The Spanish-Catalan political crisis as represented in the UK, French and German press (2010-2017)

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Abstract: Political events in Catalonia from 2010 to the present have marked part of the Spanish and EU media agenda and have resonated in the international media. We analysed German, French and UK media coverage and opinions of foreign correspondents regarding the Catalan independence movement for the period 2010 to 2017. We analysed press representations of the positions of the Spanish and Catalan governments and of the confrontation between them, focusing on the main newspapers (*Le Figaro, Le Monde, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeustsche Zeitung, The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*) of the major EU economies of Germany, France and the UK. Analysis was intended to determine the degree of (il)legitimacy of the independence movement as well as arguments in favour of the Spanish status quo and even of European identity. We conducted a framing analysis of 563 press articles and an ethnographic study based on in-depth interviews with four foreign correspondents in Spain. The analysed newspapers provided wide coverage of the Catalan independence movement, framed the crisis as a conflict between the governments of Spain and Catalonia and called repeatedly on the EU to mediate.

Keywords: press, Catalan political crisis, framing, international conflict, journalism

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Représentation de la crise politique entre Espagne et Catalogne dans la presse allemande, française et britannique (2010-2017)

Résumé: Les événements politiques qui se sont succédé depuis 2010 en Catalogne ont marqué une partie de l'agenda médiatique espagnol et européen. Cette communication a pour objectif d'analyser les discours de la presse allemande,

française et britannique sur cette question, à travers l'étude d'articles d'information et d'opinion publiés de 2010 à 2017. Compte tenu de l'écho important du conflit dans les médias internationaux, ce travail analyse la représentation de la confrontation et l'attitude respective des gouvernements espagnol et catalan dans les principaux titres des grandes puissances économiques européennes (*Le Figaro, Le Monde, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeustsche Zeitung, The Daily Telegraph* et *The Guardian*). L'étude de leur traitement de l'information permettra de déterminer le grade de légitimité (ou l'absence de légitimité) accordée au processus souverainiste catalan, de même que la présence d'arguments en faveur du statu quo espagnol, et même de l'identité européenne. Reposant sur l'analyse de 563 articles à travers l'approche méthodologique du framing et sur une série d'entretiens en profondeur réalisés auprès des correspondants des journaux en Espagne, ce travail permet de conclure que la presse européenne concède une large visibilité au processus catalan, envisage la crise comme un conflit entre les gouvernements espagnol et catalan et fait appel à la médiation de l'Union européenne.

Mots-clés: presse, crise politique en Catalogne, framing, conflits internationaux, journalisme

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Introduction

The social and political events of recent times in Catalonia have converted it into a focus of European and world news. On 28 June 2010, the Spanish Constitutional Court (in sentence STC 031/2010) ruled on a new Catalan Statute of Autonomy that had been approved by popular referendum in 2006, rejecting various articles as unconstitutional. Since then, the region of Catalonia has experienced ongoing political and social tensions over the question of its autonomy. The conflict between the Spanish and the Catalan administrations has particularly affected the European Union (EU), given the possible political and economic consequences of any possible separation of Catalonia from Spain.

We analysed news stories in the most widely circulated newspapers representing the predominant ideologies (along the right-left spectrum) in the three most economically powerful EU member states, namely, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeustsche Zeitung*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* and *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, for Germany, the United Kingdom (UK) and France, respectively, accounting -according to Eurostat (2017) – for 21.1%, 16% and 15% of EU gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.

We also conducted an ethnographic analysis based on in-depth interviews with four Spain-based correspondents for *Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, The Guardian,* and *Le Figaro*. Since international journalists interpret the *procés* as the conflict is referred to in Catalonia- for their readers, it was important

to understand how they obtained their information on the conflict and what direct contact they had with their sources in a situation that has frequently taken unpredictable turns.

The broad objective of the research was to consider how the Catalan *procés* was dealt with in foreign media, and, in particular, to examine how the German, French and UK press viewed the political situation in Catalonia and how they covered the conflict between the Spanish and Catalan governments.

Since the international media and international public opinion play a key role in legitimizing conflicts such as the *procés*, it is important to understand how the conflict was handled and the stance adopted by these key economies in the EU.

1. Background to the Spanish-Catalan political crisis

The years 2006 to 2017 witnessed mass demonstrations demanding the right to decide the political future of Catalonia. The year 2010 marked a watershed, as the Spanish Constitutional Court issued a ruling (sentence STC 031/2010), on 10 July, on a new Catalan Statute of Autonomy that had been approved by popular referendum in 2006, rejecting various articles as unconstitutional. In our research we focused on journalistic coverage of key events between the Spanish Constitutional Court ruling of 10 July 2010 and 1 October 2017, when an independence referendum put the following question to voters: 'Do you want Catalonia to become an independent state in the form of a republic?'

1.1. *Civil society as protagonist: key events*

On 10 July 2010, Òmnium Cultural mobilized 1.5 million (1.1 million according to Barcelona City Police) people, under the slogan 'We are a nation, we decide', to express their opposition to the Constitutional Court ruling. This demonstration was fully supported by the main political parties in Catalonia: Convergència i Unió (CIU), Partit Socialista de Catalunya (PSC), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds (ICV).

On the National Day of Catalonia (Diada, celebrated annually on 11 September) in 2012, a further mass demonstration was held, attended by 1.5 million people according to both the organizers and Barcelona City Police, but by the far smaller number of 600,000 people according to the Spanish Government Delegation in Catalonia. Despite the discrepancies in numbers, most media were unanimous in acknowledging the Diada 2012 protest to be the most important demonstration to ever take place in Catalonia and one of the largest ever in Spain and even Europe (Alonso-Muñoz, 2014; Xambó, Perales-García and Xicoy, 2014). The Diada 2012 demonstration was also the first with clearly separatist overtones (Serra, 2012), as indicated by its slogan 'Catalonia, a new state in Europe'. The separatist movement

was further bolstered by the Via Catalana human chain protests of the Diada 2013 and 2014 organized by the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC).

Demonstrations demanding the 'right to decide' for Catalonia date back, in fact, to 2006. The new political scenario was shaped by a strong social component that played a key role in the *procés* and that ultimately led to snap regional elections in 2012. A watershed was marked by the celebration of a non-binding participatory process in the form of a 'consultation' on 9 November 2014, in which some 2.3 million people voted. For the Diada of 2015, around 1.4 million people marched under the slogan 'On the road to a Catalan Republic', just days before elections to the Parliament of Catalonia (27 September 2015). This protest was promoted by the main separatist parties -Junts pel Sí and Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP) - as a plebiscite on Catalan independence.

2016 was marked by Diada protests, which for the first time, were held in various Catalan cities, including (as well as Barcelona), Lleida, Berga, Salt and Tarragona. This Diada, with the slogan 'A Diada for yes' was also different, however, in that it had been preceded by the announcement of a referendum for 1 October 2017, deemed to be binding by the Catalan authorities and illegal by the Spanish authorities. In the 1 October 2017 referendum, 2,286,217 people voted, with 89% of those (2,044,038 people) voting yes. Participation was 43.03% of the total census, which was declared universal from the early hours of voting. National police entered several polling stations and their charges resulted in 1,066 injured according to data from the Catalan Department of Health. On 3 October a general strike was held in Catalonia in protest against the police charges.

This article analyses media coverage to 4 October 2017 of these key events in Catalonia, which ultimately led to Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution (suspending autonomy and imposing direct rule) being triggered on 27 October 2017. Direct rule remained in place for almost a year, until Quim Torra was invested as the new President of the Generalitat.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

The media contribute to the construction of public opinion by creating certain climates and transmitting a representation of the facts from which people construct their own symbolic reality. Indeed, the media occupy a strategic position in informing about and for society. They inform about realities that are not experienced firsthand (Pont and Berrio, 2015) and also help us organize information and our thinking (Rodríguez Borges, 2011).

Berger and Luckmann (1968) have argued that everyday life is presented as an intersubjective world -that the construction of reality is social and is modified and recreated by humans. Reality is thus not immutable but continuously changes over time. Therefore, although the institutional world may seem definitive, it can be

modified. Any social representation includes a system of values, ideas and practices with the specific function of establishing an order that guides individuals and that is also communicated through exchangeable social codes. This could also be viewed as the construction of the 'meanings' that arise from human interactions and that are shared through the exchange of information (Castells, 2015, p. 27).

This construction of meanings is linked to social identity, understood as a direct consequence of representations that hare shared by a particular social group (Wagner et al., 1999, p. 100). Accordingly, identity is constructed from a young age by the mere fact of belonging to a specific group in a specific space and time. Within any given time and space, certain social representations will be in circulation, yet it will be contact with others which will model the social identity of each individual.

2.1. *Agenda setting*

Identity is nurtured by the media through their power of social penetration. The theory of agenda setting refers to the influence exerted by the media in configuring public and governmental agendas (Entman, 2007). This concept was originally developed in the 1960s by McCombs. Initial results from McCombs and his co-worker Shaw (1972) pointed to the influence of the media on reality, with agenda setting defined as a process of political consensus. For Wanta, Golan and Lee (2004), agenda setting refers to how the most important media issues reflect priority themes for the public and, thus, the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda. The setting of the agenda is obviously conditioned by journalistic production, as time and space constrains the choice of some topics over others. Consequently, agenda setting theory is applicable to a much wider field (Kosicki, 1993 in Rashi & McCombs, 2017).

The importance of the agenda setting theory is that it proposes that the media condition what the public think about and how (Entman, 2007), and this is conditioned in turn by diverse factors, such as geographical proximity and an individual's own knowledge of a subject. Wanta, Golan and Lee (2004) further argue that agenda setting acquires even greater importance when individuals do not have direct experience of the facts. This happens with news from other countries -as is the case with foreign media covering the Catalan *procés*. Accordantly with Rashi & McCombs, "In its most researched application, Agenda-Setting Theory examines the correlation between the news media agenda, that is, the prominence of issues that are under discussion in the media and the public agenda, that is, the issues that the public perceives as being of paramount importance at any particular point in time" (2017: 78-79).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) conceded that the agenda setting theory has a number of limitations. For instance, government sources and even journalistic routines condition the selection of topics that become news. Journalistic

professionalism and competence also play a key role in the selection of what might be news (Patterson and Donsbach, 1996). As active actors, journalists themselves influence news stories and even particular conflicts (Perales, 2014).

The agenda setting theory, despite its usefulness for understanding the influence of the media on public opinion, is lacking in other aspects. As suggested by Entman (2007), since the media influence how we think about reality (Cohen, 1963), the attributes of objects are significant. Framing is therefore a concept that enables us to explain the active role played by the individual at the cognitive level. This concept has been used widely in the last two decades in political communications research (De Vreese, 2012; Sábada, 2001) in the social sciences field. Framing is the menas by which certain aspects of reality are selected and emphasised in a text with a communicative purpose, in such a way that a specific definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or recommendation for solving a particular problem or situation is put forward (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Individuals acquire an understanding of a particular reality thanks to such frames of reference, which at the same time construct a narrative of the facts while interpreting and contextualizing them (Vliegenthart & Van Zoonen, 2011). Framing thus reduces the complexity of a subject by presenting it in an understandable way (Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002).

While there are different typologies of frames, that of interest for the purposes of this research is the typology proposed by De Vreese (2005), who distinguishes between issue-specific frames and generic frames. Generic frames are extrapolated to different topics over time and to different contexts, while issue-specific frames are more precisely confined to smaller issues (De Vreese, 2005, p. 54).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) proposed a typology of five frames -namely, human interest, conflict, morality, attribution of responsibility and economic consequences- that facilitates comparisons between newspapers from different countries. In this research the specific frames were not predetermined but were identified *a posteriori*.

3. Methodology

We started with the hypothesis that media discourses tend to deepen differences and conflicts, rather than provide in-depth information, contrast information from different sources and explain differentiated and mismatched positions. The media thus construct symbolic universes (Rodrigo, 2005) that do little to help build consensus or convey political positions based on solidarity and dialogue. One explanation for this stance is that the media adapt their discourses to the territorial scope of the target consumers of their news stories. Another explanation is that the media, as political institutions, operate in consonance with other public and private institutions with which they coincide (more or less) politically and tend to align,

moreover, with the political arguments of more conservative parties, which have greater access to the media.

Our general objective can be broken down into the following more specific objectives: (a) at the EU level, to determine the presence and repercussions of Catalan policy; and (b) at the international level, to identify the thematic and informational frameworks used to depict the social and political events marking the agenda in Catalonia and Spain in recent years.

The object of study of this research was to analyse published opinions in three major EU countries, namely, Germany, the UK and France. As concluded regarding the agenda setting theory, newspapers as agenda fixers are more influential than other media (McCombs, 2004). The analysed newspapers are those of the three EU member states with the greatest influence both within Europe and internationally, both because of their economic power (in GDP terms) and traditionally as the most important political and military states in Europe.

For each country, the two most widely disseminated national newspapers were selected that met criteria as follows: they had an informative and interpretative press profile; and they represented the main ideological tendencies, namely, conservative and social democratic. The resulting list of six newspapers was as follows:

- Germany: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

- UK: *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*

- France: *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*

Analysed for each newspaper were information, opinion and interpretive articles (frontpage stories, editorials, articles and columns) that referred to Catalan-Spanish relations and Catalonia's determination to decide its political future. The research, which combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies, was based on content analysis of newspaper content and ethnographic exploration through in-depth interviews. Both techniques were applied to the study sample.

3.1. *Analytical method*

Frame analysis was conducted from a communicative perspective, following Entman (1993) and Kim et al. (2002), with a view to detecting the predominant frame. This frame analysis was conducted at three levels, as follows: (a) the right-to-decide issue; (b) the main protagonists associated with the right to decide; and (c) those that use the main sources cited.

In relation to the agenda setting analysis, two indicators, each with their respective variables, were used to identify the media relevance of the Catalan *procés* (Kiousis, 2004): (a) attention; and (b) prominence. The attention variables were the total number of texts and the total number of words dedicated by each newspaper to

the *procés*, whereas the prominence variables were the article location in the newspaper and the accompanying graphics (if any).

3.1.1. Analytical approach

An analytical table was drawn up that organized the quantitative and qualitative research (agenda setting and framing) elements in six sections as follows:

(1)   Author: byline, corporate authorship, press agency.

(2)   Genre: news, feature, editorial, opinion piece, interview, cartoon strip, survey, letter to the editor, etc.

(3)   Hierarchization, as follows:

- Page where the article appears (frontpage, backpage, inside page)

- Section where the article appears (opinion, international, politics, economy, society, culture, sports, etc)

- Space taken up by the article, whether as a lead or off-lead article, filler, news in brief, etc.

- Primary or secondary focus, i.e., whether the topic is the primary focus of an article or is secondary to related news (this distinction is important because, for instance, it has been observed that UK newspapers often refer to Catalonia in news stories on the related topic of Scotland).

- Use and kind of graphics (photograph, chart, drawing, caricature, etc).

(4)   Headline details, recorded in full as headline, sub-text before or after the headline and highlights.

(5)   Actors and sources: actors are the persons to whom the text refers directly and sources are named and anonymous informants.

(6)   Dominant frame, as follows:

- Conflict: this frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing interest.

- Human interest: this frame brings a human or emotional angle to a story that personalizes or dramatizes it.

- Economic consequences: this frame reflects economic repercussions for an individual, group, region or country.

- Morality: this frame emphasizes ethical, moral or religious aspects. in terms of tenets or prescriptions regarding behaviours.

- Responsibility: this frame presents a news story in such a way as to attribute responsibility to an individual, group, institution or government.

The framing analysis also took into account the tone attributed to both the *procés* and the actors, evaluated according to Kiousis (2004) as positive, negative or neutral/ambiguous.

3.1.2. Ethnographic study

As for the ethnographic study, it is used as a complement to the content analysis already described and is done after having the results of the frame study and agenda setting. In-depth interviews have an individual character and it is a technique that allows to obtain information not available with direct observation and to contrast the process of journalistic production (Tuchman, 1983; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The ethnographic research includes in-depth interviews with foreign correspondents in Spain for *Süddeutsche Zeitung, The Guardian, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Le Figaro*.

4. Results

While all six newspapers gave wide coverage to the *procés* (Figure 1), the French *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* published most articles (563), while the UK's *Daily Telegraph, The Guardian* and the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published fewest articles (59, 79 and 84, respectively). Most articles were published in 2016 and 2017, reflecting the growing tensions in Catalan-Spanish relations resulting from the Catalan decision to hold an independence referendum.
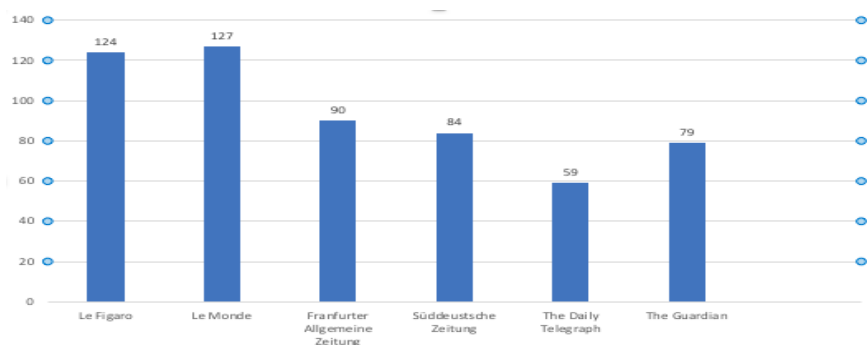

Figure 1. *Articles published 2010-2017* (Source: own elaboration).

The greatest coverage coincided with five periods of great political activity: the 2012 elections, the consultation of 9 November 2014, the 2015 elections, the Diada 2017 and the independence referendum of 1 October 2017. The five periods receiving least coverage, which tended to occur earlier in the study period, were the

2010 demonstration, the 2010 elections, the 2011 consultation, and the Diadas of 2012 and 2013.

4.1. *Sources and actors*

Regarding the French press, most of *Le Figaro*'s sources were other media (20.7% of the articles), academic contacts or experts (14.6%) and separatists and demonstrators (11%). The actors featuring most in this newspaper were separatists (25.9%), Catalonia (19.4%) -- encompassing both Catalonia and Catalans, although not separatists -- and the governments of Spain and Catalonia (11.8% each).

As for *Le Monde*, the main sources were Catalans (15.4%) and Carles Puigdemont (12%), considered more an information source than an actor, followed by the government of Spain (8.9%) and Spanish and Catalan media (8.7%). The actors were Catalonia (20.7%), separatists (18.5%), the Spanish government (15.6%) and the Catalan government (13.4%).

Regarding the German press, the most cited sources for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* were the financial sector (34.3%), other political sources not identified with Mariano Rajoy, Artur Mas or Carles Puigdemont (24.3%) and Spanish media (18.6%), particularly *El País* and *El Mundo*. The actors were mainly separatists (24.4%), the Spanish government (17.8%), the Catalan government (10.8%), Artur Mas (10.4%) and Mariano Rajoy (10.1%). The most used sources in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* were the Spanish media (39.5%), mainly *El País* and *La Vanguardia*, sports-related actors (18.4%), especially FC Barcelona, Pep Guardiola and Real Madrid (used as an analogy for the rivalry between Catalonia and Spain), and the EU (18.4%). The most cited actors were Catalonia (20%), Mariano Rajoy (16.3%), the separatists (13.5%) and the Spanish government (12.3%).

Finally, regarding the UK press, the most frequently used sources in *The Guardian* were the Spanish government (21.3%), the Catalan government (17.7%) and anonymous individuals (12.5%), whereas the most frequently featured actors were Catalonia and the Spanish government (18.9% each), Spain (13%) and the Catalan government (9.1%). As for *The Daily Telegraph*, sources were typically anonymous individuals (13.8%), mainly demonstrators or voters who reflected the climate of the moment. This newspaper typically gave a voice to separatists and unionists during elections, to political actors other than Carles Puigdemont, Artur Mas and Mariano Rajoy (13.8%) and to the Spanish government (7.7%). Four major groups of actors stood out, namely, the Spanish government (18.2%), the Catalan government (14.7%), Catalonia (14.4%), representatives of Spanish justice (9.9%) and Spain and separatists (9% each).

4.2. *Framing*

The predominant generic frame in more than 50% of the sampled articles was conflict, except in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (43%). Conflict was especially predominant in both the UK newspapers (over 70% in both).

The framing hierarchy used by *Le Figaro* prioritized conflict (50% of the articles), followed by responsibility (31.4%). The focus was mainly the political tensions and the radicalization of positions between the two administrations, especially in the latter two years of the study. Reference was frequently made to separatist 'defiance' of the Spanish government and 'divorce' between Catalonia and Spain. The division between Catalans and Spaniards was also highlighted in coverage of the terrorist attack in Barcelona in August 2017. In terms of responsibility, *Le Figaro* equally blamed the two governments for conflict escalation. It tended not to focus on the conflict in terms of its legality, but in terms of stability for the EU. While most articles had a negative tone (58.9%), a significant proportion were neutral or ambiguous (33.9%).[1]

Le Monde also framed its coverage mainly as conflict (46.4% of its articles). The conflict was identified as one between administrations in Barcelona and Madrid, not as one of populations. *Le Monde* also covered the smaller conflict within the macro-conflict -- that between separatists and unionists within Catalonia. The second most important frame was responsibility (26%), with Artur Mas attributed with identifying the *procés* with himself. The EU was also criticized for remaining silent on Carles Puigdemont's requests for help. In general, *Le Monde* echoes the support of EU leaders for Mariano Rajoy's position until the violence used to suppress the referendum of 1 October 2017; it reprimands the Madrid government, while recognizing that the referendum in not legal. The Catalan government is depicted as authoritarian and the word 'purge' is used to describe the actions of the Catalan executive. From this point, the organization of the referendum came to be represented as deliberate stubbornness on the part of the separatists. The tone used was generally negative (48.8%), although at odds with the neutral tone adopted for reportage (44.1%).

The predominant generic frame of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* also reflected conflict (43.5%). Noticeably different, however, was the coverage for 2010-2015 and for 2016-2017. For 2010-2015 the crisis was understood in terms of conflict and responsibility, but for 2016-2017 it was framed as conflict, mostly, but also in terms of economic consequences. The economic theme reflected the dependence of Catalonia on Spain and the economic non-viability of an independent Catalonia. Economic consequences also feature, although to a lesser degree, in articles published in the early years of the study period, mainly along the lines of the instability generated by the separatists expressed in a negative tone (55.3%).

The predominant generic frame of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was again conflict (59%), between separatists/the Catalan government and Spaniards/the Spanish government. Responsibility, at 24.4%, was a secondary frame, with the newspaper laying the blame with Mariano Rajoy for aggravating the conflict. Not only was he

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[1] Defined as when a news story is confined to mere facts or avoids any evaluative comments.

criticized for the police charges of 1 October 2017, but also for only applying punitive measures rather than seeking other solutions. The Catalan separatists were accused of lying and it was claimed that they may have received help from Russia and that Russian media were spreading fake news. The separatists were also viewed as naive for believing that the EU would support or intervene in the independence movement. As for economic consequences, it was stressed that Spain without Catalonia would lose financial capacity and economic muscle. The tone used by the newspaper was significantly more neutral (84.2%) than negative (12.6%).

The predominant generic frame used in *The Guardian* was also mostly conflict (71%), with responsibility featuring far less prominently than in the other newspapers (18.4%). The conflict between Catalonia and Spain was also represented in actions by the Catalan and Spanish governments and the Spanish justice system. The responsibility frame predominated in the 2015 elections and referred to two main actors: the Spanish government, in terms of its immobility and reliance on legal solutions to a conflict understood by the newspaper to be exclusively political; and the EU, in terms of the demands addressed to it by the newspaper to take action regarding the Catalan question. A neutral tone (48.7%) prevailed over a negative tone (43.4%) in this newspaper.

As for *The Daily Telegraph*, its dominant frame was of conflict (72.5% of articles), especially that between Spain and Catalonia. It called on the EU to intervene and mediate in the crisis and criticized the two sides for their incapacity to dialogue and their actions placing the Spanish state and the entire EU at risk. The secondary frame was, in fact, responsibility (11.6% of articles). A negative tone (52.2%) predominated somewhat over a neutral tone (44.9%).

4.3. *Ethnographic study*

The content analysis was complemented by an ethnographic study, based on in-depth interviews conducted individually between 15 and 20 December 2017 with correspondents in Spain for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, The Guardian* and *Le Figaro*. The anonymization of correspondent names (for privacy reasons) does not affect the final result of the investigation. Paragraphs are thus identified by interview as E01, E02, E03 and E04.

4.3.1. Media handling

The correspondents indicated that the Catalan *procés* was the most important foreign news between September and October 2017.

E01, for instance, was astonished at the 44 articles they had published in under two months. E02 was of the opinion that the international media eventually tired of this topic and eventually came to publish far less than in October 2017, when the great tensions and lack of dialogue between the Catalan and Spanish administrations were most evident.

E03 suggested that three main themes have been top of the news agenda in recent years for Spain: Catalan nationalism, Ada Colau and tourism. E03 confessed that Spanish politics is covered relatively less than Catalan politics, adding that 'politically speaking, Spain is not taken seriously.' The great concern of E02's newspaper, in relation to Catalonia, has been the fear of 'the disintegration of an EU state' -- the same fear as expressed regarding Brexit.

For E04, the Catalan conflict was of interest to the media during regional elections and when the political leadership took decisive steps; leaving aside the photographs, 'the mobilization of citizens occupies few columns on a page.'

The foreign correspondents interviewed indicated that the police charges of 1 October, the parliamentary session to approve laws for an independent Catalonia, the 'deferred' declaration of independence (E03), the arrest of separatist leaders and Carles Puigdemont's flight to Brussels were dramatic events that drew the interest of the foreign press. In some cases, news rooms had to call in reinforcements to be able to track the events as they unfolded on and after 1 October.

The correspondents also indicated that they were 'not concerned' (E03) regarding possible pressures from governments because 'diplomats know that any kind of attempt [to pressurize them] would very much bother the correspondent.' (E01).

4.3.2. The solution, according to the correspondents

The correspondents were of the opinion that the sociopolitical crisis between the Catalan and Spanish administrations required mediation given the current 'uncertainty and stagnation' (E01). The solution to the conflict, viewed as lacking dialogue, was an agreed referendum and concessions by both sides.

The police violence of 1 October, the demonstrations and the flags displayed on balconies were the images that the correspondents most identified with the conflict. This was evidence -according to E03 and E01- of how the conflict has polarized Catalan society between separatists and unionists. According to E03: 'The country is split in two. I cannot see how the percentages on each side of the dividing line could shift the current balance. Another matter would be if independence was supported by 65%.'

Conclusions

The Catalan political conflict, locally called the *procés*, has drawn the interest of the international press. Our analysis of the German, French and UK media is evidence of this attention paid to the conflict, with 563 articles published in the six analysed newspapers between 2010 and 2017. The media paid special attention to institutional events in which universal suffrage was a determinant (elections to the

Parliament of Catalonia in 2012 and 2015, the consultation of 9 November 2014 and the referendum of 1 October 2017), whereas demonstrations and grassroots events received more uneven handling. It can be concluded that the media legitimize electoral processes over civil society events, irrespective of the numbers mobilized. Of the EU newspapers analysed, the two French newspapers gave most coverage to the crisis in Catalonia, followed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *The Guardian*. It can be concluded, therefore, that proximity was a main reason for interest but there was also an interest because of parallel internal conflicts, as suggested by the ethnographic results. For example, the UK faces the challenge of Scotland and France that of Corsica and, although the intensity of the demands is different, their newspapers constantly draw comparisons between their own conflicts and the Catalan crisis. The European angle was also very important, with the German newspapers in particular concerned that the Catalan crisis could destabilize the EU politically and economically.

The analysed international media also broadly endorsed the will of the majority of Catalans to vote in a referendum, although they considered that such a referendum had to be agreed between the Catalan and Spanish governments. *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* were particularly incisive regarding this issue, in view of the agreed Scottish referendum on independence. Most newspapers criticized the refusal of the Spanish government to agree on a referendum, but also criticized the unilateralism of the Catalan government.

The sources most used by the international correspondents were experts, especially university academics. Also relied on as sources to a lesser degree were journalists from the Catalan and Spanish media, followed by economists. This points to a conflict partly explained by and for the elites, given that few civil society entities were given a voice, like, for instance, the key associations, Òmnium Cultural and the ANC. Therefore, the notion that the Catalan independence movement is above all a social movement was not reflected in the articles of the newspapers analysed, which instead tended to focus on the political aspect. The intentional media clearly identified three individuals as responsible for the conflict: Artur Mas and Carles Puigdemont, presidents in turn of Catalonia, and Mariano Rajoy, president of Spain since June 2018.

It was also clear that the Catalan *procés* was considered a Spanish conflict with direct repercussions for the EU, an issue that was especially a concern in the French and German newspapers. Destabilization of the Euro was viewed as a direct repercussion that could be unleashed by the Catalan crisis.

The interviewed correspondents also considered -as has already been noted- that the solution to the conflict was an agreed referendum. They also indicated that the high point of media attention coincided with the most critical point of the Spanish-Catalan conflict: the independence referendum held on 1 October 2017.

Finally, the international media underlined the lack of dialogue between the two sides to the conflict and, consistently over the seven years analysed, reiterated the

need to reach a negotiated solution. Of note is the fact that the articles in all the analysed newspapers were balanced in giving equal voice to both sides of the conflict.

The widespread coverage of the Catalan crisis by the European press would indicate that while the conflict was not as 'internal' as insisted on by the Spanish government, neither was it as broad as the Catalan independence movement claimed in its slogan 'the world is watching us' -a clear allusion to the allegedly huge international media coverage of the Catalan independence movement.

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