

The Catalan independence movement has been more 'emotionally' driven than its Scottish equivalent

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*Scotland is due to hold an independence referendum in September 2014, while independence supporters in Catalonia recently held a mass demonstration in favour of the territory's independence from Spain. **Luis Moreno** compares the two independence movements, noting that while the Scottish referendum campaign has been dominated by practical issues such as the economic impact of independence, the Catalan debate has tended to be more emotionally driven and linked to identity.*



What similarities and differences are there between the Catalan and Scottish political contexts? It is worth underlining the erroneous prescriptions put forward by the functionalist and Marxist schools of thought about these two territories. These approaches insisted that both territories were failed national communities which were bound to disappear. Such assertions have been repeatedly falsified in contemporary times. Far from being homogenised and dissolved within the British and Spanish polities, Scotland and Catalonia now face a possible – and plausible – future of political independence.

According to the agreement reached by the British Government and the Scottish Executive, Scotland is to hold a referendum on independence on 18 September, 2014. Recent polls indicate that a majority of people are against secession. Around half of Scots are against independence, almost a third of Scots are in favour of separation, and a little less than a fifth are undecided. Figures have fluctuated in the last months, but have persistently shown a majority of Scots expressing a 'No' vote.

Greater volatility is to be expected as the date of the referendum approaches. In the period closer to the referendum day, transfers of votes between the two camps could be important and even decisive. Let us remember the case of the [Quebec Referendum](#) in 1995. Early surveys indicated that two thirds of the population were against independence, but the final referendum produced a margin of only 77,000 votes in favour of staying a part of Canada (from an electorate of around 5 million voters).

It could well be that a majority of Scots oppose independence because arguments against the "Yes" vote prevail in the year ahead (there has been, however, a substantial increase in support for independence among young voters aged between 18 and 24).

Until now, the debate on independence in Catalonia has mainly revolved around identity politics. Nationalist elites insist that Catalonia is not Spain and does not want to belong to it. The fact that Catalans have expressed a high degree of duality in self-identification (Catalan and Spanish) is somewhat overlooked in such claims. In the last 30 years, Catalans have reiterated a lesser degree of being 'exclusive' ('I am only Catalan, not Spanish') than the Scots. Arguably, a majority of people identifying themselves 'exclusively' can be regarded as the sound sociological basis for political independence. In 1986, a survey was carried out in Scotland addressing for the first time what was



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later termed 'The Moreno Question'. In this survey, 39 per cent of respondents considered themselves to be 'only Scottish' without any identity sharing with Britain. After all these years, the percentage of 'exclusivity' in Scotland has remained rather stable with a slight increase.

In the mid-1980s, around 9 per cent of the people in Catalonia stated their 'exclusive identity'. After the ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010, which was interpreted as a setback for Catalonia's home rule aspirations, the percentage of those considering themselves to be 'only Catalan' rose to 22 per cent. Thus, it can be concluded that the increase in Catalans' exclusive self-identification has been mainly reactive and emotional. Greater numbers of Catalans have internalised the refusal of the Spanish central elites, and in particular the refusal of the Conservative Rajoy Government to negotiate new financial arrangements, as an unacceptable collective offense. Paradoxically, and despite the fact that Catalans identify themselves less 'exclusively' than Scots, independentist agitation in the *Principat de Catalunya* seems to have reached stronger levels of intensity than in Scotland, where rational arguing about the 'pros' and 'cons' of independence have so far developed in a somewhat dispassionate atmosphere.

There is a diffuse belief in Catalonia that after mass demonstrations during the territory's National Day (11th September) in 2012 and 2013, an independence referendum would validate the theses demanded by the Catalan separatist movement. On interpreting such perceptions, some Scottish nationalists praise the 'emotional intelligence' deployed by their Catalan counterparts in order to galvanise public opinion and to further sustain the momentum for secession. Political discourse in Catalonia has tended to reinforce aversion towards the central elites in Madrid, insisting in the cliché, 'Espanya ens roba' (Spain robs us). Catalan separatists have indeed deployed an effective strategy of mobilisation by which the in-group (Catalonia) is kept highly motivated in its dispute with the out-group (Spain).

All of this is aimed at maintaining the self-affirmative popular compulsion of 'Yes, we can' for the achievement of independence. This psycho-social attitude is in line with the 'demonstration effect' theorised by Thorstein Veblen as the means to overcome unsuccessful attempts in the past. Not surprisingly, cultural elements and ethno-territorial interpretations of Catalonia vis-à-vis Spain permeate most of the discussions, in which 'new converts' make passionate professions of faith after having come out of their 'independence closets'.

Debate in Scotland has so far unfolded in unruffled terms. Arguably this is a characteristic feature of the homeland of Adam Smith, David Hume, the *Democratic Intellect* and the *School of Common Sense*. On scrutinising the contrasting viewpoints on independence, an 'argumentative rationality' has been said to stand out with the use of abundant data and sources of evidence. An example in point is the challenge by the Conservative-Liberal Government to the nationalist Scottish Executive to spell out clearly whether an eventual independent Scotland would adopt the British pound or the euro as the legal currency of the new country. Such a direct interpellation puts into question the viability of a sovereign monetary policy in a future independent Scotland. It is worth noting here that, since the unleash of the 2007 financial crisis, the British Treasury has injected £300 billion into the Scottish economy as bank rescue capitals and guarantees (an equivalent sum to the total sovereign debt of Greece, which reached 157 per cent of its GDP in 2012).

To such allegations, Alex Salmond, Scotland's First Minister and leader of the Scottish National Party, has put forward the counter-argument that an independent Scotland would not be prepared to assume the public debt if the Bank Of England refused to share the currency with Scotland. It would be unreasonable, Salmond claims, that all financial assets and reserves contributed by Scotland in the past were to be kept by the Bank of England and the debt were not to be shared equitably. There is also a constant reminder by the nationalists of the huge amount of revenue gained by the British Treasury with the extraction of Scotland's North Sea Oil (which is calculated at no less than the previously mentioned figure of £300 billion). Despite repeated petitions by the SNP in the past, a Scottish Fund with revenues obtained from the resources in the North Sea was never established.

It would seem that the Scottish nationalists are tempted to repeat a more emotional line of argument, as happened in the early 1970s with the rallying cry '*It's Scotland's oil!*', which provided the SNP with an additional electoral impetus (support climbed from 12.8 per cent of the popular vote in 1970 to 30.6 per cent in the Westminster

elections held in October 1974). The 'Norwegian Dream', based on neighbouring Norway – a wealthy country with similar socio-demographic characteristics and natural resources as Scotland – appeared as a plausible case which validated the independence option not only emotionally but rationally.

Scotland, Catalonia and the European Union

The aspirations in Scotland and Catalonia to achieve national sovereignty contrast with the institutional process of Europeanisation. Convergence and political interdependence within the EU is not an incentive for internal boundary-building and the establishment of self-centred compartments of governance, as happened with the old Westphalia nation-states. Europeanisation reaches across citizens in the Old Continent as a whole (over half of the legislation in people's daily lives has a European dimension). For instance the fight against tax evasion, to mention just one important policy in the context of the financial crisis, would be inefficient if all European countries were not involved in a common stance.

It is misguided to impede or curtail self-government in stateless nations such as Scotland and Catalonia in a political union like the EU, which proclaims territorial subsidiarity as the guiding principle for policy-making and implementation. The impact that the secession of Scotland and Catalonia could bring about for the whole multi-level governance in the EU should not be trivialised either. Other stateless nations could follow similar processes of state formation to request political status as 'full' sovereign member states. In such an eventuality, who could deny similar independentist credentials to, say, the Basque Country, Corsica, Flanders or Wales? How many sovereign states could the EU coordinate in their administrative and political processes?

These issues are often left out of media discussions, but they need to be addressed from a European perspective. They certainly put into focus the growing inability of single nation states to maintain their power bases. All these considerations would be redundant if both Scottish and Catalan nationalists were not interested in Europeanisation, but they have repeatedly made explicit their European orientation and their active defence of the European social model. These aspects are democratically acknowledged by most parties involved in the on-going debates on independence.

One last question: why is the silence of intellectuals and experts on Catalonia so deafening? As agents of change, their participation in the public debate is desirable. They could contribute further to clarify discussions and to balance out the biased belligerence of powerful opinion leaders and media conglomerates. Their civic duty is to refute the claim that these matters pertain, and ought to be resolved, within the private sphere of citizens' lives. In fact, they concern the welfare of us all, and the future of our societies.



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