

**Afraid of what? Why Islamist terrorism and the Catalan independence question became conflated in representations of the 2017 Barcelona attacks**

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**Abstract**

This article analyses why the issue of terrorism and the quest for independence in Catalonia, which are fundamentally different matters, became conflated in representations of and responses to the terrorist violence of 17 August 2017 in Barcelona and Cambrils. Pro-independence discourses and messages that developed in response not only to the attacks themselves, but also to the Spanish authorities' handling of the situation, were successfully used to further the sense of group cohesion that had gradually been built over several years beforehand by pro-independence activists, and which was so crucial to attempts to increase support for independence in the run-up to the illegal referendum of 1 October 2017. This is shown through two case studies: first, the use of the phrase 'No tinc por' ('I'm not afraid') in defiance not only of Islamist terrorists, but also of Spanish politicians refusing to allow an independence referendum; and second, the role and depiction of the Mossos (the Catalan police) in the aftermath of the attacks, especially the making of a hero out of Catalan police chief Trapero.

**Key words**

Catalonia, Islamist terrorism, Catalan independence, civil society, No tinc por, Mossos

The Madrid train bombings of 11 March 2004 (11-M) will forever be etched in Spanish memory, not only on account of the terrible loss of human life but also the intense politicisation of the episode, which is widely interpreted as having cost the incumbent conservative People's Party (PP) the general election three days later. Differing attributions of blame for the attacks profoundly divided society rather than uniting it, with the Spanish right—and sectors of the media associated with it—continuing to blame the Basque terrorist group ETA in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, even as evidence pointing to Islamist terrorism quickly surfaced. On 17 August 2017, thirteen years on from the Madrid attacks, Spain again fell victim to Islamist terrorism, this time in Catalonia, the only small mercy being that this time the death toll was much lower, no doubt thanks to the fact that the terrorists had inadvertently blown up their own bomb factory days beforehand. The main attack involved a van mowing down locals and tourists along La Rambla, a wide street and pedestrian thoroughfare in central Barcelona, and was followed later the same day by a second smaller attack in the coastal town of Cambrils, Tarragona.

On this second occasion, the authorship of the attacks (Islamist militants) was never in doubt and the political circumstances in Spain were different. The main domestic political debate going on at the time was not an electoral contest between the PP and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) for the reins of Spanish government, but rather the battle between the central Spanish authorities and the Catalan regional government over the latter's unilateral plans to hold an independence referendum on 1 October 2017, against the provisions of the Spanish Constitution. While this time around any politicisation of the terror attacks was not quite as overt as back in 2004, controversies still surged that brought Spanish-Catalan tensions to the fore, such as the Catalan interior minister's distinction between Spanish and Catalan victims in his list of nationalities affected, or the debate over what both the Spanish intelligence services and the Catalan 'Mossos d'Esquadra' (regional police, hereafter Mossos)

knew about the attackers from external alerts, and whether this was passed on to their counterparts.

Clear divisions seemed particularly in evidence at a march against terrorism in Barcelona on 26 August 2017, where the presence of pro-independence and pro-Republican Catalan officials beside the Spanish king and prime minister could not mask the signs of difference all around them. An abundance of strategically placed Catalan separatist flags near the head of the march attracted much attention in the media, as did the multitude of placards denouncing the Spanish king and state, accusing them of being proponents of a capitalist world that contributes to terrorism through arms sales. The most radical party of those in favour of independence, the anti-capitalist Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), refused to join the march since members of the Spanish PP and monarchy were to be present, and organised its own separate event instead. In the media and on social networks such as Twitter, the debate before, during and after the day was heavily focused on the Spanish-Catalan political situation and resulting divisions, rather than on the global nature of Islamist terrorism, or indeed the international origins of the victims of the attacks in Catalonia.

Using a homemade style of terrorism already deployed in France, the UK and elsewhere, the terrorists had attacked tourist hotspots in Catalonia at the height of the summer season, and therefore it is not surprising that of the 16 people who died during or following the Barcelona attacks, the majority (10) were not in fact from Spain. If we include the injured, 34 nationalities in total were affected, according to Spanish and Catalan government spokespeople.<sup>1</sup> Seen in this light, the fact that so much of the political response to and media coverage of the attacks was coloured by domestic politics, despite the global reach of the terrorist attack in question, bears parallels with the aftermath of 11-M, notwithstanding the differences between the two attacks and their contexts. And yet, one of the major differences

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<sup>1</sup> 'Víctimas de 34 nacionalidades en unos atentados que suman ya 14 fallecidos', *La Vanguardia*, 18 August 2017; available at <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20170818/43636371701/victimas-de-34-nacionalidades-en-unos-atentados-que-suman-ya-14-fallecidos.html>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

this time around is that social networks and technologies that were non-existent back in 2004 were fully in operation. This proved a game-changer in terms not only of the speed with which information could be spread, but also of the sense of togetherness that could be generated among the like-minded.

Academic experts on the Catalan independence movement have studied in depth the role of hugely influential civil society groups—which are in fact politically well-connected—in building support for independence in Catalonia in recent years, and the fundamental importance of Web 2.0 communication technologies in making this possible. This has involved assessing the ways in which the discourses of political and civil society elites have evolved to attract a wider audience than the traditional centre-right Catalan nationalism of the past, and how these messages have then reached and been adopted by a wide audience thanks in large part to the new technologies. Kathryn Crameri, for example, charts the trajectory of pro-independence political discourses away from the sentimental, cultural and identitarian arguments of traditional Catalan nationalism towards practical focuses on issues such as welfare and the economy, to the point that these had become accepted ideas by 2013. She then analyses the importance of cultural and intellectual elites in ensuring the successful circulation and adoption of such pro-independence discourses and messages, which have lent themselves to the creation of a sense of group cohesiveness.<sup>2</sup>

This article seeks to build on such previous research by examining how pro-independence discourses and messages evolved in the wake of the terror attacks and the run-up to the illegal independence referendum of 1 October 2017. The key question posed is why the issue of terrorism and the quest for independence in Catalonia, which are fundamentally different matters, became conflated in representations of and responses to the attacks, and why this served to bolster the independence movement in Catalonia. This will be investigated

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<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Crameri, *'Goodbye Spain?' The Question of Independence for Catalonia* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014).

through an analysis of two separate but inter-related case studies, which illustrate in different ways how metanarratives uniting the two themes were built. A mixed methodology is used, combining content and discourse analyses of relevant social media (predominantly Twitter) and traditional media (newspapers and television), including cultural products such as political satire and cartoons. Such mixed methods are needed in order to provide an adequate understanding of the complex interplay between different media and cultural products, and between politicians, civil society leaders and individuals in generating messages and meaning among pro-independence groups. In addition, personal interviews were undertaken in December 2017 with two prominent members of the pro-independence civil society movement: Liz Castro (@lizcastro), author of several books on Catalan independence and chair of the international committee of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), the leading pro-independence civil society organisation; and Miquel Strubell (@mstrubell), one of the founding members of the ANC. These gave first-hand insight into how events were interpreted and used by pro-independence activists with a prominent social media presence and many followers.

The first case study focuses on the widespread adoption and use of the phrase ‘No tinc por’ (‘I’m not afraid’) in response not only to Islamist terrorism, but also to perceived Spanish ‘authoritarianism’. Following the terror attacks, ‘No tinc por’ became a widely repeated refrain and the lead slogan for the ‘unity’ march against terrorism in Barcelona on 26 August 2017. And yet the same phrase had already been used repeatedly among independence supporters, long before the terror attacks ever happened, to protest against the Spanish authorities’ refusal to countenance a referendum, including using means perceived by Catalan pro-independence supporters as attempts to instil fear in them. This study will analyse the origins of this phrase, why it came to be used in both circumstances, and what the consequences were for the pro-independence movement.

The second case study analyses the role and depiction of the Catalan Mossos in the aftermath of the attacks and the implications for the independence movement, with a particular

focus on the making of a modern hero out of the now former Catalan police chief Josep Lluís Trapero Álvarez. Pro-independence groups and individuals have long proven adept at using twenty-first century processes of communication and dissemination not only to revive the myths of historical heroes (especially key figures from 1714) and update them to their cause, but also to create contemporary heroes out of ordinary Catalans.<sup>3</sup> There are striking parallels here with the speed with which Trapero, previously an ordinary police chief unknown to most Catalans, became the new hero in the pro-independence psyche after certain pro-independence groups and individuals seized on him as a figure to be celebrated for his role in coordinating the Catalan police following the terror attacks, only then to be charged with sedition and subsequently demoted by the Spanish authorities for allegedly not doing enough to stop Catalans voting in the illegal referendum. Going beyond the depiction of Trapero, this section will also analyse the impact of newspaper reporting on the Catalan police's handling of the terror attacks, which was perceived—rightly or wrongly—by pro-independence forces as an attempt to discredit the Mossos in general.

One of the most striking features of the Catalan independence movement has been the important role played by civil society organisations in building citizen momentum and support for the pro-independence cause, which has led to interpretations of the turn towards a pro-sovereignty agenda in Catalonia as a 'bottom-up', 'emancipatory' process. Others, however, have problematized this by suggesting that 'top-down' nation-building activities and discourses by nationalist political elites over the decades, combined with 'outbidding' processes by political parties and elites in a context of partisan struggles within Catalonia itself, have influenced citizen identity formation processes in Catalonia and thus the emergence of an apparently bottom-up movement.<sup>4</sup> Interpretations of the evolution of Catalan territorial agendas have thus been

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<sup>3</sup> Crameri, 'Goodbye, Spain?', 73-99.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller account of the two approaches, see Caroline Gray, *Nationalist Politics and Regional Financing Systems in the Basque Country and Catalonia* (Bilbao: Foral Treasury Doctoral Thesis Collection, 2016), 82-94; available at <<http://www.conciertoeconomico.org/phocadownload/TESIS-Gray-Nationalists-politics.pdf>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

strikingly polarised, but this dualism has its limitations, with top-down approaches tending to rely heavily on survey data and bottom-up approaches showing clear signs of partisanship.<sup>5</sup> In this context, Crameri offers a more nuanced interpretation which seems more appropriate to the evidence, reconceptualising the multidimensional relationship between ‘political power’ and ‘civil counterpower’ as one of ‘co-construction’. This includes examining the complexity and multidimensionality of ‘civil counterpower’ itself, given the extensive role of cultural and media elites within the civil pro-independence movement and its highly organised nature, which problematises bottom-up/top-down distinctions.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we can go one stage further to question the distinction between ‘political power’ and ‘civil counterpower’ as well, given the fluid relationship between civil society and political elites. This became clear when leaders and members of the key pro-independence civil society groups—the ANC and Òmnium Cultural—stood as candidates at the 2015 regional elections as part of the ‘Together for Yes’ (*Junts pel Sí*) pro-independence single list, establishing a path from pro-independence civil society activism to political leadership that has continued since. Moreover, the financing of the ANC or Òmnium includes public subsidies granted by Catalan regional governments, all of which points to the blurring of boundaries between the civic and political spheres and raises the need to be wary when using the term ‘civil society’.

As Crameri acknowledges, one of the key features that has allowed civil society organisations in Catalonia to become so effective are the new technologies and the communication processes they facilitate. The fundamentally vertical forms of communication that traditional mass media constituted in the past, and which afforded little role to the receptor of the dominant message, have largely been replaced by what Castells describes as ‘horizontal networks of multimodal communication’, which give a more active role to the audience,

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<sup>5</sup> Gray, *Nationalist Politics*, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Kathryn Crameri, ‘Political Power and Civil Counterpower: The Complex Dynamics of the Catalan Independence Movement’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 21:1 (2015), 104-120 (pp. 107-111).

resulting in the emergence and construction of multiple messages and meanings.<sup>7</sup> The case studies that follow analyse such multimodal communication processes in action in order to answer the key question posed in this article. Polls have consistently shown that Catalan society is very divided on the question of independence, as also evidenced by the regional election results in 2015 and 2017, at both of which parties against independence won 52-53% of the vote and parties in favour of independence won 47-48%, notwithstanding which the latter gained more seats due to vote distribution. Yet, the pro-independence side has traditionally been far more mobilised and vocal, giving the impression that it has a strong majority, and indeed using that apparent dominance to build group cohesion. Assessing how this has been achieved is an important question that this article aims to contribute to answering through its analysis of the ways in which the issue of terrorism and the quest for independence became conflated.

### **Defiance in the face of violence: ‘No tinc por’**

Bar the change in subject from ‘We’ to ‘I’, the cry of ‘No tinc por’, which became the slogan of the anti-terror march in Barcelona on 26 August 2017, resembled the cry of ‘We’re not afraid’ that became a viral meme following the London terror attacks of 2005.<sup>8</sup> That change in subject, however, is very significant, for it gives a crucial clue as to the phrase’s origins. Despite it being used collectively by many people, the phrase predominantly remained in the singular; the very occasional use of the ‘we’ form, ‘No tenim por’, never took hold in the same way. Analysis of the phrase’s usage on social media and conversations with Catalans reveal very clearly that it originates from a lead song entitled ‘Uh! Oh! No tinc por!’ taken from a hugely popular Catalan children’s TV programme in the Catalan language, the *Club Super3*.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this phrase had

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<sup>7</sup> Manuel Castells, *Communication power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2009]), xxii-xxiv.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Honigsbaum, ‘Defiance and solidarity on the web’, *The Guardian*, 11 July 2005; available at <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2005/jul/11/newmedia.attackonlondon>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Programme website: <<http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/super3/>>; official video of the song: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgS\\_uWVMfWY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgS_uWVMfWY)>; song words: <<http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/super3/uh-oh-no-tinc-por/disc/50/>> (accessed 16 January 2018).



already been used, before the terror attacks ever happened, by pro-independence groups as an expression of defiance against the Spanish authorities and to start to encourage participation in the independence referendum on 1 October 2017. This section will explain the nature of the programme and song in order then to analyse how the song's title inspired Catalan defiance in the face of both Spanish 'authoritarianism' and Islamist terrorism.

The Club Super3 is a container programme for a Catalan children's TV series which has been broadcast since 1991, including via its own branded channel—Canal Super3—since 2009. The programme is varied, interspersing TV shows and cartoons with more informative sections and Catalan news for children.<sup>10</sup> It has undergone various format and character changes since it was first created, but the most significant changes that continue to define the nature of the show today took place in 2006, when a new series started and the Super3 family was born. At that time, five cartoon characters (Pau, Lila, Álex, Roc and Flushi) decided to flee the cartoon world in which they had lived to try their luck in the human world, becoming humans and together forming a family.

One of the key features of the Club Super3 that has made it so successful is that it is not just a children's TV programme, but also an interactive Club that merges fiction with reality in the way it enables children to join and become active participants in the series. All children that join the club become 'Súpers' and there is a direct relationship between them and the fictional characters in the series. The fictional characters often talk about the Súpers, interview some of them, show pictures or read letters that the Súpers have sent in, or announce the results of competitions they have invited them to take part in. As well as receiving a monthly magazine, the Súpers can log into the Club Super3 website to do games and activities, and they receive a membership card which gives them discounts on cultural and other activities in Catalonia. They also receive other communications such as a card on their birthday, a day when their name also

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<sup>10</sup> Josep Gustems Carnicer and Olga González Mediel, 'La música y el sonido en la programación infantil de televisión de Catalunya', in *¿Qué escuchan los niños en la televisión?*, ed. Amparo Porta (Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2010), 110-133 (pp. 120-122).

features on the TV screen. Beyond that, their parents might also take them to the musicals and concerts organised by the Club Super3, which revolve around songs composed for, performed and sung by characters on the TV programme, who then also appear as stars in the related concerts and musicals. The songs are also sold as albums.

Perhaps most importantly of all, there is an annual weekend festival for the Súpers—the *Festa dels Súpers*—that takes place in the Olympic ring at Montjuïc in Barcelona and is attended by hundreds of thousands each year, while many more watch the live retransmission on TV. Importantly, this weekend of fun for the Súpers gives them a role in determining the outcome of the story, rather than just making them passive recipients of it. Through the success not only of the television programme, but all the related activities, the Club Super3 has long been the most popular children’s club or association in Europe. At the time of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016, it had around 500,000 active members (aged 0-14), bringing the total members over its lifetime to around 1.5 million.<sup>11</sup>

For parents to take their kids to the *Festa dels Súpers* at least once, if not annually, has become something of a ritual for many Catalan families. When interviewed, Liz Castro expressed the view that, ‘It’s more than just popular [...]. The Club Super3 is an institution. Part of being a kid in Catalonia is to be part of the Club Super3.’<sup>12</sup> This, however, can be seen as potentially problematic when we consider that around half of all Catalan children are members of the Club, meaning the other half are not, and that it is those parents who want their children to have access to Catalan-language media that are more likely to subscribe their children. Indeed, Liz Castro herself specifically highlighted the important role the programme has played over the years for those parents in favour of the linguistic normalisation of Catalan:

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<sup>11</sup> Marissa de Dios, ‘El “Club Super 3” cumple 25 años’, *El Periódico*, 11 February 2016; available at <<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/tele/20160211/club-super-3-25-anos-super-3-tvc-4880345>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview, 11 December 2017.

Catalan TV was the only TV in Catalan for many years, and it's still the main one. Having your kids have visual media in Catalan is really important for normalising the language. Every afternoon kids get home from school around 5 or 5.30, and that's when the programme starts.<sup>13</sup>

A similar sentiment was expressed by the then director of TV3, Eugeni Sallent, in an interview published in *La Vanguardia* back in December 2011 when the Super3 family first featured in a musical, put on at the Teatre Victòria in Barcelona and co-produced by Dagoll Dagom and TV3. Sallent, a longstanding Catalan nationalist, described the members of the Super3 family as factors of cohesion and diffusion of the Catalan language which he saw as 'invaluable at the present time'<sup>14</sup>—no doubt alluding to the beginning of the new Spanish PP government's attempts at that time to challenge the Catalan educational model whereby all schooling is done first and foremost in Catalan. The Catalan government's linguistic normalisation policies to make Catalan the dominant language in schools, the media and public administration have long been a thorny question, especially the full immersion policy in schools. While defenders of the model argue that it paves the way for a bilingual society by avoiding segregation according to children's home language, detractors suggest that it is inappropriate to oblige children to undertake schooling in a language that is not their mother tongue, and in so doing to relegate Castilian Spanish to secondary status. Official statistics published by the Catalan government indicate that Catalan is the first language of only 36.3% of those living in Catalonia, compared to Castilian Spanish at 50.7%<sup>15</sup>—a division which also has an important class element, as native Catalan speakers tend to be more affluent than native Spanish speakers, who are often working class.

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<sup>13</sup> Personal interview.

<sup>14</sup> 'Los personajes del Super3 protagonizan un musical', *La Vanguardia*, 22 November 2013; available at <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/musica/20131122/54393759330/super3-musical.html>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>15</sup> According to the *Encuesta de Usos Lingüísticos de la Población 2013*, published by the Catalan government's Culture Department and the Catalan Statistics Institute (Idescat).

The phrase 'No tinc por' comes from the song 'Uh! Oh! No tinc por!', which was the lead song and title of the *Festa dels Súpers* back in 2011, as well as the lead song of the Super3 music album published that same year. The song was sung by character Lila, who is referring to the fact that she is not afraid of the dark, nor of vampires, ghosts or any other monsters. By singing 'Uh! Oh! No tinc por!' at the *Festa dels Súpers* in 2011 together with Lila, all the Súpers manage to defeat Mr. Pla's latest attempt to put an end to the Club Super3 with his evil intentions, thwarting his ghosts. Character Mr. Pla, who rents a house to the Super3 family, doesn't like anything to do with children and their games and is always on the lookout for ways to put an end to the Club and to force the Super3 family to leave the house. The question is, how did this phrase from a song on a children's TV show end up being used in reaction both to Islamist terrorism and to the Spanish authorities' attempt to prevent Catalan pro-independence forces from holding a referendum or seceding from Spain?

Analysis of the use of the hashtag #uhohnotincpor on Twitter shows that Catalan parents familiar with the song—due to their children being Súpers—started almost as soon as it had been invented to use the phrase to express their defiance of the Spanish authorities and their support for the 'right to decide' and independence. Not only that, but most such tweets did so in a way that also drew on the sense of community that the Club Super3 creates, in order to explicitly suggest that the same sense of togetherness is what will allow Catalonia to defy Spain and secure independence. For example, on the weekend of 22-23 October 2011, at the *Festa dels Súpers*, one Twitter user (@Genecasa) suggested that just as Lila and all the Súpers manage to take on Mr. Pla's ghosts, so too will they together achieve Catalan independence: '#uhohnotincpor Contra els fantasmes del Sr Pla, de la vida...jo amb la Lila i tots els Súpers. Junts conseguirem la #IndependènciaCatalunya' (23 October 2011). Another (@JordiCorrons) referred to the Falangists that had demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the pro-independence cultural organisation Òmnium Cultural that day, saying they should have realised that Catalans have been singing for a while that they're not afraid: 'Als falangistes que s'han

manifestat davant d' #omnium no s'han assabentat que els Catalans fa temps que cantem #uhohnotincpor' (22 October 2011). A serious political concern is thus made to seem trivial and surmountable by linking it to the children's programme, with the opponents cast in the role of insubstantial ghosts, which helps to bolster the resolve of pro-independence supporters.

It was thus individuals, rather than the leaders of civil society organisations or politicians, who first used the refrain 'Uh! Oh! No tinc por!'—or its shortened format 'No tinc por'—to express defiance of the Spanish authorities and support for the growing pro-sovereignty movement in Catalonia at the time. In the following months and years, some civil society organisations and politicians then started to do the same, picking up on the trend, which helped to amplify it further, as top-down and bottom-up processes thus interacted with each other to generate the form of multimodal communication that Castells theorises about. Various local organisations of the ANC were among the first pro-independence groups to start to appropriate the refrain. For example, on 29 September 2015, the day when Artur Mas was summoned to court for his role in the informal independence consultation of 9 November 2014, the Sant Martí delegation of the ANC (@SantMartixind) tweeted '#9NSomTots #Uhohnotincpor'. The unifying themes here were again those of unity ('We're all 9N') and fearlessness. Interestingly, however, there have also been a number of cases where pro-independence individuals have explicitly encouraged and called upon the ANC and other organisations to adopt 'Uh! Oh! No tinc por!' as a unifying chorus or refrain. For example, on 13 November 2016, when a big demonstration took place in Barcelona protesting against the charges being brought against the Catalan politicians who had organised the informal independence consultation on 9 November 2014, a Twitter user (@berticat73) tweeted the ANC suggesting that they add 'Uh! Oh! No tinc por!' to the songs of the demonstrations: '@assemblea A les cançons de les properes manifestacions també hi podem afegir el #uhohnotincpor del club Super3'.

Politicians too would pick up on the trend. Most notably, Joan Tardà, MP and spokesperson for the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) in the Spanish parliament, made mention of the song in his parliamentary intervention on 30 August 2017 when he addressed Spanish prime minister Rajoy to say that Catalans would have the courage to vote in the independence referendum on 1 October 2017.<sup>16</sup> After pointing out that the Club Super3 has ‘three times as many members as FC Barcelona’, he proceeded to talk of the ‘thousands and thousands and thousands of children in Catalonia’ who sing ‘Uh! Oh! No tinc por’. He focused on the wording of part of the song which contrasts courage with the use of force, ‘No tinc por de res, / ser valenta és molt millor / que tenir força’, addressing Rajoy as follows:

Pues bien, lo dicho, como la canción señor Rajoy, nosotros optamos por la valentía, por la valentía democrática de votar el día 1 de octubre, le dejamos a usted la fuerza, la fuerza bruta y corrupta.<sup>17</sup>

This intervention by Joan Tardà, on the subject of the upcoming illegal independence referendum of 1 October 2017, came four days after ‘No tinc por’ had been the main slogan of the anti-terror march on 26 August. It is not surprising at all that ‘Uh! Oh! No tinc por’, or simply ‘No tinc por’, then became a key refrain used by pro-independence individuals and groups to encourage people to vote in the illegal independence referendum on 1 October, especially given that ‘Uh! Oh!’ is pronounced the same in Catalan as ‘1-O’ (1 October, the date of the vote). In fact, pro-independence supporters had already started to make the most of this play on words to encourage people to vote on 1 October, long before the terrorist attacks ever happened. For example, Jordi Calvís (@jordicalvis), a Catalan illustrator, designed a picture with the characters

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Tardà a Rajoy: “Uh, oh, no tinc por”’, *La Vanguardia*, 30 August 2017; available at <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20170830/43920277505/joan-tarda-mariano-rajoy-catalunya-fuerza.htm>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Youtube clip of Tardà’s full speech: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zr98m-eKNYw>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

of Club Super3 surrounded by ballot boxes and the words '1/0! No tinc por!' written across it. This had already been printed on t-shirts that had started to be sold by *Productes de la Terra*, an outfit selling pro-independence memorabilia, back in June 2017.

Was it therefore coincidence or related that the same slogan that had already been widely used by pro-independence voters in defiance of the Spanish authorities was adopted for the anti-terror march? To an extent, it can be seen as a coincidence, in that the cry of 'No tinc por' on 26 August was aimed fundamentally at the terrorists rather than Spanish state representatives. Again, the phrase had emerged from below, as Catalans, by then very familiar with that phrase through the song, started shouting it spontaneously at the first, less organised march against terrorism at Plaza Catalunya and down the Rambla on the first Saturday (19 August) following the attacks. It then became the slogan of the larger and more organised march on the second Saturday, 26 August. The strategically placed Catalan separatist flags at the head of the latter march, combined with the whistling against the Spanish king and state representatives, led to events of the day being interpreted in the media as having turned into an anti-Spain event rather than an anti-terror march. Photos taken further back nevertheless show that the vast majority of the participants were not carrying flags or banners, suggesting that the politicisation of the march was limited to specific groups and designed in part for mediatic effect, rather than the dominant tonality.

Separatist flags aside, some Catalan pro-independence activists themselves suggest that the whistling and booing of the Spanish king and placards recriminating the sale of arms—and thus the alleged involvement of the state in perpetuating terrorism—was not in fact primarily about Catalan independence. Rather, to quote Liz Castro, 'it was about arms, it was about manipulation by *any* state, it was about the rejection of militarism'.<sup>18</sup> In other words, she suggests, the aim was to make the point that they would not let fear control how they react,

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<sup>18</sup> Personal interview.

that in contrast to other countries they would not succumb to the primal need for vengeance, but rather they would maintain an open, progressive policy towards Islam and refugees. The many groups who denounced the king's presence at the march and held placards up against his presence were primarily left-wing organisations reacting against Spanish state relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, countries which are suspected of funding ISIS, but not all were associated with the Catalan independence movement. According to this viewpoint, the reactions against the Spanish king and state at the march can be seen as an extension of the form of popular sovereignty and reaction against the traditional Spanish state institutions seen in the 15-M movement and Podemos. This argument that the activists' motives had little to do with the pro-independence cause or anti-Spain sentiment only holds so far though, since none of the pro-independence groups ever protested an important Catalan institution like Futbol Club Barcelona being funded by the Qatar sovereign fund (via the Qatar Airways sponsorship), which has also been accused of funding terrorism. Moreover, the Podemos-affiliated mayor of Cádiz conceded that his city's shipyards depend on building frigates which will be sold to Saudi Arabia to use against Yemeni rebels, and that he had no intention of protesting this.

In other senses, there are even clearer relationships between the use of 'No tinc por' against Islamist terrorists and against perceived Spanish 'authoritarianism', which tell us much about the pro-sovereignty movement in Catalonia and how it has become so popular. The Club Super3 has always been designed to promote the positive values of equality, togetherness, participation and friendship. The slogan 'Tots som súpers' ('We're all Súpers') is designed to bring children together, and the songs and stories shown in the programme are almost always geared around the idea in some shape or form of good winning over evil through the collaborative efforts and togetherness of the characters and all the Súpers. 'No tinc por' may be an individual expression of fearlessness, but it becomes a collective one when all the children sing it together. The way in which the Club Super3 thus creates a community is in fact remarkably similar to the way in which the Catalan pro-independence civil society organisations have sought



to build a sense of community and encourage defiance against the Spanish authorities through togetherness. As Castells points out, 'Togetherness is a fundamental psychological mechanism to overcome fear', and creating it through building a community is thus essential to the success of a social movement.<sup>19</sup> Liz Castro interprets 'No tinc por', in whichever context it is used, as 'a positive statement of affirmation' that says 'we're not afraid of anything', and which stems from 'a feeling in Catalonia of self-deprecation, that we never quite win, we even celebrate a defeat on September 11 [Catalan National Day].'<sup>20</sup> In this sense, violence—whether it be Islamist terrorism, 'psychological violence' by the Spanish authorities seeking to instil fear in pro-independence Catalans with threats of legal action, or actual violence inflicted by Spanish police attempting on 1 October to stop people voting—is represented in the Catalan pro-independence psyche as something never to bow to. And yet, if we turn from what is rendered visible to what is rendered invisible, and focus on the other half of all Catalan children who are not part of the Club and are therefore not included within the '*Tots som súpers*' which is presented as the epitome of 'togetherness', we have a good example of the extent to which pro-independence 'togetherness', either consciously or unconsciously, may be predicated on the exclusion of Catalans against independence, as well as of all those who do not have Catalan as their mother tongue.

Creating this sense of togetherness, which can in turn engender fearlessness, has inevitably involved creating the impression of a unified people, despite Catalan society being heavily divided on the issue of independence. This highly controversial attempt at unification is perhaps best expressed in the well-known pro-independence mantra '*Som un sol poble*' ('We're one people'), but it has also manifested itself in many other forms on specific occasions. Ahead of the march on 26 August, for example, the ANC adapted the traditional drawing of La Norma, a well-known Catalan cartoon of a young smiling girl wearing blue dungarees and a white t-shirt

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<sup>19</sup> Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social movements in the internet age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2012]), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview.

which had first been used back in the 1980s as part of the campaign to encourage and normalise use of Catalan in the new Spanish democracy after it had been banned under dictator Franco. In the original cartoon designed in 1982, she held a book saying 'Sóc la Norma' (literally, 'I'm the Norm'—a play on words since Norma is also a girl's name) and a speech bubble came from her mouth saying 'El Català, cosa de tots' ('Catalan belongs to all'). The ANC's decision in 2017 to use an adapted version of the cartoon ahead of the anti-terror march, changing the speech bubble to 'No tinc por' and giving Norma a badge saying 'Sóc ANC' (I'm the ANC), is one example of how the pro-independence forces have adopted emblems, slogans and figures that were once designed to belong to all Catalans irrespective of their political affiliation ('Catalan belongs to all') in order to build a sense of togetherness and to 'normalise' pro-independence sentiment—interestingly, again via a child-related image.

### **Politicising violence: the Catalan police as foes or heroes**

Just as the fictional Super3 family encouraged togetherness and courage, so too did a human 'hero', Josep Lluís Traperó. Traperó, then chief of Catalonia's police force, became an unintentional hero when he led the investigation and press conferences in the aftermath of the 2017 terror attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils. His heroism in the eyes of Catalan pro-independence groups would reach new heights following the illegal independence referendum held on 1 October, when Traperó was charged by the Spanish prosecutor with sedition and demoted from his position as police chief for not having followed Spanish orders to forcibly vacate polling stations where voting was taking place. This section analyses the crucial question of how Spanish-Catalan domestic political concerns influenced political and media representations of the August 2017 terrorist attacks by focusing on the role and depiction of Traperó and the wider Catalan police force.

While Traperó was praised by many citizens and politicians alike in Catalonia for professionalism in handling the situation in the aftermath of the terror attacks, this was not in

fact what first made him into an icon. Rather, it was an off-the-cuff remark he made at a press conference on 21 August when a Dutch journalist interrupted him replying to a question in Catalan to ask him to speak in Spanish instead. The Catalan police force had been issuing communications in Catalan, Spanish and English, and procedure at the press conference was to answer questions asked in Catalan in Catalan, and questions asked in Spanish in Spanish. Trapero explained this to the journalist, upon which the journalist decided to leave. At which point Trapero muttered, half in Catalan and half in Spanish, ‘Bueno, pues molt bé, pues adió’s’ (‘Right, fine then, bye’). This instinctive off-the-cuff remark ended up trending worldwide on Twitter and turning Trapero into an unsuspecting hero in the eyes of Catalan speakers, especially those in favour of independence.<sup>21</sup>

Catalonia is one of a select few regions in Spain which has its own regional police force. It is the Catalan interior ministry that commands the Mossos, while the Spanish interior ministry commands the few remaining Spanish police officers in Catalonia, who continue to fulfil central government responsibilities such as the fight against terrorism and the handling of immigration and identity documentation. As elsewhere in Spain, the highest echelons of the Catalan civil service are generally political appointments. Trapero’s appointment by Puigdemont back in April 2017 had not been entirely free from controversy in this regard: some newspapers at the time pointed to Trapero’s apparently cosy relationship with Puigdemont and other key pro-independence figures, which had been revealed by his attendance at a party organised by the well-known pro-independence journalist Pilar Rahola in August 2016 at her summer house.<sup>22</sup> In office, however, Trapero sought to keep out of politics—certainly more so than his overtly pro-independence boss, Pere Soler, Director General of the Mossos. Catalan citizens would

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<sup>21</sup> Guillermina Torresi, ‘Las redes sociales se rinden a favor de Trapero’, *La Vanguardia*, 22 August 2017; available at <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20170821/43730477206/bueno-pues-molt-be-pos-adios-josep-lluis-trapero-major-mossos-atentado-barcelona.html>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Josep Lluís Trapero, el “comisari Paella”’: de fiesta con Puigdemont y Rahola hace un año’, *Libertad Digital*, 23 August 2017, <<http://www.libertaddigital.com/espana/2017-08-23/josep-lluis-trapero-el-comisari-paella-de-fiesta-con-puigdemont-hace-un-ano-1276604754/>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

therefore not necessarily have had any reason to have heard of Trapero prior to the terror attacks. In light of this, the speed with which he unwittingly became the new pro-independence icon following the aforementioned press conference is all the more striking. Within less than 24 hours, not only had #buenopuesmoltbepuesadios started trending on Twitter, but a number of outlets had started selling t-shirts featuring cartoon-like drawings of Trapero and his words. One of the most widely used illustrations was that by Jordi Calvís—mentioned above—who again donated a drawing to the cause via his Twitter account on 21 August (@jordicalvis). A Twitter account @TraperoFansClub was created, attracting thousands of followers, and Twitter users started to use Trapero's phrase in different contexts, especially related to the independence cause. For example, one tweet from @TraperoFansClub was a picture of a ballot slip for the 1 October referendum where the answers to the question of whether Catalonia should be an independent state were either 'Bueno pues molt bé pues adió's' or 'no' (30 September 2017).

It is easy to see why the phrase caught on so quickly among pro-independence individuals and groups. Firstly, the short video clip of the moment where Trapero instinctively and casually shrugged his shoulders and said his now famous phrase is inherently suited to social media and going viral. Moreover, the phrase, which endeared Trapero to Catalans for his defence of the language, also lends itself to being used by independence supporters in other contexts: pro-independence individuals and groups aimed it on Twitter at Spanish politicians whose actions they disagree with, and indeed Spain in general, as a form of expressing their desire for independence. Not only that, but the casual, humorous nature of the phrase makes light of these serious questions, and using humour is a well-known way of overcoming fear and trepidation, especially when expressed collectively.

Trapero's newfound and unwitting fame even saw him feature in the popular Catalan political parody TV show, *Polònia*, which is watched by hundreds of thousands of viewers when it is shown by the regional broadcaster TV3 every Thursday at prime time, with a repeat on Sunday. The programme comprises a series of sketches and gags offering a comic parody of the

latest events in Spanish and especially Catalan politics. On 14 September 2017, an estimated 650,000 viewers were watching when Polònia featured Trapero as the star of a parodic hero's song, 'Sóc en Trapero' ('I'm Trapero').<sup>23</sup> This involved five other police officers dancing around him and lifting him up, while two other main characters, impersonating Catalan president Carles Puigdemont and journalist Pilar Rahola, showered Trapero with praise.

Unlike satire, which is generally designed to aggressively criticise and humiliate its target, academics have shown that Polònia fits better the description of parody, which is more playful and funny and does not have always the same malicious intent.<sup>24</sup> Polònia is thus designed first and foremost to entertain viewers with comic depictions of the latest events and characters in politics, rather than necessarily to show contempt for those figures. This does not mean, however, that Polònia is entirely neutral. There has been much debate over whether TV3 is biased towards independence, and this debate has extended to Polònia too, for even though the programme is produced by an independent company, the show's director, Toni Soler, is a fervent supporter of Catalan independence. The question is, has this impacted the way in which events and characters are portrayed in Polònia? Are some characters portrayed more sympathetically than others?

While there is certainly no facile moralising in the programme, Crameri argues that a distinction between the way the Spanish and Catalan political class are generally treated in the programme can be discerned, with the Catalan political class usually being represented in a way that humanises them more, thereby inviting viewers to raise a complicit smile with the characters rather than ridiculing them.<sup>25</sup> I would suggest the same can be said of the portrayal of Trapero: the sight of him dancing around somewhat ridiculously and being praised effusively

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<sup>23</sup> Official video of song: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ypyd7LnhVFA>> (accessed 16 January 2018); viewers' estimate according to press articles, including: 'Trapero encén el "Polònia"', *El País*, 15 September 2017; available at <[https://cat.elpais.com/cat/2017/09/15/cultura/1505470945\\_727033.html](https://cat.elpais.com/cat/2017/09/15/cultura/1505470945_727033.html)> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Crameri, 'Goodbye, Spain?', 119-120.

<sup>25</sup> Crameri, 'Goodbye, Spain?', 119-120.

by Puigdemont and Rahola—whose inclusion is no doubt designed as a subtle allusion to the aforementioned summer party—is highly entertaining. And yet viewers laugh with the characters rather than at them, with Trapero’s famous phrase appearing when Rahola sings, ‘if someone attacks him, he replies serenely with an infallible formula’, and Trapero chipping in with, ‘bueno, pues molt bé, pues adios’. Again, then, this all contributes to the sense of camaraderie and complicity between the characters on the show and the viewers watching, bolstering the sense of togetherness among Catalan pro-independence individuals and groups who made Trapero one of their icons.

While Trapero became an icon in the aftermath of the attacks for his defence of the use of Catalan at the press conference, he and the Mossos more widely also became well respected in Catalonia for their handling the situation, with attempts by some of the press to criticise the Mossos generally backfiring. In Spain, given the intensely politicised nature of much of both the national and regional media, it is not surprising that the coverage in the aftermath of the attacks was heavily coloured by the heated debate over what both the Spanish intelligence services and the Mossos knew about the attackers from external alerts, and whether this was passed on to their counterparts. Long prior to the attacks, there had been complaints from the Catalan government about Spain not allowing the Catalan police direct access to shared intelligence via Europol, the European shared intelligence resource, with the Catalan police only being able to access the information via the Spanish national police body (*Cuerpo Nacional de Policía*). Views had differed about whether direct access was really necessary, with critics in Madrid arguing that Europol was centred around member states and that the fluid stream of information between the Spanish police and regional police forces made it unnecessary for the Mossos to have direct access. In political terms, the Catalan independence movement has interpreted Madrid’s reluctance to grant them direct access as a sign of Madrid’s desire to prioritise Spanish sovereignty over safety, while politicians in Madrid have invariably seen the Catalan request as part and parcel of its sovereignty ambitions rather than a necessity. The

debate not surprisingly resurfaced with a vengeance in the aftermath of the August 2017 attacks, when the Spanish government was yet to decide whether to grant the Mossos direct access, following a petition by the Catalan Security Council (Junta de Seguretat) to this effect in July 2017.

This debate was exacerbated by what some Catalans perceived as a Spanish media campaign to ‘discredit’ the work of the Mossos. While various questions were raised and contradictions emerged about who knew what and whether there was sufficient coordination between the Spanish and Catalan authorities, the story that arguably caused the biggest noise was the publication by Barcelona-based *El Periódico*, on 31 August, of a document allegedly from the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) stating that it had warned the Catalan police in late May of intelligence pointing to the likelihood of an attack on the Rambla in the summer months—thus suggesting serious negligence on the part of the Mossos.<sup>26</sup> *El Periódico*, whose editorial line is against Catalan independence, had initially issued a tweet on the very day of the attacks suggesting that the Catalan police had received a warning from the CIA that they had ignored. They therefore came under pressure to release proof of this, leading to the front-page story reproducing the supposed document on 31 August. Suggestions immediately emerged that the latter was a fake—not least due to the very obvious Spanish spellings of some words in a text supposedly in English—at which point the director of *El Periódico* who had authored the article, Enric Hernández, said that the document was a transcription of an oral communication. Whether or not there was any truth in the situation was very unclear at the time, though Trapero himself did in fact suggest some form of warning about a possible attack on the Rambla had been received on 25 May, but that it was not from the CIA and had been given little credibility.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Enric Hernández, ‘Los Mossos recibieron la alerta de atentado en Barcelona de la CIA el 25 de mayo’, *El Periódico*, 31 August 2017 (updated 1 September 2017); available at <<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20170831/mossos-recibieron-alerta-atentado-cia-25-mayo-6255194>> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Mossos admiten un aviso sobre Rambla pero alegan que no era de la CIA ni fiable’, *La Vanguardia*, 31 August 2017; available at <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20170831/43938713732/mossos->

Eventually, some time later, evidence emerged that the alleged warning was not a forgery and that the Mossos had tried to destroy the relevant documents before their likely confiscation by Spanish national police following the 1-O.<sup>28</sup> The initial backlash against *El Periódico* when the story had first broken in August is, however, what had held sway among pro-independence voters at the time. They rallied around the Mossos as their new icon, with Enric Hernández receiving death threats.

As has been a common theme throughout this article, social media played a hugely important role in this regard. No sooner had the story been released than hashtags such as #EnricHernandezDimissio and #elPeriodicoIntoxica emerged. The ‘Spanglish’ of the ‘nota’ also gave rise to satirical humour, with one hashtag becoming #thenota (since the document read ‘the text of the nota that our service sent to the Mossos’) while cartoons and jokes featuring warnings about the attacks in amusing Spanglish started to pop up on Twitter. One of the most important developments, however, was that Julian Assange, Wikileaks founder, stepped into the debate on the very day of the publication of *El Periódico*’s front-page story, tweeting that Enric Hernández should resign for attempting to mislead the public. Given the extent of Assange’s following, this undoubtedly hugely amplified traffic about the subject. Liz Castro says, ‘The Catalan Twitter community is active and close knit, and we all noticed his presence right away.’ She notes that, while Assange’s comments on the Catalan situation in the run-up to 1 October were criticised in Madrid and in the unionist press, ‘sparking conspiracy theories pointing to Russian meddling into Europe’s affairs’, the overwhelming feeling of Catalan

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[admiten-un-aviso-sobre-rambla-pero-alegan-no-era-de-la-cia-ni-fiabile.html](#)> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>28</sup> ‘Los Mossos intentaron destruir la alerta de EEUU sobre la Rambla’, *El Periódico*, 21 January 2018; available at <<https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20180121/mossos-intentaron-destruir-alerta-eeuu-rambla-6567677>> (accessed 2 May 2018).



independence supporters like herself was one of being 'grateful that he is bringing attention to this struggle'.<sup>29</sup>

What started as an unsubstantiated news story thus became something much bigger, with Catalan independence supporters taking the backing of Assange and his following as outside acknowledgement of their 'plight' and using this to further bolster their cause. Miquel Strubell comments that, in his view, the terror attacks were 'a wonderful opportunity for Spain to attack one of Catalonia's four state structures by discrediting the police, but they lost that battle'.<sup>30</sup> The 'state structures' that Strubell refers to here are the Catalan state school system, health system, police and TV and radio, since these services have already long been devolved to the Catalan government and thus would form the backbone of an independent Catalonia under the independence parties' vision. Whether or not the Spanish authorities and the Spanish press were actually trying to discredit the Catalan police is almost irrelevant—what matters is the perception formed by pro-independence groups that they were, and how this helped to fuel their determination to vote on 1 October. Perceived attacks by Spanish political representatives and media against the Mossos saw Catalan independence supporters come out clearly in the latter's favour. Strubell points out that this was actually no small feat, given that in the recent past the Mossos had acquired an unfavourable reputation for their role in evicting people unable to keep paying their mortgages at the height of the financial crisis. The above analysis shows the important role played by Catalan television and social media in making such a feat possible.

## **Conclusion**

This article has established why the starkly different issues of Islamist terrorism and Catalan independence became conflated in the aftermath of the August 2017 terror attacks. First, there

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<sup>29</sup> Liz Castro, 'Catalonia is everyone's business', *Ara in English*, 1 October 2017, <[https://www.ara.cat/en/Catalonia-is-everyones-business\\_0\\_1879612284.html](https://www.ara.cat/en/Catalonia-is-everyones-business_0_1879612284.html)> (accessed 16 January 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Personal interview, 15 December 2017.

was the implicit connection made by some Catalan individuals and groups between Islamist terrorism and Spanish 'authoritarianism', and the use of the same well-known phrase in Catalonia, 'No tinc por', originating from a Catalan children's song, in both contexts. Beyond that, it was not surprising, in light of the push for independence in Catalonia at the time, that the terror attacks became coloured by domestic politics, with not only police chief Trapero but all the Mossos becoming icons for pro-independence Catalans at a time when debate raged over the role of the regional versus national police. Throughout these instances, a united theme in the pro-independence psyche was that 'violence' of any kind—psychological or physical—was represented as something to face without fear and never to bow to. In this regard, police chief Trapero proved the perfect example for independence supporters, maintaining as he did his conviction and calm professionalism, be it in the face of Islamist terror attacks or perceived 'attacks' of a very different nature, namely against the Catalan language or the Catalan police—one of Catalonia's 'state structures'. The terror attacks thus ended up feeding directly into the pro-independence discourses and messages established long prior to the attacks, enhancing the sense of ethno-political cohesion designed to normalise pro-independence sentiment and to encourage Catalans to overcome their fears through unity and camaraderie.