Memorandum of imperialism: 1713, when Europe abandoned the Catalans

History, May 10th
Half Europe authorized, three centuries ago, to dismantle a crown with more than five centuries of history, in exchange for ending a war for the control of the colonial empire. As a result, the rights and privileges, civil and institutional, of the kingdoms that were part of it were ended. The principality of the crown, Catalonia, lost there its authority in front of the king, carved by the implementation of a parliamentary system unique in Europe, and, the king, exercised the right of conquest. With the Treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, the European alliance against the Bourbons was broken, and these, upon taking possession of “the Spains”, imposed their authority under the Castilian
model. The Principality of Catalonia was a currency that facilitated the distribution, agreed, of colonial rights, and the beginning of the most fruitful stage of the European colonization of the world.

Catalonia and the rest of the Catalan kingdoms, Valencia and Mallorca, refused to renounce their civil rights and exercise their self-government. Today, three centuries later, Catalonia asks to express, again, their will, because Spain and Europe denied it, leading to an anomalous political configuration of Spain and a cultural selection hostile, authoritarian and never accepted willingly.

Now there are no colonial, monarchical or religious reasons that justify neglecting it, and instead there are ethical reasons, in their maximum fundamental expression, that justify making a correct decision on the “case of the Catalans.” But Europe and, of course, Spain, refuse to redirect the just historical development.

For this reason, given the repeated disavowal of the Catalan civil, socio-cultural and national reality, both present and historical, and, in the face of the passive and insufficient determination of the European Union, it is convenient to expose the origin of the events that changed in form hostile the relations of Catalonia within the concept of Spain, and that were the cause of an induced distortion of history that has persisted up to the present. It would be logical that such details would not be necessary here to relate them, but as the matter is being discussed in the media and in state and European institutions, as well as in certain intellectual circles that are related to it, it is crucial to review the facts and update their relevance.

Europe and Spain must take on the challenge of reviewing the common history, and incorporate the Catalans into it, as a memorization exercise necessary to build the cultural empathy necessary to protect, legitimize, the referendum of self-determination that Catalonia claims, after public, open and honest debate, of all parties involved.

Attending to the common responsibility that links, to half Europe, with the dismantling of the Catalan authority, with the signatures of the treaties of the Pyrenees (1659), of Rijswijk (1697) and of Utrecht (1713), and, attending to the unequal pulse that, once again, Spain exercises over the Catalans, it is necessary to remember. It is by
ethical imperative. It is appropriate to replenish the values that should allow any law to respond correctly to its fundamental purpose: a just and pious order for the government of states, the expression of free judgment without coercion and full knowledge of human cultural memory. Europe, together with Spain, must take up the historical question as an exercise of common memory suitable to work the cultural empathy necessary to take the just decision, and to protect, legitimize, the referendum of self-determination that Catalonia offers, after public debate, open and honest of all the parties involved.

Europe can't be reproached for not having fair and honest information about the Catalans, which the institutional arm of Spanish historiography has distorted for reasons of power. But Europe signed the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, and of that it is aware. And, very especially, the United Kingdom, which thanks to it obtained the privileges that took it to the dominion of good part of the world, and of Gibraltar, that was conquered with the Catalan troops, in 1704. With the taking of Gibraltar (and, during the 18th century, of the island of Menorca), England could control the route with Asia and, in the 19th century, until the 20th century, it took possession of Egypt and the Holy Land, in a chapter of history that ended with the Ottoman Empire, in 1919, on the occasion of the First World War, and with the creation of the State of Israel, in 1948, after the Second World War. With the Treaty of Utrecht, in turn, half Europe divided rights over the colonial project, until then guarded by the Iberian monarchs, with the approval of the Vatican. In the case of the United Kingdom, all this was possible after uniting the parliaments of Scotland and England with the Act of Union of 1707, thus initiating new and prosperous alliances. But, in fact, there was a previous alliance, with the Catalans, in 1705, sealed in Genoa, which England has erased from its history. In this pact or treaty, England took sides in the war of succession and undertook to defend the Catalan cause against the Bourbons, and their alliance with the Archduke Charles of Austria, incorporating the commitment to defend their privileges. It was a geopolitical strategy thought. In return, England would send 10,000 soldiers to Catalonia and deliver 12,000 rifles. For this reason, he is aware of his responsibility to the Catalans. It was they who, in 1704, sent dozens of ships off the coast of Barcelona to propose an alliance against the Bourbon pretensions for the control of the Spanish Empire, and, due to this, the War of
Spanish Succession began. But the war didn’t have the expected result for the Catalans. After an open battle on multiple fronts, England abandoned the Catalan cause and began, in return, their singular colonial enterprise.

Since then, England and the United Kingdom have an outstanding debt with the Catalans.

Since then, Spain is eminently Castilian, and insists that its Castilianess is a historical right. For this, it has distorted the meaning of the history of Spain, which is presented as an eminently Castilian project, when it was not really like that. It has transformed the “war of Spanish succession” into a minor episode, which allowed Spain to emerge from the feudal yoke, and, on the other hand, denies and erases, before the collective conscience of history, the undeniable parliamentary tradition of the Catalans, their institutions, their historical rights and privileges carved into the development of civil rights that Europe leads since the Middle Ages. At the same time, he affirms that the colonial enterprise was Castilian from its beginnings, lacking the truth, and denying the authority of the Crown of Aragon in the Spanish crown, whose fusion is materialized with the accumulation of powers in Charles I of Habsburg. Just remember the powers that came from the Catalan, Aragonese and Italian crown, called Aragon, and those from Castile.

Far from trying to dignify the colonial enterprise, it is important to reconstruct its original reason by the historical considerations that it entails. It is because it is a sign that, at a certain moment, there was another colonial enterprise that was also Catalan and of which nothing is known. And Catalonia, Spain, Europe and all of humanity have the right to know it.

In the testament of Fernando de Aragón, of 1516, the king indicates that he leaves his daughter Juana (among other powers) “la part Nos pertany a las Indies de la Mar Oceana” (it is written in Catalan and means “the part that We belong to the Indies of the Ocean Sea”) (Font: Fundación Casa de Alba, see Biblioteca Histórica de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, http://biblioteca.ucm.es/blogs/Foliocomplutense/8013.php). Then, he reports on some domains of the Indies that, as king of Aragon, he says to transfer his daughter. And it informs in Catalan, when, officially (unheard of), King Fernando did not know Catalan. And it is
not a curiosity, since there are multiple evidences that corroborate it. Numerous maps, officially dated in the 16th century, basically, that have been preserved throughout the world (outside Spain), show the Catalan symbols in the Spanish oceanic possessions, along with other singularities such as the presence of flags with Half Moon in America (maps of Jorge Reinel, 1519; of Guillaume Le Testu, 1555; of Bastian Lopes, 1558; of Lázaro Luís, 1563; of Domingo Teixeira, 1573; of Joan Oliva, 1614; etc.).

This question, far from trying to dignify the colonial enterprise, is relevant because of the historical considerations that it entails. It is because it is a sign that, at a certain moment, there was another original colonial reason that was also Catalan and of which nothing is known. And Catalonia, Spain, Europe and all of humanity have the right to know it. On the other hand, it questions both the unprecedented Castilianization of the kings of the Crown of Aragon since the beginning of the 15th century and the mythical communion of the crowns of Castile and Aragon with the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, as well as the Castilian supremacy of this alliance. It is therefore convenient to remember the rest of the possessions and dignities that Fernando de Aragón gave his daughter Juana. They were: the Principality of Catalonia, the territories of Roussillon and the rest of the “Northern Catalonia”, the kingdoms of Aragon, Valencia, Majorca, Sardinia, Sicily, Naples, the cities of Bejaia, Algiers and Tripoli (in Africa), and, of singular way, the dignities (holders) of Duke of Athens and Neopatras, king of Hungary, king of Jerusalem and emperor of the Roman Empire.

According to the historian Jerónimo Zurita (in 1580), Fernando the Catholic receives the rights of Emperor of the Roman Empire of Andrew Palaiologos, in 1502, while according to other sources the dignity of the Roman emperor is shared with the tsar of Russia, as legitimate heir (that’s why the Roman double-headed eagle looks on his flag). In its place, Castilla contributed the peninsular territories to the queen Juana. This is an illogical historical meaning more if one considers the large number of possessions of half Europe that accumulates King Charles. Although historians affirm the opposite, it makes no sense that the colonial enterprise was Castilian from its beginnings. Certainly, it exists the overwhelming presence of Castilian in the colonies of Spain, but it is also true that this empire was eminently Castilian since the end of the War of Spanish Succession, in 1715, when the Kingdom of Mallorca fell, and, since
then, it could have imposed this history, framed in the unquestionable inquisitorial impunity. The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language was created in 1712, and the Royal Academy of Spanish History in 1738. In the same way, English, French and Dutch implanted their respective languages in their colonies of America, Africa, Asia and Oceania between the centuries XVIII and XX, lasting as official languages after the dismantling of the colonial system, authorized since 1945.

Whatever the real history, the truth is that Spain, unilaterally Castilianized since the 18th century, has created a contradictory imaginary, for reasons of power. Since then, Spain has been insisting, in an impulsive way, to impose its authority in the face of any evidence or indication of the reconstruction of the Catalan authority. In its foundation appeals to the “law of history”. This law seeks that legality be an act of authority without further ado, where legitimacy is subordinated to it. When, in fact, for the correct order of the peoples, it is evident that if this subordination is not reversed, it is inevitable that there will be conflicts, and lack of authority at all levels. In a democratic and social order, legitimacy is necessarily the cause of legality, and to say otherwise is to deny reality, the past, the present, the future and human dignity.

Spain clings to its law, and uses it as a justification to deny the Catalan singularity, as well as to recriminate its right to exercise its social and cultural will, lacking historical truth. And, due to this, this law becomes the “slavery of the law” that recalls, once again, the abuses of colonial imperialism.

In front the Catalan denunciation of the abuses of the Spanish authority, that exerts, for centuries, instruments of domination on them, Spain appeals to the “law of conquest”, without recognizing it publicly. The “law” to which both the Government of Spain and His Majesty the King appeal is a “human law” that, effectively, serves to maintain a certain order in the Spanish State. But, this law, when used as a justification to deny the Catalan singularity, when it is used as a justification to deny the right of Catalan society to exercise its social and cultural will, when it lacks its own history, when it sends to prison at the political and civil representatives of the Catalan society, becomes the “slavery of the law” that recalls, once again, the abuses of colonial imperialism. It is an “artificial law”
that is far from its legitimacy when it denies the international law of
the peoples of the world to exercise their self-determination in a
peaceful manner.

Based on this complaint, this article describes the crucial facts that
preceded the War of Spanish Succession (1701/1705–1715), and
recovers, in this way, its true meaning. It was an imperialist and
colonial international war, in which there were victors and losers,
abuses and betrayals, like the one that Castilla exercised, in the
name of the Bourbons, on the Catalan kingdoms: the Principality of
Catalonia, the Kingdom of Valencia and the Kingdom of Majorca.
And all this took place when Europe was involved in religious, power
and prestige wars, between lineages and currents of thought. In the
background, the uncomfortable evidence of a colonial imperialism
was preventing any apex of constructive public debate, at a time
when there was no freedom of opinion without risk of ending up at
the stake, along with your whole family. The evangelizing
Christianity of the New Testament had nothing to do with military
colonization and the destruction, not to say genocide, that it
generated.

The origin of these events should be contextualized with the Thirty
Years War (1618–1648), which ended in 1648 with the Treaty of
Westphalia. In this pulse was at stake the history and the evolution
of multiple nations, in Western Europe, while tracing the territorial
limits of the Christian kingdoms and the Ottoman Empire in Eastern
Europe. The monarchical authority in question was that of the
Habsburgs –supported by the Society of Jesus– and their attempt to
impose a Catholic, universal imperialism for Europe and for the
colonial project. The challenge of the Christian reform headed by
Luther, Calvin and the English monarchy was at stake. In this
context, France, controlled by Cardinal Richelieu, put half of Europe
against them, taking advantage of the religious conflict for their own
benefit.

As a result of this struggle, state institutions were reinforced, and
part of the monarchical and religious authority was dismantled. In
some cases, independence processes were consolidated,
highlighting Holland and Switzerland, and, in others, processes of
secession were worked out, such as the one that would divide Spain
and Portugal, which would materialize with the Treaty of Lisbon, in
1669. The Principality of Catalonia also began, along with Portugal, in 1640, the secession of Spain, but did not achieve its objective. Catalonia sought refuge from the King of France, whom he became Count of Barcelona, but Castilla prevented it and, instead, Catalonia ended up divided between Spain and France, establishing the current border through the Pyrenees. This challenge ended with the Catalan defeat, and with half the Principality occupied by the French troops. After years of negotiation, a peace treaty was imposed, which meant the division of Catalan lands between the Bourbon and Habsburg monarchs. In 1659 the Treaty of the Pyrenees was sealed between Louis XIV of France and Philip IV of Spain. A matrimonial alliance between both crowns was established, the result of which was the creation of the dynastic rights of the Duke of Anjou, who, decades later, would end up becoming the first Bourbon king of Spain, crowned as Philip V. In turn, the treaty handed over the north of Catalonia to the French authority, and France took over Flanders and the Duchy of Luxembourg.

But the struggle for control of Catalonia continued, this time with constant French incursions. Between the years 1673 and 1697, there was a permanent war in Catalonia for the French advance, which ended up besieging and occupying Barcelona in 1697, in a war where Louis XIV of France faced the so-called Hapsburg League, formed in 1689 by the Austrian Empire, England, the United Provinces of the Netherlands (Holland), Spain, Savoy and the Holy See. The conflict was sealed with the Treaty of Rijswijk in 1697, where Spain recovered Luxembourg and Catalonia and in return delivered the western part of the island of Santo Domingo to France (later Haiti). The Holy German Roman Empire recovered Freiburg and Breisach; England returned to him Nova Scotia, to the east of the present Canada; and Strasbourg remained in France. Also, another of the consequences of the treaty of “peace” was the possibility of France to accede to the throne of Spain after the death of Charles II, and the conflict began again with his testament, the 1700.

The Catalans defended the Confederation of States of “the Spains” and a freer and more balanced order in Europe, at a time of strong and violent wars for colonial control and where different models of monarchical authority tended to perpetuate with greater or lesser success.
At the beginning of the 18th century, Catalonia was in the midst of the monarchist, absolutist and imperialist aspirations of the Bourbons, who opposed the Habsburgs, eager to be the ones who led the colonial power from Europe, and afraid of being subjugated. For all that said, when delivering the Spanish Empire to the Bourbons, between 1701 and 1704 another “European League of the Habsburgs” was rearmed, but this time being Spain and France (together with the Kingdom of Navarre) the main adversaries. In that historical moment, the Catalan cause was allied with the European holy league, before it was dismantled to distribute the colonial project. The Catalans, in the War of Spanish Succession, defended the confederation of states of “the Spains” and a freer and more balanced order in Europe, at a time of strong and violent wars for colonial control and where different models of monarchical authority tended to dominate with more or less success. The king Carlos III of Hapsburg (from 1711 the emperor Carlos I SAW of Germany), along with the queen Ana of England, Holland, Portugal and Savoy, defended the same order, before the Bourbon absolutism impelled from France.

The Queen of England had promised to defend and guarantee the liberties and privileges of the Catalans in the Genoa Pact of 1705, if the Principality of Catalonia added to the war against the Bourbons, until then one of the main enemies of Spain. In the year 1713, however, the colonial pulse, the recent coronation as emperor of Archduke Charles and the cost of the war had changed the scenario. Europe sat in Utrecht to negotiate, without Catalonia, and their liberties and privileges were left to the fate of the assistants, where each defended his own interests.

Catalonia asked the Habsburg king, in 1712, the independence, in exchange for granting the rest of the nations of Europe present in Utrecht, their right to negotiate and end the war, for the sake of their freedoms and those of Europe.

The count, king and emperor Charles left Barcelona and made the decision to guarantee and attend to the evolution of the peace process initiated in the Utrecht congresses, being in a disadvantaged position, but the confrontation with the Bourbon troops was still standing. Given the threats and uncertainties involved in this negotiation, Catalonia made the decision to maintain
its position and its weapons defending its legitimacy. They dignified the decision of the monarch who recognized as legitimate, but did not renounce to defend their rights and privileges before the unequal force in front the French and Castilian Bourbons, reinforced with those pacts, with the conviction of the moral authority of their cause and situation. Proof of this is the letter that the representatives of the Principality of Catalonia – the Council of One Hundred, the Deputation and the Military Arm, known as the Catalanian Arms or the Three Commons – processed to King Carlos. He said:

“(…) It would be very difficult to defend the Parts separated from the Body of Spain, and to obtain the End proposed by declaring this War, which was to re-establish the Tranquility of Europe, by hindring the Union of the two Monarchies of France and Spain, which the Kings your Predecessors had so much at Heart to prevent, by those Renunciations which France have no manner of Reguard to: So that the Ground of he War subsists still, and a Peace by which the Body of Spain is transferred to the House of France, cannot be looked on otherwise than as an Occasion of a new War; because that would furnish France with an Increase of Means to push on the Progress of her Arms, and to accomplish her Designs, formed so long ago against the August House of Austria, her Hereditary Countries, the Empire, and Europe.”

Later they would add:

“Sir, we beseech your Catholic Majesty with the most profound Respect, to be pleased to persevere in so important and necessary a Resolution which you have taken, to maintain and establish Spain under your Majesty's Dominion by Force of Arms: And if it happen that Fortune decides otherwise by Disposition of a Treaty of Peace; and if the Domains of this Monarchy must be divided, we most respectfully beg your Majesty to protect Catalonia and the adjacent Provinces with all your Power, in such manner, that if they cannot be saved with the entire Body of the Monarchy, they may at least maintain themselves separately.”

And he concluded the letter with the following statement of principles:
“We offer to your Majesty all the Forces of Catalonia, our Estates and our Lives, for accomplishing your sacred Imperial and Catholick Majesty’s Designs, and for the most serene Empress our Soverain: For we consider that we are obliged so to do by or Duty towards God and towards your Majesty, for the Security and Tranquility of Europe, the Liberty of Spain, and the Deliverance of the Catalonian Nation.”

This letter was transcribed, in English, in the book The deplorable history of the Catalans, published in London and dated in 1714 (pages 48-53) (Link to the reading of the book is here.

Catalonia maintained the hope of its victory until the last day, convinced that the legitimacy and dignity of its cause would overcome, but the facts worked another way. Neither Emperor Charles nor his European allies attended to the will of the Catalans, and sentenced its state dimension, compromising to a large extent even its national dimension worked after seven centuries of tradition and freedom. They are not free words, the Treaty of Utrecht, of 1713, is the unequivocal document that corroborates this regrettable decision. With this Treaty commercial agreements were sealed, where England obtained Gibraltar and Menorca from the new Spain, also Nova Scotia, the Hudson Bay and Newfoundland of France; and Austria, the United Provinces (the Netherlands) and the House of Savoy divided all the territories that the previous Spain had accumulated in Europe, dismembering the totality of the Crown of Aragon and terminating it in an ignominious way.

The European states and confederations initially allied with the Catalans obtained great advantages and prioritized their colonial and strategic interests, abandoning the Catalans to their fate in the face of the lost authority of the Bourbons.

The “Spanish law” that entailed the imposition of the privileges of the inhabitants of the two Castiles on all the inhabitants of the Principality of Catalonia, is none other than the European, colonial law of the Treaty of Utrecht of July 13, 1713. It was the previous step that allowed the imposition of the New Plant Decrees and an integral political-administrative restructuring to guarantee the absolutism of the postwar period, the disappearance of the Catalan parliamentary system, the Generalitat de Catalunya (the Deputation), the Council of One Hundred, of the Catalan Military Arm and the Court of Counterfactions. The Court of Counterfactions was
created on line 1701 of the Constitution of the Observance (of 1481), which established the submission of the king to the observance and fulfillment of the Catalan Constitutions, and was formed in an equal manner between the representatives of the king and the of the Conference of the Three Commons. It was, in a way, the first Constitutional Court in Europe.

England and Spain agreed, in 1713, the Castilianization of the Catalan kingdoms.

Europe accepted, with the determination of King and Queen Anne of England and Philip V of Spain, to give continuity to their colonial aspirations, that Catalonia be assimilated to the model of Castile, in the same way that the Bourbons had previously imposed in the kingdoms of Valencia and of Aragon. That is to say, in the Treaty negotiations was agreed that they would become Castilianized, and that its institutions, laws and privileges would disappear. Detail of the Treaty of Utrecht, July 13, 1713:

“Given that the Queen of Great Britain does not cease to urge very effectively for all the inhabitants of the Principality of Catalonia (...) to keep their old privileges unharmed and intact, the Catholic King [Philip V], in attention to British SM, grants and confirms in the present to any inhabitant of Catalonia (...) all those privileges that the inhabitants of the two Castiles possess, that of all the peoples of Spain are the most armed of the Catholic King.”

This decision, unfit for a Peace Treaty, was the reason for Catalonia’s decision to continue the war as announced in the previous letter. After the Treaty of Utrecht, Barcelona was besieged for more than a year, and suffering constant bombings by more than 40,000 Bourbon soldiers; 20,000 of Felipe V of Spain and 20,000 of Luis XIV of France. It was a war between the Catalans and the Bourbons, with 6,800 Catalan casualties and 14,200 casualties of the Bourbon kings, which ended on September 11, 1714. Barcelona withstood with the foreign aid of the Mallorcans and the food supply from Naples and Algeria. Mallorca, Eivissa (Ibiza) and Formentera fell ten months later, on July 11, 1715. As additional information, to help understand the extent of these events, it is worth saying that after the war 20% of the Ciutat Comtal (Barcelona) was destroyed to build a military citadel, and, for more than a century, Barcelona was not allowed to grow beyond its walls, built in the 14th century (until 1853).
The war for the control of the colonial enterprise that Europe neglected with the Treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, ended with the New Plant Decree in the Principality, in 1716, and this was the origin of the current centralization of powers in Spain under the Castilian authority, as well as the origin of the definitive manipulation of history. Forced peace was imposed, but the war between France, Spain and the United Kingdom continued, especially in North America. As a result of this, the United States was born, the French Revolution broke out, Spain ended up losing all its colonies, and, for three centuries, Catalonia does not stop asking to be treated with respect, to the Castilian Spain. To deny the colonial reason in the dismantling of the Catalan nation is a reprehensible act. To say the opposite, and to put as evidence the manipulation of history, is to act in bad faith.

So:
It is up to Europe and the international order, on the bases argued here, to give a worthy response, today and three centuries later, to the Catalan will to exercise its self-determination. It is up to Europe and Spain to allow the just and necessary reconstruction of the history of the colonization of Christian empires, with the collaboration of the Vatican and the rest of the congregations, to give a voice to the Catalans and to all nations, cultures and civilizations submitted, for the collective good of all humanity. And it is up to the United Kingdom and Spain, with or without the help of their monarchs, to lead this determination.

Ethics and history (of the struggle for the powers), for multiple reasons, hardly find in the truth their argument. When this happens, there is no justice. But. Above all, the restitution of the just truth is inhibited, creating a problem of difficult solution, which affects entire generations, until the injustice becomes unbearable, and claims to remake history, by ethical imperative. This is the process of Catalan independence.

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Photo: the 2010 Catalan autonomy protest, author: Amadalvarez
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