

National Construction in Fiction series: A Look at a Decade of Production from Televisió de Catalunya

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- *Fiction is a space of cultural representations. The decade from 1994 to 2003 was a prolific stage in fiction production and programming at Televisió de Catalunya. This article takes a look at Catalan fictional shows from a production analysis. The author holds that the construction of the nation on the television series was based particularly on territorial and language elements, but also included representations of a historical, political and social type. He argues that in television fiction the nation became a stage on which the characters lived.*

Key words

Fiction series, national construction, Televisió de Catalunya, national identity

Objectives and Methodology

The aim of this article is to present some of the results from a doctoral thesis whose main goal was to establish how and what types of national representation are constructed in Catalan fiction series. Fiction series have been the object of study of a number of researchers in terms of their cultural nature, particularly in the United Kingdom, South America and the United States. Catalonia is starting to have a significant amount of domestic production, exclusively via the promotion of Televisió de Catalunya (TVC). However, to date not many researchers have analysed it from the perspective of national construction.

Some works have studied the question of national identity in relation to the role of TVC (Gifreu, 1989; Tubella, 1999) or taken a detailed look at current-affairs programming (Terribas, 1994) and news programmes (Farré *et al.*, 2003). But studies on the issue of national identity and fiction in Catalonia are few and far between (O'Donnell, 2002; Fecé, 2003). The abovementioned research (Castelló, 2005) did make a contribution to this field, which has already been tackled by authors who focused on studying the domestic production of other countries in relation to national representation and identity (Griffiths, 1993; Buonanno, 1999; Moran, 2000; Ruoho, 2001; Dhoest, 2004). What forms the basis of national construction in the fiction series of TVC? What types of territory are represented? What sorts of linguistic attitudes are fostered? What other types of social and cultural representations are given? These are some of the questions I will raise and try to answer.

I decided to analyse the inhouse production of TVC between 1994 (when the first TV serial *Poble Nou* was aired) and 2003, the end limit for making the research operative and which also marked the end of a political era in Catalonia with the change from a national government

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controlled by the Convergència and Unió coalition towards a left-wing government made up of the forces of what was called the *tripartit*¹. The breadth of this study object required a macro-approximation and gave the work a historical perspective. The study object was formed by the inhouse production of series of more than 13 episodes (miniseries

and coproductions excluded) first broadcast between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 2003, helping the study to acquire greater dimensions, as can be seen in Table 1. Most of the production was TV serials, as Table 2 shows, followed by fiction series, comedy shows and sitcoms.

The study focused on production, which means it did not

Table 1. Inhouse production series from Televisió de Catalunya (1994-2003)

No.	Title	First Shown	Last Shown	Episodes
1	<i>Quico</i> ²	21/04/1994	05/03/1995	26
2	<i>Poble nou</i>	10/01/1994	26/12/1994	197
3	<i>Oh, Europa!</i>	12/06/1994	20/09/1994	13
4	<i>Estació d'enllaç</i>	20/11/1994	20/01/1999	140
5	<i>Secrets de família</i>	16/01/1995	23/12/1995	187
6	<i>Pedralbes Centre</i>	20/04/1995	20/07/1995	13
7	<i>La Rosa</i>	25/09/1995	08/04/1996	29
8	<i>Nissaga de poder</i>	29/01/1996	03/05/1998	476
9	<i>Oh, Espanya!</i>	16/09/1996	30/12/1996	17
10	<i>Sitges</i>	24/10/1996	23/09/1997	32
11	<i>El joc de viure</i>	06/01/1997	04/07/1997	114
12	<i>Dones d'aigua</i>	24/09/1997	25/02/1998	13
13	<i>Laura</i>	12/03/1998	03/09/1999	39
14	<i>Laberint d'ombres</i>	04/05/1998	10/07/2000	469
15	<i>La memòria dels Cargol</i>	18/01/1999	12/07/1999	26
16	<i>Plats bruts</i>	19/04/1999	30/07/2002	73
17	<i>Nissaga: l'herència</i>	12/05/1999	19/01/2000	26
18	<i>Crims</i>	19/03/2000	18/06/2000	13
19	<i>El cor de la ciutat</i> ³	11/09/2000	19/12/2003	683
20	<i>Temps de silenci</i>	17/01/2001	10/04/2002	53
21	<i>Psico express</i>	07/01/2002	24/06/2002	26
22	<i>Mirall trencat</i>	17/04/2002	10/07/2002	13
23	<i>Jet lag</i>	02/10/2002	13/05/2003	39
24	<i>Majoria absoluta</i>	18/10/2002	26/12/2003	37
25	<i>Setze dobles</i>	08/01/2003	24/12/2003	24
26	<i>L'un per l'altre</i>	20/11/2003	25/12/2003	6
Total				2,784

2 *Quico* was born on 17 September 1992, but its first season does not enter the study object. To prepare the study I started from the second season, which began on 21 April 1994.

3 Obviously, *El cor de la ciutat* and other series continued to air in 2004, but I only counted the series broadcast up to 31 December 2003, as explained previously.

Source: Castelló, 2005

Table 2. Inhouse fiction production at TVC, by genre (1994-2003)

<i>Genre</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Episodes</i>
Serial	1,053.50	70.1%	2,126
Series	269.58	17.9%	343
Comedy	119.50	8.0%	171
Sitcom	60.00	4.0%	144
Total	1,502.58	100%	2,784

Source: Castelló, 2005

take into account the impact the series had on audiences, an aspect I intend to deal with in future works. To carry out this production study, I followed the advice of Deacon *et al.* (1999) of using the methodology as a toolbox, and tried to use diverse methodologies and confirm the results obtained. In this case, the analysis focused on documents ('bibles'⁴, internal documents, bibliographies of press articles and production criteria) content analysis (via two samples where I detected and worked on 1,230 cultural and national references)⁵; in-depth interviews (with 23 scriptwriters, programme makers and directors and where 1,214 interactions were systematized) and narrative analysis (looking at main storylines and characters). My experience in this work was positive, both in terms of the methods chosen for the analysis and the sequence in which they were used, as the application of various techniques provides useful information for designing and executing successive methods.

Theoretical Note

The work took a constructivist approach towards national identity. A nation is not a finished fact, but a process of collective construction that is constantly evolving. The way institutions present the nation plays an essential role in this process. The media in general, and television in particular, are fundamental tools in this work of forming a collective identity. This theoretical basis is rooted in Anderson's idea (1983:15) that the nation is an 'imagined community' and is

imagined as 'limited' and 'sovereign'. Fiction becomes a creation space for this collective imagination. This is one of the reasons that has led 'national' television stations to promote inhouse fiction production. Anderson and other authors have emphasised the mass media as one of the main builders of national identity.

The concept of 'imagination' in the generation and dissemination of the nation has also been discussed by Bhabha (1990). The originality of this contribution lies in considering a 'nation' as a narrative construction. It proposes a cultural construction of nationality as a form of social and textual affiliation. This approach towards the nation as a narrative form and thus a potential discourse is similar to the theory of language and gives the term all the implications involved therein, i.e., the nation as a metaphor, subjectivity, interpretation, arbitrary symbol and imagining. This concept has impacted studies on national identity in relation to cultural production, particularly ones that focus on discourse and ideology. I believe we have to look at who is narrating the nation, why it is being explained to us in a particular way and what the thematic motives of the narration are, along with the climaxes of the storylines and the plots that do not appear.

Therefore, when we talk about 'national construction in fiction series' we are referring to the narration of the nation in these audiovisual texts. This forms part of what we understand as the 'creation of the collective imagination'. Although the society that appears in a fiction series is based on reality, it is still a projection of society, and a projection of the nation, if we understand 'nation' not only as a territory and language but above all as a collective will of a public and of a cultural nature linked to a project of sovereignty and which may include other elements related with the type of society we wish to build.

National narration is intrinsic to all cultural production of this type - American and Spanish series also establish their own models of society and tell us about their territory, social structure, culture, history and holidays. In this regard, I agree with Billig (1995) when he says that 'nationalism' is a practice that takes place in all nations, not just in ones without a state or in remote territories. Western nations (the US, the UK, France, etc.) have often practised the most virulent nationalism, which now appears in a 'banal' form in people's day-to-day lives, e.g., on the flag at the school

gate, on the mailbox, in the anthem following a football match, etc. Television is one of the main stages where the 'banal nationalism' that Billig spoke of is practised. At the end of the day, it is a type of 'national normalisation' that cannot exist in societies where there is a 'passionate' national conflict in the public sphere.

Results

This article summarises some of the results obtained from the research based on inhouse TVC production between 1994 and 2003. Possibly the most visible is the evidence of national construction in Catalan fiction series being made above all on the basis of territorial and linguistic references, but there are also other social, historical and cultures references to bear in mind.

The territory was the national element most often present in Catalan fiction series. The quantitative results I analysed suggested that in 72% of the occasions when a territory appeared in a series, it was Catalonia (more than half the times it referred to a town in the Barcelona provinces). 87.21% of time allotted to fiction series at TVC was devoted to productions set in the provinces of Barcelona⁶, 0.27% in Tarragona and 6.2% in Girona. The other fictional shows had no particular or defined location. There was no fictional show set in Lleida during these ten years⁷. Although most of the Catalan population lives in Barcelona, its provinces were approximately 11% over-represented with respect to other areas of Catalonia, if we take into account the demographic weight of the zones⁸. Thus the Catalonia represented in series is eminently urban, while the rural world was sidelined.

These figures could lead us to think that territorial representation in the shows was slightly centralist. However, the in-depth interviews with directors led me to believe that TVC makes an effort to decentralize the location of its series. So what explains this representational bias if the production-policy criterion is one of decentralisation? The reason I discerned from the responses of the directors and script-writers is related to production aspects. The decision to set a series in a particular city is determined by a number of factors, which in order of importance could be defined as follows:

- Proximity to the production centre and cost reductions: a series tends to be located close to the production centre to reduce costs (travelling expenses, meals, hotel costs, etc.).
- Coproductions on the part of local organisations: TVC sought local support in the form of coproductions or facilities that enable cost reductions. This contribution has taken the form of aid, supports or contributions of materials or organisation.
- Territorial balance: TVC tried to seek a territorial balance in the location of its fiction series. This criterion was more for representational and identification reasons than economic and production ones. However, from what I gathered from the interviews with directors and script-writers, as well as what the figures suggested, the first two reasons above ended up prevailing.

There are also other reasons. Sitcom writers said their references were eminently urban and they would find it hard to write a series set in the countryside.⁹ Sitcoms are also a very urban genre. Furthermore, some writers argued that series all over the world are centralist, i.e., the Americans set theirs in big cities like New York and the Spaniards set theirs in Madrid. Piti Espanyol, for example, said there were more opportunities for things to happen in cities.¹⁰ However, the main reason was usually related to the production aspect.

In terms of language, I summarised the results into two basic functions the series accomplished from my point of view: normalisation and regularisation. If we look at what the different heads of programming during the study period said, TVC applied a fairly consistent language policy to its series. The criterion was that all fiction had to be in Catalan. It is clear that the series in Catalan played an extra-textual function of normalisation, as previously there were no fiction series produced in Catalan. They therefore tried to plug a gap in the sphere of popular culture where Catalan was still weak. Possibly the most controversial point was that the series portrayed a basically monolingual society where everyone spoke Catalan. We are here talking about intra-textual normalisation. In other words, the series projected a country where the people speak in Catalan as a matter of course and where the characters are attended to and speak in Catalan whether they have a problem with the police

(normally the Mossos d'Esquadra, an aspect I will look at later on) or visit the doctor or courthouse. The books and media products they consume are also in the Catalan language.

The reason some scriptwriters and directors gave to explain this is that fiction does not reproduce reality as it is but rather plays with a convention that the viewing public can easily interpret. However, other people interviewed had no reticence in arguing that this was a cultural policy criterion. Not all the scriptwriters agreed with TVC's language policy and in fact, at particular times, there were conflicts in this regard. In other words, some scriptwriters advocated a greater presence of Spanish in the series to make the storylines more realistic, while others played with expressions in Spanish for humorous purposes. However, although the criterion most commonly understood among programme makers was that fiction series had to be a tool of linguistic normalisation and be completely in Catalan, in reality the series did not eliminate Spanish from the societies they represented. During ten hours of quantitative content research I detected 70 interventions in Spanish. This means the Catalan series broadcast seven interventions in Spanish per hour.

The study analysed situations where Spanish was present. There were certain times when its presence could be considered innocuous, but when the characters used Spanish in conversations it was usually to promote a model of linguistic behaviour. In any case, the presence of Spanish in dialogues was usually justified within the text - normally it involved an immigrant. This justification was not always given: there were exceptions such as the odd sitcom like *Jet lag*, where the characters mixed Spanish and Catalan. Finally, the presence of linguistic 'otherness' was used to promote two different attitudes:

- Integration: the characters made an effort to learn the Catalan language. This was the case of characters who speak Spanish at the beginning (immigrants who have just arrived), but who slowly learn Catalan.
- Resistance: there were characters who could speak Spanish more easily, without there being just a clear justification in the text, but the other characters spoke in Catalan, thus strengthening an attitude of linguistic resistance.

In any case, language was a fundamental element in national construction in the series. Immigrants adopted it and there was what I call an 'exchange relation'. Multicultural coexistence in Catalan fiction series took place in a transactional fashion. Culturally different characters were accepted in the community, but at the same time they had to adopt Catalan, at least in public – there were some characters who at home or among members of the same culture held conversations in Spanish and even in Arabic¹¹. Although no intervention in Arabic or any other extra-Community language was detected in the sample, there were conversations in five languages of the European Union.

The majority of scriptwriters mentioned this effort at linguistic normalisation. Josep Maria Benet i Jornet said that when establishing a situation of coexistence between Spanish and Catalan, he approaches it with this idea: "You are Catalan and can speak how you want. But look at the examples of people who are not Catalan and how they integrate. Please try to do that".¹² This spirit of setting examples was very common when it came to designing the linguistic treatment of the presence of Spanish. The scriptwriters said that TVC has applied a rigorous control over the presence of Spanish to date. Initially the control was more exhaustive, as Oleguer Sarsanedas said in reference to the early days: "One of the key points that guided us were the foundational objectives of the Catalan Radio and Television Corporation, which were basically the normalisation of the Catalan linguistic space in the audiovisual sphere. It was a basis of definition, a foundational purpose".¹³ Later on, according to various scriptwriters and programme makers, the rules were relaxed and more expressions in Spanish were included, to the point there were even characters who used it on a regular basis. However, this presence was criticised by some scriptwriters, who considered it 'disastrous' for linguistic normalisation. One such critic was Maria Mercè Roca: "In other words, if one character speaks Spanish and all the other characters deal with him in his language, that's ok. It could even be a good idea, because people learn that they don't have to renounce their own language if the other person understands them perfectly well (...). But it turns out that very often they go overboard [introducing Spanish into series], and that goes against Catalan and reduces its use".¹⁴

In terms of linguistic normalisation, it is important to differentiate between two aspects: linguistic variations and formal regularisation. TVC applied the criterion that an oral standard had to be used in the fiction series. This meant that Catalan had to be a living language, as spoken in the street. The question is, which street? The study found that the Catalan used in the fiction series corresponded to an eastern variant, focussed particularly on the provinces of Barcelona and, especially in urban-based sitcoms, the Catalan spoken in Barcelona. In the more than 10 hours analysed, I found only 24 examples of West Catalonia Catalan, 16 of which were classified as Valencian and 8 as from the west of Catalonia and the Ebre region. There were also three examples of the Catalan spoken in the Balearic Islands. In this regard, it can be said that the linguistic model of the series tended to adopt a centralist bias. It is obvious that if most of the series were set in the Barcelona provinces, the type of oral standard would be the Barcelona one. Characters that fell outside this group were few and few between. In fact, in series based outside the Barcelona provinces, there were problems reproducing the oral variant of the place where the action was developed. The most representative case was *Secrets de família*, set in Girona. The production team recognised that the actors found it very hard to reproduce Gironese speech and ended up having to make do the best they could. The scarce presence of linguistic variants other than the Barcelona one is justified among other reasons by the complexity, according to the scriptwriters and directors, of having a wide range of actors with other linguistic variants.

In terms of formal questions, TVC has a language-correction department that reviews all scripts and adjusts them to the right oral standard. The experts eliminate barbarisms, change expressions and seek the most genuinely Catalan way of saying something, or cut out words that don't sound right. During filming, there is a linguist on hand to check that the characters faithfully reproduce the corrected script. This obviously involves a dissemination of correct Catalan and popularises expressions which the situation that Catalan has suffered in the past might have eliminated from daily use. Inside Televisió de Catalunya, according to the director of the Language Service, Francesc Vallverdú, it is felt that the level of Catalan on TV is not representative of the level of the country, but that the oral

language has improved thanks to this normalisation (Sáez, 2002). However, this mechanism created some conflict in the fiction series. Scriptwriters highlighted two basic consequences of this policy related with the fiction genre.

Firstly, regularisation makes drama series less realistic. The fact that nearly all the characters speak correctly is an element that reduces the differences between them. Some scriptwriters complained that once the script had gone through the linguistic sieve, a mechanic ended up speaking as well as a doctor. But there were exceptions, as in the case of characters that represented immigrants, who introduced Spanish expressions and incorrect pronunciation. The second consequence was in relation to the humour genre, in particular sitcoms. Linguistic correctness can make some situations less funny if they are based on language. This was particularly significant in the series *Plats bruts*. The production team reached an agreement with the directors, given the show's good ratings, and the corrective process was toned down, which meant more Spanish expressions, politically incorrect words and event insults appeared. This led to a conflict which eventually eliminated the position of the on-set corrector¹⁵. As can be seen, language correction has interesting effects from the regularisation viewpoint, but at the same time can involve a number of handicaps for the dramatic or comic working of the story.

There were other interesting elements in the fiction series from the viewpoint of cultural identity unrelated to language or territory. In the classification of references, I found I had to include one for commercial trademarks. The detection of brands known by the Catalan audience led me to consider the relationship between trademarks and construction of identity. Trademarks usually have a symbolic load that should be taken into account, e.g., Guinness in the case of the Irish, Ferrari for the Italians, or the Osborne bull for Spaniards are paradigms of the representation of the national character. I recorded the trademarks to determine their type and origin. In just over 10 hours I counted 90 trademarks, i.e., close on nine per hour. One-third of the trademarks that appeared in the series were Catalan, i.e., their main offices were located in Catalonia. The most commonly detected trademarks belonged to beverages (particularly alcoholic beverages), food, department stores and shops and cigarettes. These appearances were

fortuitous for station management, as Televisió de Catalunya, like other television stations, cannot allow product placements in series, a practice banned under the law if there is no clear explanation that it is advertising. However, from the viewpoint of the research work, I would emphasise the majority presence of brands easily recognisable by the audience, particularly *Caprabo*, *Estrella Damm* and *Cacaolat*.

In terms of other Catalan cultural references, there were various types, including artistic, gastronomic and folkloric. The former included artists like Lluís Llach, Mercè Rodoreda, Maria Aurèlia Capmany and Joan Manuel Serrat, to name just a few. In all the cases, there were more Catalan references than ones of other nationalities. Spanish references came second and included ones to *Don Quixote*, *La verbena de la Paloma* and even the singer El Fary. In terms of gastronomy and folklore, the characters celebrated festivals with Catalan traditions. When it was Christmas they cooked traditional Catalan dishes, for example. In this area, I would also point out traditional dress (barretines, espadrilles, etc.), as well as music and dance (Sardana music and dances). Another thing considered part of Catalan popular culture were references to heirs and first-borns and popular festivals and traditions, as well as sayings (e.g., “seny i rauxa”). I should say these elements appeared particularly in the election of the storyline, in episodes where cultural elements appeared; in particular in series like *La memòria dels Cargols* and *Plats bruts*. We can say they appeared in a comic sense and in situations that often bordered on the ridiculous. Catalan folklore was sometimes presented as a ‘course’, old-fashioned tradition. Folklore was thus a reflection of the old Catalonia, of the essences that have been lost, and in comical series could be a source of mirth.

There were also elements of an administrative nature or which referred to institutions. In terms of the security forces, there were six references to the police (without specifying which police force); the Francoist Spanish army (4); the Civil Guard (3), the Mossos d’Esquadra (2), and the Francoist police (1). The Spanish security forces (police, army and Civil Guard) appeared in episodes of series that recalled the Francoist period, in particular in *Temps de silenci* and *Oh, Espanya!* (the latter involved an episode recalling the theft of the Virgin of Núria during the Franco regime). However,

the Mossos d’Esquadra appeared in a standardised form as a daily police force well integrated socially. Institutional references (police, Generalitat, city councils, mayors, etc.) were common in the series, which means they were not just a cultural representation but that, in the series, there were also political systems, laws, etc. Characters appeared before judges, were arrested and related with the institutions on a regular basis. However, I did find an absence of political parties. Fiction presented a society that was fairly non-political and which had other, economic-type references (such as the economic activities the characters were involved in), and even sports references (the most commonly mentioned team was FC Barcelona, although there was the appearance of other teams, such as Real Madrid and RCE Espanyol).

The historical element was also important, particularly in specific series like *Temps de silenci* and *La memòria dels Cargols*. These productions, as the scriptwriters and directors recognised, served to recover the historical memory and to go over, in the area of fiction, some of the most important moments in Catalonia as a national community. Historical references were commonplace in these productions and also appeared in series such as *Setze dobles* and even sitcoms like *Plats bruts*. However, it was possible to detect a social and historical background in all the series. In this regard, the model proposed by O’Donnell (1999) was particularly useful. In a series like *Poble nou*, I found a social background that talked of “the death of an industrial artisan society in decline and the appearance of a modern and cosmopolitan society, as well as the destruction of the old family model”. *Estació d’enllaç* showed “the needs of the middle class and the difficulties of small business owners, as well as a depersonalised and individualistic urban society, where one can still discern a Communist spirit”. I described these macro-stories and defined all the main characters in the series: social class, origin, links, etc. In general, it could be said that fiction series revolved around the middle and upper-middle class, and that there were a number of commonplace storylines, such as “the daily lives of the characters”, “family or partner relations”; “the weight of the past”, “the battle between tradition and modernity”, “the family saga”, “gender roles and the emancipation of women” and “class relations and conflicts about property”. These were the usual big dramatic themes

and also the focus of a large part of the plots in Catalan fiction.

Conclusions: The Nation as a Stage

The cultural and national representation of Catalonia in the fiction series was based particularly on territorial and linguistic references. However, there were others of a social and cultural nature. There were factors of construction of a historical, economic, artistic, gastronomic, folkloric and sporting nature, for example. On the one hand, we could say that national construction in Catalan fiction series was carried out through the projection of a model of society based on a national culture and in Catalan. On the other hand, that does not mean that the series did not represent an 'otherness'. In the inhouse production studied, 'otherness' was represented particularly by Spanish culture, but also by the presence of immigrants. In that regard, the series established a model of society of coexistence and community-mindedness (I coincide in this point with O'Donnell (2002)), i.e., a society that welcomes foreigners and with room for diverse cultures, but where the Catalan language is overwhelmingly predominant.

The nation had a contextual role in the fiction series: it was the stage of action. The characters played out their lives in a national space that had its territory, language, administrations, festivals, cultural system (books, media, etc.), specific social problems, autochthonous industry or economic activity, sports teams, etc. In this sense, they represented a nation with a high level of linguistic and cultural regularisation rather than a nation as a space of political and cultural conflict. These representations, however, were 'a product of, a consequence of', rather than the 'goal of' the series. In other words, the work of the creative and production mechanism did not establish the type of message the programme makers wanted to give beforehand, but rather defined the story, integrating references and shaping the discourse. Many factors were involved in this process, as is obvious in television productions.

However, there are some criteria that determine the type of national representation made in fiction series. They include the following:

- *Promotion of Catalan*: Like the rest of the programming

on TVC, Catalan fiction was an instrument to promote the Catalan language, which meant that all fiction had to be in Catalan and, if possible, series had to reflect language uses that would promote linguistic normalisation and regularisation. This cultural-policy criterion is common to all television production and also applies to fiction. This is a political criterion laid down in the Law creating CCRTV and which the station assumes and openly applies with greater or lesser success.

- *Promotion of Catalan culture*: It is clear that, with the type of fiction content broadcast during this period, there was a shoring up of the country's culture via the appearance on TV of holidays, symbols of cultural identity and elements relating to the history and collective imagination of Catalonia. This type of promotion was less obvious than the promotion of the language. It was carried out with the reinforced appearance of Catalan culture in the society described in the fiction series. These criteria were recommended both by the Advisory Board of CCRTV (1996), and the Catalonia Broadcasting Council (2004), and also form part of the general function of the programming of Televisió de Catalunya as set out in the Law creating CCRTV.
- *Promotion of the territory*: The fiction series were an element of territorial promotion. This was not a written policy (although the Advisory Board of CCRTV did call for it), but rather the criteria tried to ensure the series were set in real locations and served to demonstrate aspects of the territory which could have some benefit. This territorial promotion was more centralist than the Catalan television station originally wanted. While the political guidelines recommended decentralisation, economic imperatives (basically production costs) stopped it from being better achieved during the 10 years studied.
- *Social awareness*: Catalan fiction was a tool of awareness about social matters or problems like illness, immigration, care for the elderly, the emancipation of women, understanding between the generations, equality among citizens and other, more specific topics. In this aspect, the managers admitted they were sensitive to suggestions from the administration. From this viewpoint, fiction presented a model of politically correct behaviour which tried to avoid clichés and to explain the complex Catalan society.

- *National normalisation*: Catalan public television presented in the series a nationally normalised fictional society. This means there was a national representation as a framework where plots were developed. This normalisation might impact the audience or not (an aspect I look at in the continuation to this research work), but it seems clear that it was a function of the setting, understood from the viewpoint of fictional convention rather than an option of realism. Language was a fundamental element of this normalisation, but other aspects also played a role, such as the presence of markedly Catalan institutional, cultural, historical and social references (e.g., the recovery of historical memory). This normalisation also included cultural pluralism. There was the presence of the cultural 'other' which was linguistically integrated (immigrants who learnt Catalan), socially assimilated (their cultural and religious condition, traditions, etc. were respected) and accepted as a full member of the national group. In this aspect, it may be that the 'banal' nationalism that Michel Billig (1995) defined was practised in the society of the series, while the nation appeared as something natural in the day-to-day lives of the characters.

Although the basic goal of the fiction series was to entertain and at the same time obtain maximum ratings, their potential as a representation space cannot be underestimated. Catalonia did not have the capacity to construct a collective imagination through film fiction but it did have a chance, in television fiction, to build a universe where it was presented as a culture and a nation, at least behind closed doors within its own society.

Notes

- 1 The party of the Socialistes de Catalunya, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds.
- 2 *Quico* was born on 17 September 1992, but its first season does not enter the study object. To prepare the study I started from the second season, which began on 21 April 1994.
- 3 Obviously, *El cor de la ciutat* and other series continued to air in 2004, but I only counted the series broadcast up to 31 December 2003, as explained previously.
- 4 A 'bible' is a work document for a long-running series, particularly a serial, which specifies the main storylines, characters and plot evolutions.
- 5 For further information on the application of the content analysis, see Castelló, 2005.
- 6 Nearly all the series were set in Barcelona (12), although there were some set in Girona (1), Manresa (1), Sabadell (1), Penedès (2) and Sitges (1).
- 7 The series set in Western Catalonia, *Lo Cartanyà*, fell outside the study object.
- 8 Figures confirmed with the Idescat 2001 census.
- 9 The study was prepared before the start-up of the series set in Western Catalonia, *Lo Cartanyà*.
- 10 Interview held in Barcelona on 21 January 2005.
- 11 In the case of *El cor de la ciutat*, two characters speak together in Arabic, a conversation which was subtitled in Catalan. However, the type of product does not make these types of situations very common. TVC's criterion was that immigrants would adopt Catalan as a matter of course.
- 12 Interviewed in Barcelona on 5 November 2004.

13 Interviewed in Barcelona on 9 February 2005.

14 Interviewed in Barcelona on 22 December 2004.

15 This came up in the Parliament of Catalonia via a parliamentary question from the Opposition about the language model of *Plats bruts*.

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