The state's response to the Catalan question:

an emerging ethnic component in

contemporary Spanish nationalism?

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"Terrorism in the Basque Country is a matter of public order, but the real danger is the Catalan specificity". The words came from the Spanish prime minister Felipe González, as soon as in 1984[1], when Spain had recently finished with more than 40 years of dictatorship and was building a new democracy. This is just an example of how Catalan claims for self-government are often perceived as a threat to the national unity of Spain. The recent debate on the new Charter of autonomy for Catalonia has shown that the 'Catalan specificity' remains an unsolved question in contemporary Spain. However, some new elements have arisen in this debate. On the one hand, decentralization has not weakened self-government demands or secessionism, and to some extent it challenges the idea of Catalonia as a paradigm of dual identity. On the other hand, Spanish nationalism seems exhausted to respond in accommodation terms to Catalan nationalism and is trying to redefine and modernise its national project. These evidences would point out an underlying unstability of the processes aimed at the accommodation of national diversity in liberal democracies.

In this context, the article examines to what extent contemporary Spanish nationalism is reinforcing the ethnic elements of the nation as a response to Catalan demands for self-government. I argue that the state's response to the so-called Catalan problem includes a process of ethnic interpretation of civic elements such as the Spanish Constitution. After 25 years of democracy when references to national myths were burdened by the aggresive nationalism of Franco's dictatorship, democratic Spanish nationalism is currently building a new consensus on the idea of Spain and its national identity project. In my view these processes show that, on the one hand, ethnic and civic elements are not exclussive of a particular kind of nationalism but they are rather present in any given nationalist project, and, on the other hand, that they are an expression of the competitive character of nationalist projects.

The paper is divided into three parts. First, I present a critical approach to Kohn's distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism where I also emphasize the competitive character of nationalism. Second, I present the different conceptions of Spain and Catalonia held by contemporary Spanish and Catalan nationalism, particularly since the Catalan parliament started the process to reform the Charter of Autonomy of 1979. Third, I present a range of responses from Spanish nationalism in this period, where some elements can be interpreted as a modern version of ethnicity.

1. Kohn's distinction, uses and limits of the ethnic and civic nationalism dichotomy

Hans Kohn's famous distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism has received a wide range of criticisms, but it is still in good shape if we take a look at the academic field, the media or the

political arena (Máiz, 2004:108). Kohn's offered one of the seminal contributions on the emergence of modern nationalism and its relation with the nation-state, rooted in the classical hegelian principle and the later gellnerian principle of congruence: 'nationalism demands the nation-state; the creation of the nation-state strengthens nationalism. Here, as elsewhere in history, we find a continuous interdependence and interaction' (Kohn 1945:162). However, in my view the principle of congruence between state and nation makes difficult to integrate the case of nations without states, let alone non-secessionist nationalisms (Guibernau 2004a). With regard to the case I deal with in this paper, Kohn's distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism has at least two weaknesses. First, empirically, a significant number of cases do not fit with the civic ideal of nationalism, and here Spain is a case in point showing the limits of the Western/Eastern axis (Shulman 2002:565). Second, the ethnic/civic distinction can not be taken simply as a dichotomy; it can be argued that all sorts of nationalism feature ethnic and civic elements in a dynamic rather than static way (Máiz 2004:108). In my view, these critiques are related with Anthony Smith's approach to the theory of nationalism; as nations and nationalism are historically rooted, it is reasonable to expect both ethnic and civic elements in all kinds of nationalism, whether state-led, state-seeking or non-secessionist (Smith 1991:68; 2000:25). A nationalist movement can not neglect the ethnic dimension of its political project, as it appeals to the members of the community on something more than the contractual terms of citizenship (Marshall, 1992:24; Brubaker, 1992:21). Therefore, both elements legitimate the nation and, in the case of nations without states, further claims for self-government and self-determination. Nations and nationalism are not built in the vacuum, they are social constructions, imagined but not invented. Nationalism generates a project of inclusion, defining who is a member of the nation and who is not, and it also stablishes the ways of access to the community (Miller 2000:35, Brubaker 1992:21, Breuilly 1993:370).

Furthermore, it can be argued that the use of the ethnic/civic distinction as a dichotomy has suffered a byassed interpretation to legitimate the Western ideal of nationalism (Kuzio 2002:26). Western state-led nationalism is presented as the paradigm of the civic ideal of the nation, while nationalist movements from nations without states are labelled as a particular kind of ethnic nationalism. Thus the civic nationalism is linked to the democratic ideal of the nation-state, and also with other positive elements such as modernity, progress, patriotism, liberalism, and so on, while ethnic nationalism adscribed to the nation without state would oppose the ideas of tradition, decadence, chauvinism or authoritarianism (Máiz, 2004:116). Nonetheless, the ethnic and civic component of the nation are interrelated and can not be attached to a single kind of nationalism. Not only the Spanish nationalist project have historically had a strong component of ethnicity; the civic dimension of Catalan nationalism has been a of a significant importance, and in general,

some nations without states feature a predominant component of civic values in their nationalist projects (Keating 1996, Guibernau 1999). The dynamic variation of ethnic and civic strategies by state and nation without state nationalism is linked to a great extend to the competitive character of nationalism. When two nationalist projects appeal to the same population in a given territory, they interact competitively. Opposing goals collide, and within this competition both political projects, state and nation without state nationalim, use different strategies that can change over time. State-nationalism will seek to promote a shared national identity for all the citizens of the state, while nation without state nationalism aims to be recognized as a *demos*, either stablishing differentiated group rights, the right to self-government or even self-determination (Kymlicka and Norman 1995:306). In this sense, the dynamic use of ethnic and civic elements in the nationalist discourses can be a useful approach to understand the competitive character of nationalisms.

To sum up this broad criticism to Kohn's distinction as I use it here, in my view; (a) any given nationalist project is based upon ethnic and civic elements; (b) both elements are not a dichotomy, there is no trade-off between them (i.e. the more civic the less ethnic, and vice-versa) though different nationalisms can emphasize one or another, as they can change over time; (c) they can be considered as two dimensions that will be addressed by competing nationalisms with different strategies and discourses, and (d) they do not carry intrinsically moral implications; the morality of a political project must be argued on principles and not on explicative factors.

2. Contemporary Catalan nationalism

After 20 years of decentralization, at the turn of the century territorial politics remained a central issue in the Spanish political agenda. Whether from secessionist, assimetrycal or federal conceptions of self-government, decentralization have always been regarded by Catalan parties as an open process. In the 1990s two issues entered the political agenda of self-government in Catalonia. They were related to welfare rather than cultural affairs. First, to enhance Catalan self-government on key issues such education, infrastructures or international projection, and second, to improve the financial powers of the Catalan administration. Catalonia is one of the main contributors of Spain, and in those years emerged a growing perception that the fiscal deficit hindered her economical development (López-Casanovas 1998). The role played by pro-independence ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia) is fundamental to understand how the political agenda in Catalonia was strongly centered on the financial and self-government question. The party obtained an increasing presence in the Catalan parliament during the decade and, furthermore, it had a significant influence in the political agenda (Guibernau 2006:64).

The evolution of the self-government agenda during the 1990s could question the effects of devolution in nationalist demands. According to the dominant interpretations in the literature,

devolution would have effects on the identity of the population and on the political claims for self-government. First, it would foster dual, non-conflictive identities, strengthening regional identities without weakening state's national identity (Moreno *et.al.,*1998:75, Kymlicka, 1995:185). Second, the institutional arrangements that result from the devolution process would not fully satisfy self-government claims but at the same time would deter secessionism. Within the institutional framework of decentralized powers, the tension between the state and the minority nations may generate further claims for devolved powers but would weaken secessionist positions (Guibernau, 2006:70; Martínez-Herrera, 2002:440).

The data available in the Catalan case show how dual identitiy and claims for further devolution remain rather stable. Catalan identity (those feeling more Catalan than Spanish or only Catalan) follow a stable pattern, as shown in figure 1[2]. In recent years, dual identity in Catalonia (those feeling equally Catalan and Spanish) and those feeling more Catalan than Spanish or only Catalan represent similar groups of the population:
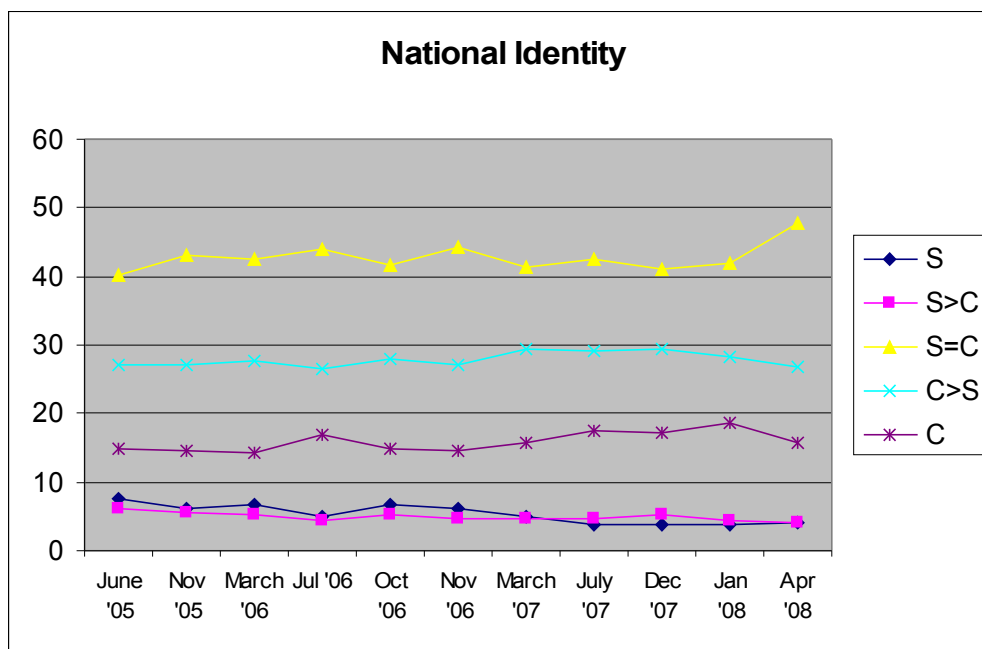

Figure 1. Identity in Catalonia. Source: CEO.

Second, with regard to institutional options, the data available also show a rather stable structure of preferences, where non-secessionist positions account for the major part of the population, but

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[2] For an account of data combining different surveys from 1979 to 2002, see Martínez-Herrera (2002). The data used in the figures are from ICPS (*Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials*), www.icps.cat and CEO (*Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió*) ceo.gencat.cat.

where secessionism has not weakened. Institutional options for Catalonia according to different surveys range from 14% to 19% for an independent state, from 32% to 37% for a Catalan state within a Federal Spain, and from 34% to 42% of population supporting the *status quo*. Support for independence in Catalonia since 1993 shows a range between 29% and 43%, while opposition to independence varies from a 43% to 56% as shown in figures 2 and 3:
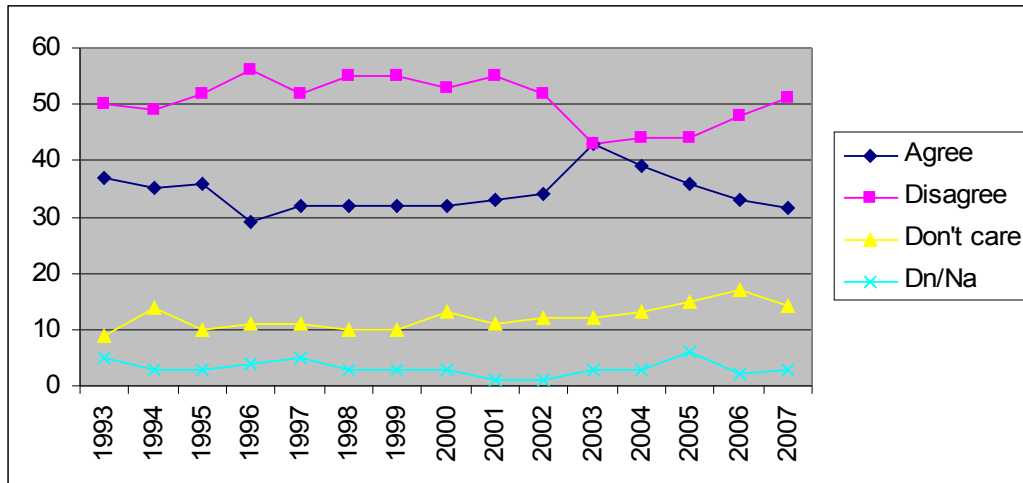

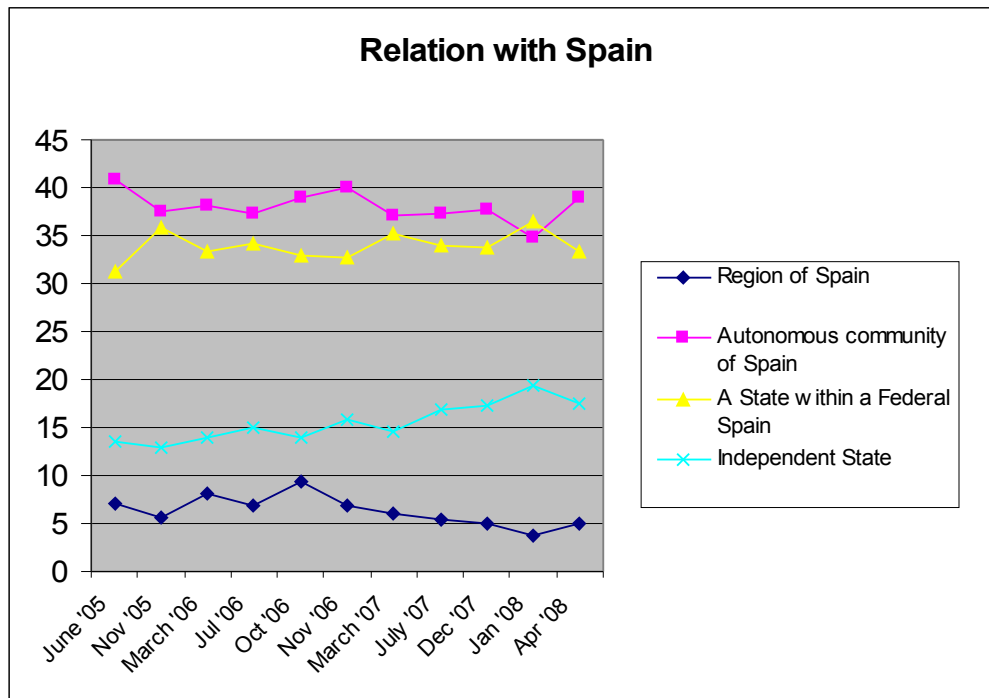*Figure 2.* Opinion on Catalan independence. Source: ICPS.

Figure 3. Prefered Catalan relations with Spain. Source; CEO.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss whether devolution fosters or weakens nationalist claims, dual identities or secessionist movements. Nonetheless, the accommodation of minority nations remains at the top of the Spanish political agenda. Actually, it can be argued that the relative stability in the national identification and the prefered political options in Catalonia show how devolution brings the political conflict into the institutional arena, but it does not solve the question by itself. Beyond this discussion, the situation draws the context for the modern response of the Spanish nationalist project, where it would attempt to redefine the narrative to integrate the whole population of the state into a common project of national identity, as the effects of the current arrangements are not clearly giving rise to a softened scenario for the self-government question in Spain.

Party visions

Most Catalan parties define Catalonia as a nation. The only exception is the regional branch of the PP (People's Party). The definition of the national identity of Catalonia includes civic and ethnic elements; a historical community with its own traditions and language, but also dynamic and characterized by a collective will for self-government based on an inclussive conception of all catalans regardless of their origins or language (Guibernau 2004b:167). Accordingly, most Catalan parties regard Spain as a plural state, though they differ on the particular meaning of this conception and its political implications. The institutional horizon for the PSC[2] (Catalan Socialist Party) is federalism, where Spain would be something close to a nation of nations. The federal approach is shared by the former communists of ICV (Initiative for Catalonia-Greens), though they emphasize plurinationality and the asymmetrical transformation of the state. On the contrary, the coalition CiU (Convergence and Union) seems to bid for asymmetry but not for the federalization of the state, while ERC at most regards federalism as a step towards the creation of an independent State (Guibernau 2004b:170). Furthermore, CDC (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia) -the bigger party in the coalition CiU- and ERC have addressed the recognition of the Catalan nation in the last years by emphasizing the 'right to decide', that is some sort of self-determination right, if not the recognition of Catalonia as a fully-fledged *demos* (Mas 2007, Ridao 2008). This position is also accepted by ICV, but not as a political priority (Bosch 2007).

The emphasys in the recognition of Catalonia as a *demos* had a significant impact in the parliamentary works for the new Charter of autonomy. The article 1.1 of the Charter proposal defined Catalonia as a nation, the primary source to legitimate self-government claims. This definition involved a broad interpretation of the Spanish Constitution, given that, while recognizing the existence of 'nationalities and regions' within the state, it also introduces a hierarchical approach by claiming 'the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and

indivisible homeland (*patria*) of all Spaniards' (art. 2). Thus the recognition of the national condition of Catalonia was controversial as it questioned the national conception of Spain, and the Spanish Congress eventually rejected the expression. The final version of the Charter approved by the Spanish parliament and later by a referendum in Catalonia included the definition as a nation in the preamble, as follows: "In reflection of the feelings and the wishes of the citizens of Catalonia, the Parliament of Catalonia has defined Catalonia as a nation by an ample majority."[3]

3. Contemporary Spanish nationalism

The democratic transition in Spain set the basis for a renewed project of national identity. According to Balfour and Quiroga, the recovery of democracy in Spain gave rise to three new national myths that consolidated in the 1990s; reconciliation and tolerance, europeanisation and modernisation, opposed to romanticism, hispanity and tradition, as represented by the francoist regime (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007). Free from these elements of ethnicity, Spanish nationalism started to rebuild national myths and symbols. A striking effect of this process has been the transformation of the Spanish Constitution into the 'last national myth' of Spain (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007:173). During the debates in the Spanish congress about Catalan or Basque demands for a stronger recognition within the state, the congress chairman, the socialist Manuel Marin, had to remind that the Constitution 'was not an untouchable myth' (*El País* 2007). This new nationalism followed to a great extent the byassed use of the civic/ethnic distinction. Presented as a civic project of constitutional patriotism, it labels minority nationalisms as ethnicist and non-democratic (Bastida 2007:148-151, Balfour and Quiroga 2007:210).

Therefore, despite the intense competition and confrontation between the PP and the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party) in the last years, on issues such as the war in Irak or fundamentalist and basque terrorism, I argue that after 25 years of democracy Spain is heading towards a new consensus about her nationalist project. Hence I will stress here some converging elements on the national idea of Spain in the political discourses of PP and PSOE. An idea that conceives Spain as a plural nation but at the same time it includes a strong component of symmetry with regard to the territorial organization of the state.

The PSOE emphasizes this civic ideal of the nation as opposed to minority nationalisms. For the socialists, even though the constitutional recognition of Spain's diversity that resulted in the 'State of the autonomies' has been a great achievement, the party's priority is to 'ensure the equality in rights and opportunities for all Spaniards' over the autonomic principle (PSOE 2003). Emphasizing the individual over the territories is a clear example of the ethnic/civic political distinction to define minority nationalims as non-democratic because they put the territory (i.e.

collective rights) over the individual (i.e. individual rights). These references appeared in the Manifesto of Santillana, the document defining the party's position on the territorial question. It was issued in August 2003 claiming the party's position as non-nationalist but focused on the individual welfare within a constitutional plural Spain:

> We are not nationalists (...). Our frontal opposition to any segregationism or pseudo-sovereigntism, coming from the PNB or CiU, is based on principles and not on partisan, juncture or propagandistic interests. In front of separatists and separators, of those willing to divide and those using segregationist tensions for their partisan goals, the PSOE has always been and always will within the Constitution. Always for the plural Spain (PSOE, 2003) .

A few months later after the manifesto was published, the Socialist Party formed government in Catalonia (november 2003) and Spain (march 2004). In Catalonia, after 23 years of nationalist governments, the coalition CiU won the elections but the PSC agreed a coalition government with pro-independence ERC and former communists of ICV. In november 2003, the PSOE's candidate to the Spanish government and eventually prime minister, José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, claimed in a meeting in Barcelona that he will 'support the reform of the Statute approved by the Catalan parliament'. Though falling short of fulfiling minority nation's demands, the proposals gave credibility to the PSOE as it seemed an opportunity to make a serious bid for the idea of 'plural Spain'.

Once in office, the Socialist Party would limit the scope of the reform to the party's terms, and particularly to their idea of the 'plural Spain' which was fulfilled by the final version of the Charter. In the Territorial Council held in 2007, the socialist party afirmed that 'Spain is today stronger than four years ago. (...) We have restored the understanding of Spain as a common project of living together for all the citizens, without exclusions' (PSOE, 2007). Under the PSOE's view, the territorial question in Spain is entering its final phase, and the party aims now to foster 'cooperative autonomism', strengthening the role of the central government, the 'coordination competences, and the constitutional responsabilities to guarantee the cohesion and solidarity among all the territories' (PSOE 2007). The party's manifesto for the general election of 2008 defines this next term as the last stage for the state of the autonomies to achieve its final goal: to give cohesion to Spain's diversity, 'equalizing the competences of the autonomous communities and homogeneising, with fully respect towards territorial differences, the economic and material conditions of every Spaniard' (PSOE 2008). A 'strong Spain', where the diverse identities of 'her citizens and peoples' will be 'compatible and non-conflictive', reinforcing the 'unity and cohesion

of Spain' (PSOE 2007). The PSOE also suggested a constitutional reform, yet with a limited scope; women's succesion rights to the Crown, naming the autonomous communities in the Constitution and giving more powers to the Senate (PSOE 2008).

The approach to the constitutional reform shapes an area of potential consensus with the PP, which agrees on a limited constitutional reform. The conservatives also talk about a diverse Spain, though they emphasize the cultural homogeneity of the population beside the role of coordination exercised by the central government (Núñez 2007:183, Balfour and Quiroga 2007:203). References to the Constitution are present throughout the party's documents and public speeches, as it is considered the expression of sovereingty of the Spanish nation:

> The constitutional culture (…) is deeply rooted. The People's Party reasserts
> its firmness in the defense of this common heritage, the basis of our
> constitutional patriotism. The Constitution is based on the unequivocal
> reality of the spanish nation as constituent subject and on the identification
> of the spanish people as the holder of the national sovereignty (PP
> 2004:363).

While recognizing Spain's diversity as expressed in the Spanish Constitution, the PP's manifesto states that 'the territorial distribution of power can not harm the sovereignty, the unity or the indivisibility of the Nation' (PP 2004:363). This means that the recognition of diversity has constitutional and political limits, thus rejecting the possibility of democratic secession processes for minority nations, not only because from the conservative point of view they don't exist as such, but also because 'our Constitution, as any other democratic nation's Constitution, does not admit a theoretical right to self-determination (…). Self-determination would involve the destruction of the Constitution, as the only holder of sovereignty is the spanish people. Nobody is above the spanish people's will' (PP 2004:363).

In the 2008 general elections, the PP's political manifesto refered to the same elements of unity and indivisibility: 'We assert that Spain is a nation of free and equal citizens in rights and duties. The national sovereignty resides in the spanish people, and it is unique and indivisible' (PP 2008:6). How does the PP perceive the claims to enhance self-government by minority nations? As I have mentioned, the constitutional distinction between nationalities and regions could have been used as a tool to accommodate Spain's diversity, but the hierarchical conception of the Spanish nation has prevailed over nationalities. Actually, national parties' approach to state's diversity has more to do with administrative decentralization than with political recognition. A further element of consensus between PSOE and PP lies in the individual/territorial opposition.

As the PP's political manifesto claimed:

> Spaniards must recover all that unite us. When alleged colective rights prevail over individual rights, difference is claimed as an argument for struggle, privileges are demanded to divide, or old conflicts are reminded to struggle again, the values of our project of living together are broken. Until this term never before a reform had been approved without consensus, at least from the two big national parties (…). We will face the critical challenges posed to the spanish Nation in this term, ensuring the stability of the constitutional Spain and the viability of the State of Autonomies. (PP 2008:11-20).

4. Ethnicist reactions? Army, bulls, anthem, flags, limiting nationalism.

In this section I present some specific reactions that had a significant impact in the Spanish media during the last few years, which are closely related to the Catalan question. These group of elements may seem more or less anecdotal but they give a measure of a certain process of ethnification in the Spanish project of national identity. I have focused on some elements involving a sort of modern ethnicist reaction in contemporary Spanish nationalism, such national symbols and myths, institutions, territory, the army or 'peripheral' nationalisms.

It must be noted that all these different issues regarding symbolical elements presented in this section arose within the political context of the process to reform the Catalan self-government. The Catalan Charter's proposals were controversial for wide sectors of Spanish nationalism. Significant conservative and progressive politicians strongly opposed the reform. Before the elections of 2004, the socialist José Bono wrote "Why Spain does need the PSOE to win the elections? To mend the ties that unite all the Spaniards. (…) We are witnessing a dangerous nationalist quest in the search of the Holy Grail of sovereignty" (*El País* 2004). He agreed with another outstanding socialist member, Alfonso Guerra, who warned that any charter reform must take into account that 'there is only one nation; Spain' (*El Mundo* 2005a). Alfonso Guerra happened to be the Constitutional Committee Chairman in the Spanish congress, thus playing a relevant role throughout the process. Alfonso Guerra asked for 'responsibility and common sense' to prevail over 'madness', because the 'territorial stability' of Spain was at stake (*El Mundo* 2005b). Once the more controversial aspects of the Catalan proposals were adjusted in the Spanish congress, Alfonso Guerra expressed his relief for having 'wiped out' the Catalan charter (*El País* 2006).

The Osborne's bull

In 1997 the Supreme Court protected the figures of the so-called Osborne's bull due to its 'cultural or aesthetic interest' (*El Mundo* 2007). The signs were supposed to be removed under a law passed in 1994 that prohibited advertising beside roads and highways. However, the bull was considered a sort of national symbol and the Socialist Party in the government of Andalusia, the region where most of the signs were placed, tried to declare them monuments to be preserved. The Spanish Supreme Court finally protected the signs arguing that they had become part of the Spanish 'landscape' (*El País 2007b*). In Catalonia, the Osborne's bull was also regarded as a Spanish national symbol and had a counterpart in form of a donkey, representing an endangered local breed. The only existing sign in Catalonia –a second one had been destroyed in 2005- was placed in front of another national symbol, probably the most respected natural heritage in Catalonia; the Mountain of Montserrat. The landscape was a "clash of myths":

Figure 4. A clash of myths; Montserrat mountain and the Osborne's bull.

The issue was not seriously addressed in Catalonia, but a nationalist group faked a commando that 'attacked' the sign: they painted it with the colours of the Catalan flag. The Spanish police was sent to protect the sign, but the group finally torn the figure down. The Spanish media took the action rather seriously and did not notice the ironical message of the group, that had issued an statement declaring that 'after three and a half hours of hard work the Osborne's bull has shamefully fallen as a giant with feet of clay' (*El País* 2007). The article received more than a hundred comments in a few hours. To understand the media reaction it must be taken into account that the bull has become a popular icon of Spain. Beyond the symbolism of bullfighting, the bull is widely present from car stickers to flags and football stadiums, a sort of modern reinterpretation of classical ethnic myths such race or blood which has been traditionally linked to

the *Fiesta Nacional*.

The Army

In January 2006, the Spanish army chief Lieutenant General Mena, said in a public speech given to officials under his command, that he and the army were concerned about the situation in Catalonia. He claimed that a new Charter of autonomy recognizing Catalonia as a nation would break the constitutional limits. He stressed that, according to the Constitution, the army had the mission to 'preserve the sovereignty and independence of Spain', and particularly the territorial integrity of the state. He added that if approved in 'its current terms' the Catalan Charter would bring 'serious consequences for the armed forces'. The general also reminded that, even though he recognized that the armed forces must not play politics, his responsability was to 'warn' about the consequences of the Catalan Charter. The defence minister was present at the speech and ordered to arrest the general the day after, but he was soon realesed and retired a few months later. A high officer of the People's Party declared that the general's statement was a reflect of the political situation in Spain (*El Mundo* 2006). While the PP did not explicitly criticized the general's statement, the PSOE clearly rejected it. Nonetheless, a few months earlier the Commander in Chief General Roldan had also expressed his concern for Spain to remain the 'common and indivisible homeland of all the Spaniards' when asked about his feelings about the Catalan proposal of new Charter (*El Mundo* 2005c). In this occasion, the defence minister said he was not worried about the general's statement, and that he could not arrest a member of the armed forces for defending 'constitutional values' (*Libertad Digital* 2006). Since the *coup d'état* of 1981, the armed forces were expressing for the first time their concerns about the territorial question in Spain. It can be argued that, more than an energic reaction from the Spanish government, they rather received an ambiguous response (Oliver, 2007:228).

Anthem and flag

The Spanish national anthem is a military composition from the late 18th century. After the Republic, general Franco re-established it as the official anthem of Spain in 1942. The lyrics to sing the anthem had been written in the 1920s, under Primo de Rivera's regime. The first words of the song, 'Long live to Spain (*Viva España*) raise your arms sons of the Spanish people' were strongly attached to the aggresive Spanish nationalism of Franco's dictatorship. In democratic Spain, the Constitution of 1978 did not mention the anthem, let alone the lyrics. Nonetheless, it did not overrule the provision of 1942 that declared it the official anthem of Spain. In 1997 the People's Party government passed a decree regulating the protocolary uses of the anthem in official events. In 2002, the Spanish prime minister José María Aznar commissioned to a group of intelectuals the task to find a more apropriate text for the national anthem, though it was

impossible to reach a consensus and the project was abandoned (*Time* 2007). In 2007, the Spanish Olympic Committe organized a new contest to provide the national anthem with lyrics. The aim was to give sportsmen something to sing in international competitions instead of the current 'la la la' they have to improvise (*Time* 2007). The winning proposal would be sent to the Spanish congress to be recognized as the official lyrics of the anthem. Nonetheless, the initiative faded away. Political representatives found the proposal of very little quality and far from reflecting the symbolism of the nation; it was so generic that nobody would know whether it talked about 'Spain or Belarus' (*New York Times* 2008).

A successful example of consensus on national symbols is the use of the Spanish flag. Federico Trillo, minister of defence with the PP ordered in 2001 the biggest Spanish flag to be held in Colon's square in Madrid. In 2002 the minister ordered to honour the flag once a month with the presence of the armed forces, as the cerimony was not only a way to 'honour the flag of all the Spaniards in the kingdom capital at the highest possible' but also a reminder of the fact that 'the armed forces of Spain are the keepers of her flag and her unity' (*El País* 2002). The initiative was controversial and heavily criticized by left and nationalist parties, but a few months later PP and PSOE agreed on a new format that was later to be continued by the socialist minister of defence, José Bono. It was somehow a response from a movement in Catalonia and the Basque Country that opted to held only the Catalan/Basque flag in public buildings, yet the law states that the flag must be displayed in every public building (Art. 3.1 Law 39/1981).

Limiting nationalism

Due to the characteristics of the Spanish electoral system, major parties must often seek support from minor parties to obtain parliamentary majorities. This hinge role is traditionally played by nationalist parties. In the case of Catalonia, CiU and more recently ERC have played this role. This situation is often perceived as a bargaining against the general interest of the state, as long as these parties tend to use their influence to enter self-government issues in the Spanish agenda. In the Catalan case, it has been usually related to the improvement of the financial resources of the autonomous government. Significant left and right sectors in Spain feel that the two 'national' parties should reach an agreement to limit the nationalist parties' influence in the Spanish Congress, preventing the nationalist demands from setting the political agenda. In 2006, a new party was created in Catalonia to fight against this 'identitarian nationalist policies aiming at the cultural homogenization of a diverse and plural society' (Ciudadanos 2006). The party, *Citizens-Citizenry's Party*, would eventually win three seats in the Catalan parliament. The party emphasized the idea of citizenship as opposed to territory, that is 'the individual rights and liberties in front of so-called collective identities' (Ciudadanos 2006). The party failed to win a

seat in the general election of March 2008, but another party with similar principles, led by a former PSOE member obtained a seat in Congress. According to this new party, *Progress and Democracy Union* (UpyD), the only institutional problem left in Spain is nationalism (UpyD 2008:2). The party's proposals included the reform of the Spanish Constitution 'closing the territorial model', strengthening the role of the state on fundamental issues such education and fiscal policy, and equalizing autonomous communities' powers (UpyD 2007:4). With regard to nationalist parties, UPyD aims to reform the electoral law and to obtain a relevant representation to 'build alternative governments free from nationalist mortgages', as the 'assymmetric Spain', which is based on 'local narcissism', undermines the 'principle of equality' among citizens (UpyD 2007:2). What could be seen as an activism developed by fringe parties has nonetheless reached the Spanish political agenda; the Spanish vice-president María Teresa Fernández de la Vega announced soon after the election of March 2008 that the reform of the electoral law would be considered by the Spanish Congress (*El Mundo* 2008).

These different political movements and reactions I have shown in this section are in my view a symptom of a certain *malaise* within the Spanish national project. Beyond a more or less plural conception of the state there is emerging a claim to introduce elements of symmetry and cohesion, visualizing the unity of the nation. As the minister of infrastructures declared when the high-speed railway between Madrid and Barcelona was inaugurated, the challenge that the Spanish nation must face in the next future is 'to sew Spain with steel wire' (PSOE, 2007b).

5. Conclusions: ethnic elements in contemporary Spanish nationalism?

In this paper I have argued that, after 25 years of democracy, Spain is building a new national consensus. To a great extent, the discussion of the new Charter of autonomy for Catalonia has triggered the process. Beyond the debate about whether it fosters or limits self-government demands, decentralization in Spain has not generated stable institutional arrangements, let alone softened the national question. Furthermore, due to the competitive character of nationalism, secessionist and homogenizing tensions can not be excluded as a likely horizon in Spanish politics.

This new national consensus include a plural -but not plurinational- conception of the state, a modernization of ethnic elements including civic myths, a byassed use of the civic/ethnic distinction such as the individual/territorial opposition, and a symmetrical principle in the organization of the state by reinforcing the powers of the central government, leveling the autonomous communities' powers and limiting the influence of minority nationalist parties in the Spanish political arena. While PSOE and PP feel that the last statute fulfils or goes beyond the idea of 'plural Spain', nationalist parties regard it just as a new step towards the recognition of

their national condition.

I have also shown that ethnic and civic elements can not be associated with any single type of nationalism; such elements are present to some extent in any nationalist project, whether state or nation without state. Nationalist discourses appealing to the same population reflect the competitive dimension of nationalism. In the Spanish/Catalan case, competitive nationalism is reinforced by an ambiguous institutional framework allowing a unitarian conception of the Spanish nation beside a sufficient level of decentralization for minority nations to develop nation-building policies. Hence we can interpret the political debates on the territorial structure of the state concerning national minorities as a process where the resulting institutional arrangements generate unstable equilibriums. As both nationalisms succeed to a relevant extent in spreading a nationalist discourse within this competitive framework, they may develop different strategies; either enhancing civic elements in the case of Catalonia (the *leit-motive* for self-government becomes welfare and not culture) or reinterpreting ethnic elements in Spain (the *leit-motive* for a united nation becomes culture and not welfare).

Is there a scenario of convergence between major political parties in Spain about the conception of the Spanish nation and its myths? If so, could it break the 'endless draw' between competing nationalist discourses? While there is relevant evidence to support the first question, the second one is far less clear. As I have shown, if we analyse the political discourse of PP and PSOE it can be argued that a process of convergence is emerging in the last years. After 30 years of democracy and decentralization, the 'territorial' debate remains an open question, and Spanish nationalism is defining a new nationalist project. A consensus built up in a context of electoral competition and partisan conflict between the PP and PSOE, but also competing with minority nations' political projects and conceptions of Spain. Democratic consolidation, far from 'ending' the territorial question is rather entrenchening it in the political debate, so it will likely remain as the most relevant 'unsolved' problem for the next future in Spain.

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[1] Statement at a Conference on the Spanish Transition held in Toledo in May, 1984.

[2] The PSC is the Catalan branch of the Spanish Socialis Party (PSOE), enjoying a certain level of autonomy and formally an independent party federated with PSOE.

[3] I have translated as literally as possible the different documents quoted in the paper. Some expressions and grammar may sound ackward in English, but I have taken this option to preserve their original meaning in Spanish and Catalan as much as possible.