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ARTICLE

How Transnational Exchanges Shaped Conceptions about Morality and Small Nations in Europe: Catalan (and Spanish) Readings of Václav Havel in the 1990s

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This paper deals with appraisals of Havel made in Spain in the 1990s. During this decade, the Czech politician's popularity reached a peak in Europe, and Spanish politicians approached his vision of morality in politics in different ways, taking advantage of it to support different political and national projects. In the first half of the decade, interpretations of Havel were especially productive in Catalonia, where two almost antagonistic political projects drew inspiration from Havel and elaborated on different concepts of European small nations. The decade's second half gave way to a more one-sided vision of him, in which he was transformed, thanks to the Spanish conservative president José María Aznar, into a reference point to support conservatism and the Atlantic agenda.

Introduction

In November 2019, the Spanish parliament inaugurated an exhibition on the theme of the thirtieth anniversary of the so-called 'Velvet Revolution'. It was entitled 'Václav Havel: responsibility as destiny', for the famous playwright and dissident was the cornerstone of the exhibition. In curatorial terms, the exhibition was a modest one, limited to displaying some pictures from the epoch and a pair of banners sketching out the main events of the Czech struggle for freedom. The discourse drew a straight line, devoid of any nuance, from the Prague Spring and the events of 1989 to the enthronement of Havel as president of the country. The left-wing factions in Spain had neither promoted nor supported such an exhibition, and its reception amongst them was greeted with nothing but indifference. Contrarily, the representatives of the populist right, the Vox Party, praised Havel as 'a great anti-Marxist, a great anti-communist' and 'one of Europe's great hopes in the battle against totalitarianism'.[1] The centre-left ruling Socialist Party, the exhibition promoter, had aimed to stress the Europeanism of Havel and the civic values the Czech politician had flagged. In an environment marked by increasingly ruthless critiques of the Socialist Party, not even an apparently consensual exhibition went unnoticed by the right, which accused the socialists of 'taking advantage of Havel's legacy', for they were governing with an alleged Communist Party (Podemos) which represented all that Havel had fought against. Three decades after the Velvet Revolution, the image of Václav Havel had been reduced to an anti-leftist battering ram, as the other dimensions of his figure were completely overlooked by the strategy of the extreme right to harass the governing party.

This article, though, aims to look back into a past where Spanish readings of Havel were not so one-sided and simplified. So far, some attention has been paid to how Spain received the dissidents of the Eastern Bloc, especially after 1975, when the Helsinki Final Accords were signed, and anti-communist dissents gained a strong voice that expanded across the West.[2] Yet, how these dissidents

[1] 'El Congreso recuerda al checo Václav Havel con una exposición por el 30 aniversario de la Revolución de Terciopelo', *Press Digital*, 19 Nov. 2019.

[2] José María Faraldo, 'Entangled Eurocommunism: Santiago Carrillo, the Spanish Communist Party and the Eastern Bloc during the Spanish Transition to Democracy, 1968–1982', *Contemporary European History*, 26, 4 (2017), 647–68; José

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remained present in the West and helped shape Spanish political culture after state socialism fell has been outside of the focus of scholarly works. In this article, we will look at the 1990s, when Václav Havel held sway and projected an image of dignity and political capacity that many Spanish politicians felt attracted to. The objective of this article is threefold. First, and most humbly, to contribute to the knowledge of bilateral relations between Spain and the Czech Republic by addressing the presence, literally and figuratively, of Václav Havel in the Spanish public sphere. Second, it aims to look at the history of Europe through different lenses. Some prevailing narratives have long stressed the hegemony of the Western European countries, that is, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. From this perspective, what occurred elsewhere is seen as the direct or indirect diffusion of ideas and processes that originated in these central countries. Any political idea – liberalism, federalism, centralism, etc. – is sifted through the sieve of Western countries, which leaves little room for autonomy in the political developments of European peripheries and semi-peripheries. What is argued here, instead, is that two semi- peripheral states, one in east-central Europe and the other in the southwest, skipped the supposed Western influence and received direct influence from each other. In this case, the article is limited to assessing the influence of Václav Havel in Spain, and not the other way round, which brings us to the third and last goal of the article, which is an analysis of the Havelian idea of Europe and its Spanish appropriation.

The Spanish appropriation of Havel's idea of Europe was based partly on the moral imprint that Havel represented, which led to a certain conception of what a civil society should be. However, the ambiguity and vagueness of some of Havel's formulations became troublesome at some points, as I will try to demonstrate. On the other hand, the idea of a Europe constituted by small nations carried extraordinary influence in one specific part of Spain: Catalonia. Up to the present day, and with special significance for the independence process started in the 2010s, the idea of a small, defenceless nation that adheres to Europe but is trapped within an authoritarian Spain has played a role. It played out in the 1990s, but back then, the appropriation of a small-nation model inspired, although not properly developed, by Havel was by no means unilateral, but took many forms. Catalan politicians of the 1990s were gripped by Havelian teachings, and all of them tried to seize them to model politics in their own way. The rising conflicts that Havel's theories provoked in Catalonia formed part of a very specific context, arguably no longer existent, that could have led to a radically different conduct of the relation between Catalonia, Spain and Europe and, by extension, between European regions and nations. This article draws on the well-established field of nationalism studies. The nation is not an objective entity but is constructed and, therefore, its conception, shape and meaning are in constant flux.[3] The article does not deal with the origin of the nations of the Czech Republic, Spain or Catalonia, but on how their meaning and future projects were transformed in a very specific context – the 1990s, when Czechoslovakia first became a democracy and later split into two separate states. During this time Spain was going through an enhanced moment of proximity to the elite of Europe; Catalonia captained part of the Spanish modernity and, in parallel, was developing a nationalist project. Besides, nationalism studies have recently sought to overcome historiographical nationalism, and this article aims to align itself with that by investigating how Catalan nationalist and political culture was influenced by a – in principle – strange political figure such as Václav Havel.[4] With the analysis of the political thought of major figures, especially of Catalonia and Spain, the article aims to shed light on how, in the words of the historian Anne-Marie Thiesse, 'there is nothing more

Luis Aguilar López-Barajas, 'Aleksander Solzhenitsyn Arrives in Spain: The Gulag Debate and the Transition to Democracy', *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, 46, 1 (2021), 26–47.

3 Some classic studies: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991); Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*(London: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

4 Eric Storm, 'A New Dawn in Nationalism Studies? Some Fresh Incentives to Overcome Historiographical Nationalism', *European History Quarterly*, 48, 1 (2018), 113–29.

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international than the formation of national identities'[5] and to address how the figure of Havel nourished different, and rather opposing political and national projects.

The article is structured as follows. First, I sketch some of the scaffolding around the reception of Czechoslovakian politics and political thought in Spain, including the context of Spain in the early 1990s and why Havel's European notoriety resonated there. Second, I present the Catalan case study. The dispute between two rather antagonistic forms, both with a Catalanist approach, collided, and through their readings of Havel it is easier to illuminate different conceptions of what 'small nations', Catalonia, Spain and Europe should be. I mainly focus on the mayor of Barcelona, the socialist Pasqual Maragall, who recognised in Havel one of his main political influences. Lastly, the article addresses the problematic edges of Havelian teachings towards the second half of the 1990s, when a new type of Spanish right wing started to blossom and the anti-totalitarian discourse permitted an appropriation of Havel that has become the prevailing one in Spain ever since.

The Czechoslovak Tradition in Spain

The bilateral relationship between Czechoslovakia and Spain had previously been rather weak. In the time before the First World War, Czechoslovakia lacked a proper state and was integrated, as the lands of Bohemia and Moravia, into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Spain suffered an imperial hangover that, after centuries of direct intervention in European and world affairs, compelled politicians to pursue a relatively isolationist approach to foreign affairs. Further into the twentieth century, the physical distance between the two countries and the differing orientations of the dictatorships they went through made it complicated to build strong relations. Despite some commercial exchanges from the 1950s,[6] it would not be until the 1970s, coinciding with the last gasps of Francoism, that Spain would send plenipotentiary ambassadors to Prague; this normalised relations but did not bring about a lasting bond.[7] One must look at other levels to better understand how indirect linkages between the two countries permit us to better comprehend not only the development of the countries themselves (in this case focusing almost exclusively on Spain), but the constitution of Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In this respect, the figure of Václav Havel stood out and provoked reactions in the Spanish political class of the late 1980s, as well as the decade with which this article is concerned, the 1990s. In March 1989, with Havel imprisoned in Prague, the Spanish culture minister and Buchenwald survivor Jorge Semprún refused to receive a Czechoslovak delegation, as he 'would not personally receive any representative of the Czechoslovak embassy as long as Václav Havel had not been released'.[8] Semprún was an intellectual who had landed almost accidentally in politics, and he was rather an exception, in contrast to the socialist Prime Minister Felipe González, who did not feel such a strong attraction to Václav Havel as others did; their relation was cordial but dry. By the time of the 'Velvet Revolution', the governing Socialist Party had already achieved hegemony both inside and outside Spain; the country had entered the EU in 1986, economic growth was high, and the socialists got absolute majorities in election after election. Nonetheless, González welcomed the changes taking place in east-central Europe. He wrote to Havel shortly after the latter was appointed president: 'Your moral authority and democratic record will undoubtedly contribute to the stability of Europe and to the strengthening of cooperation between the Spanish and Czech peoples'.[9] Europe and the moral high

[5] Anne-Marie Thiesse, *The Creation of National Identities: Europe, 18th–20th Centuries* (Boston: Brill, 2021).

[6] Helena Konrádová, 'Relaciones entre España y Checoslovaquia: El comercio en los años cincuenta', in Josef Opatrný, ed., *Las relaciones checo-españolas* (Madrid: Universidad Carolina de Praga, 2007), 293–306.

[7] Matilde Eiroa, 'Las relaciones entre España y Checoslovaquia tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial en el contexto de las relaciones de España con Europa Oriental', in Josef Opatrný, ed., *Las relaciones cecho-españolas* (Madrid: Universidad Carolina de Praga, 2007), 307–20.

[8] Jorge Semprún, *Federico Sánchez se despide de Ustedes* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1993), 216.

[9] Letter from Felipe González to Václav Havel, 11 June 1990, Fundación Felipe González, 053.09.26.

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ground that Havel represented were the points that González, and some other socialists, as we will see, underscored the most.

Even before Havel, the thinking of Czechoslovak intellectuals about nations and nation-building left an imprint in Spain as well. President González's relative disregard of Havel made sense in this context, as he was the president of a five-century-old state which had not gone through the problems the Czechoslovaks faced to pull together one state. It was in north-eastern Spain, namely in Catalonia, where their model became attractive. Here, the diffusionist centre-periphery model of nation-building was not very useful. As has been consistently demonstrated in recent decades, it was precisely in the Bohemian lands that modern ways of thinking about nations were conceived and, later, spilled over to the West. Scholars such as Hans Kohn, Karl Deutsch and later Ernest Gellner and Miroslav Hroch were either Prague-based or of Bohemian origin.[10] Kohn and Deutsch developed their thoughts on nationalism through steady discussion with Thomas Masaryk's model of nation and society.[11] In the 1980s, the novelist Milan Kundera, taking many elements from the classic discussion on nations and bringing in new elements, vindicated the relevance and importance of 'small nations' in the shaping of Europe. Though initially the debate on Middle Europe and the small nations went mostly unnoticed by leading Catalan politicians, the idea of small nations started to appear increasingly attractive to them in the 1990s. First, unlike other stateless nationalisms, such as that of the Basques, the Catalans could not make appeals using colonialist labels like those exported from the Global South to the Basque Country, Ireland or Corsica. Catalan businessmen were the ones who profited the most from the Cuban and Filipino colonies in the nineteenth century. Second, they could not claim victimisation for being excluded from state distribution, as Catalonia was by far the most industrialised and wealthiest region of Spain. Third, the European dimension of Catalanism, dating back to the 1880s, their proximity to France and the modern and urban features of their political culture made the idea of 'small nations' coming out of Bohemia much more attractive to them.[12]

Yet, turning their gaze in the 1990s to Czechoslovakia did not happen in a vacuum; it followed the Catalan nationalist tradition which, at the turn of the twentieth century, saw in Masaryk's endeavours a source of inspiration. Both Catalonia and the Czech lands shared the structural similarity of being two of the most industrialised areas of Europe. The creation of a national project for the Czechs and Slovaks and a common state project for Czechoslovakia was more complex, though, with diverse variants drawing on several traditions of political thought that made the concept of 'Czechoslovakism' somehow troublesome.[13] Catalan politicians focused on the version of a federation integrated into the Empire, as was devised by Masaryk before the First World War. The modernity of Masaryk's efforts very much fit into the idea of a civic, modern and prosperous social and political organisation, which Catalan politicians were aiming to convey to the whole of Spain.[14] Moreover, the attempts of Czechoslovak nationalists to join the Austro-Hungarian Empire on an equal footing with Budapest and Vienna, as the Hungarians had done with the Compromise of 1867, was an appealing prospect that the Catalan nationalists equally pursued: that of a federative Spain where its regions and nations could both maintain and foster their domestic identity and economy and, at the same time, secure the federation from a possible dissolution. Moreover, Catalanists at the turn of the century thought of the Spain to come as an empire which, despite having lost most of its colonies, could thrive

[10] Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe. Volume II: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond. Part I: 1918–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 53–66.

[11] Michal Kopeček, 'Czechoslovak Interwar Democracy and its Critical Introspections', *Journal of Modern European History*, 17, 1 (2019), 7–15.

[12] Vicente Cacho, *Els modernistes i el nacionalisme cultura (1881–1906)* (Barcelona: La Magrana, 1984), v–xxxvi.

[13] Michal Kopeček, 'The Concept's Blurry History', in Adam Hudek, Michal Kopeček and Jan Mervart, eds., *Czechoslovakism* (London: Routledge, 2021), 1–35.

[14] Vicente Cacho, *El nacionalismo catalán como factor de modernización* (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1998), 11–21.

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economically both on the continent and overseas, as the economic bonds with the former colonies were still quite powerful. Thus, the structure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire satisfied them the most – far more than the models of the British and German empires.[15]

Some of the attractiveness of Masaryk's ideas resonated almost a century later. Although Francoism strived to erase every trace of peripheral nationalisms, the Catalans both in exile and within the country managed to keep the political tradition alive and, after the death of Franco and during the following decades, the continuities were apparent, albeit adapted to the new challenges of the epoch.[16] Despite the internal plurality of the very rich political culture of Catalanism, it was the bourgeois faction, the traditionally prevailing one before the 1930s, that became capable of agglutinating a consistent political party and winning election after election in their quest for undoing what Franco had done in Catalonia.[17] Their embodiment was the conspicuous and skilful politician Jordi Pujol, president of Catalonia from 1980 to 2003, who would mark the political culture of the last two decades of the twentieth century and, arguably, the political culture in Catalonia up to the present day. The idea of the defence of small nations was to Pujol not a way to construct a civic Europe respecting the rights of minorities and recognising the contributions of small peoples, but a way to secure the future of Catalonia, where the Catalan political culture should occupy every snippet of social life.[18]

The Catalan Momentum

Václav Havel never properly developed the concept of 'small nations' in the vein of Masaryk; nor had he a coherent theory of nation and nationalism. Some authors, indeed, claim he was a postnational thinker,[19] which does not mean he lacked specific positions regarding the nation, as would become apparent with the crisis and later dissolution of Czechoslovakia, as we will see – though, in Catalonia, Havel civic and political statements would be partially appraised in a nationalist way. His first visit to Spain as president took place in December 1990. He met the mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall, as well as President Jordi Pujol himself. The Catalan conservative newspaper *La Vanguardia* covered Havel's activities and, significantly enough, headlined it 'Pujol and Havel commit to defending "the identity of small peoples"'. [20] The Catalan president and his media allies stressed the synchrony between himself and Havel in their efforts to catch up with an international trend, namely the gaining of independence by the eastern-central European countries formerly in the Soviet orbit which had now 'returned to Europe'.[21]

However, Pujol's commitment was not to Europe but to Catalonia. In a colloquium held two months after Havel's visit, Pujol showed his cards. There was a growing fear about nationalism, which evoked the 'refrigerator theory' proposed by political scientists: that the rise of nationalism might lead to federal dissolution and violence in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.[22] Pujol felt threatened, as the reluctance towards nationalism affected him directly; he aimed to distance Catalonia from the Czechoslovak case, arguing that Czechoslovakia was an 'artificial state', unlike Catalonia, which had a prolonged history dating back to at least the Middle Ages. To put it simply, Pujol had a cultural, some would say ethnic, understanding of his small nation, in stark contrast to the civic imprint of Havel's ideas; according to Pujol, Havel's small nation lagged behind the factual existence of Catalonia, with its robust and objective historical existence. Yet, Pujol exploited Havel and the Czechoslovak tradition in defence of small nations in permanent peril, as 'the situation

[15] Enric Ucelay-Da Cal, *El imperialismo catalán: Prat de la Riba, Cambó, D'Ors y la conquista moral de España* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 2001), 487–522.

[16] Montserrat Guibernau, *El nacionalisme catalá: franquisme, transició y democracia* (Barcelona: Pórtic, 2002), 6–9.

[17] Antonio Santamaría, *Convergencia democrática de Catalunya: De los orígenes al giro soberanista* (Madrid: Foca, 2014).

[18] Jordi Amat, *Largo proceso, amargo sueño* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2018), 434–5.

[19] Daniel Brennan, *The Political Though of Václav Havel: Philosophical Influences and Contemporary Applications* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 166–9.

[20] 'Pujol y Havel se comprometen en defender la identidad de los pueblos pequeños', *La Vanguardia*, 14 Dec. 1990, 16.

[21] Jan Zdzislaw Nowak, 'Eastern Europe's Return to Europe: Back to the Future?', *The Polish Review*, 37, 4 (1992), 549–55.

[22] Philipp Ther, *Europe Since 1989: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 64–6.

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is very open in all respects, with population movements, capital movements, etc . . . the risk is very great'.[23] Pujol, in short, saw cosmopolitanism as a threat to Catalonia, which differed significantly from the other important appraisal of Havel made in the first half of the 1990s: that of the mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall.

The appraisal of Maragall is by far the most interesting in this context, as he took advantage of Havel not as Pujol did, that is, as a masquerade to endorse a political project and, arguably, thereby distorting what Havel intended to say and represent. In the 1990s, Western mainstream takes on Havel tended to portray him as a romantic hero, champion of the struggle against totalitarianism, in a black-and-white depiction of him as a political figure.[24] Pujol pursued that path, but Maragall tried to pay closer attention to Havel and turned him into a cornerstone of his political project, albeit with some limits, as we will show. It is important to first gain a sense of the role of intellectuals and writers in Spanish society. To Pujol, intellectuals were merely instrumental, useful in service to a political project but lacking autonomy. Conversely, Maragall felt that 'there are still words that can help the world form that minimum of feeling without which ideas lack the necessary resonance to reach their recipients'.[25] Maragall wrote these words in praise of the Czechoslovak president to accompany the translation of Havel's 1989 Pennsylvania University 'Honoris causa' acceptance speech into Catalan. Maragall would sponsor the Catalan translation of many of Havel's works, and undertook several of them himself, usually short texts that had been previously translated into English. From one of those, Maragall found the inspiration to set out a political project that would fit the political situation of Catalonia, Spain and Europe. The speech 'On Home', given by the Czechoslovak president at an American university, was translated as 'A Casa Meva' and published with comment by Maragall. In this speech, Havel elaborated on the multiple overlapping identities forming the modern world. He described these as concentric circles containing identities which complemented but did not substitute for each other. Havel said that he had various homes but, ultimately, 'my home is Europe and my Europeanness and – finally – it is this planet and its present civilization and, understandably, the whole world'.[26]

The idea of concentric circles in the early 1990s was seen as a way to tackle the increasingly divided atmosphere of Catalan politics. Pujol realised that nationalist conservatism could not be achieved merely through institutions, media and political hegemony; Catalanism needed to infiltrate every aspect of society. The offensive to Catalanise the public sphere, initiated in the late 1980s, aimed to pave the way for a very narrow and one-sided understanding of what Catalonia should be.[27] At the same time, Spanish conservatives followed a tradition of showing little appreciation for the diversity of the country, and the attempts to singularise regional differences were always seen as a threat to the very essence of the Spanish nation.[28] Maragall, a Catalan socialist, had to seek a formula amidst both nationalisms to make his political project feasible, and he found in Havel's words a useful tool, as Havel spoke for the recognition of all the levels that compose the identity, without privileging the nation or any other aspect.

One of those aspects was found in the city. Maragall was elected president of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in 1991. The post suited him well, as he precisely wanted to match municipalities and regions within Europe, preserving the identity of all of them.[29] Following the idea of concentric circles, Maragall stated the following in his initial speech in Paris as head of the CEMR:

[23] 'Conversaciones', *Nueva revista*, 11 (Feb. 1991), 8–20.
[24] John Keane, *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).
[25] Pasqual Maragall, 'Václav Havel en Barcelona', *La Vanguardia*, 12 Dec. 1990, 21.
[26] Václav Havel, 'On Home', *The New York Review*, 5 Dec. 1991. https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1991/12/05/on-home/.
[27] Amat, *Largo*, 431–71.
[28] Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, *Patriotas y demócratas: El discurso nacionalista español después de Franco* (Madrid: Catarata, 2010).
[29] Pasqual Maragall, *Pensamiento y Acción* (Barcelona: RBA, 2017), 211–13.

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> Havel said almost a year ago that 'our home' is our family, our city, our nation, and also our school, our work, and even, for one person, as he was, our cell. But when it came to choosing a name for this feeling of respect for all that is 'our home', Havel chose 'civic-mindedness', because civic-mindedness seems to be the only 'island' with the necessary respect for all others, the only one aware that no one can be deprived of any of the dimensions that make up 'their home'.[30]

Maragall appealed to Havel's civic-mindedness in its double meaning. The first connotation is that civic values might constitute the public sphere as a way of 'living in truth' and in coexistence with others. Second, the very root of the word, from the Latin *civitas*, meaning citizenship, is a concept inextricably linked to cities. To Maragall laying these foundations was the condition for creating the possibility of civic-mindedness and coexistence. However, this cannot be seen in a vacuum, as merely intellectual discourse with no practical application. Maragall had good reasons to foster the meaning of cities. He was the mayor of Barcelona, a major European city which, in his thinking, ran counter to the exclusive project Pujol was attempting to carry out. Barcelona was a repository of the values of coexistence and, at the same time, was very much linked to the European project.

Maragall combined Havel with the Catalan political tradition to define his understanding of identities. The concentric circles had a lower scale – the local level corresponding to the smallest units – that constituted the very essence and the first stone upon which identity was based. He, however, was oriented around Catalonia rather than Spain, and he formulated his conception of identity in what he entitled the 'theory of the Ampurdan', a tiny county within Catalonia. To Maragall 'If one day Catalonia were to lack the Ampurdan . . . Catalonia would no longer be itself. But if one day, on the other hand, only the Ampurdan would remain in Catalonia, Catalonia could exist again, because the truth . . . does not reside in the ear but in the grain'.[31] This exemplifies his bottom-up approach to identities, which was consistent with his position as mayor of Barcelona, which was to be projected towards Europe 'to ensure that the substance of our roots is rooted in the smallest . . . in order to find, from that point onwards, a feeling of belonging that is successively broader'.[32]

This took on special significance in the early 1990s, as Barcelona was to host the 1992 Olympic Games, and therefore would present itself as a showcase of modernity and as the definitive return of Spain to the international arena after endless dictatorship.[33] In that context, the stress on the city was in the foreground, and Maragall also found in Havel's Prague a tool to resort to:

> The Czech capital and the Catalan capital are outstanding cities of the artistic and cultural modernism characteristic of an era of change, and both represent two old European cultures that are re-emerging with a strong imprint in the new century. At the end of the current century, with a horizon suddenly open to new hopes for humanity, both cities and both countries can share experiences and traditions of constructive resistance, culture and love of freedom.[34]

These words were spoken by Maragall in the presence of Havel at the town hall of Barcelona. He also wanted to draw a parallel between Prague and Barcelona as islands of freedom that had both undergone a period of dictatorship. The narrative of Maragall responded to the framework for interpreting the history of the twentieth century that Havel, amongst others, had contributed to. What has been called 'post-dissident narrative'[35] is basically a black-and-white account of the transition and

[30] 'Discurs de presa de possessió com a President del Consell de Municipis i Regions d'Europa', 12 Dec. 1991, Arxiu Digital Pasqual Maragall, 09.01.
[31] Pasqual Maragall, 'La teoría de l'Empordá', *Diari de Girona*, 5 Sept. 1993.
[32] Maragall, 'La teoría'.
[33] Jordi Canal, *25 de julio 1992: Los Juegos Olímpicos de Barcelona* (Madrid: Taurus, 2021).
[34] Maragall, 'Havel en Barcelona', 21.
[35] Michal Kopeček, 'The Rise and Fall of Czech Post-dissident Liberalism After 1989', *East European Politics & Societies*, 25, 2 (2011), 244–71.

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post-transition in Eastern Europe, deeming communism an accident of history after which, with the rise of human rights and all the assets deployed by the dissidents, gave way to a certain 'return to history'. This was endorsed by the rebirth of theories of totalitarianism in the 1990s.[36]

One could wonder about the relevance of this framework in a country like Spain. Visions of the Spanish transition to democracy constitute a vast amount of literature that is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, it can be said that consensual visions predominated, and the rejection of the Franco regime was never as severe as the Eastern European repudiation of state socialism, especially from the mid-1990s onwards, as some historians have observed.[37] In Catalonia, though, the situation was somewhat different and the levels of rejection of the dictatorship were higher than in the rest of Spain.[38] The hostility of Francoism towards Catalanism permitted some Catalan politicians to elaborate on a similar framework to Eastern Europe. Maragall resorted again to the Barcelona-Prague comparison, and in the first visit of Havel to Barcelona, he said: 'Today, a long parenthesis has been closed – a few years ago in Barcelona, a few months ago in Prague – and our countries again propose to contribute to the construction of a safe, solidary and indispensable European space'.[39] On other occasions he referred to the parenthesis, namely set up by the dictatorships both countries had suffered, which was intended to make the Spanish and Czechoslovak authoritarian times seem like a vacuum in history, to be either forgotten or dismantled, after which the normal path was reinstated.

Setting aside a parenthesis that prevented the country from following a normal path is artificial, but in the case of Maragall it was linked in a common gaze to the European homeland, which he identified as the normal future for both Catalonia and Czechoslovakia. However, this presumed, as in the Czechoslovak case, a rather uncritical gaze towards the dictatorial path as something alien to the national community, a community that Maragall identified with Catalonia rather than with Spain, as he stressed the 'parenthesis' in reference to Barcelona. At the same time, Maragall felt the wave of modernity and he, like others, fell prey to the unbridled optimism that marked the eve of the 1992 Olympic Games. This 'enthusiasm', as it has been called,[40] was perceived in Barcelona more than elsewhere, and the problem lay in harbouring a sort of expectation of limitless progress much in tune with Fukuyama's thesis of the 'End of History', which, quite early, faded away both in Spain and in Eastern Europe.[41]

Yet, Maragall's Barcelona was preparing for the Olympic Games and the mayor wanted Havel, as a representative of another major European city, to be present at the opening ceremony, the moment in which the long awaited return to the splendour of the Gothic, Baroque, Modernist and other artistic European milestones that both cities, Barcelona and Prague, shared would take a contemporary form.[42] This grandiloquent rhetoric is rather exaggerated and is to be criticised, yet captures the momentum accurately. Moreover, and in the light of the political turn Maragall would experiment with in the late 1990s and in the following decade, resorting to these types of European values was appreciable and the political myth he constructed, equating himself with Havel, portrayed a hopeful future, overcoming or at least nuancing the weight of the nation.

However, in 1992 Havel was a sheer Europeanist who, internally, had to cope with a national problem that would show a sort of ambiguous response: after the fall of communism, Slovakia started to strive for more autonomy within the Czechoslovak federation and in 1992 they already sought total independence. The dispute had started with the so-called 'hyphen war'. The Slovak National

[36] Ulrike Ehret, 'Understanding the Popular Appeal of Fascism, National Socialism and Soviet Communism: The Revival of Totalitarianism Theory and Political Religion', *History Compass*, 5, 4 (2007), 1236–67.

[37] James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 1–25.

[38] Carme Molinero and Pere Ysas, *La cuestión catalana: Catalunya en la Transición española* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010).

[39] 'Paraules de l'Excm. sr. alcalde amb motiu de la Visita del President de la República Federativa Txeca i Eslovaca Václav Havel', 13 Dec. 1990, Arxiu Digital Pasqual Maragall, 09.01.

[40] Eduardo Maura, *Los 90: Euforia y miedo en la modernidad democrática española* (Madrid: Akal, 2018).

[41] Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light that Failed: A Reckoning* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 4–13.

[42] 'Havel promete a Maragall que volverá a Barcelona', *La Vanguardia*, 21 Sept. 1991, 25.

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Council resisted the title 'Czechoslovak Republic', endorsed by Havel, and instead called for 'The Federation of Czecho-Slovakia'. After some quarrels, the Czechs yielded and decided to proclaim the 'Czech and Slovak Federative Republic' in April 1990.[43] In the following years, there would be steady debates on the Czechoslovak identity that began to drive a wedge between Czechs and Slovaks.[44] Havel never shared the Slovak assertion of national identity they had been so far deprived of. He was, indeed, very critical of the Slovak national project and always remained anchored in a Czech-dominated federation. It does not necessarily mean his civic project for Europe turned out to be an ethnonational project for Czechoslovakia. As some scholarship has shown, there is no sheer distinction between the civic and ethnic conception of the nations, and the frontiers are blurry.[45] But what matters here is not Havel's general conception but his specific position on the Slovak question. In 1992, Slovaks and Czech politicians were negotiating a separation to which Havel was opposed. He, instead, called for a referendum, asking the population whether to maintain the federation. The referendum was not approved, and the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation was approved in July 1992, in what has been called the 'Velvet Divorce'. Václav Havel resigned immediately.[46] It is interesting how the question was approached in Catalonia, which was in the heyday of its European presence, as in that July 1992 the Olympic games were inaugurated in Barcelona. As it was a 'Velvet Divorce', Pujol and others did not see the perils of nationalism there. The national question in Yugoslavia overshadowed the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Nor did the Catalan nationalists use the pacific dissolution to claim for a similar solution in Spain. As it has been recently put, by the height of 1992, the Catalan independence project was not mature enough and was supported by only a minority.[47] But Havel's solution had been a referendum, which was neither then nor later vindicated by the Catalan independentists. The Catalan political culture, which wanted to identify itself with the civic European project led by Havel, could have, when they turned to a pure independentist project after 2010, raised Havel's proposal. Instead, in 2018 Catalan president Quim Torra, looking to the past in search of models to compare Catalonia with, pushed for a 'Slovenian way' for Catalonia.[48] Not only had the 'Slovenian way', unlike the 'Velvet Divorce', had a degree of violence, but the Catalan politicians were striving for a referendum, albeit different from the terms proposed by Havel. As recent studies demonstrate, the dissimilarities between Slovakia and Catalonia are clear, not only in the federal character of Czechoslovakia but also in the history and in the legal codifications.[49] Though, one could argue, the differences with Slovenia are greater and, twenty-five years after independence, the Slovenian national project was put forward as a source of inspiration for Catalonia. The absence of Havel and the Czechoslovak dissolution in the present show the enormous distance with the 1990s in terms of political culture and, at the same time, stress the specificities of Catalan's readings of Václav Havel in the 1990s.

Political appraisals are always partial, and the reception of Havel in the 1990s shows how Catalan politicians overlooked Havel's real take on the nation and focused instead on how he allegedly defended a modern Europe populated by small nations, such as Catalonia. Pujol would also approach Havel in that way, and other big Europeanists, in his promotion of Catalonia. In 1995 Havel, along with the former president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, was awarded

[43] Jozef Žatkuliak and Adam Hudek, 'The Dissolution of Czechoslovakia: The Slovak Perspective', in Mark Stolarik, ed., *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Twenty Years of Independence 1993–2013* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 55–79.

[44] Tomás Zahradnicek, 'Debates on Czechoslovakism and Czechoslovak Identity in the Closing Years of the Federation, 1989–1992', in Hudek et al., eds., *Czechoslovakism*, 371–96.

[45] Yael Tamir, 'Not So Civic: Is There a Difference Between Ethnic and Civic Nationalism?', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 1 (2019), 419–34.

[46] Jan Rychlik, 'The Velvet Split of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992)', in Stolarik, ed., *The Czech and Slovak Republics*, 23–47.

[47] Enric Ucelay-da Cal, *Breve historia del separatismo catalán* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2018), 245–9.

[48] 'Torra plantea la vía eslovena porque "ya no hay marcha atrás posible"', *La Vanguardia*, 9.12.2018.

[49] Martin Švikruha, Dalibor Dalibor Mikuš and Matúš Meluš, 'National and State Interests of Slovaks and Catalans: Parallelism between Slovakia and Catalonia in the Way to Achieve National Emancipation', *Revista déstudis autonomics i federals*, 33 (2021), 169–212.

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the Prize of Catalonia. This was the greatest distinction that could be made to a civil figure, and it involved a reception in grand style where the prize laureates would make a speech. Alongside them Pujol, as president of Catalonia, figured as a third speaker. He used the occasion to edit a book in the six major languages of the European Union, including Catalan, where the speeches of the three of them were printed. Richard von Weizsäcker became known worldwide in 1985, when he addressed the German parliament on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and, for the first time, dared to say that had not been a defeat but a liberation. This intervention dissipated any remaining doubt with respect to overcoming the National Socialist past and elevated von Weizsäcker, who himself had been a Wehrmacht soldier, to the category of a first-class European politician.[50] Pujol placed himself alongside Havel and Weizsäcker as the president of a region within an EU country, but with pretensions to be something else. The prologue of the book was clear enough in this sense: 'Three great European leaders, as different from each other as their countries are. . . . It starts in Catalonia . . . which has always pursued two important milestones: the affirmation of its own identity and its projection and opening up to the outside world'.[51] The European projection of Pujol's Catalonia was attempting to somehow bypass Spain and figure as another European nation in its own capacity. Furthermore, the book was entitled *Ethics and Politics* as, aside from Europe, the relation between the two was addressed. The reasons for Havel and Weizsäcker to stand out in this respect were self-evident. Pujol, though, aimed to jump on the same boat and made a speech, mildly self-effacing, in which he sketched the virtues of balanced ethical-political leadership, which he modestly intended to maintain.[52]

Parallel to this, and with a desire to intervene in the celebrations of the prize awarded to Havel, Maragall sent a letter to Havel, which is perhaps the corollary of the Europeanist Maragall fascinated by the Czech politician. Yet the situation had changed much. Pujol's project continued its march, making conspicuous usage of media to favour his interest of national construction,[53] but the president started to show symptoms of exhaustion, and the socialists saw for the first time a possibility to defeat the Catalan conservative nationalists, with Pasqual Maragall as the right person to achieve it. However, in 1995 Maragall had not yet considered jumping into Catalan politics, and his letter to Havel appears sincere and shows the guidelines of his appraisal of the Czechoslovak case, the limits in mutual understanding and, also, some other troublesome questions that would manifest in the second half of the 1990s.

In the letter, Maragall underscored 'the seduction of Prague' which he had felt by reading authors such as Bohumil Hrabal and Milan Kundera, whom he had the opportunity to meet. He demanded that Prague and Barcelona become European 'capitals of culture' in the new millennium, as what united them both was being part of the civic 'skeleton of Europe'. In his references to Prague, he outlined a rather romantic perspective on Czechoslovakia and its history, which led him to essentialise what they represented. On the occasion of a meeting with the historical leader of the Prague Spring, Alexander Dubček, in 1991, Maragall told Havel that Dubček had reminded him of

> your soldier Švejk and his adages, always devoid of hope, deeply disenchanted and self-critical. He was an old-fashioned man, both in his bathing costume and in the form of his ugly and, despite everything, communist reasoning. But I am not sure that the quality of his courage was different from what you consider ethical and what I consider admirable: he was sensitive, albeit he expressed it in a rather unpoetic way.[54]

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[50] Daniela Beljan and Matthias N. Lorenz, 'Weizsäcker-Rede', in Torben Fischer and Matthias N. Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' in Deutschland: Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), 232–5.

[51] Jordi Pujol, Václav Havel and Richard von Weiszäcker, *L'etica y la política* (Barcelona: Institut Catalá de la Mediterránea d'Estudis y Cooperació), 43.

[52] Ibid., 33–8.

[53] Josep Ángel Guimerá and Ana Fernández Viso, 'National Reconstruction and the Media in Catalonia', in Huw David Jones, ed., *The Media in Europe's Small Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 47–69.

[54] Letter from Maragall to Václav Havel, 17 May 1995, Arxiu Digital Pasqual Maragall, 02.09.

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The allusions to the soldier Švejk from the novel by Jaroslav Hašek, a milestone in Czechoslovak culture, but a quite unoriginal reference, shows some of the superficialities of Maragall's discourse with respect to Prague. He suggested that there was an ethical guideline joining Švejk, Dubček and Havel, a hidden thread that kept the Czechoslovak essence alive, even amidst the most appalling circumstances.

This restricted conception of morality and ethics, which stood above the times, is displaced to the situation in Catalonia and Spain in Maragall's mention of the communist resistance in Spain: 'Communism here was much closer to the Czech dissidence than to the Czech government of the time. It is the situation that makes the attitudes, not the ideologies'.[55] It is dubious that Havel's concept of morality, united with his anti-politics, as it was first devised in his 1977 book *The Power of the Powerless*, played in such terms; rather, Havel's appeal to moral and anti-politics was, indeed, very political and became a way to approach politics in the absurd stage of late-socialist Czechoslovakia.[56] Havel's take on morals and politics evolved over time and also depended on his situation in domestic Czech politics. However, a certainly ambivalent presentation of his position, which he had deployed since *The Power of the Powerless*, turned into a somewhat paradoxical presentation that had problematic implications for political practice.[57] Much more so was it for the not-so-attentive readers such as Maragall, who, despite being linked to Havel, ignored much of the content of Czech domestic politics. Maragall sketched a theory of morality beyond ideologies that would pave the way for other much more unpleasant appraisals of Havel, such as those deployed by Aznar in the following years. Morality, beyond ideologies, was in the foreground: 'your words . . . reconstruct the deepest moral debates in Europe in that century. It was appropriate for our nationalists to feel it. The relationship between morality and politics is weakened when ideologies are too strong'.[58] Although his thoughts were ambiguous, Maragall was thinking of Pujol's project when he argued against ideologies, and he sincerely believed in a united Europe. It was 1995, and the Dayton agreements were about to be signed, putting an end to the bloody and gruelling war in Bosnia. Nationalism had dismembered the former Yugoslavia, and a couple of months after Maragall's letter to Havel the massacre of Srebrenica took place, confirming the caveats against nationalisms many had spoken of. Yet, it seems that Maragall's appraisal of Havel did not adhere in anything tangible, and his appeal to morality and civic-mindedness started to become more and more abstract. He closed the letter as follows: 'As we do not know what will happen when we decide, we decide with our eyes closed and guided by our moral intuition. Later, time will condemn us or say that we were right'.[59] Indeed, in relation to Maragall's steps towards Europe, he wanted Barcelona to be the 'moral capital' of solidarity in Europe and aimed to form a cross-cutting party to solve the conflicts in common.[60] He even dared to suggest there might be a 'Catalan model' that could address the conflict in the Balkans, but he was already thinking of his imminent competition with the homogeneous Catalonia Pujol envisaged.[61]

The Conservative Turn of the Second Half of the 1990s

As the decade marched forward, what had been a sincere aspiration to draw upon the model of Václav Havel, first in Czechoslovakia and then in the Czech Republic, lost vitality and became fossilised. This is not purely applicable to the entire tenure of Maragall as mayor of Barcelona, as he did aim to endow a civic and cosmopolitan identity – the concentric circles – to the city. But several circumstances made this impossible and turned the presence of Havel in Spanish politics into a right-oriented appeal to

[55] Ibid.

[56] Jiří Suk, *Politika jako absurdní drama: Václav Havel v letech 1975–1989* (Prague: Paseka, 2013).

[57] Jiří Suk and Kristina Andělová, 'The Power of the Powerless and Further Havelian Paradoxes in the Stream of Time', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 32, 2 (2018), 214–31.

[58] Letter from Maragall to Václav Havel, 17 May 1995, Arxiu Digital Pasqual Maragall, 02.09.

[59] Ibid.

[60] 'Maragall recibe el apoyo de Miterrand y de Cohn-Bendit, líder del mayo francés', *La Vanguardia*, 21 May 1995, 24.

[61] 'El modelo catalán para los Balcanes', *La Vanguardia*, 3 Dec. 1996, 30.

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anticommunism, along with some other dubious co-optations of his admonitions about living in truth and morality. In the 1980s, Spanish nationalism had been dormant, partially due to the stigma of the long dictatorship that Spanish conservatives wanted to get rid of. However, in the mid-1990s the situation somehow changed, and a reciprocal game between Catalan and Spanish nationalisms made the latter blossom. Catalanism had long had an aura of respectability, as Catalan nationalists, Pujol himself, had fought against the dictatorship. However, in the mid-1990s, as we said before, Pujol aimed to display a far from civic nationalism. The Spanish right-wing started to dust off its complexes and embrace again exclusive versions of nationalism.

The conservative young Popular Party leader, José María Aznar, progressed from a sui generis version of 'constitutional patriotism' *a la* Habermas, albeit poorly understood, to an unfettered national conservatism that fostered nationalist policies and, in the international arena, turned the gaze to the Atlantic.[62] He became a fellow traveller with NATO policies and, in the new millennium, a faithful ally of George W. Bush and Tony Blair. In both stages, living in truth and Havel's morality constituted a rhetorical instrument he utilised to endorse his political discourse and attack not only communists but leftists in general, which included the socialist party of Pasqual Maragall. Aznar's renewed insights into totalitarianism saw in Havel the 'strength of liberty' that had prevented the totalitarians from conquering the 'moral consciousness of the man'.[63]

In his writings from the period, Aznar showed a deep admiration for Havel, but in a sense much different from the one expressed by Maragall. Both Maragall and Aznar believed in the sense of Europe, albeit in opposite forms. Aznar thought of Europe as the natural place for Spain to be. It did not mean, though, renouncing any of the prerogatives of a national offensive similar to that practised by Jordi Pujol in Catalonia. The concentric circles formulated by Maragall had in Aznar a different resonance. If Maragall had envisaged the construction of Europe as a transnational endeavour carried out in cities and with small nations as the protagonists, Aznar had a much more one-sided vision of Europe, as a continent that owed its existence to Spain more than to anyone else. Spain had discovered the New World, expelled the Muslims and provided cultural milestones that formed the heritage of Europe.[64] The vitality of what Maragall took from Havel was completely absent in Aznar who, instead, proceeded to a more one-dimensional understanding of the work of the Czech president. If this was, in intellectual terms, much less interesting than the discourse Maragall developed, in practical terms it had arguably more resonant consequences. Moreover, Havel does not figure here as a mere puppet moved by his receivers. Instead, the attitude of Havel had changed much in the second half of the 1990s, and his proximity to Aznar was not desired by the Spanish conservative alone; Havel himself was eager to figure in such company rather than to be continually associated with more left-leaning politicians such as Pasqual Maragall. Indeed, Havel had deployed a morally loaded concept of civil society; although it stemmed from a leftist orientation dating back to his years as a dissident, it had migrated to a more conservative position that left the concept depleted and paved the way for a gradual conservative takeover.[65]

Aznar supported the Czech Republic in its attempts to join the European Union, and in December 1998 he paid an official visit to Prague, where he wanted to meet Havel and discuss the terms of Spain's support. He could not meet Havel, as a serious health condition of the Czech president prevented him from it.[66] However, the year before, Madrid hosted a NATO conference with Havel in attendance, along with representatives of some other socialist countries, where it was agreed that the Czech Republic would become part of the Atlantic Alliance.[67] As in the Spanish case, NATO

[62] Javier Tusell, *El aznarato: El gobierno del Partido Popular 1996–2003* (Madrid: Aguilar, 2004), 136–41.

[63] José María Aznar, *Cartas a un joven español* (Madrid: Planeta, 2007), 9.

[64] Xosé Manoel Nuñez Seixas, *Suspiros de España: El nacionalismo español 1808–2018* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2018), 114–20.

[65] Milan Znoj, 'Václav Havel, His Idea of Civil Society and the Czech Liberal Tradition', in Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, eds., *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), 109–39.

[66] 'La República Checa pedirá a Aznar el apoyo para su adhesión a la UE', *ABC*, 14 Dec. 1998, 22.

[67] José María Aznar, *Retratos y perfiles* (Madrid: Círculo de lectores, 2005), 109–10.

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membership was an indispensable requirement for entering the European Union, and Aznar may have facilitated the acceptance of the Czech Republic in it, which earned him a lasting friendship with Václav Havel. According to Aznar, 'Havel had it clear that his Europeanism was linked to the Atlantic compromise'.[68]

Havel's role in supporting NATO activities is widely known[69] but, interestingly enough, in his words justifying intervention in Kosovo based upon alleged humanitarianism, the NATO head made extensive use of categories such as 'moral duty' that drew directly upon Havel's formulation.[70] The NATO chief at that time was Javier Solana, not by chance a socialist from the generation of Pasqual Maragall, who was directly influenced by the presence and the debates about Havel across the 1990s. In 1995, when Solana was Minister of Foreign Affairs, he proposed to award Havel the 'Necklace of the Order of Isabella the Catholic', a high distinction that presumed the recognition of Havel's merits in Spanish politics.[71] However, beyond any close appraisal of Havel by the Spanish socialists, at the height of 1999 the position of the Czech president was evident, and it is not surprising that the NATO chief resorted to Havel's formulations to justify the intervention in Kosovo. It is here that the direct and creative usage of Havel faded away and turned into a one-sided underpinning of the Atlantic political agenda, which would become even clearer in the first years of the new millennium.

Conclusions: Into the New Millennium

Spain went through a convulsive stage in the struggle against Basque terrorism, but Aznar would refer to Havel in another context where terrorism should be approached differently. In November 2002, a NATO meeting in Prague opened with a speech by Aznar in which he stated the following: 'If anyone thinks that their country is safe from the risks of terrorism, from the risks of threats of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, they are wrong'.[72] Tony Blair and George Bush had only to underpin the words of the Spanish prime minister, wrapped in moral trappings, to set the basis for the invasion of Iraq that would take place within months. According to Aznar, the NATO meeting in Prague 'inevitably ended up becoming a tribute to Václav Havel and the Czech dissidents' for 'he remained, as he has always been, a moral and intellectual reference for all of us'.[73] As it is well known, France and Germany did not support the intervention, which gave way to the 'Letter of the Eight', a document signed by the allies of George Bush in defence of the invasion. As Aznar recalled, 'I myself called Havel to join the signatories of the Charter, which he did without hesitation'.[74] Moreover, the Spanish president might have exaggerated his role in the 'Letter of the Eight' and in convincing Havel to sign, as it was the lobbyist for the American arms industry, Bruce Jackson, who orchestrated the operation and secured the signature of Havel.[75] In any case, Aznar wanted to convey a legacy of influential world leadership combined with the moral beacon Havel provided.[76] But neither Aznar nor Jackson had to do much to convince Havel, as the Czech himself was an enthusiastic supporter of the operation captained by Bush. Nevertheless, the Spanish considered his presence of prime importance to give it a moral thrust, following the spirit of the NATO meeting of Prague in November 2002, where the Atlantic alliance had paid homage to Havel.

This is how, for Spaniards, Václav Havel entered the new millennium: being exploited by conservatives in the quest for an anti-leftist politics and backing NATO's military interventions. Havel stayed

[68] Ibid., 111.
[69] Michael Zantovsky, *Havel: A Life* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2014), 437–45.
[70] Jaume Castan Pinos, *Kosovo and the Collateral Effects of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 171–2.
[71] Real Decreto 1195/1995, 7 July 1995, Boletín Oficial del Estado, BOE-A-1995-16658.
[72] Aznar, *Retratos*, 114.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 115.
[75] Jiri Sedivy and Marcin Zaborowski, 'Old Europe, New Europe and Transatlantic Relations', in Kerry Longhurst and Marcin Zaborowski, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe and the Transatlantic Security Agenda* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1–29.
[76] Tusell, *Aznarato*, 348–54.

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close to Aznar, even after the latter ended his tenure in 2004. From that moment on, they launched initiatives to democratise Cuba. 'You and I have the responsibility to work every day for the liberty of Cuba', Havel said to Aznar in 2004.[77] Partially because of Havel's positions, he ceased to have meaning for Spanish progressives. The revulsion that authors such as Noam Chomsky expressed toward Havel had parallels in Spain. Moreover, Maragall had shifted to Catalan politics and, as some authors argue, he ended up being a tout-court nationalist, as the only way to defeat Pujol was to become an improved replica of him. Maragall of the new century considered 'too simplistic' the theory of 'concentric circles' he had elaborated on before.[78] Instead, he strove to create a new autonomic law (*estatut*) for Catalonia, which meant to deepen self-government and to approach Catalonia as the cornerstone of politics, a nation alongside Spain. Even if he still had a project for Spain where Europe, Catalonia and Barcelona had roles to play and he was not purely pro-independence, as some authors argue, it seems obvious that his esteem of Havel was, in the new millennium, rather diminished. This constituted the symbolic end of the progressivist appraisal of Havel, which until today has not been recovered.

Nonetheless, and to recapitulate, the presence of Havel in Spain, by and large, in the first half of the 1990s stimulated the political culture of Spain. Of course, this was especially so in Catalonia, where Pasqual Maragall was able to develop a compelling political project which, having Havel as one of the main references, permitted him to rethink several issues. First was the role of the cities in the past, present and future of Europe. Making parallels between Barcelona and Prague allowed Maragall to resort to the twofold connotation of civic-mindedness that acquired great significance at a time when nationalism had started to resurge. Not only in the Balkans, but also in Catalonia, Maragall found in Havel a tool to oppose the exclusive project of Catalanisation carried out by Pujol. Yet, the conservative nationalist also took credit for Havel, endorsing not only morality in politics, which he claimed to represent as much as Havel, but also the relevance of small nations as entities to be preserved and protected. This latter point permitted him to build a Catalonia embedded in Europe, but without paying much attention either to the highly cosmopolitan Barcelona or, on the other hand, to the alleged centralist Spanish project, as both threatened the survival of the Catalan nation.

The approach to Havel made by conservatives, both in Spain and Catalonia, was possible due to at least two factors. The first is that Havel himself occupied political positions very pleasing to them, such as his close relation to NATO. Second, and more importantly in my perspective, is the ambiguity of his writings, speeches and discourses. Morality, living in truth, and some of his other formulations proved to be highly controversial, as they were not endowed with clear guidelines to be followed and were, therefore, open to be interpreted by anyone. In the end, though, and up to the present day, in Spanish politics they have a very ambiguous sense, and they mainly stand for opposition to any kind of leftist policy. When joined to a Spanish conservatism that is marked by references to such works as *The Road to Serfdom* by Friedrich von Hayek, this makes for a rather one-sided cocktail, whereby even policies carried out by a timid social democratic government, such as the one led by the socialist Pedro Sánchez, is conducive to a totalitarian situation. The exhibition in the Spanish parliament commemorating the thirty years of the Velvet Revolution that was sketched in the introduction is testimony to this, and it does not seem that in the coming years Spanish political culture will turn back to a more progressive, plural and critical stance towards Václav Havel.

[77] Aznar, *Retratos*, 115.
[78] Claret, *Maragall*, 376–8.

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