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# The spanish monarchy: leukemia of history and politics?

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## Resumen

*El presente artículo estudia la resistencia a un elemento novedoso en la construcción hegemónica de la monarquía española y su nueva forma de legitimación: su estatus como parte del mundo de los famosos. Como se muestra en el artículo, la resistencia está basada en la idea de que este nuevo estatus relega a un segundo plano las controvertidas conexiones de la monarquía con su pasado franquista y su problemática posición en el sistema político español. El análisis se concentra en la interpretación de la boda de Felipe de Borbón y Letizia Rocasolano en el diario catalán Avui, que frente al discurso postmoderno, emocional e irracional del discurso de las crónicas rosas, contrapuso un discurso moderno sobre la monarquía basado en la racionalidad y la mirada objetiva de la historia.*

**Palabras clave:** Avui, Boda Real, Modernidad, Monarquía Española, Postmodernidad.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As Blain and O'Donnell point out, *[a]ll societies inherit, reproduce and generate their own myths* (2003: 93). These myths, also called grand narratives, meta-narratives or master-plots, constitute more or less coherent interpretative templates one of whose main functions is to provide a celebratory and legitimising account of the permanence and cohesion of societies. In the case of Spain, the myth of the re-foundation of the State after Franco's death is all-pervasive. Indeed, the process of Transition is generally regarded as model for other societies and as an extraordinary success. According to the historiographical consensus, King Juan Carlos played a key role in the democratic development of Spanish society and political system; and, as Stucki points out (2004: 28), in myriad studies, books and biographies he has been construed as a hero. As O'Donnell indicates:

it is seldom possible to track the emergence of a myth with any accuracy: myths enter the public domain in slow and often diffuse ways. In the case of Spanish monarchy,

however, an exact date can be given if not for the emergence of the myth<sup>1</sup>, then at least for its consolidation: this was 23 February 1981 (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003: 93).

King Juan Carlos's well-known appearance on national television to defend the newly born Spanish democracy against the rebellious generals has been constructed as *the* pivotal moment not only for the glorification of the Monarchy, but also *the* major turning point in the Transition. From that moment on, King Juan Carlos's democratic credentials (regarded as doubtful until then for having been appointed by Franco himself) strengthened; from that moment on, the Monarchy as an institution (but King Juan Carlos in particular) was attributed the function of guarantor and symbol of the Unity of Spain.

This celebratory narrative, however, does not go undisputed, particularly by peripheral nationalists (due to the centripetal force it arguably exerts) and for republicans. For its critics, the Royal institution constitutes a reflection of a society with a serious democratic deficit. This line of argument has several bases, the most important of which being precisely that the Monarchy was restored in the person of King Juan Carlos I with the approval of the Francoist Parliament.

In addition to this politico-historical argument, the defiance against the celebratory narrative of the Monarchy has now a new front which this article aims to investigate. This study will look into the resistance against what is being perceived as its new form of legitimation: its celebrity status. As will be shown, the critics of the Monarchy argue that, as opposed to his father, the heir to the Spanish throne, Felipe de Borbón, has not yet been able to prove his political pedigree, a situation that leaves him *only* with what Rojek calls 'ascribed' celebrity status – that which *typically follows from bloodline* (2001: 17). This new celebrity status, as it is argued by anti-monarchists, constitutes a planned strategy to further legitimise the Monarchy.

This article investigates this resisting discourse by focusing on one particular event: the wedding of the heir to the Spanish throne, Felipe de Borbón, and the 'commoner' and former newsreader Letizia Ortiz Rocasolano on 22 May 2004, as interpreted by editorial and opinion columns in the Catalan-language daily *Avui* from 15 April to 30 May 2004. In 2004 on average *Avui* sold 26983 daily copies, a small number compared to the 203703 copies sold by its rival *La Vanguardia*, the best selling (Castilian-language) Catalan daily<sup>2</sup>. The importance of this newspaper, however, lies in its ideological stance within the framework of the Catalan written press and in the intellectual and political stature of its contributors. *Avui's* political standpoint and its use of the Catalan language (and not Castilian) has gained it the title of 'national daily' (national meaning Catalan) (Cardús and Tolosa, 1998: 44). As far as its contributors are concerned, this article will use extensive quotes from, amongst others, Marta Pessarrodona, a well-known Catalan poet who has

<sup>1</sup>As Stucki points out, the process of mythification of King Juan Carlos was reaching its climax in the seventies (Stucki, 2004: 28).

<sup>2</sup><http://www.ojd.es>

been in charge of the coordination of the *Comissió Internacional per a la Difusió de la Cultura Catalana*, of the Department of Culture of *the Generalitat de Catalunya*; Lidia Falcón, who is the founder of the Spanish Feminist Party; and Ignasi Riera, who has been an MP in the Catalan Parliament since 1987 for the left/green coalition *Iniciativa per Catalunya / Els Verds*.

This article will deal with editorials and opinion columns which showed a certain degree of repetition, a set of recurrent arguments amounting to a kind of common denominator in their denunciation of the new popular, arguably banal and postmodern way of legitimating the role of the Spanish Monarchy and the flood of emotionality and irrationality which (it was argued) evacuate society of rational political discourse. Some of these columnists expressed their rejection of the Monarchy from a republican perspective; others from the standpoint of political Catalanism (pro-independence or otherwise) but what is important here is their coincidences in their articulation of a discourse against the entry of the Spanish Monarchy into the celebrity sphere and its alleged political consequences.

The line of argument taken by *Avui*, as will be seen, was that for want of a political epic, prince Felipe's position was being legitimised by means of maximum exposure in the media, focusing on his personal rather than his political significance. The distinction between father (who achieved his public recognition in the 1981 failed coup) and son (who had it only attributed by virtue of birth) did not escape *Avui's* columnist Marçal Sintes, who argued that:

the real legitimisation [of King Juan Carlos] was granted by his television appearance on the night of 23 February 1981 ... [On the other hand] Felipe de Borbón has not had and he is not expected to have a similar epic moment to gain endorsement (*Avui*, 16 May 2004).

The wedding, according to the same author, was the legitimising *endorsement* needed by Felipe de Borbón in the *delicate* and *critical* moment of the first royal generational change since the 'restoration of the monarchy' (*Avui* 16 May 2004). In that sense, Marçal Sintes pointed out that the wedding would bring prince Felipe closer to the people (*Avui*, 16 May 2004). Along the same lines, the column signed as Descot stated that the aim of Felipe and Letizia's marriage was to 'give the heir and the dynastic line a more popular legitimisation' – adding later jokingly that after the wedding 'Felipe and Letizia are now more important than Ronaldinho', the Brazilian player of Barcelona Football Club (*Avui*, 26 May 2004). In the words of the author and regular columnist of *Avui* Clara Isabel-Simó, it was the *make-the-prince-popular operation* (*Avui*, 23 May 2004). And the newspaper in its editorial denounced that the choice of a commoner as bride *can have favourable effects on the institution. It may bring the Spanish monarchy closer to the popular feeling* (22 May 2004). These columnists were indeed hinting at and taking issue with some of the major features of what Rojek has called the *celebrification process* of society (2001: 186-191). According to the logic of this process, the monarchy would be looking for its new form of legitimisation through a carefully orchestrated

and stage-managed marketing operation designed to both give it maximum degree of *glamour* and *impact on public consciousness* (Rojek: 2001:10).

As will be seen, *Avui* counteracted the celebrity discourse about the wedding in particular and the Monarchy in general by disassembling it through the creation of a system of dualities which opposed the *small, popular, irrational* and *weightless* celebrity narrative with the grand narrative of Historical and Political Reality. Section I of this article (*Love Versus Politics*) will deal with *Avui*'s response to the allegedly excessive degree of romanticism and emotion with which the royal wedding was generally reported and commented on. Section II (*Story versus History*) focuses on the reaction against the alleged lack of historical perspective and political depth in the reporting of the wedding. Section III (*Emotion versus Reflexion*) presents the at times haughty and elitist interpretation of the popular interest of the Monarchy's celebrity narrative. It will be seen how curiosity for the Royal event or (even worse) emotional identification with the Royal bride and groom were looked down upon and sneered at as a sign of cretinization, complacency or lack of rational thinking on the part not only of the media but also of the general public. Conversely, rationality, critical thought and objectivity were seen in *Avui* as attributes reserved for the discerning elite (formed by the paper and its readership), clear-sighted enough to see through the ideological and political components of the wedding.

All along the article and again in the conclusion, a question will be raised: why this resistance against a celebrity-Monarchy? A few introductory words will suffice here: a celebrity-Monarchy runs the risk of turning banal, post-ideological, it enters postmodernity, that phase in which *politics is drained of much of its meaning* (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003: 18). For Frederic Jameson, amongst the *constitutive features of the postmodern* are *a new depthlessness* and *a consequent weakening of historicity*, including *our relationship to public History* (Jameson, 2003: 567). Along the same lines, the Spanish author Vicente Verdú states that in the postmodern world 'history becomes less heavy in the identity of objects and persons' (2003: 34). As will be seen, that is what *Avui* fought against: by turning the Royal family into celebrities (*Avui* argued) there was taking place a relegation of the controversial historical links with its Francoist past and its (for many) problematic position in the Spanish political system.

As this article will show, *Avui* attempted to offset the banalization of the Monarchy and its conversion into part of the 'crónica rosa' ('pink' or 'celebrity' reporting); it challenged and counteracted the postmodernist *essential triviality* (Jameson, 2003: 570) of the celebrity monarchy with modernist *high seriousness* (Jameson, 2003: 570). Borrowing Jean Baudrillard's lamenting words, for *Avui* [t]he great event of this period, the great trauma, is the decline of strong referentials, these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation (1994: 43). As will be seen, *Avui*'s counteraction was carried out by choosing a discourse of the real or (in Barthes's words) a *mode of writing* where

*truth ... becomes... weighty*<sup>3</sup> (Barthes, 1984: 18-25). *Avui* put forward an *escalation of the true*, to use Baudrillard's words (1994: 7) - that is, a discourse that lugged the institution back into the real world of Politics and of History – with capital letters. With its counteraction, *Avui* was fighting the *leukemia of history and politics* (Baudrillard, 1994: 44) that allegedly affects Spanish society and which ends up legitimising the current statu quo.

## 2. LOVE VERSUS POLITICS

When comparing the modern and the postmodern, Vicente Verdú points out that whereas *before, escapes from reality looked like ignoble desertions, now, however, opportunities to flee [from work, from duties, from problems] ... are at the centre of what's on offer* (2003: 65). These escapes from reality into the personal and romantic world of celebrity were a focal point of attack within *Avui*. Thus the notion that the wedding was a *marriage of love*<sup>4</sup> was for Lidia Falcón a *propaganda operation* thought out with *brazen arrogance* by the *imposers of the crown* (*Avui* 25 May). Anna Grau (*Avui*'s reporter in Madrid) expressed her suspicion that *maybe it is not a coincidence that the future queen of Spain is an accomplished television professional* (*Avui*, 23 April 2004). The denunciations of the 'marketing operation' were indeed rejecting contamination of political discourse by that of advertising, which, as Baudrillard believes, has given form to *all original cultural forms, all determined languages... because it has no depth*, it constitutes the *[t]riumph of the superficial form, the smallest common denominator of signification, degree zero of meaning'*, it constitutes a language without a past, without a future (1994: 87).

Against this depthlessness, Ignasi Riera described the *mon del cor* (celebrity phenomenon) in general as *the rotten peace of the sentimentalised society* (*societat de color rosa*) and contrasted more specifically the wedding of the *Borbon kid* and [...] *Letizia* with the *plagues that afflict humans* (*Avui*, 22 May 2004). In an article published before the wedding, Marçal Sintes zoomed from these kinds of universal preoccupations for the whole of humanity to the implications of the wedding for the Spanish political arena: he pointed out that the *wedding [...] has a popular and to a certain extent frivolous dimension which is difficult to resist. The marriage will be [...] the apotheosis of the celebrity press and it is maybe not bad that it is that way* (16 May 2004). Despite this qualified sympathy for this flight to the weightless world of gossip, Sintes re-directed his readers to hard-and-fast reality by warning that:

<sup>3</sup>For the importance of 'reality' in political discourses such as Catalanism see León Solis (2003).

<sup>4</sup>'Love without barriers' was the title of a chronicle in *El País* (9 November 2003) just after the confirmation of the relationship between the prince and the erstwhile newsreader.

We also have to know that the events of 22 May [i.e. the royal wedding] have a very important and transcendental political dimension. All institutions want to endure but the monarchy more than any other. Enduring is part of its essence. The event [...] will have as its objective bringing the figure of the Prince of Asturias closer [to the population as a whole] (*ibidem*).

Sharing these views and in a further attempt to delegitimize the romantic component of the royal 'fairy tale', M.J. Jordan wrote an article entitled 'Renovar-se o morir' ('Renew or die') in which he took the view that European heirs to the throne change with the times in a cynical fashion: they become besotted by and then marry *good looking commoners with strong personalities* in order to modernize their institutions, thus *changing a little so that nothing important changes* (Avui, 18 May 2004). The Spanish royal wedding (and any other recent European royal wedding for that matter) would have been driven not by love but by self-interest. Five days later, the same columnist stated that *monarchies attempt to be in tune with the people through love [...] and if we add that the brides of Felipe's contemporaries have been commoners not brought up in the formalities of protocol, the deal is perfect* (Avui, 23 May 2004). Along the same lines, Lidia Falcón described the *wedding supposedly based love as a smart publicity operation* (Avui, 25 May 2004).

The column signed as Col.lectiu J.B. Boix went a step further by suggesting that the bride had been carefully chosen as part of a *marketing operation based on television*, and it added: *[w]e knew that advisers had recommended a telegenic wife in order to consolidate the monarchy from the small screen ... everything is image and certificate of trustworthiness* (Avui 25 May 2004). It is worth noting that Rojek uses the word *mediagenic* instead of *telegenic* as a key feature of cultures immersed in the *celebrification process* (2001: 15-16).

What would be the reason behind this refutation of the romantic discourse? By rebuffing the reign of emotions these ideas were fulfilling two major objectives: they functioned as warnings to the readers that emptying the event of its political component and filling it with romantic parlance constituted a cynical attempt to escape from reality in order to legitimise the monarchy. Let's further illustrate this point with an excerpt of an article by the columnist David González, who called the whole celebration *Operación Letizia*<sup>5</sup> (Avui, 24 May). This *operation* was according to González part of the populist strategy of *bread and circuses* which the Socialist Government had put in place with two main objectives: firstly, to make people believe that the Spanish Monarchy is republican in nature; secondly, to send into oblivion the controversial past of the Monarchy ('amnesia'). González also

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<sup>5</sup>Operación Letizia echoes the successful TV programme 'Operación Triunfo' (called Fame Academy in Britain). For a study of the alleged political implications of that programme in the process of Spanish nation building and Catalan identity erosion see León Solís, 2004.



denounced yet another strategy: the (allegedly cynical) use of the wedding for its cathartic effect in a time of national bereavement after the Madrid bombings on 11 March 2004:

Operation Letizia has provided millions of citizens of this monarchy (that the left-wing parties involved in the Transition are still selling us as republican) with a cocktail of amnesia and catharsis [...] which, since the times of the Roman circus, the masses need to get every now and then in order to flee from the crude reality even if it is just for a while (*Avui*, 24 May).

### 3. STORY VERSUS HISTORY

It has been noted above that according to many columnists in *Avui*, this romantic and banal construction of the royal nuptials took flight from the nitty-gritty of politics, from reality. But, as will be seen in this section, for *Avui* this escapade was not limited to current politics but also subtracted the events from the dynamics of History and converted History into stories. What should be understood by History is not the sequential position of the event in time (there was a great amount of this in the press) but an analysis of the event under the aegis of objectivity and critical analysis.

In this sense the writer Marta Pessarrodona bemoaned and criticized the lack of this kind of analysis in the Spanish media and interpreted it as a fault in Spanish society as a whole. According to Pessarrodona, one of the main features of the wedding was *the lack of all History, with capital H, despite them [here she refers to the media] harping on about the fact that we were living a historical moment* (*Avui*, 26 May). Pessarrodona further lamented this fault by judging (by way of comparison with Spain) British television coverage of socio-political events:

which are always accompanied by historical commentary... Over there, in Great Britain, there always appear historians with an ability to assess a political leader and compare them to their historical predecessors or, when the Monarchy intervenes, with hard and fast facts (*Avui*, 26 May).

Pessarrodona moreover commented on the Monarchy *à propos* an occurrence involving King Juan Carlos. On 22 April 2004, after the official swearing in of the Socialist Rodríguez Zapatero as new Prime Minister, the King embraced Santiago Carrillo, former Communist leader during the Civil War, the Francoist period and Transition to Democracy; Pessarrodona suggested that:

in the United Kingdom, the Royal-Communist embrace would have been turned into an explanation about who designated the King and about the performance of the Communist ex-leader during the Civil War. None of that here (*ibidem*).



This negative comparison is an echo of the notion (widespread in Catalonia) that Spain has not quite caught up with the rest of European civilization and the spirit of democracy (exemplified here in the form of Britain)<sup>6</sup>.

Along these critical *anti-banalization* lines Marta Pessarrodona stated that:

all the comments are about fashion design and that's all ... The only interest I find in the Monarchy, and by extension, in aristocracy is its historical contents, and history always has things to teach us (*Avui*, 26 May).

And what are those *hard and fast* facts that History teaches and the Spanish media were allegedly hiding? Pessarrodona hinted at the answer in her article with the oblique reference to Franco, *who designated the King*. This historical link to Francoism (only suggested by Pessarrodona) was given full-blown treatment by the column signed as Desclot, for whom, after the wedding, Spain is *One, Great and Monarchical*<sup>7</sup> (*Avui*, 4 May 2004); that is, Francoist. Marçal Sintes went beyond the mere reference to remind his readers that *as we all know, [Juan Carlos I] was chosen by Franco and the democratic system ratified him* (*Avui*, 16 May 2004).

There were other more indirect yet more sinister references to the relationship between King Juan Carlos and Franco. The article entitled 'Strict state wedding in the rain', despite being very descriptive and neutral in tone, carried above its main heading the words *the Royal family returns to the balcony of Plaza de Oriente 30 years later* (*Avui*, 23 May 2004). This comment led the readers back to 1974, a year before the death of Franco, a historical reference further explained in another article by Anna Grau:

the central balcony of the Royal Palace, the one that has not been opened for 30 years, where Franco came out to let himself be acclaimed ... against the international clamour against the death penalties of the Trial of Burgos<sup>8</sup>. And besides him, putting as brave a face on it as he could, King Juan Carlos still sceptical and still a prince (*Avui*, 23 May 2004).

By injecting History into the Monarchy *Avui*'s commentators were resisting the alleged process of de-historicization of the Royalty; they were attempting to offset the tendency to extract History from current politics. *Avui* was facing a challenge caused by an absence: to use Baudrillard's words, in the hegemonic coverage of the wedding there was a *liquidation of referentials* (Baudrillard, 1994: 2), in this

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<sup>6</sup>The evidence provided to illustrate the alleged gap between Spain and Europe in this respect is not so obvious – as Blain and O'Donnell point out, in Britain there is a 'gnawing absence of reality' in the presentation of the Monarchy (2003: 59-76) due to a series of vested interests ranging from 'the interests of media proprietors, managers and editors' to the interests of the socio-economic groups which benefit from the notion that there is no need for 'radical alteration' in society (*ibidem*: 59).

<sup>7</sup>This is, of course, a paraphrase of Francoist fascist definition of Spain as 'Una, Grande y Libre'.

<sup>8</sup>The Burgos Trial was the last time the death penalty (against ETA terrorists and communists) was applied in Spain. The 'international clamour' is a reference to the international condemnation of the application of the capital punishment at the time.

case, historical referentials; and with this liquidation there was an elimination of historical truth. *Avui* was resisting the introduction (or imposition for many) of a model of simulations from which *the real* has allegedly disappeared (Baudrillard, 1994: 2). A model responsible for creating a *hyperreal* (Baudrillard, 1994: 2), a model of a Monarchy that exists in a *hyperspace without atmosphere* (Baudrillard, 1994: 2), that is, without roughness or friction.

*Avui* and its contributors were therefore resisting the ascendancy of the *small narratives* of fashion, celebrities and romantic love from which the reality, the real truth of the Monarchy (thought to be revealable through the investigation of History) has been made to vanish. This countermove was of course not void of political interest. A celebrity monarchy can become a monarchy without past, that is, a monarchy that loses its 'controversial' components: in the case of the Spanish Monarchy, its Francoist connections, its pre-Constitutional origins. And without this key piece of historical reality the royal institution and the State it represents increase their legitimacy.

#### 4. EMOTION VERSUS REFLEXION

This article is arguing that *Avui* was involved in a process of resistance to the postmodernization of society which is allegedly jeopardizing the discourse of modernity based on 'reason', objective and critical interpretation of reality. This section of the article will look into *Avui's* reaction to the response of the 'general public' to the celebrity-royal discourse.

It cannot be denied that in terms of 'media audiences' the preparations for the wedding, the wedding itself and the subsequent events (such as the honeymoon) were a success: the 25 million Spaniards who watched the ceremony broke all historical records (*Avui*, 24 May 2004). In general, the picture offered by *Avui* was that the majority of the public would have been enthralled by the wedding out of free will, ignorance or lack of rational thinking:

**a) Free will.** As an example of this voluntary captivation with royal events, *Avui* stated in its 22 May 2004 editorial that the public willingly *joins in the process of collective cretinization with which we have greeted the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, effectively positioning the paper in the modernist tradition of the Frankfurt School's and Adorno's idea of cultural *levelling down* (1991: 67). The same judgement was applied to *the majority of the media –public and private– with whose contribution the wedding has turned into a new episode of the same soap opera (ibidem)*. The soap opera being, as O'Donnell points out one of the main targets of the discourse that establishes that society is going through a process of *dumbing-down* (O'Donnell, publication forthcoming).

Compounded with this voluntary cretinization of society was the unhealthy interest of the general public in 'glossy' stories. In that sense, *Avui* wrote in the same editorial that *[f]or the last weeks the majority of the public in the State has followed the events prior to the ceremony out of the curiosity –often out of*

*control and even morbid— that the celebrity press arouses in Spain (Avui, 22 May 2004).*

It is worth noting two main ideas from this quote: on the one hand, the qualification of the interest of the people as a reflection of lack of control (or the ascendancy of emotion in public opinion); on the other, the reference to the encroaching of (moral) ill-health in society (the 'even morbid' curiosity). M.J. Jordan chose the same elitist tone to explain the interest in the wedding and the makeover of Letizia from commoner to Princess: *[I]t would seem that this transformation of the Cinderella tale into real life pleases the people, easy to entertain and willing to identify with the chosen protagonist* (18 May 2004).

**b) Ignorance.** As seen above, the columnist David González interpreted the wedding and the choice of a commoner for bride as part of a strategy of entertainment *that since the times of the Roman circus the masses need to get every now and then in order to flee from the crude reality even if it is just for a while* (Avui, 24 May). Along this line, Lidia Falcón construed Spaniards as *victims of the publicity operation of a monarchy in need of prestige* (Avui, 25 May 2004, my italics). And in equally supercilious tone, she stated that the wedding was a strategy *put together in order to show the gullible espanyolets<sup>9</sup> that our monarchy is the most democratic in the world* (ibidem). About the public that turned up as spectators the day of the wedding Anna Grau (in a mixture of report and opinion column) had this to say:

[A]ll those who showed up in the streets despite the rain, the police checks points [...] and the obvious fact that everything would be clearer on the telly, did it following a mythical inertia. An existential thirst to be dumbfounded by the bride and groom (Avui, 23 May 2004).

According to Grau, these non reflective citizens with a desire to be amazed were *the happiest ones*. As opposed to these complacent *hoi poloi*

the problem was of those who were thinking. Because it is impossible to think and not ask oneself at some point: why do we have to support a Royal family that is not exposed to the ballot box Why do we have to put ourselves out in this way? Does it make sense to be a Catalanist and a monarchist, for instance? Does it make much sense to be left-wing and at the same time humour so many crowned heads? (Avui, 23 May 2004).

**c) Lack of rational thinking.** All the political questions raised in the previous quote became rhetorical and almost futile in Anna Grau's final defeatist lament:

But thinking is useless. It does not alter in the slightest the fact that a banana monarchy is more exciting than a decent republic. Centuries and centuries of Politics, Revolutions, Enlightenments have not been able to defeat one single fairy tale. True power belongs to fascination, Hitler said (Avui, 23 May).

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<sup>9</sup>Literally, 'little Spaniards'. The diminutive suffix enhances the elitist effect.

The (somewhat exaggerated) reference to Hitler further delegitimizes the monarchist *strategy* of popular fascination via a fairy tale (a small narrative) and sets it apart from *reason* and *rational thinking* (hence the reference to the Grand Narrative of the Enlightenment).

This elitism did not only divide the public into reflective and non reflective but also split them in economic and class terms. Anna Grau called those who patiently waited in the streets of Madrid to see the bride and groom *simple people* (*Avui*, 23 May 2004). On the possible future economic benefits brought to the city of Madrid by the tourists attracted by the wedding, Lidia Falcón asked herself rhetorically who would want these kinds of tourists

that litter the streets, eat their sandwiches sitting on the pavements [...] shout in bars and spend tiny amounts of money in hamburger joints and bed and breakfasts [...] because it is *people with this economic and cultural level* that can feel impelled to travel to a far-off place because a royal wedding has taken place there (*Avui*, 25 May, emphasis added).

This intellectual superciliousness and class condescension was further complicated by an unexpected component: male chauvinism (as will be seen, not restricted to male columnists). In that sense, the general interest in the wedding was explained by M.J. Jordan on the basis that it provided *a moment of emotion and adrenaline* (*Avui*, 23 May); and he then added: *no matter how republican you feel, the housewife we all have inside is always touched by a couple getting married wiping away their tears [...]* (*ibidem*). It is worth noting that M.J. Jordan uses the Castilian (and not the Catalan) *maruja* (a derogatory word for housewife), a language switch that opens up the connection between emotion and mawkish behaviour and Castilian/Spanish identity.

The idea that irrational emotion is a female trait was shared by Lidia Falcón who, harping on the idea of the wedding as a political strategy in the form of a fairy tale, commented:

the inventors of this alleged fairy tale were very smart in using this trick to arouse the support of broad female masses addicted to *Hola*<sup>10</sup>, always thirsty to see – rather than to read – the happy and luxurious life of kings and princes that is forbidden to them (*Avui*, 25 May).

The idea of the gullible female who falls into the political snare of the regal narrative embedded in glossy magazines was compounded with women's alleged lack of appetite for reading, the most important activity for modern intellectuals (many of whom are mortal enemies of the image and its ascendancy). Further on in the same article, commenting on the idea that young people are less supportive of the monarchy, Falcón stated that *they are not as attracted as their mothers and their grandmothers to the decorations of the monarch, the charity of the queen,*

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<sup>10</sup>*Hola* is the best selling glossy magazine in Spain, and has been dubbed 'the official bulletin' of the Spanish Royal family.

*the height of the princes and princesses nor the parties, regattas and palaces that they enjoy (ibidem).*

The duality established between 'emotion' and 'rationality' was also the base for the construction of Catalan identity vis à vis the Monarchy. In order to curb excessive emotional identification, support for the Royal family in Catalonia was urged to be qualified from a position of rationality and moderation, as opposed to adherence. In that sense the daily, in its editorial of 22 May, reminded its readers that:

the Spanish crown - thanks to the measured actions of King Juan Carlos [...] - has won a certain degree of support from a [Catalan] mature public opinion which has limited itself to relate the efficiency of a very problematic institution with the political stability derived from the Transition [...].

The emotional identification with the Monarchy that the romantic discourse might arouse is here offset with an attempt to base its relationship with Catalan citizens on more rational grounds. The very constrained emotional support (a certain degree of support) seems to be derived not from the commotion of recent social events (the wedding) but from a rational process in which *mature* (that is, emotionally and intellectually advanced) citizens have weighed up the political benefits brought about by the Monarchy during a long period of time. The yardstick used to appraise the institution is *efficiency*, that is, an objective instrument used to judge its ability to produce results. The image projected is that vis-à-vis the Monarchy, Catalan citizens limit themselves to an act of rational reflection out of which a timid emotional support might be derived. The relationship is restrained and reduced to the minimum since the monarchy is still a *very problematic institution*.

Another main reason why *efficiency* could be called upon as a contrast to the emotional avalanche is because it constitutes one of the elements of the constellation of identity traits regarded as typically Catalan. The other main trait is *moderation*<sup>11</sup>, with its implications of balance and reasonableness. In this respect, according to *Avui* the Spanish monarchy in the person of the heir to the throne also passed the test due to the discretion and the institutional efficiency which:

have also been assumed by Felipe. Moderation has been a constant in his official relations with Catalonia. One cannot ask for more. Because the constitutional functions of the monarch and his heir are clearly defined and scrupulously observed [...] In fairness to Felipe of Borbón, in this game of concise rules, it is worth mentioning his strict observance of Catalan linguistic reality<sup>12</sup> (*Avui*, 22 May).

By calling up *moderation* and *efficiency*, the relationship between Monarchy and Catalonia was placed in an objective terrain governed by well defined rules

<sup>11</sup>Expressed in Catalan as 'seny'.

<sup>12</sup>Here the editorial meant that Prince Felipe speaks in Catalan in official appearances in Catalonia.

strictly adhered to by both the Monarchy and Catalonia. The ulterior message seemed to be that for as long as these rules are observed, the Spanish Crown can be if not regarded as Catalan at least tolerated by the Catalans. This state of affairs, resulting not from emotional attachment but from a meticulous observance of rules is precarious and can crumble. Indeed, it can be argued that the full perlocutionary force of this editorial amounted to a reminder that the rules of moderation were at risk of being broken with the media construction of the wedding and its flood of irrational emotion. It was also an index of the friction between two different paradigms – the modern and the emotional, ideologically-drained and banal postmodern.

## 5. CONCLUSION: MODERNITY, POSTMODERNITY AND POWER

In *Media, Monarchy and Power*, Blain and O'Donnell use the term *postmodernity* not meaning a *separate new historical phase 'after' modernity, but rather a new phase continuous with modernity and running alongside what remains of modern forces in their attenuated form* (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003: 12). This juxtaposing of the modern and the postmodern paradigms in relation to the Spanish Monarchy has been highlighted by the same authors, who state that while King Juan Carlos I *has been consistently constructed in Spain as the architect of the previous transition from 'pre-modernity' to modernity, his son is now being constructed as the key to a new transition from the modern to the postmodern* (2003: 15). This article has provided evidence of how the prevailing media and political image of the Monarchy in Spain shares features of the modern and the postmodern: on the one hand, it is constructed as continuing to fulfil an important political role in the development and strengthening of Spanish democracy and unity (particularly in the figure of King Juan Carlos I). On the other, the tendency to depoliticize the institution and transfer the royal family into the celebrity world is also becoming evident.

However, the convivial picture of modern and postmodern discourses living together and the acceptance of the postmodernization of society do not go undisputed. This article has shown that *Avui* and its contributors were positioning themselves (knowingly or otherwise) in their understanding of celebrity culture within the modernist tradition (what Rojek calls *structuralist* understandings of celebrity (Rojek, 2001: 33). Following that interpretation, the columnists whose work has been analysed here denounced the celebrification of the Spanish Monarchy as an ideologically driven *cultural fabrication* (to use Rojek's words, 2001: 10). Also within that tradition *Avui* defied the alleged displacement of the (until now rather reserved) Spanish Royals into the celebrity sphere; it stood firm against its conversion into a romanticized monarchy for the masses, against its tinselization, against its conversion into entertainment. This rejection was driven by its supposedly negative implications for the construction of a strong and serious Public Sphere –understood– as a *zone for discourse which serves as a locus for the exploration of ideas and the crystallization of a public view* (Price, 1995:

24), a zone with sufficient access to information so that rational discourse and the pursuit of beneficial norms is made more likely (Price, 1995: 24). The Public Sphere (never mentioned, but implied in the call for rationality, objectivity and truth seen in many of the excerpts in this article) takes argumentation and logic as its instruments for truth-telling. And it is opposed to tinsel, romance, glamour and entertainment<sup>13</sup> –which are all–, according to Postman (1987: 24-29), part of the postmodern epistemology which pollutes *public communication* (Postman, 1987: 29). For *Avui*, the first victims of such a decline in rational discourse are the citizens, who instead of being thoughtful, rational, discerning and free become (due to the avalanche of emotional and irrational discourse) captives to ignorance, social ill health and lack of control.

*Avui*'s contributors rejected the vision of the *general public* as free users of media narratives, as capable of interpreting the messages depending on a range of individual, social and cultural factors (William 2003: 190). What was missing in this interpretation of the *public* was an acknowledgment of the varied, fragmentary meanings, uses and gratifications potentially elicited from media discourses by the general public. Also missing was the recognition that, as O'Donnell points out, *there are many ways of engaging in one's society* (O'Donnell, forthcoming). *Avui* did not acknowledge the potential of a popular public sphere in which 'people choose to negotiate their experience of contemporary societies not through the prism of the traditional structures and canonised products of modernity' (O'Donnell, forthcoming) but through other channels disregarded as non-serious, including soap-operas, chat shows or football phone-ins etc. (O'Donnell, forthcoming). For the contributors of *Avui* this supposed lack of dynamic, rational and reflective engagement converts the public into *masses*, a conversion that, according to O'Donnell, reduces them from *active* participants in their society to the *status of passive objects of manipulation* (O'Donnell, forthcoming).

This in turn revealed a static, monolithic and vertical concept of power. Who manipulates the masses from above? What is this power structure capable of creating such irresistible and overwhelming messages? As Rojek points out, the structuralist/modernist approach emphasizes that *celebrities are conceptualised as one of the means through which capitalism achieves its ends of subduing and exploiting the masses* (2001: 10). Moreover, according to the same modernist-structuralist line of thought, *the identification of the masses with celebrities is always false consciousness, since celebrities are not regarded as reflections of reality but fabrications designed to enhance the rule of capital* (Rojek, 2001: 33). The articles analysed showed a variation in this respect: according to *Avui*, false consciousness was not promoted by the capitalist consumerist society but rather by the fake political discourse, the propaganda of the Spanish monarchy and, ultimately, of the Spanish state in its present form.

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<sup>13</sup>These three attributes are, according to Postman, part of the postmodern epistemology (1987: 24).



The anti-capitalist component was substituted by the denunciation of the dominant power of the Spanish state. Thus, it has been seen, for instance, how Letizia's Cinderella tale was not criticised as a part of the *every man's fake tale for the promotion of capitalist values such as 'upward social mobility'*; it was rather denounced as part of a new scheme to prop up the acceptability of an institution regarded as controversial for being allegedly *Francoist* and *undemocratic*. Similarly, the *masses* were not constructed as victims of consumer capitalism, but as casualties of the Monarchist Spanish state. In that sense, Lidia Falcón called Spaniards *the humble subject of their majesties* (*Avui*, 25 May); and for the column signed as Descot the media construction of the wedding turned *people into vassals. Subject citizens* (*Avui*, 26 May).

It can be rightly argued that the rejection of irrational, emotional and popular discourses had a clearly unequivocal political objective: to confront the postmodern irrational acceptance of the 'small narrative' of celebrity monarchy that would prevent the rational scrutiny of the past; a scrutiny which would bring to the fore an unquestionable *truth*, an undisputable *reality* –its Francoist connections–. In turn, the disappearance of the relationship between Francoism and the present democratic system would diminish the importance of one of the key legitimising *truths* of both Republicanism and Catalan nationalism: that Spain and its political institutions are stuck in the past. In that sense, Spanish monarchy was widely regarded as medieval, anachronistic and obsolete in *Avui*: the Royal Houses are of a 'rancid and traditionalist spirit' said M.J. Jordan (*Avui*, 18 May 2004); Marta Pessarrodona reminded her readers that *the monarchy is something obsolete, despite the newly coined idea that Spain [...] is nowadays a republican monarchy [...]* (*Avui*, 26 May).

*Avui* and its contributors were attempting to hold back the *flood* of legitimating discourses (or propaganda) of the Spanish state with a discourse which has been traditionally based on an *objective* and critical look at History and political reality. This was done with a clear aim: to make evident the controversial relationship between the Spanish monarchy and its past, and ultimately, the problematic character of the Spanish state. However, the monarchist 'deluge' flows now along novel channels that are more difficult to restrain. And in this moment of conflict between Modern and Postmodern paradigms, the question is whether reinjecting *the real and the referential everywhere* (Baudrillard, 1994: 22), whether promoting Critical Thinking, Reason and Good Taste as opposed to entertainment, popular taste and small narratives of celebrity culture is to any avail; whether the citizens would be prepared to contain the irresistible flood of banality and entertainment with solid *reality*, a word that, according to Jameson (2003: 572), is now part of an *antiquated language*.

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