

Special Issue

Plurinationality, Federalism, and Sovereignty in Spain: at the Crossroads



Introduction: post-politics and the validity of nationalism in the Spanish state

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Since 2008, when the economic crisis triggered by the international financial system crunch brought about a political and social crisis in many countries around the world, the debate about nationalism has gained renewed attention. As in the analysis of other critical historical moments in the advance of nationalist forces, destabilisation of the material bases supporting the social order has led to the search for various national-type theoretical and political solutions. Thus, this scenario gave way to a marked social mobilisation and to displacement of political-party positions, both on the left and the right in many political systems (Kyriakos, 2015). Therefore, the hypotheses that emerged during the nineties, that assume that state systems are an obstacle to economic development—including theses on the end of history and neoliberal viewpoints on the global village (Fair, 2008)—,¹ as well as the Third Way as a remedy for social-democratic decline (Giddens, 2013), were thoroughly questioned.

In the framework of a *return* to politics, new nationalist political projects, both at the state and substate levels, settled upon two forms of rejection of neoliberal globalisation and its social and economic effects. On the one hand, conservative populist nationalisms, led by elites that conceive the nation-state as a resource for

¹ This is reflected in, for example, nation branding, which is considered to be a postmodern style of depoliticisation and social demobilisation in the domestic sphere (Lury, 2004). In contrast, from the perspective of publicity planning, it has been stated that *national* has scant compatibility with the marketing of *state* (Van Ham, 2001, p. 69), because it contains elements of political and social conflict.

rebuilding the industrial fabric of their countries and who articulate their scrutinising discourse about rejecting immigration, Islam, and the fight against terrorism (Corbett, 2016; Belina, 2013). This nationalistic ideal, therefore also rejects the multiculturalist project and questions the effectiveness and necessity of their key policies. In the European case, this approach is accompanied by an increase in Euroscepticism that still spans several political and social-sector domains. On the other hand, progressive nationalisms, which are torn between internationalism and several populist configurations—in which the identity-defining element is the grouping of demands (even to the point that they become scattered)—as a product of the way the neoliberal productive system is itself configured (Conversi, 2013; Rendueles, 2015). In this case, cultural diversity is often incorporated into the concept of ‘the people’ as one of the ways that the idea of ‘bottom-up’ versus ‘top-down’ exists nationally.

These are different pro-sovereignty projects which are pursuing the aim of regaining the power delegated to the global financial system and supranational institutions that preside over the current world order. Each of these projects initially had to navigate the contradictions of an international scenario characterised by a globalised economic system, a postmodern cultural model that promotes a cosmopolitan identity based on the digital world, and some low or very low-intensity democracies (Bauman, 2013). However, the growing social mobilisation occurring in many countries around these new political projects, now adopting various forms of nationalism, has demonstrated the power of political projects built around an imaginary shared nation. Therefore, the events of the last decade confirm the vitality of national identities and their validity as an instrument of political-social mobilisation, and also reopen questions about their potential for development. In this sense, digital cities and communication are presented as fundamental elements for the current forms of nationalist construction and are two of its fundamental analysis axes.

This process has manifested itself in a very specific way in Spain. Among other things, the prolonged economic crisis and accompanying austerity policies have affected the foundations of the Spanish welfare state (Sánchez Medero and Tamboleo García, 2013), clearly contributing to the disruption of the political-party structure—with the sudden emergence of two parties, one to the left and the other to the right of the system—and have pushed through a change in leadership in the Kingdom of Spain. This combination of elements means this period can be described as a political-cycle change. This sort of change is also linked to a ‘regime crisis’ in relation to the institutional and economic order achieved by the constitutive-process pacts made and which ended in 1978 (Pisarello, 2014; Rendueles, 2015). These processes led to a rethink about the country’s political-territorial order, which was interrelated with a crisis in Catalan politics, and intensified nationalist social mobilisation. This led to an expansion in the social pro-sovereignty base in the region, a phenomenon that became more acute over the years.

This current special issue of *Debats* analyses this process and examines the topic of current Spanish-state nationalism, looking at its different distinctive features by taking several different theoretical approaches. This project started a year ago during a conference held at the University of Valencia in April 2016, which brought together a significant

number of the academics featured in this current monograph.² In this context, the many national territorial and sociocultural realities that coexist in the Spanish state were contrasted and their current relevance was debated. The special issue, corresponding to number 131, of the recently relaunched journal *Debats*³ collects several of these proposals and adds others from other academics invited a posteriori that enrich the whole and allow the phenomenon to be covered from several angles. In order to introduce this set of articles, in the following section I develop the main theoretical coordinates of nationalism. I then summarise how some of the elements corresponding to these theoretical approaches are manifested on the aforementioned axes and the problems developed in the articles in this issue.

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL NATIONALISM

Following several conceptual schemes, cultural nationalism is often differentiated from political nationalism. For De Blas Guerrero (1995, p. 16) the former refers to the ‘committed’ and ‘emotive’ character of certain traits shared by a society as an ‘objective in itself’. It is the collective affirmation of different symbolic styles of self-referencing and differentiation with regard to other social and individual groups that do not necessarily exceed their own limits of enunciation. In contrast, in political nationalism “a more meaningful practical and pragmatic sense can be assumed, both as a source of legitimacy and as a generator of nation-state loyalty, which in the Western world, has been transformed into a reality comparable to the liberal democratic political system” (De Blas Guerrero, 1995, p. 16). In this vein, there are two major theoretical approaches to the emergence and development of nationalism. One is the functionalist approach, based on analysing the process of modernisation in Western states and its impact on the national construction. The other groups together several idealistic theses, which are rooted in the classic German theorists such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried von Herder, or Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

Within the framework of functionalism, nationalism is defined as a device designed for the construction of political legitimacy that facilitates the process of economic and social modernisation. In this context, the emergence of modern nationalism is explained mainly by the appearance of an industrial society in the eighteenth century, which unlike agrarian societies, had to be politically centralised to function. Similarly, industrialisation promoted the deepening of labour specialisation, which favoured the progressive standardisation of the relationship between

² This conference was titled *A plurinational state? Crossed views from Valencia, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Navarre, and Europe*, was organised by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Valencia, and was moderated by Albert Moncusí Ferré (UV). It was attended by Igor Calzada (from the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at the University of Oxford), Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins (UV), Rafael Castelló Cogollos (UV), Vega Rodríguez (UV), and Mikel Rujo (Delegate of the Government of Navarre in Brussels).

³ I would like to thank the Editorial Committee at *Debats* for inviting me to edit the current special issue and in particular, its Director, Dr. Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins.

producers and those who organise production (Gellner, 1997, p. 18). This process had two consequences in terms of social movements: obtaining the popular consensus about the homogenisation of state power and its complexification in the development of new nations emerging within this scheme, based on a common culture (Gramsci, 1997).

But within the framework of functionalism, ethnicity and culture are used mainly as instruments for accumulating state power in the modernisation process. In this sense, Gellner points out how, in the course of pre-industrial society specialisation, occupational mobility is inhibited by ethnic or cultural factors that act as in a segmental way in each of these groups; to get to that point, mobility must destroy symbolic models or ‘stereotypes’ (Gellner, 1981, 755). Therefore, there is a marked contrast in the organisational dynamics developed by “a society with inherently unstable technology, and one accustomed to continuous economic growth (and which treats it as a right and a cultural norm) is condemned to the continuous appearance of new specialities” (Gellner 1981, p. 756). Consequently, the need to develop specialisations through training and based on the division of labour, drove modern societies towards institutionalisation of the education system, which is required for organising the relationship between training and employment. In this context: “nationalism is essentially the transfer of the focus of humankind’s identity towards a culture that is mediated by literacy and a comprehensive formal education system” (Gellner, 1981, p. 757).

As opposed to the idealistic side of nationalistic theory—also defined as *primordialist*—Elie Kedourie sets the foundations of what he calls a nationalist doctrine, within a historical-ideological perspective. He also states: “it holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known for certain characteristics that can be ascertained, and that the only type of legitimate government is that of national self-governance” (Kedourie, 1998, p. 1). Unlike Gellner, for Kedourie, from the nineteenth century onwards, the state organised—and, in the case of the French, restored—a series of cultural elements and common ambitions that had already existed in several forms since ancient Roman times. Therefore, within this theoretical framework, the principle of total sovereignty resides in the nation itself, and its totality is essentially based on a common culture, which is the foundation that supports it all. Therefore, the individual Kantian way of critical thinking cannot be understood outside of its national character, that is, outside of the organisation that naturally integrates it (Kedourie, 1998, 33). Significantly, Kedourie points out in his analysis of the process of construction of the Napoleonic Empire, that nationalist processes can gain some weight by using aesthetic elements at the time of their dissemination.

For the Israeli historian, Eric Hobsbawm, nations originate in the process of organisation of the modern state and in a particular historical period of economic and technological development in which the invention of the printing industry played a central role. Therefore: “nationalism precedes nations. Nations do not build states and nationalisms, but rather, the opposite occurs” (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 18). In this sense, recognition of a nation by its discernible traits—which for Kedourie, are pre-existing—is based on useless criteria: “language, ethnicity, or whatever it may be, are also blurred, changing, and

ambiguous” (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 14). For Hobsbawm, another way of defining a nation is based on subjective criteria. It is constructed based on a conscious sense of belonging individually or collectively to a type, which gives an a posteriori definition and a tautological type. This absence of objective and universal criteria for defining a nation “makes them extremely useful for propagandistic and programmatic purposes, even though they are not very descriptive” (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 14).

However, Hobsbawm is often situated within the framework of constructivism, given that it emphasises the importance of addressing the form of national construction he calls *bottom-up* (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 19). In other words, taking the role that social movements play in historical nationalist processes into account. In this sense, he shows how the national conscience developed unevenly in several regions, but advanced in several phases; a temporary evolution carried out by different social groups in each instance. These stages of nationalist development were defined by Miroslav Hroch, who analysed the complex evolution of the relationship between ethnic (linguistic and religious) and political borders. According to his view, the nationalist movement started in Europe in the nineteenth century, in a stage of literary, cultural (folk), and intellectual production, but still reminiscent of the Middle Ages and ‘primordial’ ethnic groups (Hroch, 1994, p. 47). In the second instance, a series of ‘national idea’ militants very quickly and consciously spread this discourse, ushering in nationalist politics itself. In several nationalist processes, this development emerges because of an identity crisis, provoked by transformations in the relationships between the dominating and dominated groups, as exemplified by the case of Catalonia in the 1870s (Hroch, 1994, p. 52). Finally, in a third phase, these proclamations reached popular consensus, giving rise to new social or state organisations.

The role of the social movements in the dialectic between state and ethnic borders has also been considered from the perspective of the international system. Influenced by the monarchic tradition, until the start of the nineteenth century, nationalism functioned as a legal mechanism for legitimising the state (Marx, 2009) and was used to generate citizen identity and loyalty towards it (Mann, 1991). Nevertheless, for Hall, nationalism took another form throughout the twentieth century, moving from being an element sustaining national sovereignty (*a rason d’etat*) to also becoming a factor in national self-determination. From this perspective, the self-identification variable of the social actors linked to nationalism, is opposed to the realistic determinism of the generation of state order. The significance given to nationalism in the configuration of the international system leads to criticism of the excessive analytical nationalisation, which reduces it to an ‘epiphenomenon’ of ‘hard relationships’. Therefore, in his approach to nationalism and the international system, Hall warns of the latter that “changes in the collective identity of societal actors transforms the interests of the collective relevant players that constitute the system” (Hall, 1999, p. 5). In this view, interests of the social group are not immutable or objective in that they are both subject to self-definition of their identity with respect to other actors. Consequently, the collective social identity functions as an independent variable of the transformations in the legitimising elements and in the institutional structure

of the international system (Hall, 1999, p. 7; Colás, 2002). This constructivist thesis provides another explanation of the ways in which substate nationalist mobilisation develops, distanced from analysing resources and aimed at incorporating the impact of nationalism and the behaviour of social actors in these geopolitical processes (Hall, 1999, 11).

NATIONALISM AND THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE SPANISH STATE

In current politics a tension can be felt between cultural nationalism, which adopts several sociopolitical forms, and the political institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of national identities. With the latter we refer to several types of top-down nationalism: in advancing governmental control, multiple spaces that act to legitimise, defend, and normalise the elements comprising cultural nations are being hegemonised. Nonetheless, the differentiation of two instances, one sociocultural and the other political, in the development of nationalism—and therefore of the political organisation about the diffusion of languages, religions, or social traditions—is a conceptual scheme that has been questioned as an analytical instrument. As Keating points out, in reference to a region's capacity for political development: "The analytical problem is based on the fact that ethnicity is not, and cannot be, defined as an independent factor in political mobilisation" (Keating, 1993, p. 10). In non-existent extremes only, there are two possible isolated scenarios which may underlie this: understanding political institutions as instrumental spaces that generate identities, and as domains which determine social organisation absolutely. In this sense, the possibility that nation substate societies may develop an integral capacity for autonomous organisation is relative to multiple social and geopolitical factors in the current globalised world. Therefore, beyond analysis of the foundational elements and processes of each nation, the present world requires us to rethink statist theses on nationalism and also to consider new social, economic, and cultural elements that guide its development.

Analysis of this complex interrelation between state and societal factors in the evolution of Spanish state nationalism requires brief reference to the historical evolution of its political-territorial system. The profound process of social and cultural modernisation that the country underwent from the nineteenth century onwards encountered a serious barrier in the reactionary and undemocratic state (Juliá, 2003, p. 19). The pact that gave rise to the Bourbon Restoration (1874) established—within the framework of the constitutional monarchy—the alternation between liberals and conservatives, giving a political-institutional framework to this authoritarian dynamic. However, this power scheme collided with Spain's political-cultural diversity, itself closely related to nationalist political movements (mainly Basque and Catalan) that emerged in this context (Solé Tura, 1985, p. 43). This opposition between regime and society, expressed in the state's disregard for the distinctive features and rights of the various groups that formed the country, led to strong social mobilisation. The dichotomy that appeared deepened because of the lack of prestige given to both the political system and the monarchy during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, and eventually culminated in the Second Spanish Republic (Jackson, 1999).

This democratic process, which opened the state up to the incorporation of national substate demands, once again encountered several difficulties in its power struggle with the ecclesiastical and conservative sectors that came together during the military uprising in 1936. The protracted Franco dictatorship developed between 1939 and 1975, and after a phase of isolation it obtained the approval of the European powers which was important for its legitimisation (Berdah, 2002). It was based on a nationalist, anti-communist, and catholic ideology and was structured around the precepts of so-called organic democracy. This concept implied removal of the parliamentary system and its replacement with an autocratic and totalitarian regime, where cultural and national diversity was not only denied, it was also persecuted (Muñoz Cáliz, 2014, Abellán, 1984). The political inheritance from the dictatorship strongly influenced both Spain's constitutional and administrative order, agreed during the democratic transition, as well as the country's interpretation of foreign policy, which subsisted in different facets of its new work in Latin America (Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla, 1991).

In contrast, during the democratic transition the Spanish state evolved from the marked centralism that characterised it during the Franco regime, towards a manifestly decentralised system, which has been restructuring and reconfiguring itself since the eighties. This process was fraught with negotiations between the political forces involved, and was established based on various party positions on which new political-territorial structure the state should adopt (Colomer, 1998). In the late seventies, an agreement was made between sectors of the political right, Spanish leftist forces, and nationalist parties representing the Basque and Catalan minorities, to institute a new state model, the so-called state of Autonomies (Solé Tura, 1985). This was embodied in a constitutional scheme that sought to promote the deconcentration of public administration in order to provide efficiency, support national unity, and simultaneously address the historical claims of sovereignty by different 'historical nationalities':⁴ Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia.

A PLURINATIONAL STATE? DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS ON THE CURRENT STATUS OF NATIONS IN THE SPANISH STATE

This monograph provides several axes for the general analysis of the recent evolution of nations, subnational entities, and nationalism, always taking the Spanish state as a point of reference. In the first part of this special issue which comprises three comparative studies, John Loughlin analyses the evolution of federal and confederal state systems in plurinational countries. The author

4 The Spanish Constitution (CE; *Constitución Española*) of 1978 pointed to the political structuring of the new parliamentary monarchy as a decentralised unitary state and fixed its territorial disposition. This arrangement comprises three levels of government: municipalities, provinces, and autonomies, taking into account the existence of various 'nationalities and regions' (Article 2 CE). These were incorporated into the Autonomous Communities scheme, first-level political-administrative units governed both by the Magna Carta itself and by its respective statutes of autonomy.

exposes how regional power or territorial asymmetry in different countries manifest themselves, revealing the growing adoption of hybrid models in state organisation, and highlighting the influence of subnational nationalisms in this development. Loughlin points out the limitations of the traditional nation-state in terms of its recognition of internal cultural diversity and in exercising the values of liberal democracy, and conceives new forms of governance as possible future projects. On the other hand, Diane Saint-Pierre and Alexandre Couture Gagnon analyse the differential deployment of the Convention on Cultural Diversity (2005) in two subnational entities: Quebec and Catalonia. This analysis allows us to see how state political and legal frameworks condition or enhance the development of policies oriented towards social minorities, but in no way define the limits of such initiatives within the framework of national substate projects. In this sense, there are also different international-projection or domestic-repositioning strategies aimed towards concentrating national power on the basis of this Convention, whether in the context of cultural claims or within the framework of quasi-state projects. Finally, Igor Calzada establishes a comparative approach to nationalism, taking the cases of Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country as examples. The recent intensification of the political dispute between these regions and the governments in charge of their respective states is analysed, considering two determining factors in their development within the European framework: the federalisation (or devolution) model and how it is scaled up; he highlights the notable differences in the organisation of territorial and social nationalism in these three cases. In this context, Calzada identifies the development of innovative solutions to the accumulation of substate political power, which counteracts the increasingly 'post-national' character of their large cities.

In the second part of this special issue, we focus on the realm of national realities within the Spanish state. Rafael Castelló considers how the styles of relationships between state and society determine, in a relative way, the construction of regional identities. Using the Valencian case—with its complex network of social representations linked to several sociocultural and productive factors—as an example of how substate nationalisms can take very different forms. The scant construction of an identity and a self-perception distinct to regionalism or to Spanish unionism, have limited the organisation of a political project distinct to that of the state. This political failure to accomplish a national non-regionalist project in Valencia is explained by several factors, such as the class-structure of Valencian society and the influence of the language itself. While Castelló explains the national evolution of Valencia based on the sociology of identity, Germa Bel's article allows us to discern the structural framework of the Spanish state from its infrastructure policy. The limited delegation of control to the political substate units in this area reveals the existence of a unitary conception of the public, which was inherited from the monarchic tradition. Thus, rail transport infrastructures, and subsequently, airport infrastructures were developed as an instrument of national construction and reaffirmation. Thereby, the author reveals how the lack of rationality and democratic limitations shown by its insufficient decentralisation are the product of specific political decisions.

On the other hand, Toni Rodon analyses the evolution of the political programs of the main Catalan parties, focusing on their positions on the processes of sovereignty being developed in the region. These parties have assumed positions ranging from demands of independence to legalistic unionism, and there is a wide range of Catalanist options and proposals for decentralisation. Through an exhaustive analysis of recent electoral processes and voting-intentions surveys, the author explains the heterogeneity of the organised independence block in Catalonia and the nationalist elements that support its convergence, as well as the incidence of nationalism in the discourse of the other groups involved in the Catalan political-party system. Finally, closing this section, the work I authored comparatively analyses the evolution of cultural policies in the Autonomous Communities of Madrid, Andalusia, and Catalonia, focusing on the explanatory factors of their different governance styles, including the differential impact of identity as a factor in each of its configurations. This analysis shows that while the Community of Madrid has articulated its cultural policies to the capital's and central government's institutions without reference to autonomous identity, Catalan nationalism was fundamental to the socio-institutional discussion that gave rise to a cultural policies project that is independent and isomorphic to the state systems.

The third part of this special issue presents another fundamental dimension to understanding the current status of nationalisms in Spain: how it fits into the multilevel European governmental system. Luis Moreno analyses the sovereign projects of substate nations in the current design of the EU, which is characterised by the marked interdependence of its member states. The author emphasises how different nationalist substate projects exist in a setting of tension linked to the search for greater political autonomy within their state systems, as well as maintaining or repositioning their fit in the system of states. As a result of this analysis, the author proposes the idea of 'cosmopolitan localism' as a way of conceptualising and politically orienting such sovereignty projects. In the *Points of View* section, Mikel Irujo analyses the singularity of stateless nations and how they fit in this multilevel system from the standpoint of the right to decide. The author explains his legal and political view of the European system, stating the importance of political deliberation in giving way to legitimate territorial demands, as has already happened throughout European history with other stateless nations.

The set of articles we present in this monograph allows us to contrast several elements already explained by theory on nationalism. First, the historical importance of path dependence, both at the state and substate levels, in the evolution of nationalist politics. Second, this monograph describes the intensification of nationalism in a scenario of international economic crisis and delegitimisation of welfareist and European projects. While the functionalist tradition allows this process to be explained, constructivist theses provide conceptual tools that more adequately explain elements such as sociocultural mobilisation and the discursive orientation of new nationalist projects, as well as their new ways of social organisation. Third,

the importance of multilevel governance and the strengthening of the fabric of transnational institutions (networks of cities, regions, etc.) for European national projects is elaborated upon. The delegation of sovereignty by states translates into the growing importance of cities and supranational political organisations—alongside their discourse—for state and subnational nationalism. Finally, this phenomenon is also favoured by digital communication, which transforms urban areas into nodes and international organisations into more viable interlocutors. Hence, the mechanisms of devolution become more complex and substate bodies have more instruments for the development of sovereignty, mainly in the capacity that cities have as ‘amplifiers’ of nationalist processes.

However, as we have seen, the distinctive features of the Spanish case are diverse and are situated within the particular context of the breakdown of the so-called consensus of ’78. The recent economic and political crisis paved the way for a general rethinking of the political-territorial system, the dynamisation of social mobilisation around national identity, and several forms of political instrumentalisation of national identities, both at the state and substate level. This process has a clear historical explanation: despite factors such as Europeanism, the territorial and economic models in development since the eighties presented themselves as being hegemonic in Spain, and so the signifiers of a homeland and nation became historically disputed. In the new political-economic scenario all of these elements were contested.

On the one hand, this scenario led to the emergence of new social actors, such as the PAH⁵, and to significant change in the strategies of political action of sovereign forces in the Basque country. However, in this regard, Catalonia has taken centre stage; it has made decisive progress in the institutionalisation of its demands for independence and in favour of the so-called right to decide. On the other hand, the new players emerging in the political-party system, *Podemos* (We can) and *Ciudadanos* (Citizens), positioned themselves as antagonists in terms of this debate. While the former assumes sovereignty to be a social right and prescribes a plurinational state on the basis of constitutionalist discourse, the latter rejects the possibility of giving greater power to historical nations. Again, in functionalist terms, one may wonder how the future evolution of the economy, the productive system, and the Spanish labour market could have repercussions in recomposing some of the previous consensus. In constructivist terms, one can question which elements of the new political culture might survive beyond the crisis, translating spaces and critical positions into power or into a new political-territorial scheme. The work presented in this document provides several clues in this regard and sheds light on the limitations of, and possibilities for, national development within the Spanish state, allowing us to rethink its plurinational character.

⁵ The Platform for those [negatively] Affected by Mortgages or PAH (for *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* in its original Spanish) is a social organisation that produces political and legal actions aimed at defending the rights of families and individuals evicted from their homes in Spain. It was established in Barcelona in February 2009 and currently has more than 150 delegations in the territory.

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