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# Television and the transnational memory of undemocratic pasts: a comparison between Spain and the Czech Republic

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## RÉSUMÉ

The starting point for the present work is the conviction that we can study the memory of undemocratic pasts from both a transnational and comparative perspective. Television series offer viewers an account of the passage of official history, through the prism of both the fictional characters and viewers' personal (emotional) relationships. In light of this, some elements are going to be investigated common to two television products, the first set during the Francoism (*Cuéntame cómo pasó*) and the second during Socialism (*Vyprávěj*), whose patent purpose is to depict how everyday life was under these repressive regimes. From a transnational point of view, the two TV series demonstrate the presence of at least one common narrative mode of undemocratic pasts, which goes beyond specific national features and characteristics. The specific elements mentioned in this work (the narrator as re-affirmation of the guide-values, the family as a synecdoche for the community that remembers, the television as the 'memory medium', and the emotional recognition between audience and character as the mediation space with a 'problematic' past) can be interpreted as a possible first mapping of the different narrative modes that tend to be connected with the representation of undemocratic pasts in Europe.

## KEYWORDS / KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Transnational memory; TV series; undemocratic pasts; Spain; Czech Republic / nadnárodní pamět; televizní série; nedemokratická minulost; Španělsko; Česká republika.

The present work aims to investigate the memory of undemocratic pasts in television series. The starting point for reflection is the conviction that — however diverse individual instances of course are — we can study certain recurring elements in the memory of undemocratic pasts from both a transnational and comparative perspective.

While political science literature includes numerous studies on the transition from undemocratic to democratic regimes in both European 'blocs' (the Western bloc, with transitions in Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain; the Eastern bloc with its various post-communist transitions, including that of the Czech Republic), from a cultural studies perspective, it seems that the study of repressive regimes and transitions to democracy continues to generate a binary iron curtain system.



Studies of the memory of Eastern Europe's socialist past seem to have been characterised by the collective memory crisis (Eayl 2004, pp. 5–6) and are primarily related to the concept of nostalgia (see Boym 2002, Enns 2007, Grębecka 2010). The variety of applications of the concept of nostalgia, the diversity of its functions within cultural products (Pehe 2013, pp. 10–11), the tendency to apply individual criteria when evaluating different types of nostalgia (Bonnett 2010, p. 43), are just some of the difficulties tied to its use as an interpretative category. Studies of the Spanish transition have focused on issues relating to the initial silencing of the memory of the civil war and of Franco's dictatorship, in order to ensure the social cohesion of the country (see Alonso — Muro 2010, Aquillar 2002).

One concept that tends to be used for transition memories in both post-socialist countries and Spain is the 'cultural trauma'. Especially research on media and cultural productions highlights this dimension (see Carpentier-Reifová — Gillárová — Hladík 2012, Zwart 2013).

Although the remembrance of Franco's dictatorship and the state communism in the Czech Republic have thus been studied from very different perspectives, this article will argue, through a comparative study of two popular television series, that they share common features that are worthy of closer scrutiny.

We are therefore faced with specific questions: Is it possible to speak of common memory modalities of undemocratic pasts? If, as highlighted by Astrid Erll (2011, s. 14), we must speak of 'traveling memory' in its key dimensions, is it possible to study the memory of an undemocratic past from a perspective that extends beyond national borders, and therefore from a transnational point of view?

Given the vastness of this specific field of research, the aim of the present work is to highlight a few elements from which we can begin a comparative study of a transnational memory of undemocratic pasts in a comparative way. In light of this, some elements are going to be investigated common to two television products, the first set during the Francoism and the second during Socialism, whose patent purpose is to depict how everyday life was under these repressive regimes. The elements in question refer to the narrative modality chosen to talk about this difficult past to an audience that was already adult during those historical periods.

## 1. CUÉNTAME CÓMO PASÓ AND VYPRÁVĚJ: TWO SERIES, ONE CASE STUDY?

The Spanish *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001 — ongoing), hereinafter *Cuéntame*, and the Czech *Vyprávěj* (2009–2013) are two television series that have been catalogued as 'dramedies'.<sup>1</sup> They are characterised by a collective structure in which the close-knit family unit is part of a larger group of family and friends with whom they share personal adventures, especially moments linked to the history of their society and country. As we will see in the following, *Vyprávěj* [Tell me] has several points in common with the Spanish television series, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* [Tell me how it was]. Both series are produced by public television.

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1 See <<http://www.csfd.cz/>> a <<http://www.imdb.com/>>.



The Spanish series depicts the everyday life of a middle-class family during the last years of Franco's dictatorship. The plot revolves around the life of the Alcántara family, living in a working class neighbourhood in Madrid. The Alcántaras are a typical family: the father (Antonio), the mother (Mercedes), and their three children (Ines, Tony and Carlo), living with Herminia (Mercedes' mother). At the beginning of the series, Antonio has two jobs, Mercedes works from home in order to take care of the family, Ines has a job, Tony is a college freshman, and Carlo is eight years old. The story is narrated in voice-over by Carlo in his adult years, as he recalls memories from the past.

The Czech series depicts the everyday life of two typical 'middle-class' Czech families: the Dvořáks. One of the families lives in Pardubice, 90 km from Prague. Josef Dvořák works at the Czechoslovak State Railways, his wife Jana works at the State Planning Institute, their younger daughter Zuzana goes to high school and with them lives Alžběta, Josef's mother. The eldest son, Karel, is a university student, who lives in Prague. The series begins in 1964 when Karel meets Eva, whom he marries in the second episode. *Vyprávěj* is also narrated in voice-over, by an adult Honza (Karel and Eva's son conceived during the first episode).

If we carefully examine the two series, similarities in their narrative structure become apparent: the oral tale as a communitarian, identity-making practice; the use of the first person singular for the narrative voice and the nature of the narrator's personal memories; the family as a theoretical nucleus of collective memory; television as a key element within the story and the 'memory archives' (Assmann 2011, pp. 329–330); the decision to set the story in the 1960's. They share these specific elements with other television series based on communicative memory. As observed in various studies, for example, *Cuéntame* draws these elements from the American series *The Wonder Years* (Guerra Gómez — Rueda Laffond 2009). In general, we can affirm that in serial television productions the family plays a key role in terms of social construction and the transmission of values (Heinemann 2012, Marinescu — Branea — Mítu 2014).

The distinctive characteristic of *Cuéntame* lies in its clear intent to deal with issues tied to life during Francoism and the subsequent transition. The Spanish series is presented as a product whose aim is to become a dramatized version of recent history (Grupoganga website). Interestingly, as stated on the official Česká televize website, *Vyprávěj* is instead presented as the story of a family that deals with historical events in its everyday life, including the Soviet occupation in 1968 or the opening of the first metro in Prague. At the same time, it portrays the recent history of the city through the daily lives of the Dvořák families (*Vyprávěj* — Česká televize). In both series, family events apparently overlap with historical events, while they actually intersect with one another, since it is the chronology of historical events that determines and defines the episodes and the destinies of the protagonists.

## 2. NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL, TRANSNATIONAL: TELEVISION AND MEMORY

Television is a complex system in which many elements come into play, perhaps more prominently than other forms of media. Today, television is characterised by a con-

tinuous intertwining of national, international and transnational elements — an aspect that must be taken into account when analysing the concept of memory.

Television is an institution with a national 'dimension' in terms of regulations and fundings, and public service networks primarily draw on the basic memory narratives of the nation-state. At the same time, 'New Television' has been accelerated by digitisation and characterised by a constant oscillation between global and local features within the mediaspace (Tunstall 2010). Today we are dealing with media transnationalism and global entertainment media (Esser — Smith — Bernal-Merino 2016). The development into an international broadcasting dimension and the transnational nature of entertainment media is in turn fully expressed by the expansion of the TV format adaptation phenomenon, a complex process of repetition and adaptation of differences, based on international/national binarism, transnational production/national adaptation, etc. (Moran — Malbon 2006, p. 145).

While the Czech series is not an official adaptation of *Cuéntame*, it does feature certain undeniable similarities, so much so that the Grupo Ganga Producciones opened a dispute with the Czech production company Dramedy. The producers and especially the Czech screenwriters have always denied plagiarism, stating that it was a matter of coincidence and that they had used their personal family histories. The director of Česká televize declared: 'The existence of both series only proves that different people have had similar ideas at different times' (Hejdrová 2009). Our concern here is not to determine whether it is a case of 'parallel development', namely, A. N. Veselovskij's theory of simultaneous and independent development of canons (1981), a case of cultural transfer or simply a case of plagiarism. What I consider crucial is the decision to create a series with extremely similar narrative modes. Whether or not it is a matter of coincidence, we cannot fail to recognise the fact that similar narrative modes were used to tell stories of a difficult past in two different contexts.

### 3. COMING TO TERMS WITH AN UNDEMOCRATIC PAST IN SPAIN AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Collective remembrance of an undemocratic past entails a series of compromises because it inevitably touches on issues both of victimisation and collaboration. These processes lead to the emersion of issues regarding complicity with the 'regime', whether it is a question of collaborationism or of the existence of a silent majority (Aguilar — Humlebæk 2002, p. 121). New democratic Spanish and Czech regimes have chosen different modalities.

In Spain, transition is negotiated according to amnesty principles, as well as political and social reconciliation, in order to avoid putting democracy at risk through past wounds (Zwart 2013). The past of Forgetting, and its legal form as the 1977 Amnesty Law, led to an official silence as regard to the country's collective memory. As affirmed by Alonso and Muro: 'It was amnesia, not memory, that could secure a pluralistic regime and would prevent Spain from repeating the mistakes of the past' (2010, p. 5). Colmeiero also observed: 'Memories of the civil war and of Franco's legacy became a new cultural taboo, and therefore acquired the spectral quality of ghosts, nor here nor there' (2011, p. 25). This state of amnesia of the past began to change in the 2000's,





through recovery movement for historic memory (*Asociación para la Recuperación de la Histórica Memory*) and the 'Ley de memoria histórica' of 2007.

In contrast, the transition in Eastern Europe, 'took place in a context of ideological collapse, imperial demise, and social and economic change' (De Brito — Gonzalez Enriques — Aguillar 2001, p. 13). Kennedy speaks of a cultural transition. This structure is based on oppositions, evaluations and regulatory and logical expectations: the opposition between socialism and capitalism is fundamental and the latter is considered to be superior: 'Transition's tradition tends to draw more on capitalistic experiences from across the world than it does on any nation's socialist past. Socialism is something to be escaped, repressed, and destroyed' (2002, p. 13). In both Spain and the Czech Republic, then, the transition process involved a problematic relationship with the memory of the undemocratic period; on the one hand, it was universally condemned, and on the other hand, it was transformed into a silent 'ghost' whose memory must be rediscovered.

Starting in the 2000's, both Spain and the Czech Republic have recorded an increase in historiographical studies and cultural products that address the collective memory of the civil war and the Franco regime, and on the one other hand, and the Protectorate and communism, on the other. In their respective countries, *Cuéntame* and *Vyprávěj* have introduced the memory of undemocratic pasts and transition to democracy as themes to mass popular culture, thus exemplifying the symbiotic relationship between the cultural industry (in this case, television) and the articulated representations of cultural memory practices and discourse (Rey 2014, p. 122).

As mentioned above, one of the most troubling aspects of the collective remembrance of repressive regimes pertains to the matter of popular support and of everyday complicity; the existence of the so-called silent majority. Rose, Mishler and Munro have observed that 'the long-term survival of a regime requires voluntary support or at least the resigned acceptance of the mass of its population' (2011, p. 1). In the absence of viable alternatives, an undemocratic regime can survive also thanks to the resigned acceptance of a large part of the population who does not see any possibility of change (Linz — Stepan 1996, p. 5, Gel'man 2007, p. 55). Moreover, Gel'man argues that 'if the regime's economic, social, and international environments remain stable, the trap of "resigned acceptance" could last a long time' (2007, p. 56). In his study on the relationship between family memories and traumatic cultural pasts, social psychologist H. Welzer observed that 'one cannot analyse individual remembrance and family-transmitted memories without considering a society's official and, as it were, authoritative historiography, the basic narrative of a nation' (2011, p. 181). 'Private memory cultures' are influenced by the public sphere (debates, political transformations), but at the same time, our emotional ties affect the way we remember things and reinterpret historical facts (*ibidem*, p. 182). When telling stories of its past from a post-transition perspective, the majority of the population finds itself having to explain its position during the earlier period, 'The cultural trauma of an ordinary man is visible as a permanent ambivalence and oscillation. It points to the never-ending stumbling from guilt to suffering and back' (Carpentier-Reifová — Gillárová — Hladík 2012, p. 217). If my identity is formed both by autobiographical and collective memories, and the general collective memory condemns my autobiographical memories, this process will in turn generate friction between my personal

memory of the past and what is considered the official past. This friction produces the continuous search for a mediation and adaptation. This is where popular culture, particularly, television production, comes into play: 'Popular culture remains one of the principal sites where consumers can experience [nostalgic] links to the socialist past without having to face public reproach' (ibidem, p. 203).



#### 4. AN EMOTIONAL IMPERATIVE

Paul Julian Smith attributes an emotional imperative to the Spanish series: '[*Cuéntame*] exploits the unique temporal and spatial matrix of TV to show that it is only by passing through the private (passional) sphere that we can come to know the public (dispassionate) history of the nation' (2004, p. 364). This emotional imperative suggests that the fruition of the past is mediated by the intimate, emotive dimension of the spectator. The emotive function, the passionate bond, acts as an 'intensity marker', a key element on which the reader's trust in the narrator is based. We should also keep into account that the affective dimension of television in general is strong, even when it comes to serial production. One of the main features of serial production (long and medium-long) is the ability to lure the audience in an affective sphere: thanks to a structure of 'episodes-encounters' — usually weekly — it provides the audience with the possibility to relate to a world and characters with whom they develop an affective relationship. Even though, in the analysed series, the narrated events are widely known (the audience already knows how they will develop and, partly, their consequences), nonetheless every episode brings an element of novelty to the narrative economy of the series: on one side, the curiosity linked to the modality chosen to represent a known past, and on the other the anticipation regarding the development of the micro-stories of the characters. As Paolo Braga aptly observed, serial narrations, as every other type of narration, are required to 'answer about the happiness of the characters' (2004, p. 264). But as they unravel through a relatively 'long' period, TV series come to the conclusion of the characters' paths after several different vicissitudes; and along these paths, the characters have to progress in 'realizing the sense of their existence in relation to moral values' (ibidem). This process develops through troubles, confusion and difficulties to stay faithful to these values, and in so doing their efforts acquire a meaning in light of a strenuous loyalty to 'what is worthy of a man' (Braga 2004, p. 264). The audience experiences all this through the character's example, but at the same time, especially in a series based on the narration of the everyday life, these experiences are part of everyone's life: the audience's struggles are the character's struggles.

As we will see, the system of values of the narrated world is post-transition. It acts as a bridge between past and present, providing the room to reflect upon, but also justify, the character's — as well as the audience's — behaviour under the regime.

#### 5. MEMORY, FAMILY AND NARRATOR

**The special episode 156**, *Family and many others* in the 9<sup>th</sup> season of *Cuéntame*, presents to Spanish audiences the official adaptations of the series that were broadcasted in



other countries.<sup>2</sup> In this episode the creators, the actors and the directors of the various official adaptations of the Spanish series have been interviewed. According to one of the directors, Sergio Cabrera, the universality of the family is the key to its success. The family dimension of the story revolves around the ‘autobiographical’ nature of the two series. They are both narrated by the youngest characters (Carlo and Honza) during their adult years, rather than during their childhood: this means that the narration of the past regime develops through the filter of the post-transition perspective.

In this way, the narrator is both part of the story and an observer. The autobiographical dimension intersects with oral tradition, thus creating an emotional connection with the spectator, who in turn becomes the ‘listener’ of a story with which he or she can identify, thus strengthening the ‘sharing community’ of the communicated memory (Erlil 2011, p. 106). The title of the series itself, *Tell me*, highlights an oral narration that is strictly based on the idea of a community that shares a story it can relate to (Tonkin 1992, p. 13). The family is presented as the nucleus of the community, where its everyday life takes place, within its neighbourhood, workplace, etc. It is with the community that the family shares historical events. The history of the Alcántara and Dvořák families expands and becomes the story of a diversified group of prototypes/stereotypes within the community, but the fact that the family story is told by one of its members, is done in such a way that this collectivity acts both as an agent and as a receiver. What has been claimed for *Cuéntame* can also be applied to *Vyprávěj* because, in both series, it is the central position of the community that allows ‘to validate its fictional narrative as both representative of and identifiable for the nation-state community, therefore succeeding in making that very narrative complex suitable for insertion into the realm of collective cultural memory’ (Rey 2014, p. 124). The centrality of the community emerges when we observe how the storytelling develops; not through moments of rupture, but through a process of continuous social transformation (Brinkmann 2010, p. 358), referring to a social group’s need for continuity in order to be able to recognise and acknowledge its memory (Welzer 2010, p. 292).

The community thus becomes the subject of the television series with the central core is a middle-class family. The family becomes both a representation and an expression of a ‘medium’ status within the community; in others words, a typical family that belongs to the ‘middle’ class. The characters are ordinary people, who position themselves between two extremes, particularly at a political level. Pragmatism and common sense are the main characteristics of the two main fatherly figures (Antonio Alcántara, as well as Josef and Karel Dvořák) and have the purpose ‘to acclaim the dynamic progress from an idea of centrality’ (Rueda Laffond — Guerra Gomez 2009). In *Vyprávěj* this common sense and pragmatism is also represented by the issue of Josef’s possible entry into the Communist Party. Josef Dvořák’s boss encourages him to join the Communist Party, an act that would lead him from a safe and passive position to one of conflict with his mother, the anti-communist character of the series. However, his refusal would not only bring him into conflict with his superior, but

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2 Many television stations bought the TV series: not only in Latin America, which is predictable for linguistic reasons, but also in countries like Finland, Bulgaria and many others. Italy, Portugal, Mexico and Turkey bought the adaptation rights.

with the party itself. Crucially, the situation is resolved without his taking an actual position, when his candidacy is withdrawn due to his brother's emigration to the West. Similarly, in *Cuéntame*, Antonio ends up keeping a home a packet of flyers, unaware that their content is against Franco's dictatorship, as a favour to a 'professedly' communist friend. Once the message is discovered, Antonio and Mercedes hide the partially-opened packet on the roof, but during the night the wind blows the flyers all around the neighbourhood and the message is spread without the Alcántaras being required to take a stand in favour or against their content. As we can see, these two events also allow us to observe how taking an equidistant position to the extremes requires to be constantly vigilant, because the risk is to be unintentionally identified with one of the two.

While the heads of the families in the two series act as an element of pragmatism and caution, their sons represents a process of maturation and (re-)appropriation of the democratic principles. As such they, serve as a representation of the maturation process, the 'transition toward personal maturity (adolescence) diachronically equated to the maturity of the collective democratic values' (Rueda Laffond — Guerra Gomez 2009). In *Vyprávěj*, in order to maintain this diachronic relationship and the series' synecdochal play between the narrator's growth and the 'growth' of democracy, Honza is conceived at the beginning of the series in 1964, thus allowing his participation in the Velvet Revolution of 1989, in what is the peak of his maturity and the construction of his identity within society: in other words, university (Wang Q 2008, p. 312). The identification between maturity and adulthood with tradition and democracy consequently connects the undemocratic phase with childhood, namely a period in which we depend on an 'older' individual to make decisions for us since we are unable to make them on our own.

This growth process in *Vyprávěj* is further strengthened by the idea of a photo album, which in turn represents the act of 'remembering'. Indicative of this is the fact that a reference is made to the photo album during the first episode of the series: 'What I want to tell you is the story of our family, but do not expect an accurate story, they are just my memories, just like when you look at a photo album' (*Vyprávěj* 1x1). The photo album is perhaps the object that best represents the position of each individual within the community-family. The decision to link the album to the story highlights the emotional dimension of the various episodes of everyday life of 'common' people. The memories attached to the photo album are closely tied to the emotional and sentimental value of its images and to each individual's and the group's will to affirm and reaffirm themselves, as explained by Welzer, who refers to emotional memories as an 'Album' (Welzer — Mollerová — Tschuggnallová 2010, p. 11). The album triggers a dynamic of both mutual reinforcement within the family, which acts as an actual social unit, and of the various possible families portrayed in popular culture. Historian Kamil Činátl highlights how the album's perspective creates a temporal flow of family events: one that is linear, including births, aging and new generations, and one that is cyclical, composed of birthdays, holidays, etc. At the same time, according to the historian, the idea of an album ensures a stable cultural representation of the family's history (2014, p. 166-167).

In both products, thanks to the retrospective character of the narration, the perspective of the narrator is more far-reaching and recounts events in which he did







not actually participate and of which he could not be aware when they actually occurred.

Therefore, the narrator of the series is not only an adult who tells the story of his childhood and a member of both the community that is being described and the community to whom he is describing it, he is also a witness of what ‘actually’ happened. This aspect reinforces the narrative, not as a simple personal story, but as a choral story, while simultaneously strengthening the credibility of the story that is being told. The credibility of the events is key to gaining the audience’s trust: ‘It doesn’t matter if Carlos [or Honza, T. D.] constantly refers to scenes or events he could never have witnessed. The subliminal fact is that the voice belongs to someone “who was there”, and, consequently, what the fiction presents as a dramatization were real facts, and not the sentimental interpretation of a man — of an undefined age — remembering his childhood. This process of remembering is a representational mechanism allowing for fictional situations to attain credibility’ (Rueda Laffond — Coronado Ruiz — Duff Burnay — Díaz Pérez — Guerra Gómez — Santos 2013, p. 40).

## 6. MEDIATIONS OF DOMESTICITY

The perspective of the narrator in the present tense reaffirms a current system of values. The narrators often comment on the events of each episode and they do so by highlighting the different historical period during which they take place (we often encounter expressions such as ‘it may seem absurd, but back then...’), as well as the undemocratic dimension of the specific period (‘that fear has never gone away’). The narrator’s negative perspective of the undemocratic past allows us to ‘objectify’ his comments, as well the positions of the characters that embody the political dimension and historical ‘wisdom’ (particularly the more politically conscious characters, such as Tony and Tonda, the grandmother Beta and Herminia) in terms of the above-mentioned credibility. Along with the narrator’s comments evaluating the situation, this reaffirmation occurs through a visual catalogue of archival documents used throughout the series. The images and audio-visual material used in the two series are part of the shared imaginary of the past (Franco’s funeral, the radio announcement of the entry of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia, etc.). Rey describes a ‘cathedral of memory’, highlighting how the narrative canon of the past is affirmed through an audio-visual archive: ‘Still more important, though, is to acknowledge the connective interrelation of repeated canonical images on the one side and the narrative canon of historical pictures, interpretations, discourses and foundation myths on which collective identities are shaped and grounded on the other, that is, the canonical nature of both the signifiers and the signified, and the link between them’ (2014, p. 127).

One of the main characteristics of television is that of its long-term presence in everyday life. As stated by Silverston, ‘television is a domestic medium’, both in terms of the actual, physical space in which it is watched and its function as a medium that influences our domestic culture, but also as a means with which we integrate ourselves into culture and society (1994, p. 24). Thus, domesticity plays a crucial role in *Cuéntame*, according to Loxham: ‘Domesticity is central to the way in which

memory is approached by the series as both intensely private and yet mediated by the television that becomes the nexus of the personal and the public in terms of the family's relationship to wider political issues' (2015, p. 7). This dual nature of private and mediated domesticity is reaffirmed in each scene in which the characters watch television as a way to stay informed regarding crucial political and cultural events. Regarding *Vyprávěj* — but it also applies to *Cuéntame* — Činátl observes that it is through television that the story unfolds and it is through the pervasiveness of television that the characters and the audience react. By watching television, both the Alcántara and Dvořák families become the national audience: the typical TV series family 'synecdochically becomes a broader community' (2014, p. 170). This is because the act of watching television within the TV series creates a reference to the national television audience. The identification is complete, because we see the TV family both on screen and in front of the screen. It is the object and the subject of the series' narration (Činátl 2014, p. 170).

The fact that both the viewer and the character are observing the same audiovisual text at the same time, creates a symbiotic relationship between the two, since they are both watching television. This symbiosis therefore strengthens the viewer's position within the community-protagonist of the series. At the same time, what the viewer is watching are images and information that is already familiar to social and cultural memory, thereby reaffirming the dominant narrative of the past (Aguillar 2002, p. 10). If we take the elements mentioned thus far and analyse them as a whole, we can see that television serial narrations prove to be one of the main instruments for the formation of a shared narrative of the past. This is because television series offer viewers an account of the passage of official history, through the prism of both the fictional characters and viewers' personal (passionate) relationships. As noted above, the events experienced by the characters follow the same time sequence as official history, as well as that of the viewer. This overlapping of time occurs thanks to the television series' ability to evoke emotional attachment, viewer loyalty to the characters and their stories and the ability to function with the social group dimension.

As already mentioned, the system of values that guides Carlo and Honza's narration '*a posteriori*', and that responds to the system of values of the audience-community, is the element that regulates the two narrated narrative worlds. On one side, drawing on the collective historical imagination, we witness the reaffirmation of the dominant narration of the past, with the consequent condemnation of the Francoism and the Socialism; on the other side, to be reaffirmed is the validity of the characters' life choices, based on the 'correct' system of values that transcends the 'problematic' historical period while linking it to the present.

The archive material plays a fundamental role in these series. Along with the scenes in which they watch TV within the world of the series itself, images that are universally recognizable as being 'archive images' often become part of the narration with nothing to signal their specific nature. In so doing, the product itself becomes a sort of 'docu-drama', a hybrid of archive material and characters' stories. In *Vyprávěj*, the audience is watching a fictional scene that suddenly fades to black and white and becomes an archive recording in the following one; in *Cuéntame*, the process goes even beyond that, with the digital integration of some characters into the archive material (see Brémard 2008, Rey 2014).





The use of the official historiography condemning the undemocratic period — which is primarily expressed through a visual catalogue and a dominant value system — frees the viewer from the need to assess his or her own past. If we once again consider the observations mentioned on the silent majority's difficulty of relating to their undemocratic past, we can observe how the narrative devices adopted by *Cuéntame* and *Vyprávěj* create a sense of recognition and memory of one's past, without having to question oneself excessively.

The elements in common between the two products in analysis, identified and presented here, are crucial for the mechanism of recognition and emotional participation of the audience with the characters and the narrated world. This process of recognition of the past, staged as their 'own' past, is especially important as regards to the issue of the so-called 'silent majority' during the repressive period. The audience's positive response to both series emphasises how this narrative mode meets viewers' needs and desires: the need to remember one's past, highlighted by Carpentier-Reifová, Gillárová, Hladík, without facing a negative judgment (2012, p. 203) and the desire, highlighted by Rey, to recognise oneself in a stoic and courageous community, despite its oppressive regime (2014, p. 133). These two elements — need and desire — are not specific to Spanish and Czech populations. They characterise many countries with an undemocratic past, since they belong to some of the reaction mechanisms of the so-called silent majority. Moreover — even though briefly for obvious reasons — we wish to underline a consequence of what we have observed here: if the aim of the two series is to talk about a specific national past that has been directly experienced only by part of the audience, and not all of it, then the process of recognition and emotive fruition of the characters and the narrated world becomes recognition of the national past for both these categories: those who passively experienced that past as well as those who are just getting to know it through the television product.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

If we take the elements mentioned thus far and analyse them as a whole, we can see that television serial narrations prove to be one of the main instruments for the formation of a shared narrative of the past. This is because television series offer viewers an account of the passage of official history, through the prism of both the fictional characters and viewers' personal (emotional) relationships. As noted above, the events experienced by the characters follow the same time sequence as official history, as well as that of the viewer. This overlapping of time occurs thanks to the television series' ability to evoke emotional attachment, viewer loyalty to the characters and their stories and the ability to function with the social group dimension.

From a transnational point of view, the two TV series demonstrate the presence of at least one common narrative mode of undemocratic pasts, which goes beyond specific national features and characteristics. The specific elements mentioned in this work (the narrator as re-affirmation of the guide-values, the family as a synecdoche for the community that remembers, the television as the 'memory medium', and the emotional recognition between audience and character as the mediation space with

a 'problematic' past) can be interpreted as a possible first mapping of the different narrative modes that tend to be connected with the representation of undemocratic pasts in Europe.

With the present article, we have analysed how certain narrative mechanisms allow for the construction of a shared communicative memory of an undemocratic past in different national contexts across Europe. Two countries in which the repressive regimes were different, and the transitory process towards democracy developed in different ways. The aim was to investigate how television series negotiate the existence of friction (and mediation) between the personal autobiographical dimension of the silent majority in the past on the one hand and the official historiography on the other. Serial television productions seem to be an important medium of this continuous adaptation. Part of their cultural potential is that they can give way to a moment of catharsis given their ability to emotionally engage the viewer. Interestingly, the complex structure of the television series' relationship with undemocratic pasts shows similarities in both the Spanish and Czech contexts regardless of the specific political historical circumstances. We can therefore assume that there is room for further study with regard to the mediation of memory of undemocratic pasts from a transnational perspective.

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