Introduction: Culture, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Catalonia

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For many, Catalonia is a conundrum. An extraordinary case of collective effort, identity assertion, and political escalation, it has been one of the greatest if not *the* greatest cause of political polarisation in Spanish society for more than a decade now and one of the many thorns in the side of the EU and its institutional bodies, continually faced with a cascade of political, ideological, and juridical quandaries. A relatively recent phenomenon as a set of mature socio-cultural claims and coherent political vision, Catalan regionalism or nationalism (*catalanisme*), and its more radical manifestation, independentism (*independentisme*), are one of the not unique but rare examples of nationalism that is upheld eminently (though not exclusively) by progressive parties, and which identifies with and seduces especially 'the left'. This leaves many, but not scholars of nationalism, rather puzzled, for as one of the most prominent among them once remarked, nationalism is a protean phenomenon formed of different concepts, representations, and practices, whose different combinations 'point them in different directions, creating the various kinds of nationalism with which we are familiar' (Smith 2013, 36). Catalan independentisme has been noted for its bottom-up civil mobilisation that aims for secession from Spain due to an accumulating set of (real or imagined) grievances over cultural, linguistic, economic, and political matters since the Transition from the Franco dictatorship and especially in the past decade. This volume will address how these developments are both constructed and reflected by/in popular culture.

Along with notions such as 'culture', 'religion', 'tradition', and others, 'nation' is one of the ontological black diamonds in the historical and social sciences: a terminological crystal of many facets, absorbing, reflecting, and deflecting definitions and semantic boundaries, and yet, in spite of its polysemy and hazy aura, inevitable, just like those other concepts, in use and thought both emically and etically. There can be no doubt that the gravitational force of nations permeates our lives, shaping the configuration of our states, their sense of the past, their vision of the future, and the public and political debates of our time as much and perhaps even more than in certain periods of the 19th and 20th centuries. Far from being relegated to the past, nations, nationhood, and nationalisms are as much alive today as they have ever been.

As one of the foundational elements of modernity and a veritable factor of progress and modernisation since the French Revolution (in which it played an eminent role), nationalism has been, apparently in contradiction with itself, one of the main forces of liberation as well as oppression for the peoples in the modern and late modern world. Indeed, since the end of the *Ancien Régime*, the most noble as well the most atrocious acts have been committed in the name of the nation. No wonder then, if among scholars as well as in the much wider political and social arenas, the concepts and practices of nation and nationalism bear a polarising force, being as they are not only conceptually problematic and politically controversial, but also morally and even emotionally charged and charging.

In this volume, we have tried to unpack some of these tightly interwoven problems looking at one of the most interesting recent examples, Catalonia, where intellectuals, political actors, and independentists often feel the potential contradictions of nation building, state formation, and related processes of mass identity construction, reproduction, and legitimation. Who belongs to the nation? Who has the right to a state? 'Does the state exist after the nation-state?', as Xavier Rubert de Ventós, a Catalan intellectual, asked himself some years ago (2000, 72). Can Catalan nation-building, 'Catalanisation', and the idea of a Catalan Republic avoid the fate of becoming a mere sub-national variant of the (much criticised) homogenising tendencies of the Spanish state? Many of these questions and dilemmas are played out through culture, as this work will show.

Indeed, Catalonia is not undeservedly known for its lavish popular culture, and popular culture has always been one of the main pastures from which ideas of the nation and practices of nationhood and nationalism have sprung, been cultivated, and harvested. From the early theorisation of Herder and Romanticism generally, all the way up until our late modern times, folkloric traditions – just like language and religion – have been widely considered – or implicitly associated with – the constitutional elements of what a nation is or how it imagines itself (or is imagined by others) to be. In this volume, we look at the ways in which different dimensions of collective action and representation such as public rituality, cultural heritage-making, and the politics of culture influence, and are in turn influenced by, patterns of national identity formation and nationalist trends in contemporary Catalonia, especially since the crucial, watershed years of 2010 (in which the reform of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia was rejected), 2012 (the year of the biggest and most impressive mass demonstration on the Catalan National Day, the *Diada*), and 2017 (when the last, at present, referendum for independence was held). Indeed, these years were characterised by head-spinning developments, including the rise of record-attendance demonstrations, clashes with riot police, illegal referenda, imprisonments of elected officials, an eight-second independence declaration, and Spanish governmental standby. Spaniards voted four times over four years at general elections between 2015 and 2019, in part due to the Catalan conundrum.

Post-Franco political transformations contextualise the chapters of this volume. After the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), the moderate *catalanisme* of the centre-right Jordi Pujol government (1980–2003) successfully pursued Catalan linguistic and cultural interests but never formulated secession as a political goal. In 2003, the new centre-left, tripartite Catalan government pushed for fiscal reform and greater economic autonomy from the state, but its drafts of a reformed Statute of Autonomy were rejected in 2005 and 2010 by the Spanish Constitutional Court. From 2010 on, a quick succession of events resulted in a growing mobilisation and in a sharply polarised regional climate. As 'social discontent has been mostly channeled through the prism of identity and sovereignty, [this has led to] the largest series of popular mobilisations ever seen in modern Europe' (Dowling 2018, 5). A shortlist of such events should include: 1) The already recalled *Diada* of 2012, possibly the largest mass event in the history of Catalonia and maybe of Europe in its entirety; 2) The 2014 referendum on independence, in spite of the Spanish Constitution's ban on regional referenda; 3) The 2015 Catalan regional elections, which became a quasi-plebiscite, with pro-independence parties forming the Catalan government for the first time after the Transition; 4) Another independence referendum in 2017, this time resulting in a police crackdown on voters, and the exile or imprisonment of several high-profile Catalan politicians (among whom the President of the Generalitat himself, Carles Puigdemont), and leaders of NGOs; 5) In the year 2019, a series of demonstrations ensued across the region, including violent and mostly unprecedented night-time clashes with riot police, following the sentencing by the Spanish courts of Catalanist leaders to 9–13 years in prison.

These events or clusters of events all showed the extent of mass mobilisation, fostered by an effervescence of social movements, associationism, and other sectors of civil society. They reappropriated forms and symbols from popular culture, as this book will show in greater detail in the following chapters. In the post-2010 Catalan social landscape, 'the form adopted of political expression became that of the popular performance of mass mobilisation, with the incorporation of music and folkloric festivals' (Dowling 2018, 102). At the basis of these phenomena, there was the belief that collective action, catalysed by moral indignation and by a sense of social justice, would eventually lead to political change and social improvement (Klandermans 1997).

The Catalan 'territorial question' thus went from 'challenge' to 'crisis' and was only overshadowed by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. In February 2021, yet another pro-independence regional government was elected in Catalonia, this time with a popular majority vote of over 50%, although with a record low turnout. At the time of writing, Catalonia's and Spain's major concern is the Covid-19 pandemic. Once that battle is over, however, the territorial question will predictably resurface in Spain.

FROM AUTONOMY TO INDEPENDENCE: CATALONIA'S ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL GRIEVANCES

Catalonia's secessionist turn consisted in a shift from less than 20% supporting independence in 2005 to about 50% by 2015 and the election of pro-independence governments in the 2015, 2017, and 2021 regional elections. What happened in the decade that turned Catalonia away from devolution to secession?

The reasons behind this shift are complex. Independentist Catalans cited that they wanted self-government, institutional modernisation, more progressive social reform, cultural and linguistic identity maintenance, financial growth, and a divorce from what they saw as a corrupt and conservative Spanish government. These desires were framed by arguments of regional sovereignty, the will of the Catalan people, and the democratic right to vote at a referendum. In turn, centralists (Constitutionalists and monarchists) argued that the Catalan nationalist revival was the result of top-down indoctrination through the educational system, the media, and the activism of intellectuals;[1] that it aggressively promoted the Catalan language and identities at the expense of Spanish ones; that it was motivated by selfish capitalist accumulation at the expense of national solidarity; and that the referendum was illegal, as the Constitution prohibits regional referenda.

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[1] The idea of Catalanism being a top-down project percolating from the echelons of the high bourgeoisie, the universities, and the intellectuals into the lower classes is a very common trope in discussions about Catalonia, and a recurrent one, along with the presumed primacy of economic motivations for secessionism, in informal conversations with centrists, and in the media. In general, it has been noted that 'for most of the period since 2010, the perception of the Catalan movement from Madrid is that it is a top-down movement' (Dowling 2018, 161).

Many scholars and commentators have attempted to pin down the independentist surge in one or another factor. However, the current political quest is rather a multifaceted, stratified situation where three major types of factors aligned to change popular opinion: economic, political, and cultural. This alignment happened against, and sometimes drew from, a historical background wherein Catalonia has been reclaiming local liberties more or less intensively since at least 1714. Catalonia was again on the losing side after the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and spearheaded the 1975 Transition from the Franco dictatorship to the *España de las Autonomías*. The first two events feed into Catalan narratives of victimhood, and the third to narratives of being 'cheated' out of the promise of the Transition. These sensations and self-perceptions resurfaced at first slowly during the 1990s and the 2000s, then erupting in the years 2010s.

With the impending economic crisis and a relative regression as an economic centre, Catalonia aimed to pursue greater financial independence from Spain. The state's rejection of a *pacto fiscal* triggered debates over sovereignty in the political realm and grievances of identity, status, and recognition in the cultural realm, as well as issues related to growing migration, or rather immigration (Dowling 2014, 2018). In 2006, the Catalan government drafted and accepted a reformed Statute of Autonomy, whose main purpose was to gain broader competences in collecting taxes and managing finances. After four years of deliberation, however, the Spanish Supreme Court rejected the reformed Statute in 2010.

Many Catalans felt that the rejection was insulting in several ways. The rejection itself, as well as the grievances that it has triggered, are regarded as a watershed in the recent history of Catalonia and Catalanism. First, the court's time frame of four years of deliberation was seen excessive and dismissive of regional priorities. Second, the Supreme Court rejected a proposal that was widely supported among Catalans and the regional government, which generated a sense of frustration. Third, the rejection showed Madrid's intransigence in a crisis situation and its expectation that Catalonia would simply go along with its directions. Fourth, the Constitutional Court not only rejected the economic proposal, but responded that Catalonia, among others, may not call itself a 'nation' but only a 'nationality', as the first designation is reserved for Spain. The 2010 Supreme Court decision led to the first significant rally that floated the prospect of secession under the banner '*Som una nació, nosaltres decidim*' ('We are a nation, we decide'). Furthermore, Catalan secessionism was branded by centralists as economically driven, adding another layer of insult to injury, as it resonated with disdained stereotypes of Catalans as stingy, money-grubbing capitalists (Brandes 1990). This view insinuated that Catalonia was acting selfishly in a situation of crisis, against the solidarity principle and redistributive system of the Constitution. It also undermined Catalan arguments that independence was necessary precisely because they wanted a more just and solidary society.

The argument that Catalan *independentisme* is mostly driven by economic considerations has been questioned by multiple studies. Research shows that the economic crisis did not appear to have played a significant a role in the political process. Some studies found the contrary: that the perception of the economic situation and increased fiscal power positively correlated with the support of a 'yes' vote, and subsequent economic recovery did not diminish a secessionist voting preference (Bel et al 2019; Boylan 2015). Cuadras-Morató and Rodon (2019) called the so-called fiscal grievances 'the dog that didn't bark': they found that unemployment, the disappearance of jobs and firms, or income loss in different municipalities did not correspond to higher support for independence. Others argued that, rather than a cause, the fiscal argument was something of a rationalisation: identity and partisanship were more important drivers of support for independence, and economic motivations tended to impact ambivalent party and identity positions (Muñoz and Tormos 2015). In sum, questions of national identity and related grievances were more relevant for the emergence of secessionist sentiments (Prat i Guilanyà 2012), while pragmatic factors of fiscal autonomy, taxes, and regional sovereignty certainly resonate (Dowling 2018; Serrano 2013). For example, the populist narrative that '*Espanya ens roba*' ('Spain is robbing us') is an oft-cited general sentiment among independentists (Barrio et al 2018).

In the political realm, the rejection of the reformed Statute of Autonomy brought issues of sovereignty to the surface. The question of where sovereignty lies in the case of a conflict of interest, in the state or in the region, has been a significant ambiguity in the Constitution itself.[2] With Joan Resina (2017), one could call it the 'ghost' in the Spanish Constitution, as ambivalent definitions of sovereignty continue to haunt today. After the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, the new Constitution's main priority was the speedy transition to democracy before a potential relapse into dictatorship. This resulted in hasty drafting and an ambiguous statement of state vs regional sovereignties in 1978. The new Constitution aimed to strike a compromise between the supporters of a unitary state and those of a decentralised or federal state. The main contradiction lies in Article 2, which asserts the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, the common and indivisible country of all Spaniards, while it also recognises and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions. Finally, it guarantees solidarity among them all through its fiscal system of redistribution (Comas 2003). The result was a sort of hybrid constitutional and administrative system that Andrew Dowling has summarised as follows: 'The territorial model adopted in Spain has been termed "an imperfect or incomplete federation", "semi-federal", "a hybrid system of federalism and regionalism", "a federalising unitary state", a "covertly federal state" and a "quasi-federal" state model' (2018, 157, where also references to those who have formulated those terms over the years can be found).

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[2] This was not unlike the theoretical *and* practical questions that the Badinter Commission, established in 1991 to arbitrate between disputing parties in Yugoslavia, was supposed to answer, with consequences that are all too familiar.

The 2010 rejection of the reformed Statute of Autonomy brought into sharp relief the competing interpretations as to where sovereignty lay. The Constitutional Court found several issues with the 2006 draft, which conjured up old complaints of asymmetry and political verticalism. The decision generated a new complex of symbolic grievances and a painful conclusion about regional sovereignty:

> Jurists held that Catalonia could not call itself a 'nation' in the legal sense; could not give the Catalan language preferential status in public administration; could not shield already-devolved policy areas from future central-government involvement; could not unilaterally put a cap on what it paid into the central treasury; could not raise its own taxes; could not impose a floor below which central-government investments in the region would not be allowed to drop; and could not run its own justice system. While constitutional courts in other federal systems might well have ruled similarly, for Spain this decision marked the end of constitutional ambiguity: For the first time, the limits of regional autonomy had been authoritatively drawn. (Mueller 2019, 147)

Similarly, when it comes to the question of a referendum, competing interpretations about sovereignty prevail. Centralists argue that a region's self-determination is unconstitutional because Spain is indivisible, while independentists point at the wording that guarantees their autonomy. For centralists, Spain's indivisibility renders Catalonia's self-determination illegal. For independentists, their right to autonomy should make it legal.

Further political phenomena behind the secessionist shift have been identified in terms of 'a series of cooperation failures' (Mueller 2019, 151): between competing and in-fighting Catalan parties, between the Catalan and Spanish governments, and between the Catalan government and other autonomous communities (Colomer 2017; Dowling 2018). *Pactisme*, Catalonia's historical consensus-seeking attitude that worked so well for and during the Transition (Desfor Edles 1999) failed now. Mueller traces political impasses to the so-called 'majoritarian democracy' (Mueller 2019). As opposed to a 'consensus democracy', decisions in a majoritarian democracy depend on simple majority.

On the one hand, this led to the cancellation of the voice of a substantial minority. On the other hand, it produced absurd outcomes: in 2017, after an illegal referendum, then president Puigdemont declared Catalonia's independence and suspended it eight seconds later. Independentists too realised that a popular vote of a simple majority was not enough for such a substantial transition and that a more generalised consensus-building was necessary.

The Constitutional Court's decision that Catalonia may not call itself a 'nation' but only a 'nationality' was seen as proof of vertical power relations where regional identities and languages were ranked lower than centralist ones in the cultural realm. This, again, evoked a series of grievances that have constituted historical memory and a Catalan 'mythscape' (Crameri 2012): the loss of autonomy to the Bourbon monarchy in 1714, the loss of the Civil War to Franco (which powerfully resurfaced in the debate around the Salamanca papers), and even losing out on the Transition, as it was now experienced. Burg summarised the independentist turn as 'reform, recognition, and resentment' (2015, 290) and argues that the fervour for independence will diminish with greater recognition of the status of Catalonia. Bel summarised the same as 'disdain, distrust and dissolution': he argues that the tendency toward schism is owing to deep-rooted negative stereotypes about and hostility to Catalans state-wide and what Catalans feel as a lack of respect.

Finally, in the cultural camp, most attention has revolved around language. As Dominic Keown has noted, 'in the case of Catalonia, language, culture and politics were inseparable and would remain so evermore' (2011c, 36). Language has in fact been a primary tool in the development, articulation, and expression of Catalanism, Catalan nationalism, and Catalan independentism; no wonder that language has always been considered a 'site of political struggle' (Dowling 2018, 48).

The above-mentioned issues often revolve around the proverbial elephant in the room already evoked in this Introduction: nationalism. The object of 'continued condemnations […] as evil' (Llobera 1994, ix), nationalism has been often associated with – and reduced to – the extreme nationalist currents that developed especially during the first half of the 20th century, with their blatant ethnocentric and racist ideological axioms and policies. But that is only part of the story nationalism has to tell, although certainly the most tragic one. Less discussed in the scholarship is, for example, the role of nationalism in the construction of the idea of human and collective rights, in the birth and development of modern democracies and welfare states, and as the foundation of anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements of liberation (Majumdar 2007, 111–126; Smith 2013). Catalan nationalism has been traditionally distinguished from the Basque one, for example, for its culturalist rather than ethnicist terms (Conversi 1997) and has been broadly considered as cultural or civic (Llobera 2004) and inclusive (Testa this book), i.e., a mostly 'emancipatory' movement aimed at addressing the 'democratic deficit' experienced as a result of Spanish rule (Guibernau 2014, 2013). Lately, however, the question of whether there was an 'ethnicity bias' (Vergés-Gifra and Macià Serra 2022) in the current movement as a result of Catalan language promotion, or as centrists would say, indoctrination, has arisen. This recent view goes against the more broadly established scholarship claiming that the ethnicist component in Catalan nationalism has always been minor compared to its culturalist component.

The *resistencialisme* and *normalització* tradition in culture and language policies have had their discontents and ambiguities since the Transition (Colom-Montero 2021). Recently, studies have confirmed that in the current secessionist turn the Catalan language has been a main identity marker, but parties did not use it for 'ethnic outbidding' (Sanjaume-Calvet and Riera-Gil 2022). Rather than a sign of ethnicist authenticity, the Catalan language is increasingly serving a purpose of civil discourse and cosmopolitanism (Byrne 2020; Woolard 2016). Most independentists have realised that not only is monolingualism practically unachievable, but it would at any rate not achieve their objectives, and they have been actively seeking the involvement of Spanish-speaking immigrants in Catalonia's national debate (Argelaguet 2021).

Besides language, cultural politics and heritage have also been an important terrain of Catalanist revival. This book explores how the political emerges in Catalonia's popular culture, heritage-making process, and festival squares during the years of the recent territorial crisis, and how popular culture both reflects and constructs the political shift towards independentism. It also shows how, contrariwise, the cultural and the performative dimensions emerge from the political one, for these spheres can hardly be disentangled in contemporary Catalonia. Therefore, this book aims to provide up-to-date insights into the politics of culture in a fast-changing political environment, and therefore to fill in a lacuna in the scholarship. Indeed, until recently, in Catalan studies 'the fields of history and linguistics [have been] much over-studied when compared to, say, gastronomy, sport, and festivals' (Keown 2011b, 9). We have tried to strike a balance.

POST-TRANSITION TRANSFORMATIONS IN POPULAR AND REGIONAL CULTURE

The profound changes that have occurred since the Transition may be summarised through five major developments: the proliferation of associations; the reappropriation of 'the street', that is, the public sphere; the integration or greater participation and visibility of women; the gentrification and heritagisation of popular culture, including the impact of tourism; and the progressive politicisation of popular culture, including its pro-independence manifestations.

The Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) controlled almost all facets of life in Spain, including popular culture. Regional languages were outlawed, and customs and traditions were only tolerated as long as they did not foster regional nationalism and were compatible with Franco's ideals of national Catholicism. The evidence and literature on these aspects are abundant. Symptomatic of Francoist control of the public sphere was the reaction of Manuel Fraga, former Tourism and Information Minister, with his phrase '*La calle es mía*' ('the street is mine') in response to complaints about police repression and the banning of rallies. Towards the later years of the dictatorship, the grip of Francoist repression ultimately loosened in different social sectors, from the economy to culture and education. Catalan culture and Catalanist consciousness burst forth with new energies after the death of the Caudillo. Not only was Francoist repression a failure, but it also probably had the opposite effect of strengthening, by reaction, Catalan language and culture (Dowling 2018, 6–29; Keown 2011a, 2011b; Llobera 2004, 58–110; Sánces-Biosca 2007).

The Transition responded with calls and movements of '*sortir al carrer*' ('go out onto the streets') and the reclamation of public space for the purposes of free expression and public use (MacClancy 2014; Ofer 2017). This period was described as 'the public occupation of the street, cultural effervescence, sexual tolerance, the appearance of a series of leisure spaces, [and] the everyday practice of newfound liberty' (Carles Feixa quoted in Noyes 2011, 215). Catalonia rekindled its old traditions and penchant for associational culture or *associacionisme*, which has traditionally made space for cultural and political rearticulation 'through notions of participation, community, and self-expression' (Dowling 2018, 31). The Transition witnessed the emergence of thousands of neighbourhood associations with social, cultural, political, or leisure goals. The '*recuperació*' or 'recovery' of popular festivals was an important step towards granting popular agency to young people, who had been at the margins of politics. Over the years, popular culture has become a source of sovereignty and local empowerment (Dowling 2010, 101; Kammerer 2014; Noyes 2011; Testa in this book).

The Transition ushered in modern and, among others, feminist ideas and the revision and change of gender roles. Under Franco, women's roles had been largely reduced to domestic ones as wives and mothers who raised patriotic children for the state's National Catholic agenda (Gómez Amat 2007). Women's presence in the festival *plaça*, the paradigmatic public sphere, was largely reduced to spectatorship or auxiliary chores while men were the protagonists of cultural performances (Pink 1997).

The Transition changed traditional gender arrangements, and women became increasingly integrated, as actors, in the performances of popular culture. Traditional *colles* and *comparses*, which were eminently masculine and were formed and performed during carnivals and carnivalesque, but also religious, festivals, opened up to the active participation of women. Women's integration in popular performance genres affected wide-ranging feminist questions such as women's 'place' and public visibility, leadership roles, and conceptualisations of women's bodies and physical abilities.

Women's greater participation coincided with the general gentrification of popular culture in terms of social class, heritage-making, and tourism. The middle classes and professionals were attracted to, and spearheaded, the organisation of practices that fostered the revival of Catalan culture after Francoism. The intensification of tourism in Spain in general, its branding as sun, sand, and sea, Catalonia's *costa brava* and *costa daurada*, the wholesale transformation of Barcelona for the 1992 Olympic Games, and its thriving sport and cultural life, turned the region into a top European tourist destination. Partly as a response to the market that tourism created, heritage regimes affected the general regularisation and institutionalisation of popular culture, a process that has been profusely studied in Europe (Testa 2021). Catalonia's UNESCO Intangible Heritage titles include the *Patum* festival of Berga (granted in 2005), the ancient Pyrenees fire festival *Fallas* (2015), and the human tower-building, *Castells* (2010) (Llosa 2014; del Mármol Cartañà and Roigé Ventura 2014; Vaczi 2023). Before the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and its adoption and ratification by Spain (2006), other, national heritage denominations and cataloguing existed: up until the end of the 1970s, several Catalan festivals were on the Spanish list of *Fiestas de Interés Turístico Nacional* (in Spanish). From the early 1989s, this denomination was taken over by a corresponding Catalan scheme, recognising the *Festes tradicionals d'interès nacional* (reclassified in 2009 as *Festes patrimonials d'interès nacional*). In the last three decades, this labelling has proliferated, becoming an important part of the cultural and heritage policies of the Generalitat (del Mármol Cartañà and Roigé Ventura 2014).

Heritagisation, however, poses its own dilemmas. At the supra-national level, while these titles yield prestige and potentially help energise declining practices, they also move agency away from local practitioners to global decision-makers (Noyes 2016), as some of the case studies in this book will reveal. Within Spanish borders, it seems evident that since the 1990s 'heritage has become a source of low intensity conflict between Madrid and Barcelona' (Dowling 2018, 49).

In recent years, popular *festes* and the public sphere have become increasingly politicised as pro-independence feelings have expanded in Catalonia (Kammerer 2014; Noyes 2003, 2016; but see especially the chapters in this volume). *Catalanisme*, a feeling of local attachment and the promotion of Catalan language and culture had been proper to these spheres. But *catalanisme* is not consubstantial with *independentisme*; it is possible to be *catalanista* while wanting to remain part of Spain. The two national flags, the *senyera* and the *estelada*, also express the difference. The *estelada*, which began to be used in the 1970s, is typically flown by supporters of independence; the *senyera*, which is one of the oldest flags in Europe, may be flown by people of both pro-independence sentiments or just regional attachment without the desire to secede.

After the death of Franco and during the Transition, the Catalan national days (*Diada*) were mostly celebrated in the spirit of both *catalanisme* and unionism: '*ser y estar*' (in Spanish), that is, to be Catalan and be part of Spain (Humlebæk and Hau 2020). After 2010, regionalist *catalanisme* was substituted or complemented by *independentisme*. In 2005, only 15% of Catalans wanted the region to become independent; in 2015, the region elected its first pro-independence government with a popular vote of 48%. In 2021, the pro-independence coalition formed the government with more than 50% of the votes. This political shift was increasingly visible in the festival public sphere as pro-independence flags and messages populated the streets and town squares. The strengthening of pro-independence, mostly (but not exclusively) leftist politics appealed to many actors of popular culture, which has important roots in urban working-class sociality as well as in rural and provincial traditions. At the same time, middle-class and professional segments became attracted to Catalanist practices that, as cultural heritage, had assumed greater social and cultural prestige.

CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY CATALONIA: OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

The ethnographic loci of this collection include festivals such as Josa de Cadí and the Solsona carnival (among others) and other important features of Catalan culture such as gastronomy, the traditional sport and cultural performance called *castells*, and the *correbous* bull runs. Their focus runs from the Pyrenees in the north to the river Ebro in the south, two geographical borderlands that occupy an important place in the national imagination. The chapters reveal, through the lenses of culture, the idiosyncrasies of the current, distinctive era in Catalan politics. They variously address the emergence, transformation, and contestation of identities; they identify not just desires, but some dilemmas, contradictions, and fears when it comes to the politicisation of culture. This book problematises such concepts as 'nationhood', 'inclusion', 'integration', 'authenticity', 'belonging', and 'identity' in contemporary Catalonia. It highlights and interprets power relations as local actors interact with cultural policy-makers, heritage regimes, and political entities.

Whether considered as history, ritual continuity, or tradition, the past is the quintessential symbolic matter shaped and used for identity production and reproduction. So it is in the many case studies analysed in this entire volume, and so it is in Camila del Mármol's chapter focusing on the Cathar past and/as the Catalan past in the region of the Catalan Pyrenees. The Cathar presence in the 12–13th century in the Catalan Pyrenees, and its national myths of democracy, feminism, enlightenment, and egalitarianism, became part of a project that Mármol calls the 'imagining of independence'. Intersecting and mutually reinforcing pasts are ritually reunited in the festival of Josa de Cadí, which also offers the opportunity, del Mármol observes, to express and mediate local, regional, and national identities, while at the same time allowing the local communities to imagine possible futures, in a situation of present hardships and transformations.

In this study we see at work, again, the complex interplay of the local with the general and the regional with the national. We are also given to understand the role of tourism in the adaptation, reinforcement, and reproduction of the Cathar past and the set of narratives centred on it. Hence, identity politics, the politics of culture, the tourist economy, and demographic factors (also explored in the chapter) blend together as important socio-cultural components of the Catalan *procés*, in and for which the transmission of discourses and narratives plays a role as important as the ritual practices that foster their embodiment.

Mariann Vaczi's chapter explores sensory forms of belonging and citizenship (see Manning 2007; Trnka et al 2013; Vaczi and Watson 2021) and asserts that the nation may be not only imagined, but also embodied. Human tower-building (*castells*) is a 200-year-old tradition at the intersections of folklore, rituality, and sport (Erickson 2011; Vaczi 2016, 2023; Weig 2015). Originating from the south of Catalonia, the practice has survived the Franco dictatorship, revived during the Transition, and boomed in the 21st century. Today, as a basic function of neighbourhood integration and associational culture, more than a hundred teams build 15,000 towers a year across the festival squares of Catalonia. This spectacular success is owing to various factors: the integration of women in the 1980s, the gentrification of the practice and its expansion to the middle classes, the desire to reclaim Catalan culture in the wake of the Franco regime, and the thrill and breathtaking athleticism of these human formations.

Human towers have lent the current pro-independence movement image, social base, and vocabulary. The iconic imagery of building lends itself easily to linkages with nation-building, and dozens of human tower teams participate at Catalonia's national days (*Diadas*) each year, vindicating the right to vote. 'Making a base' (*fer pinya*), a human tower base, which relies on body diversity and body count, has become a frequently used neologism for 'making a country', and rallying diverse segments of the population behind the cause of independence.

Vaczi traces the body performances of Catalan nationalism and takes performance for the somatisation of political desires, dilemmas, and risks. The salience of *castells* for the current *procés* lies in the practice's meanings as myth and allegory in what Walter Benjamin would call a 'dialectic image' (see Buck-Morss 1989). Vaczi unpacks the narratives built in the representational process of this traditional sport and the insights they yield into the Catalan independence movement.

An increasing volume of food studies has created linkages between gastronomy, commensality, and politics in Spain (Lesh 2009; MacClancy 2007) and beyond. Venetia Johannes shows that the nation may be not only imagined and embodied, but also tasted. She traces the expression of Catalanness through food across centuries through three basic channels: cookbooks, national dishes, and the gastronomic calendar. Food and commensality in Catalonia have been a means of enculturation, community-making, and political resistance.

Johannes argues that, starting with the Middle Ages and across the Catalan Renaixança, cookbooks had a 'dual role': they were not only cooking manuals, but also important records of Catalan language and culture. In the early 20th century, as *catalanisme* emerged as a distinct political identity, some cookbooks were explicitly linked with Catalan nationhood. Images of the 'native land' and the 'hearth' were symbolically connected, to the point of 'glorifying cuisine as a rallying point' of Catalan nationalism. During the Francoist repression (1936–1939) of regional languages and cultures, the re-edition of cookbooks in Catalan in the 1960s and 1970s became an unexpected source of cultural resistance and language maintenance. They became part of private Catalan language libraries people kept, sometimes secretly, at home.

In Catalan cuisine, sauces and stews may be interpreted as symbols of Catalan identity and national character. Foodstuffs and their preparation reflect an openness and adventurousness that Catalonia has claimed as its own as an open and modern nation. Basic sauces may be added to any dish to 'Catalanise' them, and stews are expressions of rural simplicity and frugality. Johannes too links cuisine to the ubiquitous 'national' character *seny*: Catalan national dishes reflect a sensible, rational, down-to-earth attitude, thriftiness, and a practical approach to life in their simplicity and frugality. In the current pro-independence context, Johannes highlights that the politicisation of cuisine is visible, but also reluctant. After all, food is so ubiquitous that it cannot be appropriated by a single ideology.

Bull sports in Spain have long been politicised due to their associations with the Spanish state as its *fiesta nacional* (Abrisketa and Abrisketa 2020;

Brandes 2009; Douglass 1984). Manuel Delgado, Romina Martínez Alguero, and Sarai Martín López discuss the Catalan bull run (*correbous*) as a site where heritage, identity, and mainstream, institutionally endorsed forms of Catalanness are contested. The *correbous* is celebrated in the south of Catalonia, in the Ebro river delta. Its various modalities may feature a calf, ox, or cow released in the street or in the sea; the animal may wear a fireball on its horns or partake in exhibition and skills competitions. Unlike in the Spanish bullfight, the animal is not killed at the end.

The southern, Ebro region of Catalonia has witnessed a conspicuous increase in *correbous* events in recent years. In 2011, 208 bull runs were celebrated, and in 2018, this number was 439. The increase is all the more conspicuous because there is a contrary trend in Catalonia: a marked withdrawal from bull sports and the Spanish *fiesta nacional*. Catalonia's banning of the Spanish bullfight in 2010 was a political move of distancing the region itself from 'backward' Spain, and the region's bullrings have been converted into malls or the home of more 'politically correct' practices such as, famously, the biannual human towers championship *Concurs*.

The resurgence of the *correbous* in the southernmost corner of Catalonia runs counter to the general tendencies of mainstream Catalan nationalism. 'Hegemonic Catalanness', as the authors name it, was consolidated under the 23-year post-Franco rule (1980–2003) of the centre-right Democratic Convergence (CDC) party and its leader Jordi Pujol and espouses a Catalanness that is civic, open to dialogue, has a moderate temperament (*seny*), and endorses language as a core marker of identity. As such, it rejects violence of any kind. The *correbous*, in turn, came to signify 'the other "Catalanness"', one that runs counter to institutionally sanctioned expressions of identity and Catalanism. The Ebro bull runs claim the recognition of cultural plurality within Catalonia and contest the homogenising tendencies of mainstream nationalist politics and heritage regimes.

Alessandro Testa's sibling chapters centre upon public rituality in the *comarca* of Solsonès in central Catalonia, outlining the sagas of its major regional festival and the actors that play a role in it. In these two chapters, Testa opens up a window onto how the socio-cultural dimensions of ritual life, group and supra-individual configurations, collective forms of participation, the local political order, and regional/national identity construction interact and interweave in the public arenas of a central Catalonian town, which is also compared with other kin or close Catalan contexts. He does so by blending theoretical speculation and empirically (i.e., ethnographically) informed, thickly-described evidence.

The two essays also explain how these dimensions have changed along with and due to the general politics of culture in Catalonia during the Transition, in particular about folklore and festive culture, and how such changes have escalated since the 2010s.

Different forms and aspects of 'Catalanness' are therein distinguished and problematised as components and vehicles of national identity, nationhood and nationality, nationalism and Catalanism, and finally Catalan independentism. How are these different attitudes and perspectives negotiated, contested, or reproduced through and during those 'denser' moments of hyper-socialisation that festivals and public rituals create? How do representations and practices of nationhood and nationalism, and other matters national identity is made of, coalesce over, and because of, such moments of hyper-socialisation? And do they struggle or collide with other ethnic, national, and religious identities, in spite of Catalanism being generally considered an inclusive and progressive kind of nationalism?

By interpreting the symbolic and ritualised stratagems and dynamics through which national identity is constructed and vehiculated, in particular through the cultural works of the *comparses* (festive semi-formal groups) and the Catalan language, Testa demonstrates how incorporated, transmitted, and 'familiarised' behavioural forms of collective action allow the local society to reproduce social and political patterns of belonging and identity assertion. Therefore, a strong case is made for how the microcosmos of Solsona's central-Catalonian popular culture becomes a veritable matrix, but also a mirror, through which the macrocosm of Catalan national identity is both manufactured and reflected.

Given this richness of public sociality, the Covid-19 pandemic hit Mediterranean cultures such as the Catalan particularly hard. Presence, body proximity, and touch lend these cultures their human warmth, and they were now a potential source of illness and death. Public sociality, festivals, commensality, and performances came to a halt for the sake of that rather foreign notion, social distancing. Mármol and Vaczi's papers briefly address how the pandemic affected festival and performance genres; Xavier Roigé, Mireia Guil, and Lluís Bellas devote their entire chapter to a more systematic analysis of how public sociality responded to the pandemic.

Xavier Roigé, Mireia Guil, and Lluís Bellas explore the timely topic of how changing festival practices under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic affected public life and discourses in post-referendum Catalonia. The chapter mobilises a number of ethnographic examples to explore these transformations, arguing that the pandemic has added yet another layer of complexity to an already structured and stratified situation in which identity concerns, political claims, practices of heritage, and adaptations of traditions have been intersecting for years.

Adaptations, improvisations, and veritable new cultural creations have also taken place through the newly available media, fostering a 'digitalisation' of festive events and electronic forms of cultural resilience that are indeed interesting phenomena *per se*. These changes may also be considered, the authors suggest, as modes of resolution of the rising conflicts between the logic of the lockdowns and the logic of festivities – and collective phenomena in the public sphere more generally, one might add.

The authors also show how the Covid-19 situation seems to have exacerbated issues of identity and politics (at any rate typically Catalan) reflected and negotiated in the festive rituals. At the same time, the pandemic has also triggered debates about authenticity and the appropriateness of certain means for transmitting local traditions, as well as the relationship between localities and the state and the legitimacy of forms of resistance and transgression in order to guarantee the ritual reproduction of communal life in spite of adverse contingencies.

These different themes, problems, and perspectives are wrapped up in the afterword by folklorist and anthropologist Dorothy Noyes, the author of the ground-breaking ethnographic monograph about Catalonia, *Fire in the Plaça* (Noyes 2003), which is based on a long and intensive period of fieldwork the author undertook between the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. This book is now rightly considered a classic. Noyes also turned her attention to Catalonia in several follow-up studies and has been a close observer of the development of Catalan matters for over three decades.