

Chapter 19

Building a New State from Outrage: The Case of Catalonia

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ABSTRACT

Most of the social movements that we are used to hearing and reading about base their activities in the pursuit of social rights. A great majority of these movements have recently formed due to complex socioeconomic issues. Usually these movements lack a formal organization and hierarchy. Most often they gather through sit-ins and occupations. Sometimes, there are direct confrontations with police. Almost always the current government in office is the target of protest. The case of Catalonia challenges these presumed notions of contemporary activism. This chapter analyses the social participation of the Catalan pro-independence movement. Historical notes are provided which are necessary for understanding the Catalan context. Then a review is presented of the four most important demonstrations in the recent history of Catalonia (2010, 2012, 2013, and 2014), all of which were in favor of independence, and also the participatory processes derived from these events, the non-binding consultation from 2014.

INTRODUCTION

To gather and organize millions of people at once in a peaceful protest is quite a feat. To do it five times with equal success definitely challenges our established notions of public involvement. The social movement in favour of Catalan independence provides an excellent case study for public participation. In the past decade, support for the independence of Catalonia rose from 10% to 50% and higher. In this chapter, we describe how did it happen and why did it happen. With an excellent organization and very precise communication strategies for public involvement, the independence supporters have drastically enhanced its base in Catalonia, almost monopolizing the political debate in Spain, and constantly drawing notorious attention internationally. We begin by contextualizing the Catalan case historically in terms of political rule from the early days to the present, setting a strong foundation upon which the Catalan

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nationalism is built. We then analyse the key events of public involvement –four demonstrations and one referendum– chronologically as they followed in the past five years (2010 to 2015), and how this events were approached from public involvement initiatives helped by mass communications. In doing so, we explain the consistent momentum gain in the pro-independence movement through the use of new media, which marked the constant progression of Catalonia’s public involvement of millions of people.

Background of the Catalan Nation

The Catalan claim for independence cannot be understood without looking into the historical roots of Catalonia. In the 11th century, the Catalan counties –with the County of Barcelona being the strongest one politically speaking– began to form what is known as the *Principat de Catalunya* (Principality of Catalonia). The *Principat* is the first notion of Catalonia as an independent entity. The counties that formed it had their own governors, Counts, as well as their own laws (Keane, 2009). In the 12th century, Catalonia joins the Crown of Aragon after the marriage between the Count of Barcelona Ramon Berenguer IV and Queen Petronila of Aragon in 1137. For some time the new kingdom resulting from their marriage received the official name of *Regno, Dominio et Corona Aragonum et Catalonie* (Kingdom, Dominion and Crown of Aragon and Catalonia), and in further documents, after Valencia is conquered, the nomenclature is Kingdoms of Aragon, Valencia and the County of Barcelona. In both cases, Catalonia (or County of Barcelona) is identified separately, which reinforces the notion of Catalonia as an independent entity throughout the centuries (Soldevila, 1962). In the 13th century, the Catalan Courts were born. They were the policymaking body of Catalonia. In political science, they have a widespread recognition because they were the first institution to have popular participation and thus resemblance the modern Parliaments (Bisson, 1986; Keane, 2009). The *Corts Catalanes* promulgated the first Catalan Constitution in 1238 – for the record: this is six centuries before Spain had its first Constitution. In the 15th century, King of Aragon Ferdinand and Queen of Castile Isabella married to form a dynastic union of the Crown of Aragon with Castile. As a result of the expansion from further conquered territories, their reign was known as “Kingdom of the Spains”. Even then, throughout centuries of successful ruling in the Mediterranean territories, Catalonia, as well as Aragon, Valencia and the Balearic Islands kept their own institutions, laws, language and traditions.

The political rule changed in the beginning of the 18th century, when in the year 1700, King Charles II of Spain (House of Habsburg) died without an heir. The French Bourbons quickly proposed a very young Philip of Anjou to be his successor. The other European kingdoms, particularly the English, the Dutch and the Portuguese strongly opposed the idea of having a Bourbon ruling Spain, and so they proposed their own candidate: the Archduke Charles of Austria. This sparked the War of the Spanish Succession, which lasted from 1701 to 1714. The Bourbons were known to have a Jacobean conception of the state, which is that of a unique central administration. The Bourbons found their major support in Castile and vowed for a single nation: Spain. The Catalans, fearing that Philip of Anjou may well vanish the Catalan language, traditions and institutions, supported Charles, who had promised to respect the existing laws. However, the sudden news of the death of his brother, Joseph, made Charles the heir of the Holy Roman Empire in 1711. The English, the Dutch and the Portuguese were not interested in the Spanish territories anymore, and so they withdrawn from the Succession War. At that moment Catalans were all alone. Their military forces still fought for three years until the defeat and capitulation of the city of Barcelona, in 11 September 1714 – which is now the National Day of Catalonia, and it stands at the core of public-involvement in modern days as we will later review. As expected by the Catalans

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