

Critical but Dependent: How Young People Interpret Television News (The Impact of the Events in Ceuta and Melilla)

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- *The article refers to research carried out with high-school students to study the impact of television news reports about the incidents in Ceuta and Melilla, which were a focus of interest particularly in October 2005. The fieldwork was carried out two to three months after the story broke, with the objective of establishing the sediment left, both in terms of representations and values about the events themselves and particularly with regard the media treatment afforded them. It should be said that the methodology used began from the supposition that when we bring young people face to face with images like the ones they could see in these stories and we do so in a group setting and reflexive manner, we are providing a number of skills of critical understanding about reality which might, in other spaces such as the school or family, not have been produced. In this way, 'spontaneous' racist prejudices and stereotypes are put to the test with the crudeness of the images and contrasted with the joint reflection. One of the conclusions put to discussion is that the young people that took part in this research showed signs of critical capacity but also appeared to be confused and to have a divided perspective about the facts; the level to which the media contributes to building this confusion and reinforcing a partial and fragmented vision of the phenomenon dealt with is also be discussed in the final pages of this article.*

Key words

Immigration, media impact, youth, news treatment

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Approach to the problem and state of the matter

In the context of the research work about the news treatment of the incidents in the fence battles in Ceuta and Melilla of October 2005, coordinated by the Table for Diversity at the Catalonia Broadcasting Council, this article presents and discusses the results of research work into the impact on young people in obligatory and higher-certificate secondary studies.

We wanted to frame the problem of this research work within three topics: studies about the impact and effects of television; migration and its presence in the media and the ideal pedagogical framework for a careful treatment of education in audiovisual communication.

1. Studies about the Impact and Effects of Television

Research into the broadcast media has traditionally had two major study objects: the preparation of the message and its reception among viewers. The first refers to the processes involved in the design and execution of audiovisual products, which covers such diverse elements as analysis of the discourse, underlying ideological matrices, the technical requirements employed and the study of the economic agents and groups that support the media. In short, it involves studying how and why audiovisual products are prepared. The second major study object refers to how and what reaches the public, what effects the products generate and, in short, which consequences can be attributed to the intervention of the broadcast media. We will focus on the second area.

Leaving aside theories that reject from the start that television has a great importance in people's lives and which therefore do not admit its relevance, we can set out the

study of the effects of the media in three lines: *I*) research that focuses on the study of individual effects in cognitive, emotional and behavioural areas; *II*) research that focuses on studying not so much particular and specific effects but the life environment the media generates in subjects with regard to lifestyle, priorities, values, etc.; *III*) research that seeks to study the conditions of the reception of the message, both in individual terms and those referring to the direct environment of relations. All these presumptions are separate from the debate about whether there is intentionality on the part of the media to produce particular effects on subjects and the anticipated time of the impact². Thus, besides advertising, which would be the main exponent of the intentionality of activating or inhibiting particular behaviour, the question involves establishing whether the news, intentionally or not, has a more or less precise ability to impact the public's agenda of concerns, the construction of perceptions and representations of the world, and in short the elaboration of maps or scales of values, among other aspects³.

The type of effects indicated by scientific research can be summed up in four main areas of interest (WIMMER AND DOMINICK 2000): the antisocial and pro-social effects of media content; consumer uses and gratifications; establishment of an agenda on the part of the media; and cultivation of the perceptions of the social reality. The first of these areas is the one that has been the object of most effort, in a proportion that can be quantified at four to one in comparison with the others, in which studies about the effects of violence have had a prominent role⁴. In relation to consumer uses and gratifications, research in this field focuses on obtaining information about the television habits of viewers associated with particular consumption patterns, which programmers use to adjust their programming schedules. The third area of interest, i.e., the establishment of an agenda on the part of the media, is the one which probably most strongly links with the interests of the research presented in this article; this research interest has been around for nearly a century, since Lippmann suggested in 1922 that the broadcast media was responsible for the images in our heads (WIMMER AND DOMINICK 2000). These studies group programming issues together in broad categories and measure the time each operator dedicates to them; models of the public's interests are obtained through

public-opinion polls and significant correlations between the issues with the most media presence and the concerns expressed in the opinion polls are extracted. The last area of interest also features a number of points to consider in the work presented here, in particular in relation to the consideration that matters learnt through the media are generalised, sometimes incorrectly, into the social sphere. The central idea is that television cultivates or prepares perceptions of reality: for example, there is evidence that people who watch a lot of TV overestimate the presence of violence in the streets and consider themselves possible victims of criminal acts.

Thus, in relation to the impact of the effects of the media from the methodological viewpoint, its analysis has followed three basic alternative lines, according to the scientific discipline and the interests at stake: structural, behaviourist and cultural. The structural tradition is rooted particularly in approaches that focus on the media and has sought to establish television's effects through opinion or audience polls (WOLF 1992). The behaviourist tradition, belonging to psychology and in particular social psychology, focuses more on the repercussion on the behaviour of socially defined members, through the use of experimental methodologies, participant observations and content analysis. Finally, the cultural tradition, provided by sociolinguistics and anthropology, halfway between socio-centric and media-centric approaches, impacts the analysis of cases with qualitative methodologies to obtain information important for a profound understanding of particular cases and situations rather than generalisations (McQUAIL 1994).

At a point where the abovementioned traditions meet, we understand that the audiovisually competent person re-elaborates or re-codes the message in line with particular individual variables, but there are social conditions that can modify or diminish the importance of the initial impact - variables we can get at through in-depth questionnaires, discussion groups and participant observations. With the combination of the three analysis techniques, we are able to obtain relevant data about the process of the reconstruction of meanings.

In particular, when the analysis involves studying the mechanisms of discrimination of cultural diversity and immigrants in particular, it is necessary to assess how the broadcast media reproduces and possibly inflates particular

types of discrimination which are already produced in the social fabric. It is therefore important to observe how this reproduction of social discrimination, by making negative stereotypes visible, by making them invisible and by the use of discriminatory language, materialises in the different television formats (fiction, news, advertising, game shows, channel-hopping, general programmes, etc.), both in general programmes aimed at the whole of the population and specific shows for particular segments (children, sports, the elderly, etc.).

In other words, more than a problem to solve, immigration is a challenge we must know how to handle at all scales and levels of society; that there is discrimination in a good many social spheres cannot be simply attributed to television - but on the other hand, television does have a special responsibility in this matter.

2. Migration on TV

Concern about the image of immigration and cultural diversity in the broadcast media has been a constant in recent years, both from the professional and academic viewpoints and also, but to a lesser degree, from the viewpoint of operators and the Administration⁵. The fronts opened up have included, for example, using a suitable type of language in news bulletins and reports, avoiding sensationalism and simplifications, emphasising positive stories and minimising negative ones, confirming sources, giving a voice to protagonists and becoming aware, in short, of the media's social responsibility in the construction of a multi- or intercultural society⁶. Let us stop here for a moment.

Mentioning the condition of 'immigrant', or in more particular terms 'ethnic group, skin colour, home country, religion or culture' when not strictly essential to understanding a story is a practice that should be avoided⁷. It is based on the principle that, for a correct understanding of the event, the viewer or reader of the news story requires the maximum information available to know the motivations or reasons that produced the story and why, especially, the repercussions that can be produced are determined, both in general and in particular cases. Referring to the frequent news connections between immigration and crime, Giró

reminds us that "the problem is how to avoid contributing to the racist discourse without abandoning the explicative models of events, particularly the explanation of the motivation of the crime and the reasons that led to the crime being committed" and emphasises the need, as the *Style Manual* also does, of turning to reflection to avoid reductionism and sensationalism.

Migration is not a recent phenomenon in any society and has always generated intense debate and controversy. Without a doubt, in the genesis of conflict it is necessary to seek the condition of the foreign or foreigner, or in a broader and vaguer manner, the category of the *other*⁸, which faces a double consideration: it is seen as a threat to *our* lifestyle and values systems, i.e., omnipotent characters prepared to overcome a thousand difficulties and content to take our jobs and belongings, but which also dissolve our identity; criminals and foreigners willing to take extraordinary risks out of fear and desperation; and, on the other hand, a source of income that can help us fill the coffers, like tourists or pensioners who contribute wealth, but also as a source of new ideas⁹. The discourse turns on cultural diversity and immigration, usually with notions of charity and paternalism. There has also been an effort to portray migration in a positive light, recalling the need to attract tax-paying young people to ensure the coffers of the welfare state¹⁰.

It is clear that immigration is not newsworthy in itself but because of the repercussions it has on the host society. In other words, the fact that 200 people scale a fence is not a story, neither are 200 boats full of immigrants setting sail or 200 travellers entering via the airport per month - what does make a story is the fear and desperation of the protagonists, and particularly the context of illegality and the social danger in which they are framed, because the consequences altogether are unpredictable. This explains the morbid interest about immigration as a news story, i.e., the uncertainty of the present and the future.

Therefore, despite the emphasis on eliminating ethnic and religious assignments and geographic sources of origin of the people involved, when there is a report on migration flows it should come as a surprise to no-one that the coverage focuses not so much on negative facts *per se* or their causes¹¹, but rather on hints about the direct impact, in the medium or long term, on the host society, i.e., "they're here" and what is worse "we can't get rid of them".

Therefore, we understand the question is not to try to eliminate these attributes (in the case presented here it would also be absurd and possibly counterproductive to the legitimacy of the sources) but to consider the incident in its strict framework: a set of facts has been produced, with particular causes and consequences. Reporting the three *ingredients* is an ethical decision.

The reporter could forget, for example, that the incident was sparked by a previous situation of injustice (it is not necessary to seek statistics to guess that behind many crimes there is a structure of social inequality) and it would not even be necessary for the operator to question whether it is a crime to scale a border fence (in fact it is, and yet nobody questions immigration laws) or to arrive in a boat or pass an airport control with a tourist visa. What the reporter does not forget is that there is a police force (Moroccan or Spanish, it does not matter) waiting to stamp it out (by death, if necessary) or to catch people who have committed a crime and purge responsibility (deportation to the desert, enclosure in a detention centre). In this storyline, narration is forceful and without loopholes, because the crime can only have been committed by immigrants, who when caught are rapidly classified as criminals in the collective imagination of society.

In short, in news coverage it is more than likely that the balance will lean to the side of negative incidents and that positive milestones featuring immigrants are hidden or forgotten about¹², as is too their daily reality, which strangely enough can coincide to a great extent with that an autochthonous person.

It is interesting to note, in any case, that most of society only knows about the migration reality through the mass media. This knowledge is largely produced by news stories and documentaries, which usually present an ambivalent discourse (the former negative and alarmist; the latter positive and caring); furthermore, direct coexistence with immigrants very often clashes with stereotypes. It seems to confirm what Trenaman and McQuail said in 1961: “the evidence fully suggests that people think *about* something that has been said but never about *what* was said” (italics added by McQuail, 2000, p. 455).

In other words, although it is true that most people know the facts we are dealing with here with some degree of precision because of television, and that the media dis-

course can contribute to building or reinforcing a particular collective imagination about immigration and an agenda of issues to discuss, it is also true that when certain conditions are given, the importance of the definitive impact can be diminished by two elements: inter-subjective reflection, which makes it possible to comment on news stories with other people and adhere to or reject particular group positions, and (in particular) the possession of meta-communicative abilities and strategies of coding and decoding a discourse – tools that are usually explained in educational programmes¹³. Indeed, our position is located in this latter pedagogical dimension.

3. Education in Audiovisual Communication

The process of opinion-forming combines strict knowledge about events with similar previous ones and particularly the set of personal feelings the issue in question generates. Also, with regard to the particular incidents at Ceuta and Melilla, we would say that television, in daily news programmes and specific documentaries, was the most common medium by which people learnt about the events, and that the written press¹⁴ and online information had little impact on the population overall¹⁵. Indirect knowledge is obviously obtained from social interactions with friends, work colleagues or acquaintances and neighbours, who work as multipliers and amplifiers of the narration. As a matter of fact, the population institutionalised in formal training processes, whether adults or children, also have the opportunity to confirm stories with their peers, with the addition that reflexive learning situations *can* be created and prepared in a systematic and methodical manner by an education professional.

The understanding of a reality and *especially* the assessment made of it is an unavoidable educational goal and, in particular, is set out in the school programmes of the obligatory levels of high-school education. It does not involve developing a negative perspective about TV or of cutting it out of people’s lives (a highly absurd and inappropriate goal) but having the necessary imagination and ability to design educational tools that make it possible to help construct an audiovisual ability that is sufficient in the current context. We therefore understand that, if it is im-

portant to seek responsibilities about the audiovisual incompetence of viewers, we should first look at training and material shortcomings among education professionals, who have not known or not wanted to develop appropriate strategies in this regard; and only then should we direct our criticism at the media. Of course, we could turn to the inevitable function of the media to educate as well as entertain and report, but this is not one of its founding or principal activities.

Over recent years, the Moral Education Research Group¹⁶, where the research work we present here is located, has developed a conceptual framework and work methodology consistent with the previously mentioned approaches, which it is important to situate in a constructivist and dialogical position, and which seeks the full development of the moral personality of the individual in situations of social interaction. The central hypothesis is that a person is competent, from the ethical and moral points of view, when he or she employs a series of abilities of the construction of the 'I', of coexistence and of socio-moral reflection. In the construction of the 'I', a person develops skills related to self-knowledge and self-regulation and is affirmed in his or her autonomy as a person; in the abilities of coexistence, the person employs skills such as empathy, social ability, dialogue and commitment and is affirmed as a member of a capable community and also projects and proposes changes; finally, in the socio-moral reflection, the person develops skills of critical understanding and moral judgment and is shown to be capable of understanding and addressing ethically compromised situations of particular social relevance.

The intersection of the three previously mentioned spheres, i.e., the actions of becoming aware, taking a position and making decisions, linked to the emotional, rational and volitional areas, can constitute a device to ensure a person has a safe and trusting relationship with the broadcast media. It therefore does not involve, from a pedagogical viewpoint, proposing *moral lessons* to bring out the demons hidden in the television medium, as they say, but rather persuading individuals that the best way of watching TV is with the necessary abilities, and that without a doubt tools that develop a degree of critical understanding and moral judgment are the best guarantee in this regard (MARTÍNEZ AND BUJONS 2001; PUIG 2004; PRATS 2001).

We understand that only with professional codes of conduct about the treatment of news stories can we address an important but insufficient part of the problem. It is necessary to back measures of a proactive nature that impact the abovementioned processes. Along this line, although the Catalonia Broadcasting Council (CAC) promotes recommendations to operators (on the treatment and discrimination of people, users' rights, etc.) so that, in an open and democratic society, they have a fair and balanced treatment, especially in disadvantaged sectors from the social and media points of view, this would only partially solve the situation. It is true that the CAC has worked hard to increase the mechanisms of passive protection, especially for young viewers, through recommendations to families and programme-signalling systems which allow a proper selection on the part of supposedly informed and responsible viewers. But beyond the measures of passive protection, we understand it is necessary for active protection aimed at ensuring the conformation of values that meet the socio-cultural reality and the media reality of the environment, and also aimed at developing particular powers in order to properly enjoy the broadcast media. This active protection can only be guaranteed with a systematic and methodical educational intervention. The research work we have carried out is situated in this active orientation to give a voice to young and adult viewers (CAC, 2005). There is no doubt that the reception of the audiovisual message must have a clearly educational treatment.

3.1. objectives and methodology

The central hypothesis of the research work is that, independently of the ideological macro-positions in the media narration of events, the news has less of an impact if the reception conditions make it possible to discuss the most significant events. The basis of the research work is to find the appropriate methodology to establish the point to which the television treatment of events featuring immigrants, once it has contributed to constructing or reinforcing particular attitudes or values, is able to be modified by the means of a training activity.

The subjects that took part in the research work were 14- to 17-year-old students of obligatory (ESO) and higher-certificate secondary education in five public and State-assisted high schools in Reus, Barcelona, Santa Coloma de

Gramenet and Granollers. The sample was selected on the basis of the voluntary response of the education professionals in 60 centres who had taken part in a previous research work by the same group and about which there were certain guarantees of interest, seriousness and rigour, both in the monitoring of the tutors and on the part of the students. The tutors felt that the participating students presented very diverse features, particularly with regard to academic and personal interests, sociolinguistic profiles and instrumental aptitudes of reading and writing, elements that would impact the discussion of the results.

The methodological device consisted of the following instruments, which combined quantitative and qualitative elements:

a) Initial poll in the form of an individual questionnaire, administered online through the FormSite¹⁷ environment, with closed questions to collect data from the students about four main topics: *i)* the issues that concerned them most in today's society, their degree of critical thought, degree of television consumption and level of tolerance *ii)* the objectivity of the media and the media treatment of immigration in their opinion; *iii)* knowledge about and how seriously they took the incidents in Ceuta and Melilla; *iiii)* the treatment of the incidents on the part of the television news shows.

b) A discussion group, announced as an audiovisual workshop, with three moments: an initial ideas session; watching a summary of the news stories about Ceuta and Melilla (a 15-20 minute selection of the evening news shows of TVE-1, TV3, Antena 3 TV and Tele-5, on the basis of the recordings provided by the CAC) and a group discussion about the news treatment of the events in Ceuta and Melilla on the different stations. The data to collect referred to initial perceptions about the recalling of the TV images relating to the events in Ceuta and Melilla, compared with initial perceptions with the video images, the assessment of the stations that had covered the events best and the most sensationalistic and most serious stations or the ones that had the most social dimension, according to the classification by Ferrés (2005).

c) Final written poll, in the form of an individual questionnaire, as the closure of the workshop, with closed questions to observe the evolution of the phenomenon and to assess the workshop. The data collected in this phase

referred to the overall assessment of the stations and specifically to the ones that best covered the events, with most objectivity, and also the most sensationalistic ones; an analysis and assessment of the headlines and the most representative images from each station, and a selection of the most appropriate image and headline for the incidents overall.

d) Participating observation in the development of the workshop on the part of members of the research group (one or two, as well as the person leading the workshop) to impact specific aspects of the workshop. The data collected in this observation referred to indicators of critical understanding displayed by the students in the development of the workshop, both in relation to the events in Ceuta and Melilla and their media treatment; indicators of changing attitudes at the time of doing the workshops, and elements that could be attributed to the leadership and setting of the workshop that might influence their development.

e) Interview with the tutors of the groups of students, with a semi-structured script, to assess the development of the workshop. The most important information collected in the interviews referred to the general features of the group (with regard to sociolinguistic profile, participation attitudes and cooperation in academic tasks, instrumental aptitudes in reading and writing, critical capacity, etc.), the leadership and development of the workshop and the general results and satisfaction obtained.

4. Results

We present the results of the most relevant elements of the research work: degree of critical thought; television consumption and degree of critical thought; knowledge of the events; treatment of the events on the part of the news shows; treatment by station; final impact.

Degree of Critical Thought

To determine the degree of critical thought of the sample, the initial questionnaire collected information relating to two variables: belief in superstitions and popular beliefs, and opinion on the objectivity of the media.

With regard to the first, nine statements were made referring to superstitions or popular beliefs that have no

basis, such as: *The most intelligent people are those that get the best grades* and *A girl cannot get pregnant the first time she has sex*.

With regard to the second variable, the students were asked if they believed that everything that appeared on the TV news was everything that happened in real life. On the basis of these responses, the sample was divided into three positions: weak, moderate and radical. Responses such as *Don't know* (2%) and *Yes* (5%) were considered 'weak' because they showed no element of critical reflection. Answers such as *Yes, but each station shows their own version of reality* (41%) and *No* (15%) were considered 'moderate'; and the answer *No, because more things happen and they only show the ones that are newsworthy* (37%) was considered 'radical'.

This preliminary classification was crossed with the number of responses about superstitions/beliefs and the result was a new, more detailed, classification based on the number of superstitions and the position on TV, as shown in Table 1.

We considered that subjects who had no or one superstition and a radical position on TV had a *high* critical-thought profile (1+26=27 individuals). Equally, subjects with no or one superstition and a moderate position on TV had a *medium-high* critical-thought profile (1+32=33 individuals). Subjects with two superstitions and a radical or moderate position had a *medium* profile (14+20=34 individuals). Subjects with three superstitions and a radical or moderate

position had a *medium-low* profile (11+16=27 individuals), and subjects with a weak or moderate position and who had marked four items or more had a *low* degree (the rest=29 individuals).

In short, the classification of the final degree of critical thought presented five degrees as a result of combining the responses to the two abovementioned questions, as shown in Table 2.

Television Consumption

The students in the sample had a relatively low television consumption, with an average of around 2 hours a day.

A third of the sample (32.7%) watched TV for less than an hour a day.

Another third (37.3%) watched between 90 minutes and two-and-a-half hours.

The remaining third (30.0%) watched TV for more than three hours a day.

Following with the profile of students identified according to their degree of critical thought, below is a graph about the hours of television consumption and daily consumption of the students in one-hour segments:

The average hours of consumption per profile and number of individuals of each profile was as follows: students in the *high* profile watched an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes of TV each day; for students in the *medium-high* profile it was 2 hours and 30 minutes; students in the *medium* profile

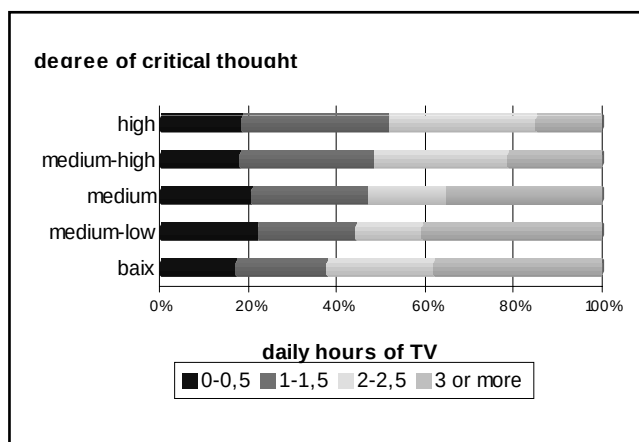
Table 1. Position on TV and Number of Superstitions

	Position on TV		
superstitions	radical	moderate	weak
0	1	1	0
1	26	32	3
2	14	20	6
3	11	16	1
4 or more	4	14	1

Table 2. Degrees of critical thought in the sample

Degree	Individuals	Percentage
High	27	18%
Medium-high	33	22%
Medium	34	23%
Medium-low	27	18%
Low	29	19%

Graph 1. Hours of television consumption of the sample according to profile of degrees of critical thought



watched an average of 2 hours and 42 minutes, in the *medium-low* profile it was 2 hours and 45 minutes, and in the *low* profile it was an average of 2 hours and 50 minutes. Therefore, despite the fact that the differences are not very significant, there was a relationship between critical thought and television consumption.

Looking at it from a different point of view, of the group that watched three hours or more of TV per day, the ones with a high degree of critical thought had the lowest value, followed by the group with the medium-high profile. Therefore, the degree of critical thought about the events that appeared on TV and the reflection on these events was not linked to the number of hours of television watched. This means we

cannot say that a higher consumption of television (i.e., 'dedication to the TV') results in a better capacity to understand and integrate everything represented on it. This observation provides arguments for the defence that young viewers can or should be trained in audiovisual communication and develop critical tools to be able to reinterpret all the stimuli they receive.

Knowledge about the Events

The level of knowledge about the events in Ceuta and Melilla amongst the students could be considered high, as four out of every five (81.3%) located the incidents clearly on the initial questionnaire, without the issue being previously introduced. About particular events, there were three incidents the students remembered most clearly: firstly, the clearest memory (88.6%) was of people scaling the border fences; secondly (60.0%), "police aggression towards immigrants"; thirdly (48.6%) they recalled the "deportation of immigrants to the desert". Of the other incidents that appeared in the media, we would like to mention the following: from a positive viewpoint, 33.3% recalled "the condemnations of NGOs" with regards the treatment afforded the immigrants, and 15.3% recalled "the construction of detention centres to house immigrants"; and from a negative viewpoint, 22.0% recalled "the political conflicts between Spain and Morocco" and 16.6% recalled "demonstrations by immigrants to demand papers".

The students' remembrances included four incidents that express certain confusion or clear manipulation (whether intentional or not) to relate the events in Ceuta and Melilla with other stories. 16% of the sample expressed certain confusion with regards events and stories, remembering that the news featured "immigrants taking off in boats for the Peninsula" [episodes of boats leaving in the direction of the Canary Islands were shown in November 2005], while 18.6% said they recalled "racist incidents in cities in France" [the incidents involving the burning of vehicles in France were from November 2005]. With regards possible manipulation of events and stories, 18.6% related it to "discussions about reforming the Immigration Law" [an issue that was not being debated at the time], and the same percentage, 18.6%, related it to the "debate about the Statute of Catalonia" [the debate in Congress on this issue was on 2 November 2005, although some stations did pre-

sent the two stories consecutively on some occasions].

Also at the start of the workshop, in the ideas session, they showed quite a lot of precision but few details when asked about their memory of the incidents. They remembered the events particularly because of the images of people scaling fences and immigrants abandoned in the desert. In particular, the events they remembered were the following: the scaling of fences, police aggression (Spanish and Moroccan police), police shooting, deportations to home countries, immigrants abandoned in the desert, immigrants returning on foot, immigrants scaling the fences and getting stuck, immigrants lying on the ground, queues of people demanding papers, demonstrations and deaths. There were also some interferences with other incidents (particularly the events in France in November 2005 and the debate about the proposed Statute).

According to the students, the 'causes' of the incidents had to be sought in the source of the problem: two-thirds (68.6%) said the root of the problem was 'poverty in their homelands', while the remaining third attributed the incidents to factors produced directly at the place of the events and therefore had a limited vision of the phenomenon¹⁸.

The first opinion was reinforced when the students were asked for a news headline they would choose for the events. The results were as follows:

- More than half (56.0%) chose a headline that featured *poverty* and *humanitarian disaster*: "Poverty in Africa Sparks Major Humanitarian Disaster".
- Two out of ten (21.6%) preferred a headline that featured *death*, *immigration* and *Europe*: "Immigrants Die in Attempt to Reach Europe".
- One out of ten (11.4%) chose a *defensive* heading relating to the *fence* and the need to put a brake on immigration: "Melilla Fence Not Enough to Stop Immigrants": Also, one out of ten (10.7%) chose an even more restrictive and alarmist headline: "Europe Invaded by Illegal Immigrants" (6.0%) or "Immigrants Without Papers Storm Europe" (4.7%).

Treatment of the Events on the Part of the News Shows

Before going into the particulars of the events in Ceuta and Melilla with regards media treatment about migration, the opinions given in the initial questionnaire were clearly distributed in three parts:

- Just over a third (38.6%) said the news provided a fairly untrue or inadequate treatment about immigration: "They show negative aspects to win ratings" (20.0%); "They only show them in association with conflicts, problems or similar situations" (18.6%).
- Another third (36.0%) considered the television treatment was pretty neutral: "They show immigrants as they are" (10.0%); "They feature in good and bad things alike" (26.0%).
- The rest (25.3%) said that the news treatment was quite correct but that it had a negative connotation because "it shows how they enter and the problems they cause".

With regard to the specific treatment of the events in Ceuta and Melilla, the students presented a partial and, to a certain extent, confused perception about the treatment provided by the news shows, but had a critical vision in general terms.

According to the critical-thought profiles, we can identify some common elements and others that belong to each profile. With regard to the differential elements, the high critical-thought profile had a more critical opinion of the treatment of the TV news shows about immigration: 19% of these individuals felt the treatment awarded immigration was *inadequate*. If we add to this the 48% that felt it was *not very accurate*, two-thirds (67%) of these students disagreed with the media treatment of immigration. The profiles of the medium (38%) and medium-high (34%) degrees, on the other hand, were more impartial and felt that the treatment was *quite good*. The medium-low profile was approving of the TV news treatment of immigration: 32% said the treatment was *quite accurate* and 15% said it was *adequate*. With regards the students in the low critical-thought profile, 41% felt the treatment was *quite accurate* while 14% felt it was *adequate*.

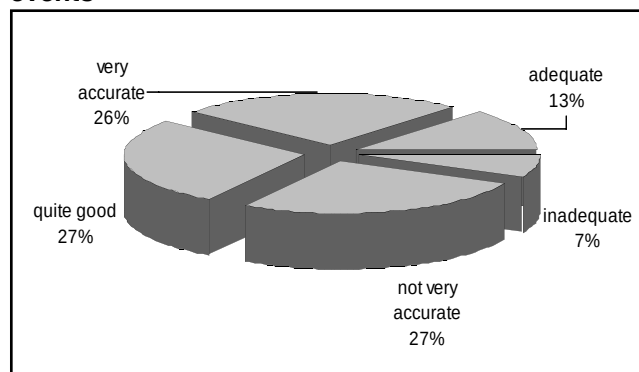
We can therefore say that the higher the degree of critical thought, the less the students agreed with the TV news treatment of immigration-related issues. This denotes a relatively critical spirit about how TV news shows report and a reflection of what reaches students from the TV.

With regard to general trends, as we said earlier, most of the individuals, independently of their profile, felt that the facts were quite or very serious. There were also no differences by profile when asked if television exaggerated the events, a question which clearly divided the

sample. 52% said it did, while 48% said it did not.

In the closing questionnaire after the workshop, the students were asked their individual opinions on the treatment of the events by the four stations that were the study object, using the same typology as the initial questionnaire. The results were as follows (graph 2).

Graph 2. General opinion on the treatment of the events



We can see that 39% (*quite accurate* and *adequate*) felt the treatment was correct. In a more neutral position were the 27% of students who said it was *quite good*, and in a negative position, 34% (*not very accurate* or *inadequate*). Therefore, again there was a division of criteria. A study of this item by degree of critical thought would help us see whether there are indicators of changing attitudes following the analysis and reflection work.

According to the students, the most frequent images on the news were negative. The main results are shown here:

- At a first level of importance, relating to direct events, two-thirds (67.5%) recalled images of “immigrants scaling fences” and close to half (48.6%) recalled “dead immigrants at the bottom of the fence”.
- At a second level, as an immediate consequence of the events, close to a third recalled “arrested immigrants trying to escape” (31.0%), and “receiving attention from health workers” (31.0%).
- At a third level, of the final repercussions of the incidents, they recalled “immigrants abandoned in the desert” (30.4%), and “telling their stories to camera” (26.3%).
- At a fourth level, about events that did not appear or that

were not related, some students recalled immigrants “que-uing up to request papers” (16.2%), and “returning to their homeland on foot” (9.4%).

In short, the degree of critical thought influenced the impact the events had on the students. The more critical tools they had, the more able they were to reflect on how the events came about and what was really happening. This statement is supported by the fact that the students with a higher degree of critical thought were more critical about the news treatment awarded immigration issues.

On the other hand, footage of events, negative connotations and harshness make for a high level of impact, as was the case here.

News Treatment by Station

In the analysis by station, the images of the stories coincided on many points and differed on some. The areas in which the stations coincided were as follows (table 3 and 4)

These differences were particularly emphasised during the workshop to determine which station had done the best reporting job and which was the specific nature of each. The station with the best treatment was TV3, followed by Tele-5, Antena 3 TV and TVE-1, with not many differences between them. All up, it is interesting to see the relationship between the station they considered to have best treated the events and the nature they attributed each station.

The groups voted on the nature of each station, according to three adjectives: sensationalist, social and serious. The students believed the most ‘sensationalist’ station was Antena 3 TV in all the groups consulted, followed by Tele-5, in three of the five groups. The most ‘social’ station was TV3, in four of the five groups and the most ‘serious’ station was TVE-1, also in four of the five groups.

These figures were confirmed in the individual questionnaire at the end, which was used to revalidate the opinions expressed in the group sessions. The figures confirmed that the most sensationalist was Antena 3 TV, followed by Tele-5. To the question of which gave the best overall treatment, it was determined to be TV3, as the workshop had already found. Finally, the station considered the most objective became TV3, comparing objectivity with seriousness, concepts worked on during the workshop, which thus dislodged TVE-1 from the top spot.

Table 3. Issues that coincided on the news shows of all stations

	TVE-1	TV3	Antena 3 TV	Tele-5
Immigrants scaling fences	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moroccan police aggression	✓	✓	✓	✓
Packed detention centre	✓	✓	✓	✓
New fences and security measures	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political debate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Politicians' visits to Melilla (Rajoy and De la Vega)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Deportations agreed on with Morocco	✓	✓	✓	✓
Abandonment of deportees in the desert	✓	✓	✓	✓
Condemnation by NGOs and aid for people affected	✓	✓	✓	✓
Statistical information on immigrants affected	✓	✓	✓	✓
Euro-African Summit (agreements between governments)	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4. Different issues on the news shows of all the stations

	TVE-1	TV3	Antena 3 TV	Tele-5
Immigrants' state of health		✓	✓	✓
Immigrants returning to their homeland on foot		✓	✓	✓
Spanish police aggression		✓		✓
Gathering up of immigrants by Moroccan government		✓		✓
Linking of events with articles of the Statute			✓	✓
Pro-Spanish demonstrations	✓			
Explanation of the causes that sparked the events		✓		
Financial cost of the incidents		✓		
Momentary dénouement of the incidents		✓		
Human rights demonstrations			✓	
Fixing up new spaces to look after immigrants				✓

Final Impact: Image and Headlines

In the final questionnaire, the students had to choose three images from among nine on the different stations about the events. The selection criterion had to be the “most significant and that which best defined the events”. The first three were as follows (see page 78).

It is significant to observe how the impact lies in images related with security responses and control of the situation and, secondly, in images related to feelings and human

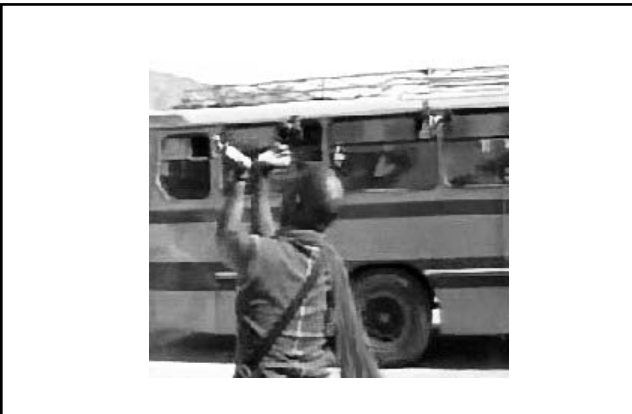
suffering. This corroborates the idea that it is possible to create a feeling of security and appeal to viewers' feelings to get them interested in a story by using images that arouse emotion. This statement is corroborated with comments by the tutors who observed them: “After having seen the images I saw that the group did not make cold judgments and thought more about the people.”

With regards the type of news stories the students would like to see, they were asked to put a heading to an image

1. Increased security



2. Deportation to the desert



3. Desperation



that represented the two previous concepts, i.e., security and emotion. They could choose from three headings: one of a social nature, one of a more serious nature, and one of a more sensationalist nature¹⁹.

The image corresponded to a handcuffed immigrant trying to escape from the coach deporting them.

The results of the headlines chosen for the image were as follows:

- *Social*: Morocco Violates Right to Life of Deported Sub-Saharan (40%)
- *Serious*: Attempt to Flee Deportation Leads to Death (38%)
- *Sensationalist*: Thousands of Sub-Saharan Immigrants Sentenced to Death in the Sahara (22%)

The students' options were firstly of a more social nature, closely followed by a more serious nature, and finally came the group of the most sensationalist nature. The previous information was therefore confirmed with the headlines, which put social news first as the model the students like most.

Discussion

In the final part of the article we submit for discussion the elements of the research work we consider stand out the most. Firstly, we refer to interesting conclusions about side elements of the research, such as the level of knowledge about the events and the seriousness as perceived by the students, or the difference in the treatment by each station. Secondly, we discuss methodological aspects and parti-

cularly the device used and each of the tools. Thirdly, we look at the background to the question, i.e., the discussion about the effects and the contribution of the media in the construction of the collective imagination.

The questions in the initial questionnaire, administered six weeks after the events, and the first onsite workshop activity, carried out two to three months later, show a fairly clear recall of the incidents on the part of the students. Their memories are partial and relatively confused and further research work would have to be done to determine the degree of responsibility of the media. The seriousness they attributed to the events is worth mentioning, bearing in mind the disinterest repeatedly attributed to young people with regards situations like the one we are concerned with here.

Indeed, the study of the recall of the images illustrates this aspect. It is important to point out that the images that made the most impact on the students involved immigrants scaling the fences and dead immigrants at the bottom of the fences (even though this image did not appear on any station). This denotes a certain tendency to associate events like the ones in Ceuta and Melilla with death, and even to internalise headlines or parts of broadcast stories by remaking them in images. It could also be by crossing other stories on the same dates and even other stories about immigration and access in Spain. It is worth recalling that the issue of the Ceuta and Melilla border fence cannot be separated from the location of these two enclaves in Africa and the international legal dispute, and that it is not an exclusive concern of the Spanish diplomatic agenda; furthermore, at the international scale too, migration is a concern that exceeds the Spanish sphere²⁰.

With regard to the difference in the treatment of the events by each station, generally speaking the students all indicated there was a *common agenda* on the part of the media, with a bunch of issues that coincided, but once the differential features of each station were detected in terms of specific topics, the students were able to assess the nature of each operator. We should recall that TV3 was considered to be the most objective station with the highest social dimension; this appreciation, however, has a correlation with the sociolinguistic profile of the students, which goes a long way to determining television consumption: non-Catalan-speaking students, who tended to watch other operators, did not believe TV3 was the most objective

station or the one that provided the best reports. This observation requires a longer-term sociolinguistic study. Furthermore, the students' preferences, which usually coincided with the station they watched the most often²¹, was combined with the operator's 'stamp', something which conditioned the assessment made; e.g., TVE-1 was the station that scored lowest and was considered the most serious because "it is the government station and explains things in the way the politicians want", according to phrases collected by the teachers and by the observers in the workshops.

From the methodological viewpoint, we would like to stop and look at a number of elements. Firstly, the research work prioritised the quality of the interventions over the number of opinions of the interviewees and therefore combined tools of mass data collection (questionnaires before and after the workshop) with tools that made it possible to look more deeply at the reflections of the students. The discussion group, in the form of the workshop on television content, was a very powerful tool, led by an experienced person and two group observers, which was able to gather quite valuable information. This procedure, however, is relatively expensive and furthermore, the need to standardise interventions to make the collected information more valid means that not many groups can be attended at the same time. So therefore, although we value the device used in quite a positive fashion, we consider it important to make a number of adjustments of a technical nature before future interventions.

All up, there is no doubt about the validity of the workshop itself. The students' immersion in a 15- to 20-minute long video showing images they could see any day but charged with crudity and desperation, enabled us to unearth a number of emotions that, if channelled correctly, could help unmask prejudices and stereotypes. The reflection process carried out after they watched it went very much more directly into the burning issues of the matter, and when we tried to establish the responsibility of the media overall, the attitudes were very sensitive. The observations of the tutors show this. The tutors said that by the end of the workshop, the students were aware of the need to identify causes in problems shown on the news, and political profitability in the treatment given by the media. In short, watching the images served to reproduce the original impact (the scaling of

fences, clothes caught on wire, deportation to the desert, blows from police ,etc.), refresh memories, put them up for discussion and reconsider opinions. Also, as the work was done in a group, individual viewpoints became less important. We can conclude that the educational validity of putting controversial issues up for discussion and reflection is guaranteed.

The background discussion, however, was the point to which the media contributes to the construction of the collective imagination of young people, in particular with regards immigration. The purpose was obviously to measure critical capacity, both in relation to the events themselves and in areas strictly related with the media treatment of the events. In the first area, the critical understanding of the events at least meant that, two or three months on, the subject could produce or articulate responses such as: identify the protagonists and the passive or active agents involved, and the most significant incidents or actions; recall the most representative images of the incidents or the ones that most precisely narrated the set of the actions; attribute a degree of seriousness to the events in comparison with other social phenomena; identify the causes of the problem and the repercussions at the social level. On the other hand, critical understanding of media treatment meant producing or articulating one or more of the following responses: calibrating the level of news coverage made by the media, so that both because of geographical proximity and number of people affected, it could be compared with other news (events in France, the tsunami, etc.); attributing a meaning to the distance detected between the most significant and the most repeated images (explanation for the insistence on particular morbid images); measuring the proportion assigned to the causes of the phenomenon shown on the news; assessing the alarmist nature of the repercussions of the incidents shown by the media, etc.

The analysis made it possible to observe that the media reinforce a partial and fragmented vision of the phenomenon involved because the students made this perception obvious and we checked that information on the issue could only have arrived via the TV. Altogether, surely, the individual framework of reception, together with the environmental conditions of this reception, are ingredients that should not be underestimated. In other words, the research

showed that, individually and to a greater or lesser extent according to the case at hand, the students possessed a number of critical capacities to handle the television discourse, but that these capacities were only activated in a heteronomous fashion, from outside, and in situations that required a painstaking methodological design that prevented reductionism and simplism, such as the our onsite workshop. We are talking, in short, about critical but dependent viewers.

Generally speaking, the students in the final year of obligatory secondary education and those in the higher-certificate course were more reflexive than students in the lower years. Among the interviews at the end of the workshop, one teacher from a group of first-year higher-certificate students said she had noticed in the workshop that the students “were aware that interests of parties, groups and/or people influenced what was reported and the discourses that reach us”. The same teacher also said it was necessary to re-channel television inputs in high school and that “at levels like the higher-certificate level, it will always be easier to be able to re-channel these types of issues because there is a high level of thinking”. This belief was shared by the five tutors who took part in the study. In other words, the school years contribute to discriminating the television discourse and also provide knowledge to adopt a more critical point of view.

The results identified both the degree of critical thought of the sample group and other indicators that help confirm the starting hypothesis: *The message that young people recall and integrate in their perception of events is partial and has variable effects depending on their degree of critical thought*. Despite this hypothesis being confirmed by the data obtained, the results did not refer to a long enough period of time to be able to state anything with conviction. However, as we said, the methodology will be reviewed for future studies to be able to more clearly collect essential aspects that improve the corroboration of the starting premise.

As the impact is not contained in a perfectly identifiable individual receptacle, as we said earlier on, it is important to try to find indications in three areas. Firstly, we understand that the supposed *individual* effects could be established on the basis of the level of knowledge about and seriousness of the events on the part of the subjects (as we have ana-

lysed here) but also on the basis of the subjects' emotional filters and the pragmatic responses usually generated in similar situations ("What do you do when you see a story like this? Do you turn off the TV or change the channel? Do you get upset or do you think it is normal?" etc.). Secondly, in terms of the reception environment, it is important to discover the degree of coincidence between the concerns and interests of the research subjects and the general population, measured in opinion polls, i.e., the *agenda* of concerns, and also to establish the news alternatives for young people. Thirdly, we consider it essential to go into more detail about the repercussions of creating a space favourable to the emergence of feelings and the exchange and confirmation of opinions and reflections with others, and to analyse the importance of the educational level in the assessments made.

In short, we can endorse the statement by Trenaman and McQuail that we mentioned earlier on, in the sense that the media provide discussion topics but in no way can we conclude that they dictate the orientation of these discussions.

Notes

- 1 We would like to thank Alba Pascual for helping design the research work and developing operational support tasks. We would also like to mention the dedication and involvement of Claustre Bofarull, Jaume M. Giménez and the 4th-year ESO (obligatory secondary education) students from Josep Tapiró High (Reus); Ramon Breu and the 1st-year higher-certificate students from Solc School (Barcelona); Joaquim Fernández-Díaz and the 1st-year higher-certificate students from Sant Ignasi School (Barcelona); Alfonso Salomón Ripeu and the 1st-year ESO students from Ramon de Berenguer High (Santa Coloma de Gramenet) and Elvira Duran and the 1st-year higher-certificate students from Celestí Bellera High (Granollers).
- 2 An analysis model that distinguishes between intentional or planned, and non-intentional, and short- and long-term effects can be consulted in McQuail, 1994, p.507. In the crossing of the two variables, intention and term, we obtain four possibilities: "tendentiousness", "involuntary ten-

dentiousness", "operator policy" and "ideology". In this work we have expressly omitted this part of the analysis.

- 3 Other aspects would be the media's ability to charm, television's impact on the socialisation of individuals, the ability of acculturation, etc. These possibilities (more in the long term) as well as no doubt the conformation of values, require long-term longitudinal studies.
- 4 Important revisions of studies about the effects of violence and presence of minorities, among other matters, can be found in Bryant and Zillman (1994). Also see the CAC (2003) proposals and recommendations in this regard.
- 5 The 3rd Journalists' Congress of Catalonia in 1996 warned about the media treatment received by 'ethnic minorities' and proposed the creation of a style manual dedicated to this issue. Previously, diverse academic studies had warned about the image of immigration in the press and on TV; the respective teams of professors Lorite and Rodrigo were the leaders of the day.
- 6 See a critical, not negative, revision of these postulates in Giró (2002).
- 7 Set out in the *Style Manual* of the Catalonia College of Journalists (www.periodistes.org) and in decision 1/99 from the CAC on the treatment of ethnic minorities on TV (CAC, 2000).
- 8 The gypsy population is also included in this category, along with all forms of racism based on ethno-centric positions that generate social inequality. For a conceptualisation of racism, see Prats (2001).
- 9 In previous decades, xenophilia in our country focussed on Francophile or Germanophile sympathies. This has lately given way, in general terms, to Westernophilia and in particular sympathy for anything from the United States (a 'philia' that covers many spheres, from trade to science, and the word for which is hard to construct let alone pronounce).
- 10 This defence collapses under its own weight: what happens to immigrants and non-immigrants who work in the underground economy and do not directly contribute to the Social Security coffers? Do we throw them out?

- 11 It goes without saying that social inequality (due to poverty in the home countries) and legal injustice (due to laws that restrict the passage of persons, but not products or money) do not make a 'good' story.
- 12 Stories that raise the protagonist to the category of hero were not included because they are anecdotal and extraordinary, e.g., the cave-in of a house in Hospitalet de Llobregat (Lorite, 2004), even though the condition of immigrant was not always mentioned in these reports.
- 13 McQuail (1996, p. 533) holds that, although a *superficial* understanding of a news story is facilitated by narrative interest, relevance and specificity, a profound *critical* understanding is assured when a story is commented on with other people and the individual has a particular level of education.
- 14 For a study on the impact of the free press, see Kathleen P. Mahoney (New York Times) and James H. Collins, (Scarborough Research) (2005) *Consumer Newspaper Choice in Markets with Free Print Options: Are Free Daily Newspapers Competition or Opportunity for Traditional Paid Products?*. Available at: <http://www.scarborough.com/press.php> [consulted: 5.2.2006]
- 15 Using the search engine Google it is possible to see how the Internet contributes to shoring up stereotypes and prejudices: see in particular the procedure for preparing the world prejudice map: <http://blog.outer-court.com/prejudice/> [consulted: 22.1.2006]
- 16 Research group from the University of Barcelona formed by university staff, researchers and other professionals. The group enjoys a consolidated position thanks to the Generalitat of Catalonia.
- 17 Questionnaire available at: <http://fs19.formsite.com/UB-CAC/melilla/index.html>. FormSite is a registered trademark.
- 18 The distribution of this group would be as follows: 11.3% of the total sample said the root of the problem was 'the low height of the fences'; 9.3% believed it was 'the lack of papers among immigrants'; 8.0% attributed it to the 'low presence of border police' and only 2.6% gave 'poor understanding between Moroccan and Spanish politicians' as the root of the problem.
- 19 It is important to mention that the headlines were not elaborated by journalists and are therefore approximations to each topic made by education professionals.
- 20 It would be interesting to compare these incidents with the ones of the Albanian and Turkish vessels that arrived at the south of Italy and Sicily in March 2002, or African boats in August 2004 and summer 2005, or even the latest incident, regarding the publication of caricatures of Mohammed, in February 2006, which usually generate a forceful response from authorities and significant media coverage.
- 21 It is worth remembering that we limited ourselves to news stories, programmes not often popular amongst young people, and which are probably watched because the TV is one at the time (mainly at meal times).

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