

Linguistic Globalism vs. Nationalism:

It's Miró, Gaudí and Dalí

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Catalan Peasant Resting, Joan Miró, 1936

Imagine for a moment you were watching a sleekly produced cultural documentary program on the individuality of Britain and America, and that the distinguished hosts, acting as interviewers guiding you around, all the while mistakenly pronouncing the name of key individuals so you hear them speak of Wa-SHING-ton, Je-FER-son, Ke-nay-DI, Dis-rael-LI, Church-HILL, and Glad-STONE, and conversing with local celebrities and authorities who respond to questions about historical figures we know as Washington, Jefferson, Kennedy, Disraeli, Churchill and Gladstone. Wouldn't you expect these names to be as familiar to the interviewers and listeners as our very own names? Would you give the hosts any respect and credence for their professional qualifications?

Something similar was the case during an hour-long program of the BBC tv special documentary re-shown during May entitled "Barcelona; An Art Lover's Guide," dealing with the individuality and cultural pride of Spain's northeastern region, Catalunya (Catalonia) and the city of Barcelona. It had been produced in 2015 when first televised and no changes made for the reshowing. The hosts inform us about GAU-di, DA-li and MI-ro, apparently unaware that the correct pronunciation of these typical Catalan names is on the last syllable (Gaudí, Dalí and Miró; all spelt with the appropriate accent mark on the final syllable), an elementary fact that the two guides, Alastair Sooke and Janina Ramirez are apparently unaware of and consider of no importance.

The program features a dozen conversations with local authorities in Barcelona expressing reverence for Gaudí, Dalí and Miró. On several occasions, the camera even focuses on street signs featuring these names with the appropriate accent marked over the LAST syllable. Is there something wrong with their vision or hearing? Yes, but in a cultural sense not a

physical one, and one that has apparently been part of the BBC's conscious decision to only use what is most familiar to an audience of native English speakers in the U.K.

Even more ironic is the use of Castilian Spanish (Castellano) rather than Catalan used by those interviewed when questioned by the hosts in English. The only reason for this is reluctance of the BBC producers to search for experienced translators and interpreters familiar with the language pair of Catalan-English, a much less common specialty than an experienced staff working in the much more common pair of Castilian Spanish and English.

The two hosts spend an hour explaining in detail what makes Barcelona, and Catalunya (Catalan); Catalonia (English), Cataluña (Spanish), distinct from a geographic cultural, social, religious, artistic, musical, architectural, political and LINGUISTIC sense from Castile and the rest of Spain. If they then choose to consciously ignore the correct pronunciation of Catalan names, it demonstrates an underlying insincerity in praising the region's distinctiveness.

Yes, it is true that all Catalan adults are bilingual in both languages, but this does not change the reality of the centuries long rivalry, attitudes learned in early childhood, animosity and distinctive outlooks transmitted from the political elite in Madrid that have dominated Spanish affairs for many centuries on multiple issues, intensifying the sense of a core identity of the Catalans.

The works in architecture and painting of Antoni Gaudí

(1852-1926), Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), and Joan (not Juan) Miró (1893-1983) span a century and embrace the diverse styles of Art Nouveau, Surrealism and Art Deco. They are regarded today as geniuses although all three were initially regarded with suspicion and curiosity, even denounced by some art critics for their daring ingenuity. All three were deeply committed to a strong sense of Catalan national identity and were hailed by the new national movement for autonomy as great artists whose work truly reflected all that distinguished Catalan culture, flair, innovation, initiative, daring and pride.

At the beginning of the 1880s, Barcelona was a city of about 350,000 people and had only just knocked down its medieval walls twenty years earlier. Pride in their city, its development, its new industry and the renaissance of the Catalan language and culture all coincided to give expression to the national awakening of "Catalanismo." The period from 1880 to the end of World War I witnessed the flowering of "La Renaixença" The Renaissance, (in Catalan, the letter x is pronounced as "sh"), expressed by a flair for innovation and inventiveness, and a desire to make Barcelona distinct from Madrid.

The Historical Divide of Language, Geographic Orientation, Economy, Social Mores, and History

As early as the twelfth century, Catalan balladeer-poets, or troubadours, wandered through the region and northward into Provence at a time when the language spoken there was recognized as a Catalan dialect. This vibrant poetic tradition and the use of Catalan by philosophers and historians, the greater achievements of Catalan seafarers and merchants who

traveled throughout the Mediterranean and brought their language to Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily (see map) and traded with the Orient at a time when Spain still had no overseas experience, colonies or trans-Atlantic ties created a lasting heritage. For many generations this heritage contributed to the feeling that a noble and civilized culture had been submerged by Castile, the central region located on the meseta (upland) that led the struggle against the Muslims from the 9th to the 15th centuries and launched the Inquisition.

In the eyes of the Catholic, conservative and rural-agrarian traditions of Castile and Andalucia, the resourcefulness of the Catalans, their industriousness, literacy, sobriety and international connections across the Mediterranean in both North Africa and the Levant evoked the Jewish traits most held in ill repute by the church and stood in contrast to the haughty pride, devout religiosity, monastic institutions and exaggerated sense of honor and disdain for manual work that characterized the model of the Castilian gentleman (hidalgo).” (see Spanish Vignettes; An Offbeat Look Into Spain’s Culture, Society and History; 1992 Berdichevsky, McFarland Publishing).

The Catalans made a transition to a modern economy and became the dynamo of Spain, outdistancing economic activity in the rest of the country. During that time, Barcelona grew much faster than any other city in Spain. Industry in the manufacture of paper, iron, wool, leather, textiles and processed fish, as well as in the export of wine and cotton led to a new sense of confidence and prosperity.

Barcelona rather than Madrid became the engine of change, progress, industrialization, workers’ unions, the first railways and the first opera. In Castile, the old prejudices

against merchants and working with one's hands still prevailed among an elite out of touch with new developments. Catalunya proved to be the most loyal region in Spain to the ideals of the Republic and was the stronghold of resistance to the Fascist uprising commanded by General Franco. Arch-conservatives distrustful of Catalan commercial astuteness even labeled support for the Republic during the Civil War (1936-39) part of what they called a "Judeo-Catalan conspiracy."

During the seven years I lived in Spain (1990-97), I had occasion to witness first-hand this suppressed animosity in which traditional Spanish antisemitism was grafted onto Catalan identity, more liberal attitudes and commercial skills. My wife and I lived in Santiago de la Ribera in the province of Murcia bordering on Catalonia. I had a part-time job teaching English to a well-to-do family in the town. The mother, who in all other respects seemed to me to be an intelligent and well-read lady, bore a strong animosity to what she termed the propensity of Catalans to be money grubbing, arrogant, radical, too fond of "foreign ideas", and lacking respect for religion and tradition "just like the Jews."

What surprised me to a similar degree was the extent to which Catalan intellectuals and "activists" in the movement for greater autonomy and even independence looked down on the majority of ordinary Spaniards as ignorant and lacking in culture.

Catalans have maintained such a fierce sense of pride and opposition to the concept that they must regard themselves first and foremost as "Spaniards" because they are citizens of

Spain. It is understandable that in their own homeland they should have priority status.

The following editorial by writer Salvador Sostres, appeared in the "well regarded" Catalan language newspaper *Avui* (*Today*