

# "Long live the Reign of Spain"

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Impressive. It is impressive how much a foreigner can feel the nationalism of a country which is hosting him/her just for a few months. I am the perfect example of this weird situation: spending my 5-months of Erasmus+ program in Madrid, I am learning to love madrileños, their tradition, their history, their typical food...briefly the whole country.

Walking around the city as a tourist, in the first days of my permanence here in the Spanish capital, my attention was immediately captured by a recurrent symbol that came to my eyes, every time I raised my head: in almost every single window or balcony on the façade of the buildings around, not only the ones in the city centre but also in those more peripheral areas, a flag moved by the wind dangled over the people in the street.

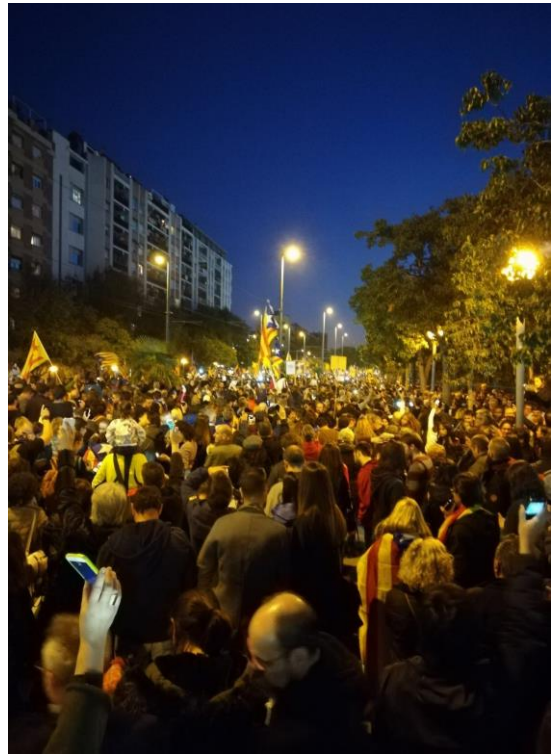
When I looked at these numerous flags, I remembered from the high school, where I studied Spanish literature and culture:

*"With the blood of a warrior and the first ray of sunshine, God made a flag and gave it to a Spaniard."*

It is a relatively famous popular chant that thoroughly sums up the vital attachment, the indissoluble bond between the Rojigualda, the Spanish flag, and the Spaniards. This red and yellow piece of cloth that here in Madrid you can easily see is a coffer that encloses the Spanish history and tradition, a reincarnation of the Spanish proud, forged by ten centuries of history, from the Moors to the Golden Age, from the Habsburgs to the Reconquista.

On the other hand, it may therefore not be surprising that, since the early-twenties, when the Spanish dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera effectively suppressed the first unilateral proclamation of independence of the never born Catalan Republic, the soul of the Catalan independence supporter has been encased in a different flag: the Estelada Blava. The design of the Estelada comprises the red-and-yellow bars of the Senyera, with the addition of a five-pointed star, symbol of the Catalan desire of deciding their own future as a free and independent folk, in a triangle at the hoist. For sure you will not see this flag anywhere in Madrid; indeed when I went to Barcelona for a weekend in November 2017, I was strongly hit by the view of millions of people, literally wearing the Catalan flag, symbol of another people, another language, another history, another will: it was clear, those people want independence.

Since the end of the dictatorship and the consequent enactment of the Constitution, backed by 2,7 millions of Catalans (the 91,09% of the voters), defined Catalunya as part of one of the most decentralized systems in the world in terms of decision-making power.



Picture 1 - Manifestation for Catalan independence (Barcelona, 11/11/17)

Through the Article 2 of the Constitution, in fact, Spain recognizes "nationalities" and "regions", within the context of "the Spanish nation", enhancing the distinct traditional regional identities of Basques, Catalans, Galicians, Cantabrians and Castilians, among others.

This epochal turn de facto sedated the sentiment of independence and sent in lethargy every discussion about a free Catalunya for at least twenty-five years. With the starting of the new Millennium various independent parties rose again, moved from what Sigmund Freud called "the narcissism of minor differences"; the equally minor differences that saw Norway break away from Sweden in 1904, or Slovakia peacefully secede from Czechoslovakia in 1993.



Picture 2 - Spanish flag on the facade of Teatre Barcelò (Madrid, 15/11/2017)

Over the years Catalunya's wealth attracted so many people from other parts of Spain that now 46% of the population mainly speaks Spanish.

The Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia of 2006, that gave the Generalitat of Catalonia the powers which enable it to carry out the functions of self-government, didn't appease the bother of Catalan people; the discomfort for the fact that so many Spanish-speakers have immigrated to Catalonia and to be, in some sense "forced" to share some of their wealth with poorer parts of Spain.

Therefore, the conflict broke inexorably out.

Catalan Independent parties, strongly supported by the 37 per cent of mainly Catalan-speakers, quickly emerged from hibernation and in 2015 managed to obtain the relative majority inside the Generalitat Catalan; this dramatically sped up the fight for independence through aggressive politics that dealt to the notorious Referendum of the 1st October 2017.



Picture 3 – Mariano Rajoy y Carles Puigdemont

The rest is already history: with a clever strategy ("Nice strategy. Shame about the mess." the comment of the journalist Gwynne Dier) Puigdemont succeeded in pointing the reflector of the foreign media coverage on Catalunya. It is no longer just an internal matter; Catalunya received the support of some independent European movements: from the Lega in Italy to Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland and the Flemish Independent Parties.

Vinaròs, the first town of the autonomous community of Valencia is just 10 km away from Alcanar, the first Catalan town, but it somehow appears now that a small ridge divides the two small villages; Catalan and Spanish have never been so distant before: Rajoy armed the "Nuclear Option", the broad and forceful Article 155 that ousted the Catalan leader, Carles Puigdemont. The native of Amer, a small town almost at the border with France, answered declaring unilaterally independence; the president of the

Generalitat Catalana, named Carles as a tribute to his grandfather, who tragically disappeared in the Spanish Civil War in 1943, is now the demiurge of the State of Catalunya.

The small ridge between Spain and Catalunya became a gargantuan chasm, the wave of independentism drowns Spain, reaching Madrid, the Stronghold of the Spanish proud. The answer of the hearth of Spain was immediate: "Long live the Reign of Spain" echoes from Puerta del Sol to Palacio Real; the Capital is with Rajoy, with its legalistic and stiff line. Madrid became a colossal Rojigualda, quintessence of the patriotism, from every window, every terrace flutters the Spanish flag; the wind of independence that overturned Barcelona hasn't arrived in Madrid.

When I come back from university, get off the train in Sol -exactly where I live- and after climbing the subway stairs I found myself in the middle of an anti-Catalan independence manifestation it arises a sort of direct awareness about the immensity of this matter. Those people will keep fighting, screaming and crying in the name of their country.

If you ask to the Madrilenian it seems like a *deja-vu*, the air they breathe in Madrid nowadays recalls the one after the 28 June 2010, when the Constitutional Court of Spain assessed the constitutionality of several articles of the Law, rewriting 14 of them and dictating the interpretation for 27 more; decisive moment for the rebirth of the Independentism in Catalunya. The continuous refusal to discuss Catalan autonomy, the irremovable position of the PP, the lack of dialogue dealt to what seems the point of no return; now more than never Spain and Catalunya may take two diametrically opposite roads. The anticipate elections may be a Band-Aid and partially restore the wound, but an opening to more right from Rajoy is, at this point, inevitable.

As far as Madrilenian are concerned, they will continue their silent battle with the Catalan; the Spanish flags will remain hung, like a second skin, out of the buildings. At the end of the day the Rojigualda is untouchable and will not change, with or without Catalunya.

*Martina Miracapillo*