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Ferreira, Carles (2019) Challenging Majority Nationalism: the Renaming of Streets in Catalonia. *Revista d'Estudis Autònoms i Federals - Journal of Self-Government* (29). pp. 101-138. ISSN 1886-2632.

DOI

DOI: 10.2436/20.8080.01.35

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Challenging Majority Nationalism: the Renaming of Streets in Catalonia

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ABSTRACT After the 2017 pro-independence referendum took place in Catalonia, many municipalities changed the names of the streets to commemorate the event. In order to do so, in some cases the names related to the central state were removed, such as those related to the constitution or the king. By performing a frame analysis, this article explores how the majority nationalist parties, which identify themselves with the state, assessed this initiative made by the pro-independence local authorities. The paper thus offers new evidence to the existing literature on majority nationalism, a subject poorly studied in comparison with the total amount of research devoted to peripheral nationalism. On the basis of street naming as a nation-building tool, two are the main empirical contributions: firstly, the representatives of majority nationalism defended the symbols linked to the state as neutral and representative of the whole citizenry, while those of the minority group were framed as partisan and deeply divisive. On the other hand, we stress the importance of the democratic transition and the 1978 constitution as relevant rhetoric resources of the national narrative in contemporary Spain.

KEYWORDS frame analysis; nationalism; nation-building; national identity.

1. Introduction

Since the outlawed Catalan secessionist referendum took place on 1 October 2017, many municipalities have renamed their streets in order to commemorate that day. In this regard, it is known that a shared symbolisation of history serves political purposes and often takes the form of a legend.¹ More specifically, the naming of streets is a political act that expresses power and

Article received on 01/02/2019; approved on 03/05/2019.

1. Azaryahu and Kook, "Mapping the nation"; Gillis, *Commemorations*; Kertzer, *Politics and symbols*.

authority² and tries to make the successful version of history seem natural.³ In the context of a region like Catalonia that forms part of a state where two nation-building projects are competing for the hearts and minds of the same citizens, this question is by no means a minor one. The spread of dozens of “1 October” streets poses a threat to the official narrative of Spanish nationalism and provides scholars with an enticing opportunity to examine the behaviour of majority nationalism in this situation.

In this respect, despite the existence of a renowned academic tradition which emphasizes nation building through the state,⁴ as well as another focusing on the sociocultural characteristics of groups upon which states are built,⁵ it is only recently that scholars have focused on the identity and behaviour of the majority group in multinational polities.⁶ Very little attention has been paid to them compared with the abundance of studies about regionalist and secessionist movements of minority groups.⁷

In relation to those recent contributions, most authors have focused on state practices as representative of the hegemonic identity⁸ and the unconscious assumption of nationhood,⁹ but the response of majority nationalism in multinational contexts when its narrative is under threat has not yet received sustained attention. However, this point is highly significant for the coexistence of different nation-building projects in the same territory.¹⁰ Furthermore, all human identities are narrated,¹¹ and commemorative street names are instrumental in the symbolic construction of this identity.¹² In this respect, the

2. Palonen, “Reading Street Names Politically”.

3. Azaryahu, “The Power of Commemorative Street Names”.

4. Tilly, *The Formation of Nation States in Western Europe*.

5. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.

6. Barak-Corren, “The Provocative Effect of Law”; Dieckhoff, *Nationalism and the Multinational State*; Gagnon et al., *Contemporary Majority Nationalism*.

7. Alonso, *Challenging the State*; Guibernau, *Nations Without States*; Keating, *Nations Against the State*.

8. Brown, “Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?”; Dieckhoff, *Nationalism and the Multinational State*; Yack, *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community*.

9. Billing, *Banal Nationalism*; Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood”.

10. Norman, *Negotiating Nationalism*.

11. Castiñeira, “Imagined Nations”.

12. Azaryahu and Kook, “Mapping the Nation”.

specific relationship between street naming and divergent nation-building projects in multinational polities has also been largely unexplored.

This paper aims to address this oversight by analysing the Catalan case in 2017. After the secessionist referendum was held on 1 October, certain state political symbols were removed from the street names. Catalan nationalists argued that those symbols were used to oppress their people, while the pro-state authorities supported the representativeness and even the neutrality of their own symbols with respect to all citizens. More particularly, I will consider Girona and Sant Cugat del Vallès¹³ as pro-independence local councils that renamed urban spaces, previously known respectively as “Constitution Square” and “King’s Square”, as “1 October Square”.

The dispute between different national narratives is highly explicit here, as contemporary Spanish nationalism is deeply anchored in the 1978 Constitution,¹⁴ and the monarchy has also played an important role in shaping the modern Spanish identity. Furthermore, the secessionist referendum is already well on the way to becoming a legend of contemporary Catalan nationalism. In this context, a heated debate between the representatives of minority and majority nationalisms was held, allowing us to make a deep analysis of how the latter reacted to the street name change.

The research is therefore driven by the following question: *how was the renaming of streets depicted by representatives of majority nationalism in the context of the 2017 Catalan secessionist referendum?* New evidence in the field is provided by a frame analysis of speeches, media reports and minutes of the debate on street naming in Girona and Sant Cugat del Vallès. The research makes three original contributions. Firstly, it offers new empirical evidence to add to existing theories about majority nationalism. Secondly, it enhances our understanding regarding the contemporary Spanish nationalist discourse. Finally, it provides an in-depth account about a specific historical event, namely, the 2017 pro-independence referendum in Catalonia.

13. In subsection 4.1 I discuss the selection of these cities, but succinctly they are the only Catalan municipalities that have removed a state-based name (“constitution” and “king” squares, respectively) beyond the addition of a new label based on the 2017 referendum. This fact allows us to better analyse the behaviour of majority nationalism in a context of a heated cultural battle.

14. Lecours and Nootens, “Understanding Majority Nationalism”.

The paper begins with some brief contextual remarks about the 2017 secessionist referendum. It then develops the theoretical framework based on the existing literature about majority nationalism, street naming and the contemporary Spanish national project. After this, the methods and results are presented. Finally, the conclusions discuss the empirical findings and end the paper.

2. The Catalan secessionist referendum: a contextual account

In recent years, Catalonia has been going through a turbulent political period.¹⁵ After controversial negotiations on a new statute of autonomy, which was declared partly unconstitutional in 2010 by the judiciary, pro-independence feeling began to grow in this Spanish region. From an average of 15%-20% of the population historically supporting secession, in November 2013 this territorial preference reached its peak (48.5%), and since then it has barely fallen below a threshold of 40%.¹⁶ In a binary question, surveys usually show a virtually tied situation between the supporters of independence and the supporters of Spanish unity (see table 1).¹⁷ Several attempts at a negotiated political solution to this challenge have failed, as has the proposal of a new fiscal agreement (2012) and a consultation about the political future of Catalonia (2014).

Table 1. Share of people who answer “yes” or “no” to the question “do you want Catalonia to be an independent country?”

	Dec 2015	Feb '15	June '15	Oct '15	Nov '15	Mar '16	June '16	Nov '16	Dec '16	Mar '17	June '17	Oct '17
YES	44.5%	44.1%	42.9%	46.7%	46.6%	45.3%	47.7%	44.9%	45.3%	44.3%	41.1%	48.7%
NO	45.3%	48.0%	50.0%	47.8%	48.2%	45.5%	42.4%	45.1%	46.8%	48.5%	49.4%	43.6%

Source: CEO, 2017.

In 2015, the secessionist parties achieved a majority in the Catalan parliament and began the unilateral phase of the so-called “Catalan process” for

15. Cuadras, *Catalonia: A new independent state in Europe?*

16. CEO, Baròmetre d’Opinió Política 3a Onada 2018.

17. CEO, Baròmetre d’Opinió Política 3a Onada 2017.

independence.¹⁸ The plan was to develop “state structures” and to declare independence in 18 months, but in the middle of the period they called a referendum as a way to enhance their legitimacy.¹⁹ However, the poll was quickly outlawed by the courts. Despite this, the regional authorities continued to push to hold it and they organised the vote for 1 October 2017. The Spanish government tried to prevent the poll by force, sending in the police. The result was 1,066 people injured on the Catalan side,²⁰ while 33 police officers were also hurt in the operation.²¹ This event opened the stormiest period in recent Spanish history, resulting in a failed declaration of independence and the subsequent imposition of direct rule from Madrid.

Memories of the referendum are thus deeply divisive in Catalan society. For a considerable number of citizens, it was an act of disobedience against the legitimate rule of law, while for others it was an event of resistance and popular self-organisation. In fact, members of the pro-independence civil society secretly kept and transported the ballot boxes to the polling stations. During the day, crowds of people stood in front of the polling stations, trying to impede the entry of the police. In the end, many people managed to vote and the Catalan government was even able to issue official results. Although numbers may be misleading due to the difficulties encountered during polling, the voter turnout was 43.03% of the electorate — over two million people — and 90% of the votes were cast for secession. The call to vote basically appealed to citizens committed to independence.

For them, the day was an epic event. While non-secessionists mainly considered the vote to be “shameful”, the Catalan nationalists stated that they felt “hope” but also “anger” due to the state repression.²² The event certainly had an impact on everyone. Since then, not only have street names been changed to commemorate the vote, but books, media reports and even documentaries have been launched about it. Nationalist politicians have also fuelled the memory of the referendum for political purposes. The result of this collec-

18. Cuadras, *Catalonia*; Kraus and Vergés, *The Catalan Process*; Martí and Cetrà, “The 2015 Catalan election”; Orriols and Rodon, “The 2015 Catalan election”.

19. Cetrà, Casanas-Adam and Tàrrega, “The 2017 Catalan independence referendum”.

20. Catalan government, *First of October*.

21. Europa Press, “Interior eleva a 33 los policías”.

22. CEO, *Enquesta sobre context polític a Catalunya 2018*.

tively constructed narrative is a mythification of 1 October as a day when the people of Catalonia “won their right to be independent”, “learnt how to be a people” or simply “definitively emotionally disconnected from Spain”.²³

In relation to the latter comment, the political symbols associated with the central state were seriously discredited, enhancing the level of what is known as “disaffection” between the Catalan nationalists and the Spanish national project. For instance, 73.9% of the pro-independence citizens would now not vote for the 1978 Spanish constitution.²⁴ The rule of law embodied in it was the main argument put forward by the central government to deny Catalonia a self-determination referendum. There was a similar reaction to the Spanish king, who gave a hard-line address two days after the poll, pledging to protect non-secessionist Catalans from their own government.²⁵

However, there is also a disconnection between the anti-secessionist citizens and the regional institutions and symbols.²⁶ These events have left a complex scenario in a region that has multiple and often overlapping identities and national loyalties. In this respect, only 28.2% of Catalans feel themselves to be “only Catalan”, while 5.1% state that they are “only Spanish”. The rest of the population have a mixed national identity.²⁷ Views are similar on the independence issue, with the population virtually divided into two halves.²⁸

It is for the reasons extensively set out here that the renaming of streets in Catalonia has been a deeply divisive matter. This point is not only associated with the secessionist referendum, but with the Spanish state symbols as well. Nevertheless, majority nationalism would be expected to depict their particular symbols as representative of all citizens regardless of their political

23. These statements were asserted by pro-independence Catalans after the referendum. All of them are extracted from media reports. About this topic, see Basta, *The state between minority and majority nationalism*, and Mueller, “Catalonia”.

24. CEO, “Baròmetre d’Opinió Política 3a Onada 2018”. About the symbolic dimension of constitutionalism and the legal frame, see Basta, “Imagined institutions”.

25. Sánchez Ugart, “Enquesta de l’Ara”.

26. The CEO and CIS barometers show that non-secessionist Catalan citizens feel more attached to state symbols, hold a worse opinion about the regional government or feel, on average, more Spanish than Catalan.

27. CEO, “Baròmetre d’Opinió Política 3a Onada 2018”.

28. Ibid.

ideology. Before considering the empirical case and presenting the results, the next section provides a wider theoretical framework grounded in the literature about majority nationalism.

3. Majority nationalism and street names: theoretical framework

Two hypotheses arise from the theoretical framework. On the one hand, it is argued that the symbols linked to the state are presented as neutral and representative of all citizens regardless of their ideology, while the pro-independence referendum and the act of renaming the streets are accused of being partisan and deeply divisive (subsection 3.2). On the other hand, it is held that the mainstream rhetoric of majority nationalism in Spain is strongly linked to the democratic transition and its symbols, the constitution being the cornerstone of all of them (subsection 3.3). The theoretical section begins with the exploration of the relationship between nation building and street naming in the multinational state.

3.1. Nation building and street naming in the multinational state

In multinational polities like Spain, possession of the tools used to promote a particular national identity is frequently in dispute. For instance, in 2012 the former Spanish Minister of Education, José Ignacio Wert, opened a bitter controversy by stating that “our aim is to make Catalan children Spanish”.²⁹ The education system in Spain is left to the autonomous communities (regional governments), and the central government wanted to regain control of some powers with the explicit aim of nation building. The underlying assumption was that the Catalan nationalists were using schools to “indoctrinate” children against Spain. The Catalan authorities reacted fiercely to maintain their control over this precious tool for nationalist policies.

This incident is typical of multinational contexts. Minority nationalism usually engages in nation-building projects to strengthen demands for more

29. Sanz, Wert: “Nuestro interés es españolizar a los niños catalanes”.

political autonomy, and vice versa: it demands political autonomy in order to obtain more tools for nation building.³⁰ In comparison, majority nationalism is often wary of giving more powers to the regions with claims of nationhood because they are fearful of this “vicious circle”: autonomy leading to nation building, nation building leading to more demands for autonomy, and so on, until secession appears almost inevitable.³¹

In this sense, state institutions are used as means to incorporate the members of national minorities into the majority national identity, and this aim often collides with the efforts of the former to promote a particular minority identity with the opposite purpose. Nation building in multinational states usually involves some kind of competition between different national identities.³² This paper focuses on the commemorative street names in Catalonia as the scenario in which this cultural battle takes place. The municipal council is the institution responsible for street naming, so the labels chosen depend on the shifting political majorities at local level.

National identity is “constructed by and experienced through shared symbols and representations”.³³ The importance of street names and commemorative spots for competing nation-building projects is, therefore, that they contribute to the symbolic construction of identity and common heritage, usually giving a mythical aura to particular events.³⁴ Street naming is thus a tool for nation building, and, more generally, sites associated with memory are fundamental for the symbolic production of national differences.³⁵

As well as being constructed, identities are also socially negotiated in specific historical and political contexts.³⁶ Usually, the construction and shaping of the national “self” reflects prevalent interests and power relationships.³⁷ In particular, nation building stems from certain needs of political elites and

30. Gagnon et al., *Contemporary Majority Nationalism*.

31. Norman, *Negotiating Nationalism*, 73-74.

32. Miller, “Nationality in Divided Societies”.

33. Azaryahu and Kook, *Mapping the nation*.

34. Azaryahu and Kook, *Mapping the Nation*; Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols*.

35. Castiñeira, “Imagined nations”.

36. *Ibid*, 199.

37. *Ibid*.

their ability to manipulate symbols and notions of common heritage.³⁸ In this sense, the naming of a street is a political act expressing power and authority.³⁹ Here, a particular version of the past serves to legitimise ideological claims as well as justifying as-yet-unfulfilled aspirations.⁴⁰ As Smith argues, nationalist archaeologists use the past for political purposes.⁴¹

The effect of this constructed identity is that it allows an official version of history to be incorporated into spheres of social and spatial practices of everyday life.⁴² This idea goes beyond Billing's "banal nationalism",⁴³ as there is a tendency for the everyday to exist separately from the influence of public institutions.⁴⁴ As Burkitt puts it, "The production of daily reality does not occur somewhere beyond our reach in, say, the 'higher' echelons of the state, and is then imposed upon us. Rather, the reality of everyday life — the sum total of all our relations — is built on the ground, in daily activities and transactions."⁴⁵

Public institutions and their nation-building aims do have an impact on everyday life, but the point here is that the people are ultimately responsible for making sense of or consuming different kinds of knowledge, rationalities and nationalisms that emanate from the institutions.⁴⁶ Nationalism is experienced on a daily basis as a "messy, complex and contested arena of [...] identity formation".⁴⁷ Although the state may want to foster a specific identity by nurturing a particular symbology, people can respond to it in different ways. The renaming of the streets by the pro-independence authorities is an example of groups resisting state projects by removing the former labels, but

38. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols*.

39. Palonen, *Regarding Street Names Politically*.

40. Azaryahu and Kook, *Mapping the Nation*.

41. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism*.

42. Azaryahu, "Street Names and Iconography".

43. Billing, *Banal Nationalism*; Crameri, "Banal catalanism?".

44. Rhys and Merriman, "Hot, Banal and Everyday Nationalism".

45. Burkitt, "The Time and Space of Everyday Life".

46. Rhys and Merriman, "Hot, Banal and Everyday Nationalism".

47. Whitehead, "Between the Marvellous and the Mundane".

the new secessionist name was also contested by the rival group on similar grounds.⁴⁸

The extent to which street naming is contested has to do with its inclusivity. Local authorities can accept the symbols of different groups, and they can choose names that may be consensual for both communities. However, strong partisanship can also occur, as some nationalist politicians may want to promote an event or political figure rejected by the rival national group.⁴⁹ In contexts of polarisation like the one we are analysing, the goal of inclusiveness is difficult to reach. Each of the two nationalisms protests against the other's symbols, and it seems that no commemorative street name can be consensually agreed.

To conclude this subsection, we have thus two very different aims. On the one hand, secessionists wanted to “rename the past”, a typical action in contexts of regime change.⁵⁰ In fact, the pro-independence Catalan authorities wanted to found their own new regime, but failed. On the other hand, the state wants to recover full authority in the Catalan region and its representatives cannot accept losing the power to impose their official national narrative. If commemoration and history are used to legitimise and consolidate state dominance, the street-naming battle is definitely a crucial one for the reasons already extensively set out.

3.2. Majority nationalism and the alleged neutrality of the state

The term “nationalism” is one of the most hotly contested and controversial concepts in political theory. One of the major scholars of nationalism, Anthony D. Smith, once noted that this term has been used to refer to political processes, feelings of identity, forms of political discourse, ideology and political platforms of all kinds.⁵¹ The efforts to build a concise but also a widely accepted definition of nationalism have not been very successful. Never-

48. Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*.

49. Norman, *Negotiating Nationalism*, 47.

50. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”.

51. Smith, *National Identity*, 72.

theless, the following statement by Gellner is often quoted: “Nationalism is primarily a political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent.”⁵² More recently, Hechter gave a similar description of nationalism as “collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit”.⁵³

According to these views, nationalism is mainly about self-determination. In this respect, minority or stateless nationalism will often seek a political unit outside the existing state, while majority nationalism will try to remove the competing national projects within its borders. Therefore, when the boundaries between the governance unit and the nation finally converge, nationalism is supposed to disappear. Nevertheless, the problem with this characterisation is that political institutions will continue to nurture a particular identity and to foster some degree of national loyalty and solidarity among the members of the community. As Wayne Norman wrote about national self-determination, it is also essential for this national “self” to be “created, nurtured, shaped and motivated”,⁵⁴ and we can also understand these actions as a form of nationalism.

In line with Norman’s assertions, I hold that nationalism articulates its project both in terms of self-determination and in terms of nation building, or literally “the attempt to determine the ‘self’ of the nation”.⁵⁵ Nation mobilising, as a strategy to generate support for a policy on the grounds of national feeling, would also be a form of nationalist politics. In this respect, if minority nationalism is usually the project of a stateless group, we can understand majority nationalism as the “articulation of a national community that usually has its core within the majority group and/or within the representations of the state’s national identity as that group sees it”.⁵⁶ Moreover, it seeks to strengthen the state with which it so strongly identifies.⁵⁷ In the context of multinational polities like Spain, we can clearly identify a Spanish majority nationalism, which is embedded in state practices, symbols and discourse;

52. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

53. Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, 7.

54. Norman, *Negotiating Nationalism*, 23-29

55. *Ibid*, 23

56. Lecours and Nootens, “Understanding Majority Nationalism”, 10

57. Coakley, “National Majorities in New States”, 102

and several minority nationalisms, among which the Catalan case is most relevant here.

However, it is also worth noting the conceptual strength of the category “state nationalism”, or “state-led nationalism” in Tilly’s words,⁵⁸ although I use the term “majority nationalism”. On the one hand, in Catalonia it is less clear that the majority group is that of the people who identify with the state. The state must also be more present in the region with its nationalising efforts precisely because its hegemony is challenged by Catalan nationalists. On the other hand, the people who identify with the state in Catalonia constitute, with the rest of Spaniards, a clear majority group in the whole country and this also affects their perspective within Catalonia in the way the next paragraph sets out.

The case for using the term “majority nationalism” is grounded on the idea that the shape and direction of nationalism are strongly affected by public institutions, but people’s beliefs and practices are also essential in the reproduction of a particular national identity. The majority group not only passively receives some form of nation building by the state, the state is also influenced by the sensitivities of this majority group. There is thus a two-way effect. The best way to sum up this idea is to say that the state is first and foremost projecting the nationalism of the majority group, and the majority group, in turn, reinforces its own identity and national loyalty with the nationalising efforts of the state. In this respect, it is assumed that those Catalans who identify with the state constitute a part of this majority group, and thus it is appropriate to label their representatives in the region as “majority nationalists” although *within* Catalonia they may not form a clear majority.

Beyond extreme behaviours of national majorities, such as the Serbs or Hutus in the early 1990s, the truth is that in liberal democracies the nationalism projected by the state is barely visible. States usually implement nation-building strategies in almost imperceptible ways with the help of state apparatuses such as the education system, political practices, symbols or traditions.⁵⁹ In fact, these symbols are essential because they are hardly noticed, falling into

58. Tilly, “States and Nationalism in Europe”.

59. Eisenstadt and Rokkan, *Building states and nations*.

Billing's category of "banal nationalism".⁶⁰ They are useful to invoke, transport, and define particular visions of a shared national identity.⁶¹

On the other hand, minority nationalism emerges through its interaction with the central state. Precisely because it challenges the symbols and practices of the majority group, which are taken for granted, it is frequently labelled "nationalist" in a pejorative way, while the majority see themselves merely as "patriotic" and non-nationalist.⁶² We know, however, that we live in a world of nations and no one escapes a minimal degree of national loyalty and identity, even though people in established nations tend to see nationalism as belonging to others.⁶³

In this respect, the majority group and its elites tend to talk about their allegiance to the state by appealing to universal claims like democracy or liberal values. In contrast with this, minority nationalism is usually seen as, by nature, bad, regressive, and irrationally based.⁶⁴ It is often viewed as a premodern force intending to protect or promote old-fashioned aspects and privileges, while the majority group supposedly stands for a national blanket settlement, concerned only about rights and liberties for all. The empirical analysis of this paper reflects on and provides new insights regarding this issue.

However, the point is that the state is already promoting the identity of the majority group and institutionalising its main features and practices. A state's neutrality in many cases serves to protect the national ambitions of the dominant community.⁶⁵ In established polities, the idea of "coexistence" is defined by and around the majority group, and in this sense identity issues are rarely discussed because this group tends to see itself as the bearer of shared national values.⁶⁶

60. Billing, *Banal Nationalism*.

61. Nieguth and Raney, "Nation-Building and Canada's National Symbolic Order".

62. Dieckhoff, "The Paradoxes of Contemporary Nationalism".

63. Billing, "Banal Nationalism".

64. Brown, "Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?".

65. Dieckhoff, "The Paradoxes of Contemporary Nationalism".

66. Dupont, "Cultural Diversity and Modernity".

For all these reasons, majority nationalism is expected to frame its symbols as neutral and representative of all citizens regardless of their ideology, while the secessionists would allegedly be accused of being deeply divisive. The next section deals with the majority nationalism under discussion in this paper, namely, Spanish nationalism. I argue that its contemporary features and narrative were largely created during the democratic transition at the end of the 1970s, and thus the rhetoric of the majority nationalism in Spain is strongly grounded in that period. Furthermore, the constitution and the crown are specifically analysed since they are the symbols under dispute in our empirical case.

3.3. Spanish majority nationalism: 1978 as a turning point

After 40 years of hot nationalism under Franco's authoritarian regime, the democratic transition required a redefinition of 'Spanishness' by the end of the 1970s.⁶⁷ The dictatorship was characterised by the defence of an ethnic concept of Spain, based on religion and the Castilian language. The dictator also launched highly centralist policies⁶⁸ and attempted to suppress minority nationalisms by repressing their languages and cultures.⁶⁹ The monopolisation of the Spanish nationalist discourse by Franco's regime ultimately discredited the national symbols after his death in 1975. For instance, particularly among liberals and left-wingers, the very use of the word "Spain" was avoided in public over that period.⁷⁰

In that context, the symbols of the democratic transition contributed to generating new benchmarks for modern Spain. The vindication of its accomplishments replaced the old Francoist rhetoric as an attempt to shape the national identity into a more liberal and democratic paradigm.⁷¹ An attempt was also made to "water down" the national project to include minority nations. The 1978 constitution was seen as the institutional embodiment of the new regime. In addition, other elements, such as the figure of the king and the ideas

67. Núñez, "What is Spanish Nationalism Today?".

68. Muro and Quiroga, "Spanish Nationalism".

69. Ibid.

70. Santiago-Guervós, *El Léxico Político de la Transición Española*, 192-251.

71. Núñez, "What is Spanish Nationalism Today?".

of consensus and modernisation, have been keystones of the contemporary Spanish national discourse.⁷²

Furthermore, all these factors are still present in the country's mainstream politics. The media and the politicians of both left and right actively appeal to the "spirit of the transition", which is still identified with democracy, consensus and unity. The period is largely seen as a time when people from very different perspectives agreed to cease hostilities and build a common future. As Druliolle puts it, "the Spanish transition is remembered as an epic journey to democracy" which is "omnipresent" in contemporary hegemonic political discourse.⁷³

The transition is also "a symbolic and normative resource that is reactivated to overcome periods of crisis",⁷⁴ and the current political situation in Catalonia is not an exception. In recent years, the adjective "constitutionalist", which is supposed to define the parties accepting the legacy of the democratic transition, has been closely identified with taking a strong stance against independence. Moreover, other projects that also challenge the established political setting are rejected for similar reasons,⁷⁵ since it is common to identify the 1978 regime with the very idea of democracy. Just as the 1 October referendum has become a new myth of Catalan nationalism, I hold that the *transición* and its symbols are undoubtedly key features of the contemporary Spanish national narrative.

In particular, the importance of the 1978 constitution for the secessionist challenge derives from the undiscussed principle of national unity. Despite their quite different stances on 'Spanishness', the so-called "constitutionalist" parties agree with the idea that the Spanish people form the sole collective entity enjoying full sovereignty.⁷⁶ Article 2 of the constitution clearly states

72. Later we will see the importance of the king. Juan Carlos I in particular was seen as the deliverer of democracy during the Spanish transition. Even the Socialist Party, which supposedly defines itself as republican, is a strong supporter of the monarchy.

73. Druliolle, "Democracy Captured by its Imaginary".

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. The Popular Party, the Socialist Party and Citizens define themselves as "constitutionalists". Nevertheless, while the socialists have historically been more nationally inclusive, upholding a "plural Spain", the other two organisations take a hard-line position on 'Spanishness', and are less tolerant of minority nationalisms.

that “the constitution is based on the indivisible unity of the Spanish nation, common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards”. This article has been widely used to rule out a referendum about the independence of Catalonia.⁷⁷ In this sense, Spanish politicians have been able to mask a nationalist claim about the country’s unity behind the liberal and democratic rhetoric of constitutionalism.⁷⁸

Along similar lines, from the mid-80s a particular translation of the Habermasian concept of “constitutional patriotism”⁷⁹ has provided new sources of legitimacy for modern Spanish nationalism. The democratic transition and its resulting constitution is often expressed as a founding moment of contemporary Spain, allegedly based on an agreement about the rights and liberties of all citizens, regardless of the region where they live.⁸⁰ From this point of view, minority nationalists are seen as a threat to this liberal, pluralistic and democratic common project. The empirical section will provide new evidence regarding this theoretical assumption.

Nonetheless, this rhetoric clashes with the largely accepted assumption that Spain was not created in 1978 but had existed for a long time before this. In this sense, the constitution is the renewed expression of a pre-existing national community with ancient roots. In line with the writings of the well-known philosopher Ortega y Gasset, for many people Spain “consists of a mixture of historical determinism grounded in the idea that Castile had been the forging power of Spanish unity under the monarchy [...] and a search for a ‘common project’ for all the Spanish peoples, expressed initially during the discovery of America”.⁸¹ For instance, the socialist and one of the “fathers of the constitution”, Gregorio Peces-Barba, once stated that “we take for granted that Spain, as a Nation, did exist before the Constitution”.⁸² Some authors have provocatively labelled all these ideas “constitutional nationalism”.⁸³

77. Constitutional Court, STC 114/2017.

78. Cetrà and Harvey, “Explaining accommodation and resistance”.

79. See Habermas, *The New Conservatism*.

80. Muñoz, *From national Catholicism to democratic patriotism?*

81. Núñez, “What is Spanish Nationalism Today?”.

82. Quoted by Bastida, *La Nación Española y el Nacionalismo Constitucional*, 156.

83. *Ibid.*

Before the left-wing party Podemos entered the political stage in May 2014, hardly any Spanish political leaders ever spoke about multinationalism.⁸⁴ This nation in existence before the 1978 constitution is strongly identified with the symbols, language, practices and beliefs of the majority group. Both in terms of recognition and institutional arrangements,⁸⁵ the so-called “historical nationalities”, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country, have not been fully accommodated within the framework of the state. In this respect, while minority nationalists saw the 1978 constitution as an opportunity to move towards some kind of multinational federalism, for most Spanish parties it was the final stage of the decentralisation process.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the 2010 court resolution against the new statute of autonomy was perceived precisely as a definitive “failure of accommodation” for many Catalans,⁸⁷ opening the way to secessionist demands.

Beyond the constitution, the Crown is another relevant element both for the transition period and for the contemporary official Spanish narrative. It is widely accepted that the former King Juan Carlos I played a crucial role in 1981, allegedly saving the country from a military coup. He was initially also seen as a powerful mediator for reconciling competing nationalisms within Spain,⁸⁸ and the monarchy was the most highly valued institution by Spaniards in all surveys until the outbreak of the economic crisis. His heir Felipe took the throne in June 2014, amid several corruption scandals regarding the monarchy. During the Catalan crisis of 2017, the new king gave a hard-line speech using the rhetoric about the constitution as a democratic tenet in defence of the country’s unity.⁸⁹

84. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some socialist politicians recognise that Spain is a “nation of nations”, although it has never been an official position of the PSOE during the democratic period.

85. On the latter issue, some authors speak of “incomplete federalism” (see Grau, 2000). Although the regions have a reasonable level of self-government, the power-sharing dimension of the Spanish territorial arrangement is definitely underdeveloped. Minority nationalists are not explicitly represented in central institutions, and they barely hold typical federal tools to directly influence the state’s governance.

86. Núñez, *What is Spanish Nationalism Today?*

87. Serrano, “Catalonia: a Failure of Accommodation?”.

88. Conversi, *Spain’s Path to Democratic Transition*.

89. Some scholars criticised the speech as inappropriate because the monarchy has a constitutional duty of neutrality. For them, the king gave up his role of arbitrator and acted as a partisan politician. The “constitutionalist” parties, however, celebrated his intervention as guarantor of the Spanish unity and the rule of law amid a deep constitutional crisis.

To summarise this subsection, I have argued that the democratic transition is at the core of contemporary Spanish official narrative. I have also presented the symbols under dispute in our empirical case: the constitution and the Crown. This, together with the assumption that majority nationalism tends to present its symbols as neutral, while accusing the other's as divisive (section 3.2), have laid the ground to understand the case under analysis.

4. Presentation and findings of the research

4.1. Case selection

The case under study is Catalonia, since it is appropriate and relevant for the purposes of the paper. Catalonia is considered a stateless nation⁹⁰ within a multinational framework. In Spain, both a majority nationalism and several minority nationalisms coexist. Moreover, the events of October 2017 and its consequences give scholars an enticing opportunity to study how the former reacted to the latter's pro-independence initiatives. More specifically the research is aimed at discovering how majority nationalism depicted the renaming of streets due to the 1 October 2017 referendum.

In this respect, countless municipalities have renamed their streets in Catalonia since the referendum took place. However, most of them have simply named new spots, or have changed neutral street names like those related to trees or mountains. For the purposes of our research, it is especially interesting to analyse those cases in which the pro-independence authorities have commemorated the referendum but have also removed those names linked to the state. This fact allows us to better analyse the cultural battle between both nationalisms and thus see more clearly the behaviour of that of the majority. Only two cities fit into this criterion: Girona and Sant Cugat del Vallès. The former names were "constitution" and "king" respectively. The examination of only a few municipalities allows us to make a deeper analysis, which is most suited to our needs. The trade-off between breadth and depth is easy to resolve here with respect to the purposes of the paper.

90. Guibernau, "Nations without states"; Keating, "nations against the state".

In particular, we are dealing with two medium-sized municipalities⁹¹ with a secessionist majority in almost all the elections held since 2015, when the Catalan process began. They are above the Catalan average in this respect (see Table 1). After the referendum of 2017, many individual citizens and civil organisations pushed for the replacement of the former names, framed as symbols of Spanish repression, in order to commemorate 1 October.

Table 2. Secessionist vote share for several elections since 2015

Election	Local 2015	Regional 2015	General 2015	General 2016	Regional 2017
Girona	62.71%	64.63%	46.99%	48.21%	62.16%
Sant Cugat	63.38%	57.98%	40.72%	41.76%	55.26%
Average for Catalonia	45.21%	47.80%	31.06%	32.63%	47.50%

The parties considered as pro-independence are CiU and its successors as well as ERC and CUP. Source: own creation.

1,522 signatures were gathered in Girona supporting the renaming of “Constitution Square” as “1 October Square” during the weeks after the poll. The initiative’s promoters held that the constitution had been used to assault peaceful citizens and, for that reason, it ceased to represent the majority of people.⁹² As we have argued, the constitution as the embodiment of the rule of law was the main argument used by the Spanish government against the referendum. In Girona, the “constitutionalist” parties (PP, PSOE and Cs) gathered 31.68% of the votes in the general elections of 2016, while in the rest of Spain they received 68.7% of the popular vote. 18 out of 25 local councillors are pro-independence.

Accordingly, and after a heated debate, a meeting of the full municipal council approved the proposal to rename “Constitution Square” as “1 October Square” by a large majority in February 2018. The square was officially inaugurated with its new name two months later. That day, a commemorative plaque was put up with the following controversial statement: “During the referendum held on 1 October 2017, the citizens of Girona were brutally assaulted by the Spanish security forces while freely and peacefully exercising

91. Girona has 98,255 inhabitants (2016) and is located in the north of Catalonia. The former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont is an ex-mayor of the city (2011-2016). Sant Cugat del Vallès is near Barcelona and has a population of 89,516 (2017).

92. CCMA, “Madrenas: “la constitució espanyola no mereix cap homenatge”, 201.

their right to vote. This square is intended to offer testimony of admiration and remembrance of the people's dignified behaviour and courage".

By contrast, non-secessionist politicians and "constitutionalist" platforms argued that the 1978 constitution is part of a common history and represents many people in Girona. In this respect, some of them asked the local authority not to change the name of Constitution Square, suggesting that the local political majorities should mark a new and as-yet unnamed street or square with the 1ST of October label. Other voices simply did not agree with naming anything after this pro-independence event.

On the other hand, Sant Cugat del Vallès removed the name of *King's Square* dedicated to Juan Carlos I in May 2018. Like the Spanish constitution, for many this king is a symbol of freedom and democracy as he is supposed to have saved the country from a military coup in 1981. However, his heir Felipe VI gave a hard-line address on 3 October 2017, two days after the referendum, in which he opposed independence and promised to protect non-secessionist Catalans from their own government. This speech dramatically reduced his already weak popularity among pro-independence citizens.⁹³ The Spanish state survey agency ceased to ask questions about the monarchy in 2015 when the institution's approval ratings were low not only in Catalonia but in the whole country.⁹⁴ The last survey launched in July 2018 by another company stated that support for the Crown in Catalonia barely reaches 20 percentage points.⁹⁵

In this respect, a full meeting of the Sant Cugat del Vallès council agreed to change the name of "King's Square" to "1 October Square" by 18 votes in favour and seven against in May 2018. Four months later, the council put up a commemorative plaque with a statement by a deceased secessionist leader: "We are not here to find a dream, we are the dream".⁹⁶ The decision was also contested by many citizens. Some people, as republicans, felt it was right to change the name of the square, but they did not agree with the pro-inde-

93. Sánchez Ugart, "Enquesta de L'Ara".

94. CIS, Barómetro de Abril.

95. CTXT, "El apoyo a la monarquía".

96. The statement is from Muriel Casals, a former president of Òmnium Cultural, one of the main secessionist civil organisations in Catalonia. Casals died as a result of a road accident in 2016. At the time, she was also a member of the Catalan Parliament.

pendence proposal. For others, as in Girona, it was simply unacceptable to change the name.

4.2. Methodology

The proposed research question — *how was the renaming of streets depicted by the representatives of majority nationalism in the context of the 2017 Catalan secessionist referendum?* — is typical of qualitative studies, and particularly those aimed at discovering how a certain event was covered by the media and what was said and in what way.⁹⁷ Moreover, the nature of the research question leads us to select a method based on frame analysis as the best way to answer the enquiry,⁹⁸ because frame analysis enables the researcher to know precisely how a particular actor (majority nationalists) depicts a certain object (renaming of the streets).

Framing is understood as an act of selecting “certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”.⁹⁹ A frame thus denotes a “schemata of interpretation”¹⁰⁰ of the social world. This sort of analysis helps us to recognise how majority nationalism defined the renaming of streets in Catalonia and the moral assessment of it.

More precisely, we have analysed both their assessment of their own symbols — the constitution and the monarchy — and their evaluation regarding the pro-independence leaders, the secessionist referendum and the act of renaming itself. The second step in the research has taken a mix between a deductive and inductive approach by identifying the main frames used by the actors under study and grouping them into several categories. The main frames introduced in the theoretical framework and its operationalisation are as follows:

97. Altheide, *Qualitative media analysis*.

98. Helbling, Hoeglinger and Wüest, “How Political Parties Frame European Integration”.

99. Entman, “Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm”.

100. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 21.

State neutrality and representativeness

Stemming from the theoretical framework, I hold that the representatives of majority nationalism in Catalonia perceive their own symbols as neutral and representative of all citizens regardless of their ideology, while the pro-independence symbols are accused of being partisan and deeply divisive. The frame of neutrality has been operationalised in three dimensions:

- a) Coexistence, meaning that the state symbols ensure coexistence because they represent all citizens regardless of their ideology.
- b) Rule of law, meaning that the state symbols follow the legitimate rule of law, thus identifying legality and official status with a neutral framework.
- c) Democracy, meaning that the state symbols are the embodiment of the ideals of democracy and liberal values within which all citizens live. The underlying assumption, as has been pointed out in the theoretical framework, is that democracy and liberal values have no national content.

Pro-independence partisanship and division

I hold that the representatives of majority nationalism framed both the secessionist referendum event and the act of renaming itself as partisan and deeply divisive. The secessionist leaders were likewise accused. The operationalisation of this idea is as follows:

- a) Division, meaning that the pro-independence activities endanger coexistence because the secessionist referendum is partisan and the act of renaming the streets is deeply divisive.
- b) Illegality, meaning that the 1 October referendum was illegal and the act of renaming the street situates the city beyond the margins of law, which generates division and social tensions.

Symbols rooted in a historical myth

According to the theoretical subsection 3.3, I argue that the historical narrative underpinning this political debate is that of the democratic transition. Here, the constitution and the crown are seen by majority nationalists as benchmarks of that period, so the reason for maintaining them is to respect the 1978 collective success. In contrast, the pro-independence leaders are accused of wanting to rewrite history. The frame here is thus coded as “historical”.

Others

In an inductive way, two other frames have been identified, which will be coded as “others” because both are theoretically irrelevant. Nevertheless, in pursuit of transparency and integrity they are described here and they will also be explained in the presentation of the results. On the one hand, the representatives of majority nationalism have referred to the majority principle both in terms of the support of state symbols—meaning that the majority of citizens feel attached to them — and rejection of the purposes of the secessionist leaders — meaning that most people actually do not want to change the street’s name —.

On the other hand, the actors under study have invoked the frame of “uselessness” regarding the act of renaming the street. With this idea, they expressed that the renaming initiative does not improve people’s life and they also meant that the only purpose of this activity is to improve the pro-independence parties electoral expectations.

More than 20 fragments of documents have been analysed, covering the minutes and records of full council meetings, political speeches and media reports (see appendix). The choice has been exhaustive. The actors under study are the representatives of majority nationalism, which include the speakers for the so-called constitutionalist platforms, the Popular Party (PP), Citizens (Cs) and the Socialist Party (PSC). The last of these cases is more ambiguous,¹⁰¹ but

101. The Catalan socialist party is, formally, an independent branch of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE). Some of their members even consider Catalonia a nation, but all of them are federalists and clearly stand against a referendum on self-determination. Although

has been included because of their clear constitutionalist and anti-secessionist referendum stance. The representatives of the “Commons” and the Green Party (ICV) have been excluded from the analysis as they are against secession but do not share the hegemonic standpoint about the idea of Spain.¹⁰² Both the Socialists and the “Commons”/Greens are the parties showing the most mixed identities in Catalonia.¹⁰³

The selected documents have been coded using the core sentences method. By “core sentence” (CS) we mean the most basic structure of each actor’s statement. It includes the subject (political actor), the object (issue) and the moral assessment about the latter (frame). 98 of them have been gathered in total. I allowed for more than one frame per CS because some of them invoke multiple frames. The number of coded frames is thus superior (107) to the total number of CS. The reader may think that the total number of CS is rather small. This is true for two reasons: on the one hand, and although my selection has been exhaustive, the coverage of the renaming initiative was not very sizeable. On the other hand, I have only coded sentences that are clearly attributable to an actor and to a specific stance, leaving uncoded those propositions that are either irrelevant for the subject under study or ambiguously worded.

My approach differs from other qualitative content studies, which typically focus on the whole document, by coding the sentence here at propositional level. This allows us to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the subject under study, and enhances the transparency of both the methods and the results. Table 2 shows four examples — one per issue — of core sentence coding. For reasons of space, the categories relating to basic data — city, type of document and date — have been removed. I have found only one frame that has not been coded. In Girona, the mayor (CiU) avoided mentioning that the

they support constitutional reform, the PSC share with the other representatives of majority nationalism a positive stance towards democratic transition, maintaining the importance of the 1978 constitution. In short, they clearly feel attached to the Spanish national project, even though they would like to reform the current political context.

102. Unlike the Socialist Party, the Greens are far more critical of the 1978 constitution and are also clearly republicans. Some branches even talk about going beyond “the 1978 regime”. Although a majority of them are against independence, they agree with secessionists on a referendum about the political future of Catalonia. Furthermore, they tend to avoid the nationalist debate and focus on right-left issues.

103. See CEO, 2018a: 60.

renaming proposal was against the constitution, while the secessionist left-wing leader (CUP) did mention it. In this respect, the Popular Party speaker referred to the CUP spokesperson as “honest”. The remark is clearly ironic and this is the reason for the exclusion.

Core sentence 61: “The origins of democracy and freedom in Catalonia are in the 1978 constitution.”

Core sentence 76: “1 October is only a symbol of division and social tension, illegality and an institutional coup.”

Core sentence 62: “Your support for the most radical secessionism, your sectarianism, and your lack of foresight, makes you [the CiU mayor] a real danger to social peace in our city.”

Core sentence 23: “They also talk about majorities, but I know many people in Girona that don’t agree with the change, and with this decision they are not being respected.”

Table 3. Examples of the coding of the core sentences

Core sentence	Actor	Issue	Frame 1	Frame 2
61	PSC	State-based name	Democracy	Historical
76	Cs	Secessionist referendum	Division	Illegality
62	Cs	Secessionist leaders	Division	
23	PP	The act of renaming	Other	

Source: own creation.

4.3. Results

Table 3 shows how the representatives of majority nationalism depicted their own symbols: the constitution in the case of Girona and the monarchy in Sant Cugat del Vallès. Both are the symbols that were removed from the street names and substituted for the commemoration of the October 2017 secessionist referendum.

Table 4. Number of core sentences referring to how the representatives of majority nationalism depicted the symbols linked to the state (the constitution in the case of Girona and the Crown in the case of Sant Cugat del Vallès)

Frames	The Constitution	The Crown	TOTAL
Coexistence	8	0	8
Rule of Law	3	0	3
Democracy	7	0	7
Historical	6	1	7
Others	3	1	4
TOTAL	27	2	29

Source: own creation.

At first glance, we can clearly see that the constitution is far more vindicated than the crown. 27 core sentences are attributable to statements regarding the Spanish *carta magna*, while only 2 propositions talk about the monarchy. This is consistent with the theoretical framework given the importance of the constitution in contemporary Spain. The low popularity of the monarchy in Catalonia could also give sense to these results, and would explain why in Sant Cugat del Vallès the representatives of majority nationalism focused on the critique against the pro-independence referendum rather than in vindicating the old symbol.

In this respect, the monarchy was defended once in historical terms and on another occasion under the “majority principle” frame — coded as “other” —. Provocatively, the Cs spokesman in Sant Cugat del Vallès asked the mayor: “If tomorrow we bring 1,500 signatures to change the name of the square to “King Felipe VI”, would you respect ‘the will of the people?’”.¹⁰⁴ He was referring ironically to one of the slogans of the Catalan secessionist movement, namely, that “the people” had voted for independence and therefore the authorities had to respect their will.

In Girona, the constitution was mainly framed as a tool which ensures co-existence. For instance, the leader of the Popular Party in this city stated that “the constitution represents us all because we all fit into it; it is a focal point for everyone”.¹⁰⁵ In the same speech, she also referred to democracy and

104. Sant Cugat del Vallès City Council, *Acta del Ple* 21/05/2018.

105. Girona City Council, *Acta del Ple* 12/02/2018.

liberal values: “The constitution sets the rules of the game and guarantees freedom, security and equality for everyone.”¹⁰⁶ This rhetoric, along with the importance of a common history that cannot be removed, were relevant arguments supporting the former commemorative street name. On this subject, the spokesperson for the socialist party in Girona stated that “This is the mistake of street renaming — attempting to remove a milestone about our collective history just because many consider it to be superseded.”¹⁰⁷ Finally, the constitution as the embodiment of the rule of law was the least important frame, together with the majority principle.

One notable difference should be pointed out here regarding the different parties. While the Popular Party and Citizens activated the neutrality frame through its three dimensions specified in the methodological section — co-existence, rule of law and democracy —, the Socialist Party made their case in support of the constitution based on the historical narrative related to the democratic transition.

Table 5. Number of core sentences referring to how the representatives of majority nationalism depicted the attitude of the secessionist leaders, the act of renaming the streets and their assessment of the pro-independence referendum

Frame	Secessionist leaders	Secessionist referendum	Act of renaming	TOTAL
Division	33	4	20	57
Illegality	5	3	0	8
Others	1	0	12	13
TOTAL	39	7	32	78

Source: own creation.

If 29 core sentences were dedicated to vindicating the former symbols, almost 80 of them referred to the attitudes and actions of the pro-independence side (see table 4). This means that, in this debate, the representatives of majority nationalism prioritised the attacks against secessionism rather than the defence of their own symbols. More specifically, the assessment of the 2017 referendum received limited attention, both the secessionist attitudes and the act of renaming the streets being the main topics in the debate.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

On the one hand, the secessionist leaders were primarily accused of “sectarianism” and “radicalism”, construed here as frames based on division. The spokesperson of Citizens in Sant Cugat offers a good example: “your support for the most radical secessionism, your sectarianism, and your lack of foresight, makes you [the CiU mayor] a real danger to social peace in our city”.¹⁰⁸ The pro-independence local authorities were also accused of promoting illegalities, as the spokesperson of Citizens in Girona stated: “you [a CiU councillor] have wanted to destroy the established law by changing the name of a square”.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, the secessionist referendum was framed as both a divisive and an illegal event.

Finally, the act of renaming the street was not accused of being illegal, basically because it is a recognised competence of the municipality. Nevertheless, the decision to remove the former names to commemorate the 2017 referendum was mostly framed as deeply divisive. The socialist speaker in Girona, for instance, expressed that “vindicating the referendum didn’t imply injuring anybody: respect and reconciliation are essential in order to guarantee civil unity and social cohesion”.¹¹⁰ The representatives of majority nationalism also activated two other frames: the “majority principle”, meaning that the initiative did not actually have popular support; and the “uselessness” argument. The latter means that the renaming of the street does not improve people’s life: “this proposal isn’t urgent and does not respond to a real need in our city. It is a populist, electioneering proposal making its supporters out to be victims” (by Citizens speaker in Girona).¹¹¹

Regarding the role of the different parties, it should be noted that the Popular Party and Citizens were far harsher than the Socialist Party in the debate. The socialists expressed their position in a more moderate way, although all of them were highlighting the divisive character of the secessionist attitudes and decisions. Precisely this frame, division, was the main argument against the pro-independence initiatives. This is also consistent with the most widely used frame to support the former symbol, which is coexistence.

108. Sant Cugat del Vallès City Council, Acta del Ple 21/05/2018.

109. Girona City Council, Acta del Ple 12/02/2018.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

5. Summary and conclusions

This article is grounded on the literature about majority nationalism, a phenomenon that is far less widely studied than the features and behaviour of the minority or stateless groups. More specifically, the aim of this research has been to explore one of the features of majority nationalism in Western countries: namely, that it tends to depict its attributes as neutral and representative of all citizens regardless of their ideology, while accusing the minority group's symbols and attitudes of division and partisanship. This fact stems from the idea that the majority group describes its attachment to the state as a form of non-nationalistic patriotism, the nationalists always being the others.¹¹²

The case under study has been Catalonia after the events of October 2017, when the local authorities decided to rename the commemorative streets about the Spanish constitution (city of Girona) and the monarchy (city of Sant Cugat del Vallès) by adding a new label in remembrance of the 2017 pro-independence referendum. The cultural battle between the majority and the minority national communities is very explicit here, and thus provides scholars with an enticing opportunity to examine the behaviour of majority nationalism in this situation.

In this respect, the empirical findings largely meet the theoretical expectations. Although several surveys show that both the Spanish and the Catalan symbols under scrutiny do not generate a broad consensus, the representatives of majority nationalism framed their own symbols as neutral and representative of all citizens regardless of their ideology, while depicting the 2017 secessionist referendum and the act of renaming the streets as partisan and deeply divisive. The role of the rule of law is also important since the other main frame activated to denounce secessionism is the illegality of the poll. Moreover, the local authorities were accused of radicalism and sectarianism for the renaming initiative. Overall, the spokespersons' statements focused more on the criticism of the pro-independence side than on the defence of their own symbols.

112. Billing, "Banal nationalism"; Dieckhoff, "The Paradoxes of Contemporary Nationalism".

By performing a frame analysis of the speeches, media reports and records of that debate, three frames have been highlighted regarding the alleged neutrality of the state symbols, especially the constitution. On the one hand, coexistence, meaning that it ensures a proper level of social harmony because it represents all citizens and is a focal point for everyone. On the other hand, the parties under study stressed that this symbol follows the legitimate rule of law, thus identifying legality and official status with a neutral framework. Finally, the constitution has also been framed as the embodiment of democracy and liberal values.

Two points are worth noting regarding this issue. First of all, the constitution in Girona is far more vindicated than the figure of the king in Sant Cugat del Vallès, which is barely mentioned. This fact is maybe due to the fact that the monarchy has a low level of support in Catalonia, even among non-secessionist citizens, while the constitutionalist rhetoric of democracy and liberal values is very engaging for those who identify with the state. Secondly, there are strong differences between the political parties. The representatives of the Popular Party and Citizens present a harsh discourse against the pro-independence symbols and attitudes, while the spokespersons of the Socialist Party project a more nuanced speech and even tolerate the new pro-independence label, but on the condition of maintaining the former one. In contrast with the PP and Cs, the Socialist Party in Catalonia has a more mixed national identity and is formally an independent branch of the Spanish PSOE.

Moreover, the Socialists in Girona made the case for maintaining the “constitution square” on the grounds of the democratic transition rhetoric. The state symbols are upheld as accomplishments of that “epic journey to democracy”,¹¹³ and the mainstream interpretation of history is seen as widely shared. It is known that collective memory gives continuity to national identity that uses stories passed down from generation to generation but, inevitably, memory ultimately becomes a production of political actors in the present and is used for political purposes.¹¹⁴ Here, the official narrative about the transition to democracy is invoked against the purposes of the pro-independence organisations in rewriting the story.

113. Druliolle, *Democracy Captured by its Imaginary*.

114. Castiñeira, *Imagined Nations*.

Nevertheless, the Popular Party and Citizens neither defended the constitution nor attacked the pro-independence initiative on the same grounds. Although we could infer that the perception of the constitution as a tool which ensures coexistence stems from its mainstream interpretation rooted in the myth of 1978, this assumption is not as robust as the explicit statements made by the socialists. The second hypothesis of the research, which holds that the contemporary Spanish nationalist discourse has much to do with the vindication of the democratic transition, is accepted in our particular case but with less empirical evidence than the first hypothesis about the alleged neutrality of the state symbols.

To conclude, three original contributions have been made in this research. On the one hand, it has offered new empirical evidence to add to existing theories about majority nationalism. Particularly, concerning the majority group's perception of the state symbols as neutral and representative of the whole citizenry, while the minority symbols are framed as partisan and divisive. On the other hand, it has provided significant although insufficient evidence regarding contemporary Spanish nationalism, which is argued to be rooted in the myth of the democratic transition, the 1978 constitution being its main symbol. Finally, the research enhances our understanding of a specific historical episode, namely, the 2017 pro-independence referendum in Catalonia and the battle for street naming in a context of national polarisation.

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Appendix: List of documents analysed

Title	Date	Source	URL
Recullen signatures en contra del canvi de Plaça Constitució de Girona per la de l'1 d'octubre	12/12/2017	ACN	https://www.ccma.cat/324/recullen-signatures-en-contra-del-canvi-de-nom-de-la-placa-constitucio-de-girona-per-la-de-l-1-d-octubre/noticia/2826264/
Defendamos Girona... ¡Peligra nuestra historia!	nd.	Change.org	https://www.change.org/p/marta-madrenas-defendamos-girona-peligra-nuestra-historia
La Plaça de la Constitució de Girona es convertirà al febrer en "plaça de l'1 d'octubre"	19/01/2018	Diari de Girona	https://www.diaridegirona.cat/girona/2018/01/19/placa-constitucio-girona-convertira-febrer/891065.html
Veray critica que "el govern de Girona s'ha intentat saltar el reglament del nomenclàtor que vam aprovar tots en el Ple de l'Ajuntament"	17/01/2018	PP Girona	https://www.ppgirona.com/veray-critica-que-el-govern-de-girona-sha-intentat-saltar-el-reglament-de-la-comissio-del-nomenclator-que-vam-aprovar-tots-en-el-ple-de-lajuntament/
Veray reitera la seva "total oposició" a la proposta de canvi de nom de la Plaça Constitució per Plaça 1 d'Octubre	19/01/2018	PP Girona	https://www.ppgirona.com/veray-reitera-la-seva-total-oposicio-a-la-proposta-de-canvi-de-nom-de-la-placa-constitucio-per-placa-1-d-octubre/
Veray reclama a Madrenas que "retiri de l'ordre del dia del Ple de dilluns la proposta de canvi de nom de la Plaça Constitució per Plaça 1-O"	09/02/2018	PP Girona	https://www.ppgirona.com/veray-reclama-a-madrenas-que-retiri-de-lordre-del-dia-del-ple-de-dilluns-la-proposta-de-canvi-de-nom-de-la-placa-constitucio-per-placa-1-o/
Javier Cercas, Joan Manuel del Pozo i Jordi Canal s'afegeixen al manifest per la Plaça de la Constitució a Girona	11/02/2018	Federalistes d'Esquerres	https://federalistesdesquerres.org/2018/02/javier-cercas-joan-manuel-del-pozo-i-jordi-canal-safegeixen-al-manifest-per-la-placa-de-la-constitutcio-a-girona/
Manifestación españolista en Girona	11/02/2018	El Nacional	https://www.elnacional.cat/es/politica/manifestacion-espanolista-girona_238017_102.html
Míriam Pujola: "el govern municipal no només ha canviat de nom una plaça, ha faltat el respecte a tots els que no pensen com ells"	12/02/2018	Cs Girona	http://girona.ciudadanos-cs.org/2018/02/12/miriam-pujola-el-govern-municipal-no-nomes-ha-canviat-de-nom-una-placa-ha-faltat-el-respecte-a-tots-els-que-no-pensen-com-ells/
Sessió ordinària de l'Ajuntament en Ple del 12 de febrer del 2018	12/02/2018	Ajuntament de Girona	https://seu.girona.cat/portal/dades/actes_plenaries/_descarrega/ActaPleOrdinari_12-02-18.pdf

Title	Date	Source	URL
El Partit Popular acusa a Mercè Conesa de “haberse convertido en adalid del independentismo más radical”	09/05/2018	Twitter	https://twitter.com/PPSantCugat
Ciutadans (Cs) Sant Cugat arremete contra el gobierno del PDeCAT por el cambio de nombre de la “Plaça del Rei” por la “Plaça de l’1 d’Octubre”	21/05/2018	Cs Sant Cugat	http://santcugat.ciudadanos-cs.org/2018/05/21/ciutadans-cs-sant-cugat-arremete-contra-el-gobierno-del-pdecat-por-el-cambio-de-nombre-de-la-placa-del-rei-por-la-placa-de-lu-doctubre/
Sant Cugat esborra el rastre Borbó i canvia el nom de la plaça del Rei	21/05/2018	Totsancugat	http://www.totsancugat.cat/actualitat/politica/sant-cugat-canvia-el-nom-de-placa-del-rei-per-u-d-octubre-amb-polemica_175735102.html
“Tabarnia Lliure” secuestra la placa de l’1 d’octubre en Sant Cugat y pide un rescate	23/05/2018	Crónica Global	https://cronicaglobal.elespanol.com/politica/tabarnia-lliure-secuestra-placa-r-o-sant-cugat_143465_102.html
Sessió ordinària de l’Ajuntament en Ple de l’11 de desembre de 2017	11/12/2017	Ajuntament de Girona	https://seu.girona.cat/portal/dades/actes_plenaries/_descarrega/ActaPleOrdinari_11-12-17.pdf
Sessió ordinària	21/05/2018	Ajuntament de Sant Cugat del Vallès	https://www.santcugat.cat/files/651-14183-fitxer/Ple_Acta_20180521.pdf
Millo arremete contra la alcaldesa de Girona por llamar “plaza del 1 de octubre” a la plaza de la Constitución	24/01/2018	eldiario.es	https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/MINUTO-Arranca-legislatura-Catalunya_13_730156978_17629.html
Millo, sobre la plaça de l’1 d’octubre: “hauria estat millor posar-li Marta Madrenas ja que és la seva excentricitat”	15/02/2018	CCMA	https://www.ccma.cat/324/millo-sobre-la-placa-de-lu-doctubre-hauria-estat-millor-posar-li-marta-madrenas-ja-que-es-la-seva-excentricitat/noticia/2838288/
Millo lleva a la abogacía del estado la placa de la plaza del 1-O de Girona	25/04/2018	El Periódico	https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20180425/millo-pide-informe-plaza-1-octubre-girona-abogacia-estado-6783516 Table 6 - List of documents analysed.