Minorities in the trap of iconography

"In contrast to inherited nationalist groupings, political claims have emerged based on cultural, linguistic or religious identity, tending to produce a fragmentation of the nation-state. These processes, more or less violent in their expression, are nourished by representations, that is to say manifestations of the Imaginary, based often on myths which are variously understood outside, and conserved to a greater or lesser degree inside, the geographical entities to which they apply. Thus the situation lends itself to an analysis in terms of images, which may become icons when they are invested with the intangible values associated with the sacred, and may thus form iconographies."

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Introduction

The contribution of Jean Gottmann, in his elaboration of the concept of *iconography,* seems to me considerable, and extremely relevant today. Europe, whose national and ideological frontiers have been considered as fixed since the Second World War, has experienced during the last decade upheavals whose importance is yet to be determined.

Behind the apparent status quo which followed Yalta, forces were and are at work everywhere which eventually brought down the Berlin Wall, dismembered the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and Balkanized – more or less painfully – European countries with their widely varying histories. In contrast to inherited nationalist groupings, political claims have emerged based on cultural, linguistic or religious identity, tending to produce a fragmentation of the nation-state.

These processes, more or less violent in their expression, are nourished by *representations*, that is to say manifestations of the *Imaginary*, often based on *myths* which are variously understood outside, and conserved to a greater or lesser degree inside, the geographical entities to which they apply. Thus the situation lends itself to an analysis in terms of *images*, which may become *icons* when they are invested with the intangible values associated with the sacred, and may thus form *iconographies*.

It seems to me that a certain *narrowness of outlook* can be detected in the images which different peoples have of each other, as revealed in their iconographies. And if it is admitted that the relations between peoples (or between nation-states) like interpersonal relations, are necessarily relations of *domination*, one may try to imagine how a dominated people may come to reverse this situation of domination in their favor, and how, in the case of success, they may be led to behave with respect to the people now dominated. The examples drawn from the two sides of the Pyrenees, of the situation of the Occitans and the Catalans in France, compared with that of the Catalans in Spain, seem to me to present a concrete case of what might otherwise seem a mere abstract hypothesis. I shall further try to envisage possible solutions to the spiral of exclusion.

Iconography, myth, and the relation of domination

Two examples of iconographies

• **The image of the Occitan:** There are in Europe micro-states – nations whose territory and population are tiny, but which are nonetheless clearly defined, and recognized by international organizations, as well as in the cultural representations of individuals on the continent and in the whole world. The same thing cannot be said of Languedoc, which has never existed as a sovereign state, but only as a group of territories where the "langue d'oc" – or Occitan language – is spoken and which is divided into six major dialects and an infinite number of sub-dialects. However, this region covers totally or partially 31 French *départements*, with a population of not less than 13 million.

This imaginary country has been controlled since the 13th century, first by the French Crown, and for the last two centuries by the French Republic. Its political domination has been accompanied by a linguistic and cultural domination, the principal milestones of which were the Edict of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539, the proclamation of the Republic in 1792, and the Education Acts of Jules Ferry at the end of the 19th century which have led, slowly but surely, to the near eradication of the use of the Occitan language today.[1]

"Occitania," or Languedoc, is a country without a name, absent from the atlases, whose language – its cultural cement – is equally anonymous, since it is described as a *patois*, or simple deformation of the national language – French. This denial of its political and linguistic existence by the dominating power does not eliminate the recognition of a cultural otherness in which one discovers the residue of all which is most contemptible, in the form of *negative representations*, or *ethnotypes*.

Three such can be distinguished, at different periods, and corresponding to different regions. The oldest, dating from the religious wars of the 15th century, represents the typical Gascon, who accompanied Henry of Navarre to Paris when he gave up the Protestant religion and ascended to the throne as Henry IV. Boastful, cunning, ambitious, aggressive and superficial, he was a stock character in French literature of the 16th and 17th centuries. He survives in the popular expression, "promesse de Gascon" i.e. "an empty promise."[2] The 19th and 20th centuries have given a leading role, first in short stories, and then in the novel and the cinema, to the Provençal, effectively identical with the typical Mediterranean personality, also seen as a persuasive talker, but lazy into the bargain, supposedly spending most of his time taking siestas, playing *pétanque*, and knocking back the *pastis*.[3] Less well-defined, because closer geographically and less garrulous, the third Occitan ethnotype is the Auvergnat, known as the "bougnat" – a tight-fisted plodder, but crafty, who comes up to Paris to ply the trade of woodseller, coal or wine merchant, or proprietor of a bistrot.[4]

These three faces of the Occitan people manifest undeniable common traits, despite the disparities in time and place mentioned above: he is an anti-hero, or rather, a hero in reverse, seen from below. He is untrustworthy, cowardly in combat, and has an ambivalent attitude to work, either dodging it (the most common situation) or applying himself to it out of avarice. Always suspected of duplicity and hiding his true feelings, he is also devoted to the ignoble pursuits of excessive eating and drinking. The Occitan is certainly the Other for the Frenchman, and this otherness is systematically stigmatized.

- **The image of the Catalan in France and in Spain:** The Roussillonnais, or French Catalan, is regarded in a similar way as the Provençal, or Occitan.[5] The only things which distinguish him are his pronounced taste for grilled snails (the *cargolada*), and the local dance, the Sardane, which he dances in his traditional red bonnet or *barretina*. He is perhaps felt to be a little calmer in his bearing, but the confusion of stereotypes draws him towards the negative images of food and laziness.

On the other side of the Pyrenees, the Catalan is seen, curiously, not as an idle Southerner, but as a Spanish Northerner, and his image, while still stigmatized, changes completely. He is seen as cold, distant, and industrious, the man who *"de les pedres treu el pà,"* i.e. who can cultivate the desert and make it flourish. In terms of the rest of the Iberian Peninsula he is seen as a businessman for whom time is money.[6] The greatest pleasure for a Catalan – who, according to popular humor, gives even the Jews cause for envy – is to count the number of steps of his famous Sardane while he dances.[7]

The Catalan belongs to one of the richest regions of the Spanish state. One of only two (the other being the Basque region) to have gone through the industrial revolution, it has been profoundly affected by new currents of economic, cultural and social thought coming from Europe. Catalonia's nationalist and separatist ambitions were nourished by the region's wealth, which encouraged an immense inward migration. This in turn provoked considerable Spanish ill-feeling, a mixture of envy and anger.

Throughout its history, Catalonia's centrifugal tendencies have come up against the centralizing process developed in turn by the Catholic monarchy (1469), the Bourbons (1715), and the recent Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). In the 20th century, Catalan national sentiment, born out of the *Renaixença* of around 1833, found its expression during the two republics (1872, and above all 1931-1939), the second of which saw the enactment in 1932 of a Statute of Autonomy which was to be the basis of the creation in 1979 of the current Autonomous Region.

One can thus identify the objective elements which give rise to a negative representation in the minds of other Spaniards. And equally, one understands why, in comparison with the Occitans, or even the Northern (French) Catalans, psychologically depressed by the state of their oppressed and decaying regions, the Spanish Catalans may be seen as proud and boastful.

Iconography and intercommunal balance of power

The types of iconographies revealed by Gotttmann are underpinned by intercommunal balances of power. From this point of view, a comparison with the relations between the *dominant* and the *dominated* of the kind developed by Albert Memmi in the context of colonialism[8] seems to me likely to prove fruitful.

Memmi has clearly demonstrated the nature of the interaction between colonizer and colonized. The colonizer, in his role of protector, bearer of progress and culture to the barbarian native, disposing of power backed up by force, inevitably forges a negative representation of the colonized, aimed at legitimizing the act of colonization. In this context, the metaphor of the minority reveals its true sense: the *minority party* (in terms of numbers or power) becomes a *minor,* whose development is inconceivable without the presence of a *tutor*.[9] The immense field of action of Authority includes, as is well known, the power of naming the Other and his attributes. The definition attributed to other languages by the French State is, as I have indicated, an example of this type of action.

The originality of Memmi's work lies in his demonstration, in *Portrait du colonisé*, of how the discourse, or rather the image (the representation) applied by the dominator, may be integrated by the dominated. The self-devaluing alibi provided by the act of domination thus arrives at its ultimate stage in insinuating itself into the very consciousness of the minority party.

Psychology and psychoanalysis have much to teach us about the *self-representations* stemming from interpersonal relations, either in the child-parent relationship, or in the relation within a couple in its phases of acceptance and unconscious adjustment on the part of the victim.[10] In the course of such a process one may come across what the Catalan sociolinguist calls *auto-odi* or "self-hate,"[11] that is to say the hatred, which may manifest itself physically or psychosomatically, of one's cultural, religious, or linguistic identity. For there exists, either latently or manifestly, a conflict between the two images (the primary self-image and the reflected or imposed image of the self) which resolves itself in the same way as the concurrent socio-political, socio-economic, or socio-cultural conflict. An equilibrium of forces leads to an exacerbation of the phenomenon, rendering it perfectly visible, while an imbalance in the relation tends to conceal it and displace it from the social sphere to that of the individual.

Depending on the circumstances, one may find oneself faced with an equal exchange of representations, of which the most amusing example is the traditional *"català burro/gavatx porc"*[12] found at the Languedoc / Roussillon frontier, or, in other circumstances, a one-way representation of the dominated by the dominator. However, whatever the degree of "minorization," or of accepted domination, it turns out that the transaction always operates in both directions. The position of the minority party is

expressed "under its breath," as it were (and sometimes behind the back of the dominator) in the form of parody, and more generally in the form of a reversal of roles, with all the compensatory advantages which flourish in a carnival situation.

It is precisely this route which is offered to us by the Occitan movement, both based on, and militating against, a state of "infantilization," or reduction to the role of minor, which is at the same time imposed and accepted. Spanish Catalonia, on the other hand, at a more advanced stage of development, provides us with an example of a successful reversal (or one which is in the process of succeeding) of the roles of dominator and dominated, and of the exploitation of the latter.

From imposed representation to created iconography

The development of an iconography as counter-representation

From 1968 on, in the wake of the American protest song and the *nova cançó catalana,*[13] the Occitan regionalist movement chose to express itself in the language up till then reserved for folksong or traditional music. Thanks to his impressive physique and charismatic personality, Claude Marti became the unchallenged leader of this movement. Emotionally close to the Communist Party, he has a pragmatic approach, putting his professional experience as a primary school teacher to good use in an artistic activity deliberately popular in form.[14]

In his teaching job he is in theory obliged to project a vision of French history which is schematic and determinist, limited nowadays to a succession of clichés aimed at celebrating the supposedly inevitable process of the unification of the French Nation.[15] The History of France, as it is taught in primary schools (from "our ancestors the Gauls" to "the good Monsieur Thiers," taking in on the way "St Louis dispensing justice under the oak," "Joan of Arc burnt by the English," "Louis XIV, the Sun-king," "The storming of the Bastille," and "Napoleon on the bridge at Arcole") constitutes a veritable *iconography* representing the dominant point of view of the Republican nation-state, but also a veritable negation of history for the outlying populations – originally non-indigenous, and sometimes, up to quite recently, non-French-speaking. However, this is not the place to demonstrate how France was formed otherwise than by unanimous and spontaneous assent, or that the nation-republic is founded on the basis of a citizenship which is both integrationist and assimilationist.[16]

Marti *deconstructs* the conventional history of France, indicating, from the Occitan point of view, its serious loopholes and distortions. He turns the insidiousness of the cliché – source of alienation – against the negator of an "alternative history," in order to conduct a veritable *subversion* of the official representation.

Montségur, which has been elevated, in the wake of the romantic re-emergence of regional nationalities, to the status of symbolic sacred site of the resistance to the oppression of the invading Crusaders,[17] was the place where the pacifist doves of the Occitan movement met the black French crows, defenders of law and order, blood and property, with the burning of the Cathar heretics on 16th March, 1244. The Commune of 1870, although originally a Parisian movement, created an example which had its followers in Languedoc, and it is invoked in order to pillory, in the person of Monsieur Thiers, the timeless oppressor of a people in justifiable revolt. Nearer to our own time, the episode of the winegrowers' revolt in Narbonne and Béziers in 1907 rendered legendary the figure of their leader Marcellin Albert, and the mutiny of the soldiers of the 17th line regiment, who sided with the demonstrators whose rebellion they were supposed to quell.[18]

The deconstruction undertaken leads to the formation of an Occitan iconography essentially anti-French in nature. In turn invader and oppressor, the French deny the right to exist to an Occitan nation of which the cultural specificity is essentially libertarian and consensual, that is to say, tolerant. But it is above all the Republican state education system, secular and compulsory, which is denounced by Marti as the vector which is supremely efficient (because of its insidious nature) in destroying the Occitan identity. It is an irrefutable fact that *acculturation à la française* is accompanied by an obvious *deculturation*, which only a *regenerative iconography* can prevent.

An iconography of a Manichean kind thus operates, enveloping everything in its confusion of times, places, and the fracture-lines – both social (opposing people against power structures), and cultural (opposing the Occitan and French people) which run through society. It is fundamentally simplistic, and the case of Marti shows both its strengths and its limitations. Having passed through the institutional machine and having become one of its cogs, Marti refuses to deliver what Bourdieu has described as "*reproduction,*"[19] and turns against the education system the very arms of which he and his Occitan comrades deem themselves victim. The impact of his songs shows how representation/iconography may be a formidable weapon, though a double-edged one: the instrument of domination may become the tool of liberation.

The nation in images

I would like to spend some time discussing a leaflet (fig. 1) from the exhibition *Simbols de Catalunya*, put on by the regional council of Spanish Catalonia, la Generalitat de Catalunya.[20]

The first page shows, below the title divided by the wavy Catalan flag (four red stripes on a gold background), nine square vignettes themselves arranged in a square. Below is the logo of the "autonomous region" and the name of the organizer of the exhibition. The vignettes are reproduced again on a second double-sided page, with a title and a column of explanatory text. Of the ten which figure on this page, one has been omitted on the first page, apparently for reasons of space and because of its relatively secondary importance.[21]

The second page summarizes and develops the information given more briefly on the panels which constitute the exhibition itself. This page is intended to inform the visitor, as well as constituting a permanent testimony, since it is distributed free. The commentary on the symbols which are in the form of icons, i.e. stylized drawings, is historical in nature. It covers the time from the region's origins up to the recent past, namely the "restoration" of Catalan autonomy at the time of the end of Franco's régime (1976).[22]

The attentive reader cannot help being struck by the heterogenous nature of this series of symbols, both in terms of the origins of the symbolic objects depicted (national, religious, political or ethnographic) and in terms of their dates (from the 11th century[23] to the beginning of the 20th), and also by the hazards of history which lead them to be chosen today. Throughout Catalonia's thousand-year history,[24] duly celebrated in 1989, these symbols have reflected the varying fortunes of Catalonia. For the 20th century, constant mention is made of the key moments of freedom of expression (the second republic and the constitutional monarchy[25]) and of repression (the dictatorships of the generals Primo de Rivera and Franco[26]) in an opposition which, while conforming to the historical truth, is nonetheless treated in a somewhat Manichean fashion.

But let us return to the nine icons on the first page of the document and their organization. The top row is structured around the national emblem, shown as a flag waving in the wind (the gust of wind symbolizing liberty) held aloft by an arm represent-

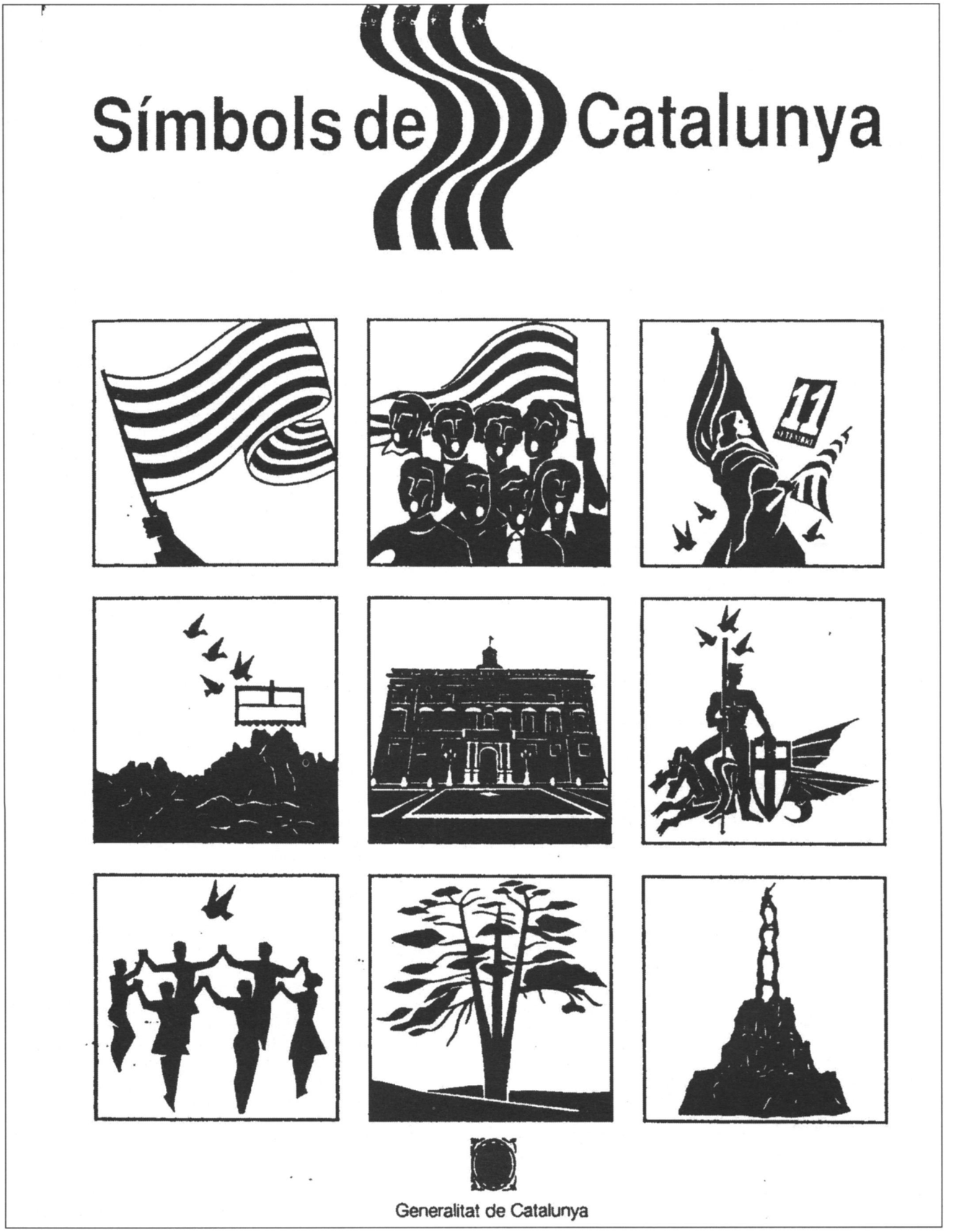

Fig. 1: Symbols of Catalonia.

ing strength and human willpower. In the center of the iconic arrangement sits the Catalan parliament, representing the seat of autonomous power.[27] Note that it is not a royal palace, but the seat of the collegial representation of the nation. A horizontal reading of this second row places the seat of the Generalitat between two religious symbols, one essentially legendary – St. George slaying the dragon – and the other spiritual, though largely rooted in the temporal, since it shows the abbey of Montserrat.[28]

A diagonal structure, in the form of a hexagon, connects four icons depicting a variable number of doves, symbolizing the pacific intentions of the Catalan state and its inhabitants. Finally, the iconic whole is given stability by an isosceles triangle whose summit is the central element of the top row, and whose base is formed by the two outer elements of the bottom row. These three points of equilibrium represent the group as a fundamental value: the determination of the open mouths singing, no doubt in unison, the national anthem is thus linked in a geometrically perfect fashion to the circle of the sardane dance and the vertical acrobatics of the human tower of the "*castellers*."

The national consciousness represented by the people united and the seat of their power, and the religious symbolism coupled with a desire for peace, are factors of *equilibrium* and *harmonious growth*, figured also in the most recent symbol (which is also the most mythically charged, since it is derived from the poetic fiction of Jacint Verdaguer[29]) namely the "three-branched pinetree."

The way the nine icons chosen are presented in function of their *semic charge* is thus never a matter of indifference. The attentive visitor to the exhibition is of course able to decode it, but most frequently this order is imposed on the viewer, for a procedure of this kind is *deliberate* and truly *significant* with respect to the motivations of the exhibition's promoter. The construction which is offered to the reader, and which in fact imposes itself, is truly that of an iconography, of a positive value: from a mass of objectively disparate elements, a significant whole is constructed, that of a *national* – even *nationalist* – *iconography*.

Collective identity and Otherness

The ambiguity of a textual formalization

The introductory text defines the motivations and the contents of the exhibition. To this end, it seems to have been prepared with as much care as the set of icons, and its analysis is even more revealing as to the intentions of the organizer, and their ambiguities.

The text fits into a chronological dynamic, within the thousand-year history of Catalonia, first expressing a set of national symbols constituted over time, then deciphering them. The existence of modern Catalonia finds its legitimacy in the past (the term "heritage" appears twice). Its beginnings are described at length, with the aid of a rich lexical arsenal based on verbs implying a result ("developed, redeveloped, recovered, recognized, constituted, create a synthesis"), with an emphasis which suggests, on the one hand, the obstacles overcome in the course of the country's historical development (explicitly mentioned in the expression "in good times or in bad times"), and on the other hand, the unremitting determination of those whom one might call the midwives of the nation's history.

From this point of view, it is worth noticing the subjects of the verbs mentioned above. Note the variety of actors named, and a subtle division between the third and first persons. The subjects mentioned in the third person are, in order, "Catalonia, the Catalan movement (twice), (all) the citizens (twice), the Catalan people," treating on the same level the historical/social/political unit; the totality of the inhabitants of that unit; and the militant driving force of the national consciousness.

The passage from this third person left vaguely defined – apparently deliberately – to the first person is effected by the repeated affirmation of the collectivity ("collectively, common, collective, all") implying a presumed unanimity. The personal pronoun and the possessives are equally ambiguous (from "his own, theirs" to "us, ours, our"). Standing out from the rest is a final "you" addressed to the visitor which, in a certain fashion, invites him to unite with "us". The process of bringing together, even of substitution, of subjects is even more subtle for the linguistics expert, in that Émile Benveniste has clearly insisted on the clear break defined in the universe between the "scene of locution" (the "I" of the speaker and the "you" of the person addressed, who is his reflection) and the person referred to, absent from the place of discourse.[30]

The constitution of a *unifying iconography* (of a positive sign) must necessarily rest on an *artificial base,* which passes from "he/she/they" to "we", incorporating surreptitiously the "you" in the "we", and creating, on the basis of disparate elements, the support of a *collective imagination*. The items assembled for this purpose consist, not only of objectively recorded events from the historical record, but also sometimes those from the legendary heritage. History and myth live side by side, enriching each other (as one can see in the textual development devoted to icons), the former imparting its authenticity to the latter. The amalgam, in fact a historical fabrication, is the work of the militant nationalist avant-garde, "*which is capable of synthesizing and re-elaborating this iconographic material,"* and whose role is comparable, with respect to the community, to that of the guide or pilot-fish.

Identification, integration, assimilation, or refusal? The temptation of "reproduction"

Iconography reveals the "structurizing" elements of "Catalanness," which presupposes the existence of the Catalan nation. What is at stake is, as is stated in the text, the "belonging" of the individual to this community, to the extent that he recognizes himself in these elements, because they make up part of his identity *("he recognizes them as his own")*. The question which is at the same time proposed and resolved is the exact meaning of the "we" envisaged.

The "we" presented as open to all citizens resident in the Catalan region admits the *diversity* and the *coexistence* between the groups (native and diverse immigrants) which form a mixed society, and leads one to think that the respect for social pluralism, both linguistic and cultural, is an accepted fact. The text, however, says nothing about those immigrants who do not wish to see themselves reflected in the mirror held up to them by the exhibition, through the accumulated symbolic material. The document invites consensus, but presupposes the integration by the individual of Catalan values of self-identification.

Now, precisely as black Africans found it difficult to recognize themselves in "our ancestors, the Gauls," in their educational acculturation, so it is for immigrants from Southern Spain. Are they ready to swap their Our Ladies of Rocío, of la Cabeza, or of Guadeloupe for "la Moreneta" of Montserrat? Are they ready to drop their own identifying signs for those which they are generously offered? Is not defining what it means to belong, at the same time to define the meaning of marginality and exclusion? The step taken, in appearance open and generous, means in fact leaving the individual the free choice to decide, while washing one's hands in a sense of the possible consequences of that choice: the exclusion which is a necessary consequence of the refusal to join.

The autonomous authority, insofar as it considers a certain level of consensuality to have been reached among the native population of its territory, seeks, in order to accomplish

its purpose fully, to win over those "on the edge." It proposes to immigrants an integrational procedure which will lead in the end to their assimilation.[31] But this invitation presents to the immigrant, for good or ill, an *alternative.* It may be useful to look beyond the inter-regional confrontation of immigrant and Catalan, towards the wider national, Spanish picture.

The claims which Catalonia tends to put forward as a nation put it on the same level as the Spanish state. Spain, however, is supposed to fit together the different regional components, and one may ask oneself whether adhesion to the former does not preclude adhesion to the latter. It may be objected that most of the symbolic elements which constitute the iconography shown in the exhibition, from the symbols of popular tradition to the flag itself, may turn out to be compatible with the Spanish state, and permit adherence to the two entities, one within the other. But is an arrangement of this kind compatible with the Catalan anthem, which is (on the grounds of legitimate defense[32]), anti-Castillian in origin? Or with the Catalan national holiday, which, in commemorating the forced submission to the Bourbons, perpetuates at the same time the cult of the martyrs and the condemnation of their persecutors?

In any case, the day-to-day life of immigrants in Catalonia is not entirely free from antagonism. The *socio-linguistic confrontation* is complex, since the relations between dominator and dominated tend to reverse themselves according to the context: the Spanish speaker, who is the dominant party on the national Spanish level,[33] is in the position of the dominated in Catalonia,[34] while the Catalan speaker, on his own ground, takes his revenge by a social domination of the immigrant. For the latter, the image of Catalonia, which has always been branded by the mark of Otherness,[35] is influenced by the traumatic experience of having been uprooted, and frequently, by social marginalization.

In the field of fiction, two works by the Spanish-speaking Barcelona writer Juan Marsé, published 14 years apart,[36] describe, through the relationship of a couple in the process of breaking up, the antagonism between a member of the local Catalan-speaking upper class and a Castillian-speaking social inferior. The relationship is described sometimes dramatically, sometimes ironically.[37] The relations between the individuals and between linguistic groups are interlinked since, beyond the question of individual incompatibilities, it is their *membership* of antagonistic groups, in social as well as in linguistic terms, which dooms their relationship. The attempt at *interculturality* personified by the narrator of *El amante bilingüe* is presented unambiguously by Marsé as doomed to the same fate.

What is in question, therefore, is the possibility of transcending one's origins, of escaping from *categorization* and even *iconographic determinism.* The Catalan example seems to indicate the inevitable nature of *iconographic reproduction.* For if the immigrant, by his attitude, perpetuates in a country which is not clearly his own[38] an attitude of superiority which is in constant conflict with the daily reality of his new environment, and elicits in return a dominating attitude just as violent in the form of rejection and marginalization, is one not faced with a veritable *vicious circle* of exclusion in which, leaving aside the reversal of roles, intercommunal relations remain unchanged, since yesterday's victim becomes automatically the aggressor?

Is the attempt at assimilation on the part of the regional authorities any different? Certainly, it offers a helping hand, but, insidiously, only takes the Other into consideration by denying his identity: *the Other* is, in fact, *only worthy of interest* from the moment that he agrees to accept a new identity, in other words, from the moment he renounces his Otherness, or at least his *claim to Otherness.* The offer of assimilation is an avoidance of conflict, or at least a state of balance of power, in which the image of power imposes a resolution without the necessity of having to use force. But it is not any more consensual: it is the *pacifying version,* which still remains an alternative.

Alternatives to iconographic imprisonment

From an imposed iconography, experienced as a subjection by the oppressed minority, to the reversal of the balance of forces which generates a new iconography, which becomes in turn an instrument of discrimination and oppression, it seems that one is functioning inside an inexorable *vicious circle.* How can it be broken? How can the coexistence of individuals and peoples be organized otherwise than in terms of negative principles? Two attempts at an answer are offered here, coming not from the sphere of politics but from that of culture, from two writers: the French-speaking West Indian Edouard Glissant, who teaches English Literature in Louisiana, and the well-known Czech opponent of the communist regime Milan Kundera, who accompanied another literary figure in his ascent to power, Vaclav Havel.

Edouard Glissant, or, the West Indian Utopia

Edouard Glissant, like all Caribbean intellectuals and artists — more so than those from the American continent — has had to face the complex problem of West Indian identity. The history, and in particular the cultural and linguistic history, of the region places the writer in a formidable state of disequilibrium. The West Indian is at the same time, but to a widely varying extent, depending on the place, social class, and even on the individuals themselves, the native, that is to say either an American Indian, a black slave torn from Africa, a European who has expropriated the land, or an American conforming to a certain continental logic.

What is more, the linguistic tool at his service is either a language of the colonizers – Spanish, English, or French – or a form of Creole. It is thus either the language of the dominator, the negator of the Other whom he exterminates and/or reduces to slavery, or a kind of multiform all-enveloping non-language, integrating into itself a variety of contributions from the history of the Caribbean. The writer confronting his West Indian-ness and his Creole-ness is in a certain fashion faced with an ultimatum to choose between a language which denies a part of his origins, and one which is elusive in its very essence, inextricably bound to its oral nature, and difficult to transmit.

Edouard Glissant, the most theoretically-minded of French-speaking West Indian writers, attempts to turn what could be handicaps into advantages and openings, by developing what he calls the Poetics of Relationships.[39] This relationship is imposed by the territorial dispersal of the archipelago, as well as by the process of racial mixing inherited from history. He gives it a name: Creolization. Glissant considers it as "a new dimension which allows everyone to be there, and at the same time somewhere else, rooted, and free." He then states that: "If we understand racial mixing as in general an encounter and a synthesis between two different beings, 'Creolization' appears to us as a racial mixing without limits, whose elements are multiplied, and whose results are unforeseeable." Such a process is typical of "the Creole language, whose particular genius lies in its openness ... Creolization thus wins out in the multilingual adventure and in the unprecedented breaking-up of cultures. But this cultural explosion does not imply their dissipation, nor their mutual dilution. It is the violent manifestation of a sharing out which

is not imposed, but willingly consented to."[40]

Such a perspective, formulated with the aid of poetic rhetoric, brilliant and fiery, coming from a writer decorated with literary honors, may seem excessive, unrealistic or even utopian. Nonetheless, it is based on a rigorous analysis of the concept of identity, which is linked, as we shall see, with our interest in *iconography.*

For Edouard Glissant opposes two forms of identity, one characteristic of the Old World, the other of the New. The former defined by roots, the latter *by relationships.*[41] The first, which concerns us Europeans, is, according to Glissant, "founded on a vision, a myth of the creation of the world." It is, above all, confirmed by the claim to legitimacy which allows a community to proclaim its right to the possession of a terrain, which then becomes a territory. It follows that "When secular cultures clash because of their lack of tolerance, the violence which ensues provokes mutual exclusions of a quasi-religious character, for which it is difficult to envisage a future conciliation."[42]

It is, so to speak, on the rights of the original occupant, the possession of territory, that the iconography – whose attributes will be easily recognized – is based. The "identity by relationship" on the other hand, put forward by Glissant, "is linked [...] to the conscious and contradictory living experience born of the contact between cultures," based on the circulation of "place" in the sense of the place where one "gives into" instead of "takes in,"[43] that is to say, on "*movement*, and *wholeness.*"[44] Here we are very close to Gottmann's concept of *circulation*, the counterpart and reworking of *iconography*. However, Glissant is quite conscious that this type of identity, which gives rise to composite cultures, "is extremely fragile" when it enters into contact with a "root-based identity" of the European type.

Milan Kundera and the "Czech Wager"

With Milan Kundera, there is a change of continent, and therefore of tone and of perspective. The Czech writer, who has accompanied the process of democratization of his country, expresses himself in terms which are more realistic, because they are political. The text published almost a year ago, just before the anniversary of the proclamation of the Czech Republic, on the 28th October, 1918, by the *Nouvel Observateur* under the title "the Czech Wager,"[45] deals with the right to independence of the "small countries" of Europe, and the relations between the different European peoples.

On the subject of his own country, "which had lost its independent statehood at the beginning of the 17th century, and disappeared from European consciousness," Kundera treats this reappearance, at the end of the First World War, in the form of a "shocking novelty on the map of Europe," as an illustration of the "celebrated wager of Pascal." Quoting the text, written in 1886 by one of "the most lucid Czech intellectuals of the 19th century," Hubert Gordon Schauer, he poses the question of the necessity of independence: "If we had linked our spiritual energy to the culture of a great nation (i.e. Germany) which is at a far higher level of development, would we not have contributed more to humanity than in giving birth laboriously to our own culture? Is the value of the latter so great as to justify the existence of our nation?" and he concludes that "there is no definite response to these questions. The existence of the Czech Republic *is*, and *will remain*, a wager."

Assuming the responsibility for such a wager for oneself, that is to say, for one's own country, may lead to the reproduction of the iconographic isolation that I have illustrated above with the Catalan example.

However, Milan Kundera shows that it is not without positive consequences, to the extent that it leads to a different assessment of nationalist movements, outside as well as inside one's own state, in accordance with the principle that: "One cannot refuse to accord to the other what one has previously claimed for oneself. One has no right," he says "to be arrogant, when one knows what it is to be the victim of arrogance."

He expresses his sympathy for the Baltic states, Slovenia and Chechnya, and is proud of the way the partition of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia was managed, a partition which one could describe as a "velvet independence," similar to the painless withdrawal from Soviet domination. From the grey period preceding independence, what stays in his mind is the song by Ludvik Vaculik in favor of the right to free speech and the construction of a collective identity for all peoples, for, "even if their ideas are not in themselves particularly extraordinary, the fact that they are different is in itself supremely extraordinary."[46]

Furthermore, Kundera encourages the reader to treat the word "greatness" without respect, but rather to praise the word "diversity," insofar as, he believes, "the Czech wager is becoming today a European wager" and, in any case, "from now on this wager can be neither won nor lost, because Europe *is* the wager."

In comparison with Edouard Glissant, one notes the almost inevitable reference to the nation and its territory, rejected by the West Indian, but also, a greater pragmatism in the European context. The solution suggested by Milan Kundera certainly allows one to escape from the vicious circle of iconographies, but it is at the price of the Balkanization of Europe, which the larger countries are scarcely ready to allow. Kundera criticizes their taste, or nostalgia, for greatness, so deeply rooted in their collective minds. Given his enthusiasm for the cause of national liberation, inherited from republican principles, he expresses "astonishment and disappointment" to see this idea "shared so lukewarmly" in France.

Conclusion

We are not, therefore, about to see the disappearance of the damaging effects of iconographies on the European continent. The different events of the drama in former Yugoslavia, which is still not over,[47] are there to remind us. I have tried here to demonstrate the modalities of the perpetuation, on the part both of the majority, interested in the maintenance of the status quo, and of the minority, which, hoping to overthrow it, finds itself however, whether or not it succeeds, in a veritable iconographic trap leading it to a reproduction of the same situation.

Are we forced, therefore, to repeat inevitably the same scenarios? Intellectuals are continually endeavoring to propose more satisfying solutions, and different peoples manage sometimes to offer the world promising counter-examples. Can they, however, be imitated on a large scale? The complex, the generous, the open model will always be, unfortunately, more fragile than the simplistic, the reductionist, and the narrow-minded. Should one therefore renounce all effort to improve the world? The useful instrument for the analysis of *iconographies* that Jean Gottmann has provided us with allows us in any case to put our finger on the problem, and to decipher the modalities of its functioning and its perversities, the better to denounce and combat them, and the better to defend the idea of *circulations*.

Notes and References

1. See A. Armengaud and R. Lafont (eds.), *Histoire d'Occitanie* (Paris, Hachette, 1979).
2. See, among others, J. Marty, "Conflits linguistiques et ethnotypes occitans dans le théâtre français du XVIIème siècle," *Lengas*, 1, 1977.
3. Already to be found in the works of Alphonse Daudet and Paul Arène, it is to be found in its purest form in the films of Marcel Pagnol, whether adapted from his own works or those of Jean Giono.

4. It is to be found, curiously enough, in the work of the Argentine writer Hector Bianciotti, who writes in French. See his novel *Sans la miséricorde du Christ* (Paris, Gallimard, 1985).
5. It is well known that the mythification, even when it is negative, tends towards the generalization: the ethnotype ignores social differences, and is uninterested in geolinguistic subtleties.
6. The novels written at the beginning of the Franco regime by Ignacio Agustí (*Mariona Rebull*, etc.) show him in this light. He can also be found in *La ciudad de los prodigios*, a panorama of Barcelona at the end of the 19th century by Eduardo Mendoza.
7. The iconography one sees here is on the borderline of racism.
8. A. Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, preceded by *Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris, Corrêa, 1957).
9. The Guatemala writer Miguel Ángel Asturias, among others, has shown this situation clearly in his novel *El papa verde*, in the confrontation between the corrupt military putschist, the *gringo* aid worker, and the people reduced to the role of spectators of the shady transactions to which they are subjected.
10. See H. Wallon, "Le rôle de l'Autre dans la conscience du Moi,» *Enfance*, 1959, 3-4, pp. 279-286; R. Perron, *Genèse de la personne* (Paris, P.U.F., 1985); R. Perron (ed.), *Les représentations de soi* (Toulouse, Privat, 1991).
11. See R. Ll. Ninyoles, *El conflicte linguistic valencià* (Valencia, Tres I Quatre, 1969), pp. 96-108.
12. Catalan donkey/Norhern (i.e. Languedoc) pig.
13. The protest song movement, led by Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, was a reaction against "Middle America" and the Vietnam war. The Catalan *nova cançó*, exemplified in turn by Raimon, Joan Manuel Serrat and Lluís Llach, acted at the same time as a spearhead of the movement for national identity, and as a redoubtable weapon in the struggle against the Franco regime, which refused to accept this movement.
14. Claude Marti, who comes from Carcassonne, has twice obtained the international record prize awarded by the Charles-Cros Academy. For 15 years he has lived a double life as a rural primary school teacher during the day, and a committed singer/songwriter in the evenings and during the holidays.
15. The song "*Mas perqué m'an pas dit?* » (Why didn't anyone tell me?) denounces the role of the education system in the denial of national identity.
16. See e.g. M. De Certeau, D. Julia and J. Revel, *Une politique de la langue: la Révolution française et les patois* (Paris, Gallimard, 1985).
17. On the creation of the Montségur myth by Napoléon Peyrat and its later development, see Ph. Martel, "Les cathares et leurs historiens," in R. Lafont, et al., *Les cathares en Occitanie* (Paris, Fayard, 1982), pp. 411-483.
18. See F. Napo, *Les révoltes viticoles du Midi rouge* (Toulouse, Privat, 1970).
19. P. Bourdieu, *La reproduction* (Paris, Minuit, 1970).
20. *Símbols de Catalunya*, travelling exhibition (Barcelona, Generalitat de Catalunya, 1993).
21. This is the *barretina*, or Catalan bonnet. When the exhibition was presented at Perpignan, the symbol of the *flama del Canigó* (the flame carried in relays, on the feast of St. John, from the summit of Mount Canigou to the Castillet in Perpignan) was added.
22. In fact, following the enactment of the 1978 constitution. The years between are known as the years of the democratic transition.
23. It was in the 9th and 10th centuries that the Romance languages came into being, together with the first documents written in the vernacular.
24. See the exhibitions and the publications *Mil anys d'història de Catalunya* (Barcelona, Generalitat de Catalunya, 1989).
25. From 1931 to 1939, then from 1976 onwards.
26. Respectively, from 1924 to 1930, and from 1939 to 1975.
27. The Generalitat is the descendant of the mediaeval *Consell de Cent*, and was also known in the 20th century as the *Mancomunitat*.
28. The subject of St George and the Dragon was part of Gaudi's decorative project for the *Casa Batlló* on the *Passeig de Gràcia* in Barcelona, only partly carried out. The Abbey of Montserrat played an important role during the Franco dictatorship as a Catalan cultural and spiritual centre, due to its important library, and the publication of the review *Serra d'Or*.
29. Poet (1845-1902), author of two epic works: *L'Atlàntida* (1877) and *Canigó* (1886).
30. E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris, Gallimard, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 225-285; vol. 2, pp. 197-214).
31. Since 1996, Spain – as has Catalonia– has had to face new forms of immigration, not national but from Africa. Former problems, which had in part been resolved, have been growing.
32. In this sense it resembles the Marseillaise.
33. In terms of political power, with all that implies administratively.
34. As an unskilled worker, the Southern Spaniard is at the bottom of the social ladder.
35. In Spain as a whole, Catalonia is generally perceived as separatist and lacking in solidarity with the rest of the country.
36. J. Marsé, *Últimas tardes con Teresa* (Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1966); *El amante bilingüe* (Barcelona, Planeta, 1990).
37. In the first novel, a young Murcian, near-deliquent, falls in love with a student, a girl from an upper-class family, while the second, a Castillian-speaking Catalan whose origins are not specified, is the parasitic and rejected husband of the daughter of a rich Catalan industrialist who holds the post of sociolinguistic counsellor in the bureau dealing with language policy in the Generalitat de Catalunya. For an analysis, see C. Lagarde, "Une tragicomédie interculturelle en Catalogne espagnole: *El amante bilingüe,* de Juan Marsé," *Lengas*, 37, 1995, pp. 115-135.
38. Is Catalonia to be considered as part of the Spanish territory, or as a completely autonomous territorial entity?
39. E. Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris, Gallimard, 1990).
40. *Ibid.,* pp. 46-47.
41. Glissant developed the Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari theory. See their *Mille plateaux* (Paris, Minuit, 1980).
42. *Ibid.,* pp. 157-159. Italics added.
43. The original French has "... où on 'donne-avec' au lieu de 'comprendre'."
44. E. Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-159.
45. M. Kundera, "Le pari tchèque," Le Nouvel Observateur, 1616, 26 octobre-1er novembre 1995, p. 54. The text is dated "Paris, October, 1995."
46. *Ibid.* Extract from L. Vaculik, *Mon Europe*, quoted by Kundera.
47. Let us remember that the text was written in 1996. It has not been changed. Nevertheless, some notes have been added to remember the writing context.