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La Assemblée Nacional Catalana: las limitaciones estratégicas de un movimiento social *sui generis*

Abstracto

Los movimientos nacionalistas son una clase de movimiento social, pero son un movimiento social atípico porque priorizan la nación, la identidad nacional y los intereses nacionales. Como con la mayoría de los movimientos que actúan alrededor del eje de la identidad nacional, la Assemblée Nacional Catalana (ANC), siguió la estrategia de presentarse como la voz del pueblo catalán. Liderado por la ANC, Cataluña ha experimentado la mayor serie de movilizaciones populares sostenidas vistas en la Europa moderna. Han sido alimentados por el resentimiento y la frustración por las limitaciones de la autonomía, por las heridas de la memoria histórica y la ira engendrada por la crisis económica. El rendimiento a través de la visualización y la coreografía de grandes multitudes se convirtió en la forma de comunicación política. Aun así, después de siete años de actuación, la meta principal de la ANC, la independencia de Cataluña no está en el horizonte. El movimiento independentista catalán elaboró con éxito un vocabulario ideológico distintivo, basándose en su sloganeering y comunicando un mensaje simple. Sin embargo, esta simplicidad llevó a una gran subestimación de su adversario y a una sobreestimación de su propia capacidad para romper con España.

Territorial tensions have been a constant feature of Spain's political landscape, the last unresolved legacy of Spain's tumultuous twentieth century. Since 2008, with varying degrees of intensity, Spain has experienced its worst institutional crisis since the death of Franco. Catalonia has been at the epicentre of Spain's political crisis, particularly around its territorial

dimension.¹ By the autumn of 2017 and beyond, the Catalan question had become the gravest political crisis in Spain since the 23F, becoming central even to the general election held in November 2019. At an earlier stage in the economic crisis, a rupture to political cultures occurred with the 15M and the Catalan independence movement, between 2011 and 2012, with both movements producing a proliferation of civic platforms, processes, associations and challenges to traditional party systems.² Whilst the indignados capitalised the early wave of protest yet soon faded from view, by the end of 2019, the Catalan sovereignty movement had achieved waves of mobilisation lasting over ten years. Annual mobilisation and conventional political activity marked the period until the autumn of 2017. New mechanisms and strategies emerged from October 2017 following the failure of separation from Spain.

The sustained basis of the Catalan sovereignty movement may simply be explained by the power of national identity as a collective sentiment combined with the sense that sustained action will be able to alter conditions and politics it seeks to address.³ The ideology of national self-determination validates moral claims of a distinct “people” to self-determination.⁴ The people are framed as a single unified political subject with the nation projected as the natural political community. National identity is a form of social identity that can find powerful expression in a social movement or struggle. Social movement and collective mobilisation theory has paid little attention to cultural or nationalist movements, in spite of the fact that movements of this kind engage in mobilisation and even disruptive activity. Yet, ‘El nacionalismo, al menos en determinadas coyunturas históricas, también es un movimiento social; y además en determinados momentos de esas coyunturas — adopta aspectos típicos de los nuevos movimientos sociales.’⁵ Ethnic and nationalist movements are seen to differ from other types of social movements because they make demands and social

¹ PORTOS, Martín, ‘Taking to the Streets in the Shadow of Austerity: A Chronology of the Cycle of Protests in Spain, 2007-2015’, *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2016, pp. 181–210.

² DOWLING, Andrew, ‘A Tale of Two Cities Madrid and Barcelona in Spain’, in COLE, Alistair and PAYRE, Raymond (eds.), *Cities as Political Objects: Historical Evolution, Analytical Categorisations and Institutionalisation Changes of Metropolitanisation*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2016, pp. 79–96.

³ KLANDERMANS, Bert, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, Wiley, Chichester, 1997, p. 179.

⁴ OLZAK, Susan, ‘Ethnic and Nationalist Social Movements’, in SNOW, David, SOULE, Sarah and KRIESI, Hanspeter, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2004, pp. 666-693.

⁵ GUELL, Pedro Ibarra, ‘Movimientos nacionalistas: el nacionalismo radical vasco: epílogo’, en Pedro Ibarra Güell coord., *Nuevos escenarios, nuevos retos en la red: anuario de movimientos sociales*, Icaria, Barcelona, 2003, págs. 177-191.

claims of group identity and/or self-determination. Political nationalism articulates a powerful combination of legitimacy and loyalty. It is nationalism that enables the ideological coherence of horizontal loyalty. Our purpose in this article is to analyse the origins, character and development of the Assemblea Nacional Catalana, ANC, as well as to assess its overall political effectiveness.

Defining social movements

Social movements are commonly interpreted as a form of contentious politics.⁶ The defining political characteristic of social movements is usually viewed as their willingness to violate the norms of political behaviour and potentially the norms of law and order. The idea of "protest" is the contentious activity most commonly associated with social movements.⁷ We can expect to see repeated public displays of collective action by people acting outside of officially sanctioned channels to achieve social change.⁸ Social movement actors engage in political or cultural conflicts with the aim to promote, or oppose, social change. These actions may include street protests, picketing, marches, sit-ins, as well as actions that can range from letter-writing campaigns to organised boycotts. Social movements are distinguished from political parties by using means other than institutionalized political channels to pursue their goals. Social movements develop 'when a feeling of dissatisfaction spreads and insufficiently flexible institutions are unable to respond'.⁹ Social movements connect individuals, organisations and networks to other actors in a broader collective mobilisation for concrete purposes: 'social movements are deeply involved in the work of "naming" grievances, connecting them to other grievances and constructing larger frames of meaning that will resonate with a population's cultural predispositions and communicate a uniform message to

⁶ MCADAM, Doug, TARROW, Sidney and TILLY, Charles, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

⁷ MEYER, David S., *The Politics of Protest: Social Movements in America*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006.

⁸ TILLY, Charles, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008.

⁹ PORTA, Donatella della and DIANI, Mario, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2006, p. 13.

powerholders and others'.¹⁰ The character of the frames chosen play a key role in the mobilisation process.¹¹

Is the Assemblea Nacional Catalana a social movement? From its initial inception in 2011 until its official launch in March 2012, it sought to avoid any sense of being a organisation that bore resemblance to the 15-M/indignados.¹² It defined itself as a representative of civic society. The ANC, between 2012 and 2017, was distinguished from the traditional range of social movements by its tactical and strategic moderation. Aberle identified four kinds of social movements (alternative, redemptive, reformatory and revolutionary) and the Catalan sovereignty movement clearly falls within the category of reformatory.¹³ The ANC, in its period of dominance, together with its ally Òmnium Cultural, sought to affirm a culture of civic engagement around a series of social and political values. Part of the social values of the ANC can be traced to a deeply rooted Catalan culture of social organisation which have long depended on the commitment of volunteers. This includes the scout movement, cultural activism, excursionisme and those charged with the organisation of the young known as esplai. By 2002, the esplai, for example, relied on over 5000 volunteers for the summer camps it organised across Catalonia. Over 40,000 associations are found in Catalonia devoted to areas of culture, sport and welfare asistencial as well as professional organisations. Deeply embedded civic organisation has long been as a distinctive characteristic of Catalan society.¹⁴

The peculiar variant of social movement that emerged in Catalonia was not transformative.¹⁵ It embodied profound loyalty to Catalan institutions, including the autonomous police force, the local bureaucracy and institutional representatives at all levels. Loyalty of this kind is rare in a social movement hence our reservation about applying this

¹⁰ TARROW, Sidney, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 144.

¹¹ SNOW, David A. and BENFORD, Robert, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,' *International Sociological Movement Research*, Vol. 1, 1998, pp. 197–218.

¹² MARTÍ, Pere, *El dia que Catalunya va dir prou. La història inedita de l'Assemblea Nacional Catalana*, Columna: Barcelona, 2014, p. 22.

¹³ SHANNAHAN, Chris, *A Theology of Community Organizing: Power to the People*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 73–4.

¹⁴ Àngel FONT, *Història Contemporània de Catalunya, L'associacionisme cultural, esportiu i assistencial*, Personatges de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2003.

¹⁵ Although we argue that the ANC fails to fall within the full definition of social movement, for shorthand we will use this term.

analytical category in the case of the ANC. The movement led by the ANC is reformist, peaceful, non-violent whilst also highly innovative. Until the autumn of 2017, it consciously avoided any strategy of passive or active resistance or civil disobedience. A further and important distinguishing characteristic as to why the ANC fails to be a social movement is the clear and persistent bilateral relationship that has existed between it and the Catalan regional (pro-independence) government that has been in place since 2012 as well as a whole range of other institutional representatives.¹⁶ From its foundation in early 2012, to its organisation of the first mass scale Diada protest of 2012, direct channels of communication existed between the ANC and the regional government of Artur Mas. Finally, unlike most social movements which operate under difficult financial constraints, the ANC has become a successful commercial operation to finance its activities. The ANC has been an important and often key actor within the broader sovereignty movement, but within one that has encompassed institutions, political parties and cultural organisations.

Although the economic crisis has shattered trust in institutions in much of southern Europe, in Catalonia this gave credibility to popular mobilisation outside of political parties without being a rejection of the party system. The ANC has sought to act as a lobby or pressure on the Catalan party system, without any sense of its overthrow. Whilst this was in one sense an anti-establishment revolt, it was only a revolt against the Spanish establishment. The only rupture is with Spanish legality which is to be replaced by a Catalan legality, without any change made to the structures of power, wealth distribution or social structure. The turn to secession within Catalonia is inexplicable without understanding the radicalisation of conservative and traditionalist sectors of Catalan society. These social sectors determined the trajectory of the ANC and its political nature. Once the left was no longer the hegemonic element within the pro-independence movement, as it had been until the early 2000s, but was one of several sectors, the need for what became known as transversality became necessary. This increasingly gave an at times confused and imprecise non-ideological tone to the movement. Catalonia has long been one of the richest regions of Spain and the middle classes within the region enjoyed comparative privilege. The province of Girona, deeply imbricated with pro-secessionist sentiment, is the richest region in all of Spain. This social sector, comparatively privileged, was traumatised by the arrival of the

¹⁶ MARTÍNEZ, Guillem, *La Gran Il·lusió. Mito y realidad del proceso indepe*, Debate, Barcelona, 2016, pp. 147-148 and 151.

intense economic crisis in Spain between 2009 and 2010. Many commentators have noted how it is the middle-class experience of precarity that has led to its increasing political engagement.¹⁷ The call within Catalan sovereignty for unity over differences in social and economic policies until independence was achieved, effectively subordinated any narrative of social change to the margins.

Radical challenge to class relations, hierarchy or the market economy are absent in the sovereignty movement, outside of minoritarian sectors. However, these are not the only measures to gauge the effectiveness of a movement such as the ANC, and those entities that preceded it have played a fundamental role in shifting the focus of Catalan politics towards the territorial dimension framed around sovereignty. The ANC was required to suspend substantial ideological debate around social issues, instead speaking in generalities of “una Catalunya para todos”, to avoid rupturing an organisation with divergent ideological positions. The national question or, more accurately, the independence question, became the sole repository of mobilisation. In marked contrast to the Scottish campaign centred around concrete and specific ideas of social justice, the ANC has been required to steer clear of such notions.¹⁸ The ANC is a reflection of the social structure of Catalonia over the post-Franco period. The movement is close to hegemonic in the interior, les comarcas, where Spanish speaking migration is lower than 20 per cent, where all social classes use the Catalan language and pro-sovereignty voting behaviour is well above 60 per cent. The ANC receives strong support from public sectors such as education and health, small businesses as well as those sectors of the middle class who have seen their class and social position threatened since 2008. Furthermore, amongst these sectors, the wider Spanish market is of little importance. The comparative weakness of the ANC in the greater urban zones from Barcelona to Tarragona, where the organisation is important but not dominant, is one further reflection of Catalan class structure.

¹⁷ THERBORN, Göran, ‘Class in the 21st Century’, *New Left Review*, Nov-Dec 2012, pp. 5-29; ESTANQUE, Elísio, ‘Middle-Class Rebellions? Precarious Employment and Social Movements in Portugal and Brazil (2011-2013)’, *RCCS Annual Review*, Vol. 7, October 2015, pp. 17-44 and NACHTWEY, Oliver, *Germany's Hidden Crisis: Social Decline in the Heart of Europe*, Bloomsbury, London, 2019.

¹⁸ SCOTT, Andrew, ‘Economics and National Autonomy’, in McHARG, Aileen, MULLEN, Tom and WALKER, Neil, (eds.), *The Scottish Independence Referendum: Constitutional and Political Implications*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, pp. 153–75.

Grassroots movements

If the ANC fails to fall within the category of full social movement is it perhaps a grassroots movement? Strategic goals and tactical approaches are what determines categorisation as grassroots activity.¹⁹ Grassroots movements can share similarities to social movements based on collective activity and can advocate (peaceful) demonstrations, protest petitions etc. However, the key distinguishing category of a grassroots type of organisation is that they are usually campaigning entities. Grassroots movements involve activity that does not break the law and are not disruptive. Furthermore, whilst grassroots movements are ideological, their ideology is weakly elaborated.²⁰ They build a culture of inclusion and encourage member participation, whilst building a new ethical framework.²¹ Given the scale of activity undertaken by the ANC between 2012 and 2017, we argue that whilst the organisation falls short of being a social movement yet its activity is also beyond that of a traditional grassroots movements. Therefore, the ANC is *sui generis*, straddling both of these analytical categories.

Political opportunity structure: the economic crisis and the Estatut

Political opportunities are key to the potential for social movements and political activity. Political opportunity includes the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments; the presence or absence of elite allies and finally the state's capacity and propensity for repression.²² Opportunities are external and can appear when the state order is perceived to be in crisis.²³

¹⁹ SYMANSKI, Ann-Marie E, *Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates, and Social Movement Outcomes*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003, p. 211.

²⁰ SMITH, David Horton, *Grassroots Associations*, Sage Publications, London, 2000, pp. 92-94.

²¹ HART, Stephen M., *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics: Styles of Engagement among Grassroots Activists*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001, p. 17.

²² GUIGNI, Marco, 'Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly', *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol. 15 No. 2, 2009, pp. 361–68.

²³ GRASSO, Maria and GIUGNI, Marco, 'Protest participation and economic crisis: The conditioning role of political opportunities', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 55, 2016, pp. 663–680.

These opportunities can be framed discursively.²⁴ In the case of Catalonia, a frame was built that Spain was a state in crisis and a real opportunity to achieve secession had appeared on the horizon.²⁵ Catalan society was convulsed, particularly between 2011 and 2013 as austerity ruptured social stability. Since this point, the Spanish state has faced a legitimacy crisis in Catalonia, as have, to some extent, the Catalan political parties. This led to the emergence of a belief that the movement faced a once in a generation opportunity to break with Spain and this opportunity must be grasped.²⁶ The slow gestation of the Estatut between 2006 and 2010, with the legal judgement appearing in the middle of an intense economic crisis, provided the contextual opportunity for the advance of Catalan secession. The decision of the Spanish Supreme Court in 2010 concerning the Estatut was the precipitating event that fed into an already existing accumulation of grievances. Cultural, language and quasi political associations were increasingly united in a common purpose.

The gestation of the ANC

Strategies to build social support for independence led to the appearance of varying forums between 2006 and 2012. The first large-scale civic mobilisation was 18 February 2006, a protest mobilising over 200,000 people. This early expression of popular pro-independence sentiment was led by *Plataforma pel Dret de Decidir*, which acted as an umbrella organisation for over 700 entities. The demonstration, whilst directly linked to the impasse over the Estatut, had a clear secessionist message. This was followed on 1 December 2007, with over 700,000 protesting in Barcelona over failures related to Catalan infrastructure, which linked economic grievance with pro-independence sentiment. These mobilisations cemented the status of organisations autonomous of the party system. As the legislation for the new Catalan Estatut, passed in 2006 was being assessed by the Spanish Supreme Court, increasingly political frustration saw the secessionist narrative in the ascendant. Between September 2009 and April 2011, Catalonia experienced a lengthy cycle of mobilisation. This took the form of a popular initiative for a non-binding referendum campaign whose sole purpose was to ask whether Catalonia should become an independent

²⁴ OPP, Karl-Dieter, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*, Routledge, London, 2009, p. 25.

²⁵ Full. Declaració de la Sectorial del moviment obrer de 'Assemblea Nacional Catalana, marzo de 2012, Caixa 1, Fons Assemblea Nacional Catalana, Centre Documental de la Comunicació, CEDOC.

²⁶ Full 'Ara és l'hora. Ara en tenim l'oportunitat', Carpeta 2014, Assemblea Nacional Catalana, CEDOC.

state within the European Union. The principal purpose of these mobilisations was to raise social awareness of sovereignty.²⁷ Over 800,000 people in some 500 municipalities took part, with the process culminating in the city of Barcelona in April 2011. To facilitate the organisation, over 25,000 amateur activists participated. This cycle of referendums lasted over a year and a half.²⁸ The Plataforma subsequently imploded due to factionalism. However, the skills honed by the Plataforma during the long wave of consultations between 2009 and 2011 left an already existing organisational base ready for utilisation which led to the creation of the Assemblea Nacional Catalana over 2011.²⁹ Both the Assemblea Nacional Catalana and other entities embraced horizontal networks and organisational structures as a deliberate tactic of distancing from the vertically organised political parties. The ANC sought to build a new kind of organisational model built around concentric circles arranged by location, profession and level of activism.

The Structure of the ANC

Social movements and campaigning organisations exhibit a range of structural forms. Traditional social movements contain little in terms of organisational structure and are able to act spontaneously. Social movement organisations however are organised. Organisational forms can include horizontal and vertical layers, degree of formal relationship and level of centralization.³⁰ Social and campaigning organisations are further marked by the level of commitment and activism expected of members or supporters. Furthermore they enable the shift from a personal to a social identity.³¹ The ANC has activists, members and supporters. Following its official launch, membership rose quickly and peaked at 80,000 by 2014. However, membership is not coterminous with activism. Whilst the ANC has striking mobilisational capacity every 11 September from 2012, attendance at a single annual event

²⁷ XIMENIS, Josep Manel, *D'Arenys de Munt al Cel: L'inici de les Consultes Independentistes*, CIM Edicions, Barcelona, 2010, pp. 198–9.

²⁸ GUIJOAN, Marc and RODON, Toni, 'Catalonia at the Crossroads: Analysis of the Increasing Support for Secession', in MORATÓ, Xavier Cuadras (ed.), *Catalonia: A New Independent State in Europe? A Debate on Secession within the European Union*, Routledge, London, 2016, pp. 20–59.

²⁹ BOSCH, Joan, *Moments Estel·lars de Catalunya*, La Campana, Barcelona, 2014, p. 194.

³⁰ WILLEMS, Jurgen and JEGERS, Marc, 'Social Movement Structures in Relation to Goals and Forms of Action: An exploratory model', *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research-Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OBSL et l'économie sociale*, Vol. 3, No 2, Fall / Automne, 2012, pp. 67 – 81.

³¹ HOGG, Michael and TURNER, Thomas, 'Intergroup behaviour, self-stereotyping and the salience of social categories', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 26 No. 4, 1987, pp. 325–340.

was testimony to the low commitment of supporters (not members). The ANC is highly effective at the marshalling of political solidarity yet little was demanded of most supporters. In this, it was unlike both traditional social and grassroots movements as, for most ANC supporters, activity was annual. The ANC adopted a pyramid-like organisational form, meaning there are both horizontal and vertical mechanisms in place. Local and sectoral assemblies exist at a horizontal level but coordinating roles also ensure a hierarchical form of communication of the views of the base. The annual assembly is the key event where the Secretariat determines the content. Five per cent of members can add an item to the agenda. The ANC is closer to the centralized than the decentralized form of political organisation and activities are carefully planned and organized. The movement has been able to hold elected representatives to account and ensure their fulfilment of promises. The direct lines of communication between activists and social movement members has ensured rapid communication of concerns and frustrations regarding the political class. The ANC, in its geographical spread and organisational structure, sought to ensure the decentralisation of power.³² Whilst the membership can contribute to policy formation, much of the practice of the organisation at its highest level is in the form of indirect democracy.

The Assemblea divided the territory of Catalonia into ten regions, for organisational purposes, with Barcelona becoming Region One. The secretariat was divided into six commissions: organització i finances; extensió territorial i sectorial; comissió jurídica; comunicació; hoja de ruta y actes. The ANC has two two main organisational strands. Firstly, the Assemblees Territorials. The role of the territorial assembly is to raise awareness locally around the independence debate and proselytism is encouraged. Secondly, we find the Assemblees Sectorials. Here the ANC is organised across a range of areas: professionals, socials, cultural, etc. The sectorial assemblies provide report on how their sector would benefit from independence. The subsequent organisation level is the Secretariat Nacional formed by 75 individuals, which are chosen at local (50) and national (25) level. The highest layer of the ANC, including its President, is chosen indirectly by this body. The role of the Secretariat is to achieve consensus around strategy and tactical issues. It is here that the form of the campaigns are determined. A smaller body, the Comitè Executiu is made up of 19 members. The Assemblea Nacional Catalana is made up of volunteers and members, whose

³² BARNILS, Andreu, *La Revolució Tranquil·la: Carme Forcadell i l'Assemblea Nacional Catalana*, Rosa dels Vents, Barcelona, 2014, p. 136.

fees provide much of the funding. The ANC benefits from individual donations and has an extensive operation in the sale of merchandise, including t-shirts, flags, banners and rucksacks.

Identity, values and ideology

The nation provides a horizontal sense of collective identity. This can also mean participants share core values which can be articulated in ideological terms. This collective identity is made up of shared “cultural capital”. Through collective identity processes, movement actors develop a shared cultural toolkit (a repertoire of protest methods including nonviolent tactics).³³ The ANC has used its membership as a vertical channel of communication to the leadership. The ideology of the ANC can be termed liberal in terms of its relationship to capitalism. Questions of infrastructure and improved economic efficiency have formed central components to the demands for independence. The ANC has defined a Catalonia that experiences economic disadvantage through its membership of Spain. The movement expresses a form of productivism, which has deep roots in a Catalan culture convinced of its advanced economic pedigree. The market economy is seen as a natural form, with the need for reform recognised though some critique of trans-national capitalism is also evident. Given its social basis amongst the middle classes, we find a strong defence of national economic sovereignty (against Spain). Catalonia is to emerge as an advanced European economy, a vision that we can call inclusionary capitalism. ‘Tiene una gran potencia económica y humana para ser un estado rico y competitivo’.³⁴ We also find a rhetoric of social justice though little in terms of its practical application. Questions of taxation have also formed part of this economic narrative. Taxation is frequently a grievance for middle class sectors of any society and questions of injustice around taxation have provoked political protest in many contexts. The modern state not only contains a coercive

³³ ROBNETT, Belinda, ‘External Political Change, Collective Identities, and Participation in Social Movement Organizations’ in MEYER, David S., WHITTIER, Nancy and ROBNETT, Belinda (Eds.), *Social Movements. Identity, Culture, and the State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 266-285.

³⁴ Full, ‘Un estat insolidari’, Carpeta Propaganda, Fons Assemblea Nacional Catalana, CEDOC.

monopoly in terms of violence but also one in its compulsory enforcement of tax collection.³⁵ The ANC produced a series of campaigns focussed on the injustice of the Catalan tax contribution to the central state.³⁶ At times, calls were made to refuse to send taxes to Madrid but given the clear illegality to such actions, these calls stayed merely rhetorical.

Social and political activists develop “frames” as a means of developing political agency and strategic unity. The pro-independence claims made around democracy, voting and self-determination sought to influence global public opinion as unanswerable and reasonable demands. These frames included the identity frame, where for Catalan media emphasis was placed on distinctiveness. As the movement evolved, it crafted a moral project around freedom and justice (rights). The ANC has been skilful as devising what is termed a ‘justificatory rhetoric’.³⁷ Catalan independence is framed as the embodiment of European values of democracy. For many Catalans, the struggle is between democracy and undemocratic practices, hence the prominence of slogans such as ‘Queremos votar’. Many of the principal public expressions and campaigns of Catalan independence have therefore been focussed on the democratic rights of the Catalan people. The right to decide has been used as a political mechanism to express Catalan self-determination. Catalan sovereignty is presented as representative of a higher ethical order.

As with most movements that act around the axis of national identity, the ANC pursued the strategy to present itself as the voice of the Catalan people. A Catalan people that has embraced sovereignty is testimony to a transformed political environment. Doctrines of popular sovereignty conceive ‘the people’ as a historically constructed territorial community. This framing of the Catalan people was inevitably that of a single entity mobilised for a single purpose. The Catalan people are unique and separate from the Spanish; hence, they must be independent. They represent an unbroken lineage of a thousand years of history and different to Spaniards in terms of language, values and cultural practices. ‘El

³⁵ MURPHY, Liam B. and NAGEL, Thomas, *The Myth of Ownership: Taxes and Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp, 41-42.

³⁶ Full, ‘Els meus impostos, A Catalunya’ 2013; Full, ‘Un estat insolidari’ and 2014, Full ‘Campanya de Sobirania Fiscal. Paguem els nostres Impostos a Catalunya and 2015, Full, ‘Perque Catalunya necessita un estat?’, Carpetas 2013, 2014 and 2015, Fons Assemblea Nacional Catalana, CEDOC.

³⁷ LEACHMAN, Gwendolyn, ‘Legal Framing’, SARAT, Austin (Ed.) *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, Vol. 61, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, 2013, pp. 25-59.

pueblo aparece aquí como una realidad casi sagrada'.³⁸ Thus, 'the people' represents a new way of imagining political association.³⁹ According to the sovereignty movement, the Catalan people have come to represent the embodiment of democracy: dictatorship comes from Spain as does judicial repression whilst the Catalans seek only for the will of the democratic majority to be expressed. The effect of these strategies has been to embody the moral high ground, a superior society held in abeyance by a corrupt and anti-democratic Spain.

As the membership of the ANC spanned the political spectrum, from ultra-leftists to conservatives, many of the political declarations of the movement were of necessity bland and ambiguous, containing terms like 'fairness', 'justice' and 'freedom', which all could identify with and interpret in their own way.⁴⁰ Old supporters of independence and the new could feel represented through a diffuse ideological phenomenon. The ANC constructed internal mechanism to create a shared value system within the organisation and then transmit these values across Catalan society. Activists were encouraged to make full use of social media, hang the Estelada from their balconies and try to convert the undecided to the independence cause.⁴¹ Proselytising was to be used to create a virtuous circle of growth in the organisation.⁴² In the fourth mass Diada held in 2015, the event was structured to enable the political communication of its core values. The demonstration was broken up into sections, each articulating the ANC's strategic messages: Equilibrio Territorial, Solidaridad, Abiertos al Mundo, Sostenibilidad, Igualdad, Innovación, Regeneración Democrática, Educación y Cultura, Bienestar y Justicia Social.⁴³ Significantly, the further function of this Diada was to promote electoral participation and support for the pro-independence electoral slate for the September elections.

³⁸ ÁLVARO, Francesc-Marc, *Ensayo general de una revuelta. Las claves del proceso catalán*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2019, p. 69.

³⁹ YACK, Bernard, *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2012, pp. 145–7.

⁴⁰ Document Fundacional (2012), Estatuts i Reglament de Règim Intern; ANC (2012) Declaració Fundacional; ANC (2013) Reglament de Règim Intern de l'Assemblea Nacional Catalana; ANC (2013) Estatuts ANC, Carpetas 2012 and 2013, Fons Assemblea Nacional Catalana, CEDOC.

⁴¹ Full, 'Què faig jo per la independència?', 2014, Carpeta Propaganda ANC, CEDOC.

⁴² AINSA I PUIG, Enric, *Els orígens de l'Assemblea Nacional Catalana. Les indiscrecions del majordom*, Institut de Promoció i Investigació Històriques, Barcelona, 2012, pp. 124-125.

⁴³ Full, *Via Lluire a la República Catalana*. 2015, Carpeta 2015, Fons ANC, CEDOC.

Prior to the ANC, during the protests of 2006, 2007 and the consultes of 2009 to 2011, horizontal structures and the absence of individual leaders marked the independence movement. The social movements that emerged from 2006 expressed strong reluctance to institutionalise themselves and ought to craft a new way of doing politics. The leaderless phase of the sovereignty movement came to an end with the emergence of the ANC, when Carme Forcadell and Muriel Casals of Òmnium Cultural came to be the public figures of the sovereignty movement. Leadership forms can be pivotal in determining the success of movements and these two leaders seemed capable of being above much of the internal dispute that has been endemic within independence movement. Citizen activists had much greater impact than members of political parties and the leadership of the movements channelled the grievances rather than simply representing them. Social media has also played a key role in the visibility of the movement and its capacity to mobilise.⁴⁴ With its trend towards self-selection, social media provides opportunities to consolidate support networks and reach beyond the limitations of traditional media forms. Social media then has functioned as a successful avenue of political communication to facilitate the visibility of the movement.⁴⁵ In this, the social movements embrace this new technology, further distinguishing themselves from the tired formulas of political parties. These technologies have expanded the scope of recruitment and mobilisation.⁴⁶ The mobilisation of symbols is important in social movements as the movements communicate to a broad public through the mass media.⁴⁷ The ANC has been highly effective in using social media platforms as a single organisation but its reach has extended further by its local, regional and sectoral groupings also being present on various platforms. The scale of the Catalan protests have facilitated messaging. However, as we have noted, the Catalan sovereignty movement exists in parallel to pro-independence political parties and institutions. Traditionally social movements are attention seeking organisations yet in the Catalan case, local broadcast media, including regional TV and radio stations, have consistently provided a ready-made platform for the

⁴⁴ CRAMERI, Kathryn, *Goodbye, Spain? The Question of Independence for Catalonia*, Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014, p. 35.

⁴⁵ BALCELLS, Josep and PADRÓ-SOLANET, Albert, *Piulant la Gent s'Entén? El Debat Sobre la Independència de Catalunya a les Xarxes Socials*, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, Barcelona, 2017.

⁴⁶ MOGHADAM, Valentine M., *Globalization and Social Movements. Islam, Feminism and the Global Justice Movements*, Rowman and Littlefield: New York, 2013, p. 208.

⁴⁷ KOWALEWSKI, David, 'The Protest Uses of Symbolic Politics: the Mobilization Functions of Protester Symbolic Resources', *Social Science Quarterly Baton Rouge*, Vol 61, Num 1, 1980, pp 95-113.

ANC. The Diada of 2012 was organised between the ANC and the regional government of Artur Mas, with TV3 given a promotional role for the event.⁴⁸

The Diada of September 2012 was the public expression of emotional, social and political grievance and was unprecedented in its scale and influence. It was notable that placards carried on this first mass scale Diada were frequently a popular expression of collective grievance, including social claims. Subsequently, the messaging and public expression of the Diada was closely managed ensuring unanimity in message and communication. The Diada of 2012 was however the moment that control passed from the political institutions to the street and the subsequent 12 months would see an intense process undertaken by the Catalan political class to domesticate and subordinate the movement to its postulates.⁴⁹ As a direct consequence of the Diada of 2012, Artur Mas called early elections in an attempt to capitalise on social pressure. The demonstration of 2012 in Barcelona had become a political turning point, driven by the citizens toward a referendum for self-determination. In 2013, following the Via Catalana, an event again vast in scale, social pressure again forced a response from the political class, which agreed to hold a form of referendum, called a consultation, announced in December 2013.⁵⁰ The ANC was key in ensuring that some kind of vote, even the symbolic kind as eventually occurred, took place on 9 November 2014. The symbolic vote held 9 November 2014 had a number of consequences. It introduced ‘voting as form of civil disobedience’.⁵¹ The turnout of 2.3 million Catalans became for many an epic story of national rebirth and triumph though it soon became apparent that the vote had no real political outcome.

The ANC is a movement that has had a clear impact on the public sphere. The emergence of the ANC changed the nature of party competition in the short term and the organisation has had significant indirect impact on the framing of the electoral cycle. The

⁴⁸ GARCIA, Lola, *El Naufragio. La deconstrucción del sueño independentista*, Barcelona: Península, 2018, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁹ *Anuari Polític de Catalunya 2014*, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, Barcelona, no. 8, 2015, pp. 33–41.

⁵⁰ BROTONS, Ròmul and ALBERTÍ, Elisenda, *300 Anys de Lluita*, Albertí, Barcelona, 2014, pp. 211–2.

⁵¹ UCELAY da CAL, Enric ‘Catalonia Dreaming: The Rise of Mass Catalan Secessionism’, *Revista de Historia Actual*, no. 3, 2015, p. 31.

ANC held a degree of political initiative, particularly between 2012 and 2014, where the Catalan political class was forced to respond to its pressures.⁵² This struggle for control of the movement was not completed until the unitary candidature Junts pel Sí incorporated the ANC and Òmnium Cultural as direct participants in the election slate of 27 September 2015. Since the crisis, parties in the rest of Spain and Catalonia have been particularly notable in their incorporation of non-career politicians onto their lists. The parties have sought to share the credibility of the social organisations. This can be clearly shown through the direct incorporation of the former President of the ANC, Carme Forcadell, as chair of the Catalan parliament in 2015. This change is testament to the deep influence held by the ANC over the party system.⁵³ Jordi Sànchez as new ANC leader worked in parallel with the then Catalan President Artur Mas. However, it can also be seen as an attempt by the dominant pro-sovereignty party to domesticate the ANC. The leadership change from Carme Forcadell to Jordi Sanchez was part of this incorporation and domestication, with the ANC increasingly subordinated to a party political agenda.⁵⁴ Sànchez became the new leader of the Junts per Catalunya candidature, a further indication of the transmission belt between the ANC and the party system. This was no long march through the institutions by social movement form as relations between the civic movement, political parties and elected bodies have been fluid throughout the period.

Patriotic Performance

Between 2012 and 2014 the ANC crafted an iconography and political brand. This was a unique and innovative form of display, visual vocabulary and political communication through the annual Diadas. The Diada became the annual ritual of Catalan independence. The professionalised choreography of patriotic performance was used to express the organisation's power and mobilising capacity. Participants from across Catalonia discovered the power of horizontal comradeship. Public space thus became part of the articulation and spectacle of representation of the Catalan nation, as defined by the ANC. The Diada was an

⁵² RIERA, Sebastià, *Onze de Setembre: Història de la Commemoració de la Diada a Barcelona*, Editorial Efadós, Barcelona, 2013, p. 156.

⁵³ MARTÍ, Pere, *Escac a l'Estat: La Trama Secreta del 9N i la Represa del Procés*, Pòrtic, Barcelona, 2015, pp. 104–106.

⁵⁴ PUJOL MAS, Andreu, *Vam fer un referendun. 1-0: El que sabem i el que no sabem*, Edicions Saldonar, Barcelona, 2018, pp. 45-47.

annual affirmation of sovereignty. As the Diada developed year by year, innovations were evident in messaging through choices of representational colour: red, yellow, purple etc. Echoing Bauman, 'the central meanings and values of a group are embodied, acted out, and laid open to examination and interpretation in symbolic form'.⁵⁵ Annual slogans were used to express both aims, precise moment of the struggle and impending destination. «Catalunya, nou estat d'Europa» (2012), «Via Catalana cap a la Independència» (2013), «V-Via Catalana» (2014) i «Via Lliure a la República Catalana» (2015) and so on. Public expression is also found in the constant production of leaflets, stickers, badges, posters and flags used by the movement. The modest costs associated with these forms facilitates mass production and distribution. The ANC developed its own semiotic code of political communication, allowing its members and supporters to share in the articulation of a collective public identity. Whether in digital or analogue form, members and supporters are able to express their collective identification.⁵⁶

Goals and success/failure

All political or social movements want to achieve their objectives. A failed movement is an attempt at mobilization that never gets off the ground. A movement failure is that of a movement, once mobilized, to achieve any of the desired types of outcomes. Movement participation should be viewed as a rational way to achieve political goals. For participation to be interpreted as rational, social movements must succeed fairly often and their achievements must depend at least partly on factors subject to participants' control.⁵⁷ Assessing success and failure in social and political movements requires consideration of not the only the wider context but also the inherent values and beliefs within a movement.⁵⁸ Assessing a movement's success involves determining whether it has achieved its goals. But what are its goals? What constitutes a successful movement outcome? Movements may be

⁵⁵ BAUMAN, Richard, 'Performance and Honor in 13th-Century Iceland', *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 99, No. 392, 1986, pp. 131-150.

⁵⁶ GERBAUDO, Paolo, 'Protest avatars as memetic signifiers: political profile pictures and the construction of collective identity on social media in the 2011 protest wave', *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 18 No. 8, 2015, pp. 916-929.

⁵⁷ GAMSON, William A., *The Strategy of Social Protest*, Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, 1990.

⁵⁸ BANASZAK, Lee Ann, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail: Opportunity, Culture, and the Struggle for Woman Suffrage*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 222.

considered successful to the extent that they achieve their formally stated goals. These include the acceptance of a challenging group by its antagonists as a valid representative for a legitimate set of interests, and the winning of new advantages for the group.⁵⁹ Thus the ANC has failed in its fundamental objective of the independence of Catalonia yet the organisation has been successful in terms of attention seeking, media visibility, international attention and its direct influence on the Catalan political system.

When prophecy fails

The Catalan movement has been highly unusual in its construction of an optimistic culture of prediction with its claim that the independence of Catalonia was not just a probability but was imminent. Whilst the response and mobilisation of July 2010 can be termed reactive, the development of the Diadas from 2012 can be framed within this optimistic narrative of the future.⁶⁰ An intriguing element of the ANC has been its unrealisable temporality. The Catalan movement has been marked by a sense of urgency that has repeatedly led to the movement setting of new objectives, dates and signposts that have become intrinsic to the independence movement. As one of the progenitors to the ANC, we can note that the Moviment per la Independència (MxI) noted in the summer of 2009, that Catalonia would become independent ‘en el marc de la Unió Europea nomes ho aconseguirem si esdevé un clam d’una majoria social incontestable’.⁶¹ The foundational document of the ANC referred to the need in a referendum for ‘uns resultats incontestables’, as well as any referendum taking place ‘supervisat per organismes internacionals’. In its foundational documents of 2011, it spoke of ‘l’horització de 2014 es, avui, mes possible que mai’. The rhetoric around obtaining a clear social majority was never fully abandoned but as events proceeded it no longer seemed a political priority as the belief increased that independence was imminent. By 2017, the ANC was proclaiming: ‘Es preveu que al llarg del

⁵⁹ JENKINS, Craig, ‘Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9, 1983, pp. 527-553.

⁶⁰ MARTÍ, Pere, ‘Del català emprenyat al català emancipat’ in ALCOBERRO, Agustí, (Ed.), *La Segona República a Catalunya, Vol. 4 1714-2014. El camí de la independència*, ARA Llibres, Barcelona, 2014, pp. 32-39.

⁶¹ ANC Full de Ruta, 2012, Carpeta 2012, Fons ANC, CEDOC.

2017 la Generalitat i el Parlament de Catalunya proclamin la independència... entrarem així a l'etapa de constitució de la sobirania'.⁶²

The ANC constructed a positive political narrative of the possibility of peaceful change. In this culture of prophecy, the ANC and others bear resemblances to millenarian movements, whether religious or political in orientation. Millenarian movements are almost always focused on prophecies predicting future events. The prophecies themselves vary widely in their nature and specificity. But those drawn to the prophecies commonly invest deeply in them, both emotionally and materially. Almost all of these prophecies, however, ultimately fail. Dates and events pass without either the cataclysmic or wonderful consequences anticipated: 'ideological cris[es] born of prophetic failures [are] a virtually universal feature of the careers of millenarian groups'.⁶³ When the prophecies fail to come true, believers are often shocked, disappointed, and bewildered. Counterintuitively, the vast majority of groups making millennial predictions weather the storm of disconfirmation quite well. Rather than driving members away in doubt and frustration, the failures may intensify the commitments of followers, at least for a time.⁶⁴ As for social movements, those that are prophecy making are required to engage in a process of denial, forgetting or reinterpretation when predictions fail to occur.⁶⁵

Conclusions

The Assemblea Nacional Catalana has resisted insertion in a clear typology of either social or grassroots movements. Social movement theory has long noted that radicalisation

⁶² Full Assemblea General Ordinària 2016 and Full de Ruta 2016-2017, Carpeta 2016 and 2017, Fons ANC, CEDOC.

⁶³ ZYGMUNT, Joseph, 'Prophetic Failure and Chilistic Identity: The Case of Jehovah's Witnesses', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 75, No. 6, 1970, pp. 926-948.

⁶⁴ FESTINGER, Leon, RIECKEN, Henry W., and SCHACTER, Stanley, *When Prophecy Fails*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1956, p. 151 and DAWSON, Lorne L., 'Prophetic Failure in Millennial Movements' in WESSINGER, Catherine (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 150-170.

⁶⁵ VAN FOSSENS, Anthony B., 'How Do Movements Survive Failures of Prophecy?' in KREISBERG, Louis, MISZTAL, Bronislaw and MUCHA, Janusz (Eds.), *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change: A Research Annual*, JAI Press, Greenwich, 1988, 193-212.

can be one outcome of movement failure.⁶⁶ The broader Catalan sovereignty movement until 2017 represented can be termed "a romantic revolt in politics".⁶⁷ Moral outrage and collective shock at police violence and the imprisonment of the civic and political leadership led into a late radicalisation of the movement. The events of 20 September 2017 saw the first real expression of spontaneous popular mobilisation, which the ANC joined, but significantly did not lead.⁶⁸ The referendum 1 October 2017 was attempted and supported by activists from the CDR who began to develop a strategy of resistance. A parallel organisation, the *Movimiento Escuelas Abiertas*, brought together parents in an attempt to occupy polling stations and ensure the referendum took place. The vast majority of the 4300 Catalan polling stations were occupied by these movements. The initial phase of the CDR can be termed that of horizontal self-organisation to support the referendum.⁶⁹ Subsequently the CDR re-emerged as *Comités de Defensa de la República*. A transitional phase from the positive tactical approach of the ANC to the more disruptive actions of the CDR lasted for two years. For the first time, new participatory actions including transport disruption, minor acts of sabotage and a more confrontational political style emerged. Yet as we have noted, there has always been within the Catalan sovereignty movement a relationship between institutions and the civic movement. This institutional character has continued with the new social movements. The CDR posited themselves as an activist rival to the ANC, leading to a radicalisation of this original organisation. A shared characteristic of the CDR/Tsunami is the role of younger, educated, middle-class activists who organise through social media messaging platforms. The emergence of this new form represents a full articulation of the social movement form, unlike, we have seen, the repertoire, messaging and strategy adopted by the ANC. Direct action and the articulation of civil disobedience represented the end point to the strategy adopted by the ANC, 2012 to 2017.

Although radicalisation suggests the embracing of increasingly disruptive agendas, this should not be seen as irrational. Rather, new mechanisms are chosen and are rationalised within a movement.⁷⁰ The CDR are a horizontal form of organisation, have an assembly like character and are absent of leadership. They emerged as a part response of the ambivalence of

⁶⁶ ALIMI, Eitan Y., BOSI, Lorenzo, DEMETRIOU, Charles, *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.

⁶⁷ BEER, Samuel, *Britain Against Itself*, Norton, New York, 1982, p. 149.

⁶⁸ Oriol MARCH, *Los entresijos del Procés*, Catarata, Madrid, 2018, p. 99.

⁶⁹ VVAA, *Els fets de l'1 d'octubre*, Pagès Editors, Lleida, 2017, p. 79.

⁷⁰ WINTROBE, Ronald, *Rational Extremism: The Political Economy of Radicalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.

the ANC around the referendum. The CDR are organised at a local level. Ideologically they are radically left and socially critical, including of the regional institutions of the Catalan government. However, as noted, a radical response has also emerged within traditional middle-class sectors so the CDR combine radical left messaging combined with a commitment from rightist nationalists to the organisation. Civil disobedience, which had been deemed unnecessary by the ANC through its repeated affirmation of its peaceful values, became an increasing part of the repertoire of the Catalan sovereignty movement.

The events of September to December 2017 testified to the strategic limits of the *Assemblea Nacional Catalana*. Seven successive and vast mass mobilisations each September since 2012 demonstrated their political limitation. The ANC often seemed to interpret its successful annual mobilization mobilisations as themselves providing the legitimacy to break with Spain. The Catalan sovereignty movement, which had shown extraordinary longevity, in contrast to the 15M, finally reached a strategic end point in the autumn of 2017.⁷¹ The Catalan movement for independence is continuing to digest the implications of the failure of secession in October 2017. The political defeat has led to a reconfiguration of independence narratives. For most of the period until the attempted independence referendum of October 2017, the ANC was a key political actor. At times between 2012 and 2015, it seemed able to determine the political decision making of a regional government and its associated parties. The victorious electoral slate of September 2015 represented the subordination of the ANC to the party system. The ever-greater imbrication within the broader alliance of ANC/institutions/parties meant the ANC was unprepared for the arrival of contentious politics, as occurred from the autumn of 2017. The strategic and tactical choices made by the ANC between 2012 and 2017, and their ultimate failure in October 2017, has meant that subsequently the *Assemblea Nacional Catalana* is but one social actor amongst many and no longer has a monopoly over social mobilisation. Post-2017, the ANC has supported increasingly radical tactics but this confirms the comparative weakness of the organisation which is no longer a dominant element within a wider sovereignty movement. The *Assemblea* is, as we have argued, *sui generis*, but the failure of this political form brings to an end the Catalan anomaly within a wider European protest culture.

⁷¹ ANTENTAS, Josep Maria, *Espectros de Octubre. Perturbaciones y paradojas del independentismo catalán*, Sylone, Barcelona, 2018, p. 119.

