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**Multiculturalism and national identities: What can Spain learn
from the American example?**

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1. Introduction

“It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies, but to be one”.¹

Richard Hofstadter

As the historian Hofstadter said, America’s identity has been defined since its foundation by an ideology, not a specific culture or history. On the other hand, Europe’s identity relies on history, ethnicity and religion.

Recent political events, such as the cry for independence from certain regions in Spain or the massive immigration that’s taking place in Europe from Muslim countries, make it crucial to rethink the Spanish national identity. If this identity were fluid and inclusive enough, then those issues could be resolved in a comprehensive and hospitable national identity. However, this is not the current situation.

The Spanish national identity has been defined by one fairly homogeneous culture, which during centuries –basically from 15th through 18th centuries- took its symbols and traditions mainly from the Castilian heritage. While there were historical reasons for the pre-eminence of Castile during those centuries, the overall result has been an asymmetrical construction of the Spanish national identity. The 18th Century witnessed the emergence and prominence of the peripheral regions, at least from the economic point of view. It would have been a historical opportunity for them to balance the national narrative. Yet, the 19th Century dismantled this opportunity: after the emergence of a Spanish national sentiment during the War of independence against the French, Spanish society proved to be deeply politically divided: those political divisions –between liberals and absolutists, Carlist wars, etc— provided the ground for deepening other cultural divisions, under the influence of emerging nationalist thought (we can think of the Galician Rexurdimento, the Catalan Renaixença, the recovery of the Basque oral culture...). In addition, after the loss

¹ MARTIN LIPSET, Seymour. *American Exceptionalism. A double-edged sword*. W.W.Norton and Company. USA. Pg 18.

of the last colonies in 1898, which forced a painful reflection on the historical destiny of Spain, the Generation of 98 recovered and sublimated the ancient Castilian symbols, thereby deepening the identification –between Castile and Spain. Yet, as Jürgen Habermas points out, such strong identification may lead to the symbolic exclusion of other sectors of society and poses a threat to social cohesion.² In a way, it “justified” the creation of a dialectical narrative, in which the normal tension between centre and peripheries broke in favour of exclusive nationalist narratives. In this context, some authors have come to speak of Spain as a “multinational” state, meaning that the different cultures represent different nations, as if the only thing that brings them together is a political “structure”, which is ultimately extrinsic or foreign to their own internal development. While the identification between “culture” and “nation” in this sense may be problematic –the word “nation”, as used since the 19th Century, harbours political connotations which are alien to the notion of culture— this approach assumes that multiculturalism constitutes a problem for the Spanish national identity, if it is not redefined.

On the other hand, in the United States multiculturalism, although perhaps of a different sort, has defined the country since its beginnings. The American national identity allows the coexistence of multiple cultures and does not identify itself with a specific cultural sector of the society. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French philosopher from the 19th century, already analyzed the American democracy. He emphasized in his book “Democracy in America” certain qualities that allowed the citizens to identify with the country. And to do so, he goes back to the simplest elements that constitute countries: the habits and the passions.

“The growth of nations presents something analogous to this; they all bear some marks of their origin. The circumstances which accompanied their birth and contributed to their development affect the whole term of their being. If we were able to go back to the elements of states, and to examine the oldest monuments of their history, I doubt not that we should discover in them the

² Cfr. BALLESTER RODRÍGUEZ, Mateo. *Auge y declive del patriotismo constitucional en España: en torno a los estados pluriétnicos*. Pg 125.

primal cause of the prejudices, the habits, the ruling passions, and, in short, of all that contributes what is called the national character”.³

Throughout this essay, I will highlight the political and cultural features that Tocqueville found in the United States’ national identity, and that permit multiculturalism.

Moreover, I will compare the Spanish and the American national identity, and its capacity to face the multiculturalism that both countries find in their soil. To do this, I will comment Tocqueville’s passages and relate them with contemporary authors, such as William Kymlicka and Jürgen Habermas. Finally, I will propose two possible redefinitions of the Spanish national identity, one that has already being tried (and failed) and another one that I consider possible and that learns from the American example.

³ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 37.

2. Concepts

The need for a redefinition of the Spanish identity, in order to face multiculturalism (both immigration and the cultural diversity within Spain), leads us to compare it to the United States, the so called melting pot. Both countries differ in their origins, their history and their development. However, Spain can learn from the United States certain elements that will make its national identity more comprehensive.

Before discussing both Spanish and American national identities properly, and how they relate to culture, we will first lay down two concepts: national identity and culture. Then we will see how Tocqueville understands them regarding the United States, and how they relate to contemporary concepts.

2.1. National identity

We have frequently identified national identity and identification with patriotism, and the truth is that they are tightly linked, but they are not the same concept. According to the Canadian political philosopher, William Kymlicka, **national identity** is “the sense of membership in a national group”, whereas **patriotism** is “the feeling of allegiance to a state”.⁴ Both are connected, but whereas the former links the **citizen to a nation**, the latter links him to the **state**. In this, Kymlicka assumes a difference between nation—which he takes to mean a group linked by history and culture—and state.

Since the 19th century and with the French Revolution, under the influence of Romantic thought, the term **nation**⁵ identifies a group linked to a specific culture (religion, traditions, customs and myths) that takes form through a State. Most European countries

⁴ KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 13.

⁵ The French and the German concepts of nation differ. On the one hand, the french philosopher Ernest Renan in 1882, said that the nation is a soul, in a subjective sense (feelings, solidarity and a will to make ‘great things’ in the future. On the other hand, the German Herder thought that the concept nation was much more objective.

identify nation – culture – with state, whereas the United States does not. This distinction between nation and state does not exclude the fact that, from a historical point of view, the concept of “nation” has incorporated also political connotations. Paradigmatically, in the case of France: where the sovereignty of the nation came to replace the sovereignty of the king; and, in a different manner, all nationalist thought, which, influenced by Romanticism, understood nation as a pre-political entity called to develop a political personality –very much like liberal thought understood the individual as a pre-political being called to contractually enter into a political society.

Moreover, in earlier societies, the distinction between ethnicity, politics and culture did not exist. It appeared with the division of labor, and it developed at the same time that societies became more complex. David Hume says that the state, as we understand it today, appeared when societies developed, and its mission was to make sure that justice prevailed.

However, in **Spain**, according to the historians Henry Kamen and Joseph Perez, the national sentiment was not fully developed. It first appeared during the Independence War against Napoleon, but when it was over, the Spaniards focused on internal conflicts. They argue that the absence of agreement regarding the hymn and the flag is very significant.⁶ But in general, Europeans –at least in the Continent- tend to **assimilate the political elements with the social ones**. Here lies the whole **issue of multiculturalism**, because when the state is identified purely with one culture and all its features, other sectors of society will not be able to partake in the state’s affairs.

However, Alexis de Tocqueville uses the terms national identity and patriotism without distinguishing them precisely, and he talks about a nation as an entity with passions, prejudices and habits. He argues that the political system ends up being a reflection of the social mentality. According to him, there is circularity between the political and the social mentality, where the latter leads the circle.

⁶ Cfr. KAMEN, Henry. *España y Cataluña: historia de una pasión*. La esfera de los libros, Madrid. PEREZ, Joseph. *Entender la historia de España*. La esfera de los libros, Madrid.

This statement implies that if a country has a specific culture, its political system will reflect such a culture. But, if the diversity of cultures increases progressively, the political system – and the identity – will have to adapt and will change. Tocqueville does not say that such a nation must correspond to a unique culture. He only states that there is a correlation between politics and society (and its culture). Therefore, this can be applied both to the European model of national identity and to the American one. For him, the United States is a country formed by different cultures brought by immigrants.

For the purpose of my thesis, I will use the term **national identity** to signify the sense of membership to a **country**, like Tocqueville did. This will allow me to compare the United States with Spain, and rethink the Spanish national identity. I will also use the term **patriotism** to signify the feeling of allegiance towards that country. If a citizen feels he is a member of a nation, he will probably have an allegiance towards it: patriotism only exists if the national identity is coherent. Therefore, I will use the term patriotism as a consequence of national identity, linked to the sense of membership to a country, which relates a citizen to a country (not just a nation or a state, as Kymlicka said, but both).

A. Importance of a coherent ‘national identity’

Multiple authors throughout the 20th century have noted that a coherent national identity is necessary for a country in order to develop. The Canadian philosopher **Charles Taylor** says that “societies need their citizens to be profoundly identified with them; members convinced that their political society is a common enterprise of a considerable transcendence”.⁷ A **lack of a common purpose** results in social conflict and disintegration; and this is due to a fragmented national identity. A simple example of this is a war situation. When a country is at war, its citizens feel more patriotic than ever because they have a common goal: defending their soil, family and property. Having a common enemy is one way of achieving political and social unity. But, for a long term

⁷ TAYLOR, Charles. NUSSBAUM, Martha. *Los límites del patriotismo*. Paidós. Barcelona. Pg 145. Personal translation.

coherent national identity, according to William Kymlicka, social unity must be based on shared values.⁸ Depending on where we put those values we can find three types of national identity.

B. Three types of 'national identity': US and Spain

There are three ways of understanding national identity, that Tocqueville already pointed out and that other contemporary authors have analyzed.

“There is one sort of **patriotic attachment**, which principally arises from that instinctive, disinterested and undefinable feeling which connects the affections of man with his birthplace. The natural fondness is united with a taste for ancient customs, and a reverence for traditions of the past. [...] It is in itself a kind of religion: it does not reason but it acts from the impulse of faith and sentiment”.⁹

This is the **first** kind of national identity and it relates directly to culture. It is the one that we can find in Spain. This notion would not accommodate a diversity of cultures, as it is purely a feeling of pride and allegiance towards customs and traditions that come from a culture. Jürgen Habermas defines this form of national identity as a “specific cultural heritage with a common language, literature or history”,¹⁰ which identifies itself with the State. In this type of national identity, the **shared values** come from one culture and its social mentality will be reflected on the political system. In Spain, this kind of national identity was encouraged by traditionalism.

⁸ Cfr. KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 187.

⁹ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 113.

¹⁰ HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Identidades nacionales y postnacionales*. Tecnos. Madrid. Pg 89. Personal translation.

“There is another species of attachment to country, which is more rational than the one we have been describing. It is perhaps, less generous and less ardent, but it is more fruitful and more lasting; it springs from **knowledge**; it is nurtured by laws; it grows by the exercise of civil rights; and, in the end, it is confounded with the personal interests of the citizen”.¹¹

This **second** kind of patriotism is purely formal, and encourages the citizen to identify with notions such as equality and freedom. Jürgen Habermas argued in favor of this kind of patriotism, where the citizen identified with the Constitution (constitutional patriotism). According to Habermas, in every national identity “there is a tension between two elements: the universalist values of the Rule of Law and democracy, on one hand; and the particularism of one nation that defines itself against the external world, on the other hand”.¹² He resolves those two elements by proposing a **constitutional patriotism** in postnational societies in which the particularistic element is weakened.¹³ Therefore, “postnational societies will be based on the universalist principles of the Rule of Law and democracy”.¹⁴ This way, the national identity would be defined despite the culture and, according to Habermas, would be more comprehensive. The shared values will be purely political, universal and abstract. From my point of view, however, there is still an unresolved issue within this constitutional patriotism. If we assume that the social mentality is reflected in politics, how is it actually reflected with this kind of national identity? Are those universal values already reflecting a social mentality based on the Enlightenment and its principles? Is this identity, then, really universal?

Finally, Tocqueville talks about patriotism (and national identity, as he does not distinguish) as the **union of private and public interests**, where “everyone takes an active part in the government of society”.¹⁵ “I maintain that the most powerful, and

¹¹ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 114.

¹² HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Identidades nacionales y postnacionales*. Tecnos. Madrid. Pg 89. Personal translation.

¹³ According to Habermas, postnational societies are the ones that have universal principles, societies in which the nation and the culture are demoted, societies from the 21st century.

¹⁴ Op.Cit. Pg 116. Personal translation.

¹⁵ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 114.

perhaps the only, means which we still possess of interesting men in the welfare of their country, is to make them partakers in the government”.¹⁶ This last variation of patriotism is the one that constitutes the **American national identity**, according to Tocqueville. It does not leave culture aside, but it does not identify itself with a specific culture, it goes beyond this.

Through this form of national identity every citizen can feel part of the country because their private interests are the same as the public ones. The United States may construct an identity like this due to its origin (immigrants). Their private interests, such as finding a job or educating their children, can coincide with the public ones, such as building a stronger economy or having the best universities of the world. Why is this possible in the United States? Because everyone can become American, as its national identity is an ideology, not just a combination of historical events; because their national identity consists in purely looking to the future, not to the past. It is also because the United States is a nation that is still being formed, in relation to modern institutions and ideals, social equality, Protestantism and republicanism. The shared values will be drawn from the different cultures that coexist in the society and the political ideals that the citizens construct. It is from this national identity that Spain could learn in order to rethink its own national identity.

For instance, we could learn two things. On the one hand, that no identity is static, but it is always being formed and developed. And on the other, that the past should not be forgotten, but understood. And there are elements from the past, from history, that can help us walk towards the future.

2.2. Culture

Culture is a key element in the three types of national identity that we have identified, and it conforms the social mentality that reflects on the political system. In order for a culture to exist there must be a **community**, a **territory**, a **religion** and a **language**. Those

¹⁶ Op. Cit. Pg. 115

are the elements that William Kymlicka and the British social critic T.S. Eliot analyze and that I will take into consideration.

On one hand, **Kymlicka** defines culture as “an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history”.¹⁷ On the other, **T.S. Eliot** gives a shorter definition: “Culture is the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs, in their religion”.¹⁸

On both definitions the element ‘**community**’ appears. A group of people that live closely to each other creating traditions. They usually have a specific **territory**, for example, the Galician culture and community occupies a portion of land. But they might not have this territory, and just freely associate, for example, Jewish and Indian communities in the United States. The element of the territory is very linked to the community. Frequently, especially in Europe, the territory has been the basic element that constitutes the nation-state. However, there are also pluricultural states, for example Canada, in which there are several organized cultures that possess a certain level of self-governance. Despite this, the whole country does share a political culture. Moreover, if the citizens are immigrants, they do not actually have a territory. The territory of their culture would be their homeland, not the country in which they are living.

Third, **religion** is, according to Eliot, the origin of culture. He identifies three conditions for culture to exist: first, the persistence of social classes (the element of community); second, local cultures (the element of languages), and third, a balance of unity and diversity in religion.¹⁹ He says that culture is the “incarnation” of a religion: “no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion”, insists Eliot.²⁰ “The dominant force in creating a common culture between people, each of which has its distinct culture, is religion”.²¹ Religion may only affect the social mentality (influencing

¹⁷ KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 18.

¹⁸ ELIOT, T.S. *Notes towards the definition of culture*. Harcourt, Brace and Company. New York. Pg 124.

¹⁹ Cfr. Op. Cit. Pg 13.

²⁰ Op. Cit. Pg 13.

²¹ Op. Cit. Pg 126.

the political one), as in secular Western countries; but it can also directly conform the political sphere like in Muslim countries. However, it is important to highlight that religion may be manifested in culture, but it is much more than culture. For example, in Christianity, there is not just one Christian culture.

And the reason is that culture comes from cult, a group of people that care deeply about something and they honor it. Cult comes from 'cultus' in Latin, which is related to cultivate. From that cult, that profound adoration towards something religious, springs culture, a way of life lived by a community through traditions. However, here Eliot does not fully distinguish between culture and society. Even though they are tightly linked (a culture is incarnated in a society), they are different concepts. When he says 'culture' he may be referring to 'society'.

Finally, **language** is the tie that binds society. Eliot says that language – local cultures – is the cause of unity in a culture: "unity of culture is that of people who live together and speak the same language: because speaking the same language means thinking, feeling and having emotions, rather differently from people who use a different language".²² There may be an official language, for the whole of the country, or there may be more than one (Catalan, Basque, Galician and Spanish), according to the different cultures. It is easy to see the power of language as the tool that keeps a nation together if we look back to the Spanish history during the 20th century, when the local languages were banned. However, language is not enough to bind a society together, nor is enough to divide one. It is socially powerful, but not politically decisive.

When Tocqueville analyzes American democracy he recognizes these elements and compares them to the French system. **Community**, for example, exists in America through religion and political associations; the **territory** is vast and there is always the possibility to go west; the spirit of **religion** is connected with the spirit of liberty; and the

²² Op. Cit. Pg 124.

main **language** is English. Regarding language he says: “the tie of **language** is, perhaps, the strongest and the most durable that can unite mankind”.²³

3. National identity in the United States and in Spain

The American and the Spanish national identity differ on three levels: social, political and cultural. Those differences explain why the former is able to accommodate multiculturalism and the latter cannot.

3.1 Different origins of the national identity

A. *Social*

Social order

“The emigrants who came at different periods to occupy the territory now covered by the American Union differed from each other in many respects; their aim was not the same, and they governed themselves on different principles. These men had, however, certain features in common, and they were all placed in an analogous situation”.²⁴

The United States is a country formed by **immigrants**. As Tocqueville says, the immigrants were all in the same situation when they arrived to America: they were exiled or they were looking for a better life. That situation made them equal: “The happy and the

²³ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 38.

²⁴ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 38.

powerful do not go into exile, and there are no surer guarantees of equality among men than poverty and misfortune”.²⁵

The first ones that arrived in North America were the **Pilgrims**, a group of Englishmen who were puritans and had to leave Britain. Their stronghold, according to Tocqueville, was in the middle classes. This starting point allowed the United States to have a certain equality of social conditions, which ended in equality of opportunities. But in a situation where classes do not create artificially a difference between men or their belonging to a group, then natural capacities do. Being smarter, quicker, or just better at something created on the long run social differences, says Tocqueville. Therefore, the disappearance of the aristocracy in the New World did not imply the absence of social order. On the contrary, the social order was determined by natural capacities, instead of being determined by an external measure. The smartest or most responsible ones would make fortunes and rearrange the social system. Money was the new criterion used to rearrange society. This led to a new inequality: **meritocracy**.

That is, **social equality led to individualism**. Individuals started seeing that if they worked hard, they could achieve whatever they wanted. And what they want was material wellness. The love for wellness is an essential feature in democratic societies. Individualism cannot be eliminated in democratic societies, but, according to Tocqueville, it can be redirected.²⁶ The society can create institutions that redirect those passions and engage the citizens in the life of the society.²⁷

Therefore, individualism in the United States led to economic differences. Those differences, however, were not due to being born in a social class. In their origin they were economic not social differences. And that led to one of the key issues in the **American dream**: you can be whatever you desire, if you work hard enough. In the American

²⁵ Op. Cit. Pg 39.

²⁶ We will see this in the next point “Political” and in the section of the “Construction of the national identity”, when explaining “Patriotism”.

²⁷ Cfr. GONZÁLEZ, Ana Marta. *Sociedad civil y normatividad. La teoría social de David Hume*. Madrid: Dykinson, 2013.

imagery the poor ones, just haven't worked enough. This was also related to the fact that the US was founded by Protestants. In Calvinism, according to Max Weber, working hard is the way to reach heaven. And external and economic success are symbols of predestination.²⁸

Group vs Individual

Martin Lipset sees this meritocracy as one of the reasons **Socialism** never succeeded in the United States. Marx and Engels thought Socialism would succeed in America, because there was a more developed capitalism.²⁹ However, Americans never felt part of a social class and could not feel related to the class struggle. They were not barons, officers or dukes; they were doctors, butchers or teachers. They were individuals who could change from class to class. If one generation was poor, the next one could go to an Ivy League. They didn't fight the richer ones, they desired to join them.

“From the time of Marx and Engels, socialists have agreed with Tocqueville that social class differences (as distinct from economic class differences) were much weaker in America than in Europe. In the Old World, people were placed in distinct classes by the society. Workers were led to support labor parties in response to deep postfeudal divisions in society. In the United States, by contrast, class was more of an abstraction and socialists were faced with the prospect of persuading workers to think in class terms”.³⁰

On the other hand, Tocqueville says that in European countries **social ranks** were imposed. One belonged to a fixed social group, and felt as a member of that group before feeling as an individual, whereas in the US the citizen was an individual before belonging

²⁸ Cfr. WEBER, Max. *The protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism*. Pg 305.

²⁹ Cfr. MARTIN LIPSET, Seymour. MARKS, Gary. *It didn't happen here: Why socialism failed in the United States*. W. W. Norton and Company. New York Times Books.

Url:<https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/l/lipset-here.html>

³⁰ Op. Cit. Url:<https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/l/lipset-here.html>

to a group. This changed with time in Europe, and social ranks developed into **social classes**, where there is social mobility. In Spain, there is currently a strong middle class, and, actually, there is a bigger social difference in the United States. But this idea of moving from class to class is much more rooted in the American collective imagery than in the Spanish one.

I believe that the emphasis on the social group or on the individual is crucial when understanding multiculturalism. That is: in countries where there are social ranks, the only way for an outsider to belong is by being part of one of them. The same could be said if instead of social ranks we would be talking about strong social classes. If those classes were determined by birth, the newcomer would never be able to be part of a social class, and will find it more difficult to identify with the national identity. In the United States, however, an immigrant sees the national identity and culture as something to acquire. If they want, they can become part of the group. Being rich, democrat, socialist or poor is not determined by birth, but by will. In European countries, it used to be determined by birth and there is still a reminiscence.

In conclusion, a society based in strong social classes makes it harder to integrate immigrants, whereas a society based on individualism makes it easier, as all they have to do is prove their worth. Therefore, America is a meritocracy.

B. Political

United States

The main political difference between the United States and Spain lies on where the country starts politically. In **America**, it is born in the **towns**, whereas in **Europe** it starts from the top and goes to the bottom: from the **State** to the towns.

“The political existence of the majority of the nations of Europe commenced in the superior ranks of society, and was gradually and imperfectly communicated to the different members of the social body. In America, on the contrary, it may be said that the township was organized before the county, the county before the State, the State before the Union”.³¹

As Tocqueville points out, **townships are essential in American politics**. In the United States, the townships gave up a part of their independence to the State. First came the local government, and then, the federal one. In modern Spain, and the rest of Europe, it goes the other way around: first comes the central power, then the autonomous communities, and at very bottom of the chain, the townships. The problem is that people can identify with their local government in practical ways, but it is more difficult for them to identify with the federal one. The local government’s public affairs are the ones that concern them in their daily lives: food, water, someone’s job, the major... Therefore, the **local government** creates a local community and the citizens feel that those issues are their personal issues. Their private interests end up coinciding with the public ones. Tocqueville sums this up by saying that in the US, when the citizens defend America, they are defending their hometowns.

Because the **private and public interests** coincide, every individual “participates equally in the government of the state.”³² Consequently, every citizen needs to be as well informed as the rest (there lies the importance of the free press). And, as Tocqueville says, the citizen recognises his power of association and his voice in politics, but also the need of a regulating force that gives form to that power:

“[The citizen] He obeys the government, because he acknowledges the utility of an association with his fellow-men, and he knows that no such association

³¹ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 45.

³² Op. Cit. Pg 60.

can exist without a regulating force. He is free and responsible to God alone, for all that concerns himself.”³³

The American feels part of the United States, because he feels responsible for his own land and he recognises the authority of the state because there is a need for it. But he does not see the state as a force to which he must subordinate his freedom. On the contrary, he sees it as a product of his own personal freedom. His voice is as relevant as the federal officer’s voice is.

According to Tocqueville, in the United States, the township lends its agents to the government, whereas in Europe the government lends its agents to the commune.³⁴ This leads to different types of **citizen**: an **active** one that feels identified with his own country; and a **passive** one who does not feel that the country is his. This relates directly to the power of townships in the nation. Townships as strong communities have two **advantages for the citizens: independence and authority**. It is a free community, and therefore the locals feel attached to it, but it is also strong which allows the citizens to participate in the government's affairs. Tocqueville points out the following idea:

“There is no surer guarantee of order and tranquility [local public spirit] and yet nothing is more difficult to create. [...] Without power and independence, a town may contain good subjects, but it can have no active citizens”³⁵

Spain

But in **Europe**, once the medieval institutions disappeared –the only exception was England-, there is an absence of local spirit due to the organization of the system, which belittles the townships. In Europe the system is centralized, which implies that the government administers the affairs of each locality. Tocqueville points out that

³³ Op. Cit. Pg 60.

³⁴ Cfr Op. Cit. Pg 61.

³⁵ Op. Cit. Pg 62.

“centralization succeeds in subjecting the external actions of men to a certain uniformity. These are not the conditions on which the alliance of human will is to be obtained: it must be free in its gait and responsible for its acts”.³⁶ European citizens render obedience to the system, to the central government, not to law and justice. And therefore they are not pledging allegiance willingly, being fully responsible for their actions.

Spain is a rare scenario in Europe, due to the importance of the regions (autonomous communities) and their dialectical relation with the Spanish State. However, those general features that are common to European countries, perhaps with the only exception of England, persist in Spain and make it more difficult to create a coherent national identity.

On the one hand, that importance of the townships in the US, which provided the substance for a strong patriotism, also occurred in Spain. Tocqueville notes that “the public spirit of the Union [US] is an aggregate or summary of the patriotic zeal of the separate provinces. A citizen in defending the Union, he defends the increasing prosperity of his own State or county”.³⁷ For example, during the regency of Maria Christina in the 19th century, one of the most controversial laws was the the Law of the Townhalls. There were two trends, the progressive one that wanted an increasing self-government for the townhalls, and the moderates that favoured the State’s power.

On the other hand, in Spain, the national identity was based on **Castille’s project**. And, even though each citizen felt identified with their specific town or region (Catalan, Basque, Galician...), they also felt part of the common enterprise. But, according to the Spanish philosopher **José Ortega y Gasset**, Spain suffered a **particularism** that dismantled the national project. He says that whereas the construction of a national identity is based on having a common project, its deconstruction is based on particularism. That is, on prioritizing the private interests of a region and playing down the common ones.³⁸ Each group “stops seeing itself as a part of a whole and, consequently, stops

³⁶ Op. Cit. Pg 69.

³⁷ Op. Cit. Pg 92.

³⁸ Cfr. ORTEGA Y GASSET, José. *España invertibrada*. Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial. Madrid. Pg 47.

sharing the other's feelings".³⁹ This has led to a dysfunctional national identity, where each region has constructed its own identity as an opposition to the central power. For example, Catalonia has constructed a dialectical narrative, in which Spain appears as the opponent who is abusing them. This creates a strong bond between the Catalans, because they have a common nemesis. Why does Catalonia have problems? The answer is simple: because of Spain.

What happens if there is a dialectical relation within a country? That those elements of the relation end up having no contact and building who they are on that opposition. As T. S. Eliot noted: "A society is in danger of disintegration when there is a lack of contact between people of different areas of activity".⁴⁰ And that danger becomes a reality when there is not only a lack of contact, but an opposition regarding their goals.

In conclusion, the local government and the townships are much stronger in the US, and allow the citizen to feel as part of the State. On the contrary, in Spain the citizens do not have that feeling towards the Spanish State. Both local identity and national identity are essential when building a country: they support one another. Without the former, the concept of nation is empty. But without the latter, the nation ceases to exist and independentism arises. As T.S. Eliot said: "It is important that a man should feel himself to be, not merely a citizen of a particular nation, but a citizen of a particular part of his county with local loyalties".⁴¹

C. Cultural

As we said when defining culture, there are four elements that must be taken into account: **community**, **territory**, **religion** and **language**. The last two elements (religion and language) are crucial if we want to understand the deep difference between the

³⁹ Op. Cit. Pg 17.

⁴⁰ ELIOT, T.S. *Notes towards the definition of culture*. Harcourt, Brace and Company. New York. Pg 86.

⁴¹ Op. Cit. Pg 51.

American and the Spanish national identity. The community can be comprehended as part of the element religion, and the territory as tightly linked to the language.

- ***Religion***

Importance

“Men cannot do without dogmatical belief, and it is much to be desired that such belief should exist among them. There is hardly any human action which does not originate in some very general idea men have conceived of the Deity”.⁴²

Religion is the core element of a culture, not only because of its external manifestations, also because of the horizon it gives to the individual (and to the society as a whole). Tocqueville says that “religion places the object of man’s desire above and beyond the treasures of earth, and imposes on man some duties towards his kind”.⁴³ Believing in something eternal, allows the individual to live for goals that go far beyond material wealth or power. The individual looks first for the salvation of his soul, and understands that his life is a project with a mission. A country with this spiritual basis, may construct a stronger identity because the personal goals (salvation or proselytism) can be comprehended within the public ones (for example, spreading democracy because it is the best possible political system). On “A letter concerning toleration”, the English philosopher **John Locke** wrote about the importance of tolerance towards religious plurality in a nation. However, he warned against two groups that should not be tolerated: Catholics (because they pledged allegiance to a foreign power - the Vatican) and atheists (because they had no loyalties at all). How could we trust someone who does not believe in an afterlife? Why would he keep his word? Why would he be ethical, if he does not

⁴² DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 171.

⁴³ Op. Cit.. Pg 173.

have something to fear? How could the state trust him, how could he be loyal to a country if his only goals depend on the immediacy of material wellness?

Protestantism in the US

The **founders of the US** were Christians from different sects (Quakers, Puritans,...). According to Tocqueville, Puritanism, which was the pilgrim's religion, was a political and religious doctrine. For Puritans, as for most protestants, education was essential. Not only because they had to read the Bible by themselves, but also because they were influenced by the Enlightenment.

The fact that they were Protestants had another consequence besides education: **capitalism**. The German sociologist **Max Weber** argues that belonging to a sect in the US meant having a certain social and moral status. The ethical approval that belonging to a sect provided resulted in a form of prestige. People would economically trust them, because they were moral. This is the link that Weber sees between Protestantism and capitalism, and that allowed the US to be built on certain principles that led to individualism.⁴⁴

The Pilgrims were intellectuals, says Tocqueville: "These men possessed a greater mass of intelligence that is to be found in any European nation of our own time".⁴⁵ The mix between their Enlightened principles and the fact that the territory was vast led to universality of principles: every religion should be able to fit in the country. Time passed and the immigrants kept coming to America. They had in common that they believed in one God.

⁴⁴ Cfr. WEBER, Max. *The protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism*. Pg 310.

⁴⁵ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg. 43.

Civil religion

Those elements built a common religion for all the US, a vague religion with which everyone could connect. The American sociologist, **Robert N. Bellah**, called it ‘civil religion’, a political religion in which there are rituals, there is a mission and there is a God. Not Christ or Allah, just God. The French philosopher Rousseau already had this idea of ‘civil religion’, because he was fascinated by the role religion had in the Roman republic. Bellah explains the role of ‘civil religion’ in America like this:

“ [...] The separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension. Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling **American civil religion**. The inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event in this religion. It reaffirms, among other things, the religious legitimation of the highest political authority”.⁴⁶

American civil religion is based on an idea of God related to law and order, a Being that cares for America and its destiny. America is like Israel in the Old Testament: the promised land. Europe was Egypt, and the chosen people fled Europe to go to America, under God’s directions. Since then, America had the mission to lead the world into a new social order (based on the ideas from the Enlightenment). Bellah says that this civil religion was **vague** enough to not discriminate, but **specific** enough regarding America’s role in the world, to create a “national religious self-understanding”.⁴⁷ And it is present in every aspect in American politics, from the inauguration of a president to Thanksgiving (a

⁴⁶ BELLAH, Robert N. *Civil religion in America*. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Religion in America. Vol 96, No 1. URL: http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm

⁴⁷ Op. Cit. URL: http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm

day to thank God). Civil religion allows different cultures with different religions to be part of the national identity.

On the contrary, **in Spain there is not a civil religion**, but a specific one. Christianity was not at first linked with politics, but during the fourth century, Catholicism became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Since then, religion was mixed with politics. This was emphasized due to the armed conflicts that took place during the end of Rome and the beginning of the Middle Ages. Civil institutions were dismantled and the only institution that remained was the Church. The Middle Ages reinforced the Church's position: if a king converted to Catholicism, then the whole kingdom did as well. Religious unity went hand in hand with political unity. And when the Reconquest began, the idea was to recover the Christian Spain against the Muslim invaders. The different kingdoms in Spain united under the flag of Christianity and with the same ideal. In Catholic countries, the religious community ties were linked to the state, whereas in protestant countries, there was a much more individualistic perspective of religion. On the contrary, in the United States Catholics did not have those political ties. In consequence, religion does not necessarily have to be linked with politics.

Nowadays, secularism has reduced the importance of religion as an element of the national identity in Spain (and other European countries). And in Spain, the Catholic religion could provide a basis on which a dialogue between different religious could be built. The way the Spanish history has been told makes it harder for immigrants with different religions to identify with the national identity.

Politics and religion

Moreover, Tocqueville also says that religion and politics in the **United States** advocated for the same value: **equality**. And also, because there were many different sects, the religious institutions were not a political power. Therefore, religion and politics were not opposed. In **Europe**, the **goals** of religion and politics **differed**, and religious institutions had political power. When the ideas from the Enlightenment sank in and the

political sphere became Enlightened, the state started seeing the Church as an enemy. There was an opposition between the Church and the state (this is one of the reasons that led to the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants -political power-). Both institutions wanted the same: to lead the citizens. Catholic countries did not suffer such a strong deconstruction of the Church, however, they did suffer the consequences of this enmity. In France, for example, that opposition led to hostilities from the State towards the Church: the State confiscated the Church's property. The same happened in Spain: during the 19th Century, liberal governments passed legislation on the dissolution of many religious orders and confiscation of church property, in order to fight internal debt and increase the credit of the state. As a result, many Catholics took sides with politically traditional positions. This dialectic continued during the 20th Century and its echo is still perceivable nowadays.

The opposition between the Church and the state in Europe led to complex national identities, where religion was not fully part of the social structure (because it had been part of the political structure before).

In conclusion, there is a need for a political culture that promotes liberty and equality. This kind of political culture must benefit from the energies that the different religions have and promote. It must not be identified with one specific religious culture, but it can draw from it. Finally, that political culture may accommodate many religious cultures, as long as they also respect liberty and equality.

- ***Language***

“For the transmission of a culture and for its maintenance there is no safeguard more reliable than a language”, says T. S. Eliot.⁴⁸ Language binds the group of people that share it, because it is the tool through which they communicate, they perform actions and they acknowledge their own reality. It is a universal truth that one feels more connected to those who speak the same language. While in the 18th Century German was about to

⁴⁸ ELIOT, T.S. *Notes towards the definition of culture*. Harcourt, Brace and Company. New York. Pg 56.

become the official language in the US, **English** finally took the lead. Since then, it is the key to enter into American culture. Nowadays, especially because of the increasing presence of latinos in American life, many people wonder whether having just English as official language is enough; one could actually wonder if it is actually inclusive, as it represents the anglo-saxon world. Be that as it may, the truth is that, by now, the United States works with just one language, whereas Spain has Spanish, Galician, Basque and Catalan. And each language is connected to a specific culture and territory.

In conclusion, the US and Spain differ on their cultural origins which makes it easier or harder to accept different cultures into their national identity. Whereas religion in the US is civil and universal, in Spain is specific (Catholicism). And whereas there is one language for all the US, there is more than one in Spain and it is much more linked to a local culture.

3.2. Construction of the national identity

A. Narrative construction

A national identity is just the story of a country told by its people, its historians, politicians and artists. Every story has its main characters, its plot and its storylines. First, we must distinguish between history and memory. Whereas the former wants to be objective, the latter is partial. In memory, as in our own lives, we tend to highlight certain elements as reasons for outcomes, and we de-emphasize others. This way we give a meaning to those events, through a narrative. This kind of story is not just about the chronological order of events, but mostly about the meaning they have and how they relate with one another. This can be applied to the construction of the national identity.

Jürgen Habermas points out the relevance of **narrative construction** when it comes to national identities. He says that those national identities are fictitious, and sew the

narrative with different threads taken from the historical conscience. According to Jürgen Habermas, “only the narrative construction of a historical event which has a meaning that is completely adequate to the social group can cover the need for affirmation”.⁴⁹

Therefore, depending on the events that the narrative chooses to highlight, the national identity will be comprehensive or not. The American narrative can be summarized in the **American dream**, which highlights two elements: **immigration** and **individualism**. America is the promised land, where if you work hard enough you can achieve your dreams; regardless of your origins. This narrative of the poor man who becomes rich through his own will is a very comprehensive one. Anyone can feel part of that narrative, and that is why the American national identity may accommodate many cultures. Therefore, the historical events emphasized in the American narratives are: the migration of the Pilgrims, the Independence War, and the 20th century in the US (industrialization, enrichment, and the US as the first world power). It is a story built on America’s greatness and on its dialectical relation to an enemy: Britain, Nazi Germany, USSR and now ISIS.

On the other hand, Spain’s national identity was constructed through a very different narrative. Overall, the **historical events** that have been highlighted in the **Spanish narrative** are: the expulsion of the Muslims (Reconquest), the French invasion and the rebellion against it (Napoleon), and the civil war. Those elements talk about a Catholic Spain which at a certain point –in the 19th century- became divided between conservatives and liberals. But they forget many other elements such as the overwhelming cultural enterprise Spain carried out in America and the inner cultural diversity of Spain, which has its roots in pre-modern times. Spain, like other European countries, has tried to tell the story of a homogenous population, but has forgot to adequately incorporate its inner diversity and its links with the other Españas, i.e, the Spanish America.

⁴⁹ HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Identidades nacionales y postnacionales*. Tecnos. Madrid. Pg 91. Personal translation.

According to the Spanish historian Borja de Riquer i Permanyer, Spanish historians throughout the 19th and 20th centuries told the history of Spain from a centralized point of view. **Madrid was Spain.** He says:

“A great deal of Spanish historiography from the 19th and the 20th centuries tried to impose socially and ideologically their own narrative of the process towards “national unity. [...] And that is how historians and politicians from the 19th century used the concept of the Spanish nation as a self-evident reality without analyzing the problematic process of its recent configuration”.⁵⁰

This way of telling Spain’s story dramatically changed in the seventies, when Franco’s dictatorship was replaced by the democracy. As an opposition to the narrative which told Madrid’s story as the country’s, different narratives appeared telling regional stories.

“There was a problematic atmosphere of constantly reviewing the official Spanish history, because that historiographic vision was identified with the dictatorship, and as an opposition the new democracy identified itself with the reaffirmation of the submitted particularisms oppressed during Franco’s dictatorship”.⁵¹

In conclusion, the Spanish narrative has not been coherent due to three reasons. First, it has told the story of a centralized Spain, of Madrid, forgetting the regions which do not feel identified with the current national identity. On the contrary, they feel alienated. Second, the Spanish narrative has forgotten Latin America, the influence we have had in those countries and vice versa. And finally, the narrative is not coherent, certain historical events have not been given a meaning and the country does not seem to have a purpose.

⁵⁰ DE RIQUER I PERMANYER, Borja. Sobre el lugar de los nacionalismos-regionalismos en la historia contemporánea española. *Historia Social*, No. 7. Fundación Instituto de Historia Social. Pg 106. Personal translation.

⁵¹ Op. Cit. Pg 109. Personal translation.

In opposition to this, the United States has a simple and compelling narrative that does not exclude anyone and encourages the newcomers to actually be Americans, although sometimes there are tensions (the south versus the north). One can become American if one wants. In contrast, the Spanish national identity has a *thicker* content than the American one, which makes it harder to assimilate for the newcomers.

B. Patriotism

Another element that has played an important role in constructing America's national identity has been their understanding of patriotism, as Tocqueville explains. It is the feeling of allegiance towards one's country.

First, in the United States, patriotism is based on **universal ideas** such as justice, respect and tolerance. Each citizen gives a specific meaning to those concepts (thanks to the importance of townships). On the contrary, in Spain, those universal values do not have any meaning. They are too abstract and the Spaniards cannot give a specific content to those values.

Second, Tocqueville uses the term “**self-interest rightly understood**” to talk about associations in America. He says that it is natural for men to pursue their own interests. We act looking for our own good and success, as Tocqueville argues: “[...] private interests are the only immutable point in the human heart”.⁵² But in the United States the citizens go a bit further and succeed in linking those private interests to public interests. This is called the Enlightened self-interest, through which citizens acknowledge that pursuing something good for the community is also good for them. An individual will not get involved in something for the community, unless he sees some kind of personal profit. This is something unique about the United States, says Tocqueville, where those selfish interests are redirected to a public good. In a way this builds a stronger national identity,

⁵² DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 116.

because in defending the country's interests they directly see they are defending their own. He also argues that religion can participate in this theory of "self-interest rightly understood" redirecting the passions of the citizens so that they behave in the best possible manner.

The third point that Tocqueville comments is the difference between being a **citizen** and being an **individual**. Whereas being an individual means pursuing personal goals and private interests, without acknowledging their relation to the public good; being a citizen implies pursuing public goods. For Tocqueville, in the United States that step between being an individual and being a citizen is smaller than in Europe, because of the custom to create political, social or cultural associations; which, for him, is also linked to the American democracy. He says that, as in democracies citizens can hardly do anything by themselves, they associate. And the associated members must be very numerous for their association to have any power.⁵³

In conclusion, a national identity built on this concept of patriotism, based on the public virtues and associations gives the people the tools to participate in the government and become citizens. It also gives them a way to pursue their private goals while they advance the public ones. This provides a framework in which it is easier to feel part of the country, as any citizen can easily raise their voice.

⁵³ Cfr. Op. Cit. Pg 231.

4. Multiculturalism in the US and Spain

“There are a variety of ways in which minorities become incorporated into political communities, from the conquest and colonization of previously self-governing societies to the voluntary immigration of individuals and families. These differences in the mode of incorporation affect the nature of minority groups, and the sort of relationship they desire with the larger society”.⁵⁴

Cultural diversity differs from the US to Spain, depending on the relationship minority groups have with the rest of the society, and on the social and political dialogue that is taking place in both countries. On the one hand, **William Kymlicka** distinguishes between two broad **patterns of cultural diversity**: ‘national minorities’ and ‘ethnic groups’. Kymlicka calls the state in which the former coexist ‘multination states’ and the latter ‘polyethnic state’. We will have to see if these patterns explain multiculturalism in both countries. On the other hand, **Charles Taylor** explains that the debate over multiculturalism in the United States is framed within a **dialogue** between liberalism and communitarianism. In Spain, however, multiculturalism faces the tension between a type of equalitarian liberalism and the claims of the historical communities.

4.1 Multiculturalism in the United States

According to Kymlicka, in the United States, “cultural diversity arises from individual and familial immigration”.⁵⁵ **Immigration** creates a type of cultural diversity in which the people have voluntarily moved to a country seeking, normally, a better life. Their desire is not to have a separate government, but “to integrate into the larger society, and to be

⁵⁴ KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 10.

⁵⁵ Op. Cit. Pg 11.

accepted as full members of it”.⁵⁶ And for that, they will try to change the institutions so that they can accommodate their cultural differences.

This relates directly with the socio-political dialogue that is taking place in the United States regarding how to adapt a variety of cultures into a political entity. In his essay “Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition”, Charles Taylor explains the two schools of thought present in the dialogue: a **liberalism** that is based on the policy of egalitarian treatment and a **communitarianism** that establishes collective goals for the society.

Charles Taylor, when explaining these two types of conceptions of society, says that they promote two types of compromises. The first one argues in favor of a **procedural compromise**: a compromise to treat each other equally regardless of the way each one conceives life’s purposes. The second one argues in favor of a **substantive compromise**: a compromise with the way we conceive life’s ends and purposes, and the way we understand what ‘a good life’ means. This means that the former understands the political society as a neutral space in which there are not substantive opinions regarding what are the proper goals in life.⁵⁷

It is easy to see how liberalism, just based on the policy of egalitarian treatment and avoiding any common goal for the society, would accommodate multiculturalism. This liberalism says that it can offer a “neutral ground in which people from different cultures could coexist and merge. According to the idea, it is necessary to make a certain number of distinctions - between public and private, or between politics and religion, for example -, and only then we can demote the contentious differences to a sphere that does not intervene in politics”.⁵⁸

On the other hand, if the United States is formed by immigration (ethnic groups) then it is easier, for all the citizens to feel identified with the national identity and to feel

⁵⁶ Op. Cit. Pg 11.

⁵⁷ Cfr TAYLOR, Charles. *El multiculturalismo y la ‘política del reconocimiento’*: Ensayo de Charles Taylor. Colección Popular. Fondo de Cultura Económica México. 1992. Pg 85. Personal translation.

⁵⁸ Op. Cit. Pg 92. Personal translation.

integrated. According to Kymlicka, “immigrants are not ‘nations’, and do not occupy homelands. Their distinctiveness is manifested primarily in their family lives and in voluntary associations, and it is not inconsistent with their institutional integration”.⁵⁹ The most important element to which the newcomers must adapt in the United States is the language. They need to speak English in order to participate in the institutions and modify them. The question is: is this egalitarian liberalism the best socio-political structure for multiculturalism? Kymlicka already posed this question in another way: should they be given certain polyethnic rights or is it enough with the common citizenship?

In Taylor’s opinion, **egalitarian liberalism is not necessarily the best system**. He says that it really isn’t a meeting point for different cultures, but “the political expression of a certain kind of culture, totally incompatible with other kinds”.⁶⁰ That is, even if there is no common goal in the society, that political ground is never neutral because it is the expression of Western cultures. With that in mind, Taylor argues for “a society with strong collective goals that can also respect diversity, especially towards those who do not share the same goals, and always safeguarding fundamental rights”.⁶¹ He concludes that the issue is not just about letting the different cultures survive, but about recognizing their value.

Kymlicka’s answer goes also in that direction, because he argues in favor of **polyethnic rights**. He says that, at least in the United States, the common rights of citizenship have been defined by white and Christian men. If the new immigrants from different religious backgrounds should feel integrated and should experience a community membership, then they should feel equal. And that will only be achieved by recognizing their differences and their value.

In conclusion, the United States faces a type of cultural diversity that comes from immigration. The answers on how to accommodate this cultural diversity are two. On the

⁵⁹ KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 14.

⁶⁰ Cfr TAYLOR, Charles. *El multiculturalismo y la ‘política del reconocimiento’*: *Ensayo de Charles Taylor*. Colección Popular. Fondo de Cultura Económica México. 1992. Pg 92. Personal translation.

⁶¹ Op. Cit. Pg 89. Personal translation.

one hand, by treating everyone the same way and avoiding any kind of collective goal within the society. On the other, by adopting collective goals and recognizing the value of each culture. However, those minorities (ethnic groups) do feel American, because the way in which the national identity is constructed is not dialectical. There is one single nation (the US) which is articulated through different States.

4.2. Multiculturalism in Spain

In Spain, cultural diversity arises from regional differences. Even though, during the Visigothic rule there was one Spain, during the Middle Ages Spain was divided in five kingdoms, that had at first little in common, except their kings. According to the historian Henry Kamen, “the strongest loyalties that the individuals and the clans had were linked to their most immediate neighborhood, not to big political structures known as region or country”.⁶² He also says that the common monarchy of Elizabeth of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon generated many internal conflicts. However, they all considered themselves to be from Spain (including Catalans).

It was a **historical community**, with a political structure (kingdoms). That historical community persisted through different political structures: Visigothic Kingdom, the five kingdoms during the Middle Ages, the Catholic monarchy, the Habsburgs and the Bourbons. During the Middle Ages, Spain was a vague concept, which referred to the geographical territory, not to a political structure. Time passed and during the 16th century, especially since Philip II, the term Spain started to mean Castile, because it was easier for the king to resort to Castilian economic and human resources in order to finance wars and conquests. After the Succession War, in which the Bourbons took the throne in Spain, Catalonia –and Aragon and Valencia- lost their political privileges. However, it was under

⁶² KAMEN, Henry. *España y Cataluña: historia de una pasión*. La esfera de los libros, Madrid. Pg 15. Personal translation.

the next two bourbons –Fernando VI and Carlos III- when Castilian lost its economic prosperity, in favour of Catalonia and other peripheral regions. Kamen says it was especially during the 19th century that Catalan authors and historians started to develop a theory in which Catalonia was a victim of Castile. Under the influence of nationalist thought, they started constructing a ‘national’ identity by antagonizing Castile, and, as an extension, Spain.

In this sense we can perhaps bring back Kymlicka’s analysis of cultural diversity through **national minorities**. While we cannot apply literally this notion to the Spanish reality, we can understand it as different ‘nations’ - cultures - under the same state. When Kymlicka talks about national minorities he is defining them in terms of culture. He says that those ‘nations’ are merged into a single state involuntarily (invasion, conquest or colonization) or voluntarily (agreement to form a federation). We could say that in Spain there have been both types of incorporation depending on the kingdom: while the Crown of Aragon formed a voluntary federation with the kingdom of Castile, the kingdom of Navarre was conquered by Castile. However, they all belonged to the territory called Spain, that is, Spain did not conquer Navarre; Castile did.

Kamen says, supporting Kymlicka’s claim, that **there was never a Spanish “nation”, in the modern sense**: while there is of course a common past which created a vague sense of unity -especially marked by the Reconquista— the national feeling, as it emerged during the independence war –all Spaniards, in different parts of the country, rebelled against the French— never reached proper maturity: right after the independence, Spaniards started to fight each other, around different political labels –liberals versus traditionalists-. As a result, “Spain since the 19th century failed completely at achieving this goal [becoming a Nation-State]”.⁶³ There was not a proper definition of the Spanish nation and there were different political entities that were part of Spain, not just one entity. By contrast, by the end of the 19th century and the 20th century we have seeing the rise of

⁶³ KAMEN, Henry. *España y Cataluña: historia de una pasión*. La esfera de los libros, Madrid. Pg 170. Personal translation.

a persistent and pervasive narrative, which, going back to Middle Ages, reconstructs Catalanian national identity in dialectical terms, in opposition to Spain.

According to Kymlicka, these national minorities have their own cultures, languages and traditions. They coexist with the national majority. Sometimes that coexistence can be peaceful, as nowadays occurs in Canada between the French and the British 'nations'. But other times it can be conflicted, as it happens in the United Kingdom with Scotland. This, however, must be rethought for Spain. Kymlicka opposes one nation to another when he talks about coexistence, but there is no such need for Spain, because all the different 'nations' are Spanish. Since the time of the Austrian dynasty, it was common to speak of "las Españas", in plural: under this denomination even American territories were included. It could be said that there is more than one way to be Spanish: Basque, Galician, Catalan. In other words: **Spanish identity is plural by definition**; while in early modern times there was a hegemony of Castilian element, this should not be necessarily the case. If our national identity were well understood, then Castile would not be identified with Spain and the different Spanish nations would feel Spanish.

Moreover, Kymlicka says those national minorities have a specific desire: they "typically wish to maintain themselves as distinct societies alongside the majority culture, and demand various forms of autonomy or self-government to ensure their survival as distinct societies".⁶⁴ How can they be reintegrated into the Spanish state? According to the Canadian philosopher, it is hard to integrate national minorities because they will always have demands for self-government and they see the existence of the larger political community as 'conditional'.

"National minorities claim that they are distinct 'peoples', with inherent rights of self-government. While they are currently part of a larger country, this is not a renunciation of their original rights of self-government. Rather it is a matter

⁶⁴ KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 10.

of transferring some aspects of their powers of self-government to the larger polity, on the condition that other powers remain in their own hands”.⁶⁵

This means that even the national minorities see their existence within the larger state as if they were giving up some of their political powers, while keeping others for themselves.

Currently, the **solution** to this is not simple. On the one hand, if the larger political community chooses to ignore those **demands for self-government rights** and “insists that citizenship is a common identity shared by all individuals, without regard to group membership”,⁶⁶ it may have terrible consequences. According to Kymlicka, this strategy would only build up that desire for secession and their feeling of alienation and enmity towards the national majority. On the other hand, if those rights to self-government are granted, the desire for a greater autonomy or independence will increase. In Spain, we have lived both decisions. During Franco’s regime, the national minorities were ignored and a common citizenship was imposed. That led to violent reactions, at least in the Basque Country with a terrorist organization. With the autonomous communities certain self-government rights were recognized. But regions such as Catalonia demanded more.

This leads to the current **dialogue** regarding how to accommodate cultural diversity in Spain: a tension between the **liberal and egalitarian state** versus the **historical communities** and their traditions (reformulated in the 19th century in nationalistic terms). Following Kymlicka, I believe that the best way to accommodate the Spanish cultural diversity is by recognizing the value of the local cultures as part of the Spain. Kymlicka says: “if there is a viable way to promote a sense of solidarity and common purpose in a multination state, it will involve accommodating, rather than subordinating, national identities”.⁶⁷ Spain can do this by creating a shared narrative that incorporates local narratives, and admitting that throughout history, different regions, for a variety of contingent reasons, are bound to have a different degree of preminence. That is, by having

⁶⁵ Op. Cit. Pg 181.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit. Pg 182.

⁶⁷ Op. Cit. Pg 189.

a common story, not a dialectical one. Moreover, there is also a need in Spain of a political culture based on political institutions that guarantee individual rights and liberties, but at the same time respect historical specificities. Tocqueville talks about American institutions by saying: “the free institutions which the inhabitants of the US possess and the political rights of which they make so much use, remind every citizen that he lives in society”.⁶⁸

5. Rethinking Spain’s national identity

The Spanish national identity needs a certain redefinition. The way its history has been told is poor. Each national identity is constructed through a narrative, and ours is not fully coherent nor inclusive. Some people in Spain do not feel identified with Spain (part of the people of Catalonia and the Basque Country), on the contrary, they feel antagonized. This is due to both the narrative those regions have created regarding their identity since the end of the 19th Century; and also to Spain’s dominant narrative since the beginning of the 20th Century –when, after the “disaster” of 1898, some intellectuals conceptualized Spain basically around the Castilian inheritance, and later on, during the early and middle 20th Century, when the Andalusian topics were chosen to represent the entirety of Spain.

Depending on the relation between the social and the political aspects, national identity will vary, and also the relationship between the concepts of **nation** (understood as Kymlicka did - cultural elements-), **state** (government) and **citizenship** (shared rights, shared identity). We explained three types of national identity that Tocqueville already analyzed. Currently, in the Spanish national identity that we have researched throughout this essay, there is has been an attempt to identify nation (understood as culture), with state (government) and citizenship (shared identity). I say “attempt”, because this ‘Nation-State’ structure was never fully developed in Spain, due to the importance of

⁶⁸ DE TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Signet Classics. New York, USA. Pg 229.

regionalisms. Also, the national feeling that arose during the Independence War against the French did not find any continuity due to the political divisions within Spain. There are other two options that can reframe the Spanish national identity. The question is: are either of them viable for Spain?

5.1. Constitutional patriotism

When the concept of nation (as in culture) is left aside, and the citizenship must uniquely respond to universal concepts incarnated through the state, we are talking about constitutional patriotism as national identity. It is similar to the concept that Taylor explained as the egalitarian liberalism, which assumes that the political society can be a neutral ground in which the cultural elements are left aside.

The idea of the constitutional patriotism was developed by **Jürgen Habermas**, who thought it would be the perfect basis for a future European identity. The constitutional patriotism is the “identification of the citizen with a political system that guarantees democratic institutions and the principles of freedom and equality, incarnated through the Constitution”.⁶⁹ Therefore, with this type of national identity, the coexistence of different cultures would be possible, and the shared identity would be only political, not social.

During the 2000s, political parties in Spain tried to promote constitutional patriotism. Citizens should feel identified with the **values incarnated in the Constitution from 1978**: liberty and equality. This way, the national identity would be inclusive and would comprehend the different cultures in Spain.

Theoretically, it is a good solution: emphasizing the political identity while separating it from the cultural identity. That is, the national identity (the sense of membership to a country) will be based on shared values (those from the Constitution). This, however,

⁶⁹ BALLESTER RODRÍGUEZ, Mateo. *Auge y declive del patriotismo constitucional en España: en torno a los estados pluriétnicos*. Pg 129. Personal translation.

posed a problem in Spain when the Popular Party adopted the constitutional patriotism: it was seen as an attempt to centralize more the country. “What was really sought with the constitutional patriotism, was to disown any demand in favor of recognizing the right to autodetermination”.⁷⁰ Several authors said that constitutional patriotism was a way to disguise a subtle nationalism.

Habermas says that for the constitutional patriotism to work the citizens must participate in a common culture, which leads to a “feeling of identification with the larger political community”.⁷¹ For this creation of a public space, the citizens would need to speak one **common language** for there to be real interaction. In Spain, this leads to choosing Castilian. But the use of Castilian as the only language for all the territory could be perceived as discriminatory, because there are other official languages in Spain. “[...] The use of Castilian as a tool of communication for the whole state-citizenship, like for example in the Congress, may be considered as discriminatory and as a failure from the equality principle”.⁷² This means that, in a way, by leaving the cultural elements from the regions aside, then the Castilian cultural elements would be emphasized in the public sphere and in the political dialogue. The fact that Castilian is the element which still defines national identity within the constitutional patriotism reveals its inconsistency. It is impossible to separate completely, in a national identity, the political and the social elements.

For that reason, I believe it is not the best solution for the Spanish national identity.

5.2. Comprehensive national identity

Demoting the cultural elements in favor of a liberal and egalitarian socio-political structure has not worked out well for Spain. The other option is to integrate those elements

⁷⁰ Op. Cit. Pg 130. Personal translation.

⁷¹ Op. Cit. Pg 131. Personal translation.

⁷² Op. Cit. Pg 131.

and learn certain features from the American example. First, we should be able to tell a more **compelling and participative narrative of our own complex history**. Second, we should promote a **political culture** which provides a structure in which public and private interests meet, and in which townships have an important role in politics giving the citizens tools to participate in the government.

With this comprehensive national identity, the **nation** - culture - would not be identified with the state, but it would have a political role. The **state** would draw from the different regional cultures recognizing their value, instead of being neutral. And the **citizenship** will be formed through the dialogue between those cultures.

A. Narrative

As Taylor says, our identity depends on the recognition others give to us and on the dialogue we establish with them. And it also depends on the story we tell ourselves regarding who we are, and the story others tell about ourselves. As we have seen, the narrative that has tried to build our national identity is quite biased: it was centralized and it antagonized certain regions. Therefore, Spain needs to retell its history.

Regarding our culture and our history we need to take three observations into account. First, by making a comprehensive story in which **local cultures** have something to say. That is, telling the story of Spain with its different actors: Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, and all the other regions; not just Castile. This implies a serious study of our history. But it also needs a compelling and easy story. The same way that the United States' narrative can be summarized with the words 'American Dream', Spain needs a story with which not only all the regions can identify, but also every citizen. Second, Spain's narrative must take into account the relationship the country has built with **Latin America** during centuries. And third, we must realize that our **culture** (religion, ethnicity, history) has an important weight in our national identity, it should not be the element that antagonizes newcomer or makes it harder for them to feel part of the Spanish identity.

Regarding the narrative itself, it must be a proper **story**. As every narrative, the main character (Spain) needs to have a goal. In the United States narrative there are two main characters: the country and the individual. While there is a persistent and increasing debate about America's identity, the dominant story sees America as invested with a "mission", namely, to spread democracy throughout the world,. The individual's mission is to succeed by working hard. Perhaps, the same should be rethought about Spain. In the past, Spain identified itself with religious goals; they were the ideological justification for the conquest of America. Nowadays, Spaniards tend to be recognized and recognize themselves as particularly committed to solidarity at least towards the distant other. Is this enough to make up a cohesive national identity?

This leads to my last point, the political culture, which is needed to make that narrative effective.

B. Political Culture

The United States has a political culture which guarantees a stronger involvement of the citizens in the government's affairs. This makes it easier for them, and for newcomers, to feel part of the country and identify with the national identity. I will highlight three elements in the American political culture which Spain should take into account.

First, the citizens in the United States are aware of the **power of association**. They associate and work for a common goal. This allows them to merge their private interests with the public ones, and to promote a dialogue between the different spheres in society. Spain should learn from this power of association. I believe that the recent appearance of new parties reveals a certain change in the political framework and it does reflect the idea that citizens have the power to associate and intervene in the government's affairs. A different matter is whether those new parties can sustain that commitment to participation once they become ordinary parties.

Second, in the United States the **local governments** have real importance, and therefore the citizens do feel they have a say in the country's affairs. It is easier for them to feel involved with political issues if they have already discussed them in their township. I believe Spain could learn from this, in the sense of promoting the citizen's involvement with their local governments.

From these two points, the third one is inferred: we need **institutions** that promote equality and liberty, and that provide the citizens with the tools to actually intervene in the government. Those institutions would help to create a dialogue, that does not demote the specificities of each culture but, on the contrary, it draws from them. This would help build a healthy patriotism, because the citizens would feel engaged with their government. And once they did, they would feel part of it and identify with the national identity.

6. Conclusion

After analyzing the American national identity and comparing it to the Spanish one, we have seen that the latter lacks certain elements that would make it more coherent and inclusive. The most important ones are a strong and compelling narrative, and a political culture with institutions that guarantee a dialogue between cultures and the involvement of the citizens in the government's affairs. If the Spanish national identity could improve in those two aspects, then it would be much more comprehensive towards internal cultural diversity and immigrant population.

This solution, however, has several **weaknesses**. First, when building a coherent narrative: who is supposed to build it? Is it the government? The politicians? One could say that a committee of individuals from different fields, regions and from both sides of the political spectrum. Would this be fair to the rest of the citizens? Second, theoretically the state can draw from the different cultures and recognize their value. Practically, how should this be done? Maybe through political measures that promote cultural diversity (workshops, campaigns). Or, for example, in the American universities a student can ask for a day off if it is due to a religious reason, regardless of the religion. Could something similar be applied in Spain? However, is this enough? And third, when talking about institutions that promote liberty and equality, and that provide the citizen with the tools to be politically active; which institutions would that be?

Those practical issues should be resolved once there is a will to rethink the Spanish national identity. And, although Spain should look at the United States to rethink those issues, Spain should not just copy it. The cultural diversity that both countries face is completely different and the content of both national identities also differs. Whereas the American is much lighter, compelling and puts an emphasis on the future instead of the past; the Spanish one has more weight due to its history and origin. Whereas the US can draw from its diversity, Spain must draw from its history to understand itself. This is not a bad thing, but it must be taken seriously in order to build up a coherent national identity.

In conclusion, the Spanish national identity needs to be rethought to face cultural diversity, both the regionalisms within Spain and the immigration. The Spanish citizens have to be politically involved, feel identified with the country and be willing to enter a dialogue between different cultures and points of view. As Tocqueville said, the challenge is the change from being an individual, who cares for his private interests, to becoming a citizen, who seeks public goals. Kymlicka also points this out: the **emphasis is on the citizens and their shared identity**.

“Recent political events and trends throughout the world have made clear that the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its basic institutions, but also on the qualities and the attitudes of its citizens: their sense of identity, and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic or religious identities, their ability to tolerate and work together with other who are different from themselves, their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good. [...] Without citizens that possess these qualities, the ability of liberal societies to function successfully progressively diminishes”.⁷³

⁷³ KYMLICKA, William. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. Pg 175.

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