Rational calculation or emotional thrust? Scotland, Catalonia and the debates over independence.


1. Introduction

The realm of nationalism and ethnic politics is a suitable field for a discussion of the relationship between rationality and emotions. The rigid distinction between these two concepts lies at the core of some of the main theoretical understandings of these two related phenomena. On the one hand, primordialist and perennialist authors describe nations as human groupings based on blood or long-lasting cultural ties. This often implies that national mobilisation and solidarity depends on inherited and unconsciously reproduced factors, rather than choice and cognition (Armstrong 1995, Hastings 1997). On the other, instrumentalist theories depict ethnicity as a socially constructed phenomenon manipulated by rational ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ mobilising people around irrational ties for their own advantages of status and power (Connor 1994, Brass 1991). In both perspectives, the distinction between emotions and rationality is clear-cut rather than nuanced.

Furthermore, being nationalism often understood as a ‘political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (Gellner 1983, 1), it is usually taken for granted that nationalist movements naturally seeks independence as an end in itself. While this interpretation has been put into question in the analysis of stateless nationalism in Western Europe (Keating 1996, Guibernau 1999), little attention has been given to party’s discourse in order to provide evidence against this commonly held assumption.

Against such background, this paper aims at exploring the role of emotions and rationality in the two current most important instances of national mobilisation in Western Europe, that is, the campaigns for independence referenda in Scotland and Catalonia. It does this by looking at the justifications in favour of external self-determination of the two most important separatist parties in these regions – the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia – ERC). The choice of the subjects of analysis is due to three reasons: the need to focus on agency in the construction of nationalist arguments for independence; the primary role played by these two actors in the contexts analysed; and their similarity in ideological terms, which facilitates a comparative study.

The paper is structured as follows: section two looks at the current literature on rationality and emotion and propose a different, although related, analytical distinction on which to base the analysis of party’s discourse; section three briefly introduces the two parties under study; section four provides an examination of their cases for independence in the long campaign for the respective referenda, making extensive use of primary sources; section five
suggests three sets of factors that would account for the similarities and differences in their rhetoric; section six draws the main conclusions.

2. Politics, Emotions and Rationality

The relationship between emotions and rationality has been a central topic in the Western political tradition since, at least, the rise of Greek philosophy. From Plato’s idea of a republic dominated by reason-driven philosopher holding in check the emotional outbursts of the rest of society to Habermas’ theory of democracy as perfect deliberation, such a relationship has been mainly characterised by a clear dichotomy pitting cold and desirable rational thinking against the negative influence of emotional intrusion (Elster 2003).

Recent studies in neuroscience have put such a view into question and rather underlined the importance of affection in guiding and motivating cognitive action as well as shaping mnemonic processes and learning (Cacioppo & Gardner 1999).1 Three major findings would warrant nuancing the traditional normative distinction between ‘bad emotions’ and ‘good reason’. First, ‘emotion systems’ deal with the sensory stream much before and on a larger basis than conscious awareness. Second, ‘emotion systems’ would be the ground from which all behavioural reactions – both emotional and cognitive – arise. Third, one of the main functions of ‘emotion systems’ would be to direct the attention of cognitive awareness to unusual sensory stimuli (Marcus 2003a, 197). Furthermore, analysing patients who have suffered bilateral damage to their amygdala and, as a consequence, have impaired experience of their emotions, Damasio (1994) showed that, while maintaining their cognitive functions intact, they could not initiate action. They spent unreasonable amounts of time pondering the pros and cons of insignificant actions without being able to take a decision and even when they reached a conclusion they had serious troubles enacting the rationally prescribed behaviour. Hence, he concluded, perfectly rational persons, unaffected by emotions, would eventually end up behaving in a totally irrational way. Emotions therefore seem to play a fundamental role, although a still unclear one, in allowing people to set priorities and make choices in the absence of perfect information.

On the basis of these empirical results and a theoretical framework previously proposed by Jeffrey Gray, Marcus et al. developed a theory of ‘Affective Intelligence’ which describes cerebral activity as dominated by three ‘emotion systems’ – fight/flight, dispositional and surveillance – that allow ‘reserving’ conscious awareness to a limited set of unfamiliar and excessively complex tasks (Marcus et al 2000, Marcus 2003a). In the authors’ view, ‘emotion systems’ would thus be ‘processes that precede conscious awareness, shape what we pay attention to and how we pay attention’, while reason would consist of a ‘set of skills that are recruited by emotion systems for just those occasions when we

1 Affection and cognition are used here as equivalent to emotion and rationality.
wish them to be available and applied, situations that compel explicit consideration and judgment’ (Marcus 2003b, 49-60).

However, as he himself made clear, Marcus and the neuroscience literature more in general have dealt with something quite different from what we usually understand as emotions. Yet, even within more traditional understandings of the subject, the normative dichotomy between bad emotions and good rationality has been put into question. This is the case, among others, with Jon Elston (1999) in philosophy, Dennis Mumby and Linda Putnam (1992) in organisation theory, Emirbayer and Goldberg (2005) and Goodwin et al. (2001) in contentious politics and social movement studies, and Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) in international relations theory. Despite their different approaches and disciplinary focuses, what all these authors agree upon is that emotions should be included as relevant analytical dimensions in their respective fields, despite the obvious methodological challenges represented by this elusive phenomenon. The first such difficulty is clear when looking for a shared definition of emotions among the authors reviewed. Goodwin et al. (2001, 10) quoted Theodore Kemper defining an emotion as ‘a relatively short-term evaluative response essentially positive or negative in nature involving distinct somatic (and often cognitive) components’. Emirbayer and Goldberg (2005, 473-490) instead cited Dewey describing emotion as ‘something called out by objects, physical and personal; it is response to an objective situation [...] an indication of intimate participation, in a more or less excited way in some scene of nature or life’, and then formulated their own definition of collective emotions as ‘(1) complexes of processes-in-relations that are (2) transpersonal in scope and that consist in (3) psychical investments, engagements, or cathexes, where these encompass (4) embodied perceptions and judgments as well as bodily states, forces, energies, or sensations’. Again, criticising Herbert Simon’s concept of bounded rationality, Mumby and Putnam (1992, 474) proposed to complement it with the concept of ‘bounded emotionality’, meant as ‘an alternative mode of organizing in which nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness are fused with individual responsibility to shape organizational experiences’.

In light of such a variety of formulations regarding the concepts of emotions and rationality, an analysis of the rhetorical strategies of the separatist parties ERC and the SNP in the context of the run-up to the respective independence referenda seems to be irremediably flawed at the outset. In order to overcome this drawback, we propose an analytical distinction that, despite reproducing to some extent the opposition between affection and cognition, might be helpful in providing a more nuanced assessment of their interrelation. More specifically, we suggest distinguishing between functional, or instrumental, and principled arguments in the party’s discourse concerning the goal of independence. In this framework, functional arguments will portray independence as a means to achieve socio-economic objectives, while principled ones will focus on

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2 Although it is not the book’s main focus, this distinction has been nuanced in Greenfeld 2013, pos. 1419-1467.
independence as an end in itself or as an issue of recognition of the national identity and culture. We argue that such a distinction not only enables a clearer definition of the tools of analysis, but it also leaves room for considering the emotional dimension attached to both type of arguments (instrumental and principled) by means of a consideration of specific sentiments – of enthusiasm, eagerness, hope, joy, solidarity, anxiety, frustration, fear, anger, isolation and so on, hence in the traditional sense of a discrete unconscious state of mind triggered by the external natural and social environment involving bodily sensations and mediated through cultural codes and practices – they are likely to appeal to.

3. The SNP and ERC: a brief historical overview

Founded in 1934, the Scottish National Party (SNP) became a relevant force in the British politics from the end of the 1960s, when Winifred Margaret Ewing conquered the party’s first seat in Parliament in the 1967 Hamilton by-election. Despite experiencing ebbs and flows, the party has since enjoyed continuing electoral representation in Westminster. In the 1970s, thanks to the ‘It’s Scotland’s Oil’ campaign, it registered record results and was able to force both the Labour and Conservative parties to agree on a referendum on the establishment of a Scottish Assembly, which was however lost in 1979. The defeat plunged the party into years of infightings and redefinition that affected it for about a decade. Since the late 1980s, however, the SNP began improving its electoral performance as well as its internal organisation. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 provided it with an unprecedented opportunity to shape Scottish politics, by eliminating the chronic underrepresentation that it had suffered in Westminster until then. After two parliamentary terms in the opposition, the SNP won a relative majority in 2007 and ran a minority government until 2011, when, thanks to good policy results and a disastrous Labour campaign, it won an absolute majority (Hassan 2011, Mitchel et al. 2011, McCrone 2012). As the organisation of a referendum on independence figured among its main priorities, in January 2012, the party launched a consultation on the subject that ended in May of the same year. At the same time, the Scottish government began talks with the British executive which, on October 15, 2012, led to the signature of the Edinburgh Agreement by First Minister Alex Salmond and Prime Minister David Cameron. This officially transferred to the Scottish Parliament the powers necessary to organise a referendum on the independence of Scotland. On November 14, 2013, the Scottish Parliament passed the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill that set the details of the vote to be held on September 18, 2014 (Scottish Government n.d.).

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With regard to its discourse, since the late 1960s the SNP tried to profile itself on the centre-left of the political spectrum, although these attempts remained quite ambiguous until, at least, the mid-1980s.\textsuperscript{4} According to Peter Lynch (2009, 631), from the early 1990s, the leadership of Alex Salmond was important in this respect as he ‘sought to make the SNP a credible alternative to Labour and thus attractive to Labour voters’. Yet, Lynch, along with others, has also pointed out a later move towards the centre and the adoption of a more pro-business attitude (Lynch 2009, Cuthbert and Cuthbert 2009).\textsuperscript{5} Another important feature of the SNP since the 1960s has been the virtual absence of references to romantic rhetoric and cultural arguments to the advantage of a focus on improving the economic and social conditions of Scotland (Lynch 2002, 4; Breuilly 1994, 319-330). This latter dimension improved consistently from the late 1980s on and increasingly focused on the idea that Scotland would be a richer country outside the Union. Salmond created the Scottish Centre for Economic and Social Research, which acted as a think tank making the case for Scottish independence on the basis of economic considerations (Lynch 2002, 211). This led to the publications of a series of papers entitled ‘For the Good of Scotland’ and aimed at ‘explaining the economic case of Independence’ (SNP 1995a, b, c), which has remained one of the central tenets of the party’s ideology until today (Salmond 1998, 2003; Scottish Executive 2009; SNP 1996, 1999, 2003, 2007). Finally, another important transformation experienced by the party through the 1990s has been the triumph of the gradualist line over the fundamentalists – although there were some new clashes between the two factions in the 1999-2003 period. Since the 1960s, the party had been indeed divided between uncompromising defenders of an independence-nothing-less stand and those members more open to collaboration with other forces and to achieve self-government goals as mid-term steps on the way towards total sovereignty (Lynch 2002, 2005; Mackay 2009; Mitchell et al. 2011, 21), with the fundamentalist wing often predominant in the 1970s and 1980s.\textsuperscript{6}

As the SNP, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) was founded in the 1930s, but, unlike this, it immediately became the dominant party in the region from its formation in 1931 through the Civil War. Once in power, Francisco Franco hit the party very hard, sentencing to death some of its most important

\textsuperscript{4} See also Andrew Marr (2013, 191) on this.

\textsuperscript{5} For a dissenting view on this matter see Mitchell et al. 2011, 117-138.

\textsuperscript{6} This view is confirmed by two old party members. See: McCormick 1988; Wilson 2009, 150-160. The much stronger grip of the gradualists over the party’s leadership in the 1990s as compared to the 1970s and 1980s is clear from a comparative analysis of the 1979 referendum campaign, the 1989 decision not to join the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the 1997 referendum campaign. While in the first the party was divided over the merit of devolution (Marr 2013, 148-152; Lynch 2002, 145-157) and in the second it refused collaboration under pressure from the fundamentalist wing (Marr 2013, 195-205; Lynch 2002, 185), in the third it compactly supported the establishment of the Parliament as a major advancement for Scotland on the march towards full independence (Lynch 2005, 524).
members, along with a substantial part of its militants, and forcing into exile an even higher number of them (Alquezar 2001; Balcells 1996, 94-127; Culla 2013, 51-53). During the dictatorship the party grew out of touch with the changing Catalan society and slowly turned into a prestigious, but old and increasingly unimportant actor. This was reflected by its electoral results that, after the good performance of the first Catalan elections in 1980, brought it near to extinction (Segura 2001). Things changed radically from the end of 1986, when a group of enthusiastic young separatists coming from different Catalan nationalist organisations arisen between the last years of the dictatorship and the early 1980s joined it with the goal to make it clearly separatist and left wing. ERC thus went from being one of the oldest to the youngest party in Catalonia and found a niche between the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (Party of the Socialists of Catalonia, PSC-PSOE) and the national-conservative Convergencia i Unio (Culla 2013, 297-350). In 1992, it became the third force in the Catalan Parliament and kept growing until an eventful alternation at the top, in 1996, stopped this first phase of expansion. In a few years, however, the new leadership of Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira led the party to its best results in the post-dictatorship period and to join two successive government coalitions between 2003 and 2010 (Argelaguet 2004, Culla 2013, 580-666; Lucas 2004). During this period, the party played a crucial role in putting on the agenda the reform of the 1978 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, with the aim to change the institutional structure of Spain into an asymmetric pluri-national federation. Yet, the text approved by the Catalan Parliament was heavily amended by the Spanish Congress and thus opposed by ERC on occasion of the popular referendum that ratified it in 2006 (Orte and Wilson 2009).

During the following four years the party went through a new phase of internal dissent and change in leadership that seriously harmed its electoral performance at both the 2008 Spanish and 2010 Catalan elections. This decline was ever more striking as, from 2009 on, Catalonia experienced the rise of a grass-roots movement for the ‘right to decide’ advocating the organisation of a referendum on the independence of the region. The ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal, in June 2010, which declared unconstitutional some articles of the already heavily amended Catalan Statute of Autonomy, and the impact of the economic crisis further fuelled popular mobilisation. On the occasion of the Catalan national day on September 11, 2012, more than a million people joined a manifestation in favour of the right to decide. In the following weeks, after having unsuccessfully proposed a new fiscal deal to the Spanish Government of Mariano Rajoy, the President of the Generalitat and leader of CiU, Artur Mas, decided to call an early election on the issue of an independence referendum. Having solved its internal disputes and found a new

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7 The party’s leader Lluís Companys was sent to the firing squad on October 1940 after having been captured in France by Nazi officials and handed over to the Spanish authorities. It thus became a symbol of the Catalan national and anti-dictatorship struggle. The number of party militants sentenced to death between 1938 and 1943 reached 793 out of a total number of 3,500 people in the entire Catalonia (Culla 2013, 51).
skilful leadership in the historian Oriol Junqueras, ERC was able to capitalise on the growing support for independence and become the second force in the Catalan Parliament (Culla 2013, 667-732). Despite remaining in the opposition, the party has offered its support to the government led by CiU on the basis of an agenda envisaging the organisation of a referendum on independence on November 9, 2014. On January 23, 2013, the Catalan Parliament passed a declaration in which Catalonia is defined as ‘sovereign political subject’ (Martí 2013). A year later, on January 16, 2014, the Parliament officially asked the Spanish Congress to transfer the powers necessary to hold such a referendum, but the demand was rejected on April 9. The Catalan executive and the other forces supporting the right to decide have however declared that the process would go on despite Madrid’s opposition (Barrena 2014, Masreal 2014).

From its foundation in the 1930s, ERC has been a left-wing nationalist party with strong, although not dominant, separatist elements. The redefinition experienced in the late 1980s, however, brought the party decisively more to the left and made it unambiguously separatist. The ambition set out by Carod-Rovira, who launched the renewal of the party in 1986 - although he later left the leadership to the more centrist Angel Colom - was to couple national and social struggle thus providing a third way between CiU and the PSC-PSOE. While during the leadership of Colom the first element was more emphasised, the leftist social agenda became of the primary importance with the rise of Carod-Rovira. In this connection, already in 1991 he introduced the important theme of the catalanisme del benestar (welfare Catalanism), which has remained as a major point in the party’s discourse. He argued that Catalan separatism had to be concerned with the everyday needs of the Catalans and strive to improve their economic and social conditions. He thus aimed at stressing the advantages that independence would bring to the Catalan population in terms of ensuring economic growth and, as a consequence, a more prosperous society enjoying higher standards of living (Carod-Rovira 1991, Colom 1995, ERC 2000, 2003a, 2006, 2008b).8 The natural corollary of such rhetorical strategy has been the denunciation of the expoli fiscal (fiscal plundering) carried out by the central administration of the Spanish state. Introduced at the end of the 1980s and consistently held since, it basically consists in the claim that Catalonia is deprived of about 8-12% of its GDP each year to finance an inefficient bureaucratic structure and ‘fake solidarity’ programmes that are instead used to fuel clientist support to the Spanish major parties, while used in Catalonia those resources could improve the welfare of the Catalan population and enable the region to compete with other advanced countries (Culla 2013, 373; ERC 1989, 1992, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003a, 2005, 2008a, 2012). In this connection, the party has not refused solidarity, but rather pleaded for targeted programmes controlled by the Generalitat and aimed at sustaining endogenous growth (Colom 1995, ERC 1999, 2003b, 2006). Finally, always during the Carod-Rovira

8 This change in ERC’s discourse in the 1990s is confirmed by Culla 2013, 373-488; and Alimbau 1993, 74.
years, the party moved to a gradualist strategy, based on the acceptance of a slow process of transition to independence involving intermediate steps such as the transformation of Spain into a pluri-national federation, and to a more civic conception of the Catalan nation that could appeal to the Spanish-speaking and immigrant population of the region (Culla 2013, 486-505).

4. The case for independence

Before going into detail with the analysis of the parties’ discourse concerning the respective independence referenda, we need to briefly describe the sources used and the periods chosen. To begin with the latter, in both cases, as at the time of writing the debates are still on-going, we have retraced the literature produced by the parties from the latest available publications up to the moment in which independence clearly became one of main issues on the political agenda. As far as Scotland is concerned we have decided to begin the analysis from the SNP’s launch of the national consultation on the independence referendum, in January 2012. The Catalan case is more complicated in this respect. A logical solution would be to start the analysis from the agreement on the process of organisation of the independence referendum signed by ERC and CiU in December 2012. Yet, as a matter of fact, the large popular mobilisation in favour of independence – support was at 57% in late 2012 – and CiU’s decision to call an early election on the matter warrant the inclusion of the short campaign for the November 2012 election.

With regard to the sources, we have consulted party documents published in the period indicated above and likely to contain information on the party’s view on independence. In the case of ERC, this boils down to the manifestos for the 2012 Catalan and the 2014 European elections plus all the issues of the party’s official magazine Esquerra Nacional. Concerning the SNP, apart from the thematic brochure Choice published in mid-2012, most of the material on the subject has in fact been produced by the Scottish Government, which is however exclusively composed of SNP members. We have thus focused on the documents issued by the Scottish executive during the timeframe chosen, with special reference to the white paper ‘Scotland’s Future’ released in November 2013.

The SNP

The text that launched the National Consultation on the independence referendum in January 2012, Your Scotland, Your Referendum, chiefly was an informative piece concerning the rules and mechanics of the process rather than the content and any partisan standpoints. Yet, in the introductory pages the SNP-led government clearly expressed its view on the matter. The following quote from the Alex Salmond’s foreword set the tone for later declarations of the party on the matter:

‘Scotland is not oppressed and we have no need to be liberated. Independence
matters because we do not have the powers to reach our potential. We are limited in what we can do to create jobs, grow the economy and help the vulnerable. We shouldn’t have a constitution which constrains us, but one which frees us to build a better society. Our politics should be judged on the health of our people, the welfare of young and old and the strength of our economy’ (Scottish Government 2012, 2).

There, the party quite clearly suggested that the main reason behind the drive for independence has to do with ‘creating jobs, grow the economy and help the vulnerable’, thus making a functional case for independence.

The white paper ‘Scotland’s Future’ certainly is the most comprehensive text explaining why Scotland should become an independent state. In that text, the Scottish government argued that ‘democracy, prosperity and fairness are the principles at the heart of the case for independence’ (Scottish Government 2013a, 40).

The first principle, democracy, is emphasised at the beginning of the document\(^9\) as the overriding one because, with independence, ‘the most important decisions about our economy and society will be taken by the people who care most about Scotland, that is by the people of Scotland’ (Scottish Government 2013a, i). Yet, at a closer look, this argument is itself instrumental to the other two principles, i.e., building up a more prosperous and a fairer Scotland. Indeed, the idea that the people of Scotland are those who care most about Scotland could be put into question as a clear platitude. What justifies the claim is the reference, made later in the text, to the so-called ‘democratic deficit’, i.e., the fact that Scotland has often been governed by British governments which did not obtain a majority in the region and enacted policies detrimental to the Scottish economy and the cohesion of the Scottish society.\(^10\) Scotland’s economic and social problems are thus framed as the result of bad Westminster management. Independence is suggested as a logical solution because – it is argued – if the people of Scotland are in charge, they would tailor policy around Scotland’s needs and inform it with their own values – implicitly assumed to be different from those of the rest of the UK – thus leading to a more prosperous and fairer society, which brings us to the next two points (Scottish Government 2013a, 40-42).

The argument about independence being key for improved prosperity is based upon two assumptions. First, Scotland has an enviable stock of first class human and natural resources. The party quotes the highest number of high-rank universities as compared with countries of similar size as evidence of the former, and the oil resources and tidal wave potential with regard to the latter. Yet, in contrast to other small and well-endowed countries, such as Norway for instance, Scotland has consistently underperformed. The party provides quantitative

\(^9\) This is also the case with the introductory paragraphs of other texts. See SNP 2012, 1; Scottish Government 2014a, 1.

\(^10\) The party counted 34 out of 68 years under a government with little legitimacy in Scotland since 1945. Yet, in reality the democratic deficit began to be perceived as a problem in Scotland only in the 1980s with the increasingly diverging fortunes of the Tories in Scotland and England.
estimates of the gap with other similar small European states and concludes that this basically consists in the difference in average yearly GDP growth recorded by them and Scotland since the 1970s, equal to 3.8% or £900 per head. This simple conclusion – if Scotland had been independent it would have performed as other similar small European countries – enables the party to accuse the British government of ineffective management and to argue that independence is the only solution, since, wide as it may be, devolution will never give Scotland all of the competences it needs to realise its full potential (Scottish Government 2013a, 42-43).

In a paper published in May 2013 and entitled Scotland’s Economy the Case for Independence (Scottish Government 2013b), the Scottish Government anticipated many of the economic arguments made in the white paper. Three aspects are interesting with regard to this text. First, the government made large use of references to authoritative independent studies and sources confirming its diagnosis of the Scottish economy, especially the Fiscal Commission Working Group, charged by the Scottish Government with providing technical guidance on the economic choices of an independent Scotland, and the OECD. In this way, it visibly tried to legitimise its arguments by attributing them the undisputable stamp of technocratic approval, a practice maintained in the other papers analysed. Second, the government did not accuse the British government of actively discriminating against Scotland, but simply of being driven by the interests of other parts of the UK, especially the South East and London. Thus, in line with the above declaration that Scotland is not oppressed, the case has rather lain in the need to do away with the one-size-fits-all economic policy of successive British governments. To this effect, the paper also quoted London’s official acknowledgement that ‘the dynamics of small economies are inherently different from larger economies such as the UK’ (Scottish Government 2013b, 7). Hence, according to the SNP-led Scottish Government, Scotland would have been marginalised by its union with a much bigger partner (England) rather than overtly discriminated against. Third, the document, as others later on (Scottish Government 2013c), provided considerable data aimed at showing the advanced nature of the Scottish economy and how it would perform better outside the UK. It argued that even without oil Scotland’s GDP was equal to 99% of the British average and if oil revenues were added it would jump to 118%, making the region the 8th richest country in the OECD by output per capita; it asserted that tax revenue in Scotland had been higher than the British average by £800 for each fiscal year since 1980-81; and it claimed that an independent Scotland would be in a better fiscal position, both in terms of public debt and budget deficit, than the UK (Scottish Government 2013c, 6-13).

The third principle on which the case for independence is made, fairness, puts into question not only the results (un)delivered by the Westminster

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11 The group is formed by four economists, of whom two Noble laureates: Andrew Hughes Hallet, Sir Jim Mirrlees, Frances Ruane and Joseph Stiglitz.
governments, but rather the economic model itself. As asserted in a document published by the Scottish Government in November 2013 on the economic policy choices in an independent Scotland:

‘the Scottish Government believes that there are also key weaknesses in the UK economic model, which threaten the stability of the Scottish economy in the long-run. Firstly, there is increasing income inequality both at the household and intra-UK regional level. Secondly the growth model pursued by successive UK governments of high levels of consumption funded by borrowing at the expenses of trade and investment, is not a solid base for sustainable growth’ (Scottish Government 2013d, 34).

Hence, the problems with the British model of growth are that it threatens equality and cohesion – by widening the gap between rich and poor as well as between different regions – and it is too concentrated on the financial sector and the city of London, thus being unsustainable in the long-term and weak to systemic shocks. By contrast, independence would allow Scotland ‘to pursue a more productive, resilient and fairer economic model. A model focused on delivering long-term sustainability and economic opportunity for all and not a targeted few’ (Scottish Government 2013d, v). The paper further showed that Scotland was already less unequal than the UK – its Gini coefficient being 0.3 instead of 0.34 – and quoted the Fiscal Commission Working Group suggesting that income inequality could hamper economic growth in the long-term, thus offering an economic, besides a moral, argument in favour of a more equal society (Scottish Government 2013d, 30). Yet, it is important to note that the idea that a Scottish independent government would necessarily enact policies oriented to build up a more equal society presumes the existence of societal differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK, with the former being more on the left.

To conclude, as clearly formulated in the 2014 document, Scotland’s Future in Your Hands (Scottish Government 2014b, 7), the SNP has consistently argued that ‘independence is not an end in itself’ but rather a means to build up a more democratic, more prosperous and fairer society, as an alternative to a Union that has grown increasingly unequal and concentrated around the priorities of London and the South East.

ERC

Published shortly after the massive popular mobilisation evidenced by the protests of September 11, ERC’s manifesto for the 2012 Catalan elections began with the acknowledgment that the people of Catalonia had showed, as never before, the conviction that ‘the independence of our country is essential to continue to exist as a nation, to defend the social rights of the citizens, to realise all our potential as a country and to guarantee the continuity of the welfare state’

12 On the argument that the UK economic model has been disproportionately based on finance to the disadvantage of manufacturing see Scottish Government 2014c, 3-4.
13 See also Scotland 2014a, 6.
Although this is not a direct statement unambiguously listing
the party’s main reasons in favour of external self-determination, there are three
main elements that are suggested to lie at the core of people’s support for such
an extreme constitutional option: an issue of recognition and survival,
preumably from some form of oppression or attempt at assimilation of the
Catalan nation; the need to ‘defend social rights’ and the welfare state; the
opportunity ‘to realise’ the country’s ‘full potential’. Thus, as in the case of the
SNP, we find a rhetoric that presents independence as a means to an end, as a
tool to reach other goals. Yet, unlike in the case of the SNP, the text clearly
showed the existence of a fundamentally unresolved principled issue of national
recognition of the Catalan nation on the part of the Spanish state. As argued
later in the same text, ‘the national question cannot be disentangled from the
social question’ (ERC 2012a, 4).

More precisely, the party has framed the national question as relating to
people’s basic democratic rights. The structure of the 2012 manifesto is
eloquent in this respect. After the introduction, the first section of the document
was entitled ‘Proposal of Catalonia to the World’. There, ERC presented its case
for independence to the international community – rather than the Catalans or
the Spanish state – on the basis of ‘a radically democratic proposal, based on
the right to decide, a proposal that puts popular sovereignty at the core of the
social and national construction’ (ERC 2012a, 6). It thus outlined an international,
a national (Catalan), and a Spanish agenda expedient to lead the country to the
goal of full independence. Consistent with the abovementioned line of
reasoning equating the demand for sovereignty (sobiranisme) with democracy,
the party stressed the need, on the international level, to explain that
sobiranisme had become dominant:

‘as a consequence of the exhaustion of the autonomist framework, as part of
a process in which the Spanish state has repeatedly denied the integration of
Catalonia and has rejected her own legitimate and democratic demands; as
part of a process in which the Spanish state has clearly opted for the
construction of a single political and economic pole centred in Madrid, has
denied Catalonia as a political and national subject and has repeatedly
breached any kind of political or economic agreements; as part of a process
in which the Spanish state has attempted to erase the cultural, historical and
linguistic reality [of Catalonia EDM]’ (ERC 2012a, 9).

While also the SNP has put the denunciation of a democratic deficit at the core
of its pro-independence campaign, the nature and the intensity of ERC’s claims
of cultural and national oppression stand in stark contrast with those used by
Salmond’s party.

Central to this argument is the attempt to portray the Spanish government as
denying the Catalan population its most basic democratic right, ie, the right to
vote. This is clear also from later texts. Commenting the likely opposition of the

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14 Unless otherwise specified, translations are our own.
Spanish government to the referendum promised by the coalition of parties for the right to decide, the manifesto for the 2014 European elections, *Commencem el #noupais* (Let’s start the new country), argued that ‘the tension between legality and legitimacy must be solved at the polling station, in accordance with the will of the majority of the citizenship’ and concluded that ‘in a democratic system, what is normal is to vote; what is not normal or acceptable is not to let vote’ (ERC 2014a, 3).

15 *Esquerra* has not concealed the strategic role of this claim. In early 2014, the party’s magazine, *Esquerra Nacional*, claimed that the opposition of the Spanish state to the referendum only reinforced the association between independence and democracy, making it easier to defend the organisation of the poll before the international community (Agudo 2014a). Some months later, in the run-up to the European election, the party’s Secretary General, Marta Rovira, asserted that the main goal of ERC’s candidates to the EU Parliament would be to present the Catalan struggle as a defence of the democratic principles enshrined in the EU Treaties (Rovira 2014). In this connection, it is important to note that – in the party’s view – Madrid’s resistance would not be the understandable reaction of a government to the extreme demands of a national minority, but rather the last in a long series of refusals to find a negotiated solution to accommodate the Catalan national difference within the framework of the Spanish state (Junqueras 2013a), ultimately due to the willingness of the Spanish state, and the *Popular Party* in particular, to assimilate the Catalans (Sol and Iglesias 2013).

Yet, as mentioned above, *Esquerra* has also based its case for independence on socio-economic functional arguments. Always in the 2012 manifesto, the party openly subscribed to the idea of independence as the only way out of the economic crisis. The overriding reason underpinning this claim has been the denunciation of a structural fiscal exploitation whereby the Spanish state has deprived the region of 8% of its GDP per year, on average, since 1986. Using these resources would not only enable the Generalitat to cancel the cuts to basic services imposed by the Spanish executive, but also to finance the conversion of the region’s economy from the Spanish model based on cheap credit, domestic demand and low-quality employment, to that followed by more advanced European states relying on high-quality manufacturing and employment. In other words, ‘the main meaning that Esquerra Republicana attributes to independence is the willingness of making people’s lives better. We know that the fiscal plundering imposed by the Spanish state leads to a social plundering when it deprives us of our revenues. And, also, it deprives us of the right to decide over public policies that aim at expand welfare and equality of opportunities’ (ERC 2012a, 41).

The party has stressed the urgency imposed by the economic crisis. As made clear in November 2012, ‘with half of our youth without a job and a person every three on the poverty line, we are in a hurry to achieve independence’ (Amoros

15 See also Agudo 2014b.
2012). This was especially the case in the spring of 2013 when the Catalan Generalitat had to ask a loan from the Autonomic Fund of Liquidity (Fons de Liquiditat Autonomica) in order to avoid bankruptcy. On that occasion, Marta Rovira (2013) commented that ‘the economic and social situation imposed by the Spanish government is so dramatic that we urgently need to put the destiny of the country on the citizens’ hands’ and called on the population to explain to as many people as possible that ‘the financial situation of the Generalitat is utterly unsustainable and the only way to guarantee the welfare of all us is to organise a referendum’. The ‘bail-out’ of the Generalitat was further described as a paradoxical situation because, not only the Spanish government deprived the region of half of its tax revenue, but it was also insolvent to the tune of 8 billion euros towards the Autonomous Community - a sum which by itself would allow to cancel the cuts planned - and forced a tighter budget deficit than the one it imposed on itself (Junqueras 2013b; Bosch 2013). Consistently with this line of reasoning, the campaign for the 2014 referendum, entitled 2014 Decidim Llibertat (2014 Let’s Choose Freedom), has been centred on the theme of Catalonia’s Ofec economic (the economic choking) (Agudo 2013). Similarly to the SNP the party has consistently provided figures evidencing the fiscal exploitation of Catalonia as well as the sound economic foundations of a future independent Catalonia, although, surprisingly, not to the same extent and with the same level of details. ERC seems indeed to have focused more on denouncing the fiscal exploitation of Catalonia – which implicitly points to the sustainability of her economy in the case of independence – rather than having answered in detail to questions concerning the potential economic risks of the confrontation with the Spanish state and the eventual process of separation.16

5. An Explanation

As seen above both ERC and the SNP have made large use of functional arguments concerning the benefits that independence would bring with regard to the national economy and the welfare of the overall population. This is an interesting finding in itself in light of some theoretical interpretations of nationalism as an inherently irrational phenomenon and/or a tool used by elites to manipulate their constituency appealing to ethnic ties and deep emotional cues. Yet, the parties also show a clear variability concerning the type of arguments used and their specific features. In this section, we will try to explain the reasons for their common tendency to rely on functional arguments, the diverse nature of their claims and the different use they make of principled ones by pointing to legitimacy, electoral and structural factors.

The first pertain to the normative divisions between ‘good rationality’ and ‘bad emotions’ introduced in the second section of this paper. Despite being anchored in the European tradition since at least Greek philosophy, the exaltation of reason to the disadvantage of emotions has become an ideological

mainstay of European thinking from the time of the Enlightenment on. Being based on the scientific method of disciplined, rational and empirically tested conjectures and refutations, science has thus increasingly become the major epistemological authority in this cultural tradition. As argued by Liah Greenfeld: ‘in the image of modern society and in modern consciousness science occupies a place of honor and authority unrivalled by any other form of intellectual endeavor’ (Greenfeld 2006, 145). Recent scientific discoveries disproving the rigid division between emotions and rationality notwithstanding, such a dichotomy seems to hold among the wider European population. As concluded by Goodwin et al. (2001, 15), ‘it is no surprise that protestors, making claims on society’s central institutions, adopt the same suspicion and devaluation of “emotionality” as the society at large. Science, not feeling, is the dominant language of legitimation and persuasion in today’s liberal societies’.

To these considerations one should add the increasing importance of the economy in people’s everyday life along with the role of state institutions in boosting and regulating it – and therefore of scientific economic arguments guiding policy – since the end of the Second World War. As pointed out by Michael Postan already at the end of the 1960s, ‘in all European countries, economic growth became a universal creed and a common expectation to which governments were expected to conform. To this extent economic growth was the product of economic growthmanship’ (Postan 1967, 25). This point has later been confirmed by the sociologist of the state Gianfranco Poggi (1990, 139), who argued that ‘in all Western industrial societies, since the Second World War, the political process has come to revolve chiefly around economic issues – primarily, which state policies can best promote industrial growth, and how the attendant burdens and the resulting advantages should be distributed within the population’. It is no wonder, then, that functional arguments pertaining to the national economy and the welfare of the national population have become an overriding topic in the propaganda of separatist parties.

The relevance of economic considerations is also confirmed, although in a more nuanced way, by electoral factors. As the province of Quebec has already experienced two independence referenda, the literature on electoral behaviour developed in that context is extremely relevant to provide theoretical cues to interpret similar events in Catalonia and Scotland. While an exhaustive treatment of this literature is beyond the scope of our paper, we can summarise the findings of the most important studies. Working on data from the 1980 referendum period, Pinard and Hamilton (1986) have focused on a model based on internal motives (grievances and aspirations), incentives (positive or negative) and a reasonable expectation of success. Their analysis of the interrelation between these three factors revealed national identity and sociotropic incentives (concerning the linguistic prospects of an independent Quebec, but even more so the economic ones) to be the decisive factor in explaining electoral behaviour, although the impact of incentives depended on the perception, or not, of grievance. Also, they found that different interpretations
of the meaning of sovereignty-association, and of the formulation of the referendum question, did have a decisive influence on people’s choice. While Pinard and Hamilton started from a social-psychology perspective more sensitive to issues of perception and recognition, working on 1991 data, Blaise and Nadeau (1992) proposed a rational-choice model whereby voters would base their support for sovereignty on a cost-benefit analysis. They agreed that national identity was the best predictor of sovereignty support, but, as attachment to Quebec was uniformly high, they suggested that the level of attachment to Canada was the really decisive variable. The other most potent factor in explaining voting intentions in a hypothetic referendum was people’s prospective evaluation of the economic impact of sovereignty. Finally, using figures for the period 1992-1993, Paul Howe (1998) argued that the electorate was not as homogenous as previously thought. He rather showed that people with weak or dual Quebec-Canadian identity were more influenced by instrumental considerations over the prospects of sovereignty, especially concerning its economic consequences. Thus, the body of voters could be divided into committed and conditional ones. The former, represented by those with strong and univocal national identities, were less likely to be influenced by the instrumental pros and cons of independence, while the latter were more attentive to the soundness of the cases made by political parties. He thus concluded that parties could swing voters on their own side during the campaign, but this possibility was mainly limited to those with intermediate and dual identities (Howe 1998, 47-55).

Thus, despite some variability, what the literature on electoral behaviour concerning sovereignty in Quebec has stressed is the major role of national identity and prospective evaluations of the economic impact of independence in influencing voters, who, in addition, cannot be considered as a homogenous body, but are likely to react differently according to the strength of their subjective national identification. Are these conclusions relevant to the Catalan and Scottish case? Recent electoral research seems to confirm similar trends although with some caveats.

Analysing a representative sample of Catalan voters, Munoz and Tormos (2012) confirmed the role of national identity in driving support for independence. This was indeed the factor with the highest explanatory power in their statistical model. Yet, functional economic considerations were the second most important factor. Unfortunately, the survey used did not include a question concerning the economic consequences of independence, thus the author based their analysis on support for ‘fiscal sovereignty’ - whether Catalonia should keep all of its taxes - and motivations for independence support provided by the interviewees in an open question. The results unambiguously showed that the stronger the feeling of Catalan national identity, the stronger the likelihood that the electors will vote

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17 For a critique and an improved theoretical model taking into account the role of political parties as cue-givers in contexts of high uncertainty see Clarke et al. 2004.
18 This distinction has been criticised by Mandelsohn 2003.
for independence. The authors then identified a body of electors (34.4% of those who would vote for independence) that, if given other constitutional options, would in fact opt for a federal solution. They dubbed these voters ‘conditional supporters’ and distinguished them from ‘unconditional ones’, that is, those who would still vote for independence even if federalism were on the offer. Munoz and Tormos estimated the differential impact of motivations for independence provided by the interviewees as well as of subjective national identification for these two groups. The results showed very clearly that identity-based rationales overrode instrumental ones among unconditional voters, while economic considerations drove the choice of conditional ones. Furthermore, they found that while national subjective identification was associated with support for independence among unconditional voters - support increased moving from the more Spanish to the more Catalan end of the spectrum - the relation between these two variables among unconditional voters was much more ambiguous. These results were later confirmed by Ivan Serrano (2013) who, despite pointing out an independent impact of economic/welfare considerations on all categories of national identity, concluded that such an influence was consistently higher among people with dual and, interestingly, predominantly Spanish identities.

The role of national identity in Scotland’s case is quite different. People with a stronger Scottish identity are more likely to vote for independence, but the association is substantially weaker than in the Catalan case. While, in late 2013, 94.4% of those who felt exclusively Catalan said they would vote in favour of independence, only 60% of those declaring to feel ‘Scottish not British’ said so in 2014 (CEO 2013; Curtice 2014, 16). Furthermore, what really seems to have divided the electorate is the attachment to the British rather than the Scottish identity. As John Curtice (2013, 5) concluded ‘Scottish identity is a near ubiquitous attachment that unites rather than divides most people in Scotland. It is how British they feel that divides them, and is reflected in different attitudes in the independence debate’. Perceptions about the likely consequences of independence on the economy have decisively driven people’s decision to support a Yes vote or not (Curtice 2013, 2014; Henderson et al. 2014). In 2012, 73% of those who thought that the economy would fare ‘a lot better’ in an independent Scotland said they would vote yes and 45% of those who thought it would fare ‘a little better’ did likewise. These figures have increased to 88% and 81% respectively in 2014 (Curtice 2013, 7; Curtice 2014, 12). In this connection, the figures suggest a crystallisation of public opinion around the arguments made by the two campaigns. In other words, as the Yes Campaign has consistently linked independence with the prospects of a better standard of living, those who thought that independence would be beneficial have increasingly...

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19 The authors point out that a reverse causation, that is instrumental considerations being a reflection of individual rationalisation on the basis of support for independence and national identity cannot be ruled out. This possibility has also been suggested by Howe with regard to the Quebec case.

20 On this see also Henderson et al. 2014, 23.
thrown their weight behind the Yes side.\textsuperscript{21} This factor seems to have trumped identity as only 10\% of those with a weak or very weak British identification, but who thought that the economy would be worse in an independent Scotland, were open to support independence (Curtice 2013). When looking in detail at the undecided, Eichhorn and Paterson (2014) found that, similarly to the Catalan case, those who would opt for more devolution, if that option were included in the referendum question, were more likely to be undecided. Furthermore, Eichhorn (2013, 4) also pointed out that those showing dual identities were slightly more prone to be undecided than those with clearly Scottish or British identities, although the difference was not very significant (37\% versus 30\%). Thus, the connection between conditional and unconditional support for independence and national identity seems to have been much weaker than in Catalonia. All this would suggest that much more Scottish voters are 'conditional' supporters, of either independence or the Union, than Catalan voters and such conditionality would be less connected with subjective national identification, leaving more room for political parties to swing, or crystallise, opinion on the basis of functional arguments concerning, above all, the economic prospects of independence.

There is a third factor we have to account for. This relates to the attitude of the parent state towards the independence referendum and has structurally influenced the structure of the debate. While in Scotland the British government has agreed on devolving powers to the Scottish Parliament in order for this to be able to legally organise the referendum, the Spanish state has starkly rejected any recognition to the poll that the Catalan Parliament has pledged to organise in November 2014. In the former, Scotland has clearly been recognised as a nation embodied with the right of self-determination. In the latter, such a condition has been denied. It does not come as a surprise that principled arguments concerning national recognition and accusation of attempts at assimilation have been quite visible among ERC’s claims, while they have been virtually inexistent in the case of the SNP.

In historical perspective, the difference between the two cases is not a novelty. At first sight, Scotland and Catalonia could be considered as very similar realities with regard to the relationship with the respective parent states. Both have been characterised by ideas of partnerships with the other nations of the state and dual identity has been a widespread phenomenon. Both have positively contributed and benefited from participation in Imperial endeavours. Both have, although in different forms, extent and timing, enjoyed forms of autonomy. Yet, at a closer look, history and discourses have been substantially different and such variance has certainly impacted on the current divergence

\textsuperscript{21} It might also be the case, however, that those who already supported independence came to the conclusion that this option made economic sense. Furthermore, as Munoz and Tormos, Curtice did not rule out the possibility that people’s assessment of the consequences of independence depended on their own subjective national identification (Curtice 2013, note 7).
concerning the recognition of the ‘right to decide’ on the part of the two central governments.

First, while the way in which the Scottish Parliament voted itself out of existence has been widely debated, the United Kingdom formally is a Union between two sovereign nations. Catalonia, on the contrary, was held within the Kingdom of Spain in 1714 by Philippe V through military conquest and stripped of its previous autonomy. The point here is not to suggest that Catalan nation was oppressed since then, as such a claim would be anachronistic because the events of 1714 were largely the result of a war of succession rather than a modern national struggle, but that the historical conflictuality between the Principality of Catalonia and the Kingdom of Castile has offered much more fuel to successive nationalist interpretations of those events.

Similar considerations can be made concerning participation in the respective empires. While the Scots disproportionately took advantage of the British Empire and, as Linda Colley (1992, 130) has convincingly showed, this has probably contributed more than anything else to the creation of a British identity in the region, a long Catalan historiographical tradition has suggested the deliberate exclusion of Catalan merchants from the colonial trade until the late 18th century (Delgado Ribas 1978). Although this interpretation has been decisively put into question (Martinez Shaw 1980), it still holds great sway in Catalan debates on the relationship with the Spanish state.

Finally, with regard to autonomy, whereas Scotland has not enjoyed autonomous political institutions until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, since 1707 it maintained its own Church as well as its own legal and education systems. Furthermore, as the central government was largely inspired to laissez faire until the first years of the 20th century, local councils enjoyed unprecedented autonomy. As argued by Thomas Devine (2007, 13), until the Great War ‘the middle classes had, therefore, no reason to seek parliamentary independence or to adopt a nationalism which was hostile to the British state’. After the First World War and, even more so after the Second, the creation of the welfare state largely replaced Empire as the main rationale for the Union. Scottish society eagerly embraced it and, according to some, the progressive weakening of Unionism since the late 1970s can be interpreted, at least in part, as a reaction to the questioning of that major British institutions on the part of the Tories (McCrone 2001). The history of Catalan autonomy has been rather more eventful. As seen above, the 1714 conquest of Barcelona put an end to the existence of the Catalan Parliament that the Principality had kept through the Union of the Crowns of 1469. In the 19th century, the Catalan elites did take part in the Spanish state institutions, yet, as Pierre Vilar (1962) has argued, they retreated into the regional ambit, seeking autonomy from the centre, after having failed to take over the central institutions of the state. The following attempts to obtain such autonomy were not very fortunate. The Mancomunidad established in 1914 was officially dismantled in 1925 under the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera. The second experiment, the Generalitat in force from
1931 through the Civil War, was also a very conflictual experience which was terminated by Franco's dictatorship. As Primo de Rivera before him, although to a larger extent, Franco imposed an organicist conception of the Spanish nation that involved extreme centralisation and open persecution and assimilation of minorities, among whom Catalonia was a major target. This implicitly set the ground for the association between democracy and autonomy in Catalonia at the end of the regime (Balcells 1996, Balfour and Quiroga 2007, Fusi Aizpurana 2000). Such association is the same that has been put by ERC, and other Catalan parties, at the core of the current bid for the right to decide. Thus, apart from the most recent events that led to the current constitutional crisis – and that we have already described in section 3 of the paper – Catalan nationalism has certainly profited from a larger historical backlog of grievances, especially related to the two dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco, as well as to a wider pool of historical events that could at least be interpreted as suggesting a long conflictual relationship between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, or, more precisely Castile. Furthermore, as Balfour and Quiroga have noticed, the post-dictatorship Spanish discourse on the nation has failed to provide a narrative capable to accommodate the diversity of historical nations such as Catalonia (Balfour and Quiroga 2007, 84).

6. Is that all there is about? A conclusion

In this paper we have analysed the arguments on independence made by the two most important separatist parties in Scotland and Catalonia, the SNP and ERC, in the ‘long campaign’ for the independence referenda that are planned for September 18 and November 9, 2014, respectively. We have proposed a distinction between functional and principled arguments, suggesting that it would be useful in order to nuance the more traditional distinction between emotional and rational arguments as well as to point out interesting features of the parties’ discourse with regard to wider debates on the nature of nationalism and ethnic politics. We have found that both parties have tended to base their case for independence on functional claims representing independence as a means to achieve a better standard of living for the people of the respective nations, rather than an end in itself. Yet, the SNP has much more consistently followed this line of reasoning, while issues of recognition of the Catalan language and culture and denunciation of assimilation have been much more frequent in ERC’s texts. We have then proposed an explanation based on legitimacy, electoral and structural factors, with the first two focusing on the increasing importance of economic considerations in legitimising state action and motivating electoral behaviour, and the third pointing to the relation between the two regions and the respective parent states in contemporary and historical perspective. With regard to the second and third factors, the two contexts are opposed. In Catalonia we have an unrecognised bid for independence driven by massive electoral support, while in Scotland we have a consensual process that has however failed, until now, to rally the majority of the population behind itself. This also contributes to
explain the highest reliance of the SNP on functional factors as well as ERC’s more frequent principled claims and, in general, highest reliance on grievances, since grievances are generally considered as more useful to convince the international community to support the Catalan cause before the Spanish state.

Before concluding, we would like to briefly show how appeals to specific emotions still hold sway in the debates analysed, often in combination with functional reasoning. The first and most obvious case is in the language used by the parties. While a comprehensive review of this feature is beyond the scope of the paper, a few examples can still provide useful indications.

The need to craft arguments in captivating language was openly recognised by Alex Salmond during the preparation of the white paper on independence. In the months preceding its publication, government sources suggested that the party would call on talented Scottish writers in order to contribute to the drafting of the document. In an interview for the Observer, in July 2013, First Minster Salmond stated that:

‘I believe in this document and I also believe in its importance for the Scottish people and people beyond our shores. I want it to resonate down through the ages’ and then added ‘inevitably, the document will be long, informative and redolent of civil service expertise and attention to detail. However, there should also be a precis or interpretation, written for the people and designed to capture the imagination. It would seem appropriate to see this composed by one of Scotland's great literary talents. To win independence we need prose to inform, but also poetry to inspire’ (McKenna 2013).

The use of such inspiring language can be seen in some of the texts analysed above. A good example is provided by a paragraph in the brochure Choice. There, the party developed its argument that independence would allow the people of Scotland to make their own choices instead of being imposed policies they do not want from London. This of course would involve challenges, but the crucial point would be that the Scots, and no other, would be responsible. The party then stated:

‘being independent means a lot of different things to each and every one of us. For some, becoming independent is when we get our first car, or our first home. Or perhaps when we start our own family. It is the point we take responsibility for our own future and our own success. Yes, there are ups and downs, but we plan, we prepare, we take out insurance and we get through even the most difficult times. Being an independent country is much the same’ (SNP 2012, 8).

In this passage the party clearly appealed to the direct experience of the Scottish population. By mentioning different examples of what responsibility may mean for each single individual, it tried to establish a direct connection between the larger concept of becoming an independent state and being an independent person. It also conveyed the idea that ‘despite ups and downs’ there would be a community supporting each member and the hope that they would eventually go through ‘the most difficult times’. This example shows that a
goal that has been suggested as the functional solution to improve people’s lives has a clear emotional dimension, which is crucial to motivate people to support it. This is even clearer in the first lines of the introduction of the white paper, where Salmond wrote:

‘Scotland’s referendum on 18 September 2014 is a choice between two futures. If we vote Yes, we take the next step on Scotland’s journey. We will move forward with confidence, ready to make the most of the many opportunities that lie ahead. The most important decisions about our economy and society will be taken by the people who care most about Scotland, that is by the people of Scotland. The door will open to a new era for our nation’ (Scottish Government 2013a, i).

Salmond, here, introduced the main theme of the campaign, that is Scotland’s decisions will be taken by the people of Scotland, but he charged it with quite strong emotional overtones. He referred to a ‘journey’, in which the Scottish nation will advance with ‘confidence’, and two futures. He mentioned opportunities ‘that lie ahead’ and concluded with the image of a door open ‘to a new era’. All was designed to portray a confident vision of a new positive future for Scotland.

While the appeals to sentiments of indignation and anger were implicit in the arguments concerning the lack of recognition of the Catalan nation, the violation of the democratic right to decide about its own destiny and the denunciation of the fiscal choking of its economy, other less obvious emotional cues can be shown. A good example is provided by an infographic published on Esquerra Nacional in November 2012 and entitled ‘We Want Independence’ (ERC 2012b, 22). There, the party provided an interesting mix of functional and more ‘emotionally coloured’ reasons to support independence such as: ‘because Catalonia cannot bear the fiscal plundering, or the social plundering, or the lack of investments in infrastructure’, on the one hand; and ‘because we want to live every day, forever, the dream that we breathed at the last September 11 [the Catalan national day EDM]’. Even more interestingly, in an article issued in March 2014, the party state that the ‘collective effervescence and the hope of the people to build up a new country reaffirms us as the place in Europe where democracy is most lively’ (Iglesias 2014). It clearly made a case for a positive role for emotions to motivate and orient action in favour of the regeneration of democracy.

The last consideration lead us to another, and arguably more obvious, level in which emotions have played a key role in the debate on independence. This has to due with the ‘vision’ offered by the two parties. Both have consistently aimed, although in different ways and to different extents, to make a ‘positive case’ for independence, to portray their identity claims as an open future-oriented project, rather than a defensive and nostalgic commemoration of the past. This has been more obvious in the case of the SNP. As Gerry Hassan (2011) has argued, for at least a decade the SNP has changed its rhetorical strategy according to the insights of the socio-psychological research of Martin
Seligman, whereby political candidates who offer a positive message are much more likely to win elections than those who do not. In this connection, in public statements, Salmond has consistently accused the No side of engaging in scaremongering and he also dubbed the Better Together Campaign ‘Project Fear’. The need for the No side to provide a more positive message in favour of the Union has been recognised among its supporters as well. By contrast, the First Minister has been accused of offering a social-democratic utopia based on flimsy evidence that Scotland would be better off. Similar claims have been made in the Catalan debate. Apart from the quote shown above, ERC has also portrayed the pro-Spanish side as playing the fear card, while offering a progressive hope for a more prosperous and democratic future. Yet, as seen above, such positive message has also been mixed with a more important role played by grievances.

Therefore, reasons and emotions have interwoven in a complex fashion in the propaganda of ERC and the SNP in the run-up to the respective referenda. As the brief review of the literature on the subject that we have provided in section two of this paper suggests, it could not be otherwise. Perfect rational deliberation is an unrealisable ideal and, as Damasio’s research shows, even if it were it would not necessarily be a desirable condition. Emotions seem to play an unavoidable role in motivating action and complementing rationality in contexts of high uncertainty as those involved by an independence referendum. In this connection, it is interesting to find that, although they are satisfied with the referendum process and declare to have high levels of knowledge of the issues at stake, 70% of the Scottish population believes that ‘neither campaign can accurately estimate the consequences of independence’ (Henderson et al. 2014, 8).

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22 See Maddox 2013 for a good example of both points.
23 See for instance the infographic entitled ‘Against fear, the dream of independence’ (ERC 2012c) or Junqueras’ speech at an ERC meeting in December 2013 where the leader opened the long campaign for the referendum before 4,000 militants and ironically thanked the Spanish government because with its threats it had become ‘a factory of separatists’ (Maiol 2013).
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Oberschall, O.


