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# Framing the “Clash of civilization” in Europe: Interaction between political and media frames

Teresa La Porte\* and M<sup>a</sup> Luisa Azpiroz

School of Communication, University of Navarra, 31080-Pamplona, Spain.

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The present study reviews the foci, symbols and interpretations that the European media use to formulate and spread the political message about the “clash of civilizations”. This means observing how this cultural clash is articulated in political discourse and how this is then reflected in the leading European media. To carry out this study, we compared the frames found in several significant political discourses (Bush, Ahmadinejad, Sarkozy, Gül) and those encountered in the coverage of these same discourses in the following European newspapers: *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. Through this specific case, the research also explores what is the process of the frame elaboration and which conditions make political discourse more effective and attractive for the media to assimilate them.

**Key words:** Framing, clash of civilizations debate, conflict coverage, political discourse, media discourse, political communication, international communication.

## INTRODUCTION

To a great extent, cultural confrontation has replaced the ideological battles of the Cold War. During the 1990s, and particularly since 11 September 2001, Islamic radical groups have attacked the political and cultural control exercised by the West, engendering a climate of constant conflict which feeds on reasons that are both old and new: old bones of contention, like the conflict between Jews and Palestinians; and new ones, like those arising out of the “war on terror” or the so-called “cartoon crisis”. Although violent actions are mainly rejected by international public opinion, there is no doubt that potential confrontations are brewing on the level of values and ways of understanding society.

In Europe, the controversy emerges with specific issues, such as the debate on Turkey’s entry to the European Union or the public use of the veil in France.

Samuel Huntington coined the term of “clash of civilizations” for this confrontation, emphasizing the most conflictive aspect of the relationship between different cultures, which was to a great extent confirmed on 9-11. Although this author’s views have met with substantial criticism, the

the concept has flourished, and has come to be accepted as a recurring iconic expression in political and media discourse. The most interesting point in all of this is how it has been framed in the public arena.

Political and media discourses are the main sources which feed and shape what goes on in the public sphere. Particularly in the global context, far from local realities, politicians and the media interact to compose a message which citizens are rarely able to influence. In this context, the media reinforce their function as intermediaries, spreading the declarations of political leaders for an audience who have no direct access to them. Alongside these political messages, they also transmit their own interpretation of events.

The aim of the present study is precisely to review the foci, symbols and interpretations that the European media use to formulate and spread the political message about the “clash of civilizations”. This means observing how this cultural clash is articulated in political discourse and how this is then reflected in the most widely-used European media. Politicians have found on this rhetoric a resonant way to address some public issues, and the media an understandable approach to portray this conflict to the audience. This analysis will enable us to answer some key questions on the portrayal of the “clash of civilizations”: How is it defined or described? What public

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\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [mtalfaro@unav.es](mailto:mtalfaro@unav.es). Tel: +34 948 42 56 00, Ext: 2847. Fax: +34 948 42 56 64.

issues are seen in relation to it? What elements are present in the way this idea is expressed?

Through this specific case, the research also intends to make a contribution to the theoretical discussion on the frame analysis. In this sense, it explores what is the process of the frame elaboration and which conditions make political discourse more effective and attractive for the media to assimilate them.

To carry out this study, we compared the frames found in several significant political discourses (Bush, Ahmadinejad, Sarkozy, Gül) and those encountered in the coverage of these same discourses in the leading European media (The Guardian, Le Monde, Frankfurter Allgemeine) to determine dynamics which affect the final content that reaches the audience.

### **Framing as a theory for the analysis of media interpretation**

Of all the possible theories of mediation (which explain how the media represent and reconstruct reality), framing is particularly useful if we want to find out the vision that the media have of events and the interpretation which they convey to the audience. In contrast to agenda-setting or priming, which stress the effects of the news on public opinion, the theory of framing also takes in the previous stage, analyzing the factors that have an effect on the way the news is written (choice of sources, cultural references, influence of external agents, professional routines).

Following the tradition of social constructivism (McQuail, 2005; D'Angelo, 2002), framing studies the focus or frames through which social agents and interest groups (sources and broadcasting companies), journalists (mediators) and the audience (receivers) assimilate, interpret and communicate the reality around them. In short, framing is the process through which the media interpret real phenomena and transmit them to an audience with a particular focus.

This media effect acts on two different levels: it shapes the way that public affairs are presented, and it also molds the knowledge of each of the individuals who is exposed to its influence. In this study we are concerned mainly with its ability to moderate public debates on political affairs (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; Schudson, 1983).

For this purpose, we understand journalists as processors of the information that comes from the sources (international political leaders), and that they interpret the ideas in the leaders' declarations, writing and broadcasting products that are different from the source content (while undoubtedly influenced by them) (Gamson and Mogdilians, 1987, 1989).

Following the classification that D'Angelo proposed for the four empirical objectives that should guide framing research in the media (identifying thematic units, researching the conditions in which they are produced, examining how they are activated and how they interact as

individual frames, and how they shape public opinion and debate), the present paper seeks to carry out the first two of these: to identify issues related to the "clash of civilizations" present in the media, and to study to what extent they reflect the international political discourse (D'Angelo, 2002). This research is therefore situated in the field of media framing and not that of audience framing (Capella and Jamieson, 1997; Scheufele, 1999).

### **Frame elaboration process**

There are different concepts of frames and, as a result, different explanations on how they shape the reality. In the views of Tuchman (1978) and Tankard (1991), the frame is the result of certain professional routines or strategies which enable us to "delimit" reality: this is the view of the professional from the "window" through which he sees the world (frame takes a "space dimension"). The frame of this window is defined by journalists' re-sources, by the different ways of organizing information within a particular medium, or by the formats used to cover similar events (Hans-Bernd and Peter, 1995). Other authors, like Gamson (1992), consider that the frame acts as a map or guidebook offering key information that helps us know, understand and analyze a given public matter. A third definition of frame identifies it with an interpretation of reality which is not confined to stressing certain issues, but which also argues and interprets the facts in a new context, or by establishing a new relationship with a previous fact (Cohen and Wolfsfeld, 1993). This interpretation is ontologically different from the subject of the piece of news or information in itself (Pan and Kosicky, 1993).

Most of the authors admit that the frames or foci used in the media are the consequence of the interaction of different factors. Gamson (1992), and Cohen and Wolfsfeld (1993) assert that the frames also depend on elements that are external to the medium, like the views of the broadcasting company, the attitude of the person receiving the message, and the cultural context in which the message is devised and broadcast.

In the view of Entman (1993, 2007), the frame is the result of elements in the contents that stand out among the others (words, ideas, relations) as the result of a process of selection, emphasis and exclusion of some types of information. The visibility of these elements enables us to construct a specific interpretation of the matter. Entman asserts that these outstanding or noteworthy features establish a definition of the problem, determine the reasons that lie behind it, its consequences, and guide the measures that are used to resolve it (2007). This way of distinguishing frames is particularly useful to identify the strategies of the political elites in their relations with the media. These frames are established in response to fixed, short-term interests, and are the result of a political initiative or the work of a pressure group. Other authors consider that the focus or interpretation in the frame is

derived from a central organizing idea which is shared socially, and which works symbolically to structure and give meaning to a given issue (Reese, 2001, 2007). It is understood as a process in constant activity, which relates ideas with each other and includes or excludes different interpretations as time goes by (Reese, 2007). This way of describing the generation of the frame is more useful for analyzing the dynamics of public debates on issues over time, and makes it easier to follow the development of political discourses and their presence in the media.

The hypothesis of the study is that frames are the result of both kinds of process. In part, there is a process involving the selection and visibility of certain concepts or words, and these are partly the result of interpretations devised from central ideas which develop over time, and which are the product of the way various factors interact.

### **Interaction between 'source frame' and 'media frame': efficacy conditions**

Scheufele's (1999) vision of framing as a continuous feedback process describes precisely, in our view, the dynamics that operates between politicians and the media in the international arena. Of the different phases which are part of this process, our study focuses on the first, that is, the moment in which the frame is constructed (frame building) which takes in the factors that contribute to forming the professional view of matters, paying special attention to external agents (see also Gans, 1979).

Regarding the typology that is established, we propose completing the classification proposed by Scheufele (1999) adding a new type of frame. Scheufele identifies those frames created by the media (media frame) and those applied by the audience (audience or individual frame): we will also take those used by social agents acting as sources of information (source frame).

As has been stated, the interest of the present study lies chiefly in the relationship that is established between the source frame and the media frame (Neuman et al., 1992). Specifically, the aim is to explore which conditions make source frame more effective: what are the situations and circumstances which make it easier for the media to assimilate them.

The first of these criteria is that the subject should be a new social phenomenon. As Beck states, on some occasions, reality goes beyond the established social concepts, which are suddenly outdated and incapable of explaining a new turn of affairs (Beck, 2003). In this situation, the media acquire the power to make meanings, because they name these new phenomena before others can, and coin expressions and terms which are taken up by the public at large, since they need to communicate and dialogue about these realities. According to Rojecky, when people experience some of the unexpected consequences of globalization in their own lives, they look to the media for points of reference that can help them to

understand their surroundings and act accordingly (Rojecky, 2005; Giddens, 1990).

A second condition that makes the media more effective is the outbreak of a crisis, or at least of situations that give people the impression that there is a crisis. It has been proven that in such circumstances, people's confidence in media discourse, and in the interpretations that take hold of public opinion, is greater than people's confidence in their own knowledge or opinions (Lang & Lang, 1981).

Finally, the media frame or interpretation is more readily accepted when it is transmitted through expressions, metaphors, values and ideas that have cultural resonance. "Cultural resonance" is an area of significance that is shared between politicians, the media and the audience, which stimulates ideas, principles and values belonging to the cultural context, communicating much more than the literal meaning of the text (La Porte, 2008).

Cultural resonance does not interpret or frame a given issue in the same way as the frame itself does. It is a reference to the culture itself, or the system of principles, which makes the frame easier to understand and more likely to succeed. As Gamson (1988) states, resonances which evoke a cultural context make the frame more effective. The allusion to cultural values that define the identity of a society, and which are generally shared, helps the audience to understand and remember the interpretation of reality that is projected by the media.

Cultural resonance can be understood as a reaction of empathy on the part of the audience when they recognize that the message contains an element from their cultural tradition (Schudson, 1989). It can also be viewed as an element of the text itself ("condensed symbols", in the words of Sapir, 1934 and Edelman, 1964), which evokes images or memories that form part of the audience's cultural identity. The study we present here takes the second of these definitions, and in the content analysis we have tried to identify the expressions or symbols which might possess cultural resonance of this kind.

We chose the debate on the "clash of civilizations" as the subject of this study because of our interest in exploring the coverage of an issue which, at least hypothetically, fulfils the conditions for effectiveness: it is a new social phenomenon, it is perceived as a dangerous threat, and it is presented by expressions and ideas with a high cultural resonance.

### **METHODOLOGY**

To carry out this study, we compared the frames or specific interpretations found in several significant political discourses and those encountered in the coverage of these same discourses in the international media.

In the choice of politicians to form part of the sample, we followed the criterion of relevance in the "clash of civilizations" debate. We thus analyzed some speeches by George W. Bush and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, insofar as they represent the two extremes of the controversy between the western and Islamic worlds. In order to avoid reducing the analysis to the "war on terror" context, we also

included two more representatives: the President of Turkey, Abdullah Gül, and French president Nicolas Sarkozy. Abulah Gül stands out because of his support, alongside Spain, for an "Alliance of Civilizations", as a possible solution to the conflict of the "clash of civilizations", while Nicolas Sarkozy is notable for his views on "positive laicism" as a solution to the problems of religious coexistence which France is experiencing within its own borders.

As far as the specific discourses of each leader are concerned, two selection criteria were applied: the interest which they aroused in the international audience, and the extent to which they reflected the problem of the "clash of civilizations".

In the case of George W. Bush, we chose four States of the Nation speeches, which take in the period from just after 9 - 11 to the present day: those of 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008. The two year lapses between speeches allow us to observe the development in his interpretation of the "clash of civilizations".

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's declarations in October 2005, made during his "The World without Zionism" conference in Teheran, had great resonance because of the attacks he made on Israel. Also considered to be of relevance were his appearances in September 2007 at the University of Columbia and before the General Assembly of the United Nations, in which he again attacked the United States and Israel. Lastly, we included an analysis of a speech made in May 2008 in which he explicitly threatened the United States.

To assess the figure of Abulah Gül, we have selected some speeches delivered from the beginning of our period of research (2001), although he was not yet President of Turkey. As it is known, Gül was Prime Minister from 2002 to 2003, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2003 to 2007. In 2007, he was elected President of the country. Analyzed speeches have been delivered in 2004, to the Islamic Conference Organization gathered in Istanbul to discuss on "Civilization and Harmony: values and mechanisms of the Global Order"; and the one given in 2006, before the General Assembly of the United Nations, in New York. For the media analysis, and, as none of the discourses chosen were reflected, we decided to look at any of his words related to the topic of the study quoted in the European media from September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Sarkozy's references to French laicism and the need to include morality in politics were already present during his election campaign speeches. We therefore complement our sample of Sarkozy's speeches as French president with his declarations as candidate to the presidency made in Bercy less than one month before he took office (29/04/2007). We also include his famous speech to the European Parliament (13/11/2007), in which he speaks of "spiritual politics" and "lay morality", and his declarations in the Roman basilica of St John Lateran (20/12/2007), in which he coined the term "positive laicism".

Regarding our sample from the European media, we selected those which can be considered to be leading newspapers in their country and have also an international prestige: *Le Monde* (France); *The Guardian* (United Kingdom); *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Alemania). The dates of publication were always either the day of the speech or the two or three following days, depending on the extent to which the story was covered.

In accord with the theoretical framework described above, the content analysis was performed paying particular attention to: quotations relevant to the "clash of civilizations"; the main object of the quotation (denunciation, threat, reinforcement of a political argument); identification of key words, authoritative arguments (of a religious, political or cultural nature), authoritative sources (religious, political), historical or cultural references and use of significant narrative resources (metaphors, examples and expressions). Those categories allow identifying elements which have contributed to build the frame and to determine which of the two theses mentioned above seems more possible.

Examination of the influence which external actors (speeches by political and religious leaders) have on the creation or modification of journalists' frames turns the media themselves into a dependent

variable (Scheufele, 1999). As the object of this study was to identify the presence of the leaders' frames in the media, and to observe the way that the media frame the issue (Price, Tewksbury and Powers 1995, 1996), the analysis concludes with a comparison between the two types of content, which make it possible to evaluate the conditions in which the frames used by the sources tend to prosper, and are conveyed to an European audience.

## Analysis of the political speeches

In what follows, we report only the conclusions that are most relevant to the aims of this study.

George W. Bush: Over the six-year period of the study, we can observe a modification in the emphasis of the speeches from the rhetoric of war to a more pacifistic focus in which values are upheld. However, there is also a set of ideas that are repeated throughout the speeches, which help us to identify a framework which imposes a specific interpretation.

First, Bush's speeches reflect a rejection of the idea of a "clash of civilizations" understood as a conflict between values or as the imposition of one set of principles on another. In this context, there are two frames or interpretations which are constantly repeated in his words: firstly, the "war" is a "war on terror", and therefore against terrorists, rather than against the Muslim world, and secondly, the USA does not want to impose its culture, but rather to defend the universal value of freedom and democracy. In accord with this approach, he often puts up a defense against accusations of imperialism that have been leveled from various quarters, mainly from within the Muslim world: "We have no intention of imposing our culture" (2002). This same focus is observed in the declarations which he makes directly to the Islamic population: "We respect your right to choose your own future and win your own freedom" (2006). In another allusion to the people of Iran, he repeats: "Our message to the people of Iran is clear: We have no quarrel with you" (2008).

A second frame that is easy to detect is his moral analysis of the situation. This is not a "clash of civilizations", but it is a "clash between good and evil". From this moral rather than political viewpoint, he tries to find a basis for his condemnation of the Islamists' deeds, and the actions of their supporters. The well-known expressions such as "enemies of freedom", "axis of evil" and "evil empire" simply encapsulate this particular approach.

In connection with this vision of the moral need to struggle against evil, other frames can be identified which can be distinguished from each other in terms of the audience to which he is speaking at particular times. It is well known that the State of the Nation speeches, though primarily aimed at the American population, are widely reported abroad, and the President is evidently addressing both audiences at different times.

Speaking to American citizens, his moral frame takes on a directly religious form. His eloquence has religious overtones, as he tells us that "Even in tragedy, God is

near”, and refers to this “Time of testing” or “Time of adversity”.

Addressing both the US and the international audience, the President draws on explanations that justify his foreign policy, with a twofold aim: to explain the effort which he is asking of the American people, and to convince his potential allies of the nobility of his venture. Along these lines, he stresses his denunciation of the terrorists’ acts which “sow terror, coerce liberty and subject the people” in its immediate and indirect consequences, which are perverse for their own people as well as for the West. Secondly, he emphasizes that the aim of American politics is not to defend the USA’s own interests, but to safeguard basic, universal human rights such as freedom, democracy and economic development. Thus, for example, in 2006 he states: “The only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change”. He also quite frequently refers to this battle using nominal forms, such as “free-dom’s fight” or “freedom’s power”.

Alongside these arguments, Bush defends the need for American leadership to respond to the call of history. This focus coincides with another characteristic trait in American political culture, which has been a constant since the times of the Founding Fathers: the duty to respond to a historic destiny by defending and extending democratic principles to all nations (ideas that are set out in the Declaration of Independence). His speeches therefore contain expressions that have a significant cultural resonance for the American population: “history has called America”, “historic goal”, “tasks of history”.

To summarize, we can state that Bush’s speeches can be seen to include several frames or interpretations. He does not take the position that there is a “clash of civilizations”, replacing this notion with that of the “war on terror” aimed at the terrorists alone. Along the same lines, he stresses that the actions of the USA are not intended to impose a specific culture, but rather to defend the universal value of freedom. Secondly, in connection with the earlier interpretation, the struggle that the USA is envisaging is moral rather than cultural: the confrontation is between “good and evil”. This moral analysis takes on a religious frame when it is directed at a national audience. Finally, we may note a vision of American leadership as obliged to respond to the “call of history” to fulfill its mission to defend and spread democratic principles to all nations.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is well known for his controversial comments openly criticizing the United States and Israel. In the context of the “clash of civilizations”, he might in some way be considered to be George W. Bush’s antagonist. In Ahmadinejad’s speeches, we can observe four main frames of interpretation.

First, we can detect the coexistence of a cultural vision of the tension between Islamic and Christian or West

world, expressed in a general and somewhat vague way, with a political vision that is very forcefully manifested.

This cultural view is noticeable in the Iranian President’s proposal for solving the conflict arising from the “clash of civilizations”: a “Coalition for Peace”, which he himself defines as a “fraternal front (...) based on monotheism and justice (...) to prevent incursions and arrogance, and to spread the culture of cordiality and justice.” This “fraternity” is understood mainly to group together the Islamic nations.

In the political aspect of his view, the confrontation is with particular countries, that is, the USA and Israel. Although these could also be representatives of two cultures, the reason given for antagonism is that they hold political aims that are opposed to Iran and other Islamic governments. US imperialism is to blame for the problems of the Middle East, because the USA is trying to prevent the development of these peoples in order to maintain its world hegemony. He accuses the USA of putting pressure on other powers (Europe) to follow in its footsteps. In his address to the United Nations, he compares the position of “certain great powers” with “the condescending attitude (...) of the feudal lords towards the peasants in the Middle Ages”. Ahmadinejad rejects the concept of a “religious war”, replacing it with “Bush’s expansionism”. Moreover, he uses highly significant expressions to refer to the USA: “Oppressor World”, “Global Arrogance”, “World Arrogance”, “Global dominant system” and “Bullying powers”.

The image of Israel is as a “bridgehead” created by the USA to extend its dominion over the Muslim world in a way that is far from legitimate. The “Islamic nation” must unite against this “conspiracy”. In his 2005 speech, the Iranian President makes his position very clear: “Israel should be wiped off the map”, “I warn all the leaders in the Islamic world to beware of this conspiracy. If any of them takes a step towards the recognition of this regime, then he will burn in the fire of the Islamic Umma (...)”.

The third and fourth frame identified in this analysis brings to light an interesting parallelism with the frames used in Bush’s speeches. In concrete, in his use of the religious frame and his way of understanding the role that destiny (or history) has assigned to him in person, and to his country.

For the President of Iran, references to God and the Islamic faith are always present when it comes to taking decisions and making judgments. Justice belongs to God. This is reflected, for example, in the declarations he made in 2008 in reference to the USA: “You can be sure that the hand of God and the wrath of the peoples will grab you by the throat”. The oppressor powers form an “Infidel front” which the Islamic Umma must defeat, with God’s aid.

Ahmadinejad again shows parallels with Bush when he draws on history to explain his ideas. In his view, the Islamic Umma is going through an “era of darkness” which “will come to an end”. “The customs and traditions based on oppression and injustice will be destroyed.” Meanwhile,

it has to fight against a “historical enemy”, namely Israel. The conflict with the USA and Israel is a “battle of destiny”.

We may thus conclude that Ahmadinejad’s discourse can be seen to contain four frames of interpretation regarding the “clash of civilizations”. First, an ill-defined cultural vision coexists with a more political interpretation of the conflict between cultures. The second frame, which is more explicit, sees that USA as preventing the development of the Middle East in order to maintain its own world hegemony. Third, he draws on a religious argument to justify the duty to intervene, situating this within the framework of the Holy War and reproducing the most literal meaning of the “clash of civilizations”. The fourth frame is a continuation of this, expressing the historical significance of his mission.

Abdullah Gül: The Turkish President, Abdullah Gül, concentrated his labors on promoting diplomatic relations between Turkey and the rest of the world, particularly within the “Alliance of Civilizations” project proposed as an alternative to the “culture clash”.

At this point, it is significant to note that the terminology he uses to describe the potential conflict that we are discussing makes no reference to culture or religion, but only to geography, which tends to emphasize a neutral or anodyne stance: he never talks about the Islamic world, for example, but only about East and West.

The use of these terms is consistent with his discourse, which is openly on the side of genuine dialogue between cultures: in fact, the word “dialogue” appears with striking frequency in his declarations: “The high quality and candidness of the discussions were very much fitting to the atmosphere of dialogue we want to advance among different cultures. It was genuine, focused and in a sense operational, with a clear eye on the future of our dialogue. It is important that we do not only talk of dialogue, but also engage in the real thing, because genuine dialogue is the only insurance for our common future”.

His words demonstrate his conviction that it is possible for different cultures and religions to live side by side, and reinforce his main idea by recalling historical experiences: “This has been the case at certain glorious periods of the Andaluz, Roman or Ottoman Empires, as well as in many other eras”. He is a clear proponent of pluralism, and he understands that cultural diversity is compatible with the existence of universal human values which will enable us to build a shared world society.

Following these principles, he focuses the main part of the debate on the defence and improvement of human rights, thus avoiding confrontation about values or beliefs: “This challenge is not about our religion. It is about strengthening our societies and providing for our citizens the highest possible standards in political, economic and social life”. In this context, he has no qualms about warning Islamic nations about the need to consolidate democracy, eliminate corruption and guarantee the defence of human rights, ideals that do not belong only to western

culture: “We are fortunate, because the Islamic faith lends itself to a rational and humanistic understanding of the world”.

His vision is thus consistent with that expressed by his Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan, who interprets the “clash of civilizations” as caused by a lack of communication between the western and Muslim world, which has led to “Islamophobia” in western countries. To overcome this rejection and restore a more accurate view of Islam, Ali Babacan makes a clear distinction between Islam and the “holy war” fomented by terrorists: “Islam is the religion of peace. Peace is the object of Islam and the purpose of Muslims”.

To encourage communication between East (Islamic world) and West, he backs the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, which is not just a political project but an interpretation as to how to approach and resolve the clash of civilizations: “We must promote a kind of mutual understanding and tolerance that will enable us to counter and reverse a growing trend to racist, xenophobic and discriminatory discourse”. The aim of the Alliance of Civilizations coincides with the frame that this politician tries to promote: international cooperation to combat extremism in many countries, break down social and cultural barriers between the west and the Islamic world, and reduce the tensions between societies with different religious and social values.

We could therefore conclude that Abdullah Gül is trying to mini-mize the confrontation between cultures, avoiding references to differences in values or beliefs, and centring the debate on the need to guarantee human rights as universal rights; secondly, he thinks that the best way to resolve potential confrontation is by genuine dialogue which respects the identity of each culture; and thirdly, he points to the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations as being the most appropriate way of achieving peaceful and tolerant coexistence.

Nicolas Sarkozy: Nicolas Sarkozy’s references to French laicism and the need for morality to be part of politics appear as early as his election campaign speeches.

Regarding the interpretative frame of the clash of civilizations, the French President can be said to identify religion as a cause of conflict, and to propose a solution to this by creating a “civil religion” characterized by “spiritual politics” and “lay morality” which take politics, freedom and democracy as their cornerstone.

Secondly, in close harmony with the first interpretation of the “clash of civilizations”, we can identify the idea of “positive laicism”. This term was coined by Sarkozy in his speech at the basilica of St. John Lateran, in Rome, and has taken on resonance all over the world because of the implicit meaning that it contains. As Sarkozy himself explained, “positive laicism” is an approach which “always concerned with the freedom to think, to believe or not believe, does not see religions as a danger, but as a value”(…) “The aim is to seek dialogue with the great religions of France, and to obey the principle of making the

everyday life of the great spiritual movements easier, instead of more complicated”.

Finally, we can deduce that, as far as the culture clash goes, Sarkozy interprets the construction of Europe as something that has to be reinforced and promoted, as a “great ideal”. He credits the idea of “European identity” with great importance: Europe is made up of a set of peoples with common values who form a civilization. In his speech to the European parliament, he expressed his ideas thus: The construction of Europe is the expression of the common will of the peoples of Europe, who recognize common values, acknowledge a common civilization, and want those values and that civilization to stay alive.”

From our study of Sarkozy’s speeches, we can deduce that he establishes various frames of interpretation for analysis of the international political situation and the clash of cultures. His main idea is that it is important to defend a “civil religion” characterized by “spiritual politics” and “lay morality”. Thus although he removes religion from the public sphere, he does not obliterate it, but advocates “positive laicism” characterized by religious freedom and dialogue between different beliefs. Finally, we may note his idea of Europe as a civilization that shares a set of values and an identity of its own that must be strengthened.

### **Analysis of the media presence of these speeches**

Now that we have established the interpretative frames for the “clash of civilizations” that these politicians use in their speeches, the next step is to see how these frames are reflected or ignored by the media, and what new approaches the media create through their reports.

### **The Guardian and its rejection of the “clash of civilizations”**

First, it must be pointed out that The Guardian understands the world order as a multipolar system. In the different analyses published around the dates of the speeches analysed above, it does not hesitate to emphasize the multiplicity of centres of power that condition and determine what happens in the international community (Jonathan Steel, 3 February 2006, “Bush just has to face it: he is wrong and Chirac is right: The crisis over Hamas and Iran underline the collapse of the neocon mission and the end of a one-superpower world”). From this viewpoint, it would seem obvious that the editorial line will determine a marked scepticism when it comes to admitting the existence of a possible “clash of civilizations”.

The Guardian accepts President Bush’s rejection of the existence of a “clash of civilizations” as a conflict between cultures. However, it openly criticizes Bush’s moral vision of the “war on terror”, and stresses the purely political nature of the conflict. It states that this “war” is

an “organizing principles of the White House agenda”, which has concrete aims that are even defined in terms of limited time periods: according to The Guardian, the “war on terror” which began on 11 September ended on 20 January 2004 when the American administration was forced to turn its attention to the economy, without having conquered its declared enemies.

The newspaper pays special attention to the expression “axis of evil”. It denounces the way that Al Qaeda comes to be substituted by the group of nations which the USA regards as enemies, as a further proof of Bush’s political intentions, and asserts that the rhetoric used alongside this doctrine is nothing more than an alarmist strategy to justify the invasion of Iraq. Although it does give the President’s statements concerning America’s mission in history and its leadership in the quest for world peace, it reinterprets these words in a more pragmatic sense, demanding that Bush should seek a prompt, definitive solution to the Iraq problem.

In the case of Ahmadinejad, too, The Guardian considers that the rhetoric of the clash of civilizations responds to political intentions: it brings out the point that the coalition which Ahmadinejad tries to create through his contacts with Russia, China or Venezuela does not reflect a cultural criterion, but rather an anti-American one. On similar lines, the newspaper considers that his denial of the Holocaust is motivated by internal political issues, and that his main aim is to consolidate his own power in the face of internal dissidence.

We may therefore conclude that The Guardian does not accept the dualist view of the “clash of civilizations”, but accepts that this logic colours the political discourse of Bush and of Islamic fundamentalism, even though the reasons for this on both sides are political rather than cultural (Timothy Garton Ash, 22 January 2004, “Next stop Syria: Washington’s post 9-11 war on terror is finished. But another has only just begun”).

The Guardian takes a different stance when it covers the speeches by Sarkozy and Abdullah Gül. Out of all the possible issues, here it emphasizes the controversy on Turkey’s admission to the European Union. Without modifying its scepticism concerning the so-called “clash”, and in order to defend Turkey’s candidature, it does not hesitate to use not only the elements that belong within the framework of the “clash of civilizations”, but even the term itself: “Turkey and France are seen, from Paris at least, as irreconcilable opposites, embodiments of the ‘clash of civilizations’. Except, of course, they are not” (Fiachra Gibbons, 13 October 2006, “This ignorant act will only fan the flames of division: The French vote to outlaw denial of the Armenian genocide plays into the hands of Islamist nationalists in Turkey”, Guardian comment and debate pages). The Guardian warns of the possible risks of rejecting the Turkish proposal, and it is understood that if this happens, the confrontation will have cultural overtones. However, it also eludes the frame of reference being analysed here, using various different approaches: the conflict is still political, not a “clash of

civilizations”; if the EU promise is broken, this would send Turkey a signal that there are “deep divisions between East and West”; and finally, it attributes the interpretation of this clash to a particular position held by Sarkozy, which is not even shared by his immediate colleagues (Philippe Marliere, 24 abril 2007, Comment is free: Do not be fooled by Sarkozy: France's soul is still leftwing: “The socialists' blunders have placed a brutal neoliberal on the verge of power – but it is not too late to stop him”, Guardian comment and debate pages).

The Turkish position is reflected through Erdogan's declarations: Abdullah Gül is scarcely quoted. In Erdogan's words, the references to the “clash of civilizations” appear with great frequency, as a danger which would Europe would be provoking if it failed to accept Turkey in its midst. In this case, The Guardian joins in the rhetoric by considering this possibility, but always in a purely figurative context. The newspaper's arguments are underpinned by its multipolar view: Turkey's entry would enable us to create a powerful European Union capable of confronting other emerging powers, such as China or India.

In conclusion, we can state that the editorial line of this news-paper prevails over the political discourses. The Guardian still uses the rhetoric and foci proper to the “clash of civilizations”, but does so as a frame of reference used by others, with intentions other than what might properly be termed cultural conflict. Our analysis brings to light two different contexts.

The first context, which could be regarded as global, is determined by the speeches of Bush and Ahmadinejad. In this case, though the “clash of civilizations” is not mentioned directly, other expressions associated with this schema are used, such as “axis of evil” or “war on terror” in the case of Bush, or “Great Satan” and “global arrogance” in Ahmadinejad's case. But in this context, the “clash” is a clash not of civilizations but of political interests.

The second context is a European one. Here, a conflict of a cultural nature is mentioned explicitly, but the newspaper's pragmatic approach prevents this from being seen as a real threat: it is just another useful argument to defend Turkey's admission to the European Union.

### **Le Monde: The ‘clash of civilizations’ is European**

It is hard to determine what Le Monde's stance is towards the clash of civilizations. First, it should be stated that it is not particularly interested in reporting the speeches of the political leaders selected for this study, and this attitude is particularly noticeable in the case of Ahmadinejad and Abdullah Gül. On the other hand, as one might expect, Sarkozy's words are analysed in the domestic context, without assessing their international repercussions.

In its coverage of Bush's speeches, it emphasizes the Iraq war and the country's ongoing economic crisis. Regarding the war, Le Monde quotes directly expressions and arguments which belong to the frame of the “clash of

civilizations”: Biblical references, and expressions with an apocalyptic tone, accompany Bush's state-ments on “America's mission in the world” and its moral obligation to defend values like freedom and democracy.

None the less, the news articles about Bush's speeches have a political focus. The rhetoric which Bush uses in this context is handled with chill scepticism. Although its critical vision coincides with that of The Guardian, Le Monde does not so much denounce the political interests behind the “war on terror” as its ideological nature, comparing this conflict with the confrontation with communism during the Cold War (“It was the speech of a man who knew how to prepare his country to face a challenge equivalent to the Cold War against communism”, 31/1/2002, Le Monde, ‘Bush en guerre’). Although the direct quotations in which Bush justifies and explains the Iraq war are reported faithfully, the frequent retorts to Bush's assertions are noteworthy, as they establish a contrast with political analyses that differ from Bush's position: thus, whereas Bush states that he has China and Russia on his side in the Iraq war (“Bush declares his satisfaction at having China and Russia on his side”), Le Monde emphasizes that these countries are the main suppliers of arms to the “axis of evil”: “America has to lead the world. This is imperative for its safety. The alternative to America's leadership is a much more dangerous world, a world full of fear”. 31/1/2002, Le Monde, ‘Bush en guerre’).

As far as the Iranian President's speeches are concerned, particular attention is paid to his denial of the Holocaust and the anti-Zionism which this entails, which is interpreted as a consequence of the Islamic revolution of 1979. Le Monde considers Ahmadinejad's position poses a risk to international security, but above all, threatens a conflict generated by the confrontation between civilizations as a result of the different values and religious views that prevail in the Orient and in the West.

In its coverage of Abdullah Gül's speeches, and in accord with the position that seems to have become widespread in France, the danger of fundamentalism in Turkey is stressed, and the opposition to Gül within the country because he is in favour of introducing certain aspects of Sharia in civil legislation is emphasized. Le Monde alludes frequently to the threat posed by the new government to traditional Turkish laicism, and defends, directly or through declarations made by the Turkish opposition, the need for freedom and independence of thought, and for democracy. In a context in which the possible incorporation of Turkey in the European Union is being debated, the newspaper's coverage warns of the risk of allowing a country that does not respect human rights to enter the EU, without referring specifically to the “clash of civilizations”.

This vision is strengthened by the words of the French President himself. Although, as we mentioned above, the main focus of his speeches is domestic, Le Monde reflects the importance which Sarkozy places on the values



that define French culture. In Bercy, he stresses the values of the national culture, but adds a European dimension. He follows up on this, reinforcing the European angle, in his Strasbourg and Lateran speeches, where the newspaper reflects Sarkozy's interpretation in no uncertain terms: France is the heart of Europe, and French values are European values.

Although there is no explicit reference to the "clash of civilizations", we can perceive an implicit intention to mark the limits that should define European culture with regard to other cultures. In his speech to the European Parliament, Sarkozy clearly alludes to the idea that it would be difficult for the European Union to allow Turkey to enter, and his ideas are evidently based on the notion that rejecting Turkey is not just a question of frontiers, but also a matter of cultural identity and values.

In Lateran, this European identity acquires certain religious over-tones, in this case, involving Christianity. *Le Monde* gives broad coverage to this event, considering that Sarkozy's acceptance of the honorary title given to him by the Vatican is a historic landmark. Although the newspaper seems not to be in favour of this rapprochement with the Church, and stresses France's lay heritage, it does not hesitate to interpret this encounter using the frame of the "clash of civilizations": Sarkozy is trying to strengthen the Christian roots as a means of demonstrating the cultural differences that separate Turkey from Europe. ("If there is not a single word about Islam, he confirms the usefulness of the commission on the State-Catholic Church launched in 2002 by Lionel Jospin", *Le Monde*, 22/12/2007).

Whatever the case, the image of Sarkozy projected in *Le Monde* is that he accepts the view of the "clash of civilizations", which is mainly reflected in the duty he has, as President of the European Union, to reinforce Europe's cultural identity. However, in his rhetoric he avoids any allusion or direct confrontation with Islamic culture, placing a greater emphasis on defining European culture than on pointing out the way it contrasts with other value systems.

### **The equanimity of the Frankfurter: Another way of showing the 'clash of civilizations'**

The Frankfurter Allgemeine avoids sensationalism and mixing news with opinion. It has a serious style, and handles the political sources in a way that is correct and respectful, abstaining from comparisons and strong assertions. Instead, it conveys its opinion through subtle use of irony, or by contrasting different points of view. It generally allows all the parties involved to give their opinion, showing the arguments put forward by all the different sides so that readers can draw their own conclusions.

As far as the 'clash of civilizations' is concerned, this newspaper never mentions it as such. However, it is prepared to reproduce the declarations made by Islamic

leaders who do make explicit use of the rhetoric that surrounds this concept. Thus the Frankfurter gives voice to the Iranian ayatollah Ali Chamenei, who asserts that "Bush is thirsting for blood" and that "Iran is proud to be hated by the greatest Satan in history" ('Axis of evil', 1/12/2002). On the other hand, terms like "axis of evil" and "war on terror" are always given in inverted commas, quoted as something that someone else has said.

Along similar lines, Frankfurter Allgemeine does not criticize Bush's position, but rather confines itself to explaining his arguments and contrasting them with the declarations made by countries with opposing views. In 2002, it explains the terms "axis of terror", and "war on terrorism or/and war on terror" carefully, within the context of the Iraq war and 9-11. In its coverage of the 2004 speech, it is noticeable how it insists on giving the full arguments used by Bush to explain the decision to invade Iraq without the support of the UN, providing literal quotations from the President's words, such as "America's historic mission" and "America does not need to ask for anyone's permission when it is a matter of security" which were frequently used in his speeches around that time.

Following Bush's own development, in 2006, this newspaper provides the most extensive coverage of the North American economy and the problem of energy resources and, in 2008, it once again emphasizes the words that the President uses to justify the struggle against Al Qaeda, using terms like "ideological warfare of the 21st century".

Regarding Ahmadinejad, on 26 October 2005 Frankfurter reports on his speech attacking Israel. In this article, his most aggressive expressions are quoted literally, such as "Anybody who recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation's fury". ('Iran: Israel will disappear', 26/10/2005). Nevertheless, without compromising its neutrality, the newspaper systematically contrasts Ahmadinejad's declarations with those of the authorities of the countries to which he refers, and those of other leading figures who are opposed to his ideas. While still following its policy of offering all the different points of view, this newspaper manages to temper statements that it takes to be disproportionate.

As for Ahmadinejad's address at Columbia University, the reporting focuses on the President of the University's initial refusal to allow him to speak. The newspaper does not hesitate to defend the President's academic freedom to choose who should speak on his campus and who should not. About the contents of his talk, the newspaper places emphasis on the students' participation and the controversy surrounding the issue of homosexuality, and scarcely makes reference to Ahmadinejad's words. It is significant that during the same period, this newspaper published a long report on what young Iranians think, showing the difference between this sector of the population and the President. This report concluded that young people have blogs and are not anti-Semitic.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine also provides a detailed description of Sarkozy's political aims, a profile of the ministers he chooses, and information about the measures he takes to quell the disturbances on the streets of Paris. In its coverage of Sarkozy's speeches, it takes a similar approach to that used with President Bush: for example, it gives an accurate explanation of the term 'positive laicism' used by Sarkozy in his Lateran address, as well as of the meaning of the ceremony, and relations between France and the Vatican. In the newspaper's interpretation of the term 'laicism', Sarkozy's position is described in relation to the clash of civilizations: Frankfurter Allgemeine identifies laicism with the values proper to the French State, concluding that Sarkozy is against a multicultural society in which religions can hold sway over the public sphere. In public affairs, the values of the French State must prevail, and these are essentially lay values. This newspaper interpretes the adjective 'positive' as meaning freedom of worship, but without allowing religious principles to condition laws or influence politics.

The German newspaper also points out that Sarkozy is close to Angela Merkel in this, showing their agreement on the future of Europe, Turkey's entry into the European Union, and the way they face the challenges posed by the Islamic minorities in their countries.

References to Abdullah Gül are scarce, but more frequent mention is made of Prime Minister Erdogan. In both cases, they appear in news items about Turkey's entry into the European Union, a issue which Frankfurter covers as if it were a matter of national rather than international politics. The attitudes of the German and Turkish governments are explicit: Turkey is applying for entry, and German refuses to accept integration, even though it is willing to grant preferential treatment.

The debate is clearly framed as a matter of cultural difference, although Erdogan's argument that the European Union would lose power if it did not include Turkey is also reported: "If the European Union wants to be a world power and avoid a clash of cultures, it ought to opt for an alliance of civilizations and not leave Turkey outside" ('A feast day for chauvinists', 4/10/2005). According to this newspaper, by saying this, the Turkish leader is telling us that a refusal to admit Turkey is evidence of an attitude that is contrary to dialogue, and which will lead to cultural confrontation. The published declarations of both Gül and Erdogan use the same words as Merkel and Sarkozy: 'laicism' and 'integration'. But the newspaper points out that for Erdogan, 'lay' means that the State should keep the same distance from Christians and Muslims alike, and emphasizes that in his view, the Turks in Germany are undergoing a process of "assimilation" rather than "integration", because they are obliged to adopt the German language and culture. The newspaper also reports on the attitude of the most conservative Turkish association in Germany, which seeks to promote Turkish identity and demands that the government should create bilingual (Turkish-German) schools.

In spite of these declarations, the newspaper reports at length on Angela Merkel's views, which are clearly opposed to Turkey's entry. Alongside the words of the leading politicians in both countries, Frankfurter Allgemeine also reflects a wide variety of opinions from citizens' associations, cultural leaders and radical groups in each of the two countries.

## Conclusions

The aim of the present study is, as we stated at the outset, to review the foci, symbols and interpretations that the world media use to reflect and spread the political message concerning the "clash of civilizations". Our purpose is to observe how this cultural conflict is expressed in the political discourse, and how this is then reflected in the major world media. In short, in what form is the notion of the "clash of civilizations" being presented in the public debate? How is it defined or described? What conflicts are brought into association with this expression? How media reflect or frame political discourse?

Firstly, we could conclude that the frame of the "clash of civilizations" is perceived more clearly in the political discourse than in the media.

Politicians interpret, or frame, the concept of a "clash of civilizations" in accord with their own interests. Thus Bush distances himself from the schema of a confrontation between civilizations in order to establish another interpretation: he is fighting a war on "those who spread terror", and not against Islamic civilization. The clash is happening for reasons of security, and it is not a cultural battle. In the case of Iran, political interpretations also take precedence over cultural ones: the cause of the conflict is the US aggression in the Middle East and its action through its "bridgehead", that is, Israel. Abdullah Gül and Erdogan acknowledge the existence of a tension between cultures, but minimize the possibility of a "clash", and they back the chances of an understanding. They stress the need to integrate Turkey in the European Union. Sarkozy's stance is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, he does not hesitate to preach "positive laicism" in which all religions have to be able to live side by side, as a way of resolving the problems of multiculturalism in his own country. On the other hand, he sees Europe as a "fortress" with a definite cultural identity, with some values currently in crisis, which has to be consolidated and defended from outside forces. This is why he is so radically opposed to Turkey's entry to the European Union, and to the increase in the number of immigrants.

In spite of the differences, we could also conclude that political leaders use similar frames with different (opposing) meanings. There is a certain overlap in the values which all of these leaders express. Specifically, there is a striking parallelism between the terms used by Bush and Ahmadinejad in their speeches (Table 1).

This situation reflects a certain similarity in the cultural frame through which the "clash of civilizations" is understood.

**Table 1.** Political frames amongst politician.

<b>GEORGE W. BUSH</b>	“Enemies of freedom”	“Evil regime”	“Tasks of history”	“War on terror”
<b>MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD</b>	“Bullying powers”	“Infidel Front”	“Battle of destiny”	“Era of darkness”

Regarding the newspapers analysed, we can say that in all three cases, the interpretive frame set by the editorial line prevails over that used in the political discourse. In accord with this, the newspapers studied here strive to attribute the expressions and rhetoric associated with the “clash of civilizations” to the declarations made by the political leaders in question.

However, we must also stress the way the focus alters in all three European newspapers when there is a change in the scenario in which the hypothetical “clash of civilizations” is supposedly being played out.

In the world context, the frame of the “clash of civilizations” would seem not to form part of the way newspapers perceive the state of affairs. The speeches of Bush and Ahmadinejad are handled with a certain scepticism, and the political interests that underlie both their points of view are emphasized, accompanied by explanations of the controversy in the light of the newspaper’s own stance towards the international order: The Guardian has an attitude that is clearly critical, coloured by its own multipolar view of world politics; Le Monde takes a neutral stance, preferring to give a historical interpretation of events; and the Frankfurter Allgemeine maintains its characteristic equanimity, while clearly providing evidence of the disproportional nature of Ahmadinejad’s discourses and questioning his status as an international authority.

In the European context, however, the newspapers are more willing to become involved and adopt a frame of cultural interpretation. They agree in emphasizing the differences between Europe (France and Germany, in this case) and Turkey. The Guardian defends Turkey’s EU entry, and even refers explicitly to the threat posed by a possible clash if Turkey is rejected. Although The Guardian is talking about a political clash rather than a cultural one, it is not afraid to use expressions from the ambit of the “clash of civilizations” to defend its stance. Le Monde, questions whether Turkey’s entry would be opportune, and makes no bones about falling back on the framework of cultural interpretation to express the difference between European laicism and the growing fundamentalism in Turkey. It is in this key that it interprets the President’s declarations, reporting his views on this at some length. The Frankfurter Allgemeine maintains a balanced position, but does not abstain from alluding to the cultural problem posed by the Turkish minority in Germany, or pointing out the general agreement between Sarkozy and Merkel on this issue.

We may therefore conclude that the political frame which has the greatest chance of prospering and being assimilated by the media is that which makes reference

to internal politics. In this context, it is noteworthy that national interests prevail over cultural issues.

Finally, exclusively on the basis of the results of this study, we can conclude that the process by which a particular frame is created on a matter of a symbolic nature, like the clash of civilizations, would seem to reflect the thesis put forward by Reese, rather than the proposals of other authors.

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