

SUMMARY

History, Manipulation and Trauma. Catalonia: A Case History

The author undertakes an analysis of the narrative of Catalonia's past, in particular where it concerns its relations with Spain which, in the Catalan discourse, happen to be presented in a way that moulds historical awareness of Catalans in terms of injustices the nation has suffered. Focusing on "victimhood" makes it possible to forge a sense of community by celebrating historical trauma. Consequently, we are dealing not so much with history as critical reflection on the past, but with a history of memory. The trauma underpinning memory and identity is due to such historical events as the Compromise of Caspe (1412), the Reapers' War (1640–1652) and the capitulation of Barcelona in 1714. The author seeks to find out how Catalan researchers who – using Ernst Cassirer's terminology – may be described as "adept and cunning artificers" and avail themselves of mythologization and deceit to transform historical events into symbols of distinctiveness and separatism. Such practices stem from conceiving Catalan history as inherently traumatic. It is thus claimed that throughout its history Catalonia had been subjugated by Castile, then Spain, while the suppression of their independence bid is its most recent manifestation. Formulated from such a standpoint, the texts within that discourse are a repository of emotion and sentiment rather than knowledge, while their authors become peculiar "manufacturers" of the trauma. Relying on the concepts advanced by Dominic LaCapra, the author demonstrates that the events that fuel the discourse of history – the defeat of 1714 in particular – have transformed into a particular interpretive trope that assumes the shape of a spectre of the past that haunts the Catalan community.

The discourse analysed here yields a Manichean vision of history, in which Castile/Spain is antithetical to Catalonia. In such a form, the discourse strives to reconstruct the core of the nationalist political project, which is why it may be termed a "strategic discourse". A substantial contribution is made here by Catalan intellectuals, including historians, who blur the difference between "absence" (of what has never been) and "loss" (of what once used to be there). While – as the author of *Writing History. Writing*

Trauma asserts – loss is thoroughly natural for any historical past, the past in the Catalan discourse is approached in terms of absence. Specifically, it is the independence that Catalonia arguably enjoyed in the Middle Ages and of which it was subsequently deprived. The problem is that one cannot lose what has not existed previously or was anything but a historical fact. Consequently, not loss but absence is at stake, or more precisely independence that should be there but has failed to materialize, yet it is considered restorable. The confusion it engenders as a result disrupts the temporal order (what was once, as imagined, becomes that which one longs for now) and distorts the image of the past; moreover, blame for the alleged loss is projected onto others. The latter, as LaCapra underlines, implies looking for a “scapegoat” that the Catalan discourse finds in Castile/Spain.

The author argues that, due to the devices of the “experts on past”, the concept of trauma is used and abused in Catalonia, so as to dictate – in a top-down fashion – how past should be remembered and perceived. Practicing history in this manner has more to do with politics than science. For this reason, the book attempts to demystify the manipulated discourse which does Catalan history – a dramatic one, no doubt – a disservice instead of working to its advantage as it asserts. Reducing almost the entire history of Catalonia and the relations with Castile/Spain to propagandistically exaggerated Catalanophobia, it presents Catalans with their own history narrated from the perspective of an enslaved nation, paradoxically becoming a “colonizing” discourse which instills a negative stereotype of themselves and foments hatred of Spain. Simultaneously, less and less space is left for the double consciousness, facing Catalans with the necessity of making an unequivocal choice between Catalanness and Spanishness.

Thus delineated, the goal of inquiry and the methodological approach are reflected in the structure of the book which, next to introduction and conclusions, consists of three chapters and includes a bibliography. In Chapter One, entitled *The Catalan Disease of the Past*, the author focuses on showing the role of history in the Catalan nationalist discourse to reconstruct the premises of the Catalan *fet diferencial*, a point of departure for underscoring differences between Catalans and Castilians/the Spanish. It is argued that Catalan identity has been founded on a manipulated vision of the past, which is now shared by a majority of Catalans. This is the aftermath of nationalization of history, a process which began already in the late 19th and the early 20th century to become even more elaborate and intense under Jordi Pujol. The author observes that the nationalization process goes back to the legend of Wilfred the Hairy (Cat. Guifré el Pilós) and the stories of independent Catalonia in the medieval period, associated with the figure of Borrell II. The analysis delves into the works of the foremost names in Catalan culture, philosophy, or history, such as Enric Prat de la Riba, Antoni Rovira i Virgili, Valentí Almirall, Pere Màrtir Rossell i Vilà, Josep Ferrater Mora, and Jaume Vicens Vives. The Reader can thus see that distortions of

Catalonia's past are a widespread practice and a matter of course. In this context, the author studies the examples of metaphorized narratives and the principal strategies of narration.

In Chapter Two, *Manipulating the past as a "praxis"*, critical analysis concentrates on those past events which tend to be most often mythologized and manipulated in the Catalan historical discourse. The events serve as markers of the Catalan difference on the one hand, but they are also perceived as psychological injuries, wounds that have not healed and exacerbate due to the current policies of the government in Madrid, which prevent Catalans from fulfilling their yearnings and aspirations, whilst drawing largely on the historical contexts. Some of the key moments include the ascent of the Castilian house Trastámara to the throne of Aragon in 1412: the onset of Catalonia's existence under the Castilian yoke in the shape of a foreign dynasty; the policy pursued in Catalonia by Ferdinand the Catholic and Charles I; the Reapers' War of 1640, which resulted in the first Catalan secession under French protectorate and culminated in the return to Castile/Spain in 1652; the War of the Spanish Succession of 1714, the watershed in the discourse of Catalan nationalists and certain historians who presume it to have been a war of Catalonia against Spain; finally, there is the controversy surrounding national heroes of Catalonia: Rafael Casanova and Josep Moragues.

Two kinds of publications and public discourses concerned with the past of Catalonia are subject to interpretation and critique in Chapter Three, entitled *Catalan counter- and pseudohistories or the myth of the therapeutic narrative*. First, these are the works of Catalan authors which unfold an alternative, radically anti-Castilian vision of the historical relation between Catalonia and Castile/Spain, most notably the studies of historians such as Fèlix Cucurull and Josep Maria Batista i Roca, who argue that Catalonia was colonized by Castile/Spain. Secondly, the author undertakes a critical assessment and deconstructs the works by Josep Fontana, Jaume Sobrequés i Callicó and Jordi Bilbeny, who resort to evident manipulation, lies, deliberate omissions and confabulated historical facts in order to eulogize Catalonia in all its glory and greatness, legitimize its distinct nature and uniqueness as well as show its history in the spirit of victimhood. Here, the author also draws on the syntheses of Catalan history, monographs devoted to particular historical events and figures, or materials from the notorious conference entitled "Spain Against Catalonia: A Historical Approach (1714–2014)", to demonstrate that both counter-histories and pseudohistories produce one and the same outcome: having taken root in the social space of Catalonia, they achieve similar ontological status.

In the conclusions, the author underlines that the Catalan historical discourse is characterized by the excess of the so-called historical sense – referred to in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche – which causes history to be no longer useful to life but grow downright harmful. Its ahistorical

and manipulated constructs make Catalans experience history as a burden, a baggage from which the disease of the past develops. As it is, the Catalan historical discourse does little to foster knowledge of the past but, on the contrary, it is a peculiar kind of writing history against history. Putting it bluntly, it eradicates history.