

Gender Roles, Family Models and Community-Building Processes in *Poblenou* Comparative Analysis of American, British and Catalan Soap Operas

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Abstract This article explores connections between construction of gender roles, family models and community-building processes in soap opera narratives. The underlying research hypothesis maintains that construction of gender roles and family models in soap operas influences values around which a sense of community is constructed. Using textual analysis as methodology and an intercultural approach, this study compares and contrasts British and American soap operas. This approach allows to set out two contrasting models and investigate whether and to what extent Catalan soap operas adhere to one of them by proposing an original analysis of selected characters and storylines from a corpus of Catalan drama serials. This article also queries in which ways Catalonia's situation as a stateless nation influences a sense of community construction in Catalan soap operas.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background and Methodology. – 3 Models of Family in Soap Operas. – 4 The Construction of a Sense of Community in Soap Operas. – 5 Sense of Community and Narratives of Memory. – 6 Conclusions.

Keywords Soap operas. Gender roles. Family models. Communities. Collective memory. Catalonia.


1 Introduction

In the same way as numerous ethnographic studies of viewing practices have revealed the complexity of soap operas viewership (Ang 1985; Brown 1994; Brundson 1981; Buckingham 1987; Hobson 1982; Livingstone 1990; Modleski 1983; Seiter et al. 1989), the study of soap operas informed by textual analysis can help us reveal the narrative diversity within this genre. The aim of this article is to examine how gender roles have been constructed in soap operas from three different cultural contexts. I will then explore the connections between such constructions and the family

This article is the result of the research I conducted within the research project *Discourses of the Nation and the National* at the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages of University of Oslo.

DOI 10.30687/Ri/2037-6588/2018/110/006

Submitted: 2017-05-24 | Accepted: 2018-06-17

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models they produce. Finally, I will analyse how these representations of gender roles and family models highly influence the construction of a sense of community in soap operas' narratives. Throughout my examination I will question whether and how different sociocultural contexts influence the construction of narrative frames such as gender, family and community. In my analysis I will adopt an intercultural approach, comparing and contrasting these frames in British and American soaps since they represent the two main models for this genre. I will propose an original analysis of Catalan serials in order to determine by which model they were inspired and to which extent. The main object of my analysis will be the soap *Poblenou*, broadcast by TV3, the main channel of the Catalan television public service, in 1994.¹ My examination will be informed by my own analysis of characters and storylines, as well as the interviews which I have conducted with writer Josep Maria Benet i Jornet - creator of *Poblenou* and *Ventdelplà* -, writer Jordi Galceran - co-author of *El cor de la ciutat* - and director Esteve Rovira - main director of *El cor de la ciutat* and *La Riera*.²

My corpus is mainly comprised by soap operas which were on air in the 1980s and 1990s: *Dallas* was broadcast in American between 1978 and 1991, *Dynasty* between 1981 and 1989; in the UK *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* are still on air and their broadcast began, respectively, in 1985 and in 1960. These American and British soap operas were dubbed in Catalan and broadcast by TV3: *Dallas* was broadcast between 1983 and 1992, while *EastEnders* between 1987 and 1996 with the title *Gent del barri*. TV3 began to produce its own soap operas precisely while these programs were being broadcast by the Catalan channel. The presence of American and British soaps on Catalan television in the same time frame as the first Catalan soap was being produced justifies my choice of comparing and contrasting Catalan soaps with their American and British counterparts.³

Moreover, as the reader will notice, many bibliographical sources I employ in this article come from Anglo-Saxon contexts. This choice is justified by the fact that soap operas have been analysed from a gender perspective predominantly by British and American scholars. Another important strand of work on this television genre comes from Latin America (Martín-Barbero 1987; 1995; 2001), but these studies focus more on other aspects, such

1 In this article, other Catalan soap operas will be mentioned: *Nissaga de poder* (1996-1998), *Laberint d'ombres* (1998-2000), *El cor de la ciutat* (2000-2009), *Ventdelplà* (2005-2010) and *La Riera* (2010-2017). All these soap operas have been broadcast by TV3.

2 The interview with Esteve Rovira was conducted in May 2010. The interview with Josep Maria Benet i Jornet was conducted in May 2011. The interview with Jordi Galceran was conducted in September 2015. All three interviews were conducted in Catalan.

3 The comparative approach between Catalan serials and British and American soap operas represents a novelty. For a comparative study of Catalan serials and Spanish and Latin American *telenovelas*, I refer to O'Donnell 2007.

as the recreation of a national imagery or the portrayal of social conflicts. Moreover, the attention given by feminist television criticism to the genre of soap opera is mainly concerned with the 1980s and 1990s, which explains why a significant component of the theoretical sources which inform this chapter dates from the late twentieth century period.

2 Theoretical Background and Methodology

It is important to stress that I do not argue that the structure of family ties and the construction of a sense of community in soap operas reflect social reality. Scholars such as Milly Buonanno (2008, 70-5) have questioned the dichotomy between reality and fiction; they define as erroneous the evaluation criterion of fiction in terms of verisimilitude, that is to say the presumption that fiction should be evaluated for its supposed mimetic function. Media are not an objective or universal representation of the world, but a specific cultural construction and their representations contribute to the construction of determined identities, not mirroring or distorting them. Television images are neither accurate nor inaccurate representations of the world, but the “site of struggles over what counts as meaning and truth” (Barker 1999, 60). In this sense, gender representations in the media, especially television, on account of “its constant accessibility” (Brown 1990, 18), acquire a significant importance, due to “the power of representation to promote or contest domination” (Moseley, Read 2002, 238).

It is no surprise, then, that television, and media in general, are included in Louis Althusser’s (1989) definition of “Ideological State Apparatuses, (ISAs)”, that is social institutions such as family, religion, the political system or, precisely, the media which “operate as overlapping or ‘over-determined’ ideological influences which develop in a people a tendency to behave and think in socially acceptable ways” (Brown 1990, 18). Entertainment plays a crucial role in this sense because even without being “primarily a vehicle for the transmission of ideas [...] even the most emotionally saturated entertainment will also produce ideas, and these will certainly be locatable in terms of ideology” (Lovell 1981, 47). Even fictional shows convey strong messages about “what is normal, good, strange, or dangerous” (Capsuto 2000, 1). Similarly, Buonanno argues that television narratives should be interpreted as an “interpretative practice” (2008, 72) which contributes to a redefinition of “shared conceptions of what is normal and what violates the norm” (75). According to Buonanno, these narratives create “imagined alternatives” of reality which give us “access to a plurality of possible worlds that form an integral part of the multiple realities that inform our life experience” (2008, 75). In particular, Robert Allen, who also considers television as a “performance medium” (1992, 101), maintains that “to a greater extent perhaps than any other fiction,

the soap opera text constantly walks the line between one that can be read as fiction and one that spills over into the experiential world of the viewer” (1985, 91). In my article I also refuse to evaluate soap operas’ narratives through their supposed mimetic function of the ‘real world’. However, I agree with Schank, Tamara and Berman’s statement according to which “we construct and tell stories, in part, to teach ourselves what we know and what we think. We also create stories to teach others about us, what we know and what we think” (2002, 294). Therefore, this article is based on the premise that the way soap operas’ narratives construct gender roles, family models and communities is influenced by the sociocultural context in which they are produced. In order to understand how a particular culture attaches meanings and values to such constructions, it is important to examine how it narrates a repertoire of legitimised stories around them and how these come to be interpreted as common sense.

I will analyse ‘gender’, ‘family’ and ‘community’ as narrative frames. According to Stephen Reese’s definition, “frames are organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (2001, 11). Starting from this definition, James Hertog and Douglas McLeod (2001, 140) argue that frames are not as much cognitive phenomena as they are cultural expressions, since they can be defined as structures of meaning: they derive power and symbolic significance from their use of recognizable myths and metaphors which enjoy a wide acceptance by individuals and institutions within a particular culture. Therefore, Hertog and McLeod (2001, 148) recognise the role of narratives as powerful mechanisms of organisation which are able to create common sense around the meanings constructed about society and roles of its members and groups (144-5). Buonanno (2008, 115) also emphasises the function of narratives, and in particular media narratives, of explaining stories and familiarise them with the aim of maintaining the community. Therefore, media narratives transform specific ideological constructions into common sense (Grandi 1992, 118).

I consider textual analysis to be the most appropriate methodology to achieve the aim of this article since it allows to reveal meanings through bottom-up analysis and through a detailed immersion in the texts. In particular, I will follow the approach to textual analysis which can be appreciated in the work of several Cultural Studies scholars such as O’Donnell, Liebes and Livingstone as well as feminist scholars such as Buonanno and Geraghty. Finally, the advantage of a comparative approach is that if texts reveal something of the society in which they are successful, then “questions of local or global culture may be addressed through textual analysis” (Liebes, Livingstone 1998, 156). In conclusion, this article approaches soap operas as discursive proposals of certain narrative frames, considering that their texts are embedded with interpretative framework influenced by cultural contexts.

3 Models of Family in Soap Operas

Geraghty argues that close attention to the differences in the soap opera genre between the United States and the United Kingdom is crucial in order to explain the different role that women play in soap operas' narratives in these two countries. In analysing these differences, she proposes a distinction between the "patriarchal soap", which corresponds to the American tradition, and the "matriarchal soap", which refers to the British tradition (Geraghty 1991, 62-83).

Commenting on American soap operas, Geraghty (1991, 62) stresses that, at first, it seems ironic that a genre which is deemed to be addressed to women should be so heavily dominated by businessmen. In both *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, the pivotal character is the white male capitalist whose role as the head of a business also gives him his status as the head of the family. In patriarchal soap operas men commute between home and work and there is a mutual invasion of the two realms, whereas women are mainly seen at home, worrying about romances and motherhood. Women might have a job but their access to power is still measured by their ability to deliver (beauty or babies) to their husbands (Liebes, Katz 1993, 11). Therefore, the patriarchal soap opera model is strictly linked to a rigid division of labor. However, as Mulvey (1987, 76) points out, the "rampant male virility" of the patriarch poses a threat to domestic order and much of the drama in these programs derives from the way in which patriarchal power is continually challenged. Male protagonism as the driving force of the plot is only an illusion even in patriarchal soap operas, since it is always female characters' movements which, in fact, act as the disruptive agent in the narrative. It is their refusal of men's control and their constant attempts to challenge the family and the business of the patriarch which constitute the driving force which pushes the narrative forwards.

Male characters in American soap operas, then, are engaged in a continual struggle to maintain control over the family, since at stake in such stories is "not only the family but the patriarchal values around which it is organised" (Geraghty 1991, 69). On the failure of the patriarch depends the continuance of the story. Therefore, although male characters seem to be at the centre of these soap operas, "the pleasure for women viewers of patriarchal soaps is the demonstration that male power, challenged on the one hand by moral questioning and on the other by women's refusal to be controlled, can never be fully or unproblematically asserted" (74). In her analysis of *Dallas*, however, Ang expresses a contrasting opinion. Female characters in this soap opera, she argues, "never rise above their own problematic positions. On the contrary, they completely identify with them" (1985, 123), maintaining the patriarchal status quo unaltered.

British soap operas depict a contrasting model of family compared to their American counterparts. They are more open and more dominated by female

characters, who are not only represented as the moral and emotional centre of their families but very often as their financial support. This narrative and emotional predominance of female characters is the reason why Geraghty (1991) defines them as matriarchal soap operas: in their model of the nuclear family, British serials depict women as the linchpin of the family, able to sustain it whatever happens, overcoming obstacles and crisis.

In this aspect, Catalan soaps are clearly inspired by their British counterparts. In *Poblenou*, *El cor de la ciutat*, and *Ventdelplà*, the predominance of women in the narratives is manifest. In fact, all these series begin with a dramatic change in a female character's life: in *Poblenou*, Rosa wins the lottery; in *El cor de la ciutat*, Clara is released from prison and returns home; and in *Ventdelplà*, Teresa goes away from Barcelona to escape from her abusive husband, finding refuge in the town where she was born.

Poblenou is the serial that would mostly fit in the matriarchal soap opera paradigm: the narrative is dominated by female characters and Rosa, in her attempt to keep her family together, in spite of everything, is among the characters on Catalan television the one who most closely resembles analogous female characters in British soap operas. However, harmony in the family is not represented as an ideal; on the contrary, in the final episode, Rosa finally decides to end an unhappy marriage and the soap opera depicts the journey she undertakes to reach this decision. In the following paragraphs, I am going to examine the character of Rosa, which exemplifies the protagonist of the matriarchal soap opera and contrasts with the construction of gender roles in the patriarchal soap opera.

Rosa is represented as a working-class, uneducated housewife. The audience is told nothing about her hobbies or friends and she is initially only shown within the domestic sphere, often doing housework such as cooking, cleaning, and mending socks. Therefore, the immediate impression is that Rosa's life evolves entirely around her family and her roles of wife and mother. She has three children: Ferran, who is twenty-one years old; Anna, who is seventeen; and Martí, who is fourteen. In the first episode, Rosa admits to her daughter that she feels she is getting old and that she is afraid of thinking about what her life is going to be like when her three children will have grown up:

ROSA El Ferran ja és gran i tu també. I el Martí ho serà dintre de quatre dies. Avui m'he mirat al mirall i m'he adonat que m'estic fent vella.

ANNA Hauries de treballar. Et distrauries.

ROSA De què vols que treballi!? Si, a part de cuinar, no sé fer res. Vaig ser l'última estúpida dels temps que les dones deixaven de treballar quan es casaven.

The archetype represented by Rosa is contrasted throughout the serial with that embodied by the character of Helena. A teacher in secondary school, He-

lena is represented very often doing activities concerned with her job, such as marking exams or writing a review of an anthology of nineteenth century poets. Her professional career is very important to her and she is dedicated to it, so much so that at the end of the series she is promoted to head of school. She is the single mother of a seventeen-year-old girl, Júlia, and her interpretation of sexuality and relationships clashes pointedly with Rosa's: "Sóc una persona lliure, sense problemes. Vaig amb un home que m'agrada i quan l'experiència s'ha acabat, adéu-siau, i va ser bonic mentre va durar", she once tells her lover, Enric. Helena's decision to raise Júlia by herself also contrasts with Rosa's apparently traditional family. "No en necessites tu, de pare", she tells her daughter.⁴ Helena's belief that what is generally called a 'traditional' family is not necessarily the best option for raising a child is restated in a dialogue with Enric: "La figura del pare no és necessària", she tells him. Her conviction clashes with Rosa's system of values which, at the beginning of the soap opera, prompts her to make whatever sacrifice is needed in order to keep her family together. When she finds out that her husband had an affair with another woman, she decides not to divorce on account of what she interprets as the wellbeing of her children: "Per a ells continuaré fent el que feia fins ara: cuinaré, netejaré la roba... Tu no t'ho mereixes, però ells s'ho mereixen tot", she tells her unfaithful husband.

However, during the course of the serial, Rosa is forced to go through some experiences which lead her to reconsider aspects of her life she had always thought to be unquestionable. First of all, the routine of Rosa's life is broken when she finds out that she has won the lottery - enough money to move to a new flat and convert the shop which belongs to Antonio's aunt Victòria into a supermarket. However, all these choices are made by her husband, who excludes Rosa from any decision. Antonio's patronising attitude is clearly visible in one scene in which he refuses to show his wife the estimate for the shop because he is convinced that she would not understand it. Later, Victòria finds out that Antonio is trying to open the supermarket only under his name, thus excluding his wife from the ownership of the business. This is the first time we see Rosa reacting to her husband's deceptions: "Si pel llit, per la cuina i per pujar-te els fills serveixo, també serviré per ser la propietària d'aquest supermercat. O serveixo per tot o no serveixo per res", she warns him.

Rosa's attitude changes radically once she becomes the co-owner of a catering business with her friend Bernat. When Antonio, who disapproves of his wife working alongside another man, demands to know with whom she spends her time when she is not at home, she replies: "Jo vaig amb qui vull, em veig amb qui vull i tu no n'has de fer res". She undergoes a significant change, also because of some other events which prompt her

4 In fact, after a few episodes, we realise that Helena is not Júlia's biological mother but her aunt. We find out that Helena's sister died after being abandoned by Júlia's father and, since then, Helena has raised Júlia as her daughter without any help.

to question her system of values: she finds out that her brother has a relationship with another man and that her teenage daughter is pregnant. This change of behaviour is also reflected by a change of image: with Helena's help, she starts to take care of her physical appearance, she dyes her hair, she changes the way she dresses, so much so that she begins to wear trousers, something that she never does in the first part of the series. Finally, Rosa decides to separate from her spouse for good, refusing the patriarchal model of family imposed by her husband:

Tu no tens ni idea del que sento. Mai no l'has tingut. I mai no t'has preocupat de saber-ho. Això és el que més em dol. Però s'ha acabat, Antonio, aquesta vegada s'ha acabat de debó.

Rosa even refuses Bernat's proposal because she wants to try, for once, to live by herself. At the end of the soap opera, the victimised attitude has gone together with the resignation with which she had always uncritically accepted everything that would happen in her life: Rosa is now a confident woman, willing to begin a new life in her forties. It is precisely in the character of Rosa and her journey towards freedom and awareness that we find the main moral of the soap opera. At the beginning of the serial, Rosa symbolises the average working-class woman of the *postguerra*, educated under the Franco's regime in its chauvinist interpretation of women's role and family structure. She married Antonio when she was still very young, and when he was the only lover she had ever had, and then she had three children. During the course of the soap opera, through a series of events, she changes and becomes aware of her value as a person and as a woman. Therefore, the depiction of Rosa clashes with the representation of women which Ang recognises in American soap operas and, in particular, *Dallas*. As I have already illustrated, Ang argues that female characters in *Dallas* never question the patriarchal status quo, believing in its values, such as the consideration of the unity of the family as more important than the happiness of its members – especially female ones – and the indissoluble link between womanhood and motherhood, according to which a woman cannot lead a satisfactory life without having children.

It is also important to point out that in *Poblenou*, as in most cases in Catalan serials, the divorce or separation comes from the woman's initiative. *Poblenou* clearly links their achievement of economic and financial independence to their awareness of gender discrimination. For example, we have seen how Rosa's changed attitude towards her husband and her role as wife and mother is also the result of her decision to open a catering business by herself, thus finding for the first time a space in her life which is completely separated from her family. Divorce in Catalan soap operas is represented as positive if the marriage is damaging for a member of the couple, especially the woman. Another example in *Poblenou* which

proves this statement is Charo's decision to leave her abusive husband. Moreover, both *Poblenou* and *El cor de la ciutat* include a couple - Marta and Grau in the former, Carme and Jordi in the latter - in which the woman decides to end the relationship after she finds out her husband's infidelity. Additionally, in Catalan soap operas negative values are attached to those who express the opinion that a couple must stay together regardless of conflicts which may cause the unhappiness of one of the members. In *El cor de la ciutat*, Jordi's parents think that Carme should stay with her husband ignoring his numerous adventures: "El que compta és que esteu junts, com heu d'estar, heu passat mitja vida junts i així heu d'estar". In *Poblenou* Cristina is very unhappy with her husband but she prefers to maintain the appearance of a perfect marriage to defend the social prestige of her family, even at the cost of her own happiness and the possibility of a loving relationship. She tells to a friend:

Jo no dic que una dona no hagi de treballar, però hi ha moments que si ella no hi és, malament rai. Ara que mira de què m'ha servit a mi pensar d'aquesta manera. Al meu home gairebé no li veig el pèl. Si jo i l'Eudald estem junts és ben bé perquè a aquestes edats i en la nostra situació és més còmode aguantar i callar.

Therefore, she represents the risk of internalisation by women of patriarchal values through socialisation. Indeed, some female characters of her generation, though not all, are shown as being torn between contradictory feelings. Their personal and emotional dissatisfaction clashes with what they have been taught all their lives about how they should behave and the priorities they should have - they have been educated "a l'antiga" as Rosa frequently says. At the same time, *Poblenou* also attempts to convey the emotional complexity involved in the breakup of a marriage. After spending all her life with the same man, Rosa admits to her daughter that she feels lonely, but at the same time, she feels "més lluire, valorada i no un zero a l'esquerra". Therefore, in *Poblenou* marriages characterised by a patriarchal model end up in divorce and women are always depicted as the driving force for change.

4 The Construction of a Sense of Community in Soap Operas

In matriarchal soap operas, when family is characterised by equal gender roles, it tends to be depicted as a place of safety, so much so that "it provides a model for the structures of the wider community" (Geraghty 1991, 83). The construction of a sense of community is a crucial aspect of matriarchal soap operas, which for this reason have been defined also as "community soaps" (Liebes, Livingstone 1998, 174). By contrast, Ameri-

can serial dramas' narratives are usually dominated by one single family and, therefore, are defined as "dynastic soaps" (174). The chosen model has consequences for the representation of power structures, social locus and gender relations in the possible world of the soap opera, in this way offering audiences specific constructed versions of what constitutes everyday life. These constructions are necessarily influenced by cultural and national differences. As Liebes and Livingstone argue, "while there are many successful formats available for import across national boundaries, certain choices are made, and these surely reveal the cultural assumptions and audience expectations of a particular nation" (1998, 172).

The importance played by the construction of a sense of community in British soap operas is expressed by Richard Dyer, who points out that "life in *Coronation Street* [...] is defined as community, interpersonal activity on a day-to-day basis" (1981, 4), while Suzi Hush, ex-producer of *Coronation Street* stresses this emphasis on community in terms of its emotional role: "the sense of community is a basic human requirement. It feeds our need for gossip, curiosity, belonging" (Franks 1982). The narrative of British soap operas aspires to a model of a harmonious community as an ideal which is never realised because the format of the genre denies a final ending. Although the community can never be finally established, its ideals are clearly considered as an aspiration. These values "are based on an ethos of sharing, an acceptance of each other's individual characteristics and a recognition that everyone has a role to play if the community is to continue" (Geraghty 1991, 85).

Therefore, as James Curran argues, what is valued by the community in British soap operas is the diversity of its members and "a sense of social cohesion and belonging" (2002, 207). Curran makes a connection between British public service broadcasting and the community orientation of its serials and contrasts this with the "glamourised, 'upscale' settings that dominate much of American domestic drama" (207). Liebes and Livingstone also connect the community soap opera model, which they define as the "most European" subgenre of soap opera, with "a strong public broadcasting tradition" (1998, 172). Likewise, in his comparative study, Hugh O'Donnell points out that most European soap operas promote "values of solidarity [and] caring for and about others, defending other people's rights, compromises and co-operation" (1999, 222-3). Similarly, Gallego (1999, 21) describes the society constructed in Catalan serials as democratic, integrating, and open.

This is not only true of European soap operas, as demonstrated by Purnima Mankekar's ethnographic study of Indian soaps, which, she states, transmit "explicit social messages" (1999, 303). In addition, with reference to the huge popularity of *telenovelas* in Latin America, Martín-Barbero suggests that one reason for this could be their "capacity to make an archaic narrative the repository for propositions to modernize some dimensions

of life" (1995, 280). It is interesting to link this "didactic project assigned to soaps [...] in which productions (often state-controlled), text and reception come together in different ways to present a version of the modern state" (Geraghty 2005, 12) to the role of women as a "modernizing force" (O'Donnell 2002, 222). From this perspective, we can see, therefore, that the representation of community in British and Catalan soap operas is intrinsically linked to its matriarchal structure.

Moreover, the community soap opera model typically represents groups who tend to be ignored in other genres, for example, people belonging to ethnic or sexual minorities or age groups who receive little space in other formats, especially the elderly. Therefore, this kind of soap opera plays a social role in exploring shifting and marginal identities, privileging "difference over homogeneity, understanding over rejection" (Hayward 1997, 191) and in promoting "sympathetic understanding of the others" (O'Donnell 2002, 207). What Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley define as "the moral economy" (1992) of a soap opera is strictly related to the kind of connection it establishes with the viewers. Community soap operas, which are generally "mimetic", i.e. they position the characters at the same level as the viewers, are also prone to discuss social issues and to be "socially responsible" (Liebes, Livinstone 1998, 173). On the other hand, dynastic soap operas, which depict their characters as socially and economically superior with respect to the average viewers, tend to avoid tackling social issues (Liebes, Livinstone 1998, 173). For instance, because their characters are upper class, in American dynastic soaps the daily care of babies and children is unproblematic as it is the everyday management of their lives. In this way, the "processes of daily life are invisible" (Liebes, Livinstone, 732) and romance can occupy centre stage. In British and Catalan community soap operas, the processes of everyday life are portrayed in details - the characters go to the supermarket, the shops, they pick up children from school, and so forth. All these activities provide opportunities for neighborly interactions, emphasising the interdependence of the characters and, consequently, a sense of community-belonging.

Moreover, in community soap operas, the characters face a wide range of problems, such as unemployment, illness, teenage pregnancy, racism, and domestic violence. These issues are mainly dealt with a strong pedagogic tone, so much so that *EastEnders*, one of the main examples of the British community soap subgenre, has been defined as a "teacherly text" (Buckingham 1987, 102). In particular, with respect to the program's representation of ethnicity, Buckingham comments that "the crucial question is not whether *EastEnders*'s black characters are 'realistic', but how the serial invites its viewers to make sense of questions of ethnicity" (102). When I mentioned these reflections on the community soap opera model during the interview that I conducted with him, Josep Maria Benet i Jornet told me that:

Nosaltres també ho vam fer això. També vam posar immigrants diverses vegades. I sempre des d'un punt de vista positiu. Sempre per explicar que aquesta gent és maca, aquesta gent és fantàstica. Però fent trampes. No ho sé, fem que aquesta persona de sobte ajudi i en un moment en què els altres no saben què fer, ell o ella sap què fer, i per tant salva la situació. O posem una noia que s'enamora d'un negre i acaben bé, fan parella. [...] Sí, sí, tot això ho hem fet. A veure, en definitiva, sí, és didàctic. Som didàctics. Declaradament didàctics, en les sèries.

In a similar vein, in the interview I conducted with him, Esteve Rovira also commented that “sens dubte que la nostra feina també és educar socialment i explorar temes”. This emphasis on the didactical function of Catalan serials is also acknowledged by scriptwriters Enric Gomà and Jordi Galceran who avow that, in some cases, more time is spent discussing the moral than the storyline. They affirm that, although they do not believe soap operas are able to influence people's lives, they can serve to “crear estats d'opinió” (quoted in Ortega Lorenzo 2002, 333). In the interview I conducted with him, Galceran stated that “la ficció serveix per crear un imaginari i ajudar a la gent, d'alguna manera, a tenir una certa conscienciació del món”.

Delving into the didactic aspect of community soap operas, I would argue that this is particularly evident in the way Catalan soap operas treat the issue of gender violence, which is given a significant importance in all serials. In *Poblenou*, for example, this issue is dealt with through two characters, Rosa and Charo. Both women are working-class, although they belong to different age groups: Rosa is in her forties whereas Charo is in her twenties. Both Rosa and Charo are subjected to sexual violence by their husbands, and thus the storylines focus their attention on domestic violence. The objectification of women and an interpretation of marriage as an 'ownership' certificate of the female body is harshly criticised by the series. This possessive conceptualisation of marriage is represented by Antonio's words in the rape scene: “Tinc dret a tocar-te. Sí, tens la culpa d'estar jo calent [...] Sóc el teu home i tinc unes necessitats [...] Ets meva, ets meva, ets meva”. Moreover, through the character of Charo, the serial deals with the danger of self-hatred and the sense of guilt that some victims feel after being abused: “Som casats, de moment. Encara és el meu marit, deu tenir els seus drets”, she says to her employer and friend Helena, whose indignant rejoinder expresses the moral of the soap opera:

Els seus drets? Quins drets? Els drets de fer-te servir com i quan vulgui? Com una baieta, com un fregall de cuina? Estàs equivocada, eh? Charo, tu ets una persona, com ell, igual que ell. Ni dintre ni fora del matrimoni cap home té dret a violentar el cos d'una dona sense el seu consentiment. Ho entens això? [...] Això que el teu home t'ha fet per la força bruta és un delictes.

The issue of institutionalised violence is also dealt with when Charo decides to report the crime. She has to face the prejudices of the policemen in charge of the case, something which, she says on one occasion, has even managed to make her feel guilty about what happened. When I drew this storyline to Benet i Jornet's attention, he also recalled the character of Teresa in *Ventdelplà*. As I have mentioned earlier, the serial begins with this female character escaping from her abusive husband, Damià. What is important in this storyline, in Benet i Jornet's opinion, is that both Teresa and Damià belong to the upper-middle class, since she is a doctor and he is a lawyer. According to Benet i Jornet, this kind of storyline has always been linked exclusively to working class people, thus, hiding the fact that gender violence occurs irrespective of social class.

Benet i Jornet concluded his argument about the didactic aspirations of Catalan soap operas by stating that:

[N]ormalment fas més històries sentimentals, de vegades dramàtiques, de vegades d'intriga, o el que sigui, però també procurem posar problemes reals, explicant-los a la gent i explicant, si tenen solució, la manera de solucionar-los, i si no en tenen, què s'hauria de fer per...bé, ja m'entens.

Similarly, talking about the success of Catalan soap operas in terms of audience ratings, the same Benet i Jornet had already emphasised the role of the series in transmitting social values in an interview published by *El País* on 25 April 1998:

No conectamos con la sociedad por los temas que tratamos, sino que lo que influye al público es lo que subyace tras la trama. Y debajo de las historias hay información: sobre un modelo de vida de tolerancia, de respeto y de entendimiento del mundo que nos rodea. Eso es lo que llega.⁵

Therefore, Catalan soap operas share with their British counterparts an aspiration to educate the public about social issues. As I have already mentioned, this pedagogic tone is a crucial aspect of the community soap opera model. Moreover, community soap operas tend to create what Badia and Berrio define as a national project of society (1997, 235), that is, they aspire to represent a supposedly ideal society instead of being exclusively linked to an epistemology of realism. As O'Donnell (2002) observes, one of the key features in Catalan serial dramas is the emphasis on the strength of community spirit, on its collectivist character, on the importance of build-

5 Cendros, Teresa (1998). "El nuevo serial de TV-3 prescinde de los temas tabú y apuesta por la intriga". *El País*, 25 de abril. URL http://elpais.com/diario/1998/04/25/catalunya/893466454_850215.html (2018-11-17).

ing a society through negotiation of its differences against the neoliberal ideology of individual success.

However, in the construction of a sense of community, important differences can be noted between British and Catalan soap operas. The emphasis in British serials on the concept of class, and particularly the representation of the lower class, is very important in building up a sense of community.⁶ Class distinctions are also used to mark the boundaries of the community. The strategy is evident in *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*. In both series a clear line is traced between the people who live in the Street or the Square – who belong to the working class – and the outsiders, usually upper-middle-class people.

By contrast, critics have observed that class is not used to create a sense of community in American soap operas, since the actions are understood in terms of the family and the individuals. Feuer (1984, 14) argues that in these programs “the economics of multinational corporations” are dealt with not in terms of class but “of the familial conflicts which control the destinies of these companies”. Similarly, Alvarado, Gutch, and Wollen suggest that “wealth creation is narrativised as the outcome of the actions of individuals rather than classes” (1987, 163). In this sense, Liebes and Livingstone consider that programs of this kind are “less expressive of any particular cultural environment” and that they do not “reflect the cultural concerns of their country” (1998, 174-5). I would argue, however, that this assessment of American soap operas is problematic. By no means, the lack of social conflicts and issues related to class in dynastic soap operas’ narrative structure is indicative of a less strong connection of such programs with the cultural context in which they are produced. In fact, a classless society is an important fiction within American culture and society. During Richard Nixon’s address to the Soviet People in 1959 – broadcast by radio and television – , he proclaimed that the United States had nearly achieved “freedom and abundance for all in a classless society” (Nixon 1959, 717). Therefore, by sustaining this fiction, these serials prove to be very much an expression of a “particular cultural environment”. This fiction of classlessness also explains why in American soap operas a sense of community is disregarded in favour of a more individualist perspective.⁷

In spite of the fact that Catalan serials transmit a sense of community which is very similar to that expressed in British soap operas, as has

6 Examining the role of class in *Coronation Street*, Richard Dyer (1981, 3-4) draws parallels between Richard Hoggart’s “growing portrait of the warmth of the working-class mother” in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and the soap’s “plethora of splendid mums”.

7 This fiction has become increasingly unsustainable following the economic crisis, as the Wall Street demonstrations against the ‘richest 1%’ made evident. However, at least until the 1980s, it was an important part of political discourse, certainly as far as Reagan and the New Conservatives are concerned. This is the period when *Dallas* and *Dynasty* were created.

already been argued, the emphasis on class is not, however, a key characteristic of Catalan program making in this genre. The community is demarcated by geographical limits – the district of Poblenuou or the town of Ventdelplà – but not through class distinctions. This is particularly evident in *Ventdelplà*, where a sense of community is linked to the small town, regardless of the social status of its inhabitants, whether they are doctors, shopkeepers, or farmers. The only two Catalan soap operas which pay attention to class differences are *Nissaga de poder* and, more explicitly, *Laberint d'ombres*, which portray working environments where representatives of different social strata exist alongside each other: the family owner of the Cava lands in *Nissaga de poder* and the family owner of the factory in *Laberint d'ombres* share the same space with their employees, and thus these differences cannot be ignored. For instance, storylines of several episodes were dedicated to depicting the organisation of strikes caused by social conflicts.

In *Poblenuou*, a sense of community is also created by a distinction – that between the inhabitants of the old part of the district and those of the new one. Even if this separation also implies class differences – the new part of the district, with its more expensive apartments, is necessarily inhabited by upper-middle class people – the emphasis is not on their social status, but rather on their condition as outsiders. In this sense, the community is not constructed through class but through a sense of belonging to a place, with its history and shared experiences. *El cor de la ciutat* represents a shift in the way a sense of community is constructed. In this soap opera, the community is not linked to a specific place. Although the serial is set in the district of Sant Andreu, the geographical setting does not suppose a demarcation of the community between insiders and outsiders. The community in *El cor de la ciutat* is depicted as much more open and is mainly based on personal relationships and friendships. According to this constructed environment, everybody is entitled to belong to the community, provided that he/she is willing to participate in its network of solidarity and mutual help. The most recent Catalan soap opera, *La Riera*, supposes a complete contrast with its predecessors. In this soap opera, a sense of community is not constructed at all. The serial is set in the fictitious town of Sant Climent but this does not articulate a sense of identity or belonging. Furthermore, friendships and relationships are seen from an individual perspective, rather than a collective one. Unlike *El cor de la ciutat*, everybody does not know everybody else in *La Riera*: there are characters that do not have any kind of relationship between each other and there is not a sense of collective solidarity. It can be argued that, instead of a community, in *La Riera* the protagonists are a group of nuclear families who just happen to live in the same town. It does not come as a surprise that, among Catalan serials, *La Riera* is also the one which less fits the definition of matriarchal soap since there is a balance between

male and female characters who have equal importance in the evolution of the narrative. According to Galceran, the pedagogic function that was so relevant for *Poblenou* and *El cor de la ciutat* is also less evident in the most recent Catalan soap opera. Therefore, this analysis of *La Riera* reinforces my argument which links the matriarchal narrative structure together with the construction of a sense of community and the social responsibility of this kind of programs.

5 Sense of Community and Narratives of Memory

The construction of a sense of community in British soap operas seems to be at odds with their attachment to an epistemology of realism so often claimed by writers and producers of these programs.⁸ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a neighbourhood in a big city such as London or Manchester, where everybody knows each other, shopping is always done in the corner shop, celebrations are shared with the whole community, whose members – independent of their origins or age – meet up to organise traditional festivities or marriages. In contemporary Western society a marriage is much more likely to be organised by the families of the two spouses than by the entire community; it is usually celebrated in private among family friends, like the marriage between Oriol Palau and Mireia Flaquer in *La Riera*, where not even all their work colleagues are invited but just those who are close friends.

In order to explain the lack of correspondence between the claimed epistemology of realism and the representation of community in British soap operas, Geraghty explains that the sense of community created in these programs “refer[s] to an architecture of the past which, because of its smaller scale and layout, has connotations of a lost neighbourliness” (1991, 88). She argues that references to the community’s own past are linked to a general sense of the ‘good old days’ to provide a perspective on the present: “It is in the past that the most perfect expression of the community’s values are to be found and, at times, characters mourn this lost past of prosperity and safety where values were more secure” (94). The past thus fulfills the function of providing an example of how an order can be created which will enable the community to survive.

In this sense, especially in the first decades of British soap operas, the most common external point of reference – meaning one that does not refer specifically to the fictional community created by soap – has been the experience of World War II, which has been used to provide a model

8 For example, Julia Smith, the original producer of *EastEnders*, remarked on a TV phone-in celebrating its second anniversary (BBC Television’s Open Air, 19 February 1987), “We don’t make life, we reflect it”.

for how to behave. Much has been written on how World War II provides British culture with images and references which are constantly drawn upon and reworked in different contexts (Hurd 1984).⁹ This process has a particular resonance in British serials since the sense of the community which is at the heart of the representation of the War is also central to the soap opera's narrative. Indeed, this period is often perceived as a time when the concepts of community in general and of Britishness in particular were less problematic than they have been in the last forty years.

By contrast, in the construction of a sense of community in Catalan soap operas, we do not find the same emphasis on the past as 'the good old days'. This representation would be problematic taking into account that referring to the last century in Catalonia inevitably leads to considering the period of the dictatorship. In the interview I conducted with him, Galceran explains the lack of references towards the past in the following terms: "Nosaltres som un país que 'El passat, millor oblidar-lo' [...] [La dictadura] és com un parèntesi que ens agradaria agafar-lo i treure'l, que no hagués existit. I amb la ficció també ho representem així". Therefore, references to the past in Catalan soap operas are rare. The most notable exception is provided by the character of Victòria in *Poblenou*, who often recalls anecdotes about her father, who fought in the Civil War. However, Victòria's memories and stories are not aimed at transmitting nostalgia for the past, but rather at conserving a collective memory of the War and the anti-Francoist resistance.

On the one hand, this character follows the representation of older women in British soap operas as depositary of compassion and wisdom (Geraghty 1991, 82). On the other hand, Victòria is also far from stereotypes of narrow-mindedness and petulance, to which many older female characters in British serials have been relegated. Instead, Victòria has a youthful spirit: "Això de ser gran o de ser jove depèn de la sang que hi ha a les venes", she says very often. As her best friend Andreu says, Victòria is full of "alegria de viure". She wants to do everything by herself and she hates being treated like an old person: "Qui no se l'escampa sol, no se l'escampa mai" is her motto. She is represented as a good-humoured person, who always has witty remarks to make about everything, including her late husband and his quality as a lover – or, rather, his lack of it:

9 A recent example of the powerful imagery inspired by World War II is provided by Ken Loach's film *The Spirit of '45* (2013). According to the synopsis on its official page, the film is "[a]n impassioned documentary about how the spirit of unity which buoyed Britain during the war years carried through to create a vision of a fairer, united society" (<http://www.thespiritof45.com/About-The-Film/A-Brief-Synopsis>, 2018-11-22).

VICTÒRIA El meu difunt marit de bona voluntat ja n'hi posava però mai va tenir gaire empenta [...] del Fidel no en parlaré malament, però era un soca que s'adormia pels racons!

ANDREU Fas bé de no voler-ne parlar malament.

VICTÒRIA Això mai. Ara, és que no va arribar a fer-me ni un fill! [...] En fi, el Fidel, me l'estimava molt.

ANDREU Prou que es veu!

She has no children but she does not feel any kind of frustration about not being a mother. She projects her maternal feelings onto her nephew, Antonio, and she behaves like a grandmother with his children. In this aspect as well, she is comparable to British elderly female characters or, as Geraghty (1991, 97) defines them, the “grandmother figures”, whose “role in transmitting the values of the community extends well beyond the boundaries of [their] own family and the firm guidance [they offer] is backed up by genuine concern for those whom [they adopt]”. Indeed, another aspect which differentiates British and Catalan community soap operas from American dynastic soap operas is that in the latter the function of mothering (or grandmothereing) is almost exclusively performed by biological mothers (and grandmothers). On the other hand, in community soap operas, fictive kinship is common, establishing “gift/obligation relationship[s]” (Liebes, Livingstone 1994, 731) not based on direct bloodline but on what we can be defined as “organic solidarity” in Durkheimian’s terms. The lack of a sense of community in American serials also explains its one-generational structure. The focus on love relationships of the dynastic soap opera model entails the exclusion of children and teenagers as well as elderly mothers and grandmothers – the invisibility of all characters outside the reach of romance and sexual bonds. By contrast, generational distinctions are a crucial characteristic of the community soap opera model and, in particular, great emphasis is given to the role elderly people, especially women, play in maintenance of the community structure. Geraghty (1991, 82) defines these “grandmother figures” as “guardian[s] of the community’s tradition”.

This definition precisely describes the role that the character of Victòria plays in the narrative structure of *Poblenou* and her constant efforts to keep alive the memory of what she perceives to be her community. In the case of Victòria, the physical and emotional environment which constitutes her community is interpreted both as local – her district – and national – Catalonia. The attachment she feels to her local community is expressed through the emotional bond she has with her little shop, which was first her grandfather’s and then her father’s. Everybody keeps telling her that she should sell it but she categorically refuses to think about it: “La botiga és mitja vida. Aquí vaig néixer i aquí moriré quan calgui. Encara falta molt de temps gràcies a Déu”. This shop is so important to her becau-

se it is linked to her memories of her father, since it was here that he used to meet his friends just before the Civil War: “Un home d’esquerres, un republicà de tota la vida, haver de veure com els feixistes ocupaven el poder”, she once says about him and how he changed after Franco’s victory.

Victòria also feels a very strong emotional bond to Poble Nou, the district where she has lived all her life. “D’aquí no em treu ningú”, she says to Andreu. She has lived through the Civil War and she feels profoundly free-spirited, politically engaged, and linked to her environment and its history. However, as I have already observed, this sensitivity towards the past does not make her an old-fashioned woman. She could be defined instead as progressive, always concerned about the conditions of socially and economically disadvantaged people, and fighting with enthusiasm against the injustices she sees. For example, she criticises Rosa for distancing herself from her brother Xavier because of his sexuality and his relationship with another man.

When Anna, her nephew’s daughter, confides to her that she is pregnant, Victòria gives the girl her unconditional support:

VICTÒRIA Jo penso que tot els fills han de ser desitjats, tenir-ne és molt maco [...] però també penso que tenir-ne és una responsabilitat molt gran i de vegada no tothom és capaç d’assumir-ho. [...]

ANNA Què faig, tieta?

VICTÒRIA No sóc jo qui t’ho ha de dir. Ets tu mateixa, però Anna, facis el que facis, decideixis el que decideixis, et farà costat.

However, it is also true that the strong feelings she has towards her community lead her to reject the new part of the district, the one which was rebuilt for the Barcelona 1992 Olympics Games, and its inhabitants. She feels betrayed, as she expresses in the following dialogue:

VICTÒRIA No hi entro gaire [in the storehouse of her shop] perquè em porta massa records. Aquí es reunien els amics del meu pare.

ANTONIO I aquella porta donava a les fàbriques i a les vies.

VICTÒRIA Quan la fàbrica funcionava [...]. Quan van tancar les fàbriques, això d’aquí fora es va convertir en un niu de delinqüents. El Fidel i jo vam decidir de mantenir la porta ben tancada.

ROSA Ara no hi ha ni vies ni fàbriques. Hi ha un barri nou la mar de maco.

VICTÒRIA Ja us el regalo. Aquí, el que havien de fer-hi, eren jardins per a la gent del barri vell.

ANTONIO Ja n’han fet de jardins!

VICTÒRIA I pisos cars! Amb gent nova que es queda amb el que havia de ser nostre.

When Antonio finally convinces her to convert the little shop into a supermarket, he opens the door of the storehouse and he wants all the family to be present for this “acte simbòlic i historic”:

Antonio: Obrirem la porta del magatzem que fa anys que no s’ha obert.
Deixarem que corri un aire nou entre el davant i el darrere i unirem així el passat amb el futur. [He opens the door] El barri nou.
ANNA Que maco!
VICTÒRIA No sé què hi veus de maco. No em deixaré enredar.

After the dialogue, we see a panoramic view of the new part of the district with its high and modern buildings. However, at the end of the series, Victòria understands that changes do not necessarily have to imply a loss of her sense of identity and she is ready to embrace the future:

VICTÒRIA El barri no morirà mai. Després de nosaltres, hi ha la joventut que empeny i que també estima el lloc en que va néixer.
ANDREU Només faltaria! No, aquest barri no morirà ara per ara.
VICTÒRIA I si xino xano ens arribéssim al barri nou?
ANDREU [looking surprised] El barri nou?
VICTÒRIA Mira, ben mirat, potser no és tan mal barri com això. Va anem, vinga!

In this storyline, we can perceive how the two parts of the district of Poble Nou are used as a metaphor for Catalonia, caught between its willingness to keep a sense of identity perceived as distinctive and its desire to be a cosmopolitan and modern society. It is not a surprise, then, that this dichotomy is represented through the character of Victòria, a woman who has witnessed the Civil War and the dictatorship, is committed to her ideals and to the defence of what she perceives to be her identity, both national - Catalan - and local - her district -, but at the same time is represented as an open-minded, progressive person. Therefore, this representation of the character of Victòria as well as the construction of a sense of community in *Poblenou* which evolves around an interpretation of identity as linked to a geographical setting exemplifies the function of Catalan serials of depicting a national project of society (Badia, Berrio 1997, 235). Despite claiming an attachment to an epistemology of realism,¹⁰ Catalan serials construct an ideal model of society built around values such as solidarity and celebration of difference, but also a non-conflictive acceptance of a sense of community constructed around a sense of identity defined by

10 Benet i Jornet, Rovira and Galceran, all stressed Catalan serials’ aspiration to follow this convention inspired by what they interpret as the ‘realism’ of British cinema and soap operas.

geographical limits. Regardless of their social class and origin, all characters in Catalan soap operas feel an emotional bond to the district and the town in which they live. In the interview I have conducted with him, Galceran describes the construction of a sense of community in Catalan soap operas in the following terms:

[E]l sentiment que ens funciona és el territorial. És el de pertenyer a aquest barri, doncs els que estem aquí junts, hem de treballar junts, independentment de d'on vinguis, del passat i aquestes coses. Ja et dic que és una [representació] més imaginària que real; és el país que a nosaltres ens agradaria tenir'.

In this quote Galceran begins talking about the representation of district and small towns in Catalan serials and how characters develop a sense of belonging to these places with their history and shared experiences. And yet, at the end of the sentence Galceran refers to the representation of an ideal 'country'. This is not a coincidence: the districts and the towns where the stories of Catalan soap operas take place and the local communities they create function as a metaphor for Catalonia, defined as a national geographical space which inspires in the characters a sense of national belonging and able to create a national community.

6 Conclusions

In my article, employing textual analysis, I examined the construction in soap operas of narrative frames such as gender roles, family models and community. Thanks to an intercultural approach I was able to individuate two main models in this genre based on the analysis of gender roles: the American model, defined as patriarchal soap opera, and the British model, defined as matriarchal soap opera. Examining these two models I concluded that the patriarchal soap opera tends to represent female characters as a disruptive force in the narrative, whereas the matriarchal soap opera represents women as a source of preservation of the order. This construction of gender roles highly influences the representation of the family. While the patriarchal soap opera presents the family as a battleground for power, the matriarchal soap opera depicts it as a place of safety, so much so that it provides a model for the structure of the wider community. Creating a sense of community is a crucial aspect for the matriarchal model, which for this reason is also called community soap opera; on the other hand, the patriarchal one, also defined as dynastic soap opera, does not construct a sense of community at all. The last part of the analysis of these two models demonstrated that the community soap opera is characterised by a strong pedagogic tone in dealing with

the representation of social issues. By contrast, these issues are ignored by the dynastic soap opera.

Throughout this analysis, I compared the results of my investigation of these two models with the examination of Catalan soap operas trying to discover whether they could fit the paradigms elaborated for their British and American counterparts and how soap operas in Catalonia could relate to other traditions within this genre. In the light of this comparison, I argued that Catalan soap operas resemble British drama serials more closely than they do American ones. Most Catalan serials fit the matriarchal model and can be clearly defined as community soap operas. However, the sense of community in Catalan serials is defined by geographical space and not by class, which on the other hand plays a crucial role in the process of community-building in British soap operas. Moreover, references to the past, in particular to War World II, are an important source of collective identity in British soap operas. By contrast, in Catalan serials the past, and in particular the dictatorship period, is rarely mentioned. The character of Victòria in *Poblenou* represents an exception. My analysis of this character emphasised her role as guardian of community memories, as comprised by the inhabitants of old Poble Nou's district. Finally, I examined how this district can be interpreted as a metaphor for Catalonia defined as a geographical space which represents the main source of collective identity and community-belonging for all characters in Catalan soap operas.

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