

PARALLEL LIVES

TRIBUNE

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Israel and Catalonia, although very different in many aspects, have shared some common foes throughout history, and nowadays share important opportunities for a better future.

The Jewish people have suffered imprisonment, punishment and death at the hands of different executioners, starting in the ancient Egyptian and Roman empires. For example, one million Jews were killed in the wars they waged against the Romans to gain autonomy. The repression continued through medieval times, with multiple accounts of synagogues being destroyed and massacres targeting Jews in different European countries, with the key support of the Spanish inquisition. The antisemitism reached an all-time high in the 20th century in Nazi Germany, which stripped Jews of their rights not only as citizens, but also as human beings.

Fascism has also targeted Catalans. Thousands of Catalans had to go into exile, threatened by Franco's fascism. One of them was Lluís Companys, who was caught and handed over by the Nazis, and who became the only democratically elected president in Europe to be executed during the 20th century. A decade before that, Primo de Rivera had perpetrated his own military coup which suppressed Catalan institutions and prohibited the Catalan language. The famous architect Antoni Gaudí, for example, was detained and mistreated at the age of 72 for speaking Catalan in front of the police. There are numerous accounts of repression against Catalan culture and institutions from the Middle Ages on. In the 15th century, the first bible in Catalan was suppressed and burned. In the 18th century, Felipe V de Borbón burned different towns across the Catalans Countries, dissolved their local governments, and banned the Catalan language. Language bans continued over the years, both in Spain and France, including most



Ex-president Artur Mas met Israel PM Shimon Peres in 2013. P. M.

of the 20th century. Repression has continued during the 21st century, including the ban on Catalan in the Spanish parliament, blatant fiscal plundering by the state, and the imprisonment of elected representatives and political activists. The fact that 9 out of the last 11 Catalan presidents have been prosecuted, exiled or executed by the Spanish government is telling.

Hence, both Israel and Catalonia have a long history of persecution and struggle for survival, and are nowadays surrounded by states that either wish their disappearance as a state (in the case of Israel), or for Catalonia never to become one. These are important grounds for mutual solidarity.

There are also noteworthy economic and demographic similarities and opportunities for collaboration. Israel and Catalonia are both Mediterranean nations with a relatively similar population (9.2 vs 7.6 million). Their economic structure has a similar balance of services (71% vs 79% of GDP), industry (26.5% vs 20%) and agriculture (2.5% vs 1%). Both nations lack natural resources and large multinational corporations, so that entrepreneurship

plays a key role in the development of their economies. Some 99.5% of Israeli companies have less than 100 employees, and they account for one third of total employment. Similarly, in Catalonia 95% have less than 250 employees, making up 41% of total employment. Hence, both nations depend heavily on SMEs, which must often resort to alliances to gain bargaining power and scale. This calls for partnerships between companies from both places. Furthermore, Catalonia has over 1,000 high-growth startups, and entrepreneurs recently named Barcelona as the third best city in Europe to create a startup. In turn, Israel has more than 6,000 active startups, making it the world leader in startups per capita.

To sum up, Israel and Catalonia share important threats and common foes that call for mutual solidarity. The two societies and economies also depict common features and opportunities that constitute powerful grounds for collaboration.

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