



[Research](#) - [How to cite this article](#) - [referees' reports](#) - [scheduling](#) - [metadata](#) - [PDF](#) - [Creative Commons](#)
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-65-2010-895-222-230-EN - ISSN 1138 - 5820 - RLCS # 65 - 2010

Xenophobic discourse and agenda-setting. A case study in the press of the Canary Islands (Spain)

Dr. Rodrigo F. Rodríguez Borges [C.V.] Profesor del Departamento de Ciencias de la Información, Universidad de La Laguna, ULL, Spain - rrodbor@ull.es

Abstract: Since its formulation by McCombs and Shaw in the 70s, the concept of agenda-setting has proved to be of relevant heuristic value to explore the relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda and the processes of transference between them both. Taking this idea as a reference and basing on the tools of the analysis discourse by Van Dijk, this article shows the strategy of informative dosage developed by the newspaper *El Día* from Tenerife, Canary Islands (Spain) to turn the irregular immigration into the main issue in the civil agenda. The case study is focused on the support given by the newspaper to the call for a demonstration supporting a law of residence as the solution to the arrival of immigrants to the islands. We identified the writing units addressed to the demonstration call, the deliberate chronological sequence used to inform the readers and the editorial declarations supporting the initiative. The analysis lets us appreciate a paradigmatic example of the power of the media to set the political agenda and take in the political parties and the main institutions.

Keywords: immigration; xenophobia; Canary Islands; agenda-setting; discourse analysis; press.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. Analysis of a strategy of informative dosage 3. The agenda-setting of the demonstration. Institutions put in check. 3. Media agenda vs public agenda. Civic response. 4. Conclusions 5. Bibliography 6. Notes.

Translation: **Carmen Dorta Orta** and **Michael McLean**.

1. Introduction

On 24 September 2008, the Parliament of the Canary Islands passed, in an unprecedented decision, a Declaration to condemn the newspaper *EL Día* (published in Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain) for its 'xenophobic ideas' repeatedly appeared in its editorials. Ever since the phenomenon of irregular immigration increased in the archipelago and, especially during 2006, this journal had been making declarations close to xenophobia, that distrustful or hostile attitude against foreigners or ethnic group differentiated by reasons of race, ideology or culture.

This is the case of the editorial published on 21 April 2006, in which the newspaper wondered about the consequences that might entail 'the appearance of just one case of Ebola among the thousands of immigrants who arrive to the Canary Islands every year. Would it mean the end of this archipelago? What would happen with tourism, the main source of revenues?', adding: "It urges to repatriate and extradite immigrants ...since the Canary Islands are still a European region, neither South American nor African or Asian". A month later, on 24 May, *El Día* stated in another editorial that 'The Canary Islands are suffering an invasion of pure black Africans whose race, as everybody knows, prevale over white people in case of mixture, except in cases of Aids or infectious diseases'.

These statements were uttered within an explosive context of exacerbation of xenophobic attitudes that had their most shameful expression in the Resolution approved by the Parliament of the Canary Islands in May, demanding the use of the Army to the central Government in order to stop the massive arrival of 'pateras' [open boats] that were putting the Islands in an 'emergency situation'.

El Día had been spreading xenophobic attitudes until the condemn of the Parliament, counting on with the approval or cowardice of the political forces of the archipelago, all of them fearful of wakening the editor's wrath of the newspaper with the largest circulation in the archipelago. An institution like the Foro Canario de la Inmigración [Canarian Forum for Immigration] had not raised its voice to condemn the events either. Paradoxically, it was an ecologist association –Ben Magec- Ecologistas en acción [Ecologists in Action]– who pressed charges against the newspaper at the Attorney General's Office by incitement to racism and xenophobia [1]

According to Bourdieu (1985), words are not neutral. Communication processes are a faithful (symbolic) representation of power relations. Naming and qualifying constitute privileged tools of intervening in the world. This is the reason why any relevant social agent dares to exert that power to name and to create the world by naming it, this way becoming 'a symbolic authority, socially recognized, to impose a certain view of the social world' (Bourdieu, 1985: 66). This is also the case of media, in which informative work and the will to coin reality coexist, influencing on the symbolic representations of reality. (Bourdieu, 1985: 96)

From the point of view of discourse analysis, the importance given to media discourse derives from its power to give

the voice to certain social actors while silencing others. It is especially evident the role that some media play spreading xenophobic discourses. According to Van Dijk (1997, 2003a, 2003b and 2008) and Cohen and Young (1981), critical analysis of news texts serve to prove the connections that link the various actors involved in their production, identifying those who are the main characters of the information and those who are mere passive subjects of the story.

Since its formulation in the seventies by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the concept of agenda setting has proved to be of significant heuristic value to clarify the connections between the media agenda and the public agenda. As many empirical researches have established (Shaw and McCombs, 1997; Winter and Eyal, 1981; López-Escobar, McCombs and Rey, 1996; and McCombs, 2006, et al.), readers use the important clues that accompany the news to organize their own catalogue of interests, in a process of 'transference of salience' from the media agenda to the public agenda.

We can complete this statement by adding: media do not merely direct the audience's attention towards certain issues, but also present those issues according to a certain interpreting framing that contributes to select and emphasize some features or qualities of the object in question (Shaw and McCombs, 1977; and Tankard, 2001).

Regarding to immigration, the use of certain discourse strategies together with the pragmatic context in which the discourse is performed, ends up generating an approach to the matter that may help to give rise to presumptions and significances of xenophobic ideas, socially accepted (Van Dijk, 1997). The booming of immigration in Spain and in the Canary Islands and how media treat it have deserved the attention of many researchers from different perspectives (Igartua, Muñiz and Cheng, 2005; Igartua, Muñiz and Otero, 2006; Muñiz and Cheng, 2005; Nash, 2005), what has also happened in the Canary Islands (Dallanhol, 2000; Ardévol, 2008; Rodríguez Borges, 2006 and 2009.)

2. Methodology. Analysis of a strategy of informative dosage

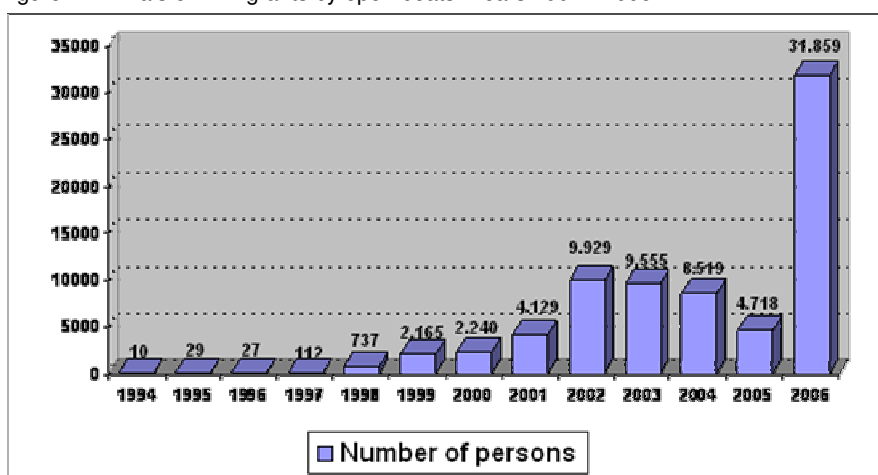
According to the concept of agenda setting and the tools of critical discourse analysis, this article aims to show a case study on how the newspaper *El Día* –with the largest circulation in the province of Santa Cruz de Tenerife– tried to set the political agenda on immigration in the Canary Islands, drawing in the main political parties and institutions, and inoculating apprehension to the population.

The support given by *El Día* to a demonstration call in favour of a Residence Act to control immigration in the most serious moment during the immigratory crisis in 2006, demonstrates the strategy developed by the newspaper to impose its discourse on the public sphere, a prime example of the power of media to set the agenda of public concerns. If, according to Luhmann (2000: 18), social success of media is measured by its capacity to lead certain matters, we can anticipate that *El Día* achieved its purpose, since the main political actors of the archipelago had to declare themselves in favour or against the demonstration and its convenience.

The methodology combines a double approach. On the one hand, a quantitative approach to compute news stories on illegal immigration and the demonstration that were published during October, bearing in mind that these systematic counts have heuristic value themselves (Bardin, 1986: 22) and allow us to go a step further to formulate valid and well founded inferences (Krippendorff, 1990: 28.) On the other hand, the qualitative enquiry based on Van Dijk's model of discourse analysis proves the importance of time on news circulation and sets the analyzed discourse into the pragmatic context.

According to the first approach, we proceeded to find all the news stories identified with a title (news articles, reports, editorials, columns, essays, etc) dealing with immigration in general or specifically with the demonstration call in the four weeks before the march. The chosen date for the demonstration –29 October– tried to take advantage of public reaction to the arrival of thousands of immigrants by open boats in earlier months.

Figure 1. Arrivals of immigrants by open boats .Years 1994 - 2006.



Source: Central Government Office in the Canary Islands. Personal compilation.

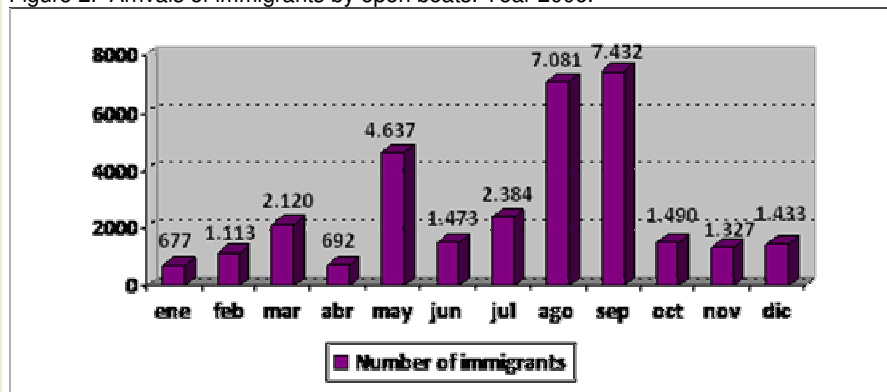
In fact, almost 32,000 people arrived to the coast of the Canary Islands during 2006, reaching numbers of unknown dimension. As we can appreciate in figure 1, the number of immigrants 'who enter through places different from the

legally established' (so to speak in the cold prose of the Ministry of Interior) almost multiplied the arrivals in 2005 by seven and were more than three times the figures of 2002, the year with the highest record until then.

The evolution in the number of entries of illegal immigrants during the first ten months of 2006 explains why the demonstration was to be held in October. As we can see in figure 2, in September the Central Government Office in the Canary Islands recorded a number of arrivals noteworthy higher than the total amount of those registered in 2005, what had already happened in August. The importance of these numbers eventually persuaded the conveners to mobilize public opinion. In this context of civic distress, the newspaper *El Día* launched a supporting campaign in favour of the protesters.

In the four weeks of October before the demonstration, the journal published 238 news stories about immigration, the visibility and appeal of almost one hundred of them (93 exactly) were strengthened with graphic support (photographs, graphs, pictures, etc.) The fact that almost 40% of the news stories were accompanied by some of these graphic elements gives us an idea about how determined the newspaper was to emphasize these contents and direct the interest of the readers towards them.

Figure 2. Arrivals of immigrants by open boats. Year 2006.



Source: Central Government Office in the Canary Islands. Personal compilation.

We can also deduce the informative emphasis given to the arrival of immigrants from other additional facts that prove the high level of issue focussing: 71 references to irregular immigration appeared on the 31 front pages of October; 16 out of them advertised the demonstration. What's more, in half of 31 front pages (16) irregular immigrants were the main characters of the stories.

The hemerographic review of the opinion texts on immigration appeared in *El Día* throughout the month shows a clear preference for that issue in the opinion columns written by the staff journalists and in the ones written by the contributors to the newspaper: the consequences of this migratory explosion were analyzed, dissected and evaluated in the 31 texts appeared on the opinion pages of October. Exactly 23 of these 31 columns (almost 75%) offered a negative and controversial image of irregular immigration, as observed in such as expressive titles as 'Unsustainable illegal immigration' or 'Fools' solidarity'.

Not even the traditional letters to the editor sent by the readers escaped the editorial bias that gave priority to any reference to the "problems" caused by immigrants and the urgent necessity of protesting and forcing authorities to intervene. A total of 13 letters found a place on the pages of *El Día*, with revealing titles such as: 'Illegal immigrants: blame Europe', 'Canario, fight', 'Demonstration', and 'Everybody to the mass meeting!'.

The newspaper was so involved in the success of the call that could not let anybody forget the date of the demonstration. This explains why this unusual text appeared in the section 'Letters to the editor' on 26th: 'Note: in the letter published yesterday entitled "Everybody to the mass meeting", the author said ... the demonstration will be held next Saturday, when, in fact, it will be held on Sunday 29'.

But nothing as revealing as watching the editorial relevance given to this issue. The newspaper set its institutional position and disposition in the editorials. Van Dijk (2003a: 262) was right when he pointed out that news editorials are a sort of discourse produced by an elite and, as such, they express the opinion of a privileged agent that exerts his power to legitimize the actions of the represented social group (Van Dijk, 2003: 262.)

When reviewing the editorials published by *El Día* during October it becomes evident the interest to turn irregular immigration into the main issue of the social agenda: the newspaper published 13 editorials in just four weeks, and six of them explicitly calling for the demonstration in support of 'effective control on immigration to avoid irrational xenophobic outbreaks'. Some of them bearing unambiguous titles such as: 'Reasonable and Necessary Demonstration' or 'Everybody to today's demonstration'.

Table 1 summarizes the statistics of news stories that *El Día* devoted to immigration in the four weeks of October 2006: the total number of news articles dealing with immigration, the number of times that this issue was the main story, the times that it appeared on the front page as prominent or included in the sidebar, and the number of articles, editorials and letters from the readers on this issue.

Table 1. *El Día*. New stories devoted to immigration in October 2006.

Weeks	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	TOTAL
Total number of news pieces	63	59	52	64	238
Number of front pages	4	5	2	5	16
Number of news pieces on front page and sidebars	16	19	10	10	55
Number of news pieces with graphic support	26	26	15	26	93
Number of articles	8	7	6	10	31
Number of editorials	2	3	4	4	13
Number of letters to the editor	3	2	2	6	13

Source: *El Día*. Personal compilation.

There is no doubt that the flow of news stories devoted to the demonstration is an unquestionable sign of the newspaper's interest. Suffice it to say that readers were repeatedly informed about the reasons and the route of the demonstration 14 times, without counting four large advertisements. But the amount of information is as important as the timing of publishing it. The reconstruction of this chronology lets us state that the reporting work complied with a perfectly planned dosing strategy, intended to create a shift in public opinion in favour of the Residence Act advocated by the conveners of the demonstration.

The first indirect reference to the demonstration appeared in *El Día* on Sunday 1 October on the front page sidebar below the headline 'Concave [Confederation of Residents' Associations] supports the Residence Act to stop immigration', followed by this lead: 'During the last debate held in *El Día*, the Concave and the group Identidad Canaria [Canarian Identity] bet on a Residence Act considering the acculturation process of the islands'. The inside pages (42 and 43) collected the opinions given by some neighbourhood leaders who had been invited to debate by *El Día* in the first issue of the section 'Debates de actualidad' [Current Debates] devoted to this subject.

Contrary to the impression given by the headline, three of the five participants 'recognized the benefits generated by immigration'. Their opinions were tolerant and inclusive but strategically omitted in the headline in the interest of the stands taken by the members of Concave and Identidad Canaria, who were the only ones to talk about the necessity of population control. During the debate, Mateo López, Head of Identidad Canaria, announced that 'a demonstration in favour of the Residence Act has been organized to be held at the end of October' (p. 43) making use of an impersonal and cryptic construction

That Sunday's issue offered several texts that helped to reach *critical mass* around the binomial immigration-overpopulation. The front page sidebar also included: 'The population of La Gallega [2] (Santa Cruz) will increase by five in two years'. On page 6, an interview to the Head of Ashotel [Hotels and Accommodation Association of Tenerife], with the title: 'Stop illegal immigration' in one of the copy blocks. The section 'Los mojos de la última' [section on the cover page] started with the sentence: 'The people of Tenerife are worried about the avalanche of illegal immigrants arriving by open boats and the increase of the population of the islands'; thereby, linking population growth and arrivals of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa.

The opinion pages also contained many references to immigration, starting with the editorial: 'Embarrassment with Immigration' (p.3). Page 4 reproduces another editorial that had already been published: 'Supportive but not Naïve'. And the following articles: 'Immigration can not be used as an electoral weapon' (p.10) and 'Unsustainable illegal immigration' (p.19); and the column 'Charlatans' about the 'dramatic phenomenon of immigration'. Also, on page 18, a letter with the title 'Tourism and Immigration' exhorted the people of Tenerife to react to the damage that the arrival of open boats to our beaches was inflicting to the tourist image of the Islands.

We found the following allusion to the demonstration in the issue published on Friday 6: a half column-length text with the title 'Neighbourhood Demonstration on 29th in favour of Population Control' (p.4). This headline is really surprising, as it does not clarify who or what organizations were promoting the demonstration. In the body copy, the Head of Identidad Canaria repeated the same impersonal expression used on 29 October: 'Yesterday Mateo López stated that a neighbourhood demonstration has been organized in Santa Cruz in favour of population control', transferring to the readers the idea that the demonstration was self-organized.

On the same day the newspaper opened with this five column headline: 'Another 20 immigrants die at sea', followed by twelve stories about minor immigrants (p. 3), court costs generated by immigration (p. 4), escapes from immigration detention centres (p. 6), and the objection of Coalición Canaria [Canarian Coalition, centre-right nationalist party] against the increase of those centres in the archipelago (p. 70). It also included an editorial (p. 7) in which the newspaper proclaimed its determination to fight against 'this disorganized and bizarre phenomenon of illegal immigration'. On the following days –Sunday 8, Tuesday 10, Wednesday 11– the newspaper would publish more editorials.

On Thursday 12, a group of professors of the two universities of the Canary Islands made known the document 'Reflections on Current African Immigration by Open Boat', warning of the responsibility of politicians and media for the spreading of xenophobic attitudes. *El Día* reported the presentation of the manifesto but tried to counteract it with the editorial 'To the readers of Tenerife and the Canary Islands' (p. 7), attacking multicultural coexistence:

We will continue fighting for our children and will not make the mistake of devoting our efforts and money

to care for others' children: multiculturalism is fair but when it really occurs, not when massive arrivals of foreign people compromise the perdurance of our native customs, our very existence and way of living, that is to say, our historical identity.

On Sunday 15, the extreme right organization Democracia Nacional planned a mass meeting in Los Cristianos (Tenerife) under the slogan 'Not to invasion, against overcrowding of illegal immigrants in the Canaries'. While some rival newspapers published the information (especially *La Opinión*), *El Día* opted for minimizing the references to this undoubtedly racist event that was provoking critical comments for its xenophobic connotations and held just two weeks before the demonstration organized in Santa Cruz.

On Tuesday 17, on page 4, *El Día* published the full decalogue of reasons given by Identidad Canaria and the Concave to justify the march on the 29th. The other newspapers did not echo it. *El Día* continues its privileged relationship with the conveners. Two days later, on Thursday 19, the newspaper placed an editorial with this unambiguous headline: 'Reasonable and Necessary Demonstration' (p. 7). The body copy is a glossary of common words in discriminating and criminalizing discourses against immigrants: "tide", "flow", "irregular", "unemployment", "overpopulation", "violence", and other similar expressions appeared throughout the text. The aims of the march- the writer of the editorial stated- collect the 'opinion of the majority'

To stop the human tide reaching the islands by plane or boat everyday, those who settle among us illegally and worsen our limited territory, high unemployment and population density. Furthermore, if we do not stop the flow, the risk of violent reactions of native people against illegal immigrants will increase.

On Saturday 21, *El Día* comes back to illegal immigration with the editorial 'Growing Anger against Irregular Immigration' (p. 7), predicting a civil protest about this situation:

The problem of illegal immigration in the Canary Islands has reached the point of unleashing popular indignation in demonstrations against the lack of solutions and the carelessness of the central Government. [The successive governments] that have let the snowball grow and turn into a real invasion of the archipelago... It is evident that people are tired of what is happening.

On the following day, Sunday 22, the journal published this editorial on page 3: 'Yes to Sunday's March'. The call to the citizens is accompanied by nine news stories on immigration, three op-eds on the same issue, and the third part of 'Current Debates' that the paper had devoted to the migratory phenomenon. Even though on the first occasion (1/10, p.42-43) the headline of the debate had been 'Immigration from Neighbours' View' and on the second occasion (15/10, p.6-7) it was neutral 'Reflections on Immigration', the third one (22/10, p.4-5) raised the tune and stated 'What do citizens think of foreign invasion?'. All the participants declared themselves in favour of a Residence Act.

3. The demonstration is set in the agenda. Checkmate to the institutions

A few days before the demonstration, the initiative had had such major impact that politicians had to declare themselves on the call. On Monday 23, the coalition of minor parties at Santa Cruz City Council unsuccessfully proposed a motion to keep immigration out of election campaigns. During the debate, the PSOE [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party] claimed that the conveners of the march –in reference to the Head of Concave and the Head of Identidad Canaria– were paid a salary from the town council as advisors of Mayor Miguel Zerolo (member of Coalición Canaria.). [3]

On Tuesday 24 we could read in the newspaper the statements issued by Paulino Rivero –President of Coalición Canaria at that time–. He agreed with the ideological principles of the demonstration, although he considered that it was not the "right moment" for it. (*El Día*, 24/10, p.21). Being asked about the relationship between the conveners and his party, he said he was unaware of 'any sort of connections' (*La Opinión*, 24/10, p.14). In spite of the denial, the support given by Coalición Canaria to the protest march was unquestionable for some newspapers: 'Partido Popular and Coalición Canaria encourage racist protest in Tenerife' (*La Provincia*, 26/10, p.22) and 'The attitude of Coalición Canaria towards immigration inspires the demonstration' (*Canarias* 7, 29/10, p.34).

The denial of any xenophobic element, the (apparent) concession that 'the other' also has inherent values and the positive self presentation of the endogroup as tolerant and hospitable, are some of the features that characterize the racist discourse of the elite and the media. 'Therefore –Van Dijk states (2003a: 254 et seq)– when a newspaper says something negative about a minority, may also emphasize at the same time, that it has nothing against those people'. The editorial of *El Día* appeared on Tuesday 24 ('Not to racism and xenophobia, yes to the demonstration', p. 5) proved to be a good example of these discursive strategies.

Firstly, the plea for traditional hospitality: 'Tenerife has always been a welcoming land with foreigners who visit us'. Secondly, a condescending recognition of the others' human condition: 'We do not mind the colour of Africans, no matter how dark it is. We trust human intelligence and feelings of those creatures whom, like us, God has put on Earth'. And finally, the rejection against the accusation of racism, expressed in a concessive way: 'By this we mean that we have never justified or will ever justify racism or xenophobia, but the situation requires solutions, those that the conveners of next Sunday's demonstration request'.

Somewhat worried about the accusations of xenophobia that were starting to spread, the conveners of the event took advantage of the open door policy of *El Día* (24/10, p.31) to stop critics with a pseudo piece of news: 'Concave remarks that the demonstration on the 29th is not against immigrants'.

On October 25 the controversy arrives to the Parliament. In the session, the socialist spokesman asked the President of the Government, Adán Martín, member of Coalición Canaria, to reprove the march: a newspaper and two advisors of Santa Cruz City Council at the head of two organizations without any known public activity have succeeded in imposing the agenda of the highest representative institution of the islands. Despite the request, Martín does not accept to reprove the march (*El Día*, 26/10, p.3). In the parliamentary session next day, the socialist group proposed to sign an agreement against xenophobia and racism, but Coalición Canaria and Partido Popular [People's Party, the main centre-right party in Spain] rejected it.

On the same day 25, *El Día* uses an interview with a Canarian migrant in Venezuela, back to the islands after 52 years' absence, to criticize immigration. Headline of the interview: 'We went to Venezuela to work, why do immigrants come to the islands?'. In addition to a timely report on education ('Tenerife is the island with the highest number of school registrations of foreign students', p.31), the section 'Los mojos de la última', on the cover page, includes a short text with the title 'They want to break the demonstration' where we can read: 'We have received anonymous information warning ... that some would try to boycott from within the march. How? Taking out banners with racist and xenophobic messages at a given moment'.

A day after the Parliament rejected the agreement against xenophobia, the PSOE at the Island Council of Tenerife managed to pass a motion urging people 'not to participate in actions involving xenophobic attitudes, rejection or aggression against immigrants'. On Thursday 26 the Island Council of Gran Canaria endorsed a similar motion: the islands councils also had to submit to the agenda setting devised by a newspaper.

There were some that immediately took advantage of the controversy, especially Centro Canario Nacionalista (another centre-right nationalist party) that started to gather signatures to promote a Residence Act at the Regional Parliament to stop the arrivals of foreigners. In order to support this initiative, the party handed out leaflets blaming immigrants for the economic suffocation of town councils, saturation of courts and hospitals, disease transmission, ruining tourism and undermining local identity. A revealing coincidence: the photograph of the open boat accompanying the execrable libel was the same that had appeared on posters for the October 15 Democracia Nacional mass meeting in Los Cristianos.

In the issue of Thursday 26, *El Día* published the editorial: 'Less politicking and more commending work', which reiterates the call for the demonstration: 'We must take to the streets to keep on being local, Canarian, Spanish and European people... Not to racism, not to xenophobia. Yes to Sunday's march. Defend Tenerife, defend the Canary Islands'. The editorial appeared next to a column, signed by the President of Partido Nacionalista Canario, in which he states that the disproportionate population growth suffered in the islands hides a sort of 'neocolonialism' that 'aims to depersonalize and blur native people' (p.33) That day, the newspaper also included an advertisement of the demonstration that occupied two thirds of page 33. [4]

The campaign of *El Día* in support of the demonstration continues. On Friday 27, the headline of the front cover story is: 'Concave relies on massive attendance' and the subheading: 'Conveners for Residence Act expect people coming from all the islands'. On page 34, the journal publishes the article 'The Future Residence Act', signed by Antonio Cubillo, founder of the separatist organization MPAIAC. That day's edition is completed with a letter to the editor -'The Canary Islands Lose Face' (p.8)- supporting the protest, and inserting for the second time the advertisement of Concave and Identidad Canaria calling for the demonstration (p.15).

Just 24 hours before the march, *El Día* mobilized all its power of influence. Making an attempt to deactivate accusations of xenophobia, the headline stated: 'Six associations of immigrants will attend the demonstration' on the front page, but none of them is identified throughout the text. [5]

Apart from an interview with the leader of Centro Canario Nacionalista, who expresses his support to the march, the stories about immigration include the column 'Day 29' (p.9), three letters to the editor on page 10; the article "Canarias, parada y fonda" [archaic expression used to describe a place where people stop to drink and eat and follow their way]; the op-ed 'Fools' Solidarity', signed by one of the leaders of Centro Canario Nacionalista, and a short note in which the conveners predict the success of the demonstration (p.31).

The list of persuasive texts of this edition is completed with a pressing editorial: 'Save the Canary Islands' (p. 31) that accuses socialists of being against the protest looking for migrant votes in future local elections. 'However- the text concludes- with or without votes, they will throw us out of our houses in the end as it says the Canarian proverb: someone will come from the street that will throw you out of your house. Well, they are here'. In addition, they insert, for the third time, an advertisement calling for the demonstration (p.25), and a new interview with the Head of Identidad Canaria, Mateo López, with the headline: 'PSOE plays unfairly when stating that the demonstration is racist' (p.32).

Despite efforts made by the conveners, the rejection to the march made its way: On Saturday 28 *La Provincia*, a newspaper published in Gran Canaria, entitles on front page: 'Some 50 civil associations raise their voices in view of official silence. Associations accuse Partido Popular and Coalición Canaria of encouraging rejection to immigrants'. The trade unions UGT and CCOO, the NGOs Cáritas, Médicos del Mundo, the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid and immigrant groups were among these associations, all of them members of the Foro Canario de la Inmigración.

As it was correctly commented in *La Provincia* on 26 October, the sixth point of the Decalogue for Integrating and Non-Xenophobic Information promoted by the Foro states that: 'It is necessary to adopt a belligerent position against racist and/or xenophobic attitudes. We must specially watch out demonstrations of radical and intolerant groups, without neglecting diffuse racism in other positions of the political sphere'. Incoherent with its own decalogue, the Foro Canario de la Inmigración was unable to shake off official tutelage in order to criticize the demonstration and eventually split into pieces.

Even on the same day of the demonstration, *El Día* made a final effort to mobilize undecided people. With a surprising display of expeditious information, the main headline of this issue offered –*avant la lettre*– a news story that had not happened yet: ‘Neighbours took to the streets for population control’. On page 6 there was an interview with another leader of Centro Canario Nacionalista below the headline ‘Fernández Del Torco insists on saying that the Residence Act would not be unconstitutional’, in which the politician supports the demonstration; and an ambiguous ‘Open Letter from Partido Popular of Tenerife’, signed by its President Cristina Tavío, who states that ‘there are reasons to attend the demonstration’.

In addition, on the day of the demonstration, the newspaper publishes an opinion column that reiterates the need for a Residence Act (‘The Canary Islands with borders’, p. 7) and the fourth part of ‘Debates de Actualidad’. Again, ‘What do citizens think of foreign invasion?’ asks the five column headline (p.4). The answer is, at least, amphibological, and it is answered by the newspaper: ‘It is necessary to enclose the archipelago’.

Nevertheless, it is really surprising that, once again, the answer does not fit with the opinion of the people attending the debate: ‘El Fraile –says the president of the residents’ association of this suburb of Arona municipality– is setting a good example of solidarity and coexistence. There are more than 100 different nationalities mixed among 15,000 inhabitants and nothing serious has ever happened there...’. Moisés Pérez, a resident of Arona, says that the coexistence among the 150 nationalities of the municipality ‘is exemplary.’ However, none of these opinions were in the headlines or summary decks. [6]

For the fourth consecutive day the same advertisement of the demonstration and the last editorial call to the population, ‘Everybody to the demonstration today’ (p3), which literally repeats the editorial on Tuesday 24, again making references to ‘invasion’, ‘flood’ that ‘overflows’ the Islands, uncontrolled ‘avalanches’ and ‘massive’ arrivals. There is such perfect understanding between the newspaper and the *official* conveners of the march that the reasons given by the journal are the same, word by word, as those used by Concave. The hand that rocks the call from the newspaper and from the associations is the same.

The controversy and the division generated by the call reached such a point that the moderate newspaper *Diario de Avisos*, published in Tenerife, felt obliged to call for calmness in the editorial ‘We must take care of coexistence’, appeared on Sunday 29 (p.3). The newspaper considered its duty

To warn about the risks of certain biased calls that only contribute to accentuate the frustration of weakest social groups that might feel harmed by the strong migratory pressure that the archipelago is suffering. The irony or hypocrisy of this story is that, far from analysing the causes or processes or looking for real solutions beyond the false lure of a Residence Act, it only feeds the conflict between social groups.

Just a week before, on October 22, the same newspaper had already published the editorial ‘Incoherent Demonstration’, which harshly criticized the reasons of the conveners and the opportunity of the call:

It is true that the frequent arrivals of open boats to the coast of the Canary Islands, full of Sub-Saharan immigrants, is a matter of national concern that demands suitable actions, taking into consideration current serious circumstances. But we can not mix this necessity with the simplicity of certain analysis determined to clearly convey conflict rather than discussion. This can be applied to the demonstration called by the group Identidad Canaria -unknown to date- and some residents’ associations ... There are precious materials that must not be handled in excess, coexistence is one of them. Conveners state that the demonstrations will not be racist or xenophobic, and we will not be prejudiced and charge on those who will be attending it next Sunday, but we affirm that this is the worst option, based on opportunist rather than appropriate arguments, full of conflicting ideas, –at least those regarding to the pressure of immigration on the Islands–, very flimsy and hypocritical.

4. Media agenda vs. public agenda. Civic response

Finally, the demonstration was held as was to be expected on Sunday 29 Except for *El Día*, all the journals of the islands pointed out the poor attendance: *Canarias 7*, on front page: ‘Low commitment to the xenophobic march. Fewer than 2,000 people attend it’. *La Provincia* entitled: ‘About 3,000 people attend march against immigrants in Tenerife’, while ‘Several thousand demonstrators ask for residence act’ was the headline chosen by *Diario de Avisos*.

Unlike other newspapers that focused on the number of attenders, *El Día* preferred a poetic headline: ‘Feeling the Canary Islands’ and numbers pushed into the subheadline: ‘About 15,000 people, according to the conveners, marched in Santa Cruz to ask for Residence Act and defend the Islands’. Surprisingly, the newspaper accepted the figures provided by the conveners without contrasting them with the police information or its own estimate, against usual informative guideline.

Surprisingly, the report on the demonstration was not signed and was away from the minimum standards of objectivity. Unusual explanations tried to justify the failure of the demonstration: ‘We are certain that lots of citizens did not attend the march due to the threats and insults hurled by interested groups during the previous days’. The writer also stepped into the shoes of a mass psychologist: ‘In fact, phone calls made to our editorial department by some neighbours reveal that they felt awkward with the possibility of being considered as racist people’.

The outrageous closing paragraph of the article combined both pretended editorializing and picturesque reports about popular festivities:

Azul Televisión, television division of *El Día*, offered images of the demonstration from different places throughout the day, so revealing the importance of the march, the overflowing feeling of Canarian identity and the indignation against national parties for their negligent attitude towards the archipelago, what has led the islands to this unsustainable population growth.

It seems remarkable that we had to wait until Tuesday 31 to read the editorial of *El Día* assessing the event, already known the opinion of the other newspapers and the political and civic reaction. The editorial 'Canarian Feelings' insisted on the idea that 'the people who took to the streets love their native land... ordinary, decent, serious people who love their islands and protested against the governing parties in Madrid, responsible for the loss of our identity'.

When talking about the number of protesters, the unconscious betrays the writer (*excusatio non petita*...), who, once again, takes up outlandish ideas to justify lower attendance than expected: '*El Día* did not lie on his front page yesterday. Canarian feeling overwhelmed Santa Cruz de Tenerife though conveners were threatened days earlier, what influenced on the attendance, as well as showers... we are accused of racism and xenophobia just because we love Tenerife, our islands, our people. People who pay their taxes to have their basic needs, public health and education covered, and who want to preserve their identity'.

5. Conclusions

The review of the news stories that the journal devoted to the demonstration during some weeks before the demonstration reveals the long-run outline of the campaign used to infect public opinion with the perception of being living an emergency situation.

The analysis of the circumstances surrounding the demonstration causes mixed feelings. On the one hand, one is shocked by the restrained informative dosage developed by a single newspaper, with privileged position in the media ecosystem of the archipelago, and able to promote an initiative, presented as a spontaneous popular protest that forced main institutions of the archipelago (Parliament, regional government, island councils, Santa Cruz City Council, etc.) to take sides and marked time to political organizations.

The closeness to elections made political parties behave cautiously but ambiguously, opinions expressed in one island (Gran Canaria) did not fit with the ones expressed in the other island (Tenerife). Unfortunately, the social, political and media conflict left a collateral victim, the Foro Canario de la Inmigración, whose lack of independence and internal division have irreparably harmed the credibility of such an important institution.

On the other hand, it is comforting to see that a majority of the population of Tenerife was able to counteract the criminalization of immigrants, defying the power of a newspaper that condemned dissenters to silence. Despite money and propaganda, the support of the population to the demonstration was, fortunately, unimportant. The best proof for this is that those ideologues of the march have desisted from making another attempt so far.

We can conclude that *El Día*, indeed, managed to impose a demonstration in favour of a Residence Act and immigration control in the public agenda, but failed in making citizens to support its opinions, in spite of the great amount of news stories about irregular immigration and the call for the demonstration. All things considered, what happened confirms the well-known thesis by B. C. Cohen (1963: 13): media tell us what we must think about but fortunately they cannot tell us what we must think.

6. References

- Ardévol, A. (2008): "La inmigración en la fotografía de prensa de Canarias". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 63, pp. 409-417, available at: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/08/34_791_54_fotoperiodismo/Alberto_Ardevol.html. Retrieved: 1 September 2009.
- Bañón, A. (1997): "El discurso racista de la prensa y la manipulación de los testimonios orales". *Mugak*, 2, available at: <http://revista.mugak.eu/articulos/show/15>. Retrieved: 5 March 2009.
- Bardin, L. (1986): *El análisis de contenido*. Madrid: Akal.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985): *¿Qué significa hablar? Economía de los intercambios lingüísticos*. Madrid: Akal.
- Cohen, B. (1963): *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, New York: Princeton University Press.
- Cohen, S. y Young, J. (comps.) (1981): *The manufacture of news. Deviance, social problems and the mass media*. London: Constable.
- Dallanhol, H. (2000): "Propuesta de cobertura periodística sobre la inmigración ilegal". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 33, available at: <http://www.revistalatinacs.org/aa2000kjl/x33se/62helo.htm>. Retrieved: 1 June 2009.
- Igartua, J. J., Muñiz, C. y Cheng, L. (2005): "La inmigración en la prensa española. Aportaciones empíricas y metodológicas desde la teoría del encuadre noticioso". *Migraciones*, 17, pp. 143-181.
- Igartua, J. J., Muñiz, C. y Otero, J. A. (2006): "El tratamiento informativo de la inmigración en la prensa y la televisión española. Una aproximación empírica desde la Teoría del Framing". *Global Media Journal*, vol. 3 (5),

available at: http://gmje.mty.itesm.mx/igartua_muniz_otero.htm. Retrieved: 10 March 2009.

Krippendorff, K. (1990): *Metodología de análisis de contenido*. Barcelona: Paidós.

López-Escobar, E., McCombs, M., y Rey, F. (1996): "La imagen de los candidatos: el segundo nivel de la agenda-setting". *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. IX (1 & 2), pp. 39-65.

Luhmann, N. (2000): *La realidad de los medios de masas*. Barcelona: Anthropos.

McCombs (2006): *Estableciendo la agenda. El impacto de los medios en la opinión pública y en el conocimiento*. Barcelona: Paidós.

McCombs, M. y Shaw, D. (1972): "The agenda-setting function of mass media". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 36 (2), pp. 176-187.

Nash, M. (2005): *Inmigrantes en nuestro espejo*. Barcelona: Icaria.

Rodríguez Borges, R. F. (2006): "Inmigración, comunicación y convivencia multicultural". *Revista de Filosofía Laguna*, vol. 18, pp. 125-140.

--- (2009): "Inmigración, medios de comunicación y ética periodística", in Collective work: *Límites y fronteras*. La Laguna: Universidad de La Laguna, pp. 734-741.

Shaw D. y McCombs, M. (1976): *The emergence of american political issues. The agenda-setting function of the press*. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing House.

Tankard, J. (2001): "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing", in Reese, S. et al. (eds.): *Framing Public Life*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Van Dijk, T. (1997): *Racismo y análisis crítico de los medios*. Barcelona: Paidós.

--- (2003a): *Racismo y discurso de las élites*. Barcelona: Gedisa.

--- (2003b): *Dominación étnica y racismo discursivo en España y América Latina*. Barcelona: Gedisa.

--- (2008): "Reproducir el racismo: el rol de la prensa", in Checa y Olmos, F. (ed.): *La inmigración sale a la calle. Comunicación y discursos políticos sobre el fenómeno migratorio*. Barcelona: Icaria.

Winter, J. y Eyal, C. (1981): "Agenda-setting for a civil rights issue". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45, pp. 376-383.

7. Notes

[1] The text of the formal complaint is available at: http://media.epi.es/www.la-provincia.com/media/documentos/2008-08-24_DOC_2008-04-24_22_08_27_denuncia_racismo_ben_magec.pdf. Retrieved: 21 October 2009.

[2] A dormitory suburb of the capital city of Tenerife.

[3] Izquierdo figured as an advisor to the Culture councillorship, whereas López was the advisor to the Mayor.

[4] The demonstration was not advertised in any other newspaper of the Canary Islands.

[5] On the contrary, the Coordinating Committee of Immigrants denied the statements of the newspaper in a press release.

[6] See Bañón (1997) on the manipulation of oral statements in the press.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES / REFERENCES:

Rodríguez Borges, Rodrigo F.: "Xenophobic discourse and agenda-setting. A case study in the press of the Canary Islands (Spain)", at *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 65, pages 222 to 230. La Laguna (Tenerife, Canary Islands): La Laguna University, retrieved on ____th of ____ of 2____, from http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art2/895_ULL/17_RodrigoEN.html
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-65-2010-895-222-230-EN

Note: the [DOI](#) number is **part** of the bibliographic references and it must be cited if you cited this article.

To send this article to a friend, just click on the little envelope: 