other. Yet, Catalan separatism’s non-violent character belies the latter, and this precisely earned it the support of many inside and outside Catalonia after the state’s aggression against the referendum. As Colm Tóibín wrote, “Unlike Northern Ireland and the Basque country, Catalonians have sought to win the argument using constitutional methods.” (2018).

Random Coincidences in the News?

Revealing separatism as a call for democracy, it shows pacifism as a successful moral and strategic device to defend the Catalan cause in a context of structural power deficit which furnishes the Spanish state with most legal, political, military, financial and economic means to maintain a situation of – some might argue: neo-colonial – control and oppression. Right-wing Spanish unionism covers this power imbalance up with a pseudo-democratic discourse of victimhood, which denies the authoritarian past, reinstates the Spanish constitutionalist order, and refuses dialogue and negotiation by criminalising it. We will have to see to what extent the new socialist central government, relatively unburdened by the undemocratic fascist heritage, yet bent upon imposing a centripetal unionist notion of territorial solidarity, will play different cards and encourage solidarity and respect as a two-way street. As this is yet another question mark regarding the new central government, the synchronicity of some random pieces of news apparently unrelated to the Catalan state of affairs, circulating in the Spanish media in late spring – early summer 2018 and causing widespread popular and political outrage, may hint at the very conservative nature of the structures that form the backbone of Spanish society, further revealing its ingrained race, gender and class tenets.

Quim Torra and the King

The new Catalan president after Puigdemont, the polemically-outspoken separatist Quim Torra, would not decide until the very last moment whether he would go to the opening of the Mediterranean Games in Valencia – the geographical and political core of so many of the corruption scandals that have affected the People’s Party PP over these years, but also part of *Els Països Catalans*, or the Greater Catalonia. This was to avoid having to shake hands with King Philip VI, who had made himself most unpopular among many Catalans with his rigid, irate defence of essentialist nationalism, justifying state violence over democracy on the day of the independence referendum (Anonymous, 2018g). King Philip’s reaction was considered

undignified by many Catalans and at odds with King Juan Carlos's defence of democracy during the 1982 coup d'état, which had won the Royal Family enduring support after the monarchy was restored by Franco.

The King's Brother in Law

The King's brother in law, Iñaki Urdangarín, Basque and born into the entrepreneurial elite, was condemned for fraud and corruption for his involvement in shady business projects in the Balearic Islands (also part of the Greater Catalonia), in which he had abused of the privileges bestowed by his newly acquired aristocratic title, the Duke of Palma. He was allowed to serve his six-year jail sentence in a prison of his choice, enjoying the extraordinary privilege of private, isolated quarters in a females-only prison in Avila. This while Catalan politicians were kept captive as ordinary prisoners in jails far removed from Catalonia without being sentenced or transferred to prisons closer to home (fortunately, the approximation to home has now been implemented by the new socialist government). In the meantime, it has transpired that Urdangarín can very soon apply for and be conceded conditional liberty (Anonymous, 2018h), which, if achieved, would make his jail sentence largely and unjustly symbolical. This also coincides with the confession of one of the king emeritus's many ex-lovers, Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, that suggest Juan Carlos's deep financial implication in the Nóos case and his son-in-law's imprisonment as a smokescreen to protect the Spanish Royal Family (Escobar Marti, 2018).

The Rapist "Manada"

The case of "La Manada" (The Gang) in Pamplona, on the linguistic-cultural frontier between Basque and Spanish in the autonomous region of Navarra, sees five young men from Seville, in their twenties, some with penal antecedents and others with connections to the state police force, avoid prison after having gang-raped an 18-year-old girl during the famous Pamplona Fiestas in 2016. This obviously happened against her will, but the judges produced a male-chauvinist sentence on sexual consensus which exonerates the perpetrators and allows them to go unhindered after paying a symbolic bail of 6,000 Euro a head. Apparently, this is not the first sexual crime in which the accused have been implicated and they are having another court sentence pending, making their abusive sexual behaviour structural (Anonymous, 2018e).

The Altsasu Incident

This sees eight young Basques beat up two "guardia civiles" or paramilitary police in Alsasua, a small town halfway Pamplona and Vitoria, and also the locality where the Basque terrorist organization ETA was founded six decades ago, on the Basque-Spanish linguistic and cultural interface. The aggressors were condemned to jail sentences up to thirteen years for terrorist violence against the Spanish nation-state. The ETA background of the village is significant: the Franco regime promoted migration to Alsasua from other parts of Spain to break Basque resistance demographically but was only partly successful. Harking back to the times of the dictatorship, a well-armed garrison of the Guardia Civil still patrols and controls the area, which makes the pub fight more than random and coincidental (Aduriz, 2018).

Valtònc rap

We could tease out the mutual connections and overlaps among these pieces of news in considering the Mallorcan rapper Valtònc and his three-year jail sentence for apology of terrorism and disrespect of the Crown because of his politically-charged songs regarding Catalan Independence, capitalism, fascism etc. He has had no choice but to flee the country and follow ex-president Puigdemont's suit, making Belgium his country of residence, so as to avoid imprisonment (Anonymous, 2018b).

Conclusion

These five stories coinciding in the Spanish media bring me, somewhat unexpectedly, to the popular science fiction film trilogy *The Matrix* (1999–2003), written and directed by the then Wachowski brothers within the doom scenario of the new millennium. The *Matrix* trilogy is a dystopian vision of the future in which the human species is colonized by a massive computer network that feeds on the human body's heat and brain impulses and immerses the mind into a soothing virtual reality to make bodily exploitation possible. This network is called "the matrix" as it configures a "nurturing" environment in which virtual reality invades all and enslaves the human being. While on the one hand a matrix is a mathematical disposition to solve problems and so applied in computer science and practice – as the trilogy shows – as a site of growth and development, the term is also related to "matriz" in Spanish and "matriu" in Catalan for "womb", which genders the concept. Interestingly, the then Wachowski brothers have since the trilogy transgendered to sisters; signing off their latest, successful TV series *Sense8* as Lilly and Lana Wachowski. It comes as no surprise that *Sense8* (pronounced as in "sensate") presents an outspoken utopian vision of future society based on a highly empathetic deconstruction of gender, as well as class and race.

Similarly, the five stories could in conjunction be read as part and parcel of a larger mainstream discursive grid which ties ethnicity, gender and class structurally together into an accommodated, male, Spanish "patrix". Such a "patrix" would self-servingly control and soothe a citizenry kept ignorant with a fabricated discourse on democracy, solidarity and individual and group rights and identity. In Shakespeare's early-modern play *Hamlet*, the ghost of the dead Danish king haunts the corrupt Body Politic and stands for the need to return to ethnically-pure, upper-class, male-sanctioned rule to achieve national normalcy. This blueprint for rule could be seen to reach out from the past and attach itself upon the political cadavers of the ousted presidents Aznar and Rajoy as well as upon the scandals involving the Crown. The play's famous quote "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" harks back to a discourse that feels obsolete and passé, yet this "patrix" shows unexpected, ongoing resilience in this age of territorial and identitarian redefinition.

It is within the latter reactionary framework that Pablo Casado convinced his party that he would be their best leader. Pledging loyalty to the monarchy and the constitution, he promised as one of the main points of his agenda to start a vigorous campaign in support of traditional family values that would curtail the current, liberal abortion legislation of 2010 and return to the restrictive Law of 1985, which only allows abortion if the woman's health is in danger, if the foetus is deformed, or if the child is the result of rape (Junquera, 2018). There is little need to say that such a regression would severely limit a woman's control over her womb and by extension, her own body. For as much as we may consider Spanish society gynocentric, an accommodated, authoritarian Spanish "patrix" keeps imposing itself on a more egalitarian "matrix" of which Catalonia forms part. Catalonia appears to be structurally

caught up in a conflict between the mainstream and the margins that, ultimately, conflates and complicates ethnicity with gender and class issues.

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