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Enkvist, Inger

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Do Northern and Southern Europe Discuss the Same Issues?

A comparison between the opinion-editorial
pages in the Spanish daily *El País* and
the Swedish *Dagens Nyheter*

Inger Enkvist

Inger.Enkvist@rom.lu.se

Inger Enkvist is a researcher at the Department of Romance Languages, University of Lund, Sweden. Recent publications include *Cuando huye el siglo. Argentina y Suecia frente al Tercer Milenio* (1999) Ovejero-Martín, Rosario, Argentina (with María Elvira Sagarzazu) and *Arbeta tvärvetenskapligt* (1999) Studentlitteratur, Lund (with Angel Sahuquillo).

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CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES AT LUND UNIVERSITY:

Box 52
SE-221 00 LUND
Sweden

Phone: +46 (0)46-222 88 99
Fax: +46 (0)46-222 40 06
Email: cfe@cfe.lu.se

Abstract

A comparison was made between the opinion-editorial pages in *El País* and in *Dagens Nyheter* during the first six months of 1998, and the result was that there are many differences. The authors of the articles do not belong to the same social or professional groups. In *El País*, the dominant groups are university teachers and writers, whereas in *Dagens Nyheter* articles written by politicians or by people belonging to organisations with political influence predominate. In Sweden a large number of articles were signed by two persons or more, a phenomenon that was almost non-existent in Spain. The articles do not deal with the same subject matter. Political influence also appears in different ways in the two newspapers compared. Could this reflect differences in intellectual “climate” and not just different editorial policies?

Do Northern and Southern Europe discuss the same issues?

A comparison between the opinion-editorial (op-ed) pages in the Spanish daily *El País* and the Swedish *Dagens Nyheter*

Why choose *El País* and *Dagens Nyheter*? The two newspapers have both similarities and differences that make the comparison worthwhile. Both have a dominant position and represent prevailing trends and issues in the public debate in their respective countries as well as being the most prestigious papers. Both have or have had very close links with the political power in the country. Other newspapers quote them, and people who want to achieve political significance must appear on their pages. The result of the comparison is somewhat surprising as the differences are greater than one would have expected. The subjects discussed are not the same, and the social and professional backgrounds of the contributors differ. Another very significant difference is that in *Dagens Nyheter* there are a greater number of articles signed by more than one author.

El País

Spanish commentators all agree that in quantity and quality, Spanish journalism has never been better. At the same time, sociologist Amando de Miguel mentions one reason for not celebrating the high intellectual level of Spanish article writing, the possible reason being that collections of essays do not sell well in Spain, and writing in the press therefore becomes the only way to reach an audience (Miguel 55,15).

El País has enjoyed an exceptional position in Spain during the last twenty years. The critic Vidal Beneyto was the first person to start talking about *El País* as being an “obligatory” or “dominating” point of reference if one wants to be well informed in Spain. In his view, the concept includes the following characteristics (Martínez Montón 12):

- a. It accords great importance to the section on international politics, economics and culture.
- b. Its information and analyses are indispensable when statements are made about a particular country in question.
- c. Its pages are open to influential groups.
- d. The paper is characterised by sobriety and rigour in the presentation of material. Sensationalism is avoided, and the information printed is thoroughly checked.
- e. Great attention is paid to the style, the clarity and the elegance of expression.
- f. Ideologically, economic liberalism is combined with social progressiveness.

El País also enjoys the rare privilege of being at the same time a newspaper for the elite and for the general public and, in the 1980s, it was the Spanish newspaper with the largest circulation, with the exception of a newspaper specialising in sport. There are few newspapers in the world with this double characteristic. In 1995, *El País* sold 420.000 copies daily, *El Mundo* 308.000, and *El ABC* 322.000.

El País has been included in a prestigious list of the ten best newspapers in the world, a list established annually since 1968 by the American researcher John C. Merrill. He compiles the list from the results of questionnaires to academics, journalists and civil servants, chosen randomly in the five continents, as to which newspapers are, in their opinion, of high quality. For 1999, the list includes *The New York Times* (USA), *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (Switzerland), *The Washington Post* (USA), *The Independent* (Britain), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany), *Le Monde* (France), *Asahi Shimbun* (Japan), *The Los Angeles Times* (USA), *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (Germany) and *El País* (Spain). (Martínez de Rituerto 44). *El País* has reached this position in a relatively short time, as it was founded in 1973.

Editorial section in El País

Nobody questions the importance of *El País* in the emergence of a new democratic Spain after the death of Franco. *El País* helped Spaniards create a new image of themselves as responsible citizens, it helped to elaborate the new democratic constitution and it helped to integrate the different socialist groups into the PSOE, the Spanish socialist party (e.g. Uriarte Bengoexea 267, 278; Espantaleón Peralta 27-34). The greatly renowned chief editor, J.L. Cebrián, took it upon himself to give voice to the will of the people and to address himself to the political leaders, for example on such themes as how democracy and justice ought to function. In order to educate the readers by showing how things really are, the newspaper maintains a serious, neutral, impersonal tone, which sometimes borders on the didactic. This seemingly transparent prose is naturally a narrative technique (Gaitán Moya 207). However, the level of abstraction and style is so high that the reader probably needs a university degree in order fully to comprehend the language.

The section for external collaborators, which is the one that is of interest to us here, also prints a cartoon and letters to the editor, which may contain comments on articles previously printed there. There are no photos or other illustrations to accompany the articles, and the headings are mostly objective. The section tries to capture the reader by being serious, by the quality of the intellectual and linguistic level and by the social and intellectual weight of the collaborators. The simultaneous presence of different voices, of literary subjects and political cartoons, may be an intelligent way of convincing the reader and entertaining him or her at the same time (Martínez Montón 12-25). The reactions of intellectuals to the editorials in *El País* vary from being attracted by the well-chosen language and the clearly-exposed argumentation to finding the didactic tone not at all to their taste.

The opinion-editorial¹ page is more literary and also more varied than the actual editorials as to subject matter. Famous persons express their opinions on topical issues. Among intellectuals it is a professional goal, an honour, to be published on the pages of *El País* which are devoted to public debate and current issues. As in the opinion-editorial section in other newspapers, these pages can be seen as a sort of forum, a stage offered to the

public, an invitation and an acceptance of a pluralism of opinions. At the same time, one should be aware of the possibility of misrepresentation. The authors may not represent real public opinion, or their presence in the newspaper may be an alibi, a way of concealing the fact that most of the opinions expressed are similar. Amando de Miguel points out that writing in newspapers is a way of participating in politics and exerting influence but, in order to have access to this possibility in a prestigious newspaper, one must write well. Professional politicians, however, are not usually successful article writers, and what they write often lacks a surprise impact as the well-informed public already knows what they will say (Miguel 41, 29).

During the last two decades, the column as a special feature has become important in *El País* and in the rest of the Spanish newspaper world. This so-called new journalism consists of a tendency to underline the human interest aspects of any subject and to show a preference for a personal style of writing. One special reason in Spain for this kind of article is said to be the democratic and moral stance of the press through all the politically important events after Franco's death in 1975. They gained the respect of their readers by their objective way of reporting the abortive military coup in 1981, the socialist success in the 1982 elections and later the scandals which occurred under the socialist government and which were denounced by the press. The interest in the column may be due to an interest on the part of the readership in hearing how a particular journalist, in whom they have confidence, comments on the events of the day. The column is a combination of information, reflection and entertainment, all imbued with a personal style.

The success of *El País* also illustrates the fact that nowadays the intellectual centre of Spain is clearly Madrid and no longer Barcelona. At the beginning of the 1970s, Barcelona was the centre for publishing houses and for translation from and into Spanish and had a diversified and well-informed press. It was the centre for music, theatre and film production while the cultural life in Madrid at the time may be described as somnolent. With the return of democracy, Madrid has gained importance at a steady rate (Miguel 139-142). Lately, Catalan nationalism has contributed to undermine Catalan influence outside Catalonia.

Dagens Nyheter

The position of *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden is similar to that of *El País* in Spain. Founded in 1864, it is today the Swedish newspaper with the largest circulation, with the exception of a tabloid evening paper. According to statistics published in the paper, in 1999 it sold 352.000 copies on weekdays and 413.000 on Sundays, whereas its competitor for the evening readers, (*Aftonbladet*) sold 382.000 on weekdays. If one compares with the Spanish figures, it is easy to see that Swedish editions are large for a population of some 8 million inhabitants or, alternatively, the Spanish figures are low for a population of 40 millions. Like *El País*, *Dagens Nyheter* functions at the same time as a national newspaper and as a local newspaper for the inhabitants in and around the capital. It is probably less read in the rest of the country than *El País* is in Spain due to the existence of two important regional newspapers in the west and south of Sweden. Both *El País* and *Dagens Nyheter* claim to be independent and politically they oscillate between socialism and liberalism, tending mostly to favour the socialist parties.

Dagens Nyheter is the dominating paper for references to Swedish public debate, and this is illustrated by a relatively new phenomenon. MPs and ministers prefer to present their new initiatives in the opinion-editorial section of *Dagens Nyheter* rather than in parliament. A professor of journalism has pointed out that journalists ought not to rejoice over this as one of the reasons may be that politicians want to avoid having their statements transmitted in a distorted way. It may rather be a symptom of decreasing respect for the press and, of course, also for parliament (Hadenius 4). Publishing on this page gives publicity to the author of an article, publicity that may be resented by the journalists on the staff of the paper, as the articles on the debate page are more frequently discussed than other articles. Another reason for resentment could be that readers and journalists residing outside the capital may think that "Stockholm" wields too much power (Lindström 25; Wahlgren 26).

As regards the selection of subjects and authors, there is a small group of persons responsible for the page, who decide what and whom to print. Every day the newspaper receives a considerable number of articles among which approximately 10% are chosen. As the competition is so keen, it is

interesting to note that the present chief editor of the page, Bergstrand, considers that he has a mandate to exercise “active” journalism, for example initiating debates, something that can be compared to investigative journalism. The page rarely prints responses to the articles but considers, somewhat arrogantly, that the discussion can continue in other media. Given to the extreme importance of this page as a public debate forum, it is little less than sensational that the chief editor of the page reveals that he contacts well-known persons in public life and asks them to comment on subjects of current public interest and that this may be the origin of up to 40 % of the articles (Lindström 46). In other words, what the chief editor calls active journalism can be interpreted by others as reserving for himself the right to exert considerable political influence, obviously without having a democratic mandate to do so.

In *Dagens Nyheter*, the opinion–editorial page is also part of the editorial section together with the editorial page and letters to the editor. Just as in *El País*, the layout is always the same. There is often a photo of the author of the article, and the title, generally a quote from the article, is set within quotation marks. Thus it would seem that the reader is to be attracted by early knowledge of a new political initiative rather than by a new line of reasoning developed by a famous academic as in *El País*. The impression is that the page is more journalistic, political and practical and not as intellectual as the corresponding page in *El País*. The articles in *Dagens Nyheter* are much shorter than those in *El País* and, if there is a second article, it is usually a short comment occupying no more than a column. During the first six months of 1998, there were 274 articles published in *El País*, generally two each day. The articles published under the heading “In Defence of the Reader” have not been included as they are different in character. In *Dagens Nyheter* there were 230 articles published during the same period but in volume they correspond to less the half the space that *El País* devotes to its corresponding articles.

The results of the comparison are truly unexpected for someone believing that the European Union has contributed to a decrease in differences within Europe. The authors of the articles do not belong to the same social or professional groups and they do not deal with the same subject matter.

The Social and Professional Origins of the Authors in El País

El País usually prints a short description of the author under each article, including the profession and place of residence. In this study, these presentations have been used as a basis for categorising the authors, with the occasional difficulty that sometimes there is no presentation of the author and sometimes two professions are mentioned.²

Two professional categories dominate among the authors: university professors and writers. The op-ed page in *El País* constitutes almost a reserved hunting ground for professors of philosophy, political science, ethics and sociology. There were 121 articles signed by university professors from all over Spain but especially from Madrid. Those who published most were Fernando Savater with eight articles, Antonio Elorza with six and Gurutz Jáuregui and Ignacio Sotelo with four, and several had published three. The respect and the value accorded to the contributions made by the academics constitute a notable difference from the situation in Sweden. The 15 articles in *El País*, classified as “impossible to identify”, also seem to have been written by members of that group, thus further illustrating the dominant position of the academic world. There were also 44 articles written by other professionals with a university degree.

If many articles were written by professors, relatively few were written by politicians, only 37, in this newspaper which is considered to be very ideological. In addition, the articles in question were not very interesting (cf López Pan 115). Some texts written by members of the European Parliament are informative, but do not necessarily express party policy. In some cases, the real authors could be aides and the real intention not to transmit a specific message but to make an appearance in the press. The politicians are more circumspect, seeming to try to avoid trouble rather than to provoke their opponents as the more audacious professors do.

The number of articles published by writers and journalists, 67, is also surprising. In few places can the profession of writer be more prestigious than in *El País*. Most of these writers only published one or two articles, but a handful published three: Xavier Bru de Salas, Jorge Edwards, Rafael Argullol, Abilio Estévez, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Barbara Probst Salomon. Two writers published four articles each, namely Javier Marías

and José Ortega Spottorno. Juan Goytisolo and Carlos Fuentes published five, and Mario Vargas Llosa, the real heavy weight, twelve.

One should also point out that some of these writers write not about political and social subjects but on cultural topics. This means that the reader often meets a literary text on the op-ed page. The phenomenon can be seen as a tradition from the times when one and the same person was a novelist, an intellectual with opinions on public affairs and a politician. This combination was frequent both in Spain and in Latin America up to the middle of the 20th century. Another way of looking upon it would be to say that the newspaper takes a broad outlook on what constitutes intellectual life, therefore including examples of creative writing on the debate page. Finally, the massive presence of writers on the debate page can be seen as something typically Spanish. What is personal is highly rated.

The case of Vargas Llosa is exceptional, first of all because, of all the contributors to the opinion-editorial page, he has published most during the period investigated, in all twelve articles. He also publishes under a special heading, “The Probing Stone” (Piedra de toque), which underlines the fact that his articles can be read like the columns described earlier. It is more a rule than an exception that his articles are long, and they sometimes take up the whole page, so that there is no second article that day. His articles are often published on a Sunday, which means that the newspaper thinks that they will attract readers. Finally, the fact that *El País* has the copyright for the articles for the whole world is noted under his name each time. This means that the paper counts on other newspapers wanting to reprint the articles and informs us that *El País* intends to do business with them. Indirectly, it also shows that the newspaper does not count on this being the case with the articles of others collaborators. The special heading, “probing stone” may also be interpreted as a way for the editorial board to point out that it does not necessarily share the opinions expressed by the writer, as it is well known that he does not agree with the political line most favoured by the newspaper.

There are few representatives from the fields of economy and technology, whereas there are a couple of contributions from theologians and high-ranking officers, groups not well known for their collaboration with the press. In general, these texts add little to the discussion on topical issues. Therefore one may suspect that the reason for their presence is more the

result of an editorial policy decision to prevent the Church and the Armed Forces from feeling excluded from the media.

It is noticeable that there are only two articles signed by more than one author, which means that the publicity gained by the author of an article on the opinion-editorial page need not be shared by co-authors.

Varied Background of the Authors in El País

Madrid dominates as the place of residence of the authors, but there is a noticeable percentage of Catalans and Basques. All this gives the impression of a newspaper that wants to be fair to intellectuals in other regions so that they do not feel slighted by "Madrid". As regionalist feelings are important in Spain, a newspaper would not want to be linked to the idea of centralism, just because its head office is in the capital. This is so noticeable that one cannot help thinking that it must be an explicit policy of the newspaper, an aim to serve as a forum for the whole country.

It is also noticeable that there are many foreigners among the writers. Many of them have a complex identity and represent nobody but themselves, one example being Mario Vargas Llosa who is at the same time Peruvian and Spanish and cosmopolitan. There is a noticeable Latin-American presence for example through the Chileans Jorge Edwards, Luis Sepúlveda and Ariel Dorfman, the Cubans Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Abilio Estévez and the Mexican Carlos Fuentes. Among the European contributors Italians and French are numerous, and there are also several Israelis, a Moroccan, Tahar Ben Jelloun, who lives in France and Salman Rushdie who has had to keep changing residences. For a newspaper renowned for being ideologically consistent, one could almost say predictable, there is a wide variety of experience, of temperament and talent among these writers. If the classification is made in such a way that one obtains a maximum of diversity, there are 71 articles written by foreign authors. The foreigners are mainly writers and politicians. *El País* therefore makes a noticeable effort to bring the Spanish public into contact with thinking and opinions in other countries and pays special attention to the relations with Latin America.

There is a group of regular collaborators, veterans, who oscillate between university, journalism and politics, which means that there could be less variation than is apparent at first sight. The average age of the collaborators is also rather high and may be more than 60 years, as some of them rather belong to the category former stars of Spanish literature and journalism. The reader may suspect now and then that an article is published more out of respect and affection for the author than for the quality of its thinking or writing.

Out of all these articles, only 17 were written by women. The nine women belong to the same professional categories as the men and most of them are professors or writers. The most outstanding female collaborator is the professor of Arabic Studies in Madrid, Gema Martín Muñoz, who has published three articles as has the American journalist, Barbara Probst Solomon.

The Authors in Dagens Nyheter

An important result of the investigation is the difficulty of ascribing a professional category to the participants in the public debate in Sweden, that is to distinguish between politicians, senior civil servants, representatives of different organisations and others. The numbers given below are approximations. This difficulty indicates that different power spheres in Sweden are interwoven, a fact which may be a consequence of the long Social-Democratic dominance in Swedish politics. The party has governed with short interruptions since the 1930s. The government appoints civil servants, many organisations have Social Democratic origins, and all organisations try to influence the government, which leads to a situation where everything revolves around that party. The selection of authors for the opinion-editorial page in *Dagens Nyheter* both reflects and prolongs this situation. As many of the authors are individuals who already have posts of responsibility, malice would have it that on this debate page of the *Dagens Nyheter*, political power talks to itself.

An unforeseen and noticeable result is that the professional background of the authors in the two newspapers is different. In *Dagens Nyheter* articles written by politicians or by people belonging to organisations with politi-

cal influence predominate. There are articles written by professors but they are few compared with the situation in *El País*, and there are no articles by literary writers. Out of 230 articles, 82 were written by politicians or trade union representatives whose adherence is well-known, a number that may be exceptionally high because it was a pre-electoral period. However, there were also elections in Spain at this time, the much-talked-out “Socialist primaries” which, though not as important as general elections, also generated much discussion.

Of the 82 articles written by politicians in *Dagens Nyheter*, 50 come from the Left and the writers are ministers, ex ministers and well-known MPs. Of these 50 articles, there are 20 written by women, generally ministers. Some articles were written by representatives from the parties that support the government, the “leftist party” (formerly the Communist party) and the “ecological party” (the Green party). The opposition, the liberal block, was represented by 32 articles, most of which were contributed by members of the Moderate party, (the Swedish equivalent of the Conservatives), and the Liberal Party. In these cases, the author was also the leader of the party in question. Another conclusion from the investigation is that politics appears in different ways in the op-ed pages of the two newspapers compared. In *El País* the political slant can be seen in the selection of authors and in the type of argumentation, whereas in *Dagens Nyheter*, prominent politicians propose solutions to current problems.

There are other differences. In *Dagens Nyheter*, there are 70 articles written by authors representing categories that have no equivalent in *El País*. There are representatives of different organisations, senior civil servants and also groups of relatives of victims of violence, several assistant nurses and people associated with police work. Compared to *El País*, the op-ed page in *Dagens Nyheter* permits more popular participation at the same time as it is also a more direct expression of the views of people with real political power.

There is not one single contributor who is a writer in the studied sample from *Dagens Nyheter*, but there are 14 journalists who comment upon different concrete cases or events. There are 40 articles written by professors and investigators but the character of these texts is different from the texts in *El País*. They do not so much attempt to show the intellectual structure of a problem as to present information about some social or po-

litical problem, comment on a special case or ask for funding for different organisations. As articles must be short, the authors can only mention the most important aspects of a problem.

Of these 230 articles, there are 130 written by a man and 31 by a woman.³ The chief editor of *Dagens Nyheter* has declared that he does not see it as a goal to try to augment the presence of women on the page. The relatively high proportion of women may simply reflect the growing presence of women in Swedish public life. In contrast to *El País*, there are only six articles written by foreigners, here represented by Tony Blair, Kofi Annan and Henry Kissinger, which underlines the fact that this page is dedicated above all to domestic policy. The most unexpected collaborators are two controversial philosophers and a politically correct archbishop. In the case of *Dagens Nyheter*, it is of no particular interest to speak about geographical origins within Sweden. Public life is strongly concentrated in the capital, and this is such a well-known fact that it would be superfluous to mention it. What is very important, though, is the organisational adherence of the writer.

One of the most unexpected results was the fact that there were 69 articles signed by two persons or more. At first sight, the number of articles signed by more than one author is puzzling. One hypothesis would be that the difficulty of getting an article published makes authors try to add weight to their names and consequently their chances of publication by adding more and, if possible, important names to their own. Another could be that people are afraid to express their opinions publicly without the support of influential groups. This may seem to be contradicted by the fact that some of those who sign as a group are ministers, members of parliament or prestigious researchers. Political scientists often speak about corporative tendencies in Swedish society, and the result of this investigation corroborates such an observation. One other factor may be that the chief editor of the opinion-editorial page has declared that he wants to give prominence to organisations, as they are important factors in social life. He also reveals that it is almost impossible for a person without affiliation to some organisation or public entity to be published (Lindström 41-45). The surprisingly large number of collectively signed articles could, therefore, reflect both a Swedish characteristic and newspaper policy. The comparison with *El País* serves as an indication that this may be an unusual practice outside Sweden.

The Two Countries Do Not Discuss the Same Issues

The most important issue in *El País* during the period investigated was ETA and the situation in the Basque Country, and more energy is devoted to this issue than to all others, 28 articles in all. The intellectual quality of these articles is very high, and the authors are often courageous as they may well become the next victim of the organisation. Nine articles dealt with Catalan politics and especially with the much criticised language law. The socialist primary elections were discussed in eleven articles.

The European Union and European co-operation was the theme of 22 articles. However, these articles lack the vitality of debate articles, as was the case with the 14 articles recalling events from 1858, 1898 and 1968. This latter category of articles is wholly absent from the Swedish newspaper.

Further, the working of political life in general was discussed in 10 articles, the situation for schools in eleven, investigations and official reports in eight and legal questions in seven. Seven articles also dealt with economics and unemployment. Euthanasia was the theme of six articles, prompted by a recent event. Finally, there were six articles in the category of obituaries and homage.

In the international field, the Pope's visit to Cuba, together with reminiscences from 1898, the year when, among other memorable events, Cuba ceased to be a Spanish colony, led to a flood of 16 articles on Cuba, more than on any other country. Israel is the subject in eight articles, the U.S. in seven, Mexico in six, Algeria and India in five each. In many cases, these articles recall past events, such as the 50th anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel.

While in *El País* the reader is offered the result of the aims of different intellectuals to help analyse a debate, in *Dagens Nyheter* there are more often political initiatives or discussions on how to solve practical problems, in other words internal policy issues. A good article in *Dagens Nyheter* sums up in a clear and concise manner information that throws new light on a social problem. When comparing the authors in *El País* with those in *Dagens Nyheter*, one may also talk about generalists and specialists.

One issue often discussed in Sweden was that of the police and the courts of justice with 30 articles, among which those dealing with the

search for the murderer of former Prime Minister Olof Palme were particularly noticeable. The growing state of chaos in schools was discussed in eleven articles, probably due in part to its being an election year. The same number of articles was dedicated to health care, especially for the ageing population. Eight articles dealt with taxes, about ten with immigration, and the same number with the functioning of the mass media and the labour market. There was much protest because of the cutback in public expenditure on investigation and official reports.

Some articles were of especial interest as they did not fall into the category of the politically correct. An economist declared that it was unnecessary to deplore the lack of dynamism in the labour market with laws designed to create stability rather than creativity. One article pointed out that in incest cases, the father is not always to blame, that there are cases where the father's "guilt" could be a projection of a mother with emotional problems. One person had studied the way state services for citizens function and had found that the authorities do not listen to citizens as they claim to do nor are they as democratic as they say. A professor of journalism claimed that journalism is losing prestige and that journalists try to deprive the politicians of power, without having a democratic mandate to do so. A professor of political science was brave enough to question whether gender research has yielded the anticipated results considering the investments made in that field of research. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan points out that it is an error to blame the West for the wars in Africa when those responsible are Africans.

In one article during the period studied, an ex-editor-in-chief of *Dagens Nyheter* critically examines Swedish public debate and finds a tendency towards conformity. As an example he mentions the debate on racism (Nycander 4). He points out that among those who decide what can be said or not said in Sweden, there is strong concern about not being considered one hundred per cent pure as regards the issues of racism and nazism. This is true to such an extent that it can only be compared with the debate on child pornography. No one wants to be suspected of not feeling as much aversion as everybody else. Nycander thinks that this concern endangers the liberty of expression as there is a tendency only to accept one "official" opinion at any one time. There is no room for those who try to question accepted ideas or introduce nuances.

Final Discussion

The study of these 504 articles shows the extent of the political power of the editors of these newspapers that dominate as terms of reference, those that a reader must consult in order to be well informed. The Spanish articles show a noticeable interest in thinking and literature whereas the Swedish articles are both more pragmatic and more influenced by day-to-day politics.

The style of the articles is a consequence of the professional category of the authors and of the subjects. In *Dagens Nyheter* it is obvious that representatives of different groups try to influence political decisions, offer concrete information, often of a statistical nature, rather than new thinking, and the author usually refers to his or her professional experience in the matter. A typical article in *Dagens Nyheter* is short and concrete, and the platform from which the author speaks is clear. The author is a more of a lobbyist than an intellectual. A typical author on the opinion-editorial page in *El País* would be an intellectual, a middle-aged man who tries to help structure a debate by introducing definitions, and he is usually not a specialist or official spokesman. The high stylistic level and the academic and literary character of the op-ed page in *El País* may be the reason why there are several important areas not discussed. There is, for instance, little said about issues that concern the ordinary citizen like unemployment and drugs, and there are almost no articles written by persons working in engineering, business or public services other than the universities.

The op-ed page in *El País* offers, as we have seen, an excellent essayistic level but it should also be mentioned that some articles are long, confused and without any clear message. In these articles there is often a high level of abstraction, and the subject does not usually stem from the authors' professional experience. The authors of these articles are often writers but sometimes diplomats, military personnel or theologians. If one tries to evaluate the level, *El País* generally has better articles but also sometimes confused articles of limited interest, whereas *Dagens Nyheter* has a relatively high level without reaching the level of the best articles in *El País*.

All readers have their own preferences, but the stars among all these authors investigated in the two newspapers are perhaps Mario Vargas Llosa and Fernando Savater, a writer and a university professor respectively, both

for the quantity and the quality of their articles. Both are so well known that their articles read like “columns”, that is that the readers have the impression of knowing them before they start to read. Typically, the readers may ask themselves what “he” is going to tell them this time. Vargas Llosa’s articles are interesting because of his vast knowledge on many issues, his familiarity with widely different settings, and the clarity with which he expresses himself. He often starts off with a personal experience of some kind, for instance a visit to a certain place. He then describes why this place is interesting, compares it with some other experience or book to enhance what he has just told us, and he finishes with a general reflection and a reference to the beginning of the text. As he is very well known, the reader may even feel that he or she is involved in a dialogue with the author as the platform from which he speaks is familiar. Savater is also a brilliant essayist due to the transparency of his prose, the importance of the issues treated and the courage with which he deals with problems like ETA. He usually comments on subjects and events that have cropped up in the news, carefully delineates the meaning of the terms used and often gives examples to illustrate his points. Both write on important issues, both are brave when it comes to defending causes that are not always popular, and both treat the reader as a reasonable person, assuming that he or she shares their concern on serious issues.

Notes

- 1 The name in Swedish is “debate page”. English and American newspapers often do not have a special “page” for external contributors, but when they do, the term “opinion-editorial page” is used at least in the US.
- 2 All figures in this paper include a margin of uncertainty. As the categories are not clear-cut, another researcher could arrive at slightly different results. There is no doubt, however, about the main tendencies.
- 3 Articles signed by more than one author have not been classified here, nor have one or two articles written by authors with names that made it difficult to say whether the author was a man or a woman.

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