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**CATALONIA 2018:
CLASHING IDENTITIES IN PUBLIC SPACE¹**

Abstract

The article analyses the manifestations of underlying identity conflicts in the social spaces of Catalonia, chiefly Barcelona, encountered in the streets, on the sidewalks, motorways, buildings, or beaches. The study focuses on elements that made their appearance after the illegal Catalan independence referendum of October 1st, 2017. Relying on participant observation, the author shows Catalan public space as a domain of semantic and polysemous game, in which struggle for freedom and free speech is the core element.

Key words

Catalonia, Spain, Catalan nationalism, banal nationalism, identity, *estelada*, *señera*, *rojigualda*, *lazo amarillo*, habituation

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From a political standpoint, Catalonia today is one of the prime hotspots of conflict in Western Europe. The events of recent months resulted not only in profound social and political divisions between Spain and Catalonia; deep rifts emerged within the Catalan community itself. A cultural war of symbols is waged on the streets, and its habituation constitutes a valuable source for investigations into the nature and form of contemporary Catalan nationalism. The principal thesis I would like to advance, is that following the illegal independence referendum of October 1st, 2017, Catalonia has become a polysemous social and cultural space, where adherents and opponents of Catalan independence engage in daily interactions.

I believe that the polysemous game played as part of the right to public expression of one's views (freedom of speech), is a key to understanding current political and social developments in that country. I am particularly interested in the manifestations of the inner Catalan rivalry involving symbols, signs, and flags, as well as in the extent to which they partake in the process of social engineering that Catalan community is subjected to; the degree to which they represent a more or less rational materialization of the Catalan *el fet diferencial* will be examined as well.

Although the article is concerned with the instances of the quotidian war of symbols, I omit La Diada (September 11th) and the Spanish National Day (October 12th), during which symbols of Catalonia and Spain are paraded with particular intensity. This is a deliberate expedient, as I concentrate on the use of such emblems in everyday space (*profanum*), beyond the celebratory context (*sacrum*) which those days impose. In daily life, the streets of Barcelona, its buildings, pedestrian crossings, squares, thoroughfares, as well as the attire of the inhabitants of the Catalan capital become a slate on which the identity conflict in Catalonia is recorded. Supporters of independent Catalonia, seeking to mark the space around, fill it with symbols independence as well as those denoting Spanish oppression. On the other hand, people who oppose Catalan secession introduce tokens of Spanish unity. The streets of Barcelona are replete with *esteladas*, Catalan independence flags, banners with the slogan "Free political prisoners" (*Llibertat presos polítics*) (Fig. 1), demanding the release of politicians arrested by the Spanish authorities as responsible for the attempted secession. Many persons decorate their clothes with a yellow ribbon (Cat. *llaç groc*, Sp. *lazo amarillo*²) in a gesture of solidarity

² The more widespread Spanish variant is used throughout this text. The same applies in the case of the official and pro-independence flag of Catalonia (respectively: *señera/as* and *estelada/as*).

with the detained. The facades of numerous buildings bear banners with pro-independence slogans. Other peculiar forms of expressing defiance towards the policies of Madrid include adding “Republic of Catalonia” (*República catalana*) to signs indicating street names (Fig. 2), painting pedestrian crossings so that they resemble the *estelada* or erecting yellow crosses inscribed with “Freedom” (*Llibertat*) and “Democracy” (*Democràcia*) at roundabouts and beaches. At the same time, the cityscape has no shortage of Spanish flags, (Fig. 3) banners and slogans proclaiming “Long Live Spain!” (*¡Viva España!*), which convey public support for the idea of Spanish unity. The *estelada* may predominate in the Catalan public space, but it has not ousted Spanish flags, which do have their place there.

Although this paper is concerned primarily with the public space in Barcelona, much the same can be observed throughout Catalonia, both in larger cities and in smaller localities; the intensity of the manifestations varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and from place to place. For instance, in the Campclar quarter in Tarragona, Spanish flags visibly prevail, while the *estelada* is hardly ever seen. The quarter was established in the 1960s, following the influx of immigrants from Andalucía and Estremadura, as well as Morocco later. Despite being a stronghold of constitutionalists, adherents of Catalan independence also live there³. The important thing is that one should not all too readily embrace the oversimplified notion that only native Catalans desire independence, while supporters of unity can be found solely among immigrants. Not every Catalan wishes for secession, just as not every immigrant is in favour of maintaining the union with Spain. Furthermore, the Catalan war of symbols reverberates across the country, which may be easily inferred from the mass presence of state flags in the cities and towns throughout Spain.

FROM PICNIC NATIONALISM TO THE WAR OF SYMBOLS

It has become customary to emphasize that Catalan nationalism today assumes the form of a holiday and family spectacle evinced most eloquently by La Diada. According to Ruiz-Domènec, “these demonstrations have now become family gatherings, much in the nature of a fete: fathers and sons,

³ Tedó 2018, p. 13.

grandparents and children ‘unite in a group’ to celebrate the values of the nation”⁴. That picnic-like atmosphere which typified independence rallies in 2012-2017, changed radically after the illegal referendum of 2017. Two things ensued: “adherents of independence were outraged, the defenders of the constitution woke up”⁵. Thus, the war of symbols broke out in Catalonia for earnest. The sides in that singular war aspire to seize the space, to remove and erase an alien symbol to put one’s own in its place. The contest taking place in the Catalan streets today is all about visibility, as Catalonia has become what Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka defined as a “society of icons”⁶, whose space powerfully saturated with images. According to Sztompka “they are endowed with significance by the author, and the purpose is either intensely expressive, attempting to elicit a sensation or experience, or communicative, in that it endeavours to convey a certain communication”⁷. The example of Barcelona shows that these objectives are not mutually exclusive: they communicate things on the one hand (unity of Spain or secession of Catalonia) whilst being highly emotionally charged on the other (there are groups who put up independence symbols, and groups which remove them). Just as politicians compete using platforms, declarations and reciprocal accusations as weapons, so does the Catalan community vie for ascendancy in their space. The elements in that contest include streets, houses, vehicles (cars, motorbikes, bicycles) motorways, beaches, railway stations, facades of private and public buildings, football stadiums and the human body as well.

The nomenclature used in Catalonia no doubt deserves attention, as it clearly divides the community into two opposing and hostile factions⁸. The constitutionalists and unionists (*constitucionalistes*, *unionistes*), wishing to uphold Spanish constitution of 1978 and the unity of the Spanish nation are one of those. Confronting them, there are separatists (*separatistas*) or adherents of independence (*independentistas*), who invoke the illegal referendum of October 2017 to question current political solutions and strive for a separation from Spain. Persons who remove symbols and banners which demand freedom for “political prisoners” and support the creation of the Catalan Republic are called fascists and/or terrorists (*feixistes*, *fatxes*, *terroristes*) by

⁴ Ruiz-Domènec 2014, p. 112.

⁵ Sàlmon 2018.

⁶ Sztompka 2012, p. 15.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ The nomenclature has become established in social circulation and tends to be widely used in Spanish media. Cf. Tensión en Mataró 2018.

their adversaries. It was with those words that they were described by former president of the Generalitat, Carles Puigdemont, in his Twitter feed. Referring to the events in the Catalan town of Verges, where a group of masked individuals tore down yellow ribbons and *esteladas*, he wrote:

This mode of action is *terrorism pure* [highlighted by this author]. Edged weapons, shirts, night operation. The organized groups which commit those acts are criminal gangs... Meanwhile, peaceful, honourable and democratically-minded people are in prisons, because they have held a referendum⁹.

On the other hand, those who sport yellow ribbons (*lazos amarillos*), place banners or placards reading “Free political prisoners” in the public space, hang out *esteladas* or put up the yellow crosses tend to be called using the newly coined *lazis*, *lazistas* or *catalazis*, designations which combine three Spanish words: *lazo* (ribbon) *catalán* (Catalan) and *nazi* (Nazi). The comparisons between supporters of Catalan independence and Nazis often take a vivid visual form online, where one encounters likenesses of Carles Puigdemont and Quim Torra (current president of the Generalitat) in Nazi uniforms or with a swastika in the background.

As already noted, the demonstrations associated with the Catalan Diada contributed greatly to radicalization of public sentiments, in particular during the 2013 celebrations, when a 400-kilometre-long human chain (*Via Catalana*) was formed, becoming a symbol of the Catalan struggle for independence. However, the activities of those who champion independence have roused those inhabitants of Catalonia who consider themselves Spaniards as well and see no point in pursuing independence. The daily flagging of space by the Catalan nationalists encouraged opponents of secession to do likewise. That very interaction may be seen as the inception of the Catalan war of symbols. Since La Diada was celebrated with increasing panache, regular counter-displays have been organized in response, culminating on October 12th, the National Day of Spain. The latter are a proof that the idea of independence is not uniformly supported by the entire Catalonia. Still, the wave of backlash, involving symbolic acts of hanging out Spanish flags, removal of independence-related symbols or creation of dedicated pages in social media to expose the absurdities of secessionism spilled really wide only when the Catalan aspirations materialized in the shape of illegal referendum and the decision of the Catalan parliament, which in a secret ballot voted for the establishment of an independent Republic of Catalonia.

⁹ Puigdemont 2018.

THE *ESTELADA* VERSUS THE *ROJIGUALDA*. THE FLAG WAR

The scale of emotion that national colours can elicit in Spain is very well reflected in the tweets posted by the current prime minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, with which he commemorated the victims of the Barcelona terrorist attack two years ago. In the first tweet, published in Spanish, contained the national emblem and flag of Spain which accompanied Sánchez's appeal for unity of the Spanish nation in the face of terrorism and barbarity, and called for solidarity with the victims. In the second tweet, which communicated the same but in Catalan, the emblem and the flag of Spain were lacking¹⁰. The missing elements were restored following angry response of the online community, while the premier's retinue claimed a "human error without a political intention, which has been remedied as soon as it came to light"¹¹. Given the circumstances in which Pedro Sánchez came to power and his attitude towards Catalan nationalism, the explanation seems hardly credible. That was one of the many examples demonstrating the significance which the national flag has gained in Spain. At the moment, there is no Western European state where the official flag is an object of ridicule and acts of vandalism; the flag war rages on in Catalonia. Today, the *rojigualda* (flag of Spain) has its rival in the *estelada*, which symbolizes Catalonia's striving for independence and clearly supplants the official *señera*.

Early harbingers of the war of symbols could be seen during the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, which were a "forest of symbols, a world anthology of flags, anthems and signs of belonging"¹². Joan Crexell observes that before 1992, Catalonia had indeed had numerous opportunities to make an appearance on the international stage and show itself to the world, but all those occasions, including world exhibitions in 1888 and 1929, the International Eucharistic Congress of 1952, or the world football championship in 1982, which took place at the capital of Catalonia, coincided with the periods when anything that was Catalan was subject to persecution or suppression. During the Olympic Games in 1992 things were different, as the power in Catalonia had been held since 1980 by the nationalists from *Convergència and Unió*. The situation was thus exploited for international promotion of Catalonia¹³.

¹⁰ Sánchez 2018a, Sánchez 2018b.

¹¹ Pedro Sánchez quita el escudo 2018.

¹² Crexell 1994a, p. 12.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20.

For that purpose, the association Acció Olímpica carried out a series of campaigns, intended to build the brand of Catalonia. Journalists covering the Games would receive a publication entitled “Barcelona News”, in English, French, or Spanish, containing information about Catalonia as a nation and about Barcelona itself. Announcements appearing in newspapers and other media stated that “No one’s going to do it for you” (*Ningú no ho farà per tu*), thereby urging people to hang out the Catalan *señera* and slogans such as “Freedom for Catalonia”, in order to advertise Catalan-ness and show the world that the Olympic Games are in fact held in Catalonia¹⁴. Interestingly enough, the Ajuntament of Barcelona distanced itself from the position, and encouraged inhabitants of the city to display the flag of the city rather than the *señera*¹⁵. This prompted a peculiar “civil war on flags” in Barcelona. According to “El Observador” daily, the Catalan *señera* proved the dominant colour during the Games (55.2%), outstripping the Spanish flag (0.7%), the flag of Barcelona (19.7%), as well as the Olympic flag (24.1%) and the pro-independence *estelada* (0.3%)¹⁶. The campaign aiming at Catalanization of the Games was thoroughly successful. The world found out about the colours of the *señera*, which during that time flew all over the Catalan capital.

Journalists also received a video recording with the song “Free Catalonia from Spain” by Celdoni Fonoll, from which they could learn that in the course of its history Catalonia, its language, people, and institutions were persecuted. A book titled “Catalonia 92. A European Nation”¹⁷ was available as well. Moreover, Acció Olímpica would encourage citizens to hang *senyeras* and slogans demanding “Freedom for Catalonia” on the route of the Olympic torch as it travelled through the region¹⁸. Catalan became the language of the Olympics, along with French, English and Spanish. During the opening and closing ceremonies, when the royal couple appeared in the VIP box, the Catalan anthem *Els Segadors* and the national anthem of Spain were played in succession, all against the colours of Spain, Catalonia and Barcelona flying in the background¹⁹. This owed to a compromise between the Catalan authorities, the royal court and the central government²⁰. According to José Antich, king Juan Carlos overshadowed the incumbent president of the

¹⁴ Ibidem, pp. 50-51 and 124-125.

¹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 125-133.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 140.

¹⁷ Ibidem, pp. 80-81.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 105.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 84.

²⁰ Antich 1994, p. 283.

Generalitat Jordi Pujol in media coverage. The royal pair and the Spanish sportspersons celebrating Spanish successes were the sight one saw in the media most often. One journalist went as far as making a historical comparison, asserting that “it was as if the audience were subordinated to the phantasm of Philip V [Bourbon], but without the need for armed coercion”²¹.

In the present political circumstances, no such compromise would be possible. King Felipe VI of Spain arouses negative emotions among supporters of independence, especially after his televised address on October 3rd, 2017, in which he spoke for the unity of Spain and restoration of order in Catalonia. Incidents took place as Felipe VI attended the opening of the Mediterranean Games in Tarragona in June 2017²², and during his visit to Barcelona on August 17th, 2018, where he came to commemorate the victims of the terrorist attack two years prior²³. Acts of burning the pictures of the royal pair and the Spanish constitution have also been reported in Catalonia.

While during the 1992 Olympics the percentage share of the Spanish flags and flags symbolizing independence in the space of Barcelona was negligible, the situation has changed substantially since then. The *estelada* predominates, competing for space and visibility with the national flag of Spain. There can be no doubt that the flag campaign in 1992 showed Catalans that undertakings of the kind do pay off. The extensive coverage of the Barcelona Games in mass media was a particularly significant element; some even believe that the Olympics became one of the major international spectacles as a result²⁴. Thanks to the Games, Catalans found it much easier to transition from hanging out *senyeras* and “Freedom for Catalonia” banners to hoisting the independence-affirming *esteladas* and signs demanding “Llibertat presos politics”. Jordi Canal argues that the independence process in Catalonia brought about changes in how flags are customarily used:

For some time now, the *senyera* and the *estelada* have not been put out on the balconies of the apartments of Catalans only when the calendar dictates, in particular on the days of La Diada, St George’s Day and local holidays, but remain hanging there permanently. The Catalan cityscape is changing. The strategy of visual occupation of the public space seems evident²⁵.

Today, the flag war in Catalonia is a daily practice, especially since the 2017 referendum. I recall that during one of my first stays in Barcelona (2006

²¹ Ibidem, p. 275.

²² Palau 2018, p. 6.

²³ Baquero 2018.

²⁴ Ibáñez and Fuentes, Chico and Maquieira 1988, p. 11.

²⁵ Canal 2018, pp. 323-324.

and 2008), there were few flags, and those in evidence were the *señeras*, the official flags of Catalonia. Changes seem to have been taking place in 2011-2016 as the number of *señeras* grew considerably, but still they could not be said to have become a dominant element of everyday landscape. Also, *esteladas*, could be seen in the city space next to *señeras*. However, what I saw in Catalonia during my most recent stay there (March–July 2018) reflected a radical shift. The flag which now predominates utterly in the Catalan space is the *estelada* (Fig. 4), which is sometimes accompanied by the *ikurriña* (Fig. 5), the flag of the Basque Country. Flags of Spain are also present, in combination with the *señera* and the flag of the European Union (Fig. 6).

Based on thorough observation, one can distinguish eight types of places where flags are seen in the public space in Catalonia:

1. *Estelada*-only places. It may be presumed with a high degree of likelihood that they are inhabited by the adherents of Catalan independence or at least persons who consciously support the idea of separation. *Esteladas* are often accompanied by the yellow ribbon (*lazo amarillo*), which betokens solidarity with the representatives of Catalan government (e.g. Carles Puigdemont, Jordi Sánchez, Jordi Cuixart, Joaquim Forn or Oriol Junqueras), who have been arrested after the illegal independence referendum.

2. Places where flags of Spain occur exclusively. It may be surmised that the areas are populated by those who are in favour of unity with Spain, i.e. Catalans who recognize themselves as Spaniards as well, or immigrants from other regions of Spain, who may be living in Catalonia but feel cultural and mental affiliation with Spain. Some of the *rojigualdas* feature the representation of a bull in the centre, drawing on the *corrida*, one of the most popular symbols of Spain. Often enough, flags of Spain are accompanied by the flag of the European Union.

3. Places where flags of Spain occur in combination with *señeras*. In its likely that Catalans living in such areas are content with the current legal and institutional order in Spain, where Catalonia is an autonomous entity and has its official flag. Sometimes, the flags are heart-shaped and the EU flag is hoisted next to them.

4. *Señera*-only places. When the Catalan flag flies alone or it is accompanied by pro-independence slogans and symbol while the *rojigualda* is absent, it may be surmised that the location is inhabited by Catalans for whom the *señera* is the sole official flag of Catalonia. In this sense, the *señera* would constitute an autotelic symbol which draws on the past and simultaneously implies the striving for independence. This choice may be founded on specific

arguments: the legend of the Catalan origin of the flag, the significance in acquired in the 19th century and the prohibitions it was subjected to under José Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco. The choice would also be linked to and echo the flagging of the Catalan space during the 1992 Olympics.

5. Places where *esteladas* co-occur with *señeras*. These locations demonstrate the the official Catalan flag and the pro-independence flag can co-exist, despite the distinct significations they convey and generate. The arrangement may also be interpreted as a double flagging of space with symbols which underscore Catalan-ness.

6. Places with concurrent flags of Spain and *esteladas*. In such areas, adherents of unity and secession appear to live side by side. The presence of both *rojigualdas* and *esteladas* in one place is the best illustration of the dichotomy and polysemous nature of the Catalan identity conflict.

7. Places where *esteladas* are displayed together with the *ikurriña*, flag of the Basque Country. The combination may indicate a coupling of two nationalisms, i.e. Catalan and Basque, whose communities strive for independence of their respective regions. It might also mean that the person who hangs the *ikurriña* next to the *estelada* is a Basque living in Catalonia and supports the secession.

8. Places where *esteladas* are displayed together with the flag of FC Barcelona. I decided to distinguish this particular combination in view of the role and significance of the famous Catalan club. The set, often seen on the balconies and in the windows in Catalonia, may attest to the change of the role apparently played by the “symbolic, unarmed army of Catalan-ness”²⁶, as *Barça* has been described by the eminent Catalan writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. One should perhaps recall that in Franco’s times displaying the *señera* was forbidden and the flag of FC Barcelona served as a symbol of all things Catalan (in fact, Camp Nou was the only place where the *señera* did appear, despite the ban) and an emblem of resistance against the regime. Similarly, increasing numbers of fans of the *Blaugrana* fly its flag today together with the *estelada*, expressing their pro-independence stance which the club itself is supposed to embody.

There are several kinds of the *estelada*. The most frequent among those is the blue *estelada* (*estelada azul*), including a blue triangle with a white star; this variant tends to be most often used by Catalan nationalists. The flag was created by Vicenç Albert Ballester Camps, who had been inspired by the flags

²⁶ Vázquez Montalbán 2005, p. 169.

of Cuba and Puerto Rico²⁷, although the first *esteladas* had indeed appeared in early 20th century in Cuba²⁸. Visual survey indicates that the type accounts for as much as 95% of all visible *esteladas* in the Catalan cityspace. Other variants include the red *estelada* (*estelada roja*), where the triangle is yellow and the star red, making a reference to Marxist ideology and socialism, as well as the green *estelada* (*estelada verde*) whose green triangle and white star convey associations with the ecological movement, animal rights and pacifism (the two latter occur decidedly more seldom in Catalonia)²⁹. The two remaining types of the *estelada* are virtually absent in that space: the communist variant from the 1980s, with a red triangle and yellow star, or the decade later anarchist version, featuring a black triangle, a red star, and eight stripes indicating all territories of the so-called Catalan countries. In 2014, a special black *estelada* (*estelada negra*) was created for the anniversary of the 1714 events: all in black, with a white cross of St Eulalia, patron saint of Barcelona in the centre, and a white star to the left³⁰. During my stay in Barcelona, I did see the black *estelada* on several occasions, displayed on the balconies and in the windows of Catalan households. The combination of the white star and the cross of St Eulalia draws in a particular fashion on what happened in the early 18th century. The defeat in the war of 1714 and the subsequent repressions that Catalonia suffered are at the very root of the nationalist revindications.

The dominance of the *estelada* in the landscape of streets, squares and crucial sites across Catalonia owes to the pro-independence strategy which urges one to “hang the *estelada* on the balcony and do not take it down until independence has been won”³¹. *Esteladas* have become a permanent element of the Catalan landscape (*esteladas perennes*)³². It would be legitimate to claim that the *estelada* has in fact forced the *señera* out and took its place – especially in the symbolic dimension – by virtue of widespread and daily presence. In this sense, the *estelada* has gone further than Jordi Pujol could have thought possible when he encouraged Catalans in the 1980s and the 1990s to make the *señera* visible in the public space in Catalonia.

²⁷ Segura Just 2016, p. 216; Canal 2018, p. 308.

²⁸ Crexell 2008b, p. 36.

²⁹ Montañés 2017.

³⁰ Hancock 2017.

³¹ Tobeña 2016, p. 95.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 97.

The *estelada* thus ascends to the rank of metonymy³³, as it may be used to manifest nationality or nation. It serves as a lodestar, showing the Catalan community the goal of independence. This is what makes the *estelada* different from the *señera* which, as an official flag of Catalonia, symbolizes its historical past and the links which bind it to Spain. That distinction between the *señera* and the *estelada* was splendidly encapsulated by Catalan historian Albert Balcells: “[In the case of the *estelada*], it is a sign of struggle, which visually embodies the necessity to fight for national liberation, whereas the *señera* is a historical and legal flag of Catalonia”³⁴. Jordi Canal sees it likewise, describing the *estelada* as the “flag of fight” (*una bandera de combate*)³⁵. Its special trait is that it implies struggle, a striving to reach a goal (independence of Catalonia), by severing all historical ties with Spain (Fig. 7). The following principle operates here: the more *esteladas* there are, the less Spain there is. Segura Just believes that in the hypothetically independent Catalan Republic the *estelada* is certain to replace the *señera*, which would lose its importance precisely due to historical considerations, which link it both to the Francoist period and the Spanish *Transición*³⁶. A different opinion on the matter has been voiced by Joan Crexell, an expert on the history of the *estelada*. He argues that contrary to what one may think, the *estelada* is provisional and when Catalonia regains independence the *señera* will remain its flag³⁷. Interestingly enough, at the time when it was created and later on as well, the *estelada* engendered conflicting opinions; some saw it as a symbol which divided Catalans³⁸. Javier Barraycoa believes that by replacing the *señera* with the pro-independence *estelada*, the nationalists actually reject Catalan tradition³⁹.

LAZOS AMARILLOS. **THE WAR OF YELLOW RIBBONS**

Apart from the *estelada*, the yellow ribbon (*lazo amarillo*) has become an enduring symbolic feature of the public space in Catalonia in the wake of the

³³ Billig 2008, p. 89.

³⁴ Balcells 2008, p. 72.

³⁵ Canal 2018, p. 313.

³⁶ Segura Just 2016, pp. 220-221.

³⁷ Crexell 2008b, p. 92.

³⁸ Crexell 2008b, pp. 92-97, Albertí 2010, p. 253.

³⁹ Barraycoa 2011, pp. 194-195.

illegal independence referendum. The ribbons, made of plastic or fabric, are seen in the streets, on the trees, cars, buses, public administration buildings, private houses, as well as adorn the attire of Catalans. Ribbons as such are not a novel phenomenon in Spain; blue ones used to symbolize fight with the ETA, pink ones denote breast cancer action, green ones convey support for natural conservation, while red ones stand for AIDS awareness. Ribbons had been employed in Catalonia previously: in the 1990s nationalists used – *señera*-coloured ribbons calling for autonomy, or even demanding independence. That was at the end of the Francoist era, during the period of *La Transición*. The current custom developed in connection with the independence referendum. The demonstration against the arrest of Jordi Sánchez and Jordi Cuixart, presidents of the *Assemblea Nacional Catalana y Òmnium Cultural*⁴⁰, which Barcelona witnessed on October 17th, 2017, contributed substantially to the propagation of the *lazos*. As Canal put it, “the yellow craze attacked and brought the colour to many places in Catalonia”⁴¹. From the very beginning, yellow ribbons carried a reference to the incarceration of people involved in the Catalan bid for independence, who then tended to be called “political prisoners” (*presos polítics*), by way of recollection of the Francoist regime. Some look even further back and cite the Bourbons, who sported blue as opposed to the yellow of their Habsburg foes. In 1705, a number of inhabitants of Barcelona is reported to have attached yellow ribbons to their hats in an act of protest against the Bourbons⁴². Given the role that the year 1714 and Philip V of Spain play in the nationalist and pro-independence discourse, such associations only add fuel to the Catalan-Spanish conflict, and drive the war of symbols.

It is a fact that *lazos amarillos* have conquered the streets of Catalonia, being truly ubiquitous (Fig. 8). Apart from the balconies and windows of private apartments, variedly sized *lazos* (stuck on, painted, or attached) are visible on buildings (Fig. 9), trees, streets, posts, cars, buses, motorbikes, bicycles, and sidewalks. Numerous Catalans wear them with their clothes, usually on the left breast, pinned to the shirts, sweaters or jackets. Also, a number of professors at the universities of Barcelona can be seen to wear yellow ribbons daily. *Lazos amarillos* are the source of intense feelings and tensions in Catalonia. Some members of the community place them in the public space, others remove them and throw them out. An ordinary piece of

⁴⁰ Canal 2018, pp. 334-335.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 337.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

plastic or fabric has divided Catalans, increasingly often culminating in violent acts⁴³. It has become a widespread practice to change the yellow ribbon into a red-yellow-red one, the colours of the Spanish flag (Fig. 10). Specially formed groups go out into the streets of Catalonia – usually under the cover of night – and repaint the yellow ribbons adding the red stripes. As a result, the symbol of support for the imprisoned is transformed into a sign of support for Spain. The conflict surrounding *lazos* has grown so severe that some speak of a “war of yellow ribbons” (*guerra de los lazos amarillos*) and attempt to draw maps of the conflict starring the *lazo*⁴⁴. Already, one book has been devoted solely to the phenomenon of the Catalan yellow ribbons⁴⁵.

What is so special about the yellow ribbon that it manages to stir up such extreme sentiments among Catalans? According to Ignacio Ravel, *lazos amarillos* have become “an instrument of political agitation, social confrontation, nationalist consolidation and an expression of the highest nationalist exaltation”⁴⁶. Under the pretence of free speech, the ribbons have morphed into a tool of oppression:

Their core function is to identify emotion and discontent, to point at and stigmatize those who do not wear it, to inspire fear in a part of the Catalan society who still wish to be Spanish. Wearing of the ribbon in Puigdetorra’s Catalonia [from the names of Puigdemont and Torra] is an equivalent of the extended hand of Spain after the Civil War, while not doing it – not to mention disposing of it – begins to be a risky choice⁴⁷.

In Blanes (Girona), a restaurant owner and immigrant from Cordoba, who had lived in Catalonia for 50 years, clashed with the supporters of independence who did not like it that he tore down and threw on the ground the *lazos amarillos* they had placed on the terrace of his restaurant as part of the space-marking action⁴⁸. The video of the incident went viral online.

Another issue relating to the presence of *lazos amarillos* is noted by Miriam González, who writes about the invasion of the latter into the social space of Catalonia. What is more, placing them just anywhere can be dangerous, as exemplified by the ribbons drawn on the streets and roads. González is of the opinion that freedom of speech ends where human life is thus put at

⁴³ There was much publicity following the attack on a woman who, together with her family, took down *lazos amarillos* in the vicinity of the Ciutadella park. The attacker abused her verbally and then hit her, breaking her nose. Gubern 2018.

⁴⁴ El mapa que resume los 30 incidentes 2018.

⁴⁵ Xinxó 2018.

⁴⁶ Varela 2018.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Tensión en Blanes 2018.

risk⁴⁹. The danger does not arise when a person exercising their right to free speech places *lazos* on their house or public buildings, doing so only to annoy those who hold different views⁵⁰.

Only about 30% of the inhabitants of Barcelona – based on my observation – wear the yellow ribbons. Very often, those are elderly persons above 60, though middle-aged and younger people wear them as well. An elderly man seen in the city centre wore a cream-coloured sweatshirt with “República catalana” and a large *estelada* printed on it. I also saw two girls (in most likely early teens) one of whom wore a yellow ribbon attached to the backpack, while the other had it on her blouse. Still, most persons seen in the streets every day do not sport *lazos amarillos*. Naturally, this does not mean that those who choose not to wear it do not support the idea of independent Catalonia. It may be readily presumed that this is deliberate, as they do not wish to display it publicly and face any backlash that may ensue.

In Barcelona, every quarter is divided, with various symbols and flags seen in particular areas (Fig. 11). In those dominated by *esteladas* one also encounters numerous yellow ribbons hung on the trees, posts, or painted on street surfaces. Carrer Verdi in the Gràcia quarter made a great impression in that respect, with an abundance of symbols relating to the idea of independence. Invariably, *esteladas* fly on each side of the street, hanging from the windows and balconies; there are multiple *lazos*, too, put up on the trees or painted on the walls and streets, along with slogans such as “Llibertat preses polítiques” and “República catalana”. However, isolated flags of Spain can also be seen there, though an inscription on one of the walls in the quarter proclaimed in Catalan that “Gràcia is not Spanish”.

STREETS, MOTORWAYS AND BEACHES.

THE CONTEST FOR SPACE

The social space in Catalonia today is a domain of dichotomies and distinctions, with streets, motorways and even beaches (Fig. 12) becoming a site of polysemous and semantic duels. In the Catalan conflict of identity there are two major active factions: the pro-independence movement which marks the space with symbols expressing their striving for secession, and the pro-Spanish camp, whose representatives remove such symbols or change their

⁴⁹ González 2018.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

import. Thus, on the one hand, there are various groups gathered in the Committee for the Defence of the Republic (*Comité de Defensa de la República* – CDR), and the Group for Action and Resistance of Spanish Citizens (*Grupo de Acción y Resistencia de Ciudadanos Españoles* – GARCE). The groups which undertake to combat pro-independence signage are referred to as the “cleaning brigades” (*brigadas de limpieza*). Their members, operating chiefly at night, use social media and mobile apps to communicate and advise one another of the location of things to be removed. Their actions are recorded and the videos posted online. The most notorious groups include “LIBERAGERONA”, “Groc Enlloc”, “Brigada 155”, “Aixeca’t” or “Segadors del Maresme”. Their efforts against the appropriation of the public space through pro-independence symbols earned them the label of fascists⁵¹ in the parlance of the secessionists. Meanwhile, a number of right-wing Spanish media compare the methods of the adherents of independence to the Basque *kale borroka*, calling it street terrorism (*terrorismo callejero*) which subverts constitutional order, disrupts public peace and terrorizes those who defend the lawful order⁵².

In the war of symbols, international publicity concerning the situation in Catalonia plays no mean role. For that end diverse strategies are employed, just as during the Olympic Games in 1992. For instance, the association Òmnium Cultural has a number of coaches present in the social space (chiefly in the tourist zones), driving around with the slogan “Freedom for all Catalan prisoners and exiles” painted on the sides in Catalan, Spanish, French, and English. Available in hotels and bars there are postcards with the slogan “Free Them All” (in English) as well as T-shirts and stickers with pro-independence catchphrases⁵³. In the streets of Barcelona, quite often in the vicinity of its landmark, one sees images this author observed near the Arc de Triomf, for instance: a policeman beating a person with the following caption “Spain: fake democracy” (Fig. 13). One also encounters phrases such as “Good Morning, Republic” (*Bon dia República*) with a *lazo* (Fig. 14), painted on doors or yellow cards admonishing in English: “Wake up! U’know that Spain is not a democracy?”, which evidently call for the release of political prisoners. The intended target of the communications are tourists who

⁵¹ Fernández 2018, p. 18. It may be worthwhile to note that adherents of unity use the same label when referring to supporters of independence.

⁵² Terrorismo callejero 2018, p. 3.

⁵³ de Diego 2018.

numerously visit Catalonia. University campuses are also sites where pro-independence slogans thrive.

Throughout Catalonia, it has become a greatly popular practice to dedicate streets to Catalan “political prisoners” and “exiles”. As examples, one could quote “Plaça dels Exiliats” or “Carrer Carme Forcadell” with its appended legend: „President of the Parliament of Catalonia, imprisoned for the referendum of October 1st”, both in Torrelameu (Tarragona)⁵⁴, or “Carrer dels Presos Polítics” in Sabadell, with its accompanying inscription “In memory of all persecuted for defending the rights and freedoms of the people of Catalonia”⁵⁵. The illegal Catalan independence referendum of October 1st, 2017, has its street as well: “Carrer de l’1 d’Octubre” in Cervera⁵⁶.

Another conspicuous element in the Catalan war of symbols are the yellow crosses, put up in great numbers by the supporters of secession in central locations of cities and towns, at roundabouts and beaches, in what is a peculiar war of crosses. Many are upset that the crosses with catchwords such as “Freedom” or “Democracy” planted one next to another on Catalan beaches make them look like a cemetery⁵⁷. Some consider it a threat to tourism which generates most of the Catalan revenue, and an act disparaging the memorials-cemeteries commemorating the victims of World War 2⁵⁸. Counteraction on the part of the constitutionalists is only to be expected in these circumstances. For instance, in May 2018 a group of people used lengths of fabric to arrange yellow crosses inscribed with “Democracy” (*Democràcia*), “Justice” (*Justícia*) and “Freedom” (*Llibertat*) at the Mataró beach⁵⁹. However, a group of masked individuals came to the Canet del Mar beach to remove the crosses there. Some wore *esteladas*, to confuse those who guarded the crosses. In its report on the incident, Catalan journal “El Punt Avui” described the individuals as fascists (*feixistes*)⁶⁰.

Quite an exceptional situation was witnessed in the town Vic, where supporters of independence filled its Plaza Mayor with 2,500 yellow crosses in an expression of solidarity with the “political prisoners”. A number of the crosses were then run over by a vehicle driver. The event was widely

⁵⁴ Torrelameu dedica els seus carrers 2018.

⁵⁵ El CDR de Sabadell 2018.

⁵⁶ Cervera inaugura el carrer 2018.

⁵⁷ Gubern, 2018, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Sánchez-Melo 2018, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Coll 2018, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Brugué 2018, p. 13.

commented in Spanish and Catalan press. In the opinion of the mayor of Vic, the act was an assault on the freedom of speech⁶¹.

Umbrellas have also become weapons in the symbolic warfare. In August 2018, a group of people opposing secession left umbrellas in the colours of the Spanish flag at the Arenys de Mar beach in Barcelona, as a response to the yellow crosses and *lazos*⁶². A similar initiative was carried out at the beach of Montgat (Maresme) by way of countermove to the yellow umbrellas placed at the beach in Fosca de Palamós⁶³. That peculiar campaign was organized by the “España Ciudadana”, a platform affiliated with the political party Ciudadanos. As part of the campaign, a light aircraft was also used to fly over all Catalan beaches trailing a banner reading “Spain. Away with the yellow ribbons. Beaches are for everyone”⁶⁴.

In Girona, pro-independence activists hung 2,000 chains that were supposed to symbolize repressive measures that Spain brought to bear on Catalonia. As part of the undertaking, they also set up 300 chairs with black silhouettes on yellow background – epitomizing the citizens of Catalonia – as well as portraits of the incarcerated leaders of the independence movement to accompany those. On top of that, there were a number of *estaladas*, a scythe, the symbol of harvesters that draws on the war of 1640 which brought about the first Catalan secession, and slogans: “Dignitat” (*Dignity*), “Llibertat” (*Liberty*), “Esperança” (*Hope*), and “República” (*Republic*). The banner reading “Estat espanyol” (*Spanish State*) was flanked by *rojigualdas* and slogans such as “Odi” (*Hatred*), “Opressió” (*Oppression*) and “Feixisme” (*Fascism*)⁶⁵.

In Catalonia, the war of symbols is also staged on the sidewalks, streets and motorways. A variety of slogans can be found there, including those referring to Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution (Fig. 15), or demanding freedom for political prisoners (Fig. 16), sometimes with the counter-slogan “Onward Spain” (Fig. 17). In El Catllar (Tarragona), one of the streets was entirely painted over with yellow ribbons. At the motorways, there have been frequent situations where a group of persons on the overpass would wave *esteladas* and display pro-independence slogans to the drivers below⁶⁶. Opponents of secession meet in similar places to brandish flags of Spain and show that Catalonia is its part.

⁶¹ Un coche derriba cruces amarillas 2018.

⁶² Plantan una decena de “sombrellas españolas” 2018.

⁶³ Catalunya es España 2018.

⁶⁴ Lanzan campaña aérea 2018.

⁶⁵ Soberanistas ofrecen apadrinar cadenas 2018, Hispanofobia en Gerona 2018.

⁶⁶ Cf. Instalan una pancarta independentista 2018.

Marc Augé included motorways (as well as petrol stations, railway terminals, airports or supermarkets) among the “non-places” where people engage in interactions only with particular texts, without creating any unique identity or relationship. He argues that:

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place⁶⁷.

In the case of motorways, their characteristic is that they inform drivers about specific places by means of signs and boards, by virtue of which “in a sense, the traveller is absolved of the need to stop or even look”⁶⁸. According to Augé, some of those places “exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places, or rather. imaginary places: banal utopias, clichés”⁶⁹.

In my opinion, the Catalan war of symbols has led to a situation where the concept of the French philosopher is invalidated. Both the supporters of Catalan independence and its adversaries use Catalan motorways to manifest their views and display particular symbols: *esteladas*, *lazos amarillos*, slogans or flags of Spain, all as part of the identity dispute. An interesting related practice can be noted here: the letter “E” for Spain on the number plates of scooters, motorbikes and cars (in the blue section where it is surrounded by the 12 EU stars) is covered by a special sticker with the abbreviation “CAT” denoting Catalonia. In this fashion, users of the vehicles demonstrate their support of the idea of the Catalan Republic. During my four-month stay in Barcelona, I encountered a total of eight vehicles (seven scooters and one PCV), whose plates were thus – illegally – marked, evincing revindication sentiments (Fig. 18). Eduard Goligorsky referred to those as “plates of honour” (*matriculas de honor*)⁷⁰. The use of pro-independence stickers on number plates is not a new practice, as it dates back to the early 21st century, when the association DesmarCAT called upon people to replace the “E” in the circle of EU stars with “CAT”, while certain newspapers, e.g. “La Vanguardia”, offered the stickers with their paper issues⁷¹. However, my observations indicate that they are not greatly popular.

⁶⁷ Augé 2010, p. 53.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 65.

⁷⁰ Goligorsky 2002, p. 46.

⁷¹ Ibidem, pp. 46-47.

Consequently, those who travel on the motorways of Catalonia cannot help being exposed to varied manifestations of identity. Numerous drivers express their support or objection when they pass such symbols by sounding their horns. The Catalan war of symbols shows the degree to which political struggle engenders colonization of spaces which by definition can hardly serve to build identity. In the case of Catalonia, specific symbols introduced in the area of streets and motorways – flags, banners, or yellow ribbons – effect a change, temporary though it may be, of those spaces into locations which are linked to the historical-political situation (seeking separation from Spain or maintaining unity) reflected in particular identity projects (Catalans and Spaniards together, only Catalans and/or only Spaniards).

As the polysemous game continues to be played in Catalonia, numerous inhabitants find it aggravating that independence symbols are placed on the official building of municipal authorities in Catalonia⁷². They consider it to be an expression of bias and disrespect towards those who do not subscribe to the idea of independence. Also, much controversy is aroused by the activities of Mossos d'Esquadra, the Catalan police, which consist in identifying persons who take down pro-independence symbols.

DAILY BANALIZATION OF NATIONALISM

The widespread use of flags and diverse symbols in the Catalan space is in line with the concept of banal nationalism, in which “nationhood is near the surface of contemporary life”⁷³. The mundane display of Catalan symbols, the *señeras* and *esteladas* as well as banners with pro-independence slogans drive the habituation process of the Catalan community one the one hand and serve to de-habituate the Spanish nation on the other. A relatively straightforward principle operates here: the greater the number of flags, symbols and signs affirming Catalan-ness and Catalonia, the less visibility will be afforded to the Spanish symbols. The multiplicity of Catalan symbols and their daily use renders them a part of the routine, a banal element, whilst dispossessing Spanish symbols and thus enfeebling the link with Spain.

⁷² In July 2018, the High Court of Justice of Catalonia (TSJC) issued an order to the authorities of Sant Cugat del Vallès (Barcelona) requesting removal of the *estelada*, with the rationale that by displaying a symbol of a political party in public space the authorities violate the neutrality principle, while public institutions are not entitled to invoke the right to free speech. Piñol 2018.

⁷³ Billig 2008, p. 175.

As Jesús Laínz put it, all symbols serve to “engender an imaginary awareness of nationhood that is remote from Spain (...) and symbolize in the eyes of the world that Catalonia is not Spain”⁷⁴. Others draw attention to the necessity of constant indoctrination on the part of Catalan nationalists, and their exploitation of xenophobia, without which they would not be able to hold on to power⁷⁵.

Without doubt, “hot nationalism” (the official, state variant), would not be successful without the “daily practices, habitual actions and ideological convictions”⁷⁶. Their purpose is to produce a permanent notional cliché associated with the flagged objects. As Billig writes:

Precisely the processes of banal nationalism enable developed states their continued existence. The very same processes provide model aspirations to peoples who believe that they are denied the right to national independence. In this sense, nationalism is a permanent trait of the world today, not some peripheral factor which flares up from time to time⁷⁷.

In this context, Catalonia represents an instance of its own. On the one hand, despite the fact that Catalan nationalism is a “cold” one, resting on banalization, one cannot speak here of seeking to reproduce a nation state because the Catalan state in the shape of a republic has not been established. On the other hand, Catalan nationalism strives to change the political map of Spain and Europe, which materializes in the quotidian practice of marking space with flags and signs. The Catalan community, or at least its substantial proportion, entertain the conviction that Catalonia is a nation lacking a state. The daily banalization practices serve to sustain the conceived idea of the Catalan Republic. What is more, banalization as a manifestation of the “cold” nationalism which ensures success to the “hot” one has led to a situation where banalization is being banalized today. Many persons who were previously unaware of the banality of certain symbols in the social space are aware of it now, and in spite of treating the banalized symbols seriously, banalize them at the same time in everyday life. Jordi Canal goes as far as calling it an “independence fad” (*una moda indepe*), evinced in patriotic production of various items featuring independence symbols (phone cases, helmets, bands, necklaces, cobs, watches, pendants, etc.)⁷⁸. Then again, at least half of the inhabitants of Catalonia do not yield to the banalization, as the flag-inundated

⁷⁴ Laínz 2007 p. 79.

⁷⁵ Tortella et al. 2016, p. 476.

⁷⁶ Billig 2008, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, pp. 15-16.

⁷⁸ Canal 2018, pp. 330-332.

space cause resistance and counteraction. One could say that the greatest weakness of banalization of nationalism in Catalonia is the inability of exerting influence on the entire community. Banal nationalism did not result in social homogenization in Catalonia, and in this respect the success of “cold nationalism” is incomplete, which subsequently translates into “hot nationalism”. Consequently, the percentage of Catalans who are in favour of independence amounts to “mere” 47%.

The war of symbols in Catalonia shows that banal nationalism may reinforce the “hot” variety, but it can banalize it too. After all, people consciously use either Catalan or Spanish flags and symbols (political use) but, being ubiquitously present on a daily basis and having become a product for sale, they descend into banality. This daily banalization of nationalism help to forge hard nationalism but its strength is thus undermined. For instance, each Chinese shop in Catalonia sells both Spanish flags and *esteladas*, as well as other gadgets bearing the symbols of Catalonia and Spain. Many Catalans wear *lazos amarillos* bought from Chinese who made it themselves, using a length of ribbon and an ordinary safety pin.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the upshots of the mass flagging of Catalan space with pro-independence symbols is that flags of Spain are displayed not only in Catalonia but also in the entire country. These spontaneous acts may be interpreted as a political declaration and a statement of identity, an affirmation of Spanishness and Spain’s unity. The streets of Zaragoza provide a telling example, giving the impression of an ongoing national holiday. Spanish flags are seen on most buildings, but there is no single *estelada* in sight. In these circumstances, some even speak of a revival of Spanish patriotism and pride in national symbols⁷⁹, which previously were not so readily exhibited due to connotations with the Francoist regime. Naturally, a proportion of Catalans is likely to consider it a manifestation of the centralist nationalism, which would like to see any Catalan symbol suppressed, as it did take place during the times of José Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco. Today, Spaniards no longer have to wait for the matches of *La Roja* to be able to hang out national flags, flagging the space of the country on a daily basis. Again, the mass pres-

⁷⁹ Quiroga and Achilles 2018, pp. IX-XI.

ence of the Spanish flag increases its value on the one hand whilst causing its symbolic devaluation in the process of banalization on the other. Thus, the war of symbols transforms them into “articles of patriotic consumption”⁸⁰ and results in double banalization of both Catalan and Spanish symbols.

According to Josep Colomer, that symbolic rift in the Spanish society should be attributed not only to political instability and frequent change of governments, but also attests to poor social cohesion⁸¹. Colomer, a political scientist from Barcelona, emphasizes that banalizations of patriotism are not widespread in Spain, but owe their limited scope to resignation, indifference, discomfort and rejection of aggression⁸². However, one can hardly concur with the view as far as Catalonia is concerned, whose community is divided as never before. Its members are actively involved in marking their territories and asserting identity with symbols, which clash in the streets of Catalonia day by day. One side puts out their yellow ribbons, *esteladas* and yellow crosses, the other attempt to remove them. Actions of that kind frequently entail aggression or violence, not to mention visual perpetuation through videos posted online. All that causes tension to mount and the social divisions to deepen (Fig. 19). One can barely resist the impression that Catalonia finds itself on the brink of a civil war.

CATALONIA 2018: CLASHING IDENTITIES IN PUBLIC SPACE

Summary

The current political situation in Catalonia engenders grave social tension. The Catalan community is far from homogeneous, being divided into two hostile camps: the *constitucionalistes*, supporters of Spanish unity and the rights guaranteed under the Constitution of 1978, and the *independentistas*, adherents of the independence of Catalonia envisaged as a republic. Catalonia today witnesses semantic and polysemous rivalry, having become an arena to the war of symbols, flags, signs and identities. Ceaseless contest is taking place in the Catalan public space, where people claim the right to manifest distinct identities and political views, evinced in the simultaneous presence of the pro-independence flag called *estelada*, the official Catalan flag

⁸⁰ Moreno Luzón and Núñez Seixas 2017, p. 423.

⁸¹ Colomer 2018, p. 171.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 172.

known as *señera* and the national Spanish *rojigualda*. Slogans such as “Away with the monarchy!”, “Catalan Republic” or “Fuck Spain!” clash with “Long live the king!”, “Long live Spain!” and “Screw Catalonia!”. Contrary to widely held opinions, the author argues that the struggle for freedom and free speech in Catalonia after October 1st, 2017 – excluding evident instances of violation of such rights – attest to the polysemous nature of the Catalan community in what is the most severe political crisis that the Iberian Peninsula has experienced in the 21st century.



Fig. 1. “Free political prisoners” in Catalan in one of the main streets of Barcelona. All photographs made in Barcelona by Filip Kubiaczyk.



Fig. 2. Sticker with the slogan “Catalan Republic” (in Catalan) under a street name plate.

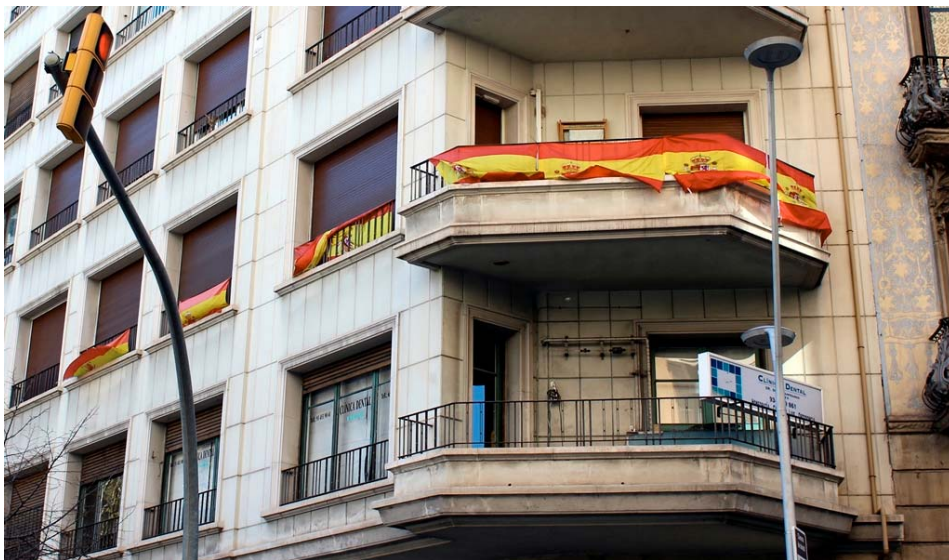


Fig. 3. Flags of Spain on a building in Barcelona.



Fig. 4. A building dominated by *esteladas*.



Fig. 5. The *estelada* accompanied by *ikurriña*.



Fig. 6. Flag of Spain combined with the *señera* and the flag of the European Union.



Fig. 7. Flag with a slogan in Catalan: “Catalonia, a new state in Europe”.



Fig. 8. Fence decorated with *lazos amarillos*.



Fig. 9. Building on which the *señera*, the *estelada*, a *lazo amarillo* and the *rojigualda* can be seen together.



Fig. 10. *Lazo amarillo* changed into a *lazo* in Spanish colours.



Fig. 11. A wall with the inscription reading “Catalan Republic” in Catalan and the *estelada* drawn next to it.



Fig. 12. The text in English, “Free all catalan political prisoners”, has been painted on a wall by the walkway to the beach.



Fig. 13. The drawing on a sidewalk in the centre of Barcelona, showing a police officer beating a person, has been supplied with the message in English: “Spain: fake democracy”.



Fig. 14. “Bon dia República” (*Good Morning Republic*) with a lazo, painted on outer doors.



Fig. 15. The crossed-through figure of 155 protests the suspension of the autonomy of Catalonia under Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution.



Fig. 16. Inscription on the sidewalk reading “Free political prisoners” complemented with a *lazo amarillo*.



Fig. 17. The Catalan text on a wall, “Free political prisoners!”, has been countered with the slogan “Onward Spain”.



Fig. 18. The standard symbol for Spain on the licence plate of this scooter (E) has been replaced with a sticker saying CAT (for Catalonia) and matching EU iconography.



Fig. 19. These two inscriptions (both in Catalan) on a building wall respectively assert “Fuck Spain” and “Fuck Catalonia”.

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