Identity and Nation in 21st Century Catalonia
Identity and Nation in 21st Century Catalonia:

*El Procés*

Edited by
Steven Byrne
# Table of Contents

List of Figures.......................................................................................................................... viii
List of Tables........................................................................................................................... ix
List of Images........................................................................................................................... x
Notes on Contributors.............................................................................................................. xi
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... xvii
Introduction ............................................................................................................................... xviii
Steven Byrne

**Section One: Catalonia and Secessionism: Understanding Ongoing Cultural, Social and Political Debates**

Chapter One............................................................................................................................... 2
A Divided Spain? The Evolution of Catalan Nationalism: Consequences at the Regional and State Level
Marcos Martínez-Solanilla and Steven Byrne

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................................... 24
Liquid Catalonia: Civic Mobilisation Strategies and Performing Locality on a Global Stage
Tilman Lanz

Chapter Three ............................................................................................................................. 50
“Un Sol Poble”: The Populist Logic in the Catalan Independence Movement
Juan Alberto Ruiz Casado

Chapter Four............................................................................................................................... 71
Activism and Boundary Unmaking in Northern Catalan Pyrenees-Orientales
Aleida Bertran
Chapter Five .......................................................... 91
Conflicts over Nation-Building in Multinational States: The Majority
Nationalism’s Case for Neutrality
Carles Ferreira

Chapter Six .......................................................... 112
Time-Space Variation in and Ethnicisation of Catalan Nationalist
Alignments
Martin Lepić

Section Two: Deconstructing Linguistic Claims and Political Conflicts

Chapter Seven .......................................................... 142
Language Attitudes in Catalonia: The Effect of Individual Characteristics
on Status and Solidarity
Anna Tudela-Isanta

Chapter Eight .......................................................... 166
The Future of Catalonia: Exploring the Relationship between Collective
Identity, Political Engagement and Secessionist Claims of Catalan
Students
Kim Hoeks

Chapter Nine .......................................................... 190
Between Catalan and Spanish: Tracing Identity Formation
in Modern-Day Barcelona
Liesl Drew

Chapter Ten .......................................................... 213
The Authenticity Debate: Challenging Language Ideologies
in Contemporary Catalonia
Mandie Iveson

Section Three: Media, Politics, Language and Identity Representation

Chapter Eleven .......................................................... 238
Building an Ethnic Wedge as a means to Reject State Reform:
The Strategy of Spanish Unionism throughout the Catalan Crisis
Sergi Auladell Fauchs
Chapter Twelve ...................................................................................... 265
Glocalisation, (Un)Markedness and Sustainable Multilingualism: Catalonia, the De-Territorialisation and De-Ethnicisation of Catalan Guillem Belmar Viernes

Chapter Thirteen ..................................................................................... 284
Media(ted) Frame Analysis of the Spanish-Catalan Political Crisis Andrea Wagner, Dorian Kroqi, Jianna Marin and Ruan Bouwer

Chapter Fourteen .................................................................................... 307
Politicians’ Strategic use of Voice: Satirical Impersonators Approach to Leaders’ Speaking in the Catalan Context Mario Álvarez Fuentes

Conclusion: Reflections and Future Trajectories ................................. 326
Steven Byrne
LIST OF FIGURES

4.1 Geographical location of Northern Catalonia
5.1 National identity and attitudes towards independence in contemporary Catalonia
6.1 Nationalist vote and independence preferences in Catalonia (2003–2020)
6.2 Clustering and polarisation of Catalan nationalist support and people born in Spain (outside Catalonia) (2003–2017)
6.3 Multi-level variation in Catalan nationalist support in all of Catalonia (2003–2017)
6.4 Clustering of Catalan nationalist support between 2003–2010 and 2012–2017
6.5 Multi-level variation in Catalan nationalist support in metropolitan and coastal areas (2003–2017)
6.6 Multi-level variation in Catalan nationalist support in the nationalist heartland area (2003–2017)
7.1 Evolution of the abilities to speak and write Catalan among general population and youngsters, 1986–2018(%) 
7.2 Evolution of the rate of use (always or usually) of Catalan 2003–2018(%)
LIST OF TABLES

5.1 Nation-building powers in contemporary Spain affairs
5.2 Policy proposals of state-wide parties in Spain in relation to nation-building powers; November 2011 general elections
5.3 Policy proposals of the state-wide parties in Spain in relation to nation-building powers; November 2019 general elections
7.1 Informants’ characteristics
7.2 Highest factor loadings for male and female speakers of Catalan and Spanish
7.3 Status and solidarity general model
7.4 Status and solidarity according to the informants’ gender
7.5 Status and solidarity according to the informants’ sociolinguistic origin
7.6 Status and solidarity according to the informants’ L1
7.7 Status and solidarity according to the informants’ language of schooling
7.8 Status and solidarity according to the informants’ political ideology
7.9 Status and solidarity according to the informants’ Catalan identity
8.1 Complexity of collective identity of Catalan students
8.2 Results of the Moreno-question
8.3 Views on Catalonia as an independent state
8.4 Voting preferences for pro-independence parties
13.1 Examples of media statements and coding
13.2 Variation within newspaper’s legitimacy claims
13.3 Legitimation and delegitimation claims on the 2017 Catalan Referendum
LIST OF IMAGES

6.1 Plaça Major in Vic, July 2017
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Since the turn of the 21st century, Europe has been immersed in a situation of political and social upheaval marked by processes such as Brexit, the growth of new left- and right-wing populist parties and the strengthening of sub-state nationalism across the continent. These developments have seen scenarios of polarisation and a deep crisis of political legitimation across Europe, where sociolinguistic and socio-cultural issues are frequently a point of contention in territorial disputes. Understanding the dynamics of sub-state nationalist movements and continuing political upheaval as the European Union continues its process of supranational integration is of critical importance. This volume has been written to reflect both societal changes and the latest research in 21st century Catalonia.

*El Procés: Language, Identity and Nation in 21st Century Catalonia* examines the main sociolinguistic, socio-political and socio-cultural processes that are taking place in Catalonia today. Located in the northeast of Spain, the autonomous community (AC) has a population of approximately 7.5 million people and is a key political and economic region of Europe. It is one of the most affluent areas in Spain and a region where a republic has been unilaterally declared under different formulae on five occasions (1641, 1873, 1931, 1934 and 2017). However, these attempts at independence have always been ephemeral. Catalonia came to the full attention of the international media at the beginning of October 2017 when the region attempted to stage a referendum on its independence from Spain. The referendum was declared unconstitutional by central state authorities and the Spanish Constitutional Court. This ongoing issue represents Spain’s worst political crisis in 40 years and the effects of the 2017 referendum still loom over the political and social milieu in both Catalonia and Spain today, generating the deepest social fractures among Catalans for generations. Several Catalan leaders both in and out of government have been imprisoned on charges of sedition and misuse of public funds while others have fled into exile. The current context is one of the most interesting if not
perilous periods in the region’s recent history. In 2020, pro-independence leaders and MEPs, Carles Puigdemont and Toni Comin called on the perplexed EU authorities to take a position on the Catalan issue. For these reasons, it is now timely to examine the situation in contemporary Catalonia. As such, this volume will offer a series of empirically robust and innovative studies that examine the situation in 21st century Catalonia from a range of academic disciplines.

This book offers an interdisciplinary analysis of the ongoing situation between Spain and Catalonia. There is little doubt that the events of October 2017 were of paramount importance in the relationship between the two parties. Thus, it is against this backdrop that this volume is set. However, the analyses offered in this edited volume also focuses on the events prior to and after the controversial referendum. As such, this volume brings together new and emerging research on the situation in Catalonia from an international range of established academics as well early career and independent researchers who are drawn from a wide range of universities and institutions. The contributors to this volume come from Canada, Chile, Latvia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. Thus, the multifaceted nature and complexity of the political conflict between Spanish and Catalan institutions is represented by the richly eclectic and diverse range of contributions.

The volume has been divided into three sections of six, four and four chapters respectively. Together the chapters in this book represent a thorough investigation of many of the most important issues of the Catalan conflict: nationalism and populism, sovereignty, language, media representation, popular discourse and political activism. The first of these sections gathers contributions dealing with the independence movement in the region, its growth and the consequences of the 2017 referendum for the political situation in Spain in general. In the first chapter, Marcos Martínez-Solanilla and Steven Byrne open the collection and set the scene for a wider analysis of the situation in Catalonia. This chapter examines key historical aspects that have contributed to the growth of Catalan nationalism from its origins toward the opening decades of the 21st century, explaining how it is rooted in multiple historical, political and territorial crises. Tilman Lanz adds to this first chapter, discussing the transformation of political actors, dynamics and discourses within the context of the venturous bid for the independence of Catalonia over the past decade. In doing so, he excellently examines how contemporary political movements flexibly adapt to rapidly changing circumstances when pursuing their aims. In the third chapter, Juan Alberto Ruiz Casado considers the role of populist discourse in the Catalan
independence movement between 2010 and 2017. In particular, he unpacks the processes by which the independence movement constructed an underdog discourse in the face of a common enemy, namely, the Spanish state. As Ruiz Casado describes, this approach has permitted the independence movement to increase its support base, overcoming various national ethnocultural identifications, socio-economic disparity and various other ideological leanings. In her unique contribution, Aleida Bertran shifts the focus to Northern Catalonia, a region in the southeast of France. In a post-referendum era, she outlines the historical and contemporary importance of the territory as a symbolic boundary and dynamic site of political activism for those who claim Catalan identity. Carles Ferreira brings together a similar interest in wider socio-political discourse and Spanish-Catalan relations. The focus in his contribution are the respective nation-building dynamics in both Spain and Catalonia as outlined in the manifestos of political parties. In addition, Ferreira analyses the normative grounds upon which nation-building claims are constructed, which he argues are framed by the notion of neutrality. This section is concluded by Martin Lepič who, in his study on nationalist support and its ethnolinguistic determinants, provides a detailed insight into salient internal differences across Catalan society.

The second section of this volume focuses on the ethnolinguistic dimension of the push for secession in Catalonia. In the first chapter of part two, Anna Tudela-Isanta employs a questionnaire and matched guise test (MGT) to evaluate the attitudes toward Catalan and Spanish among undergraduate students enrolled in public universities in Barcelona. Here Tudela-Isanta expertly outlines the contemporary sociolinguistic context of Catalonia as well as providing the reader with a depth of knowledge on language attitude research in the region. Kim Hoeks’ contribution continues to pay attention to university students but shifts the focus to collective identity and political engagement. Through employing a quantitative approach, she analyses the extent to which the two aforementioned factors explain secessionist claims among young and highly educated individuals. Hoeks maintains that her sample views an independent Catalonia as a means to achieving a sustainable future for themselves as well as future generations. Liesl Drew brings together a similar view on identity construction in her ethnographic research on the Catalan and Spanish lived experience in Barcelona. In particular, Drew provides a detailed insight into how her respondents construct and transform their identities between Spanish and Catalan cultures, where language and political allegiance are prominent factors. Drawing on data from Catalan media outlets as well as qualitative interviews, Mandie Iveson takes up the examination of modern identity
politics and language debates in Catalonia. In particular, she explores theories of language ideologies and linguistic authority, relating these to the present situation in the territory.

The third and final section takes as its theme wider political and media discourse, investigating how the Catalan independence movement is constructed in the region itself as well as from an international perspective. This section opens with Sergi Auladell Fauchs’ work on pro-independence and unionist discourse in Spain and Catalonia since the mid-2000s. In his work, he maintains that while the pro-independence camp call for inclusive collective rights, freedom, democracy, and peaceful civil disobedience the unionist side has mainly managed to galvanise its support through the co-optation of a once marginal discourse that prompts the establishment of a social rupture on identitarian and sectarian grounds. In his work, Guillem Belmar Viernes returns our focus to the linguistic dimension of the Catalan conflict once again and as such, echoes some of the focus found in the second section of this book. In his contribution, he explores the impact of glocalisation on the de-territorialisation and de-ethnicisation of the Catalan language and identity formation. In addition, Belmar Viernes notes that there is a need to embrace a form of sustainable multilingualism and perhaps more importantly challenge the “markedness” of the Catalan language in minority media. In their contribution, Andrea Wagner, Dorian Kroqi, Jianna Marin and Ruan Bouwer continue to unpack media representations of the Catalan situation but with a focus on four newspapers (Catalan News, La Vanguardia, El País, and the New York Times), aiming to reveal how foreign, Catalan and Spanish media frame the Catalan-Spanish standoff. Interestingly, in their work, they also make use of in-depth interviews with academics, journalists and politicians in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia to examine the perception of the media’s role in amplifying or controlling the Catalan conflict. The final chapter of this section also investigates how the political debate in Catalonia is represented in the media. However, in his work, Mario Álvarez Fuentes shifts the focus slightly and examines how politicians’ individuality plays a role in politics. In this intriguing piece of work, Álvarez Fuentes notes that Polònia (a political impersonation television programme in Catalonia) acts as an enriching case to further our understanding of politicians’ ability to construct and reinforce collective identities against the backdrop of the Catalan secessionist movement.

In conclusion, this volume provides a rich and detailed overview of the interdisciplinary research being conducted on the current situation in Catalonia today. In the wake of the controversial referendum in October 2017 and the subsequent unilateral declaration of independence, the issue of Catalonia becoming an independent state to that of Spain came to the fore
internationally. With this, the authority of the Spanish state and legislation was called into question. While the path to independence for Catalonia remains unclear, whatever happens, the region will remain an important object for study in the field of secessionist movements, international relations and minority language studies. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain, it seems that the focus may have shifted away from the issue of Catalan independence. However, it is safe to say that the effects of the 2017 referendum and subsequent events continue to resonate in political and social life in Catalonia and Spain today. Moreover, recent research indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic may have provoked new tensions within the Spanish state, revealing that the conflict is far from resolved. In line with this, as calls for secession are likely to increase across the globe in the coming decades, the interdisciplinary contributions in this volume have relevance for regions where there are calls for varying degrees of independence or increased autonomy, such as in South Tyrol, the Basque Country or Flanders.

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SECTION ONE:

CATALONIA AND SECESSIONISM: UNDERSTANDING ONGOING CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DEBATES
CHAPTER ONE

A DIVIDED SPAIN?
THE EVOLUTION OF CATALAN NATIONALISM:
CONSEQUENCES AT THE REGIONAL
AND STATE LEVEL

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Introduction

The Catalan independence referendum (1st October 2017) was a significant moment of internal territorial instability in Spain. However, rather than being an isolated event, this vote and the violent episodes that occurred during it are the result of complex socio-political processes that have taken place in Catalonia for centuries. Support for an independent Catalonia has risen dramatically since the early 2010s. On 10th July 2010, over one million people demonstrated on the streets of Barcelona against the Constitutional Court’s decision to suppress parts of the 2006 Catalan Statute of Autonomy. At the time, this was the largest pro-independence demonstration that had taken place in the territory (Vilà 2014).

Although the political and economic situation in Spain fuelled the growth of nationalist sentiment in Catalonia in the 21st century, Crameri (2015) argues that the policies and discourse of the cultural and intellectual elites in the autonomous region are also a key factor in the growth of pro-secession sentiment. Adding to this, processes such as the linguistic immersion program and the establishment of regional media outlets have been particularly successful in re-establishing the Catalan language in the public sphere, making it the main institutional language and the principal medium of instruction in schools. Related to this, in a post-Franco era, the political
elite in Catalonia saw the Spanish transition to democracy as an opportunity to re-establish political Catalanism (Catalan nationalism). In line with this, Catalonia has traditionally pushed for national recognition and greater devolution of power in the form of autonomy. This is in contrast to today, where there has been a strong increase in calls for independence (Crameri 2014; de las Heras-Pedrosa et al. 2020).

This chapter reviews key historical aspects that have contributed to the growth of nationalist sentiment in Catalonia. It would be inappropriate to attempt to capture eleven centuries of Catalan history in this chapter. However, it does offer a review of some of the most important aspects of the socio-political history of the region. Consequently, the main aim here is to set out the context of the current situation and identify the most salient features in the Catalan case with the objective being to provide a backdrop against which current trends can be situated. As such, this chapter examines the history of Catalan nationalism from its origins up until the opening decades of the 21st century. The chapter will also focus on the recent spike in support for an independent Catalonia which, ultimately, led to the controversial referendum on 1st October 2017. In addition, this chapter focuses on the consequences of the independence movement not only in Catalonia but also throughout Spain, where, after the November 2019 general elections, the far right-wing party VOX became the third biggest political force in the Parliament (Wheeler 2020).

**Catalan Nationalism: Origins**

Esman (1994) contends that nationalism is the “ideology that proclaims the distinctiveness of a particular people and their right to self-rule in their homeland” (Esman 1994, 28). Considering this, modern Catalonia and the creation of nationalist sentiment in the region are the result of the conjunction of several large and complex sets of lasting historical phenomena. The origins of modern Catalonia can be traced to the 9th century, when the region comprised the territories that had split from the Carolingian Empire. These smaller regions, while initially independent from each other, gradually came closer between the 9th and 12th centuries; eventually forming the frontier between the Moorish south and the Frankish north (Sabaté 2017; Hawkey 2018). In the 12th century, Catalonia merged with the Crown of Aragon. During this period, the region enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Ryder (2007) notes that the states of the Crown (which included Aragon, Catalonia, the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands, among others throughout the Mediterranean) “retained its own administrative, judicial, and representative institutions, having nothing in common with its fellows
other than the sovereign monarch” (Ryder 2007, 5). With the marriage of Ferdinand II and Isabella I of Castile in 1469, Catalonia and Aragon were joined politically. This is considered by many scholars as the emergence of a unified Spain, although the Crowns of Castile and Aragon maintained distinct territories (Phillips and Philips 2016; Colomer 2019). While both regions still enjoyed a high degree of political autonomy, the balance of power did shift toward Castile. Given this, the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella marked a period of cultural decadence (decadència) for Catalonia. As such, Spanish, not Catalan, became the language of social advancement in the region (Hawkey 2018). While Castile experienced growth as a result of its American colonies, the Crown of Aragon had limited access to these resources (Colomer 2019). As a result, Castile became the largest economic and military force in the Iberian Peninsula.

Against the backdrop of Madrid’s continued global expansion and gradual attempts to centralise power, the Guerra dels Segadors (Reapers’ War) (1640–1652) took place in Catalonia. This uprising by Catalan peasants against the Kingdom of Spain is considered one of the most important moments in the history of Catalan nationalism. Guibernau (2004) notes that the rebellion occurred as a result of tax increases in Catalonia in an attempt by Madrid to redistribute more evenly the significant economic and military burden of the Spanish Empire, which until then had mainly been supported by the Crown of Castile. Scholars also point to two other factors for this conflict: the quartering of Catalan soldiers and the presence of Castilian troops in Catalonia during the Franco-Spanish War. This larger conflict took place between the Monarchy of Spain and the Kingdom of France as part of the Thirty Years War in Europe (1618–1648) (Stein and Stein 2000; Wilson 2008). Castañeda and Megens-Sedor (2020) add that:

Catalonia favored France over Castile. The war required many men from Catalonia to fight against France, the locals did not support this cause, and they turned their anger towards Castile. A hymn developed during the Reapers war, Els Segadors, which was sung by the rebels, depicted the ongoing struggle between local peasants and imperial elites. (Castañeda and Megens-Sedor 2020, 212)

Although the revolt was crushed, it became a key element of wider Catalan nationalist discourse. In fact, Els Segadors (Song of the Reapers) became an anthem of the Catalan nationalist movement. Moreover, in 1993, the song became the national anthem of Catalonia and its importance was such that it was played at the start of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Barcelona (Balcells 1996; Llobera 2004). Gies (1994) adds that these Games were one of the most important features in the creation of a strong
nationalist sentiment in Catalonia since the transition to democracy in Spain.

Shortly after the Reapers’ War, Catalonia further affirmed its rejection of Castile with the *Revolta dels Barretines* (Revolt of the Barretines) (1687–1689).¹ This was another key moment in the development of nationalism in Catalonia (Castañeda and Megens-Sedor 2020). The causes for this uprising were similar to those of the Reapers’ War. As Spain was preparing for another war with France, not only did it increase its military presence in Catalonia, but it also increased the taxes that the region had to pay to the centralised government. Both of these factors were compounded by the fact that food supplies in the region were low due to a poor harvest in 1687 (Davies 2011). Throughout the period 1687–1689, increasing numbers from across Catalonia marched in the streets to protest against the military presence and poor standard of living. This deep social unrest led to several nationalist episodes across the region (see e.g., Kamen 1977, 2005).

At the beginning of the 18th century, Catalonia once again came into conflict with Madrid. With the death of Charles II in 1700, the Hispanic empire was left heirless and the War of Spanish Succession began (1702–1714). Catalonia joined the war in 1705 on the side of the Habsburgs, fighting against Philip V of House Bourbon. Ultimately, Catalonia backed the losing side (the Habsburgs) in the war. On 11th of September 1714, Barcelona fell to the Bourbon forces after a yearlong siege and Catalonia faced severe consequences (Carr 1980; Kamen 2005). By defeating the Habsburgs, Philip V of House Bourbon occupied the territories of the Crown of Aragon. This had devastating economic, political and cultural consequences for Catalonia. Philip V abolished the political structures and dismantled the main organs of government in the occupied territories, essentially quashing the sovereignty of Catalonia and its very existence as a nation. This marked the submission of Catalonia to the Spanish Crown (Albareda 2010; Castells 2010). This defeat saw local intellectuals becoming “Castilianized” and further taxes were placed upon Catalan citizens. In Balcells’ (1996) words, “the Spanish monarchy wiped out its financial deficit through the fiscal exploitation of the countries of the former Crown of Aragon” (Balcells 1996, 16). Furthermore, the 11th of September 1714 is often marked out as the end of Catalonia as a separate political entity. This date is also celebrated as the national holiday (*La Diada*) of Catalonia (Lanz 2016), when public support for Catalan independence is arguably most visible.

¹ *Revolta dels Barretines* or the “Revolt of the berets” refers to the traditional hat worn by Catalan peasants and sailors. It is similar in colour and shape to the Phrygian cap (Balcells 1996).
The Reinforcement of Catalan Identity

The various confrontations between Madrid and Catalonia in the 17th and 18th centuries are manifestations of the tensions that existed in broad sections of Catalan society toward the central government. Giner (1984) notes that the years after the War of Succession can rightly be seen as the lowest point in history for Catalans. As the use of the Catalan language was discouraged by an increasingly centralised state, it became progressively dialectalised and archaic, furthering the Castilianisation of Catalan society. This led to an attitude of resistance toward Spanish-imposed institutions which was to form the basis for the Catalan literary revival in the 19th century (Webber and Strubell-Trueta 1991). With this came the linguistic and cultural movements, the Renai\'xen\'ça and then the Modernisme, which would enable Catalan language and literature to claim a high cultural and cosmopolitan aspect (Conversi 2000; Vargas 2018). It was these movements that led to the development of Catalan nationalism and a desire for Catalan autonomy, first in the form of regionalism and later in demands for a federal state (Woolard 1989; Crameri 2000, 2015; Balfour and Quiroga 2007).

For example, the Renai\'xen\'ça refers to the Catalan linguistic and cultural revival that is cited as beginning in 1833, when Carles Aribau published his poem Oda a la Pàtria (Ode to the Homeland). Shortly after, in 1841, the first periodic publication in Catalan (Lo Pare Arcàngel) was founded. In 1879, El Diari Català, the first daily newspaper written exclusively in Catalan, was published, and, in 1907, the Institut d’Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies) was founded by the Catalanist Enric Prat de la Riba. The Institut d’Estudis Catalans consolidated Catalan’s literacy standards and sought to standardise the language (Parès-Maicas 1985; Woolard 1989). In line with this, as early as 1911, the institution established a philology division that included, among others, the Catalan grammarian Pompeu Fabra (Camarasa and Roca-Rosell 2008).

Toward the end of the 19th century, increasing demographic and economic power fuelled the growth of regional nationalism in different areas of Spain. This phenomenon was particularly evident in Catalonia, the Basque Country and, to a lesser extent, Galicia. In the case of Catalonia, the rise of nationalism coincided with the emergence of Modernisme (1882–1906). This movement strived to replace “the nostalgic focus on Catalonia’s traditional language and culture with a celebration of modernity, progress, and cosmopolitanism” (Edles 1999, 318). The Renai\'xen\'ça, and later Modernisme, shaped the regionalist movement in Catalonia which would form the basis for the political nationalism of the 20th century (Pradilla Car-
donà 2011). However, Catalan nationalism did not emerge as a unified phenomenon (Balcells 1996). At the turn of the 20th century, Catalan nationalism was supported by conservative and federal-republican sources. As Edles (1999) notes:

[Catalan nationalism] emerged from two different sources. One was a conservative, Catholic tradition that looked back to the glories of medieval Catalonia, seeking to re-create a natural hierarchical state informed by the teachings of the Church. This brand of nationalism celebrated the traditional symbols at the heart of the *renaixença* [...] A second strand of nationalism evolved out of Federal Republicanism and proposed a democratic and secular nationalism in which Catalonia would lead Spain. (Edles 1999, 319)

Despite the fact that at the turn of the 20th-century Catalan society was fractured along political lines, cultural nationalism still functioned as a unitary reference for all Catalanists beyond political allegiance (Casassas 2009; Balcells 2013). Furthermore, as one of the most economically developed regions in Spain, the Catalan economy of the early 20th century was a key element that contributed to the growth of nationalist sentiment throughout Catalonia. These factors assisted in the promotion and spread of shared cultural symbols and the progressive installation of autonomous political structures in Catalonia (Anguera 2008, 2009; Cattini 2015).

In 1901, the first political party of conservative Catalan nationalism, the *Lliga Regionalista* (Regionalist League), was founded. This is often considered to be the first fully-fledged Catalanist political party, and it dominated the political scene in Catalonia until the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 (Zabaltza 2019). In line with this, the *Mancomunitat de Catalunya* was established in 1914 (Forcadell-Esteller 2018). The *Mancomunitat* was the first self-governing Catalan body since the 18th century and it represented a degree of concession on the part of Madrid for Catalan autonomy. However, the *Mancomunitat* was abolished in 1925 during Miguel Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship. On 14th of April 1931, following the fall of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939) was declared. This represented a period of greater political tolerance in Spain. The new constitution defined Spain as an “integral state” and it recognised the right to territorial autonomy for the regions that requested it (Giner 1984; Woolard 1989). During the Second Republic, Catalonia was granted a Statute of Autonomy (*Estatut d’Autonomia de Catalunya*) and the *Generalitat de Catalunya* was revived (Guibernau 2013a, b). These institutions gave substantial home control over administration, education and public services in Catalonia. However, against the backdrop of insurrections across the Spanish state, on 6th October 1934 the then president of the *Generalitat*, Lluís Companys,
unilaterally proclaimed Catalonia as a state within the Republic of Spain arguing that the Spanish government of the time was fascist (Vilar 1980; Hansen 2021). Companys’ decision, which went against the Constitution of 1931 due to its federalist underpinnings, led to a failed rebellion in Catalonia that resulted in the death of 46 people: 38 civilians and 8 soldiers (Casanova 2007). His actions had a strong federalist component and were ultimately aimed at protecting the autonomy of the Generalitat from Madrid. Scholars note that Catalan nationalism’s goal has traditionally not been the formation of a totally independent state, but the consolidation of an autonomy strong enough to gain an influence over Spanish policies (Diez 1995; Smith 1996). This is in comparison to today, where there has been a strong increase in calls for outright independence in Catalonia (Crameri 2014; Guibernau 2014a).

A Parenthesis of Four Decades: Civil War and Francoism

Francisco Franco came to power following the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), where at least 180,000 people died (Espinosa 2010). Once in power, Franco carried out a deep social, political and military restructuring in Spain and established a regime that had similarities with German Nazism and Italian Fascism. Franco quickly abolished both the Statute of Autonomy and the Generalitat (Woolard 1989; Guibernau 2004). As Ledesma (1994) states:

Francoism shared some fundamental characteristics, especially in regard to its repressive attitudes, with the Italian and German regimes: among them, the abolition of representative institutions, the prohibition of any ideology that would threaten the official doctrine, press censorship and the control of mass media by the state, the suppression of socialist movements and intolerance toward any sign of dissent or opposition, and finally the subordination of the interests of the working class to the objectives of the state. (Ledesma 1994, 184; author’s own translation)

The social consequences of Francoism (1939–1975) were reinforced by its longevity. It was the second-longest dictatorship in Western Europe during the 20th century, only surpassed by the 48 year-long Portuguese dictatorship, which took place between 1926 and 1974 (Birmingham 2003).

Although the repressive attitude of the regime moderated over time—especially after 1945, when the Axis powers were defeated in World War II—, the number of fatalities on all sides was substantial. In the first few months of the dictatorship, tens of thousands were imprisoned and hundreds faced execution on a daily basis. Reflecting this, Pujol-Casademont (2020)