

# **The Construction of Gender Roles And Sexual Dissidence on TV**

**Using Anglo-Saxon Paradigms to  
Re-read Catalan and Spanish Texts**

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# Abstract

Taking as a starting point an interpretation of the television medium as an Ideological State Apparatus, in my thesis I examine how gender roles and sexual dissidence are constructed in Spanish and Catalan television series. I focus on a corpus of narrative materials through a perspective informed by theories elaborated by Anglo-Saxon scholars in gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence.

In my first chapter, which focuses on the construction of gender roles in Catalan soap operas, I apply the analytical paradigms that Anglo-Saxon feminist scholars have elaborated for the content of soap operas and the viewing practices of their audiences to a corpus of material which has rarely been analysed through this perspective. In the second chapter, which focuses on the construction of sexual dissidence in Spanish and Catalan television series, I aim to challenge 'essentialist' paradigms which have so far dominated the examination of the construction of sexual dissidence in television series. Moreover, I query the pedagogical aspirations of public-funded television and the contradictions often involved in the application of this remit.

My theoretical base encompasses the work of scholars as diverse as Christine Geraghty and Alberto Mira. Studies by Ricardo Llamas, Charlotte Brundson, and Dorothy Hobson, in particular, help me to articulate my comparative analysis of television content in Spanish and Catalan contexts. In conclusion, the aim of my thesis is to address the role performed by television in the construction of meanings which surround gender issues and sexual dissidence. This is a timely exercise because gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence are fairly recent fields in Spanish and Catalan academia and television has been largely disregarded, especially as far as the analysis of characters and storylines is concerned. My thesis aims to be a contribution to these fields in the Spanish and Catalan contexts.

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# Introduction

Taking as a starting point an interpretation of the medium of television as an 'Ideological State Apparatus', following Louis Althusser's definition (1989), in my thesis I examine how gender roles and sexual dissidence are constructed in Spanish and Catalan television series. I focus my analysis on a corpus of material constituted by characters and storylines—a perspective which has mainly been disregarded by Spanish and Catalan scholars. Therefore, little attention has been given in Spanish and Catalan media studies to the contribution of television entertainment programming to the construction of a gender binary system and an heteronormative system and my thesis aspires to be an attempt to fill this gap.

However, it is necessary to point out that, in the Spanish and Catalan contexts, gender and sexual perspectives have not only received little attention as far as television studies is concerned. As Josep-Anton Fernàndez observes with regret, gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence still remain 'in the academic closet of Catalan Studies' (2000a: 1). This same evaluation can be applied to Spanish universities more generally, in which these disciplines have not yet received the status of accepted academic fields. In an interview conducted by Santiago Fouz Hernández in 2001, Ricardo Llamas lamented that there was still no institutional support for such studies in Spanish academia, with few courses, initiatives, or conferences in this field (2003: 83). He also criticised the lack of interdisciplinarity, which he considered a characteristic of Spanish universities in general, which prevented scholars in different fields

from developing common projects. In his opinion, Spanish gender and sexual dissidence studies 'crece, no sé si mejora todavía'<sup>1</sup> (2003: 83).

Since Fernández's and Llamas's remarks, a decade has passed, one which has certainly bought an increase in the amount of work related to gender and sexual dissidence studies in Spanish and Catalan academia. However, I would argue that the lack of institutional support and interdisciplinarity denounced by Llamas is still a fair criticism to be made of the attitude Spanish and Catalan universities demonstrate towards these disciplines. The first field to pay attention to a gender perspective was sociology, which remained for many years the main focus of gender scholars in the Spanish state, as is demonstrated by the rich bibliography found in the Centro de Estudios de la Mujer.<sup>2</sup> The same observation can be applied to the studies of sexual dissidence with pioneers such as Ricardo Llamas and Francisco Vidarte (1999; 2000), and Óscar Guash (2000; 2002), who also contributed to introducing queer theory into Spanish and Catalan academia. In September 2007, José Ignacio Pichardo Galán published an article in the gay magazine *Zero*, in which he commented on how queer studies in Spain had concentrated more on sociological subjects than on literary criticism. He lamented that many critics ignored the homoerotic content of Spanish literary masterpieces and how the sexual preferences of some canonical writers might have influenced their works.

According to Raitt, one of the main functions of literary studies of sexual dissidence is precisely to retrieve 'the pearls of our lost culture' (1995), rediscovering, on the one hand, texts which had been deemed as sexually heretical and, on the other, exposing the homoerotic subtexts of major classics which had been bowdlerised to fit the heteronormative literary canon. In an interview for the La7 network, commenting on Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, the openly gay Italian politician and poet Nichi Vendola

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<sup>1</sup> 'Is growing, I don't know if it is improving yet'.

<sup>2</sup> [http://mujeres.usal.es/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=111&Itemid=60](http://mujeres.usal.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=111&Itemid=60).

also stresses literature's role in recuperating concealed stories in order to create a sense of belonging for those people who feel excluded from heteronormativity. In particular, he talks about how literature was a source of homoerotic and homoaffective referents absent in the Italy of his childhood and adolescence—a time which the Italian politician describes as a world in which there were no words to name his feelings. The friendships between Achille and Patroclo in Omero's *Iliade*, Eurialo and Niso in Virgilio's *Eneide*, and Cloridano and Medoro in Ariosto's *L'Orlando Furioso* offered a range of images and stories about same-sex relationships which contrasted with the stereotypes so pervasive in the Italian society of the 1960s-1970s. Finally, Vendola remembers the publication in 1977 of a small book, entitled *I neoplatonici*, written by Luigi Settembrini, an Italian patriot, in the 1858. This short novel, which portrays a happy and passionate love story between two teenage boys, remained concealed for more than a century because its publication was considered inappropriate due to the homoerotic content and the prestige of its author.<sup>3</sup>

It is precisely for this reason that, in the Anglo-Saxon contexts, since the 1970s scholars belonging to studies of sexual dissidence have considered as a crucial aim of their research the reconstruction of a genealogy of a 'gay and lesbian literary tradition', veiled by the established literary criticism. Bibliography and anthologies such as Brian Reade's *Sexual Heretics* (1970), Ian Young's *The Male Muse: A Gay Anthology* (1973), and *The Lesbian in Literature*<sup>4</sup> (1967; 1975; 1981) were published. However, the antiessentialist approach promoted by poststructuralist theories problematises the concept itself of a 'gay and lesbian literature':

If sexuality is no longer thought of as a basically natural drive unchangeable throughout human history, then the notion of a 'homosexual tradition' running from classical Greece to twentieth-century modernity will itself be an ideological construct, tied to a

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI3pbLG34Pw>.

<sup>4</sup> *The Lesbian in Literature* began as an outgrowth of lesbian magazine *The Ladder*, published from 1956 to 1972.



specific moment in the construction of modern 'sexual identity'.  
(Pustianaz 2000: 149)

Nonetheless, many scholars from different theoretical backgrounds still consider the exposure of homophobic strategies in the established literary canon an important aim of literary studies of sexual dissidence. Italian queer scholar Liana Borghi defines the construction of a 'lesbian literary canon' as a strategy of 'resistance to the varied and complex heteropatriarchal practice of eradicating lesbian desire' (2000: 156) and some of the most extensive studies which attempt to achieve this aim were published in the 1990s such as Julie Abraham's *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (1996), Marilyn Farwell's *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (1996), and Sally Munt's *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space* (1998).

This field of studies was very prolific in Anglo-Saxon contexts but the activity of challenging the heteronormativity of the established literary canon has been much more recent in the Spanish academic world. Federico García Lorca's loves and sexual preferences, for instance, have been censored by Spanish literary criticism for many years. In some cases, Lorca's sexuality was denied, in others it was dismissed as irrelevant. Irish Hispanist Ian Gibson criticises this hypocrisy of the Spanish cultural establishment against what is a crucial aspect in any human being's life—his/her emotions and desires—which, in the case of artists, have a deep impact on their works: 'Mucha gente decía que el hecho de que [Lorca] fuera homosexual, no tenía nada que ver con su obra, pero a mí me parece justo lo contrario. Su temática está llena de amores que no pueden ser',<sup>5</sup> Gibson comments in an article published in *El País* on 16 January 1998.<sup>6</sup> Lorca's surrealist drama, *El público*—which advocated the right

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<sup>5</sup> 'Many people used to say that the fact that [Lorca] was homosexual had nothing to do with his work, but I think just the opposite is true. His subject matter is full of loves which cannot be'.

<sup>6</sup> [http://elpais.com/diario/1998/01/16/cultura/884905204\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1998/01/16/cultura/884905204_850215.html). In 2009, Ian Gibson published *Caballo azul de mi locura: Lorca y el mundo gay*, in which the Hispanist examined Lorca's passionate and often conflicted relationships with his lovers and friends through excerpts from his letters and his work.

to erotic freedom, especially of same-sex desires, against sexual repression—was written in 1929-1930, but it was only published in 1978, after the end of Franco's regime. Most of his *Sonetos del amor oscuro*, dedicated to his lover Rafael Rodríguez Rapún, remained unpublished until 1986.<sup>7</sup> The following year, between 26 November 1987 and 2 January 1988, TVE1, the main channel of Spanish State-owned television, broadcast a six-part miniseries entitled *Lorca, La muerte de un poeta*. Based on Ian Gibson's *La represión nacionalista de Granada en 1936 y la muerte de Federico García Lorca* (1971) and directed by the prestigious director Juan Antonio Bardem, this miniseries represented a break from the Spanish television panorama of those years. Indeed, Lorca's sexuality—and its impact on his work—is at the core of the story together with an historical reconstruction of the years which preceded the Civil War.

In 1991 Angel Sahuquillo, one of the few Spanish queer scholars to focus on literature, published *Federico García Lorca y la cultura de la homosexualidad masculina*. This book on Lorca was published explicitly against the ideological structures which were so pervasive in the Spanish literary world and interprets sexual preferences—and some of their consequences, such as fear of rejection and the lack of a canon to express same-sex emotions—as a crucial angle of analysis of an artist's work. The study also focuses on writers such as Emilio Prado, Luis Cernuda, and Juan Gil-Albert, whose works are examined for their homoeroticism and sexual tensions. This perspective in Spanish and Catalan literary criticism is still rare. Josep-Anton Fernández's *Another Country: Sexuality and National Identity in Catalan Gay Fiction* (2000a) is the first extensive study of the representation of (male) sexual dissidence in the work of Catalan authors

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<sup>7</sup> In 1975, Juan-Gil Albert published *Heraclés: sobre una manera de ser*, a book he had written in 1955 which, as the same author explains in the introduction, is about 'el único tema escabroso que queda en pie' [the only scabrous subject which stands], that is sexual dissidence (1975: 9). Jaime Gil de Biedma left a diary of 2000 pages, many of which remain unpublished. However, his relationships and his sexual life are the main subject of Sigfrid Monleón's film *El cónsul de Sodoma* (2010). In the same year TVE1 broadcast the documentary *Jaime Gil de Biedma: Retrato de un poeta*.

such as Terenci Moix, Biel Mesquida, and Lluís Fernàndez. A more recent example is provided by David Vilaseca's *Queer Events: Post-deconstructive Subjectivities in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960s to 1990s* (2010), which analyses from a queer perspective *Todos los parques no son un paraíso*, the autobiographical novel written by Carmelite priest Antonio Roig Roselló, which focuses on the writer's sexual experiences with men<sup>8</sup> (1976), and openly gay writer Terenci Moix's *Memorias: El peso de la paja*.<sup>9</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that all these three scholars were working outside Spain when they published these studies: Angel Sahuquillo worked in Sweden, Josep-Anton Fernàndez was a professor at Queen Mary University of London, and David Vilaseca was a professor at the University of London. Moreover, as Santiago Fouz Hernández recalls, the publication of Alfredo Martínez-Exposito's *Los escribas furiosos: configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* (1998) was possible only thanks to Australian funding (2003: 90).

Also published abroad, *Lesbian Realities/Lesbian Fictions in Contemporary Spain* (2011) is one of the most exhaustive sociological and cultural analyses of politics and representations of female sexual dissidents in Spain. However, the contribution of Spanish scholars to this book focuses on sociological studies—Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio's 'Politics and Language: The Representation of Some "Others" in the Spanish Parliament' and Marta Sofía López Rodríguez and Yolanda Sánchez Paz's 'Living Out/Off Chueca', for example—whereas among five essays dedicated to literature only one is contributed by a Spanish scholar, namely Inmaculada Pertusa-Seva's 'Flavia Company: From Lesbian Passion to Gender Trouble', confirming the

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<sup>8</sup> After the publication of this book Roig was expelled from his order.

<sup>9</sup> Moix's autobiography comprises three books: *El cine de los sábados* (1990), *El beso de Peter Pan* (1993), and *Extraño en el paraíso* (1998).

predominance of the sociological perspective with respect to literary studies detected by Galán.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, Spanish literary referents of homoerotic desire among women were initially given even less attention than their male counterparts. The Spanish official literary canon—male, white, and heterosexual, as Lunati describes it<sup>11</sup> (2007: 78)—already discriminates against female writers and poets and, therefore, sexually dissident female authors have to face a double exclusion. Catalan poet Maria Mercè Marçal exposes this lack of female referents in literature and criticises the subordinate position suffered by female writers in a falsely neutral cultural universe, dominated by the masculine perspective (1998). This discrimination prevents the creation of a female literary tradition and thus a female literary genealogy (Lunati 2007: 88). It is interesting to notice, however, that one of the first novels to narrate the love and sexual relationship among two women was written by a Spanish author, Ángeles Vicente. The book is entitled *Zeze* and was published in 1909. Moreover, activist and poet Lucía Sánchez Saornil, who was one of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*, a feminist anarchist association (1936-1939), published many poems which were explicitly homoerotic. However, it was not until 1996 that an anthology of her work saw the light, in which literary critics Rosa María Martín Casamitjana comments on the discrimination imposed on Lucía Sánchez Saornil by the Spanish intellectual and cultural world for being a woman and for her anarchist militancy. Nonetheless, even though she briefly mentions the poet's 'lesbian inclinations' (1996: 10), Martín Casamitjana does not consider this element important for her analysis of Saornil's work, since she ignores this angle of

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<sup>10</sup> Another example is provided by *Amazonia, retos de visibilidad lesbiana* (2007), which also includes one chapter on literature out of eight. The chapter is Angie Simonis's 'Silencio a gritos: discurso e imágenes del lesbianismo en la literatura', which focuses on recuperating stories about love and sexual relationships between women in literature.

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Showalter also makes similar considerations with respect to the British literary canon, explaining that only a few women were allowed to enter the history of literature (1977). However, in Southern European countries such as Spain and Italy the discrimination imposed on female writers have been even tougher.

interpretation to focus instead on Saornil's anarchist and feminist ideals, understood through an heteronormative perspective. However, in 2010, the feminist journal *Letras Femenina*, dedicated a whole number to 'lesbian visibility' in contemporary Ibero-American literature, art, and cinema, indicating an increase attention to artistic productions by female sexually dissident authors.

As far as Catalan female literary referents are concerned, there is another consideration that needs to be borne in mind. In the formation of a Catalan literary canon the national and linguistic aspects have prevailed relegating other factors to the shadows. As Francesca Bartina argues, scholars have long ignored issues of gender and sexuality in Víctor Català's<sup>12</sup> *Solitud* (1905), which are crucial to understanding the novel (2001: 198). Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del diamant* (1962) was firstly analysed from a feminist perspective only by Anglo-American scholars. The homoerotic content of Maria Mercè Marçal's poems was also initially censored by the Catalan intellectual worlds. As Laia Climent maintains in *Maria-Mercè Marçal: cos i compromís*, the poet was initially excluded from the history of literature because she breaks the norms of patriarchal society and her work does not fit the esthetic patterns of the established canon (2008: 204). Josep-Anton Fernández also maintains that the 'historicist paradigm' around which Catalan literary studies are 'methodologically structured depends heavily on the concept of national literature' (Fernández 2000a: 1). Therefore, the history of Catalan literature and culture has been mostly studied as the history of the construction of a national literature and culture. He concludes that 'nationality is thus the central [...] tenet of Catalan Studies' (Fernández 2000a: 1). However, Climent's works on Marçal (2002; 2008), Angie Simonis's analysis of the works of Carme Riera and Montserrat Roig (2011) and Maria Àngels Cabré's (2011) research into 'contemporary lesbian literature' are clear examples of how the situation is changing in Catalan

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<sup>12</sup> Víctor Català is the pseudonym of Caterina Albert.

literary criticism and aspects such as gender and sexuality are attracting more attention. As Lunati comments, '[a]vui, però, des de posicions crítiques diverses, la problematització de la idea mateixa d'un canon o la seva pluralització sembla inajornable'<sup>13</sup> (2007: 82).

In *Another Country: Sexuality and National Identity in Catalan Gay Fiction*, Fernàndez attempts to trace a relationship between these two patterns of identity—sexuality and nationality. Fernàndez recognises the tension between the 'nation' and the 'body' in Catalan literature, arguing that the former, being under construction, tends to present itself as homogeneous, while the latter is heterogeneous and its polymorphous desires could represent a threat to the naturalisation of the nation (2000a: 1). However, instead of seeing these two patterns of identities as being conflictive, Fernàndez sees a liberating potentiality in their encounter. In this interpretation, Fernàndez reprises the work of Robert Schwartzwald who, referring to the context of Québec, argues that nationality and sexuality, far from being mutually exclusive categories, can and indeed should be theorised in relation to each other: sexual desires are constantly inflected by the conceptualisation of national identity, thus the understanding of sexuality cannot escape from the frame of national culture (Schwartzwald 1993: 290).

In this respect, Fernàndez suggests a twofold strategy, according to which the demands for equal rights for sexual dissidents are to be the basis for a wider agenda for social equality, and 'to prevent the reproduction of hierarchies on this field of plural identities, efforts would be made to generate an epistemology of multiplicity and complexity' (2000a: 209-210). This strategy will create what he defines as 'queer nationalism' which would universalise the point of view of minorities and constitute a dynamic identity model. Referencing Braidotti (1994), Fernàndez concludes by affirming that the

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<sup>13</sup> 'Today, however, from different critical positions, the problematisation of the idea itself of a canon or the pluralisation of this idea seem unpostponable'.

'Catalan queer self would be a nomadic subject, one related to a territory but not attached to it' (2000a: 210). This tension between sexual and national patterns of identity is also unveiled in Timothy McGovern's study of Galician poet Antón Lopo's *Pronomes*. After describing the double marginality suffered by Lopo for the use of a marginalised language and his sexual preferences, McGovern wonders: 'If gay/lesbian/queer/bisexual/transgender writing in Spain must rely on always marking its difference from a heterosexist canon, how does it fit into the Galician project?'<sup>14</sup> (2006: 149).

A divergent opinion is expressed by Llamas in the interview conducted by Fouz Hernández which I have already mentioned. Llamas is very skeptical of the concept of 'queer nationalism' and contrasts the concept of nation with his idea of 'gay communities':

Yo creo que las comunidades *gay* son de las comunidades más internacionalistas o menos nacionalistas, por decirlo de otra manera, creo que los gays y las lesbianas, precisamente por la sensación de exilio más o menos permanente con respecto a nuestros pueblos, a nuestras familias, a la cultura más o menos mayoritaria que hemos vivido, tenemos una comprensión de lo que supone el exilio para el resto de las personas y de lo que supone también la comunicación entre personas de distintos horizontes y, a mi modo de ver, todas estas cosas deberían animarnos a poner muy en cuestión los referentes nacionales.<sup>15</sup> (2003: 92)

Ryan Prout also examines the tensions and contradictions between national and sexual patterns of identity in his article on Galician director Juan

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<sup>14</sup> The issue of double marginality—or in her case triple—was also uncovered by Maria Marcè Marçal in her poem 'Divisa' included in *Cau de llunes* (1977): 'A l'atzar agraeixo tres dons: haver nascut dona,/de classe baixa i nació oprimida./I el tèrbol atzur de ser tres voltes rebel' [I am grateful to fate for three gifts: to have been born a woman,/ from the working class and an oppressed nation./And the turbid azure of being three times a rebel].

<sup>15</sup> 'I think that gay communities are among the most internationalist or, to put it another way, the least nationalist communities; I think gays and lesbians, precisely because of the more or less permanent sentiment of exile we feel towards our countries, our families, the more or less mainstream culture we live in, understand what exile means for other people and also what it means to communicate with people of different points of view and, in my opinion, all this should encourage us to question national referents'.

Pinzáz's 'Trilogía de vida, de amor y de sexo',<sup>16</sup> which comprises *Era outra vez* (2000), *Días de voda* (2002), and *El desenlace* (2005). Prout sets out a 'dual coming-out paradigm' (2010: 79) presupposed in the narration of the first two films which 'invite [the] audience to draw parallels between the process of coming out of the gay closet and coming out of the linguistic closet' (2010: 79): 'the expression of a sexual and of linguistic preference both seem to involve the courage required by going against the grain and being seen and heard to be unconventional in contexts where it would be easier to pass as straight or as Spanish-speaking' (2010: 78). However, Prout unveils the tensions and the contradictions involved in this process, especially evident in the third film of the trilogy, in which the 'gay identity' of the protagonist and his 'Galician-speaking identity' seem to be mutually exclusive (2010: 85).

These debates as well as the expansion of the areas of studies which have been examined through a gender and sexual perspective are indicative of how much the situation of gender and sexual dissidence studies has improved in the last decade in the Spanish and Catalan contexts. As far as media studies is concerned, compelling research has been conducted regarding the construction of gender roles and issues of sexual dissidence in cinema. This is demonstrated by Pilar Aguilar Carrasco's work on the role played by films in sustaining gender discrimination and their manipulative depiction of gender violence (1995; 1998; 2002; 2010) and Alberto Mira's study of aesthetic qualities and political potentiality in Almodóvar's cinema, in which he analyses to what extent it can be examined through the theories surrounding 'camp' elaborated in the Anglo-Saxon contexts (2005). However, as I have already commented, this recent attention paid by gender and sexual dissidence studies to literature and cinema has not been noticeable as far as television is concerned. Therefore, my thesis aspires to explore the fruitful intersections between television studies and gender and sexual dissidence studies in the Spanish and Catalan

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<sup>16</sup> 'Trilogy of Life, Love, and Sex'.



contexts—a perspective so far mainly disregarded, especially as far as the role played by television series in the construction of a strict gender binary system and heteronormativity is concerned.

My first chapter focuses on the construction of gender roles in Catalan soap operas. I have chosen to concentrate on this genre because it allows me to apply the paradigms of analysis that Anglo-Saxon feminist scholars have elaborated for the content of soap operas and the viewing practices of their audiences to a corpus of material which has rarely been analysed through this perspective. This angle has proven to be fascinating also from a personal point of view. Indeed, the research I conducted for this chapter required confrontation with my prejudices and skepticism towards a television genre which I had always regarded as superficial. Instead, my investigation has allowed me to see how soap operas can be an interesting object of analysis as far as their construction of gender roles and identities and their treatment of gender-related issues is concerned. Moreover, in this chapter, I have chosen to focus only on the Catalan context since this choice provides me with a coherent body of material, in which it was possible to isolate paradigms of analysis and compare and contrast them with those elaborated for British and American soaps.

As the reader will notice, many bibliographical sources I employ in this chapter 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; Morgan 2013), but these studies focus more on other aspects, such 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. My chapter aims precisely to see to which extent this theoretical background can be applied to my examination of the content of Catalan soaps and the viewing practices adopted by the audience for them.

The second chapter focuses on the construction of sexual dissidence in Spanish and Catalan television series. Therefore, for this part, I have chosen to focus on a wider range of material which comprises different genres and series from different channels, both in Spanish and in Catalan and both private and public-funded. This choice is justified by the fact that I do not concentrate here on paradigms elaborated for a particular genre, but I aim to challenge the 'positivity' and 'essentialist' paradigms which have so far dominated the examination of the construction of sexual dissidence in television series. Indeed, television studies has mainly disregarded poststructuralist theories in its evaluation of non-heteronormative characters and storylines. My chapter aims precisely to apply such theories to a body of material which has never been analysed through this perspective.

To summarise thus far, the two chapters which constitute the body of my thesis follow a similar approach which consists in inserting theories and paradigms elaborated in Anglo-Saxon contexts to characters and storylines taken from Spanish and Catalan television series. In the following paragraphs, I am going to present a more detailed resume of the two chapters.

The first chapter is entitled 'The Construction of Gender Roles in Soaps: Using Anglo-Saxon Paradigms to Re-read Catalan Texts'. In the first section of this chapter, entitled 'A Call to Action: Television as a Site for Feminist Struggle', I examine how feminist criticism, with all its diverse and contradictory strands, has approached television studies. I describe the different methods employed by liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism to analyse how television content constructs gender roles. I then illustrate the shift proposed by poststructuralist feminism from content analysis to an inspection of viewing practices.

In the second section, entitled 'How and Why Women Watch Television: From Content Analysis to Audience Analysis', I focus on how some feminist scholars, such as Tania Modleski and Charlotte Brunsdon, have analysed soap operas' content and structure to find reasons for this genre's appeal to an audience constructed as female. Taking their studies as a starting point, I examine how feminist criticism applied reader-oriented theories elaborated by Barthes, Ingarden, and Iser to television and, in particular, to the genre of soap opera and the viewing practices it requires.

In the third section, entitled 'Soap Opera: A "Female" Genre?', I query the predominance of the genre of soap opera in feminist television studies; I investigate the association of soap operas with an audience constructed as female and the (negative) connotations derived from this construction as a 'female' genre, inserting it in the more general concept of 'women's picture', which I examine through a wide range of texts taken from literature and cinema, paying particular attention to the genre of melodrama.

In the fourth section, 'How and Why Women Watch Soap Operas: An Analysis of this Genre's Appeal for Female Audiences', I apply Dorothy Hobson's, Ien Ang's, and Mary Ellen Brown's pioneering studies and theories to my examination of the written feedback posted by viewers on Catalan television's official internet forum. I argue that those comments lend weight to these studies' hypothesis that there exists an emotional bond between soap operas and an audience constructed as female, as well as to the contention that the discursive spaces around soaps are important as a source of networking for this audience. Moreover, choosing online texts as the material for the analysis, I explore the possibilities that new digital media offer for broadening the connections among viewers of a soap. However, I also problematise the depiction of women as a monolithic and homogeneous category, and the construction of soap opera's audience as 'female'.

In the fifth section, entitled 'Are Soaps all the Same? An Analysis of National Differences within the Genre', I illustrate Christine Geraghty's paradigm of soap opera analysis through three aesthetic traditions—entertainment, melodrama, and realism—and I expose how the different permutations of the three variants demarcates differences between British and American traditions of this genre. Throughout this analysis, I compare the results with my own examination of Catalan soaps to try to discover whether they can fit the paradigm elaborated for their British and American counterparts and how soap operas in Catalonia can be related to other traditions of this genre. In the light of this examination, I argue that Catalan soaps resemble British drama serials more closely than they do American ones. This is evident in all three of the aesthetic traditions taken into consideration. However, in my analysis, I detect dissimilarities between Catalan and British soaps in their different strategies which they employ to achieve a supposedly realist mode of narration. In this section, I also set out the controversies around the epistemology of realism in television texts and, in particular, in the soap opera genre.

In the sixth section, 'Are Soaps a Safe Place? An Analysis of Models of Family and the Construction of a Sense of Community in Soaps', I compare and contrast American and British soaps in their representation of community and families. In the American ones, I underscore how a sense of community is not constructed at all, since the drama serials generally focus on one family, whereas in British soaps a sense of community is crucial. This difference is also due to the diverse way in which American and British soaps represent women as either a source of disruption or maintaining of the order within the narratives of the soaps. In this aspect, I argue that Catalan soaps follow the path established by British drama serials in representing a sense of community.

In the seventh section, 'Learning from Soaps: An Analysis of Soap Operas' Didactic Aspirations', I examine of how Catalan soaps have

approached social issues. Starting with a comparison between American and British soaps, I show that the former tend to disregard social conflicts and issues, whereas the second have been defined as teacherly texts precisely because of their depiction of, and pedagogical approach to, such themes. I argue that, in this respect too, Catalan soaps are similar to their British counterparts. I propose an examination of the treatment that Catalan drama serials reserve for social issues informed by my own analysis of characters and storylines, as well as the interviews which I have conducted with the writer Josep Maria Benet i Jornet and the director Esteve Rovira.

I particularly focus on the representation of gender violence. I argue that Catalan soaps demonstrate a will to deal with themes which are generally disregarded, such as rape within marriage and domestic violence in upper-middle class families. I then examine how health issues are depicted in Catalan soaps. Moreover, I investigate how Catalan soaps employ the representation of some illnesses, especially breast cancer, in order to explore the dynamics between disease and gender. I argue that all these storylines make evident the pedagogical role that Catalan television aims to perform in educating its audience about social issues. These aspirations, I argue, demonstrate that, if television cannot quite be an agent for social change, it still plays a crucial role in constructing meanings and perceptions of gender roles and issues.

The second chapter, entitled 'The Construction of Sexual Dissidence on TV: Using Anglo-Saxon Paradigms to Re-read Spanish and Catalan Texts', complicates the pedagogic aspirations of television as far as the depiction of non-heteronormative feelings and relationships is concerned. In the first section, entitled 'Do Words Count? A Terminological Clarification', I explain why I do not employ the terms 'homosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian', or 'queer' in order to refer generally to people who are excluded from heteronormativity. Indeed, all these terms have been developed in specific social and political contexts and they express a precise sense of identity: some people might feel comfortable in

defining themselves as gay but others might refuse this label and I do not consider that I can impose this or any other term on people. Therefore, I only use these terms when I refer to a particular person who I know for sure defines himself or herself as such (for instance, this is the case of lesbian activist Empar Pineda and queer scholar Liana Borghi). Instead, when I am talking in general terms, I employ the expressions 'sexual dissidents' and 'people excluded from heteronormativity' since, beyond the debate between essentialism and constructionism, the focus on my thesis is on the social and cultural constructions of the meanings which surround relationships and feelings among people of the same sex and, in particular, the role that television plays in these constructions. In this sense, I problematise the use of the words 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' and, despite the notorious expression 'compulsory heterosexuality' (1984) elaborated by Adrienne Rich, I explain my choice of the term 'heteronormativity'. I argue that this term explicitly refers to the 'sex system' denounced by Gayle Rubin, which sanctions certain sexual behaviours while imposing a status of 'neutrality' on others.

In the second section, entitled 'An Overview of the Studies of Non-Heteronormative Content on TV', I contrast the extensive research dedicated to non-heteronormative content in cinema with the disinterest demonstrated by academic studies towards this content on television. Moreover, I point out that most of the studies published on this subject focus on American small screen, whereas Spanish and Catalan television content has mainly been examined through other perspectives: Spanish television in its role of sustaining the values and the objectives pursued by the Movimiento Nacional during the dictatorship and the autonomic medium for its role in portraying and promoting an image of Catalonia as a nation.

In the third section, 'Why Television Counts: The Importance of Non-Heteronormative Media Images', I query the role of television in giving visibility to non-dominant discourses and in expanding the range of feelings

and desires seen in the public sphere. I illustrate the exclusionary role performed by the process of stereotyping, which functions as a mechanism of discrimination. Starting from the conviction that homophobia is a social issue rooted in discourses and cultural representations, I stress the importance of examining how television series construct sexual dissidence and non-heteronormative feelings. However, I also uncover the ambiguity and inadequacy of the criteria which have usually been employed by Anglo-Saxon scholars to evaluate such representations. I question the validity of the quantitative and qualitative approaches mostly employed in this evaluation by LGBT organisations. These approaches are based on the paradigm of 'positivity', that is the pretension of evaluating a sexually dissident character or a non-heteronormative storyline through a positive-negative scale, which is infused with a clichéd notion of 'realism': a sexually dissident character is judged as 'negative' if he/she is not 'realistic'. However, when more accurate and verisimilar images are demanded, an epistemology of realism is implied in which the function of the media is held to be the mirroring of the real world. Instead, I interpret media not as an objective or universal representation of the world, but as a specific cultural construction and I argue that their representations contribute to the construction of determined identities, not mirroring or distorting them. Therefore, in my chapter, I distance myself from this approach as it is not my intention to determine whether or not an image represents a 'positive' portrayal of people excluded from heteronormativity, simply because I do not believe such an aim can be achieved considering that these people are not a homogeneous group with a unified identity. On the other hand, following the 'semiological guerilla warfare' approach proposed by Umberto Eco, I share the interpretation of television criticism as an instrument which can help audiences decode programmes and gain consciousness of how television polices the boundaries of meaning, thus contributing to the deconstruction of prejudicial practices.

In the fourth section, entitled 'Normalisation: Who Has the Right to Belong to a Normal Country?', I query the process and the strategies of 'normalisation'—one of the most important aims of Catalan television. However, this concept is usually examined through an interpretation of the autonomic medium as a 'national public television service' and its role in constructing a Catalan national imagery. On the other hand, I will apply this concept of 'normalisation' to the representation of non-heteronormative feelings and relationships, querying how a pedagogic aim of 'normalising' non-heteronormativity is often achieved by a process of exclusion of certain subjects, such as those who do not conform to a strict gender binary system.

In the fifth section, I concentrate on the debate between essentialist and poststructuralist views of sexuality. I will demonstrate how the former conception is dominant in television representation of sexual dissidence through an analysis of characters and plots from Spanish and Catalan series.

In the sixth section, entitled 'Constructing a Collective History', I explain how poststructuralist theories have complicated the concept of a collective history for those people excluded from heteronormativity. Nonetheless, even recognising its fictitiousness and arbitrariness, I stress the usefulness of this strategy. I also examine the role played by Catalan and Spanish television in narrating non-heteronormative relationships set in other periods of times, especially during the dictatorship.

In the seventh section, entitled 'Television's Depiction of the Role of the School System in Sustaining Heteronormativity', I stress the role that the educational system should perform in challenging the monopoly of heteronormativity. Then, I examine the few storylines in Spanish and Catalan series which have been dedicated to query the role of school in transmitting to children and teenagers the knowledge of the range of sexual options. Finally, I focus on the bullying against people excluded from heteronormativity in school and how Spanish and Catalan television narrations have depicted this issue.



In conclusion, in the two chapters of my thesis, I examine a corpus of material constituted by characters and plots from Spanish and Catalan series through a perspective informed by theories elaborated by Anglo-Saxon scholars in gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence. These two fields of studies, which are fairly recent in Spanish and Catalan academia, have disregarded television content and the aim of my thesis is precisely to address the role performed by this medium in the construction of meanings surrounding gender issues and sexual dissidence. Moreover, in both chapters, I query the pedagogical aspirations of publically funded television and the contradictions often involved in these aspirations.

Finally, my thesis comprises two appendixes. The first one includes the transcription and translation into English of the interview I conducted with Catalan director Esteve Rovira on 18 May 2010. The second appendix includes the transcription and translation into English of the interview I conducted with Catalan theatre and television writer Josep Maria Benet i Jornet on 17 May 2011.

Throughout the thesis, the translation of any quote in languages other than English is provided in the footnotes.

# **The Construction of Gender Roles in Soap Operas**

## **Using Anglo-Saxon Paradigms to Re-read Catalan Texts**

If we consider television as a powerful ideological apparatus and feminism as a resistance theory, it becomes evident why television content has been a focus of feminist studies from early on in the development of gender studies. In the first section of this chapter 'A Call to Action: Television as a Site for Feminist Struggle', I will examine how feminist criticism, with all its diverse and contradictory strands, has approached television studies. In the second section, entitled 'How and Why Women Watch Television: From Content Analysis to Audience Analysis', I will particularly focus my attention on post-structuralist feminism and the shift it proposed from content analysis to an inspection of viewing practices. I will discuss pioneering studies of female audience analysis, such as those by Dorothy Hobson, Ien Ang, and Charlotte Brunsdon. Taking their work as a starting point, I will examine how feminist criticism applied reader-oriented theories to television and its audiences. I will begin the third section 'Soap Opera: A Female Genre?' by querying the prominence of soap opera analysis in feminist television studies and will ask how this genre addresses an audience which has traditionally been constructed as 'female', as Tania Modleski and Charlotte Brundson argue. Subsequently, I will examine the derogatory connotations of the term 'soap' and of 'women's fiction' in general. In the fourth section, 'How and Why Women Watch Soap Operas: An Analysis of this Genre's Appeal for Female Audiences', I will query the historical association between soaps and women viewers and I will discuss some of the main works which try to identify the reasons for the predication of women as the consumers of soap opera. I will intersect this review of feminist studies of audience analysis with my own examination of comments left by viewers on the official internet forum maintained by Televisió de Catalunya, the

Catalan public television service.<sup>17</sup> In the fifth section, entitled 'Are Soaps all the Same? An Analysis of National Differences within the Genre', following the paradigm elaborated by Geraghty, I will analyse the genre of soap opera according to three aesthetic traditions—entertainment, melodrama, and realism—and see how the different permutations by which they are combined demarcate variations between British and American traditions within and around the genre. Examining the paradigms elaborated in Anglo-Saxon contexts allows me to consider to what extent Catalan soaps fit them by proposing an original analysis of selected characters and storylines from a corpus of Catalan drama serials. This approach will be also followed in the sixth section, 'Are Soaps a Safe Place? An Analysis of Models of Family and the Construction of a Sense of Community in Soaps', in which I will compare and contrast American and British soaps in their representation of community and families and examine to which paradigm Catalan soaps adhere. Finally, in the seventh section, 'Learning from Soaps: An Analysis of Soap Operas' Didactic Aspirations', I will examine how Catalan soaps have approached social issues and I will query the pedagogical aspirations of the Catalan public television service.

### **1.1 A Call to Action: Television as a Site for Feminist Struggle**

While British cultural studies were firstly concerned with issues related to class and ethnicity, scholars working at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary and Cultural Studies were pioneers in studying how these issues, and others, related to gender. Publications such as *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination* (1978) evolved out of the collective work of authors such as Charlotte Brunsdon, Marion Jordon, Dorothy Hobson, and Christine Geraghty,

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<sup>17</sup> All the Catalan television programmes that I discuss in my thesis are broadcast on TV3, the main channel of Televisió de Catalunya, the Catalan public television service. In my thesis, the term 'Catalan television' is always employed to indicate Televisió de Catalunya.

who were committed to understanding popular culture as a site of struggle over meaning (Hall 1980).

According to Catherine Lumby, 'if feminism is to remain engaged with and relevant to the everyday lives of women, then feminists desperately need the tools to understand everyday culture' (1997: 174). Indeed, analysing how patriarchal ideology excludes, silences, and oppresses women inevitably leads to the analysis of the processes and practices that produce ideas about what it means to be a woman in culture (McCabe and Akass 2006: 108). 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 and Read 2002: 238). It is precisely this pervasive and omnipresent nature of television which makes it such a fascinating and, at the same time, complex object of analysis:

After all, everybody *knows* what it is like to watch television. Certainly; and it is television's familiarity, its centrality to our culture, that makes it so important, so fascinating and so difficult to analyse. It is rather like the language we speak: taken for granted, but both complex and vital to an understanding of the way human beings have created their world. (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 16)

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 "overdetermined" ideological influences which develop in a people a tendency to behave and think in socially acceptable ways' (Brown 1990: 18).

The reiteration of similar perspectives by these multiple social institutions is used to reinforce and perpetuate the ideology of the dominant groups and their 'hegemony', in Antonio Gramsci's words (1975). The Italian philosopher explains how 'hegemony', as opposed to 'dominion', is not

imposed through coercive power but rather through persuasion, that is making subordinated groups interiorise their status of being dominated. This 'intellectual and moral direction', as defined by Gramsci, is naturalised and universalised because it comes from so many different sources that it turns into common sense. However, he also argues that the praxis of cultural hegemony is neither fixed nor monolithic. Similarly, Mary Ellen Brown argues that these hegemonic ideological positions 'have to be consciously accepted by people before they become part of the cultural practice of various group and subgroups within society, even though the particular ideological position in question may go against their interests' (1990: 18). Therefore, Gramsci concludes, people have to be continually won over to any ideological position and the potential for opposition always exists. Consequently, such ISAs as the media have 'continually [to] convince and re-convince [their] subjects or audiences, through various types of repetition' (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) and even fictional shows convey strong messages about 'what is normal, good, strange, or dangerous' (Capsuto 2000: 1).

From a contrary position, John Fiske and John Hartley maintain that television is forced by its own constraints and contradictions to give 'freedom of perception to all its viewers' (1978: 19), and they interpret television texts as polysemic sites for the potential generation of ideological meaning. According to this view, television contains within it 'the contradictions which enable viewers to understand the play of ideology' (Brown 1990: 18). Moreover, television texts are not isolated; rather, they gain meaning through the interaction not only with other media but also with broader cultural forms. In addition, one ought not to forget that 'the audience' itself is not an

unproblematic and homogeneous category, but is instead 'composed of differing social and cultural groups [who] can use television texts for their own purposes and in different ways from each other' (Brown 1990: 15).

Initial feminist interest in television was, in the words of Charlotte Brunson, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel, a call 'to action growing out of the deep conviction that women's oppression was very much related to mass media representations and that change was not only urgent, but possible' (1997: 5). It is fair to argue that feminist criticism, with all its diverse and often contradictory strands, played a fundamental role in setting an agenda for television studies. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that feminism and television studies appeared in the academia at the same time because both of them 'are rooted in an intellectual context which challenges grand theories and master narratives' (McCabe and Akass 2006: 116).

As far as artistic forms are concerned, feminist critics locate the issue of women's exclusion from the artistic establishment in its 'inherent androcentricity' and its 'inability [...] to convey an experience that women recognise as congruent with their own' (Brown 1990: 39). Rachel DuPlessis expands on this discrimination suffered by women in the established culture by stating that 'all forms of dominant narrative [...] are tropes for the sex-gender system as a whole' (1985: 43). Therefore, contemporary feminist criticism exposes the hegemonic nature of the relationship between narrative and ideology, circumscribing both processes of creation and interpretation, as well as consumption. Even if these arguments were initially elaborated for literary and artistic expressions, I argue that they are equally applicable to feminist television criticism. Indeed, television programming is mostly produced by men, even those programmes which specifically target a 'female audience', as if this were a monolithic and unproblematically defined group.<sup>18</sup> According to Brown, the absence of the representation of female experience and voices in

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<sup>18</sup> This is particularly true for the genre of soap opera, as I will discuss later.

dominant narrative forms 'conspires with the sex-gender system at large to maintain the marginal status of women, their ideas and their art' (1990: 39). This is why feminist analysis of popular culture is important to the politics of feminism and to women's struggle to be able to narrate their own experiences with their own voices.

Therefore, feminism can be considered part of what Brown defines as 'resistance theory', that is 'a body of work which addresses the issue of how ordinary people and subcultural groups can resist hegemonic, or dominant pressures' (1990: 12). Likewise, in Linda Gordon's words, feminism comprises 'an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it' (1979: 107). However, the term 'feminism' is a complex one because it does not refer to a monolithic and homogeneous movement, but to a wide range of thoughts and studies, 'reliant upon diverse aims, separate objectives and different intellectual concerns' (McCabe and Akass 2006: 108). I will discuss some of the main strands of feminism developed in the 1970s and 1980s and how each of these strands approached and influenced television criticism.

Liberal feminism was concerned with women's struggle for equality in the public work sphere, that is, women's demands for equal access to jobs and institutional power; Marxist feminist scholars linked specific female oppressions to that of other groups—ethnic minorities, the working class, and so forth—and to the larger structure of capitalism; radical feminism considered women as fundamentally different from men and its aim was to advance women's specific needs and desires; and later, in the 1980s, influenced by postmodernism, another strand usually known as poststructuralist feminism was developed, influenced by antiessentialist theory, which considered 'men' and 'women' to be socially constructed subjects, rather than natural categories. Antiessentialist theorists examined the processes through which female subjectivity is constituted in patriarchal culture. In this view, the 'feminine' is not something outside of, or untouched by, patriarchy, but integral to it. A

pioneering scholar in this branch of gender studies is Judith Butler (1990; 1993), who argues that both gender and sex are cultural constructions, performances to be repeated and subject to regulatory norms rather than natural categories. This view had a considerable impact on studies which examine the production and circulation of gender constructions in different arenas, one of the most pervasive being television, as I have previously argued.

Liberal feminism leads to a type of television criticism focused on content analysis, according to which programmes are studied in terms of the types and frequency of female roles they contain. Such studies aim to examine the degree to which television series reflect the changes in the status of women in society. An example of this kind of feminist criticism is Diana Meehan's *Ladies of the Evening: Women Characters of Prime-Time Television* (1983). Meehan's aim is to provide 'specific and accurate descriptions of television characters and behaviours and some index of change over time' (1983: vii). She claims that television representation of female characters encompasses 'reflections of women's lives, implicit endorsement of beliefs and values about women in a very popular forum' (1983: vii).

Marxist feminism analyses the ways in which women as a group are manipulated by larger economic and political concerns. Influenced by Althusser, Marxist feminists consider television a fundamentally capitalist institution and they examine the consequences this has in terms of which images of women are portrayed. Marxist feminist researchers focus on the construction of the female viewer as a consumer, a process which emerges from television's need to sell products through advertising (Kaplan 1992: 257). I will later consider in detail the important role played in this process by women's pictures in general and, in particular, by the genre of soap opera.

Radical feminism influences a strand of television criticism concerned with the support this medium offers to heteronormativity, with its construction of the heterosexual coupling as the norm, and the support of a strict gender



binary system in which men are attributed the dominant position. One of the earliest examples of this line of feminist television criticism is Carol Aschur's 'Daytime Television: You'll Never Want to Leave Home', published in 1976, in which she points out how television represented family as 'the sole repository of love, understanding, compassion, respect, and sexuality' (1976: 74). By way of example she continues by pointing to the representation of family in American soap operas, which, she says, 'portray the idealized lives of families economically headed by professional men', while by contrast most female characters are depicted as housewives<sup>19</sup> (1976: 79). One criticism which was levelled against liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism by subsequent generations of feminists is that they have tended to treat the category of woman as an undifferentiated one, that is, they promoted the idea that all women are taken to share something fundamental in common, in contrast to all men. This is an assumption continually challenged by black feminists, who have argued that, in defining women as white, the feminist movement has overlooked the differences between black and white women's experiences (Carby 1982).

Poststructuralist feminism was influenced by Jacques Lacan's theories regarding the way in which the subject is constructed in a patriarchal language order, which he calls 'the Symbolic', and in which women are normally relegated to the position of absence (Kaplan 1992: 261). Michel Foucault's theories also constituted an important theoretical background for the development of this strand of feminism, especially his idea that power operates in culture through discourses. By discourse, Foucault means:

[A] network of possible ways of speaking or being spoken, being, belonging, empowering, and consequently socially and physically enforcing normalcy. In other words, the ways that people can live, their social practices, are 'constructed' by the way these practices can be spoken about or conceptualised in language. (Brown 1990: 15)

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<sup>19</sup> I will demonstrate that this way of constructing family units is an element which differentiates American soaps from their British and Catalan counterparts.

As far as my research is concerned, particularly relevant is his conceptualisation of sexuality and desire as constructed through dominant discourses. This understanding is not aimed at disregarding biological differences between women and men, but at recognising that the meanings attached to those biological differences and to sexuality are constructed over time through discourse. Feminist television critics use this concept in order to analyse the role performed by television in formulating and circulating those constructions. For instance, scholars have examined the ways in which advertisements and other commercial propaganda construct cultural discourses that become pervasive, thus functioning as power (Kaplan 1992: 262). Taking these theories as a starting point, I will later examine how, in the 1930s, advertising in America exploited and, at the same time, contributed to the circulation of the image of a 'new woman', which was being represented in certain cinematic genres specifically addressed to women, especially melodramas.

Finally, feminist television criticism has been influenced by feminist film theory, especially by Laura Mulvey's pioneering article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', originally published in 1975. Mulvey was one of the first scholars to employ Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories to analyse the patriarchal cultural and psychoanalytical underpinnings of Hollywood narrative ideology. She considers Hollywood films as an embodiment of the patriarchal unconscious and she argues that the spectator is always constructed as masculine.<sup>20</sup> Mulvey's insights into the construction of certain narrative forms, with their cause and effect relationships and ultimate resolution as masculine, generated an interest in looking at the form of a work as possibly

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<sup>20</sup> This identification of the camera with a dominating gaze has been challenged by several women directors. For example, in her film *Costa Brava* (1995), Catalan director Marta Ballebó-Coll narrates a love story between two women, Anna and Montserrat. In one scene they make love in a car; the camera keeps getting closer to the car from multiple angles, but never gets close enough to allow the spectator to see what is happening in the car. By frustrating the voyeuristic aspirations of the spectator, the director, at the same time, exposes them.

gender-related and, thus, shaped, at least in part, by its intended audience. I will later examine the relevance of such theories in analysing the genre of soap opera, which was constructed, from its very beginning, as a 'female' genre.

However, feminist television criticism also marked a difference with film theory since feminist critics called into question the concept of cinema (or media in general) as a 'mirror' which reflects reality (Loevenger 1968), defining it more as a 'distorting reflector' (Brown 1990: 41) or a 'mediator, shaman or relator' (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 86) for 'no text can be a direct, immediate reproduction of an outside world, the problematic nature of such a concept notwithstanding' (Brown 1990: 41). In this sense, feminist television criticism was influenced by certain feminist literary critics, such as Toril Moi, who had also rejected the social reality criterion and also verisimilitude. Moi criticises the idea of a faithful reproduction of a real world outside the fictional one, pointing out the constructed nature of any reality. Her critique goes on to delineate the inability of 'extreme reflectionism' to:

[A]ccommodate notions of formal and generic constraints on textual production, since the knowledge [of] such constraints is equivalent to accepting the inherent impossibility of ever achieving a total reproduction of reality and fiction. (1985: 46)

According to Brown, popular fictions tend to sustain an epistemology of realism. In her opinion, instead of asking how realistic television is, critics need to ask whose fictions it narrates and what culture(s) these fictions serve. Focusing in this way on issues surrounding realism, she concludes, 'leads not to a dead end but to a higher level of analysis—more sophisticated models of balance and fairness, as well as of the audience's interpretative behaviour'<sup>21</sup> (1990: 42).

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<sup>21</sup> In the second chapter, I will question the paradigm of 'positivity', based precisely on an epistemology of realism, and which dominates the examination of how television series construct meanings surrounding sexual dissidence.

The strand of feminist television criticism which was born out of liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism was based on textual analysis: its focus was on content, on the production conditions, and the socio-cultural (and economic) contexts in which television products were created. Following this kind of content analysis, more recent works have employed interdisciplinary approaches in order to understand how gender is produced. Mary Beth Haralovicg (2003) focuses on how classic American sitcoms like *Leave It To Beaver* (1957-1963) and *Father Knows Best* (1954-1963) transmit a determined image of suburban middle-class family life and 'naturalised class and gender identities through patterns of consumption and the spatial layout of the home, to the female consumer' (McCabe and Akass 2006: 110).

One of the most thorough-going examples of this approach remains D'Acci's study (1994) of the police series *Cagney & Lacey* (1981-1988), analysed in a wider socio-cultural context regarding media representations of feminism and network television's institutionalisation of that discourse. In an article precisely focused on the construction of 'femininity' in television, published in 2002, D'Acci affirms that gender is so deeply ingrained in television practices and conventions that it 'is produced at the level of the overall production process—in the myriad imperatives that directly govern the construction of audiences and programmes' (2002: 93). D'Acci study of *Cagney & Lacey* also initiated an important area of discussion by contemporary feminist television criticism, that is the analysis of how television accommodates social change and naturalises dissent, incorporating it and turning it into consensual representation preserving dominant patriarchal ideology. Indeed, she observes that the initial feminist aspirations of *Cagney & Lacey* were gradually diluted due to the negative responses the show garnered in certain sectors of society. In her opinion, this series' representation of feminism 'changed [...] from a criticism of institutional inequities (sexism, racism, and, to a lesser degree, classism) to an examination of women's issues (or what the industry imagined

as such issues) that had the potential for dramatic intensity and exploitability' (1994: 103).

Other examples of this approach can be found in Lauren Rabinovitz's (1994) analysis of 'single mom' sitcoms like *One Day At A Time* (1975-1984) and *Kate and Allie* (1984-1988); Aniko Bodroghkozy's (2003) study of the black sitcom *Julia* (1968-1971) in the context of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement; and Serafina Bathrick's (2003) analysis of how a sitcom such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), although focusing on an unmarried career woman, in fact works to preserve patriarchal values. Similarly, in her study of how female viewers may interpret patterns of identity such as gender and class, Andrea Press argues that 'commercial femininity', as she labels it, is a hallmark of 'postfeminist television', in which 'women are given the freedom to work but not the freedom to disregard conventional standards of physical attractiveness' (1991: 39).

As far as Spanish academia is concerned, little attention has been dedicated to the construction of gender identities and roles in television. An exception is to be found in the work of Pilar Aguilar Carrasco, who has published work on the representation of women on the Spanish small screen, although she mainly concentrates on cinema (1996; 2005). In 2010 Pedro Sangro and Juan Plaza edited *La representación de las mujeres en el cine y la televisión contemporáneos*, a portmanteau volume on the representation of women in cinema and television, as seen from a Spanish perspective. Five articles are dedicated to the small screen and they cover a range of different subjects: authorship in Concepción Cascajosa's 'Mujeres creadoras de ficción televisiva en España'; the relations among different patterns of identity such as class, culture, and gender in *Mujeres* and *Desperate Housewives* in Isabel Menéndez's 'Variables de diferencia en ficción televisiva: cultura, clase y género en *Mujeres* y *Mujeres desesperadas*'; the representation of women in TV news—Nuria Quintana's 'Tratamientos sexistas en el *infoshow*: visión de género sobre el

*pseudoperiodismo satírico en televisión*—and advertising—Óscar Sánchez’s ‘*La alfombra roja de la publicidad: representaciones, ausencias y dobles varas de medir*’; and, finally, the construction of femininity in American series in Marta Fernández Morales’s ‘*Dramaturgias televisivas contemporáneas: el género en las series médicas estadounidenses*’. From among these five articles, only Menéndez’s partially deals with the construction of gender in a Spanish series. Indeed, the limited amount of work which has been done on the connection between gender and media studies in Spain has been dominated by a sociological perspective. In this approach, an examination from a gender perspective of television storylines and characters has been largely disregarded. Catalan television has been even more rarely examined from a gender perspective. The few exceptions to this rule are Lorena Gómez’s article ‘*De qué habla El cor de la ciutat (2000-2009): Estudio de la agenda social del serial más largo de la televisión catalana*’, published in 2011, which briefly discusses the representation of gender issues in the Catalan soap opera *El cor de la ciutat*, and Marta Ortega Lorenzo’s doctoral thesis *Les telenovel·les catalanes Poblenou i El cor de la ciutat: Una anàlisi demogràfica i des de la perspectiva de gènere* (2002), which focuses on how the representation of family units on Catalan drama serials has evolved and pays particular attention to the depiction of the role of wives. However, despite these isolated examples, it is fair to affirm that the crucial role played by television series in the construction of gender identities and issues has received little attention within Spanish and Catalan academic circles.

## **1.2 How and Why Women Watch Television: From Content Analysis to Audience Analysis**

All the scholars whose works I have just discussed aim to examine how gender is (re)produced and institutionalised by television and its representational practices and how those gendered meanings correspond with, or else, oppose, broader areas of women’s changing experiences and culture (McCabe and

Akass 2006: 111). In the 1980s, influenced by poststructuralist feminism, feminist television studies began increasingly to pay attention to audience analysis, which did not focus on the 'textual subject', i.e. the subject constituted within the text itself, but on the 'social subject' constructed within culture (Brunsdon 1981: 32). Much of the audience analysis in feminist television criticism focuses on the soap opera genre. Scholars working along these lines focus on problems of enunciation, that is, of 'who *speaks* a text and to whom it is addressed; the role of TV in domestic life; or the ideology embedded in the forms of product and reception' (Kaplan 1992: 264). Focusing on the audience's interpretative behaviours and the authorship of television texts, these strands of work address those issues clustered around the concept of realism and set out by Brown (1990: 42), which I have discussed above. These scholars also expose the lack of 'female voices'—discrimination towards the female in the creation and production of television programming—to which I have previously referred.

One of the earliest scholars to approach the study of gender in television from this perspective was Tania Modleski, who, following Aschur (1976), identifies the rhythms of television as similar to those of domestic labour and also underscores how the episodic, multi-linear narrative form of soap opera replicates patterns of distraction and disruption. She theorises that:

Soap operas tend more than any other form to break down the distance required for the proper working of identification. But rather than seeing these cases as pathological instances of *over*-identification [...] I would argue that they point to a different *kind* of relationship between spectator and characters that can be described in the words of Irigaray as 'nearness'. The viewer does not become the characters [...] but rather relates to them as intimates, as extensions of her world. (1983: 68-69)

Modleski claims that soap opera meets real socio-cultural needs for those women feeling isolated at home, playing out the intimacies of family life and providing a 'collective fantasy [...] of community' (1982: 108). However, she

concludes that 'women's popular culture speaks to women's pleasure at the same time that it puts it in the service of patriarchy, keeps it working for the good of the family' (1983: 69). She had already made this kind of statement in her analysis of the continued popularity of romantic fiction in the postfeminist era, asking herself what it is about old-age patriarchal tales of naïve heroines and dashing heroes that still finds a 'female audience' keen 'to participate in and actively desire feminine self betrayal' (1982: 37). Therefore, Modleski's viewer is represented as uncultured, naïve, and unaware of the processes through which ideology is created and diffused. This depiction of the television viewer, and in particular of the soap opera viewer, has been re-evaluated by feminist author Charlotte Brunsdon, who, in her seminal article '*Crossroads: Notes on Soap Opera*', published in 1981, argues that this British soap is concerned with the ideology of 'personal life'. In Brunsdon's opinion, *Crossroads* constructs 'moral consensus about the conduct of personal life. There is an endless unsettling, discussion and resettling of acceptable modes of behaviour within the sphere of personal relationships' (1981: 35). Brunsdon stresses that the historical spectator is constructed by a whole range of other discourses, including motherhood, romance, and sexuality, which will determine her reactions to a text (1981: 32). She concludes that the addressee of soap opera is constructed as a gendered audience which relies on 'the traditionally feminine competencies associated with the responsibility for "managing" the sphere of personal life' (1981: 37). Yet she is careful to avoid the essentialist trap of claiming that such competencies are natural and innate for women; rather, she sees them as being socially constructed so as to be ascribed to women through inscription in 'the ideological and moral frameworks, the rules, of romance, marriage and family life' (1981: 37).

The depiction of soap operas' viewers as gullible and uncritical is still pervasive as demonstrated by Nick Morgan's article (2013) on *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*, a Colombian *telenovela*. Morgan criticises what he interprets as a



simplistic portrayal of soap operas' audiences exemplified by media critic Omar Rincón who affirms that 'cuando algo sale en teve [sic] y tiene éxito es porque la sociedad lo acepta como propio y genera identificación y hasta orgullo'<sup>22</sup> (2009). In his essay 'Narco.estetica y narco.cultura en narco.lombia' (2009), Rincón sees the popularity of television products such as *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* as a cultural expression of Colombia's moral decline. However, Morgan dismantles this association by employing Raymond Williams's theories and his rejection of the 'false equation', according to which 'the observable badness of so much widely distributed popular culture is a true guide to the state of mind and feeling, the essential quality of living of its consumers' (1989: 12). Morgan's criticism is informed by his presentation of the results of two group studies conducted among viewers of *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*. According to Morgan, these results demonstrate that their enjoyment of the soap does not imply an unmediated identification with the characters and that their understanding of *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* is more sophisticated and ambiguous than critics generally allow. Morgan concludes that these results should invite media scholars 'to be sceptical of sweeping generalisations and dig deeper into the complexities of the beliefs and practices' through which viewers make sense of the fictional world presented by soap operas (2013: 74).

Ien Ang (1982) and Dorothy Hobson (1982) were two of the first scholars to adopt an ethnographic approach, which involves a 'direct observation of television viewing behaviour' (Allen 1992: 102), to examine television viewing habits, gendered pleasures, and how female viewers interacted with the text. Putting forward an alternative interpretation of the text-reader relationship, Ang relies on letters written by Dutch viewers of *Dallas*—first broadcast in the USA by Lorimar Television/CBS in 1978-1991—to theorise the complex relationship between feminism, women, and a text supposedly appealing to a

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<sup>22</sup> 'When something is seen on television and has success, it is because society accepts this programme as part of itself and this programme generates identification and even pride'.

viewership constructed as female. Investigating the diverse and often contradictory responses offered by women as to why they enjoyed watching *Dallas* leads her to construct a social analysis around pleasure and ideology. Unlike Modleski's viewer, however, the female audiences which emerge from Ang's study are active, critical, and selective. However, in contrast with certain audience research which accepts unquestioningly what people say as a direct reflection of their viewing experience, Ang interprets the responses as a 'text' to be read—while warning against the theoretical 'dangers of an over-politicising of [female] pleasure' (1982: 132). Similarly, Hobson studies housewives at home watching the early evening British soap *Crossroads* (Associated Television/ITV in 1964-1988). Noting how women drew on cultural knowledge and personal experience, her findings challenge Stuart Hall's 'preferred reading' model (1980) to suggest instead that textual meaning is constructed at the moment of reading.

Feminist television studies was indeed pioneering in its application of reader-oriented theories to cultural forms other than literature. Before proceeding to the analysis of such theories and to their relevance for feminist critique of the genre of soap opera, I need to make two crucial considerations. First of all, I am perfectly aware of the criticisms which can be made of the use of terms such as 'the reader' or 'the viewer' to refer to any reader or any viewer. In fact, each reader or viewer might perceive himself/herself as having a specific identity in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion, which inevitably influences his/her reading-viewing experience. However, I will need to use such terms for practical reasons. Secondly, although reader-oriented theories can be and have been used to analyse the process of television viewership, there are important differences between the reader/novel and the viewer/television relationships which are worth mentioning. According to Robert Allen, television is a 'performance medium', thus resembling 'the I/you relationship of face-to-face communication more than the removed and

mediated writer/reader relationship' (1992: 101). Moreover, the reader's role in the exchange process between writer and reader is hidden because the reader is rarely addressed or appealed to. Commercial television, by contrast, constantly addresses, demands, and attempts to seduce its viewer (Allen 1992: 101-102).

In Allen's words, 'reader-oriented criticism is the name given to those works which examine the role of the reader in understanding and deriving pleasure from literary texts' (1992: 102). According to structuralist critics, the meaning of a literary text does not reside in any absolute sense within the text itself, but texts are made to have meaning by readers through the reading process. In his pioneering essay 'The Death of the Author', Roland Barthes argues that, while the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, 'the true locus of writing is reading':

A text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author [...] but the reader. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.<sup>23</sup> (1967)

Reader-oriented criticism was also influenced by a philosophical position known as phenomenology, which studies the relationship between the perceiving individual and the things, people, and actions which might be perceived by him/her. According to this theory, all thought and perception involve mutually dependent subjects and objects:

I cannot think but I think of *something*. Thus to study *any* thing is to study that thing as it is experienced or conceptualized within the consciousness of a particular individual. Reality, in other words, has no meaning for us except as individually experienced phenomena.<sup>24</sup> (Allen 1992: 103)

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes>. I think it is relevant to point out that, in his essay, Barthes keeps referring to the reader as 'homme' (man), thus disregarding female readership.

<sup>24</sup> The first sentence 'I cannot think but I think of something' clearly refers to Plato's principles of 'knowledge of knowledge' and of knowledge as 'nothing but perception', which have

Therefore, the act of reading is not merely a mechanical process of sense making, but rather a 'curious and paradoxical process by which lifeless and pitifully inadequate marks of a page are brought to life in the reader's imagination' (Allen 1992: 104). As I have mentioned before, this concept had already been elaborated by Barthes. In his essay *S/Z*, Barthes distinguishes between those texts he defines as 'scriptible'<sup>25</sup> (writerly) and those which are 'lisible' (readerly). According to his definition, readerly texts are those written in a linear and traditional manner, thus, adhering to the status quo in style and content. Meaning in these texts is fixed and pre-determined so that the reader is a site merely to receive information. These texts attempt, through the use of standard representations and dominant signifying practices, to hide any element that would open up the text to multiple meanings. On the other hand, writerly texts reveal such elements, so that the reader can take an active role in the construction of meaning. The stable meaning of readerly texts is replaced by a proliferation of meanings in writerly ones. According to Barthes:

[T]he writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (Barthes 1974: 5)

In *Le plaisir du texte* (1973), Barthes links these two different kinds of texts to the effects they raise. 'Plaisir' (pleasure) is generated by readerly texts, whereas writerly texts provoke 'jouissance'. This term was translated by Miller as 'bliss', but in French it has a connotation of sensual pleasure, even orgasm. Indeed, in Barthes's opinion, the ideal text blurs the distinction between the reader and writer:

In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of

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influenced critical thinking—Descartes's 'Cogito ergo sum' and methodological skepticism, just to mention one example—and artistic expressions, such as, for instance, Hamlet's 'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so' (*Hamlet*, III, 2).

<sup>25</sup> The word 'scriptible' is a neologism in French created by Barthes.

signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable [...]; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (1974: 5)

The literary text, then, is only half of the perceptual dynamic. Following Barthes's theory, Roman Ingarden (1973) argues that it is the reader who completes this dynamic by filling in the places that the text leaves vacant. The notion of gap filling recognises that reading a novel involves:

[N]ot merely following a mental recipe using ingredients supplied by the text, but a much more complex process in which the reader brings to bear upon the words of the text previous experiences with literary texts, knowledge of other texts of the same type, and an array of mostly unconscious assumptions drawn from his or her own experiential world. (Allen 1992: 104-105)

Because these experiences and knowledge vary from culture to culture, group to group, and between individuals, there will be different fictional worlds constructed by different readers on the basis of the same text.

Taking Ingarden's work as a starting point, Wolfgang Iser develops his theory of the 'wandering viewpoint': unlike a painting, a reader cannot experience a novel as a whole at once. Instead of contemplating it from the outside, the reader constantly changes his/her position within the text (1978: 3). Moreover, as Iser points out, throughout the entire text, there is an alternation between protension—the reader's expectation or anticipation—and retention—his/her knowledge of the text to that point (1978: 5). This theory is particularly relevant for the analysis of soap operas, since their open structure and the presence of multiple narrative lines have been identified by feminist scholars as the features of this genre which make it most appealing to an audience constructed as female, as I will discuss later. According to Iser, although the text can stimulate and attempt to channel pretension and

retention, it cannot control these processes because both occur in the places where the text is silent—in the inevitable gaps between sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. 'It is in these holes in the textual structure that we as readers [...] 'work' on that structure. We make connections that the text cannot make for us' (Allen 1992: 106).

The phenomenological theory of reading activity developed by Barthes, Ingarden, and Iser has been employed by feminist critics to analyse television audiences. Elizabeth Freund observes that: 'The trend to liberate the reader from his enforced anonymity and silence, to enable him to recover an identity or the authority of a force, is bedevilled by all the concomitant hazards, schism, anxieties, and jargons of liberation movements' (1987: 6). If we dwell for a moment on her words, it comes as no surprise that feminist television criticism has been concerned from its very beginning with audience research. And as Freund concludes, reader-response criticism is a 'labyrinth of converging and sometimes contradictory approaches' (1987: 6).

Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have studied the ways in which women have integrated television into their cultural perspectives and the struggle over the meanings attached to the category of 'women' produced by television and the relationship of these meanings to specific audiences (Brown 1990: 18-19). Beginning in the 1990s, there has been work which employs an interdisciplinary perspective to combine empirical audience analysis with textual analysis. For example, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992) examines how television form dictates viewing practices; Laura Stempel Mumford's (1995) interrogation of the pleasure she herself takes in a genre (soap opera) which 'displays oppressive tendencies like racism, classism and heterosexism' (McCabe and Akass 2006: 112); and Louise Spence's (2005) multidisciplinary study of varied critical and creative ways in which women viewers use American daytime soaps in their lives. Other works focus on the relationship between gender and ethnicity: Michèle Matterlart's (1997) survey of women

consuming *telenovelas* in Chile; Jacqueline Bobo and Ellen Seiter's (1997) work on representations of African-American femininity; and Purnima Mankekar's (1999) study of how state sponsored television series in India shaped a sense of womanhood. One of the most recent examples in this strand of feminist television studies is Brenda Chao and Wang Xueli's (2011) article about how Singaporean women interpret and appropriate Korean television dramas, which in Chao and Xueli's words, 'have become tools for reflexivity for female audiences [in] building a reflexive understanding of their roles and identities' (2011: 302). McCabe and Akass conclude that this kind of study 'not only reveals the astonishing breadth of feminist insight in discerning how gender is constructed in and by television's representational practices but also pushes us into new directions for future analyses of the global, national and regional aspects shaping the relationship between gender and television' (2006: 109).

Finally, another strand of recent feminist studies involves the theorisation of new forms of audience engagement made possible by new technologies: the ways in which websites, blogs, and internet chat rooms make possible as never before a meta-narrative created and adapted by viewers/fans are analysed by works such as Zweerink and Gatson's study (2002) of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Warn's (2006) study of *The L Word*. This kind of research also focuses on how new media technologies are building on, and extending, existing forms of fandom and doing so with implications which are not only local but global. Moreover, special attention is given to examining how these new forms of television consumption are changing the ways in which the viewer engages with the text. Following the example of these recent theories, I will later propose my own analysis of comments left by viewers on Televisió de Catalunya's official forum.

### 1.3 Soap Opera: A 'Female' Genre?

Feminist television criticism has mainly focused on one specific genre, namely soap opera. According to Geraghty, it was precisely the work on soap opera which 'allowed an entrée for feminist work on television' (2006: 129). 'Soap' has always been, and to a certain extent still is, 'a term of derision, an expression which implied an over-dramatic, under-rehearsed presentation of trivial dramas blown up out of all proportion to their importance' (Geraghty 1991: 1). Jane Root has pointed out that the fact that 'soap operas are seen as female has helped to bring the whole form into disrepute' (1986: 68).

In this sense, soaps are subject to the same prejudice as other 'women's fictions', usually labelled as 'escapist' and generally associated with an allegedly self-indulgent desire to move away from reality and to find refuge in another world created by the fiction. For example, Radway's study of women's reading of romance novels reveals that this activity represented a temporary escape from 'the harsh world' (1984: 88), and it provided those female readers with a private space and time away from their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers, during which they could engage in a pleasurable activity on their own (1984: 91-93). Richard Dyer, in his article 'Entertainment and Utopia', analyses this escapist function and explains why it remains such a persistent characteristic of entertainment in general and of what has been defined as 'women's fiction' in particular. Dyer claims that entertainment functions by offering:

[T]he image of 'something better' to escape into, or something that we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes—these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and may be realised. (1981b: 177)

Dyer stresses that what entertainment offers is not a representation of what an ideal world might be like but what it would feel like: 'the utopianism is



contained in the feeling it embodies. It presents, head on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised' (1981b: 177). In addition, Geraghty argues that 'women's fictions' tend to offer models of both happiness and grief and the opportunity thereby to rehearse the extreme of emotional feeling: they 'establish utopias in which emotional needs are imaginatively fulfilled or, more frightening, dystopias in which the values of "women's fiction" are undermined and destroyed' (1991: 108). Therefore, she concludes, if this is recognised, it becomes possible to see why 'escapist' may be a proper term for much 'women's fiction' and that its derogatory connotations are unjustified (1991: 108).

The negative meanings that surround the term 'soap opera' are evident in so far as it is often used to define all kinds of entertainment products addressed to audiences constructed as female, which demonstrates Root's argument that the dismissing attitude towards the genre is mainly due to its connotation as a 'female genre'. For instance, Douglas Sirk's films were often labelled 'soap operas', since fifties critics considered them 'slick Hollywood illusionism' (Klinger 1994: 157). His films were generally poorly received by reviewers, who dismissed them as unimportant—because they revolved around female and domestic issues—and unrealistic—because of their melodramatic style. As I will discuss later, these are key aspects in soap opera's aesthetic, which illustrates the clear influence Sirk's films have exerted on this television genre.<sup>26</sup>

However, critics' opinions on Sirk's films have not remained unvaried throughout the years. Barbara Klinger notices that, in the 1960s, feminist and Marxist critics re-evaluate Sirk's films interpreting them as 'transgressive of 50s bourgeois and patriarchal ideology' (1994: 158). Similarly, in the late 1970s, psychoanalytic readings uncovered the critique of the 'unconscious sexual

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<sup>26</sup> For example, his film *Written on the Wind* (1956), about the opulent and corrupt dysfunctional family of a Texas oil dynasty, is a clear precedent for American soaps, such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.

dynamics of patriarchal culture' (Klinger 1994: 19) in his films. In the 1980s, feminist critics praised their power to '[reveal] the industry's deceptive gender machinations', considering them 'vehicles of dissonant gender values' (Klinger 1994: 158). According to Klinger, this view was also influenced by Rock Hudson's coming out at the same time as he acknowledged publically that he was suffering from an illness caused by the HIV virus: 'These melodramas thus came to express the clash between Hudson's heterosexual roles and homosexual private life, potentially provoking progressive as well as homophobic responses to his appearance on screen' (1994: 158). Indeed, Rock Hudson is a regular in Sirk's films, in which he usually plays the part of the playboy who, in the end, falls in love with a woman. Finally, in the 1990s, Sirk's films came to be regarded as the epitome of camp for their exposure of Hollywood artificiality<sup>27</sup> (Klinger 1994: 158).

In her study Klinger attempts to explain the socio-historical reasons why Sirk's films have been interpreted by audiences and critics in different ways over the years, revealing, 'a dynamic historical process that continuously transformed the significance and value of Sirk's films' (1994: 159). Klinger's work illustrates that texts will always have fluid meanings and suggests that an historical approach to textual analysis demystifies the assertion that one interpretation—elaborated within one ideological framework—can be the only valuable reading of a text:

Aesthetic presumptions about textual worth are traditionally based on assertions that *this* meaning and no other is valid; and, further, we can prove this meaning by close analysis of a text's internal organization and features. By contrast, historical analysis tells us that there is a certain fluidity to meaning, that textual characteristics are routinely subject to cultural rewriting, that there is nothing sacred about textual boundaries. (1994: 160)

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<sup>27</sup> In 2002 Todd Haynes directed *Far From Heaven*, which is a film inspired by Sirk's melodramas, in particular *All That Heaven Allows*. Although Haynes maintains the 1950s setting of Sirk's films, he exposes their feminist and non-heteronormative subtexts.

As we can see, Klinger follows, in her interpretative methodology, Bordwell's model of 'bottom-up' analysis, i.e. an investigation that begins outside rather than within the text (Bordwell 1991: 138). Moreover, Sirk himself emphasises the importance of viewers' taking an active role in interpreting and constructing meanings of a text: 'What I'm doing is just showing things—the criticism must start with the audience', he once said.<sup>28</sup> This quote, in my opinion, argues against the classification of melodramas, and 'women's pictures' in general, as 'readerly texts'.

Soap operas' viewers, however, have always been denied recognition for this active role. Indeed, women who watch soap operas are generally represented as deluded and gullible persons and such representations are very often found in mainstream entertainment products, such as Hollywood films. *Nurse Betty* (Neil LaBute 2000), for example, is about a woman who, after witnessing her husband's murder, seeks to escape from reality and to try to find refuge in the world of her favourite soap opera. The film, therefore, exploits the stereotype of soaps' viewers as incapable of distinguishing reality from fiction. In *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack 1982), the female viewers of the fictional soap opera *Southwest General* are also seen as addicted to daytime television and, thus, intellectually shallow. In Holdstein's words, the film 'depicts women as weak, powerless, banal emotional blobs. They are saved only by a man's inspiring assertiveness in the guise of a soap-opera actress-heroine in designer blouses' (1983: 1). She ironically comments that *Tootsie's* message is that it takes a man to make a 'good' woman. The film, she thus argues, embeds a patriarchal structure: 'The film's final freeze-frame perhaps emphasises the immutability of a manipulative, patriarchal system under the guise of feminist inspiration' (1983: 1).

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Haynes in the director's commentary track included on the DVD release of *Far From Heaven*.

Faced with simplistic and stereotyped views regarding soap operas' audience of the sort reflected in *Tootsie* and *Nurse Betty*, feminist television studies attempts to elaborate a richer understanding of the relationship between knowledge and belief in the viewing process, analysing how viewers actively manipulate the boundary between fiction and reality—a manipulation which is often considered to constitute one of the most appealing aspects of soap operas. As Ang suggests 'it is in this world of the imagination that watching melodramatic soap operas like *Dallas* can be pleasurable: *Dallas* offers a starting point for the melodramatic imagination, nourishes, makes it concrete' (Ang 1985: 80). Thus, feminist interest in soaps has played a crucial role in re-evaluating this genre and the pleasures it may offer to an audience constructed as female, rather than dismissing it as inherently worthless as some other approaches not informed by feminism have done.

One of the reasons for feminist interest in soap operas is precisely that, although the programming schedule<sup>29</sup> and the history of this genre shift from one national context to another, one aspect of soap opera does seem consistent across national boundaries: its historical association with a spectatorship constructed as female. According to Anna McCarthy, 'soap opera's narrative characteristics and institutional forms are deeply rooted in a particular, and most certainly *gendered*, cultural history of the home as a target of consumer address' (2001: 48).

The serial form is closely linked with the rise of fiction as a commodity form. As Jennifer Wicke notes in her study of Anglo-American literature in the nineteenth century, the scheduled structure of the serial narrative encouraged close attention because its regularised forms of interruption and continuity rewarded readers who maintained an ongoing engagement with the text and its advertising inserts (1988: 35; 51). The mass-market institutionalisation of serial fiction extended from magazines to motion pictures with the emergence of

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<sup>29</sup> They can be daily or weekly soaps, for example.

popular film serials in the early twentieth century. In this period the identification of serial fiction with audiences constructed as female was already acknowledged, as demonstrated by film serials like *The Perils of Pauline*, which were actively marketed to young women consumers (Shelley Stamp 2000). Thus, by the time broadcast radio and television technology became widespread, the commercial and textual conditions of serial narrative as a form directed towards audiences constructed as female was already established.

These serials belonged to the broader genre of so-called 'women's pictures'. As far as cinema is concerned, this genre dated back to the silent era with melodramas such as *True Heart Susie* (Griffith 1919) and *The Sunrise* (Murnau 1927). These films generally featured a woman who, after overcoming a series of obstacles, finally reaches her happy ending, which unfailingly involved a man. Other films, such as *That Certain Woman* (Goulding 1937) and *Imitation of Life* (Sirk 1959), were usually called 'Maternal Melodramas' because they represented suffering mothers who end up sacrificing themselves for their children. However, in the 1930s, some actresses related to the genre of 'women's pictures' contributed to a redefinition of images of femininity, impersonating heroines interpreted as more 'liberated'. This is the case, for example, of Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco* (1930), *Blonde Venus* (1932), and *The Devil is a Woman* (1935); Greta Garbo in *Anna Christie* (1930) and *Anna Karenina* (1935);<sup>30</sup> and Joan Crawford in *Rain* (1932), *The Bride Wore Red* (1937), *Strange Cargo* (1940), and *Johnny Guitar* (1954). This more independent image of women was labelled 'new woman' and would soon become an exemplification of

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<sup>30</sup> Greta Garbo also played the title role in *Queen Christina* (1933), a film about the homonymous Swedish sexually dissident monarch. Even though Hollywood modified her sexual preferences in order to include her into heteronormativity, some hints of her sexuality were embedded in the dialogues. 'But, your Majesty, you cannot die an old maid!', her Chancellor tells her in one scene, to which she replies: 'I have no intention to, Chancellor. I shall die a bachelor!'. In another scene, she kisses a woman on the mouth. It is worthwhile emphasising that it is not a coincidence that actresses, such as Dietrich and Garbo, or directors, such as Josef von Sternberg, were both pioneers in this redefinition of 'femininity' and female sexuality since their own sexual identities might have played an important role in their vision of heteronormativity and patriarchy.

American modernity and mass culture, both in the United States and in other countries.

During this period, significant transformations in consumer culture had already been taking place. A consequence of the birth of commercial radio, where soap operas began to be broadcast, was the rise of brand names, the increase in the amount of advertising and, by the late 1920s, the recognition that household markets were dominated by female consumers, as demonstrated by marketing manuals such as Christine Frederick's *Selling Mrs Consumer* (1929). Therefore, in the 1930s, radio became increasingly identified with markets perceived as female. In order to corroborate this opinion, Robert Allen cites a 1932 study which considered that:

The housewife in a majority of cases is the member of the family who has the most influence upon family purchases and is the one who spends the greatest amount of time in the home. She is therefore, the member of the family most easily reached by radio broadcasts. (1985: 107)

It is worth noticing that, at this time, the term advertising was not used since the activities this term would later come to denote were still called commercial propaganda. However, in the 1930s, the term 'propaganda' became associated with the Nazis, so new names such as 'public relations' were invented. The strategies of selling products to the masses also changed around this time. One key figure in this process was Freud's nephew Edward Bernays, who applied his uncle's theories on human psychology to link 'mass produced goods to [people's] unconscious desires',<sup>31</sup> transforming 'America from a needs [in]to a desires culture' and its 'citizen[s] [in]to consumer[s]'.<sup>32</sup> In the Adam Curtis's documentary, Bernays refers unabashedly to advertisement as a means

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<sup>31</sup> All the quotes are from Adam Curtis's documentary film *The Century of the Self*, aired on BBC Four on 17 March 2002. <http://vimeo.com/61857758>.

<sup>32</sup> This transformation is evident, for example, in a debate between then Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at Sokolniki Park in Moscow in 1959 about the level of women's freedom in their respective countries. In this debate, Nixon often used interchangeably the concepts of 'liberty' and 'freedom to consume'.

of 'mass persuasion'. Not only did this process have a general impact on American society and its values, but it also affected the situation of women in particular. Products began to be advertised by female Hollywood stars, such as Clara Bow, and images of goods directed to women were included in female magazines. Therefore, certain goods and products, such as shoes or cars, stopped being valued for their practical functionality and became increasingly linked to the image people wanted to portray of themselves. This was (and still is) particularly relevant when we consider the kinds of femininity constructed in advertising.

The 'new woman' soon began to be associated with American mass society and culture around the world thanks to the dissemination of these images in melodramatic films and popular culture. This is how French commentator George Duhamel exemplifies his idea of what constitutes the 'American Menace':

What better symbol of it could there be than this madly rushing machine, [...] steered by a charming woman with manicured nails and beautiful legs, who smoked a cigarette by travelling between fifty and sixty miles an hour, while her husband, seated on the cushions of the rear seat, with a set jaw scribbled figures on the back of an envelope. (1931: 70-71)

However, the image of the American 'new woman' repulsed not only male European intellectuals, but also feminists. In her controversial travel account *America Day by Day*, Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, recounts that she was initially impressed by the independence shown by American women, but that she soon realised it was merely a facade to hide their feelings of inferiority and what she defines as a puritanical inability to express physical love (1952: 254).

Film critic Jackie Stacey (1994) provides a detailed study of the attraction that the image of the 'new woman', projected by American films in the 1940s and 1950s, generated in female British moviegoers. This fascination, she argues,

was not only directed at the female heroines of the films, but also to the actresses themselves and their glamour. This fascination is also considered by Maria LaPlace (1987), who argues that these films were deliberately targeted at audiences constructed as female not just in terms of their female-centred subject matter, but also because their textual attributes draw on what it usually defined as 'women's culture', linking women's consumption of commodities with the commodification inherent in the star system. In her study of the melodrama *Now, Voyager* (1942), LaPlace draws on a range of non-filmic source materials, including studio press books, fan magazines, and film posters, in order to show how, in the 1940s, this film participated in, and contributed to, cultures of femininity and consumerism. As I have already argued, radio soap operas were precisely the result of the association between 'women's pictures' and consumerism, since this genre was purposefully created as a vehicle to sell domestic products. Television soaps would later take on this role.

#### **1.4 How and Why Women Watch Soap Operas: An Analysis of this Genre's Appeal for an Audience Constructed as Female**

As Laura Stempel Mumford points out, the persistence of the image of soap opera as a 'women's genre' to this day does not tell us much about 'actual' audiences, but it does call attention to the fact that soap opera narrative requires of the viewer 'a set of knowledge and skills normally associated with women in patriarchal culture' (1995: 45).

However, the idea that there is a specific relationship between soap opera and women viewers has been questioned by more recent work such as David Gauntlett and Annette Hill's (1999) five-year study of four hundred and fifty British viewers. According to this study, soap operas have changed inasmuch as there is less emphasis on female characters' stories and the network of talk and discussion that surrounds the series is not exclusively for



women. Furthermore, the male respondents considered in this study generally did not find it difficult to admit that they watched soaps and, more broadly, the viewers who took part in this project avoid distinction between 'women's' and 'men's interests' in television viewing (Gauntlett and Hill 1999: 219).

Similarly, Robert Allen argues that 'new groups have discovered soap operas' (1985: 3), including university students, men, and adolescents. To some extent this kind of critique has been backed up by other studies, such as David Buckingham's (1987) work on children's viewing; Marie Gillespie's (1994) on teenagers; and John Tulloch's (1989) on the elderly. On the contrary, there has been relatively little analysis of male viewership of soap operas, even though the few studies which have been conducted reveal that men receive 'the same pleasure which women have been documented as obtaining from the genre. Whilst this is not true of all men, many of our subjects revealed themselves to be active interpreters of a genre which has excluded them for a long time'<sup>33</sup> (Prescott 1998). These theories seem corroborated by the data presented by Marta Ortega in her studies of Catalan soap opera *Poblenou*.<sup>34</sup> She reports that sixty-two per cent of the viewers were women, whereas men constituted thirty-eight per cent of the audience, therefore being certainly a minority, but a fairly significant one. As far as age-group is concerned, twenty-nine per cent of the audience was between forty-five and sixty-four years old; twenty-seven per cent between twenty-five and forty-four; twenty-three per cent more than sixty-five; eighteen per cent between thirteen and twenty-four; and three per cent between four and twelve. Therefore, even if it is true that the main audience is included in the age range between twenty-five and sixty-four (fifty-six per cent of the total), the percentage of young and teenage audience is significant since it amounts to twenty-one per cent (Ortega 2002: 174). In the figures presented by Vilches, Berciano, and Lacalle (1999: 30-31) on Catalan soap opera *Nissaga de*

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/acp9601.html>.

<sup>34</sup> *Poblenou* was broadcast from 10 January to 25 December 1994.

*poder*,<sup>35</sup> we can detect a slight decrease in the percentage of male viewers (thirty-one per cent) compared to *Poblenou*, but a strong increase in the appeal of the genre for children and teenagers. Indeed, in November 1998—in other words a month in which the usual TV schedule is not disrupted by holidays or special events—*Nissaga de poder* was able to obtain a 40.7% share of the audience among children between four and twelve, which was higher than other programmes specifically targeted at teenagers, such as the daily youth series *El joc de viure* (Vilches, Berciano, and Lacalle 1999: 43). In the interview I conducted with him, Josep Maria Benet i Jornet comments ironically on what he sees as the misinterpretation of soap operas' audience as female:

Aquestes sèries [...] no les veuen només la gent popular i les dones, les veuen advocats i polítics i les veu tothom, el que passa és que dissimulen! El meu dentista em deia 'la meva mare es veu aquesta sèrie que tu portes i et pregunta tal cosa' i t'ho explicava. Què dius ta mare, ets tu! I ta mare de passada, si vols, però ets tu que te la mires.<sup>36</sup>

These remarks notwithstanding, other surveys show that women are still the most engaged viewers of soaps. A British survey published in 2002 by the Broadcasting Standards Commission found that the most strongly committed viewers of primetime soap operas were predominantly working-class women. Other studies indicate that women in general have a different kind of engagement with soap operas when compared with other groups (Geraghty 2006: 133). In Geraghty's opinion, if soaps are considered 'women's fiction', it is not just because their storylines are dominated by female characters, but also because of the way their viewers feel about these programmes (2006: 132). Indeed, in her study of *Crossroads*, which she defines as 'the most maligned programme on British television' (1982: 36), Hobson points out that 'it is

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<sup>35</sup> *Nissaga de poder* was broadcast from 28 January 1996 to 3 January 1998.

<sup>36</sup> 'These series [...] are not only watched by lower class people and women, they are also watched by lawyers and politicians, everybody, but they won't admit it! My dentist would say to me: "My mother watches this series you're writing and she would like to ask you this". What are you talking about? Your mother? It's you! And your mother watches it as well, but it is you who watch it'.

criticised for its technical or script inadequacies, without seeing that its greatest strength is in its stories and connections with its audiences' (1982: 170-171). This sense of identification is evident in some of the comments left on Televisió de Catalunya's official forum when two of the most popular Catalan soaps ended: *El cor de la ciutat*—broadcast from 11 September 2000 to 23 December 2009—and *Ventdelplà*—broadcast from 14 February 2005 to 17 October 2010. This is a message left by Lledò on the *Ventdelplà* forum on 24 October 2010:<sup>37</sup>

Al llarg dels 5 anys ens hem sentit identificats amb els personatges, personalment tinc un pare morrut com el Jaume, la meu [sic] mare va patir un càncer al mateix temps que la Teresa, el meu fill de 6 anys té una semblança al Biel, al meu marit li encanta la Teresa i a mi el Julià [...]. Connexió crec que es [sic] la paraula que resumeix lo nostre amb Ventdelpla [sic].<sup>38</sup>

Similar messages were left by viewers on the *El cor de la ciutat* forum<sup>39</sup>, such as this one by Scorpion on 23 July 2009, who wrote that the programme comprised: 'Historias dignas de recordar como en la vida real'.<sup>40</sup> Other messages show how this identification with the characters and storylines cause a sense of sadness and nostalgia when soaps end. Marta left this message on the *Ventdelplà* forum on 24 October 2010:

Em fa molta pena que s'acabi. Porto tants anys veient la sèrie...que sembla com si una part de mi marxi. Tinc tantes anècdotes amb Vent del pla [sic]: [...] un capítol vist amb les companyes d'universitat a l'habitació de l'hotel de Tenerife en el viatge de final de carrera. [...] Vent del Pla [sic] s'acaba però quedarà en el record.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> <http://forums.tv3.cat/viewforum.php?f=302>.

<sup>38</sup> 'For the last five years we have felt identified with the characters, personally I have a surly father like Jaume, my mother suffered from cancer at the same time as Teresa did, my son is six years old and he looks a little bit like Biel, my husband really likes Teresa and I really like Julià [...]. Connection I think is the word that sums up our relationship with Ventdelpla [sic]'.

<sup>39</sup> <http://forums.tv3.cat/viewforum.php?f=214&sid=2ee05333aeaddff880600f36b2dd74cb7>.

<sup>40</sup> 'Stories that deserve to be remembered as in real life'.

<sup>41</sup> 'I'm so sad that it's over. I have been watching the series for many years...it seems like a piece of me is going as well. I have so many anecdotes about Vent del pla [sic]: an episode seen with friends from university in the hotel room in Tenerife on our holidays after graduation [...] Vent del Pla [sic] is over but it will remain in our memory'.

Likewise, on the *El cor de la ciutat* forum, Bepella posted this message on 23 December 2009: 'Que [sic] veurem ara mentre dinem? hem molta, molta pena :(42 ja m'he acostumat al peris [sic] i a tothom després [sic] de tants anys es [sic] com si ens deixesis vidus'.43 However, not all comments are positive and some of them express negative reactions. Most of the time this is due to the disappointment that some viewers felt about the finale, especially as far as happy endings and the breakup of relationships are concerned. This message was left by Chumm2 on *El cor de la ciutat* forum on 24 December 2009:

Doncs això estic INDIGNAT! perquè han de deixar-ho així [sic]??????  
No ens podien fer una mica contents amb el David i la Marta junts?  
com diu el Peris estan fets l'un per l'altre i després de tot el que els ha  
passat (bo i dolent) no poden acabar d'una altra [sic] manera que  
JUNTS!!!44

This same strong emotional bond with soaps' storylines is expressed in another message left by mire\_vdp on 17 July 2010, which shows that identification with the characters can also generate negative reactions. When fantasies are not satisfied, viewers feel betrayed:

[T]ot té un límit, i veure a [sic] la Teresa i en Julià com la 'parelleta feliç' ha sigut la gota que ha fet vessar el got. Per aquí NO hi passo. M'he negat a veure les escenes romàntiques entre aquest parell. NO NO i NO. [...] Des del capítol número [sic] 1 ens van vendre que la base de la sèrie eren els personatges de la Teresa i en David, i la seva relació, i tots els problemes que tenien per estar junts. Aquesta era la base de la sèrie.45

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42 The punctuation in this sentence is used as an emoticon, in this case one which represents a sad expression.

43 'What are we going to watch now when we eat? We are very, very sad. I am used to peris and everybody else, after so many years it is like being bereaved'.

44 'I am OUTRAGED! Why did they end it like this?????? Couldn't they make us happy with David and Marta together? As Peris says, they are made for each other and after everything that has happened (good or bad) they can't end up but TOGETHER!'

45 'Everything has a limit and seeing Teresa and Julià as the "happy couple" is the last straw. I am NOT swallowing this. I refuse to watch romantic scenes between these two. NO NO and NO [...] Since episode one they sold us the idea that the foundations of the series were the characters of Teresa and David and their relationship and all the obstacles they had to face in order to be together. This was the foundation of the series'.

I maintain that these responses lend weight to Hobson's argument that the connection between soap operas and their audiences is the genre's greatest strength.

Before discussing how this connection has been examined by other feminist critics, I need to make some considerations. First of all, in assuming an audience in which women predominate, neither producers nor critics can further assume that women are a consistent or unchanging category.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in Geraghty's opinion, the importance of soaps in Western culture as one of the litmus tests of the 'feminine' cannot be ignored (1991: 40). A distinction needs to be made between the 'subject positions' offered to the women viewer by the programmes; the 'social subject' positioned through diverse patterns of identity—ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and so forth—'who may or may not take these positions up' (Brunsdon 1981: 32); and the responses of individual viewers. As far as this last point is concerned, I have already commented that, whereas film criticism had previously focused on an a-historical spectator constituted in the text, feminists' interests in television have focused on empirical audiences—how actual women watch and make use of television (McCabe and Akass 2006: 111).

Terry Lovell, for instance, uses Gramsci's distinctions between 'good sense' and 'common sense' in her study of *Coronation Street* to argue that this soap offers viewers certain marginalised 'structures of feeling':

It offers women a validation and celebration of those interests and concerns which are seen as properly theirs within the social world they inhabit. Soap opera may be [...] a context in which women can ambiguously express *both* good-humoured acceptance of their oppression *and* recognition of that oppression, and some equally good-humoured protest against it. (1981: 50-51)

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<sup>46</sup> This consideration should be kept in mind by the reader anytime he/she encounters the word 'women', which, following poststructuralist feminist theories, is never intended to define a homogeneous group but a gendered identity socially and culturally constructed. However, words such as 'women' or 'female audience' need to be used for practical reasons.

Ien Ang also employs Raymond Williams's notion of 'structure of feeling' (1977). She engages critically with both empiricist realism—'a text is realist (and therefore good) if it supplies adequate knowledge of reality' (1985: 45)—and screen theory's concept of the 'classic realist text'—which is 'bad because it only creates an illusion of knowledge' (1985: 45). In both these notions of realism:

[A] cognitive-rationalistic idea dominates: both are based on the assumption that a realistic text offers *knowledge* of the 'objective' social reality [...] But the realism experienced by the *Dallas* fans [...] bears no relation to this cognitive level—it is situated at the emotional level: what is recognised as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: a 'structure of feeling'. (1985: 45)

Thus, Ang notes that the viewers did not derive a sense of reality from the show's diegetic world—its settings, characters, and storylines, which were hardly what most people would define as 'realistic': 'None of the following sensational problems has not yet occurred in *Dallas*: murder, suspicion of murder, marital crisis, adultery, alcoholism, rare disease, miscarriage, rape, airplane accident, car accident, kidnapping, corruption, psychiatric treatment, and so on' (Ang 1985: 60). However, Ang argues that soap opera viewers derive a sense of realism from what they consider a verisimilar depiction of psychological situations. Ang defines this process as 'emotional realism' and concludes that 'what is experienced as "real" indicates above all else a certain structure of feeling which is aroused by the programme' (1985: 47).

Brunsdon recontextualises Bourdieu's work on class and cultural competence to point out the ideological knowledge systems internalised by young men and women which leads to greater attention to, and pleasure in, one popular television form than another. In the case of soap opera, she argues, programmes like *Crossroads* engage with, and extend, existing discourses of femininity. According to Brunsdon, soaps require three categories of competence: generic knowledge—familiarity with the conventions of soap

opera as a genre; serial-specific knowledge—knowledge of past narratives and of characters; and cultural knowledge of ‘the socially acceptable codes and conventions for the conduct of personal life’ (1981: 36). This last category refers to those competences socially and culturally constructed as ‘female’, associated with ‘the responsibility for “managing” the sphere of personal life’ (1981: 36).

I am now going to discuss some of the most relevant work on the implications and meanings that soap opera narrative has for an audience constructed as female. Many scholars have, indeed, commented on soaps’ ability to ‘spread their hermeneutic entanglements well beyond the television set and to engage their audiences in the process of discussion’ (Geraghty 1991: 5).

Dorothy Hobson’s (1989) work stresses that the process by which people make television relevant, meaningful, and pleasurable might begin with watching programmes at home, but the trajectory of that process carries it far beyond the immediate viewing environment. Feminist critics such as Brown have argued that soap viewing is accompanied by female-dominated talk, a process which links mothers, daughters, and friends in a ‘women’s oral culture that bridges geographic distances’ (1994: 85). She argues that ‘the sense-making that people engage in when they talk about television may be as important as their actual viewing of the television program’ (1994: 2). She interprets this ‘micropolitical’ activity of women’s conversations around soap operas as potentially emancipatory, considering that social changes are often the result of the sharing of experiences. In this sense, she maintains, through their networks of gossip about soap opera, women can generate resistive meanings. I would argue that the internet has enabled these conversational activities because it allows people to communicate with other viewers, distant in space but ‘connected [...] by the tenuous strands’ of the Web (Raymond 1998: 1). Jenkins defines this practice as ‘participatory culture’, in which ‘fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of

new content' (2006: 290). This 'open social process' (Lang 1998: 3) is compared by Barbrook to the system of the potlatch, the circulation of gift, practiced by Polynesian tribes (1999: 2):

For most of its users, the Net is somewhere to work, play, love, learn and discuss with other people. Unrestricted by physical distance, they collaborate with each other [...]. Unconcerned about copyright, they give and receive information without thought of payment. In the absence of states or markets to mediate social bonds, network communities are instead formed through the mutual obligations created by gifts of time and ideas. (1999: 4-5)

I would argue that 'instantaneous online platforms' (Rivera 2012: 215), such as forums and blogs, exemplify the concept of 'ágora electrónica'<sup>47</sup> expressed by Castells (2003: 180). According to Rivera, such spaces are 'a central location of identity negotiation and formation as well as an alternative public sphere' where viewers can 'speak back to, interact with, and produce images and text'. Therefore, 'these are spaces of solidarity, community, and fan culture' (2011: 296). The importance of soap as a space for networking is expressed by several comments left on Catalan soap operas' official forums, such as this message left by Aida on the *Ventdelplà* forum on 24 October 2010:

Jo encara hem [sic] recordo, de 4 o 5 anys, que tots els de la classe es reunien a comentar el capítol del dia anterior i jo encara no ho mirava i no m'enterava [sic] de res. Un bon dia vaig començar jo també a fer-ho fins avui mateix.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, Brown's micropolitical activities are also possible thanks to the capacity of soaps to open up for public discussion emotional and domestic issues which are normally deemed to be private (Geraghty 1991: 5). Allen argues 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

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<sup>47</sup> 'Electronic agora'.

<sup>48</sup> 'I still remember that four or five years ago everybody in my class met to comment on the episode shown the day before and I hadn't started to watch it yet and didn't understand anything. One day I began to watch it and have done since then until today'.



that spills over into the experiential world of the viewer' (1985: 91).

Commenting on the popularity of *Dallas*, Stuart Hall notes that:

At a certain point, the programme attained a type of popularity that was not a popularity in terms of figures and ratings. I mean that it had repercussions on culture as a whole. The viewers' involvement became something different. You couldn't help talking about the popularity of *Dallas*, because people were starting to refer to categories taken from the serial in interpreting their own experience. (quoted in Silj 1988: 25)

Many feminist studies of soap have examined this relationship between this television genre and a viewership constructed as female, analysing different aspects, such as soap operas' content or formal structure.

Tania Modlesky was the first scholar to analyse soap's structure, particularly its multi-narrativity and openness, as one of the possible reasons for its success among women viewers. Soaps, she argues, 'invest exquisite pleasure' in what she considers 'the central condition of a woman's life: waiting' since 'soap operas do not end. Consequently, truth for women is seen to lie not "at the end of expectation", but in expectation, not in the "return to order", but in (familial) disorder' (1982: 88). Therefore, what is important in soap operas is not what happens, but the effect that events cause on the characters. According to Allen, to emphasise what happens when in soaps—in semiotic terms, the syntagmatic dimension—is to underestimate the equal importance of who relates this to whom—the paradigmatic dimension (1992: 112). Thus, unlike those genres defined as 'masculine' in which pleasure in narrative focuses on closure, soaps delay resolution and make anticipation an end in itself: 'In direct contrast to the typical male narrative film, in which the climax functions to resolve difficulties, the "mini-climaxes" of soap operas function to introduce difficulties and to complicate rather than simplify the characters' lives' (Modleski 1982: 107). Anthony Easthope (1990) similarly argues that those narrative forms defined as 'masculine' avoid indeterminacy to arrive at a closure and a resolution: dialogue in these narratives serves the

purpose of explaining, clarifying, and simplifying the plot, whereas in soaps dialogue blurs and delays. Considering how this genre is dedicated to 'decentring the subject', Modleski believes that the supposed women's pleasures in soaps come from the fact that 'women are, in their lives, their work, and in certain forms of their pleasure, already decentred' (1982: 105). She concludes polemically by arguing that 'soap opera may be in the vanguard not just of TV art but of all narrative art' (1982: 87).

Another aspect of soaps' structure which has caught the attention of feminist critics is the presence of multiple narrative lines, which constitute a non-linear plot. Rather than being based around a single resolving storyline, soap operas 'disperse their narrative energy among a constantly changing set of interrelated plots, which may merge, overlap, diverge, fragment, close off, and open up again over a viewing period of several years' (Allen 1992: 108). According to Chandler, this narrative structure invites viewers to interpret events from the perspective of characters they consider similar to themselves and to offer their own comments<sup>49</sup> (1994)—a process allowed by the lack of a privileged moral perspective entailed by such multinarrativity. It is from this perspective that Buckingham defines soap opera as a form of collective game, stressing the importance of viewers' participation in interpretation and construction of meaning:

Perhaps the most appropriate metaphor for soap-opera is to regard it as a form of collective game, in which viewers themselves are the major participants. The programme itself provides a basis for the game, but viewers are constantly extending and redefining it. Far from being simply manipulated, they know they are playing a game, and derive considerable pleasure from crossing the boundaries between fiction and reality. (1987: 204)

In her analysis of the ideological structure of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, Jane Feuer argues that these soaps represent a 'potentially progressive form' (1984: 15), precisely because the serial form and the multiple plot structure do not

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/acp9601.html>.

allow for clear-cut ideological positions and constructions. 'Since no action is irreversible, every ideological position may be countered by its opposite', and thus, these soaps may be read 'either as critical of the dominant ideology of capitalism or as belonging to it, depending upon the position from which the reader comes at it' (1984: 15).

Since representation of ambivalence and contradictions is at the heart of the genre, this continuing ideological uncertainty gives viewers a certain freedom to construct their own meanings. In Ellen Seiter's opinion, it is precisely this ideological uncertainty which marks soap opera as a 'female genre':

The importance of small discontinuous narrative units which are never organized by a single patriarchal discourse or main narrative line, which do not build towards an ending or a closure of meaning, which in their very complexity cannot give a final ideological word on anything, makes soap opera uniquely 'open' to feminist readings. (1981: 43)

These theories could be seen as a challenge to teleological theories, according to which a thing, process, or action is worthy when it is for the sake of an end, that is when it has a final cause. According to teleological ethics, it is the ends or consequences of an act which determine whether an act is good or evil. However, this strand of ethical theory implies the existence of some form of 'transcendent and universal truth' (Lyotard 1984: xxiv) and a metanarrative able to narrate it, being based on a 'consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth' (Lyotard 1984: xxiii). Such premises have been challenged by poststructuralist theories: 'The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements' (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). I would argue that these theories prove to be valuable in analysing the appeal that soap operas' open structure and discontinuous narratives constitute for a viewership constructed as female.

However, Feuer recognises that ““openness” of TV texts does not in and of itself represent a salutary [sic] or progressive stance’, yet, she claims, a ‘continuing melodramatic serial seems to offer an especially active role for the spectator’ (1984: 15). In order to examine the connection between soap operas’ structure and an audience constructed as female, it is also useful to draw again on the reader-oriented theory, which I have previously discussed. The time between the end of one soap opera episode and the beginning of the next constitutes an enforced gap between syntagmatic segments of the text. Iser comments on a parallel pattern of textual organisation in the novels of Charles Dickens, which were first published in weekly instalments in two magazines: *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*.<sup>50</sup> Iser explains how the strategic interruptions of the narrative at crucial moments, favoured by this form of textual organisation, cause a protensive tension. Therefore, by structuring the text around the gaps between instalments, the serial novel stimulates the reader’s imagination making him or her a more active reader (Iser 1978: 191-192).

He also argues that textual gaps can be created by cutting between plot lines in a story, so that just when the reader’s interest has been secured by the characters and situations of one plotline, the text shifts suddenly to another set of characters and another plot strand. Because of this, in Iser’s opinion, ‘the reader is forced to try to find connections between the hitherto familiar story and the new, unforeseeable situations. He is faced with a whole network of possibilities, and thus begins himself to formulate missing links’ (1978: 192). Again, this theory is evidently applicable to soap opera’s narrative form, constituted as it is by intercutting storylines. Finally, resuming Iser’s ‘wandering viewpoint’ theory, it is important to mention that unlike closed

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<sup>50</sup> *Household Words* (March 30, 1850 - May 28, 1859) was a weekly magazine which contained topical journalism, essays, short fiction, and poetry. The magazine proved to be a financial success with sales reaching 100,000 weekly and was followed by *All the Year Round*, which began to be published on 20 April 1859 (until 1893).

narrative forms, the soap opera does not give us a position after 'The End' from which to look back on the entire text. Thus, soap opera viewers cannot help 'but be inside the narrative flow of the soap opera text' (Allen 1992: 109).

Moreover, feminist television criticism has examined another appeal of soaps for audiences constructed as female: the disruption of the deep-rooted value structure which is based on the traditional opposition between masculinity and femininity. Geraghty argues that 'the concerns of soaps have traditionally been based on the commonly perceived split between the public and the personal, between work and leisure, reason and emotion, action and contemplation' (1991: 40). These socially constructed dichotomies not only offer a set of positions but praise what are seen to be the more active models—those of the public sphere—over those of the personal sphere, considered more passive. Feminists have been questioning the naturalness of such dichotomies in different ways, in some cases, bringing the personal into the public sphere—for example with the introduction of child care and sexuality issues into trade union activity; in others, this has been done by celebrating the specificity of women's pleasures and re-evaluating them against male denigration (Geraghty 1991: 40-41).

The personal sphere is the essence of soap storylines and 'the emphasis is on talk not on action, on slow development rather than immediate response, on delayed retribution rather than instant effect' (Geraghty 1991: 41). Moreover, in Geraghty's opinion, soaps acknowledge and value the emotional work which women supposedly 'undertake in the personal sphere' (1991: 42-43). This engagement with the personal is thought to be central to women's involvement with soaps and it is achieved through different strategies: the setting in domestic spaces of most of the scenes, an approach to social issues with an emphasis on their emotional and personal consequences, and the location centre stage of strong female characters.

Commenting on the distinction between public and personal life as one of the main aspects of the genre, Brunsdon argues that 'the ideological problematic of soap opera' is 'personal life in its everyday realization through the personal relationship' and that 'it is within this realm of the domestic, the personal, the private, that feminine competence is recognised' (1981: 34). She concludes that '[i]t is the culturally constructed skills of femininity—sensitivity, perception, intuition and the necessary privileging of the concerns of personal life—which are both called on and practiced in the genre' (1981: 36). According to Brunsdon, then, understanding *Crossroads* and the derivation of pleasure from viewing it requires skilled readers and the 'competences necessary for that process are the very ones which are valued in the soaps themselves' (Geraghty 1991: 46). Thus, Brunsdon does not share the interpretation of soaps' viewers as distracted and unaware. On the contrary, she believes the viewer is called on to make judgments about characters and events. In Geraghty's opinion, this should be the approach employed in soap opera' audience analysis: 'until we replace the model of the tolerant viewer accepting everything with that of Brunsdon's competent viewer weighing the emotional dilemmas put before her, we are always going to underestimate the position offered by the female viewer of soap operas' (1991: 47).

These judgments the viewer is invited to make are influenced by one of the main aspects of soap opera, which has also contributed to marking it as a 'female' genre since its very beginning. When television soap operas were initially developed in Great Britain and the United States, in the 1960s and 1970s, television series traditionally had a narrative structure in which 'the man's role' was treated as 'the active one' and had the function 'of forwarding the story, making things happen' (Mulvey 1975: 12). However, in soap operas, since the dawn of the genre, not only have female characters occupied centre stage but the viewer has always been invited to live the actions through their perspective, thus identifying with their point of view. In Geraghty's words, this

process establishes a 'shared female viewpoint' (1991: 49), an identification and almost a sense of solidarity between them and the viewer. In her opinion, 'this sense of being "down among the women" is crucial to the pleasures of recognition which soaps offer women—a slightly secretive, sometimes unspoken understanding developed through the endless analysis of emotional dilemma' (1991: 47). At the heart of many soaps, we find relationships between mothers and daughters and female friends, and a significant amount of time is dedicated to showing women talking together.

Arguing that the core of soap opera storylines is the personal sphere does not mean that this genre ignores issues raised in the public sphere, such as unemployment or labour discrimination, but that these are dealt with in a way that involves an emphasis on their emotional consequences. This way of focusing on social issues has received much criticism of the sort exemplified by this comment by a left-wing critic in reference to *Coronation Street*: 'Ugly social issues are reduced to a level of private, family melodrama' (Gardner 1982), which somehow demonstrates how deep rooted is the dichotomy between the personal and the public in patriarchal society, since it is obvious that social issues inevitably have emotional effects in the private life of individuals as well. Similarly, describing Catalan soaps, Joana Gallego affirms that '[e]ls conflictes no solen ser col·lectius, sinó personals, fruit de les relacions interpersonals'.<sup>51</sup> Despite dealing with serious social issues, she concludes, these are treated from a personal point of view (1999: 21). However, I would argue that we should at least give credit to soap opera for dealing with issues which are usually ignored by other dramas, such as domestic violence, as I will discuss later.

And yet, it is undeniable—and in fact I have already argued—that in this genre the private sphere dominates over the public one, something that also influences the locations where soap opera storylines are shown to unfold. The

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<sup>51</sup> 'Conflicts tend to be personal, instead of collective, depicted as the result of interpersonal relationships'.

action takes place mainly in domestic settings and, even if some work places are shown, such as the launderette or the pub, 'these locations are used not because of a particular concern with the work done there but because in general they provide a public place in which people can meet and the gossip which fuels the narrative can be exchanged' (Geraghty 1991: 53).

However, there is a trend of dedicating increasingly more space to work places or, at least, this is true for Catalan soaps, in particular the most recent, *La Riera*. In this soap, the management of the family restaurant is very important for the narrative. The restaurant's kitchen is not just treated as a space in which to form romantic relationships or friendships: a great deal of attention is given to depicting faithfully the work which goes on in the real working environment of a kitchen. That is why, as I discovered when I interviewed Esteve Rovira, the soap's production team collaborates with a professional chef and a food journalist. An important storyline, which is developed in several episodes, is the reorganization of the whole restaurant, from the food to the service, in order to improve its quality and achieve recognition through the award of a Michelin star. Furthermore, there are other characters who are businessmen, particularly involved with property speculation and corruption. Similarly, these issues are not just an excuse to depict and develop the rivalry between them but are dealt with very carefully, again with the help of consultants, such as members of the Catalan police.

Notwithstanding these examples, it is true that soaps have a tendency to treat working relationships as an extension of family and friendship, especially since the genre frequently presents family businesses. This characteristic is shared by American and British soaps, although the former focus more on big businesses—in the oil industry, for example—whereas the latter concentrate more on small businesses. Catalan soaps more closely resemble British programmes here, with, for example, the Aiguadé family's supermarket in *Poblenou*, Peris's bar in *El cor de la ciutat* and the Can Riera restaurant in *La Riera*.



## 1.5 Are Soaps all the Same? An Analysis of National Differences within the Genre

As we can see from the overview I have developed above, the variations in the production of soap opera tend to demarcate national differences within realisations of the genre and this also influences reception dynamics. When distinguishing *Dallas*'s emotional realism from its diegetic reality, Ang's Dutch interviewees often emphasise the soap's 'Americanness' linking the stylised elements of the programme's mise-en-scène to Hollywood production values and by extension to an unreal and excessive imaginary world (1985: 55). Similarly, Hobson notes that British viewers of soap operas such as *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* tend to oppose their 'native' soaps to American ones through the distinction between fantasy and realism (1989: 157). Viewers' perceptions signal a recognition, on the one hand, of the settings and situations of American soap operas as hyperbolic and unrealistic and, on the other, of social realism as an aesthetic strategy of British serials.

Indeed, soap operas' aesthetics are often assumed to be determined only by the limits of their production budgets. However, it is not entirely reasonable to trace back the aesthetic experience of soaps solely to the economic constraints in which this genre is usually developed. For instance, Geraghty argues that, on the contrary, 'soaps have drawn on different traditions to develop an aesthetic which offers pleasures within and perhaps despite the limits of economic restraints' (1991: 26). Soaps, she claims, 'are not dominated by one aesthetic tradition but offer a range of experiences based on the different and sometimes competing values of light entertainment, melodrama and realism' (1991: 25). It is the diverse weight of these three aesthetics and the different way they are combined together which mark national differences within the genre, above all between British and American soaps. An analysis of the different traditions of

this genre in these two countries is useful to see if and how Catalan soaps fit in the critical paradigms elaborated by feminist television critics for British and American soap operas.

As far as the values of light entertainment are concerned, Dyer identifies an 'aesthetic of escape', that is to say, a mechanism of obliteration which offers, as a substitute to the experience of reality, 'a world which is totally other than the real world, a completely fabricated artificial separate reality. This is in itself so fascinating, so entrancing that the real world slips from consciousness' (1973: 7). This aspect of soap aesthetics has a significant and crucial presence in American soaps, such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty*, with the glamour of the Carrington mansion or the emphasis on Alexis's clothes, which encourages the audience to sit back and enjoy the stylish spectacle as much as the storylines. Indeed, Ang stresses the important role played by the 'stylisation' of 'the external manifestation of the fictional world of *Dallas*' in viewers' engagement with the programme (1985: 47). On the other hand, these values are far less present in British soaps and glamorous spectacle is rarely to be found in Catalan soaps.

In the British context, there were some exceptions, mainly the BBC drama series *Howards' Way*, which dealt with the personal and professional lives of the yachting and business communities in the fictional town of Tarrant on the South Coast of England. However, I would argue that this kind of soap is dissonant with the tradition of this genre in the British context, as it is demonstrated, in my opinion, by the fact that it only lasted five years (1985-1990), in a country where some soaps have been on air for fifty years. The producer of *Howards' Way*, Gerard Glaister, tried to follow up on this programme with another soap, *Trainer*, set in the world of horse-racing, but it only lasted one season (1991-1992). Moreover, I think it is relevant to point out that *Howards' Way* was deeply linked to the political and cultural period in which it was created, that of Thatcherism. It is not a coincidence that the final episode of *Howards' Way* was transmitted on 25 November 1990, three days

before the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as British Prime Minister.<sup>52</sup> In the Catalan context, there was only one exception, *Nissaga de poder*, but the glamorisation of sets and characters is not comparable to that of its American counterparts.<sup>53</sup>

However, even in American soaps, where values drawn from the tradition of light entertainment prevail, these are challenged by other aesthetic values. Geraghty points out that the emotional drama of soaps also demands an aesthetic derived from the tradition of melodrama, which draws the audience in and 'establish[es] the characters not only as objects of spectacle but as our emotional representatives' (1991: 29). Feuer points out the way in which various aesthetic devices such as 'acting, editing, musical underscoring and the use of zoom lens frequently conspire to create scenes of high (melo)drama' (1984: 9). Thus, the visual characteristics of soaps—the close-ups of faces or important objects, the exchange of meaningful glances, the lingering of the camera on a face at the end of the scene<sup>54</sup>—work to stress the importance of every action, mark out emotional relationships and to help the audience understand the significance of every scene. This is particularly important given the complicated nature of the stories being told: melodramatic devices help underline and clarify soap narratives, which are characterised by 'chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversions, last-minute rescues and revelations, *deus ex machina* endings' (Neale 1986: 6). The 'course of events' he

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<sup>52</sup> Another soap opera which was produced in this historical context was *Triangle*. It only lasted three series, from 1981 to 1983, and was set aboard a North Sea ferry which sailed from Felixstowe to Gothenburg and Gothenburg to Amsterdam. The business owner was played by Kate O'Mara, who also had a role in *Howards' Way* and in *Dynasty*.

<sup>53</sup> I should also point out that this diversity in representing glamour is certainly due to a different cultural 'taste'—to use a word employed by Barbara Klinger (1994)—towards melodrama. Moreover, on the one hand, production values correspond with the different *milieux* they represent—a billionaire American oil tycoon family and a Catalan family who own a wine-producing business. On the other, the disparity in the budgets available for an American and a Catalan series is reflected in the different content.

<sup>54</sup> Andy Warhol ironically labelled such strategies as 'consternation fadeouts', referencing the high frequency with which soap opera scenes end with a shot of someone looking off screen with an expression of puzzlement (Morris 1999).  
<http://brightlightsfilm.com/25/25defyinggravity.php>.

argues, 'is unmotivated (or undermotivated) from a realist point of view, such preparation and motivation as does exist is always "insufficient". There is an *excess* of effect over cause, of the extraordinary over the ordinary' (1986: 7). Besides emotional and dramatic intensity, Gerould also identifies the open structure as a characteristic of melodrama and, as I have already discussed, this is also one of the most important characteristics of the soap opera genre:

What is characteristic for melodramatic composition is not a straight rise to the culminating point and then a lowering of tension until the conclusion, but rather a movement in tiers by which each new phase of the plot with its new 'obstacles' and 'non-resolutions' gives rise to new degrees of dramatic intensity. This new 'quality' of dramatic intensity, which builds in layers, creates heightened dramatic perception on the part of the spectator, not resolved until the final moments of the denouement. (1991: 125)

The melodramatic aesthetic is a core characteristic of the soap opera genre, in Catalonia as much as in the UK or in the United States. Finally, British and Catalan soaps are strongly marked by another aesthetic tradition, which is generally not present in American soap: the convention of realism.

In Great Britain, this aesthetics is rooted in a tradition in British cinema which highly values an epistemology of realism and, as Andrew Higson has commented, 'each successive realist movement in British cinema and television has been celebrated both for its commitment to the exploration of contemporary social problems, and for its working out of those problems in relation to "realistic" landscapes and characters' (1986: 95). As Marion Jordan explains, in *Coronation Street* as in social realism:

The settings should be recognisable (the pub, the street, the factory, the home, and more particularly the kitchen) [...] the time should be the present [...] the style should be such as to suggest an immediate, unprejudiced and complete view of reality. (1981: 28)

The convention of realism in British soaps particularly derives from the so-called Kitchen sink dramas, a term coined to describe a British cultural movement which developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s in theatre, art,

novels, films, and television plays.<sup>55</sup> The visual arts of this period began increasingly to pay attention to domestic subjects—therefore also labelled as banal. The term was also applied to a then-emerging style of drama, which embraced an epistemology of realism in its depiction of working class environments. The film *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947) is considered the pioneer of Kitchen sink dramas and one of the prime examples of the movement is John Osborne’s play—and the homonymous film based on it—*Look Back in Anger* (1959). The realist conventions of these dramas were soon adopted by television, with television plays such as *Armchair Theatre* (1956-1968), broadcast on ITV, and *Cathy Come Home* (1966), directed by Ken Loach for The Wednesday Play slot on BBC One. Soap operas in the 1960s could not but be influenced by the convention of realism so pervasive in cultural production of this period. The epistemology of realism, however, still occupies an important position in British critical perception (Williams 1976: 218). As Julia Smith, the original producer of *EastEnders*, remarked on a TV phone-in celebrating its second anniversary,<sup>56</sup> ‘We don’t make life, we reflect it’.<sup>57</sup>

Geraghty disputes this conceptualisation of realism since it avoids questioning whose reality is supposedly being reflected and whose is excluded from the fictional world created by the soap (Geraghty 1991: 32). Therefore, the interpretation of realism implied in Julia Smith’s comment hides complex relations between what is understood to be reality and fictional constructions supposedly reflecting it. Furthermore, Smith’s comment refuses to acknowledge the importance of conventions in forming our understanding of what constitutes realism and the way in which, as John Hill puts it:

No work can ever simply reveal reality. Realism, no less than any other type of art, depends on conventions, conventions which [...]

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<sup>55</sup> The term ‘kitchen sink’ can be traced back to an expressionist painting by John Bratby, which contains an image of a kitchen sink.

<sup>56</sup> BBC Television’s Open Air, 19 February 1987.

<sup>57</sup> This sentence contrasts, for example, with Hitchcock’s well-known quip that ‘cinema isn’t a slice of life, it’s a piece of cake’, which ironically queries the supposed ‘realism’ of cinema, instead emphasising its artificial nature.

have successfully achieved the status of being accepted as 'realistic'. It is this 'conventionality' of realism which makes its usage so vulnerable to change, for as conventions change (either in reaction to previously established conventions or in accordance with new perceptions of what constitutes reality) so too does our sense of what then constitutes realism. (1986: 57)

Similarly, Fiske argues, realism is not a matter of fidelity to an empirical reality, but of a discursive convention by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed (1987: 21). The commitment to an epistemology of realism remains remarkably consistent in British soaps and the strategies used to apply it in programme making are to be found in specific settings, 'authentic' regional experiences, and a particular class representation<sup>58</sup> (Geraghty 1991: 34-35), as I am about to examine.

The settings depicted in British soaps are specific—a street, a motel, a square—and are defined geographically so that the audience builds up a precise sense of place. It is not a coincidence that most British soap operas' titles do not refer to individuals but to geographical places. Just as important, each serial is able to call up and indeed help to create the connotations of a region—*Coronation Street's* evocation of Manchester, *EastEnders'* referencing of the London docklands and *Brookside's* commitment to Liverpool. In all these cases, the ability to work with regional characteristics and stereotypes gives the soaps a sense of specificity crucial in conveying a sense of realism. Finally, the commitment to bringing to the screen working-class 'accents, mores, problems and pleasures' is another important element in British soap operas' claims to realism (Geraghty 1991: 35). The realist aesthetic tradition was also adopted by Catalan soaps, which in their early days were especially influenced by British drama serials, as both Esteve Rovira and Josep Maria Benet i Jornet observe in the interviews I conducted with them. The attachment to an epistemology of realism in the making of Catalan soaps is clearly acknowledged by those

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<sup>58</sup> This focus on working class districts also pays tribute to the Kitchen sink dramas, which tended to ascribe social conflicts and issues to the remote provinces and working class areas.

involved in their production. According to one of *El cor de la ciutat*'s writers, Jordi Galcerán, this series takes inspiration from what he interprets as the 'realism' of British cinema. In the press pack given to journalists during the presentation of *Poblenou*, the regular characters in the series are described as 'una mena de parents que ens són ben pròxims, massa pròxims, aquí mateix, a la nostra ciutat, al nostre barri, al costat mateix de casa. Potser si hem de ser sincers, dins mateix de casa'<sup>59</sup> (quoted in Ortega 2002: 149). Similarly, the press kit for *El cor de la ciutat* indicates as this soap's main distinctive features 'realism' and 'feelings'. According to one of the scriptwriters, Lluís Arcarazo, the main protagonist in *El cor de la ciutat* is the precariousness experienced in all aspects of life: employment—reflecting the new system of short-term contracts, housing—with the rise of prices which prevents most young people from owning a house, and private lives and love stories (quoted in Ortega 2002: 152). For this reason, Catalan soaps are often described as *costumistes* or *naturalistes* (Ortega 1999: 61), two terms which precisely emphasise their attachment to realist conventions. In the next paragraphs, I am going to examine how an epistemology of realism has been applied in Catalan soaps, comparing and contrasting them with the British tradition.

As far as the devices employed for the depiction of locations are concerned, Catalan soaps present similar strategies to those used by British soaps. The detailed representation of houses, supermarkets, and restaurants, for example, is crucial in Catalan soaps' adoption of realist conventions and sometimes real locations are used, such as a traditional bar in Carrer Gran de Sant Andreu in Barcelona in *El cor de la ciutat* or the square and streets of Breda, a town in the *comarca*<sup>60</sup> of Empordà, in *Ventdelplà*. A precisely defined sense of place is also created, so that the audience has the feeling of knowing 'the town'

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<sup>59</sup> 'As being like relatives who are very close, too close, right here, in our city, in our district, next door. Maybe if we have to be honest, right inside our home'.

<sup>60</sup> The term 'comarca' indicates a traditional or historical geographic division, which in Catalonia has administrative competencies.

or 'the district' inside out. Moreover, as in British soaps, the titles of Catalan serials often reflect this emphasis on a geographical place, be it real—*Poblenou*—or fictional—*Ventdelplà*. In order to convey this attachment to a place, Catalan television also employs the internet. For example, the official webpage of *Ventdelplà* is constructed as if it were the web portal of a real town. On the main page we have a map with a legend pointing out the public places—school, bar, supermarket, football field, cemetery, and so forth—and the homes of the main characters. Below this we find a section with several images of the town, the history of which is given going back to the ninth century. Indeed, *Ventdelplà* is a fictitious town but it is based on a real place, Breda: the story narrated in this section is in fact the story of this real small town. The next link shows us the main characters in the series but instead of 'Personatges', which means characters in Catalan, they are referred to as 'La gent', which means people: through this word, this section depicts the characters of the series as if they were the inhabitants of the town. In a similar vein, on *El cor de la ciutat*'s website, the Sant Andreu borough—a real district of Barcelona—is represented in its fictitious version, with the homes of the principal characters and some public spaces, among which is included the most important of all, the Peris's bar, the heart of the series.

Having said that Catalan and British soaps are alike in their use of locations, there are some considerations which need to be made as far as the former are concerned. Since the beginning, Catalan soaps have been set in different geographic areas: *Poblenou*—broadcast from 10 January to 26 December 1994—is set in the homonymous district of Barcelona; *Secrets de família*—broadcast from 16 January 1995 to 23 December 1995—in Girona; *Nissaga de poder*—broadcast from 28 January 1996 to 3 January 1998—in the *comarca* of Panadès; *Laberint d'ombres*—broadcast from 4 May 1998 to 10 June 2000—in Sabadell; *El cor de la ciutat*—broadcast from 11 September 2000 to 23 December 2009—in the district of Sant Andreu in Barcelona; *La*



*Riera*—broadcast since 10 January 2010—in the *comarca* of El Maresme; and *Ventdelplà*—broadcast from 14 February 2005 to 17 October 2010—is set in the *comarca* of Empordà.<sup>61</sup> According to Gallego, this choice to de-centralise the geographical spaces included in Catalan television fictions implies a willingness of ‘democratisation’ (1999: 21). However, I argue that, despite this variety of geographical areas, Catalan soaps do not present the same concern as their British counterparts in depicting the local characteristics of such spaces, such as accents or stereotypes. The reason for this difference lies in the facts that, besides their different settings, all these series share the same aim: in Gallego’s words, ‘la reivindicació d’una identitat pròpia dins un país diferent’,<sup>62</sup> that is to say, representing a national Catalan imaginary as different from the Spanish one. Therefore, these serials are not so interested in depicting the local geographical area in which they are set, as they are in constructing an image of Catalonia as a ‘normal country’. Gallego describes the process of normalisation of Catalonia promoted by Catalan soaps in the following terms:

El serial català reuneix els trets ideals que atorgarien carta de naturalesa a un país normalitzat: un territori amb una llengua pròpia, uns costums i unes tradicions diferents i un imaginari simbòlic col·lectiu específic. El serial català representaria, en últim terme, una societat normalitzada, amb els problemes inherents a qualsevol altra societat, però amb l’autonomia i l’autosuficiència que no té, encara, en la realitat.<sup>63</sup> (1999: 19)

Therefore, reprising Joan Fuster’s remark—according to which a country does not have an identity unless it is able to sustain it through popular culture (Vilches, Berciano, and Lacalle 1999: 29)—and considering soap opera one of the main genres of mass culture, Catalan television chose a type of programming

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<sup>61</sup> All the soaps mentioned are daily afternoon serials, with the exception of *Ventdelplà*, which was a weekly soap broadcast at prime-time.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The claim of a distinctive identity within a different country’.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Catalan soaps include all the ideal characteristics which would give a certificate of normality to a normalised country: a territory with a distinctive language, different costumes and traditions and a specific collective imagery. Catalan soaps represent, ultimately, a normalised society, with those problems inherent to any other society, but with the autonomy and self-sufficiency that it still does not have’.

that could serve best its ideological purposes.<sup>64</sup> According to Giner, Flaquer, Busquet, Bultà:

[E]ls serials confegits a casa nostra, entre altres forces, actuen com a nou gresol cultural que genera una autovisió de la societat catalana passada pel sedàs dels productors i els creadors mediàtics, amb les corresponents ideologies de consens que ells trasmeten.<sup>65</sup> (1996: 69)

During the interview I conducted with Esteve Rovira, one of the terms he most often repeated was ‘proximity’. In his own definition, this term describes Catalan soaps’ focus on ‘històries que passen al nostre país, en el nostre entorn, a les nostres ciutats, als nostres pobles’.<sup>66</sup> Rovira ascribes the success of Catalan television’s soap opera in terms of audience ratings to the series’ commitment to ‘Catalonia’—a demarcated geographical space interpreted as national.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Vilches, Berciano, and Lacalle indicate the ‘empathy’ which many

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<sup>64</sup> In January 1994, Catalan television began to broadcast a locally produced soap opera before any other channel in Spain. It was followed a few months later, in October 1994, by Euskal Telebista—the public television service in the Basque Country—with *Goenkale*, a soap in *Euskera*. Thus, we can say that the creation of the genre of soap operas in Spain had much to do with the post-dictatorship framework of autonomous communities and broadcasting structures for previously suppressed national identities.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Soaps produced in Catalonia, together with other tools, act as a new cultural melting pot which generates a self-vision of Catalan society, gone through the filter of producers and creators, with the correspondent ideologies of consensus that they transmit’.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Stories which happen in our country, in our environment, in our cities, in our towns’. Moraga, Garitaonandia and Lopez define ‘proximity’ in the following terms: ‘El concepto de proximidad aplicado a la televisión tiene que ver con la idea de que entre la emisora y sus receptores existe un escenario de experiencias compartidas, cosa que, en definitiva, se verá reflejada en los contenidos de la programación’ [The concept of proximity applied to television has to do with the idea that between the sender and its addressees there is a scenery of shared experiences, something that, finally, is going to be reflected in the contents of the programming] (1999: 19). With reference to this identification between Catalan television and its target audience, former director of Catalan television Mònica Terribas claims that ‘[t]he viewing public in Catalonia is very demanding because they see it as belonging to them’ (Piquer 2010-2011: 50). This relationship is exemplified by Catalan television’s slogan: ‘la teva’, which means ‘yours’ in Catalan.

<sup>67</sup> According to Vilches, Berciano, and Lacalle, *Poblenou*’s producers had declared before its airing that they would have considered themselves satisfied if the series had achieved a 20-25% share of the audience (1999: 28). As Ortega reports, *Poblenou* achieved a forty-five per cent share on average and its last episode attained 46.7% (2002: 163). Therefore, the success of the soap surpassed all the expectations of its creators and of the channel. This surprise was also expressed in an article published in *El Periódico de Cataluña* in December 1994, entitled ‘El misterio de Poble boom’ (quoted in Ortega 2002: 163). As Esteve Rovira told me in our interview, *El cor de la ciutat* also attained similar audience ratings.

viewers feel towards the ‘Catalan context’ depicted in the soaps as one of the main reasons for their success (1999: 32).

However, a tension can be detected between Catalan soaps’ attachment to an epistemology of realism and their aspiration in constructing a distinctive Catalan national imagery. For instance, presenting Catalonia as a linguistically homogeneous nation, in which people almost exclusively speak Catalan, these serials move away from a verisimilar representation of the bilingual territory. I discuss this issue with Esteve Rovira during our interview. On the one hand, the Catalan director states his conviction that fiction ‘ha de reflectir la realitat social i la realitat és que és bilingüe’.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, he emphasises the aim for which Catalan television was created, that is to say, to promote the use and knowledge of the Catalan language:

Vol dir, això, que a totes les sèries, des del punt de vista de cadena, els personatges s’han d’expressar en català? No tenim cap prohibició, de cap de les maneres, que no hi hagi un personatge que sigui castellano-parlant, però sí que la cadena demana que els personatges castellano-parlants facin l’esforç també d’anar-se integrant i parlar de tant en tant en català, i això és una cosa que jo comparteixo com a director.<sup>69</sup>

In particular, he refers to the character of Valeria in *La Riera*, an Argentinean chef who works in the restaurant owned by the protagonists of the series. Valeria speaks almost exclusively in Spanish and only occasionally utters words or sentences in Catalan. The aim of this representation, according to Esteve Rovira, is double. First of all, these few sentences uttered by Valeria in Catalan represent an element of integration. Second, this character serves the purpose of ‘donar una sensació de normalitat’<sup>70</sup> to bilingual conversations:

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Has to reflect the reality and the reality is that Catalan society is bilingual’.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Does this mean that in all series, from the point of view of the channel, the characters have to express themselves in Catalan? We have absolutely no prohibition against including a Spanish-speaking character but the channel requires that the Spanish-speaking characters also make some effort to integrate and sometimes speak in Catalan and this is something that I agree with as a director’.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Give a sense of normality’.

Catalan characters speak to Valeria in Catalan and she speaks in Spanish to them: 'Donem un punt de normalitat perquè molts castellans entenen el català però els costa parlar-lo. Però si m'entens, per què no et puc parlar amb el meu idioma?',<sup>71</sup> Rovira concludes.<sup>72</sup>

In order to explain Catalan soaps' avoidance of local and folkloric characteristics, it is also worthwhile considering their intent to transmit an image of a modern and dynamic society or, in Esteve Rovira's words, a European society. This concern was not uppermost in the minds of the producers of British soaps, since Great Britain did not have to work against an image of cultural backwardness retained by Catalan—and Spanish<sup>73</sup>—society after the end of the dictatorship, an image which did not disappear so quickly.

Another trait that differentiates the interpretation of the epistemology of realism in Catalan soaps as compared to their British counterparts is that, in Catalan serials, the working class does not play the same fundamental role as it plays in British soaps in their realist aspirations. As has already been argued,

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<sup>71</sup> 'We provide a touch of normality because many Spanish people understand Catalan but have difficulties in speaking it. However, if you understand me, why can't I speak my own language?'

<sup>72</sup> The depiction of sociolinguistic aspects in Catalan television has been complicated in more recent years. In the last series of *El cor de la ciutat*, the soap included a significant number of immigrants from different parts of the world: Néelson from Cuba, Hires and Dhara from India, and they all speak only Spanish. In *El cor de la ciutat*, one of the most beloved characters is Juan Benjumea Carmona, an old Andalusian man who has been living in Catalonia for many years but still speaks Spanish. There is also a tendency to represent flexible situations within families: Juan speaks Spanish but his grandchildren speak Catalan; in *Ventdelplà*, a Catalan man is married to a Latin American woman and their conversations are almost always bilingual with him speaking in Catalan and she in Spanish; also in *Ventdelplà*, a Spanish couple that own a bar always speak Catalan with the clients but they speak in Spanish between themselves.

<sup>73</sup> This could also explain the reasons why Spanish series are characterised by centralism. Almost all television series in Spanish national channels are set in Madrid and very little attention is dedicated to regional differences. I do not refer only to the absence of references to Spain's linguistic diversity (we never hear any language other than Spanish), but also to its cultural diversity: not only minority cultures, but also different regional characteristics and traditions are excluded for the Spanish national imagery constructed in most Spanish series. The only characters allowed to express different cultural traits are, generally, Andalusians, though this is often done with comic aims. The result is a constructed image of Spain as a linguistically and culturally homogeneous country, interpreted as an extension of its capital. Although it is necessary to point out that each autonomous community in Spain has its own locally produced television service, I still think it is interesting to query the lack of diversity in those television series targeted to audiences of the entire territory of the state.

this emphasis on the lower classes was derived in Great Britain from a pre-existing tradition in British cinema, which was not present in Catalonia. Moreover, it is useful to reprise Dyer's observation that *Coronation Street*, the pioneer among British soaps, was created in a very specific social, cultural, and economic context—that of the 1960s. By contrast, the first Catalan soap, *Poblenou*, was created in 1994, in a context which, arguably, was no longer quite so marked by class struggle in social imagery and which had already seen the evolution from an industrial society to a post-industrial, tertiary one. By stating this, I do not intend, by any means, to argue that in the 1990s class-based wealth disparities had disappeared. In fact, most statistics about wealth distribution show that the disparity between the poorest and the richest classes has increased, rather than diminished, with the creation of an underclass—mainly employed in casual and unskilled jobs in the service sector—, whose quality of life is, arguably, worse than that enjoyed by the working class in the 1960s. What I wanted to emphasise is that in the post-industrial society, classes are not so well demarcated and easily defined and a sense of class belonging is certainly fading out in favour of a more individualistic approach, fomented by the social and economic context of new-liberal capitalism. These changes have also had an impact on cultural representations with a decrease of stories about and images of a supposedly once homogenous 'working class'.<sup>74</sup>

## **1.6 Are Soaps a Safe Place? An Analysis of Models of Family and the Construction of a Sense of Community in Soaps**

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 soaps' narratives in these two countries. In analysing these differences, she proposes a distinction between the

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<sup>74</sup> Of course, 'working class' has never been a monolithic sector of the society but was often treated this way by politics and media.

'patriarchal soap', which corresponds to the American tradition, and the 'matriarchal soap', which refers to the British tradition (1991: 62-83). A brief discussion of the traits of each of these categories is valuable when examining whether or not this distinction can usefully be applied to an analysis of Catalan soap operas.

Commenting on American soaps, Geraghty 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 (1991: 62). 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. However, as Mulvey points out, the 'rampant male virility' of such characters poses a threat to domestic order and much of the drama in these programmes derives from the way in which patriarchal power is continually challenged (1987: 76). And yet, male protagonism as the driving force of the plot is only an illusion even in patriarchal soaps, 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 soaps, 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 soaps, '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' (Geraghty 1991: 74). In her analysis of *Dallas*, however, Ang expresses a contrasting opinion. Female characters in this

soap, 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 soaps 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 defines them as 'matriarchal soaps': in their model of the nuclear family, British soaps depict women as the linchpin of the family, able to sustain it whatever happens, overcoming obstacles and crisis.

Again, in this aspect, Catalan soaps present more similarities with their British counterparts than with American programming. In Catalan soap operas, we do not find a patriarch's constant struggle to retain his status as the head of the family, not even in *Nissaga de poder*, which is clearly the Catalan soap which most resembles American programmes. Even in this 'Catalan *Falcon Crest*' (O'Donnell 1999), the driving force of the narrative is Eulàlia and her incestuous feelings for her brother Mateu. However, *Nissaga de poder* is an exception within the gamut of Catalan soaps, which usually focus on an extended group of people, rather than the dramas and intrigues of one family.

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. Discussing the representation of women in *El cor de la ciutat*, Galcerán states: 'A *El cor de la ciutat*, les dones manen, és una sèrie de dones [...]. Elles prenen les decisions'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> 'In *El cor de la ciutat*, women rule, it is a women's series. They take the decisions'.

(quoted in Ortega 2002: 332). Most recent Catalan soaps, though still presenting a variety of strong female characters, also included in central roles male characters who not only react to events but also assume the initiative, playing a crucial role in the development of the narrative. For instance, unlike *Poblenou*, *Ventdelplà* presents gender and sexual issues involved in relationships—such as abortion, for instance—from the point of view of both partners. Finally, one of the most recent soaps, *La Riera*, would not fit this category since there is a balance between male and female characters who have equal importance in the evolution of the narrative. However, the family which is the primary concern of the programme's narrative still grows around the strong figure of the mother, Mercè Riera, who tries to extend her control both over the family and business matters.

*Poblenou* is the series that most would fit in the 'matriarchal soap' 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 soaps. 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 depicts the journey she undertakes to reach this decision. It is important to point out that in the series, as in most cases in Catalan soaps, the divorce or separation always comes from the woman's initiative. *Poblenou* clearly links their achievement of economic and financial independence to their awareness of gender discrimination. For example, 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 soaps is represented as positive if the marriage is damaging for a member of the couple, especially the woman. However, *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'.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, in *Poblenou* marriages characterised by a patriarchal model end up in divorce and women are always depicted as the driving force for change.

Another point which needs to be made is that, unlike American soaps, which present the family as a battleground for power and inheritance of wealth, British soaps depict it 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 British soaps, which could be defined as 'community soaps' employing Liebes and Livingstone's terminology (1998: 174). By contrast, American serial dramas' narratives are usually dominated by one single family and, therefore, are defined as 'dynastic soaps' or 'dyadic soaps', in which stories are centred almost exclusively on the establishment and breakup of marriages and relationships (1998: 174).

This importance 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). British soap narrative 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).

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<sup>76</sup> 'More free and valued, not a useless nobody'.

Therefore, as James Curran argues, what is valued by the community in British soaps 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 soaps and contrasts this with the 'glamourised, "upscale" settings that dominate much of American domestic drama' (2002: 207). 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: 222-223). Similarly, Gallego describes the society constructed in Catalan soaps as democratic, integrating, and open (1999: 21).

This is not only true of European soaps, 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 soaps is intrinsically linked to its matriarchal structure.

Moreover, soaps typically represent groups who tend to be ignored in other genres, for example, people who feel they belong to ethnic or sexual minorities or age groups who receive little space in other formats, especially the elderly. Thus, soaps play 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). This didactic aspect also reprises an old discussion about whether television functions as an agent for, or as a mirror of, social change. According to Badia and Berrio, television creates a 'projecte nacional de societat'<sup>77</sup> (1997: 235), that is, it aspires to represent a supposedly ideal society instead of being exclusively linked to an epistemology of realism.<sup>78</sup> In scriptwriter Enric Gomà's 'words, 'les telenovel·les beuen de la realitat però no són reflexes de la realitat'<sup>79</sup> (quoted in Gomez 2002: 331).

In this respect, Catalan soaps create a sense of community which resembles that of British soaps. 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 building a society through negotiation of its differences against the neoliberal ideology of individual success. I would add that another aspect is the importance given to respecting disadvantaged people and their inclusion in the community on the same basis as any other member. For example, the soap *Ventdelplà* includes a physically disabled character, Mònica, who uses a wheelchair. In *El cor de la ciutat*, mental disability was portrayed through the character of Narcí. He was represented as a friend, a son, a boyfriend, and, finally, as a husband, when he marries his fiancée Neus, who also has a minor mental disability. The disabled characters are depicted as having the same personal and love problems as any other character; in this way, the series tries not to distinguish them from the rest of the micro-society it recreates.

However, in the construction of a sense of community, important differences can be noted between British and Catalan soaps. In addition to its crucial role in providing a sense of realism, the emphasis in British soaps on the concept of class, and particularly the representation of the lower class, is also

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<sup>77</sup> 'National project of society'.

<sup>78</sup> I have already examined the contradictory relations between an attachment to conventions of realism and a construction of a social and cultural ideal in Catalan soaps.

<sup>79</sup> 'Soap operas draw on reality but they don't reflect it'.

very important in building up a sense of community. Class distinctions are also used to mark the boundaries of the community. The strategy is evident in *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, especially in the early years of their production. 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 middle-class people. Thus, the geographic setting plays a key role in demarcating the limits of the community.

By contrast, critics have observed that class is not used to create a sense of community in American prime time soaps, since the actions are understood in terms of the family and the individuals. Feuer argues that in these programmes ‘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’ (Feuer 1984: 14). Similarly, Alvaro, 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 programmes of this kind are less engaged with the social, ‘less expressive of any particular cultural environment’ and that they do not ‘reflect the cultural concerns of their country’ (1998: 174-175). I would argue, however, that this assessment of American soaps is problematic. If it is true that they do not depict the social conflicts and issues of the country, this does not mean that they ignore its cultural concerns. 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’<sup>80</sup> (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 soaps

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<sup>80</sup> 1959 was the same year in which the Sokolniki Park Summit in Moscow took place, when Khrushchev boasted about URSS’s achievements in space technology and Nixon countered with US’s achievements in consumer products, such as colour television and video recording.

a sense of community is disregarded in favour of a more individualist perspective.<sup>81</sup>

In spite of the fact that Catalan soaps transmit a sense of community which is very similar to British soaps, as has already been argued, the emphasis on class is not, however, a key characteristic of Catalan programme making in this genre. The community is demarcated by geographical limits—the districts of Poblenou 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, independent of the social status of its inhabitants, whether they are doctors, shopkeepers, or farmers. The only two Catalan soaps 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 *Poblenou*, 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, the community is not linked to a

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<sup>81</sup> This fiction has become increasingly unsustainable following the economic crisis, as the Wall Street demonstrations against the 'richest 1%' make 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.

specific place. Although the series 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, *La Riera*, supposes a complete contrast with its predecessors. In this soap, a sense of community is not constructed at all. The series 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 themselves 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.

The construction of a sense of community in British soaps seems to be at odds with their attachment to an epistemology of realism. Indeed, nowadays 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. A marriage is much more likely to be organised by the families of the two spouses than by the entire community and 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 this contradiction, Geraghty explains that the sense of community created in British soaps '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' (1991: 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 for how to behave.<sup>82</sup> 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).<sup>83</sup> This process has a particular resonance in British soaps since the sense of the community which is at the heart of the representation of the War is also central to the soap 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 are nowadays.

By contrast, in the construction of a sense of community in Catalan soaps, we do not find the same emphasis on the past as 'the good old days'.

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<sup>82</sup> My discourse on the positive connotations of the Second World War in British cultural representations strictly refers to the community values associated with wartime Britain. By no means is it meant to convey a disregard for the tragedy the War supposed in terms of lost lives and economic hardship.

<sup>83</sup> A very 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>.

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. Therefore, references to the past in Catalan soaps 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 a 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 soaps, which, in Geraghty's opinion, construct the 'grandmother figure [...] around a core of compassion and wisdom' (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 soaps 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',<sup>84</sup> she says very often. As her best friend Andreu says, Victòria is full of 'alegria de viure'.<sup>85</sup> 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'<sup>86</sup> 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:

**Victòria:** El meu difunt marit de bona voluntat ja n'hi posava però mai va tenir gaire empenya [...] 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!<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 'Being old or young depends on the blood that runs in your veins'.

<sup>85</sup> 'Joy of life'.

<sup>86</sup> 'Who can't get away by themselves, can't get away at all'.

<sup>87</sup> '**Victòria:** My late husband was full of goodwill but never had much energy [...] I won't say bad things about Fidel, but he was a couch potato!

**Andreu:** You are right not to say bad things about him.

**Victòria:** Never. Well, he hadn't even been able to give me a child! [...] So, I really loved Fidel.



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, she is comparable to British elderly female characters or, as Geraghty 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]' (1991: 97). Moreover, both Victòria and her British counterparts can be considered the 'guardian[s] of the community's tradition' (Geraghty 1991: 82).

In the case of Victòria, the attachment she feels to her 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'.<sup>88</sup> This shop is so important to her because 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',<sup>89</sup> 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',<sup>90</sup> 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

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**Andreu:** I can see that!.

<sup>88</sup> 'The shop is my life. I was born here and I will die here when the time comes. I still have lots of time, thank God'.

<sup>89</sup> 'A left-wing man, a Republican all his life, was forced to see how the fascists took power'.

<sup>90</sup> 'Nobody can take me away from here'.

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 rejecting her brother Xavier because of his sexual preferences and his relationship with another man.<sup>91</sup>

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 faré costat.<sup>92</sup>

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.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> An examination of this storyline is included in the second chapter of the thesis.

<sup>92</sup> 'Victòria: I think all children deserve to be wanted, having a baby is wonderful [...] but I also think that it is a great responsibility and, sometimes, not everybody is able to bear it.

**Anna:** What should I do, aunty?

**Victòria:** I cannot tell you that. It's your decision, but Anna, whatever you do, whatever you decide, I will be by your side'.

<sup>93</sup> 'Victòria: I don't come here very often, there are too many memories. This is where my father and his friends used to meet.

**Anna:** And that door opened onto the factories and the narrow streets.

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 històric':<sup>94</sup>

**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.<sup>95</sup>

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 modernity does not necessarily imply a loss 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!<sup>96</sup>

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**Victòria:** When the factory was still running [...]. When the factories closed down, the zone became a den of criminals. Fidel and I decided to close the door for good.

**Rosa:** Now there are neither streets nor factories. There is a brand new district, very nice.

**Victòria:** You can keep it. What they should have done is create gardens for people from the old district.

**Anna:** They have already made gardens!

**Victòria:** And expensive apartments. With new people who are taking what should be ours'.

<sup>94</sup> 'Symbolic and historic act'.

<sup>95</sup> '**Antonio:** We'll open the door of the storehouse, which has been kept closed for years. We will let fresh air flow between the front and the back and, thus, we'll link past and present. The new district.

**Anna:** It's beautiful!

**Victòria:** I don't know what you see in it. I won't let it fool me'.

<sup>96</sup> '**Victòria:** The district will never die. After us, there are young people who push and also love the place where they were born.

**Andreu:** Of course! No, this district has no intention of dying as for now.

**Victòria:** What about if, we mosey along to the new district now?

**Andreu:** The new district?

**Victòria:** After all, maybe it is not such a bad district as I thought. Come on, let's go!'.

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 distinctive identity 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.

However, *Poblenou* also marks an important difference with British soaps because the other character who performs the role of keeping alive and transmitting the memory of her community is Anna, who is seventeen years old. On the one hand, Anna is attracted by the new district, especially by the prospect of meeting new people; on the other hand, the girl is fascinated by Victòria's stories about late members of the family and her old pictures, so much so that the old part of the district and its people are the main subject of her first novel, when she becomes a writer. Therefore, in *Poblenou*, the role of guardian of community values and memories is also performed by a young girl.

As I have previously argued, many scholars have detected precisely this sense of community created by soaps and the set of values depicted in them as features of this genre which give it most appeal to an audience constructed as female. In his account of the affinities between *Coronation Street* and the working-class world, Dyer draws parallels between Richard Hoggart's 'growing portrait of the warmth of the working-class mother' in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and *Coronation Street's* 'plethora of splendid mums' (Dyer 1981: 3-4). He also comments on how one set of relationships—the family—represents a model for another—the community. The mothering structure which is clear in British soaps plays an important part in the transmission of the community's values and has effects on how the community is presented in the programmes. It confirms the way in which women dominate the narrative and it gives a

value to older women who do not have a role in their own families but who exercise an influence and control within the community. As I have attempted to demonstrate through the character of Victòria, this consideration is also valuable in analysing Catalan soaps.

This representation of a community also conveys a sense of a stable world in the soap which is essentially consistent with the values it espouses (Geraghty 1991: 131). This sense of stability has been tied to the notion of soap as 'a refuge, a safe haven' (Buckman 1984: 60). Mary Cassata in an article entitled 'The More Things Change, the More They are the Same' writes that in soaps, 'it is the interaction of the soap opera characters within a stable social framework which we have come to count upon all these years that has made us feel comfortable and secure' (1983: 100). Discussing this sense of continuity created by soaps, Allen similarly comments that 'the soap opera community is a self-perpetuating, self-preserving system little affected by the turbulence experienced by its individual members or the fate of any one character' (1985: 70). Dennis Porter specifically analyses how the way in which time is organised in the daytime soaps influences this perception: 'Nothing grows or ripens in soap time and nothing is corroded or scattered. [...] There is no future and no past but an eternal featureless present in which every day looks like the last and the one to come' (1982: 96). This sense of community and its continuity is what makes soaps pleasurable, according to Peter Buckman. Soap 'deals with the victory of old-fashioned and traditional certainties over the evanescent fashions that assail them' (1984: 38). Soap characters, he argues, 'are not there to surprise you, quite the contrary. Their purpose is to reassure' (1984: 64). This establishment of soaps as a safe place is linked to the coherent set of values offered by soap operas, based on the importance of personal relationships and the consistent espousal of women's points of view (Geraghty 1991: 133).

However, especially as far as television criticism is concerned, the reference to soap operas as a 'safe place' often does not refer to their value

system, but to the repetitive nature of their storylines. Negative comments towards this genre often imply a disapproval for its narrative structure deemed as monotonous. Geraghty, however, does not agree with these negative considerations and while she recognises that it is easy to underestimate the pleasure of predictability, she also argues that the repetition of plots, so tedious to the casual viewers, is very often part of a pattern based on the well-established character traits of particular individuals (1991: 15). Indeed, familiarity with a soap's narratives and characters gives the audience access to knowledge which is well beyond that which could be gleaned from any one episode. This knowledge, as I have previously observed, is defined by Brunsdon as 'serial-specific knowledge' (1981: 36). For example, the faithful audience is aware if one character suffered traumatic events in the past which affect the way he/she is currently behaving and 'can ascribe reasons for behaviour beyond that of the dramatic necessity or the demands of plotting' (Geraghty 1991: 15). Such awareness is not only based on the knowledge of the key events and characters but also on the network of relationships which are at the centre of a soap's narrative. Thus, familiarity with events, characters, and their networks of relationships allows the viewer to bring meaning to the narrative, rather than relying on what is shown in one particular episode. It is the viewer, then, according to Geraghty, 'who brings richness and density to a material which on the surface can look thin and unrewarding', thus emphasising the active role of a soap's viewers (1991: 15).

However, this familiarity does not depend only on the knowledge of series-specific characters and their plotlines. Soap opera conventions themselves—in establishing space, time, and characters—become so familiar that they are recognisable to soap audiences as formal strategies. The awareness of the rules of this convention, which Brunsdon labels 'generic knowledge' (1981: 36), allows the audience to recognise the way in which soap narrative is constructed. In this way, the viewer is able to enter into the play of that process

by predicting future events through a reading of internal conventions (Geraghty 1991: 19). The pleasures of rehearsing and predicting the mechanisms of narrative can be considered another reason for soap operas' attractiveness to their audiences.

By contrast, if the presence of well-established characters leads soap to value familiarity and predictability, the audience is also invited to enjoy changes. The familiar world which soap works so hard to establish is disrupted by new characters and storylines. Because of soaps' open-ended structure, an ultimate conclusion is forbidden and soaps are, therefore, based on a premise of continuous disruption. This contradiction between familiarity and disruption is possible because the genre is flexible enough to allow soaps constantly to extend their range of stories, thus establishing new characters and providing the audience with change and variety without losing that stability which I have just discussed. I would argue that this contradiction between repetition and disruption, familiarity and change, also plays a significant role in understanding the audience's engagement with soaps. The programmes can survive major change because the audience's commitment does not depend on one or two characters, but rather is engaged across a range of characters and stories. Due to this numerous cast, the identification is decentred, since the audience is invited to follow the vicissitudes of a significant—sometimes huge—amount of characters, not with a particular central figure. One of the most important consequences of this decentred identification is the range of characters in the programmes, with a great variety of ages, professions, origins, levels of education, and so forth, which allows the audience a whole set of possible identifications which are not mutually exclusive.

As far as establishing a cast of numerous characters is concerned, the most exemplary Catalan soap is *El cor de la ciutat*, which has more or less ninety characters. This high number of characters is also possible because, as I have argued earlier, compared to other Catalan soaps, *El cor de la ciutat* presents a

more open sense of community, and one which is not so strongly demarcated by a sense of geographical belonging, as in *Poblenou* and *Ventdelplà*. However, as I have already commented, *La Riera* does not present a sense of community. I would argue, in fact, that *La Riera* even represents a shift in the depiction of those values of solidarity and inclusivity, which have so far played such an important role in Catalan soaps, as we have seen. It is not a coincidence that, as Esteve Rovira told me, his referent for the creation of *La Riera* was not British drama serials, as had always been the case up until that point, but the American series *Brother and Sisters*. It is too early to predict whether this shift represents a stable trend or would only end up, like *Nissaga de poder* in its resemblance to American soaps, constituting an exception within the tradition of the soap opera genre in Catalonia.

### **1.7 Learning from Soaps: An Analysis of Soap Operas' Didactic Aspirations**

I have already mentioned that a significant aspect of the construction of a community in British and Catalan soaps is the representation of socially and economically marginalised groups and members of the society. I would argue that the genre of soap opera was also one of the first to address social issues and conflicts, especially those affecting women, on television. As we have seen, this way of approaching the study of soaps leads us back to an old debate about the role of television as a public educator.

Dealing with this didactic quality in *EastEnders* leads Buckingham to define this soap as a 'teacherly text' (1987: 102), and, with respect to the programme's representation of ethnicity, he 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' (1987: 102). When I mentioned these reflections on the soap opera genre to Benet i Jornet in the interview, he 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.<sup>97</sup>

In a similar vein, director Esteve Rovira also commented that 'sens dubte que la nostra feina també és educar socialment i explorar temes'.<sup>98</sup> This 'didacticism'<sup>99</sup> is also acknowledged by scriptwriters Enric Gomà and Jordi Galcerán 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'<sup>100</sup> (quoted in Ortega 2002: 333). Delving into the didactic aspect of soap operas, I would argue that this is particularly evident in the way Catalan soaps 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

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<sup>97</sup> 'We have done that as well. We have also included immigrant characters several times. And always from a positive point of view in order to explain that these people are nice and fantastic. We also do tricks. For example we create a situation in which the characters don't know what to do, while the immigrant one knows what to do, and he/she saves the day. Or a girl falls in love with a black man and they end up as a happy couple. [...] Yes, we have done all this. The word that says it all is didactic. We are didactic. Explicitly didactic, in the series'.

<sup>98</sup> 'There is no doubt that our job is to educate socially and explore topics'.

<sup>99</sup> 'Didacticism'.

<sup>100</sup> 'Influence public opinion'.

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'.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, through the character of Charo, the series 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',<sup>102</sup> she says to her employer and friend Helena, whose indignant rejoinder expresses the moral of the series:

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.<sup>103</sup>

The issue of institutionalised sexism 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 series 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.

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<sup>101</sup> 'I have the right to touch you. It's your fault if I am aroused [...] I am your husband and I have my needs...You are mine, you are mine, you are mine'.

<sup>102</sup> 'We are still married at the moment. He is still my husband, I guess he has his rights'.

<sup>103</sup> 'His rights? What rights? The rights to use you however and whenever he wants? As a floor cloth, as a kitchen scourer? You are wrong, eh? Charo, you are a person, like him, equal to him. Whether inside or outside a marriage no man has a right to rape the body of a woman, without her consent. Do you understand that? What your husband forced you to do is a crime'.

The same consideration can be made with respect to gender discrimination, especially within marriage. In the series *Poblenou*, two marriages were characterised by strict division of gender roles, due to the chauvinist attitude of the two men: on the one hand, Antonio, Rosa's husband, belongs to the working class, whereas, on the other, Eudald belongs to the upper-middle class. This conception of relationship and marriage is epitomised by Antonio's slur, according to which 'un home ha de saber portar els pantalons, si no, no es pot mantenir el matrimoni'.<sup>104</sup> While Rosa finally decides to separate from her husband, Eudald's wife Cristina 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:

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.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, she represents the risk of an 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'<sup>106</sup> as Rosa frequently says.

In the next paragraphs, I am going to examine Rosa's storyline. I have chosen to focus on this character because the relatively limited number of episodes allows me to extrapolate a definite pattern of representation and to

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<sup>104</sup> 'A man has to know how to be the one who wears the trousers, otherwise the marriage falls apart'.

<sup>105</sup> 'I am not saying that a woman shouldn't work, but there are moments when, if she isn't there, that's no good. Now, look what I gained from thinking like this. I almost never see my husband. If Eudald and I are still together, it's just because at our age and in our situation it is more convenient to put up and shut up'.

<sup>106</sup> 'In an old-fashioned way'.

identify a clear evolution of the character. Rosa is depicted 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. Thus, 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.<sup>107</sup>

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

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<sup>107</sup> **Rosa:** Ferran is already a grown-up and you are as well. And Martí will be very soon. Today I've looked myself in the mirror and realised that I'm getting old.

**Anna:** You should work. It would distract you.

**Rosa:** How can I work!? I can't do anything but cooking. I'm among the last of that generation that stupidly thought that when women got married they had to give up working.'

s'ha acabat, adéu-siau, i va ser bonic mentre va durar',<sup>108</sup> 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',<sup>109</sup> she tells her daughter.<sup>110</sup> 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',<sup>111</sup> she tells him. Her conviction clashes with Rosa's system of values which, at the beginning of the series, 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',<sup>112</sup> she tells her unfaithful husband.

However, during the course of the series, 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

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<sup>108</sup> 'I'm a free person, with no problem. I go with a man who I like and when the experience is over, good-bye and it was nice while it lasted'.

<sup>109</sup> 'You don't need a father'.

<sup>110</sup> 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.

<sup>111</sup> 'The father figure is not necessary'.

<sup>112</sup> 'For them, I will keep doing what I have been doing so far: cooking, washing clothes... You don't deserve it, but they deserve it all'.

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',<sup>113</sup> she warns him.

As I have already illustrated, 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'.<sup>114</sup> She undergoes a significant change, also because of some other events which prompt her 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.<sup>115</sup>

Rosa even refuses Bernat's proposal because she wants to try, for once, to live by herself. At the end of the soap, 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 a confident woman, willing to

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<sup>113</sup> 'If I am good for sex, cooking, and raising your children, I will also be good as the owner of this supermarket. I am either good for everything or I am good for nothing'.

<sup>114</sup> 'I go with who I want, I see who I want, and it is none of your business'.

<sup>115</sup> 'You have no idea about how I feel. You never had. And you never cared. This is what hurts me the most. But it's over, Antonio, this time it's over for good'.

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. At the beginning of the series, Rosa is a metaphor for the average working class woman of the *postguerra*, a woman who has always done what she has been told to do. 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, 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 depiction of women which Ang recognises in American soaps 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. As I have argued when examining Victòria's storyline, this female character has no children and no sense of frustration comes from her inexperience of maternity.<sup>116</sup>

The narrative structure of contrasting two opposite female archetypes is also found in the serial which is being broadcast at the moment of writing, *La Riera*, through the representation of Mercè and Nuria. Like Helena and Rosa, they also belong to the same generation—Mercè is sixty-two and Nuria is fifty-eight—but they are depicted so to represent two polarised interpretations of womanhood. Mercè is an independent woman, respected and valued in her private and family life as well as in her professional life by the employees in her restaurant. On the other hand, Nuria is a housewife and it is her husband Albert who is responsible not only for the financial support of the family but

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<sup>116</sup> Not everybody appreciated the model of family depicted in *Poblenou*, which was harshly criticised by the Opus Dei and the archbishop of Barcelona (Ortega 1999: 69).

also for managing the domestic economy. Nuria is depicted as a naïve woman who has never lived outside her little town and has a strong belief system which is strictly built around her religious faith—she and her husband are, indeed, practicing Catholics. Both Mercè and Nuria belong to the upper-middle class, thus their different interpretation of their roles as wives and their different conceptualisation of womanhood are not linked to a diverse social and economic status. It is interesting to note that, from *Poblenou* to *La Riera*, the depiction of these two polarised archetypes has been shifted from women in their forties to women in their late fifties and early sixties.

Indeed, as far as younger female characters go, *La Riera* tends to represent them as professionals—lawyers, business women, journalists, and so forth—and none of them is depicted as having issues about balancing work with their home lives, and in particular with their role as mothers. I argue that this issue—which was so crucial in *Poblenou*, especially as far as the character of Rosa is concerned when she decides to open a catering business and become economically independent from her husband—has been deliberately disregarded in *La Riera* in order to represent a generation of women in their thirties and forties who do not interpret their professional ambitions as being at odds with their idea of femininity and motherhood. However, there are two considerations that need to be made. First of all, these female characters are depicted as wealthy and their economically privileged situation allows them, for example, to pay for child care—something that it is not within everyone’s reach. Secondly, by making this choice, the series avoids confronting issues such as the job discrimination and bullying often suffered by women after their maternal leave. I maintain that the representation of this set of characters exemplifies the interpretation of television’s role as a projector of an ideal society elaborated by Badia and Berrio, which I have discussed above.

It is also worthwhile noticing that, while I have argued that Catalan soaps often link professional self-development and economic independence to



women's awareness of their gender identities, this is not translated into a devaluation of the experience of maternity. As Rosa says, 'pujar tres criatures ensenya més del que molts es pensen';<sup>117</sup> female teenage characters in Catalan soaps often recognise this role. In this sense, a significant meaning is acquired by the dedication which Anna writes to her mother when she gives her a copy of her first published novel: 'A la meva mare que em va ensenyar a caminar, a parlar i a estimar'.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the relationships created by different generations of women which allow them to establish a network of mutual help and comfort plays a crucial role in all Catalan soaps: from Victòria, Rosa, and Anna in *Poblenou* to Mercè, Sònia, and Ariadna in *La Riera*, a genealogy of female experiences is created. On the other hand, this genealogy is rarely constructed for men. The contrary is true, since very often fathers and sons are deliberately employed to depict polarised interpretations of manhood. This narrative structure is particularly clear as far as the characters of Eudald and his son Jaume in *Poblenou* are concerned. I have already examined how Eudald represents a conceptualisation of marriage based on strict binary gender roles. He is also represented as an authoritarian father, not willing to establish a relationship based on dialogue and trust with his son. However, in the series, the way men relate to their role as father changes significantly between different generations. Since the beginning, Jaume wants to be involved in the rearing of his child and feels very responsible for his education, even if, when Anna tells him she is pregnant, they are temporarily separated. While he is in New York, Jaume sends the following fax to Anna:

Jo hi penso molt, potser més del que em pertoca. Tenir un fill teu serà la cosa més bonica que m'haurà passat a la vida. Tot l'amor que he sentit per tu el dipositaré en ell. Vull ser responsable d'aquest fill, ja ho saps. No penso quedar-me per sempre a Nova York, però si no hi

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<sup>117</sup> 'Raising three children teaches you more than many people think'.

<sup>118</sup> 'To my mum, who taught me how to walk, talk, and love'.

hagués cap més raó, educar i veure com creix la criatura que ha de néixer seria suficient per tornar a Barcelona.<sup>119</sup>

Anna's storyline also allows me to reflect on another issue often dealt with in Catalan soaps, that is to say unexpected pregnancy. In *Poblenou*, this topic is represented through three characters: Helena, Anna, and Emília. The latter is a poor, uneducated woman in her forties whose purpose in the soap is to criticise the illegality of abortion during Franco's dictatorship. Indeed, Emília conceived a child when she was very young with a man who abandoned her. The series stresses the difficulties this woman had to face in order to raise a child alone in a time when being a single mother was socially condemned. Therefore, unlike Helena and Anna, as we are going to see, Emília did not choose to have the child, but her maternity was imposed on her by the social and juridical contexts. It is made clear to the audience, in fact, that Emília did not want a child and that, if she had been given the choice, she would have had an abortion. On the contrary, Helena and Anna take the decision of seeing their pregnancies through.

Although these two female characters belong to different generations, their storylines follow parallel paths: they both find out that they are pregnant during a moment of crisis in the relationship. Therefore, they are faced with the prospect of raising their child without a steady partner. The series unequivocally represents the choice about whether or not to have an abortion as always down to women since, in both cases, they unilaterally decide without consulting their partners. This conviction is expressed by Helena: 'Serà el meu fill, i el del Daniel, ja ho veuré',<sup>120</sup> she says when she takes the decision to keep the baby. Anna's situation is complicated by her young age, her lack of

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<sup>119</sup> 'I think about it a lot, maybe more than I should. Having a child with you will be the best thing that has happened in my life. All the love I felt for you I will give it to him. I want to be responsible for this child, you know that. I won't stay here in New York forever, but if there wasn't any another reason, educating and seeing our child growing up would be enough to come back to Barcelona'.

<sup>120</sup> 'He is going to be my baby. Whether he is going to be Daniel's as well, we'll see'.

economic independence, and the feeling of not being ready for such a great responsibility, as she confesses to Victòria: 'Jo no sé si estic preparada per tenir un fill [...] Em sento molt immadura per ser mare. I vull fer tantíssimes coses, només tinc divuit anys, tieta!'.<sup>121</sup> However, after reflecting upon the consequences, Anna also decides to keep her baby. Therefore, a generally negative attitude can be perceived towards abortion since under all circumstances, when confronting the possibility of interrupting their pregnancies, women always choose to keep the baby. This decision is always rewarded with solving the problems in their relationships and with an improvement in their economic condition. However, this attitude has changed throughout the years and in *Ventdelplà* we can find the storyline of Isona, a university student who finds out she is pregnant and decides to have an abortion. In one scene, the girl overhears a conversation between two women, Marcela and Berta. The latter is pregnant and Marcela asks her if she is ready to change nappies and wake up in the middle of the night to feed the baby. After replying that she does not mind, Berta nonetheless adds: 'Els fills els tens quan els desitjes si no...tot se't fa una muntanya'.<sup>122</sup> Isona realises that she is not ready to have a child and communicates her decision to her partner, Enric, who, on the other hand, is enthusiastic about becoming a father. Enric tells her that she cannot take this decision by herself, but Isona vehemently replies: 'No perdona, és el meu cos i la decisió és només meva'.<sup>123</sup> Despite her partner's opposition, Isona decides to see it through and have an abortion. Although *Ventdelplà* also presents Enric's point of view, it is clear that the series defends the right of a woman ultimately to decide with or without her partner's consent.

Finally, the representation of illnesses and disability can also be seen from a pedagogical perspective. Catalan soaps have dealt with several health

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<sup>121</sup> 'I don't know if I am ready to have a baby. I feel very immature to be a mother. And I want to do so many things, I am only eighteen years old, aunty!'

<sup>122</sup> 'You should have children only when you want them, otherwise...you can't bear the responsibility'

<sup>123</sup> 'No, I am sorry, this is my body and it is only up to me to take this decision'

issues, including Alzheimer's, mental and physical disability, and cancer. In *Ventdelplà*, for example, one of the main characters is Mònica, a young woman who is involved in a car accident and loses the use of her legs. As Benet i Jornet told me, the writers of the series wanted to depict the whole arc of the story, including a suicide attempt. However, he also stressed the importance of giving these storylines a positive angle, so the viewer also gets to see how Mònica manages to resume her life and become a successful novelist writer. However, this must be done within certain limits. For example, Benet i Jornet mentioned that when people asked him when Mònica would get up, he used to reply 'quan hi hagi una manera d'aixecar-se, ja l'aixecarem, no estem aquí per fer miracles'.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, for the depiction of a physically disabled person, the creators of the series were helped by doctors from the Institut Guttman, a medical institute in Catalonia devoted to the study and treatment of physical disabilities. Some scenes were also shot in this institute.

I have already mentioned how Catalan series sometimes rely on the help of external advisors. However, it can also happen that a storyline is developed after being suggested by professionals in certain areas. For example, Benet i Jornet recounted that the Head of Research at the Hospital Clínic in Barcelona, a friend of his, asked him to treat the issue of diabetes in children in *Laberint d'ombres*. Consequently, Benet i Jornet created a storyline about Marina, a little girl who is diagnosed with the condition, and the story covers her struggles and the difficulties of her mother, Magnòlia, who is a widow, in dealing with it. For example, it is shown how each day Magnòlia has to give her daughter an insulin injection and how guilty she feels for the pain she is inflicting on her child, although this is necessary for her life. In one scene, Marina talks to the old lady who owns the news-stand where she buys her comic every week and finds out that she is diabetic too. The old lady sees how worried the little girl is about her condition and, in particular, how she fears that, because of it, she will never

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<sup>124</sup> 'When there is a way of getting her up, we will. We are not here to perform miracles'.

be able to realise her dream of travelling around the world. The old lady tries to reassure Marina by telling her that diabetes ‘no em va privar ni de tenir fills, ni de viatjar ni de fer una vida completament normal’.<sup>125</sup> The series also approaches the issue of how the dynamics of the relationship between the mother and the daughter change after the diagnosis. Magnòlia begins to overprotect her child by forbidding her to go on school trips and accompanying her everywhere. Because of that, one day Marina goes out without telling her mother and she gets lost. She only has one insulin dose with her and everybody thinks that they will find her dead, but the girl has put into practice all the guidelines the doctor had taught her: instead of injecting the entire dose of insulin, the little girl has rationed it to make it last longer. After listening to the girl’s account, Ció, one of Magnòlia’s best friends, says: ‘No cal que pateixis per la teva filla. Sap molt bé com cuidar-se’.<sup>126</sup> Finally, Magnòlia understands that she needs to trust her daughter and allow her more freedom.

An illness which has been included in several Catalan soaps is cancer, especially breast cancer, which has given the writers the chance to uncover the relationship which, sometimes, can be detected between illness and gender. Both Helena in *Poblenou* and Clara in *El cor de la ciutat*, for example, are diagnosed with the disease, but these two storylines are not curtailed after the mastectomy they undergo. Both series portray the struggles that the two female characters face in order to accept their bodies, which have undergone such a dramatic change, and to be physically intimate with others, especially their partners. A similar issue is represented in the case of Mònica, since *Ventdelplà* shows how her disability affects her love for and sexual relationship with her boyfriend Rafa. However, in this storyline, the series also examines Rafa’s insecurities and fears. The first time they try to have sex after the accident, Rafa is too worried about what Mònica might or might not feel and cannot get an

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<sup>125</sup> ‘Did not prevent me either from having children or travelling or leading a completely normal life’.

<sup>126</sup> ‘You don’t have to be worried about you daughter. She knows how to take care of herself’.

erection, making him feel inadequate. It takes them some time to feel sexually comfortable with one another. In the love scene in which they finally do, Mònica's wheelchair is left in the background, out of focus, as an element which does not disrupt the lovers' life anymore.

Another storyline included in *Ventdelplà* which deals with the relation between illness and sexuality is narrated through the character of Cristina, a young woman who finds out she is HIV positive. The series depicts the difficulties her HIV status supposes for her sex life. She initially believes that her boyfriend Martí, who is not positive, is staying with her after finding out only out of compassion: 'No suportó la teva pietat. No vull la teva llàstima',<sup>127</sup> she tells him and she gives him the chance to end the relationship. Martí refuses to do so but soon understands that he cannot deal with the situation: he is terrified of becoming infected and he constantly rejects Cristina's displays of affection. Realising Martí's fears, Cristina decides to break up with him. However, in subsequent storylines involving her character, we see how the girl is able to overcome the situation and, in the end, she finds a partner, Enric, who is not scared of her HIV status.

Going back to the depiction of cancer, both Helena and Clara survive the illness, as do the majority of the characters who suffer from it in Catalan series. However, Benet i Jornet told me that he thought the series should also deal with the death of a character with cancer, but he admitted that this was such a delicate issue that the writers needed to be careful. Therefore, they created a storyline in *Laberint d'ombres* in which a woman, Mònica, despite all the warnings from her friends, never goes to the doctor. In this way, Benet i Jornet told me, the series wanted to send a message about how important prevention is. After being diagnosed with cancer, Mònica meets a younger man, Alfred, and they fall in love. The storyline ends with the woman who, already in a

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<sup>127</sup> 'I can't stand your pity. I don't want your pity'.

terminal state, watches Alfred, a flautist, triumphing in a televised symphonic concert. When the concert is over, she takes some pills and commits suicide.

This issue was also discussed by Esteve Rovira during our interview. Commenting on the storyline about Toni, a terminally ill character who thinks about committing suicide in *El cor de la ciutat*,<sup>128</sup> Esteve Rovira expressed his concerns about these stories, which can easily tip over into sensationalism. In his opinion, what television should do is present a wide range of characters who express different opinions on a delicate social issue such as assisted suicide, so that the viewer can develop his/her own point of view. In her quantitative study of what she defines as ‘the social agenda’ of *El cor de la ciutat*, Lorena Gómez notices that:

Un mismo tema se aborda a partir de dos (o más) tramas simultáneas conducidas por personajes diferentes, con o sin relación entre sí. [...] Esta estrategia permite diversificar el tratamiento narrativo de los temas y/o de las variables de representación.<sup>129</sup> (2011: 6)

The same strategy is employed in the treatment of the issue of squatting and the phenomenon of the *okupas* in *El cor de la ciutat*. This plotline appeared in 2007, when in big cities in Spain, and particularly in Barcelona, young people were occupying unused houses to protest against property speculation and the rise of house prices. In order to deal with the issue, the soap presents two radical and opposed ideological positions: on the one hand, Ivan, involved with property speculation, and, on the other, Ross and K (Cristina), who represent a radical position in favour of occupying unused buildings. In the middle, there is a wide range of characters who express more moderate opinions, in favour or

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<sup>128</sup> The same series had already presented a storyline, which involved two of the main characters, Peris and his wife, Cinta. After a car accident, their daughter, Laura, enters an irreversible coma and they disconnect her from life support mechanisms.

<sup>129</sup> ‘The same issue is approached from two (or more) simultaneous storylines of different characters who may or may not be related to each other. This strategy allows a diversification of a narrative treatment of such issues and/or its variants of representation’.

against, and, in addition, some people even change their position towards this issue throughout the course of this narrative strand.<sup>130</sup>

However, as Esteve Rovira comments in our interview, there has been a storyline included in *La Riera* which has not respected the narrative structure aimed at presenting different ideological positions embodied in a range of characters. It is the storyline that evolved around the character of Mauri, a fifty-three year old member of the main family in the series. Mauri is the younger brother of Mercè Riera, the matriarch, and he is the chief cook in the family restaurant. He has an authoritarian personality but he is appreciated and well-liked by his colleagues as well as loved by his sisters, his nephews, and his daughter. At the beginning of the series, Mauri is deliberately established as a likeable character, with which many people in the audience could feel a connection. That is the reason why, for the audience, it is a shock to find out in the episode eighty-five that Mauri is a paedophile. The audience finds out when Mauri, who has been chatting with a person named Berta for weeks, decides to meet her. In a scene accompanied by tense music, the audience sees that the only person waiting where the *rendezvous* should take place is a little girl.

Mauri's secret enters the public domain as the consequence of two women's enquiries: the public prosecutor Sònia—married to one of Mauri's nephews—is investigating a case of child abuse; and Txell, Mauri's daughter, is trying to find out Berta's identity. On the one hand, Sònia finds out that Mauri was related to her case and, on the other hand, Txell manages to find Berta. Esteve Rovira explained to me that, due to the delicate nature of the subject, it was impossible to present the usual narrative structure followed by Catalan series in depicting social issues. Instead of presenting a verity of opinions, here we have a total condemnation of the character:

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<sup>130</sup> In *El cor de la ciutat*, the *okupas'* storyline focuses on young people, but in *La Riera*, a storyline was included about a family with a baby girl who occupies an apartment after the father loses his job. They cannot pay the rent and, when the owner throws them out, they find themselves homeless. Thus, the series deals with the consequences of the current economic crisis and, in particular, of the high rate of unemployment in Catalonia.



[T]ots rebutjaran el personatge, tots el rebutjaran amb més o menys matisos, això sí, però és un tema massa dur per agradar, és a dir, com a tele pública el que direm és *esto es jodío* però existeix, per això ho tractem.<sup>131</sup>

Mauri's storyline represents an exception within the extremely limited range of stories in television series which deal with this subject. First of all, this storyline was developed over several weeks. Therefore, it is not something which is only condemned in a single episode so that the audience can forget about it by the next one. Second, it does not concern a marginal disposable character, but one of the protagonists. For this reason, the audience follows the consequences this discovery has on each member of the family, particularly the way Sergi, the younger among Mauri's nephews, and Mercè, Mauri's older sister, react. Sergi is also a chef and has looked up to his uncle all his life, taking him as a role model. When he finds out Mauri is a paedophile, the sense of identification Sergi has always felt with his uncle breaks abruptly, leaving the young man devastated. This is the reason why, among the members of the family, he is the one who reacts most strongly, so much so that in one scene he throws his uncle out of his mother's house. Indeed, after his secret is revealed, Mauri finds refuge in his older sister's house. Mercè and Mauri had always had a very close relationship and she is torn between the disgust she feels about what she has found out about her brother and her love for him. In order to bear the situation, Mercè firmly wants to believe in what Mauri has told her, that is that he has never abused a child. In one scene, the contradictory and contrasting feelings mother and son feels towards Mauri come to surface in a tense dialogue:

**Sergi:** Ho sé tot, mare. I de veritat, prefereixo no tornar-lo a veure perquè, si no, vomitaré.

**Mercè:** I tu ja corres a jutjar-lo. [...] En Mauri no pot controlar el que li passa.

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<sup>131</sup> '[E]verybody will reject the character, everybody will reject him, in one way or another, but this issue is too hard for anyone to be in favour of it; what we will say as a public television service is this sucks but it exists, that's why we deal with it'.

**Sergi:** Mira, no el defensis, que totes aquestes excuses de merda, ja me les ha dit ell mateix.

**Mercè:** Hi has parlat? Per això se n'ha anat... Com t'atreveixes a fer fora de casa meva el meu germà?

**Sergi:** A mi tant se m'en fot si és el teu germà. És un degenerat!

**Mercè:** En Mauri no ha fet res de dolent.

**Sergi:** Mare...li agraden les nenes, eh?

**Mercè:** Però sempre s'ho ha guardat per ell. Mai ha permès que passés res amb ningú. M'ho ha dit ell.

**Sergi:** I te'l creus? [...] És un perturbat. Què et fa pensar que t'ha explicat la veritat? Si ha amagat això durant dècades...

**Mercè:** Sergi, ja n'hi ha prou. Conec en Mauri. És bona persona. Sé que no faria mal a ningú. La nostra obligació és ajudar-lo i protegir-lo.

**Sergi:** No t'enganyis, mare. En Mauri no és la persona que coneixíem tots. Et pots enganyar i creure que sí però ja no ho és.<sup>132</sup>

The series avoids simplistic judgment about any of those reactions, depicting the complexity of feelings involved in a storyline such as this. Moreover, the soap presents a surprisingly detailed psychological analysis of Mauri. As Esteve Rovira told me, the writers were helped by a team of psychiatrists in developing the character:

[E]stem assessorats per psicòlegs i psiquiatres [...]. Hem parlat amb gent que pateix aquest tema. La percepció que tenen els psicòlegs és que un pederasta mai té la sensació d'estar fent res dolent, és el que volem explicar, que ell es creu que és incomprès per la societat, que

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<sup>132</sup> **Sergi:** I know everything, mum. And honestly, I prefer not to see him again because, otherwise, I will throw up.

**Mercè:** And you immediately judge him. [...] Mauri has no control over what he feels.

**Sergi:** Don't defend him, he has already tried all those shitty excuses on me.

**Mercè:** Have you talked to him? That's why he has run away... How dare you throw my brother out of my house?

**Sergi:** I don't care if he is your bother. He is a degenerate!

**Mercè:** Mauri has done nothing wrong.

**Sergi:** Mum...he likes little girls, eh?

**Mercè:** But he has always kept it to himself. He has never let anything happen with anyone. He told me so.

**Sergi:** And you believe him? [...] He is perturbed. What makes you think that he has told you the truth? If he has been hiding this for decades...

**Mercè:** Sergi, that's it. I know Mauri. He is a good person. I know he will never harm anyone. Our duty is to help him and protect him.

**Sergi:** Don't fool yourself, mum. Mauri is not the person we all knew. You can fool yourself and believe so, but he is not'.

ell simplement s'enamora de persones, però, coi, que són de dotze anys!<sup>133</sup>

In our interview, Esteve Rovira also emphasises that Mari's story allows the series to deal with another issue, that is to say, the potential risks for children involved in the use of chat rooms. As I have already mentioned, Mauri's daughter finds out that her father is chatting with a little girl and that he has also tried to meet her. For this subplot, the series also sought professional advice from the Mossos d'Esquadra,<sup>134</sup> who looked favourably on the fact that the series was dealing with the issue:

Els Mossos fan xerrades a les escoles, amb els nens i les nenes, 'compte amb als xats perquè mai hi ha al darrera qui tu creus que hi ha'. No se sap qui hi ha al darrera d'un xat, no? Aleshores, de rebot, ens permet explicar els perills d'internet. Estem assessorats pels Mossos d'Esquadra en aquest aspecte, ells veuen molt bé que tractem el tema.<sup>135</sup>

Another subplot derived from Mauri's storyline allows the series to expose the Church's hypocritical attitude towards the scandal of child abuse committed by priests. In one scene, Mauri tells Mercè that he was abused by their parish priest when he was a small child and Mercè finds out that, after a few years, this priest was suddenly transferred to another parish. With the help of Mauri's daughter, Mercè realises that the church discovered the abuses committed by this priest but, instead of denouncing his crimes to the police, they transferred him and covered up the scandal.

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<sup>133</sup> '[W]e have psychologists, psychiatrists [...] as consultants. [...] We have talked with people who suffer from this problem. The perception that psychologists have that a pederast has never the sensation that he is doing something wrong is the story we want to explain, that he believes he is misunderstood by society, that he simply falls in love with someone but, damn, they are twelve years old!'

<sup>134</sup> Catalan Police.

<sup>135</sup> 'The Mossos give talks in schools, with children, and advise about the dangers of chat rooms because you never know who you're really talking to, do you? Then, we take the chance to explain the dangers of the internet as well. The Mossos act as consultants in this aspect and they look favourably on the fact that the series is dealing with the issue.'

Benet i Jornet concluded his argument about the didactic aspirations of Catalan soaps 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.<sup>136</sup>

Similarly, talking about the success of Catalan soaps 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.<sup>137</sup>

Therefore, Catalan soaps share with their British counterparts an aspiration to educate the public about social issues. As far as Catalan drama serials are concerned, great effort is dedicated to representing cases of domestic violence, especially in the first soap *Poblenou* in 1994, a moment when the issue of violence against women within the domestic realm was not given significant attention by the political establishment. In this sense, I would go so far as to argue that media, although evidently lacking any performative function, can sometimes substitute for the political arena in creating debates and influencing public opinion around social issues. As Pilar Aguilar Carrasco argues in her essay about the representations of sexual violence in Spanish films, 'la ficción audiovisual es una poderosa maquinaria que crea puntos de vista ideológicos

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<sup>136</sup> 'We usually create romantic, or tragic, or thriller-like stories, it varies. But we also try to deal with real problems, explain them to people, and, by doing that, suggest solutions, if there are any, otherwise we explain what should be done in order to...well, you know what I mean'.

<sup>137</sup> 'We don't connect with society because of the stories we tell. What influences the audience is what there is underneath the storyline. And underneath the stories, there is information: about a social model of acceptance, respect, and understanding of the world that surrounds us. This is what gets to the audience'.

[http://elpais.com/diario/1998/04/25/catalunya/893466454\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1998/04/25/catalunya/893466454_850215.html).

y/o emotivos, permisividad o censura, lazos proyectivos de empatía o de rechazo, etc. Estamos, pues, ante un potente artefacto al que hay que prestar atención si creemos que otro mundo es posible y queremos trabajar por él'<sup>138</sup> (2010: 144).

## 1.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined how feminist studies have analysed television and, in particular, I have queried the prominent status that the genre of soap opera enjoys in feminist television criticism. I have also investigated the association of soap opera with female audiences and, therefore, its connotation as a 'female' genre, inserting it in the more general concept of 'women's picture', which I have examined through a wide range of texts taken from literature and cinema, paying particular attention to the genre of melodrama. Following this, I have focused on how some feminist scholars, such as Modleski and Brunsdon, have analysed the content and structure of soap operas to find reasons for this genre's appeal to an audience constructed as female; I have also referred to reader-oriented theories as elaborated by Barthes, Ingarden, and Iser to set out the context for my analysis.

As far as the interpretation of audiences' responses is concerned, I have mostly relied on the pioneering studies of Hobson, Ang, and Brown and I have applied their theories to my examination of feedback written by viewers on Televisió de Catalunya's official internet forum. I have argued that those comments lend weight to feminists' hypothesis that there exists an emotional bond between female viewers and soap operas, as well as to the contention that the discursive spaces around soaps are as important as the programmes

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<sup>138</sup> 'Audiovisual fiction is a powerful machinery which creates ideological and/or emotional points of view, permissiveness or censorship, empathy or rejection, and so forth. We are, then, in front of a powerful artifact, to which we should pay attention, if we believe that another world is possible and we want to work to create it'.

themselves as a source of networking for women viewers. Moreover, choosing online texts as the material for the analysis, I have explored the possibilities that new digital media offer for broadening the connections among viewers of a soap. However, throughout the chapter, I have also tried to problematise the depiction of women as a monolithic and homogeneous category, pointing out the risks involved in using words such as ‘feminine’ and ‘female’.

Finally, applying feminist studies of the content of soap operas with particular reference to the work of Geraghty, I have examined this genre according to three aesthetic traditions—entertainment, melodrama, and realism—and I have illustrated how the different permutations of the three variants demarcates differences between British and American traditions of this genre. Throughout this analysis, I have compared the results with my own examination of Catalan soaps to try 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 examination, I argue that Catalan soaps resemble British drama serials more closely than they do American ones. This is evident in all three of the aesthetic traditions taken into consideration. However, in my analysis, I have also detected differences between Catalan and British soaps, mainly in their attachment to an epistemology of realism. I have pointed out how important the aesthetic values of realism are in British culture, due to a tradition which dates back to the late 1950s and early 1960s with the British New Wave, which influenced all artistic forms, from painting to cinema, from theatre to television, including, of course, the newly born television soaps. The lack of a similar tradition in Catalonia marks a divergence between Catalan and British drama serials when it comes to approaching the convention of realism. These differences are mainly detected in a disregard of class as a source of identity and belonging with respect to Catalan soaps, whereas soaps from Great Britain and Catalonia are similar in their detailed depiction of the fictitious world in

which they take place, be it a district, street, or town. I have also observed how Catalan television employs a dedicated website to construct a detailed sense of place for its soaps, especially with maps. However, I have examined the contradictions that can be found between Catalan television's attachment to an epistemology of realism and its aim of sustaining a distinctive national Catalan imaginary, especially as far as the representation of sociolinguistic aspects are concerned.

I have also compared and contrasted American and British soaps in their representation of community and families. In the American ones, I have underscored how a sense of community is not constructed at all, since the drama serials generally focus on one family, whereas in British soaps a sense of community is crucial. This difference is also due to the diverse way in which American and British soaps represent women as either a source of disruption or preservation of the order within the narratives of the soaps. In this aspect too, I argue that Catalan soaps follow the path established by British drama serials in representing a sense of community, although this is more defined by geographical space and less by class. I have particularly focused on the character of Victòria as the guardian of the memories of her community, as comprised by the inhabitants of the old part of the district of Poble Nou. I argue that this character belongs to the category of 'grandmothers' elaborated by Geraghty—elderly women in British soaps who perform the same role as Victòria. However, I have also detected an important difference between British and Catalan soaps in this respect. In *Poblenou*, the role of 'guardian' of the community is also performed by a young girl, who collects Victòria's anecdotes and stories and integrates them in the novel she is writing, thus transmitting them to future generations.

Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of how Catalan soaps have approached social issues. Starting with a comparison between American and British soaps, I have commented that the former disregard social conflicts

and issues, whereas the second have been defined as teacherly texts precisely because of their depiction of such themes. I argue that, in this aspect also, Catalan soaps are similar to their British counterparts. I have proposed an examination of the treatment that Catalan drama serials reserve for social issues informed by my own analysis of characters and storylines, as well as the interviews which I have conducted with the director Esteve Rovira and the writer Josep Maria Benet i Jornet. I have particularly focused on the representation of gender violence and I argue that Catalan soaps demonstrate a will to deal with themes which are generally disregarded, such as rape within marriage and domestic violence in upper-middle class families. I have then examined how health issues are depicted in Catalan soaps. For example, I have analysed the storyline of a child living with diabetes and I have explained how this plotline originated in a conversation between Benet i Jornet and the Head of Research at a hospital in Barcelona.

Moreover, I have investigated how Catalan soaps have explored the dynamics between disease and gender in their representation of some illnesses, especially breast cancer. Since the construction of gender identity is so embedded in the body, an illness which imposes a dramatic change on it also influences the perception a woman might have of herself as a gendered and sexual subject. I argue that all these storylines make evident the pedagogical role that Catalan television aims to perform in educating its audience about social issues. Finally, I have examined a storyline which evolves around paedophilia and other related subjects, such as the dangers of the internet and the responsibility of the Church in covering scandals of child abuse. These aspirations, I argue, demonstrate that if television cannot quite be an agent for social change, it can at least aspire to be one. However, these aspirations necessarily entails risks and contradictions, as I will examine in the following chapter dedicated to the construction of sexual dissidence in Spanish and Catalan series.



# The Construction of Sexual Dissidence on TV

## Using Anglo-Saxon Paradigms to Re-read Spanish and Catalan Texts

The early attention dedicated by scholars in gender studies to the power and the risks embedded in television representations was not carried over into scholarship on forms and representations of sexual dissidence.<sup>139</sup> As I will explain in the section entitled ‘Studies of Sexual Dissidence: An Overview of Studies of Non-Heteronormative Content on TV’, this dismissal of non-heteronormative television content as an object of academic study is even more evident in the Spanish and Catalan context. This chapter is, therefore, an attempt to balance this situation, focusing on non-heteronormative narratives in Spanish and Catalan television series.

However, as I will illustrate in the section ‘Why Television Counts: The Importance of Non-Heteronormative Media Images’, the aim of this chapter is not to evaluate whether such images on Spanish and Catalan television can be read as positive or negative—an approach which has been dominant in the analyses of these images on the American small screen. I will explain the controversies which surround the definition of the concept of ‘positive’ images and I suggest a reading practice which avoids recourse to this rhetoric. In the fourth section, entitled ‘Normalisation: Who Has the Right to Belong to a Normal Country?’, I query the process and the strategies of ‘normalisation’—one of the most important aims of Catalan television. However, this concept is usually examined through an interpretation of the

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<sup>139</sup> I do not intend with this sentence implying that gender and sexual dissidence studies are two entirely separate disciplines. I am aware of the interactions and overlapping of these two fields of studies. What I am referring here to is the perspective—gender and sexual—from which television content is examined. As Gayle Rubin argues, although sex and gender are related, they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice (1999: 170).

autonomic medium as a 'national television service'<sup>140</sup> and its role in sustaining a Catalan national imagery. Instead, I will apply this concept of 'normalisation' to the representation of non-heteronormative feelings and relationships, querying how a pedagogic aim of 'normalising' non-heteronormativity is often achieved by a process of exclusion of certain subjects, such as those who do not conform to a strict gender binary system.

In the fifth section, I concentrate on the debate between essentialist and constructionist views of sexuality. I will demonstrate how the former conception is dominant in television representation of sexual dissidence through an analysis of characters and plots from Spanish and Catalan series. In the sixth section, entitled 'Constructing a Collective History', I explain how poststructuralist theories have complicated the concept of a collective history for those people excluded from heteronormativity. While recognising its fictitiousness and arbitrariness, I will nonetheless stress the usefulness of this strategy. I will also examine the role played by Catalan and Spanish television in narrating non-heteronormative relationships set in other time periods, especially during Franco's dictatorship.

In the seventh section, entitled 'Television's Depiction of the Role of the School System in Sustaining Heteronormativity', I stress the role that the educational system should perform in challenging the monopoly of heteronormativity. Then, I examine the few storylines in Spanish and Catalan series which have been dedicated to query the role of school in transmitting to children and teenagers the knowledge of the range of sexual options. Finally, I focus on the bullying against people excluded from heteronormativity in school and how Spanish and Catalan television narrations have depicted this issue.

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<sup>140</sup> According to Lluís de Carreras, '[l]as televisiones que realizan la función de representar a una comunidad que puede identificarse políticamente como una nación y que han nacido o se justifican para ser vehículo de una lengua o preservar una cultura propia y diferenciada tienen vocación de ser "televisiónes nacionales"' [television broadcastings that perform the function of representing a community which can politically identify itself as nation, that have been created or are justified to be the vehicle of a language, or with the purpose of preserving a singular and differentiated culture have a vocation to be 'national television services'] (1995: 153).

Before going on to develop these arguments, however, some terminological explanation is needed.

## 2.1 Do Words Count? A Terminological Clarification

In the following paragraphs, I am going to explain the terminological choices I have adopted in this chapter. As Chaucey (1982) argues, since the late nineteenth century, knowledge related to desires and feelings among people of the same sex has always been structured by strenuously contested categories. Terms such as 'homosexual', 'gay' or 'lesbian', and 'queer' symbolise shifts in the interpretation of sexuality and the political strategies that it calls into being. The debates around the use and meanings of these words are not empty discussions about purely linguistic matters since they 'point to a changing reality, both in the ways a hostile society labelled homosexuality, and in the way those stigmatized saw themselves' (Weeks 1977: 3). Indeed, each of these terms is indissolubly linked to the social and cultural context in which it was developed.<sup>141</sup>

The word 'homosexuality' was coined in 1869 by Swiss doctor Karoly Maria Benkert but was not used broadly in English until the 1890s, when it was adopted by the sexologist Havelock Ellis. After the gay and lesbian liberation movement this term came to be associated with a negative attitude towards dissident sexualities. Simon Watney, for example, writes that 'to describe oneself as "a homosexual" is immediately to inhabit a pseudo-scientific theory of sexuality which more properly belongs to the age of the steam engine than to the late twentieth century' (1992: 20). In his compendium of non-heteronormative cultural referents, Alberto Mira stresses the contradictions of

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<sup>141</sup> This lexical overview is mainly based on Anglo-Saxon contexts but, as Alberto Mira's references will demonstrate, this terminological discussion is relevant also for the Spanish and Catalan contexts. Indeed, Spanish and Catalan have imported the Anglicisms 'homosexual' and 'gay'—often spelled 'gai' in Catalan—which are in common use. Less frequent is the use of the term 'queer' in these two languages.

the word 'homosexual' through an etymological analysis, describing it as an 'aberración etimológica'<sup>142</sup> (1999: 7). Formed by two words, one Greek—homo, which means 'the same'—the other Latin (sexo), homosexual is an 'extraño compuesto que ni siquiera equivale exactamente a la suma de sus partes'<sup>143</sup> (1999: 7). Mira concludes with an ironic note, when he comments: 'Qué apropiado el que un término que históricamente se ha asociado con comportamientos definidos como marginales o criminales sea un auténtico atentado contra la propiedad y el rigor lingüísticos'<sup>144</sup> (1999: 7).

In the 1960s-1970s, in the United States and in the United Kingdom, the Gay Liberation Movement made a strategic break with the word homosexual by appropriating and re-contextualising a nineteenth-century slang term which was employed to describe female prostitutes: 'gay'. This word was purposely exploited as a specifically political counter to that binarised and hierarchised sexual categorisation which classifies homosexuality as a deviation from a privileged and naturalised heterosexuality. However, in Mira's compendium it is argued that the term gay should be regarded as 'una de las (posibles) identidades homosexuales contemporáneas'<sup>145</sup> (1999: 325), criticising the use of the term as an absolute and acknowledging its exclusionary potentiality, especially—but not only—towards women. Similarly, Ricardo Llamas also criticises this term because, in his opinion, it does not acknowledge the plurality of experiences and it excludes many people who do not recognise themselves in it (Fouz 2003: 92).

By contrast, inspired by Deleuze's theorisation of a nomadic subject, the term 'queer' came to identify a new model of identification which proposed itself as an alternative to the one represented by the word gay (Wilton 1995: 42). The etymological meaning of the term—'strange'—aims to emphasise the

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<sup>142</sup> 'Etymological aberration'.

<sup>143</sup> 'Strange compound which does not even correspond to the sum of its parts'.

<sup>144</sup> 'How appropriate that a term which has been historically associated with behaviours deemed as marginal and criminal should be an authentic attack against linguistic accuracy and rigour'.

<sup>145</sup> 'One of the (possible) contemporary homosexual identities'.

fluidity and indeterminacy of sexuality: 'No solo consiste en identificarse con un término que antes servía para insultar; si se elige *queer* frente a otros términos similares es porque al mismo tiempo pretende subrayar la extrañeza con la que ha de observarse la sexualidad humana'<sup>146</sup> (Mira 1999: 621).

Therefore, these terms are intrinsically linked to the social, cultural, and political contexts they represent. In her ironic account relating the passage between gay and lesbian liberation and queer activism, Susan Hayes illustrates the contribution of two historical moments of 'moral panic' (Weeks 1981: 14-15)—Stonewall and the AIDS crisis—to the shift in sexual politics represented by the terms 'gay' or 'lesbian' and 'queer':

[T]here was Stonewall (1969) and we all became gay. There was feminism, too, and some of us became lesbian feminists and even lesbian separatists. There was drag and clones and dykes and politics and Gay Sweatshop. Then there was AIDS, which through the intense discussion of sexual practices (as opposed to sexual identities), spawned the Queer movement in America. (1994: 14).

Indeed, according to Rubin, moments of moral panic are the 'political movement of sex' (1999: 163), in which diffuse attitudes are channeled into political action and from there into social transformations, which involve not only society and the meanings and values given to sexuality, but also the self-perception of people excluded from heteronormativity. The defiant use of the words homosexual, gay, and queer symbolises these shifts in identity politics and each of these terms transmits particular perception of sexuality and political strategies. I argue that the specific meanings of these words impede their general use to define those people who are excluded from heteronormativity because they express a precise sense of identity—or a rejection of it—with which people can or cannot feel comfortable: some men who have sexual relations with other men might want to define themselves as

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<sup>146</sup> 'It is not only a matter of identifying with a term which was previously used as an insult; if you choose *queer*, as opposed to other similar terms, it is because it also aspires to emphasise the strangeness with which human sexuality must be observed'.

gay, but others might refuse this label and I do not consider it is fair on my behalf to impose this term or any other on people. Questioning the general use of the term queer, Llamas had already stressed the difficulty of theorising something so personal as sexuality (Fouz 2003: 84). Therefore, I will only use these terms when I refer to a particular person who I know for sure defines himself/herself as such (for instance, this is the case of openly lesbian activists Empar Pineda and Sarah Schulman or openly gay politician Nichi Vendola). Instead, when I am talking in general terms, I will employ the expressions 'sexual dissidents' and 'people excluded from heteronormativity' since, beyond the debate between essentialism and constructionism, the focus of my thesis is on the social and cultural constructions of the meanings which surround relationships and feelings among people of the same sex and, in particular, the role that television plays in these constructions.

Consequently, I also find problematic the use of the terms 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality'. Adrienne Rich defines 'compulsory heterosexuality' (1999) as a constructed ideology which, indissolubly linked with patriarchy and racism, produces a system of oppression. However, I agree with Fernández and Chavarria who maintain that identifying 'heterosexuality' with 'patriarchy' would be to ignore that the former, apart from being an institution, is also a structure of desire and feelings (2003: 11). Moreover, the two terms could be misinterpreted as a stance on an essentialist view of sexuality and it is not the aim of my research to take a position in this debate by commenting on the origins of sexual desires.

However, I confute the conception of sexuality as comprehensible in purely biological terms, as something 'eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical' (Rubin 1999: 149). It is my informed conviction based on my research that, as with ethnicity and gender, it is impossible to study the politics of sexuality as long as it is thought of as a solely biological entity rather than a social construct. Rubin goes so far as to state that 'sex as we know it—gender

identity, sexual desire and fantasy, concepts of childhood—is itself a social product’ (1975: 166). This interpretation does not exclude the fact that sex is an activity which relates to natural sexual impulses and desires, but stresses that this conception is not enough to understand the complexity of sexuality. Same-sex desire might always have been existed among humans but in different societies and epochs ‘it may be rewarded or punished, required or forbidden, a temporary experience or a life-long vocation’ (Rubin 1999: 155). For instance, in some New Guinea societies, sexual activities among men are obligatory, roles are based on ages, and partners are determined by kinship status (Williams 1936; Baal 1966; Kelly 1976; Herdt 1981; Rubin 1982). As Rubin maintains:

The realm of sexuality also has its own internal politics, inequities, and modes of oppression. As with other aspects of human behaviour, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity [...]. In that sense, sex is always political (1999: 143).

Considering sex and sexuality as ‘political’ also means acknowledging the existence of what Rubin calls a ‘sex system’ which rewards and encourages some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others (1999: 171). It is for this reason that I have opted for the use of a word which expresses precisely the construction of this system: ‘heteronormativity’. Based on the fixed and opportunistic interpretation of chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire, this term indicates the tendency in the contemporary Western sex/gender binary classification to view relations among people of different ‘genders’ as the norm, while all other forms of sexual behaviour are classified as deviations from it. Therefore, unlike the term ‘heterosexuality’ which also refers to a structure of desires or a sense of identity of an individual, ‘heteronormativity’ explicitly exposes the ‘sex system’ denounced by Rubin, which sanctions certain sexual behaviours while imposing a status of ‘neutrality’ on others. Indeed, the use of this term explicitly relates to the object of this chapter, which, as I have already illustrated, is the social construction of

the meanings surrounding dissident sexualities and, in particular, the role played by television in constructing and transmitting such meanings in the Spanish and Catalan contexts.

## **2.2 An Overview of Studies of Non-Heteronormative Content on TV**

The disinterest demonstrated by students of sexual dissidence towards television could seem anachronistic considering that, when such studies began to enjoy a recognised status as an academic discipline, feminist critics had already produced complex analyses of media representations of women, as well as incisive accounts of the politics involved in the production, distribution, and reception of television. The first analyses of non-heteronormative representations in popular culture focused on cinema. It was 1981 when Vito Russo published *The Celluloid Closet*, a pioneering and ambitious overview of the depiction of non-heteronormative characters in American and British films. A few years earlier, Richard Dyer had published a collection of essays entitled *Gays and Film* (1977) which highlighted the relationship people who feel excluded from heteronormativity have with the cinema, not just theorising the ways these people are represented on screen but also examining viewing practices and consumption habits specific to these audiences.

Since then, in Anglo-Saxon countries, film studies of sexual dissidence have acquired recognition as an academic field covering a wide and rich range of subjects, from content analysis (Tyler 1993) to studies of audiences' responses (Whatling 1997). Some authors have analysed the relationship between non-heteronormative characters and particular cinematic genres, such as Henry Benshoff (1997) who considers that the figure of the monster in classic horror films can often be interpreted as a metaphorical construction for people excluded from heteronormativity, and Richard Dyer (1977; 2002), who has



dedicated several studies to the representation of non-heteronormative characters in the film noir genre. Other scholars have adopted an historical perspective, such as Alexander Doty (2000), who aims to expose the concealed non-heteronormativity of classic mainstream film, or Boze Hadleigh (1993), Axel Madsen (1995), and William Mann (2001), who concentrate not so much on the analysis of the content of the films as on how people excluded from heteronormativity who worked behind the camera influenced what made it to the screen. Sexuality has also been examined as intrinsically linked to other patterns of identity such as ethnicity or gender (Young 1996; Davies and Smith 1997). Movements within independent cinema which challenged heteronormativity have also been the subject of academic studies (Suarez 1992; Aaron 2004) as have other modes and formats such as documentary (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997) and video (Gever, Greyson, and Parmar 1993).

However, this extensive array of film studies of sexual dissidence was not matched by a similar expanse of studies of non-heteronormative content on television. Very often, even academic books which were aimed at examining the broader field of popular culture ignored television: Dyer (2001) tackles the wider implications on our culture of non-heteronormative representations focusing on certain authors (Fassbinder), cinematic genres (film noir) or icons (Rock Hudson); Lynda Hart (1994) examines the representations of violent women and their codification as 'lesbians', drawing on an extensive material from a range of different art forms—literature, stage, and films—which does not include television, however.

Therefore, even if some academic articles about non-heteronormative television content had previously been written, television studies of sexual dissidence began to acquire a more consistent presence only in the twenty-first century. Most of these studies concentrate on American television and present a chronological overview of sexually dissident characters and their plotlines (Capsuto 2000; Tropiano 2002; Johnson 2001). Other authors such as Suzanna

Danuta Walters (2001) and Larry Gross (2001) contextualise the analysis of non-heteronormative television content as part of a wider examination of the relationship between media and politics.

This dismissal of television studies from a sexual perspective is even more prominent in the Spanish context. However, it is fair to point out that television has received scant attention from Spanish scholars in general, which could seem unexpected considering that television in Spain is, in Paul Julian Smith's words, 'the elephant in the living room' (2007: 1). Spanish television enjoys some of the highest per capita viewing figures in Europe and the audience for a single prime-time show is greater than the annual audience for all Spanish feature films (Smith 2007: 1). I argue that a longstanding contempt for television on the part of intellectuals, more pronounced in Southern Europe than in the Anglo-Saxon contexts, contributes to this neglect of the medium as an object of academic enquiry.

Tatjana Pavlović also comments on the surprising lack of attention dedicated to the small screen in Spain. She considers the role played by Spanish television since its very inception as a tool for sustaining the values and the objectives pursued by the *Movimiento Nacional* (2007: 5). As Anna McCarthy argues for the American context:

By appearing to make 'elsewhere' present in the home, the screen serves as a discursive and material figure for the ways in which family life is integrated into microlevel issues of the nation, international politics, and the global marketplace. (2004: 2)

This consideration is all the more evident in the role television played in portraying and shaping the interpenetration of family life and that of the nation in Franco's Spain. In his speech marking the inauguration of a national television service in Spain in 1956, the Minister of Information and Tourism Gabriel Arias Salgado made it clear that the new medium should promote and defend the values conveyed by the regime. In Salgado's words, the two basic principles of Spanish television had to be 'la ortodoxia y rigor desde el punto de

vista religioso y moral, con obediencia a las normas que en tal materia dicte la Iglesia católica y la intención de servicio y el servicio mismo a los grandes ideales del Movimiento Nacional'<sup>147</sup> (Palacio 2001: 39). The Minister concluded by stating that Spanish television would become 'uno de los mejores instrumentos educativos para el perfeccionamiento individual y colectivo de las familias españolas'<sup>148</sup> (Palacio 2001: 39). Having been created under a dictatorial regime, Spanish television performed the role of maintaining the symbolic order (Bourdieu 1996: 17) in an explicit way.

It is reasonable to argue that this is the reason why the few studies dedicated to television by Spanish scholars focus precisely on its role in the ideological apparatus of Franco's dictatorship (Baget i Herms 1992; Rodríguez Márquez and Martínez Uceda 1992; Palacio 1992). In 1996 the Archivos de la Filmoteca issued a special edition of its in house journal entitled *Televisión en España 1956-1996*. On the contrary, some Anglo-Saxon scholars have applied a cultural studies approach in their examination of television content in post-dictatorship Spanish television (Maxwell 1995; Smith 2009). However, an analysis of Spanish television from a sexual perspective has largely been overlooked.<sup>149</sup> To my knowledge, the only monograph on the subject is Ricardo Llamas's *Miss Media: Una lectura perversa de la comunicación de masas* (1997). Yet, in this study Llamas employs a sociological perspective in his analysis of news segments and talk shows, thus not including an examination informed by cultural studies of television series and characters. However, this approach is followed by Luzmila Camacho Platero in her article 'De butchs a femmes:

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<sup>147</sup> 'The orthodoxy and the rigour from a religious and moral point of view, with obedience to the norms dictated by the Catholic Church in such issues and the intention of serving the great ideals of the Movimiento Nacional'.

<sup>148</sup> 'One of the best instruments for perfecting Spanish families both individually and collectively'.

<sup>149</sup> Spanish films, on the other hand, have been the object of a more prolific production of studies concerning representations of sexual dissidence. Paul Julian Smith was a pioneering Hispanist in this field with his analysis of Almodóvar's films (1992, 1994) and the intersection between different patterns of identity—national, class belonging, and sexuality—in Eloy de la Iglesia's films (1992).

representación de personajes lésbicos en la televisión española' (2010: 103-121). Similarly, Aina Pérez Fontdevila examines the ambiguity in the processes of representation of characters codified as 'lesbians' in Catalan television (2011: 143-153). This article represents, nonetheless, an exception since the autonomic medium has been mainly analysed for its role in sustaining a Catalan national imagery (De Carreras 1987; Terribas 1994; Faura, Paloma, and Torrent 1998; Tubella 1999; Izquierdo 2002; Castelló 2005, 2007; Crameri 2008; O'Donnell 2002)—a predominant focus which has obscured issues of representations of sexual dissidence.<sup>150</sup>

This chapter aims to address the issue—as we have seen, until now largely ignored by scholars—of the construction of sexual dissidence on Spanish and Catalan television series. In the following paragraphs I am going to illustrate the approach and methodologies I intend to employ in my examination of a corpus of material comprising characters and plots taken from Spanish and Catalan television series.

### **2.3 Why Television Counts: The Importance of Non-Heteronormative Media Images**

Authors such as Anthony Giddens (1990) and John Thompson (1995) have argued that the mass media have caused the enlargement of the public sphere in modern societies by bringing greater visibility to public discourses and action. Indeed, nowadays the public sphere is arguably media-saturated and

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<sup>150</sup> Like Catalan television, Catalan cinema has also been mainly examined from a national perspective, despite many interesting and compelling films which deal explicitly with gender non-conformism and non-heteronormative desires, such as Ventura Pons's work. Apart from being briefly examined by Josep-Anton Fernández (2000), Ventura Pons's cinema has been analysed by Alberto Mira in *Miradas insumisas: Gays y lesbianas en el cine* (2008). In this examination of the relationships between non-heteronormative experiences and fantasies and the seventh art, Alberto Mira includes Ventura Pons in a diverse and heterogenic group of directors—Pasolini, Fassbinder and Almodóvar, among others—who nonetheless share a willingness to find narrative and aesthetic forms which allow them to escape from the traditional gender and sexual imagery.

‘the visual has gained in prominence over the verbal’ (Barker 1999: 154). Therefore, television can potentially play an important role in expanding the range of feelings and desires seen in the public sphere.

People who feel they belong to a majority race and majority sexual orientation are surrounded by images with which they can identify, but, for other people, any sort of media visibility can have a visceral importance. For instance, Comstock argues that television plays a significant role in the socialization of American children (1991) and, following Bondura’s social cognitive theory (1989), Cynthia Hoffner maintains that children ‘learn from positive or negative televised role models, and acquire norms and standards for conduct’ (1996: 389). In particular, several studies have demonstrated the relevance of media images, and in particular television, for teenagers who feel excluded from heteronormativity. In her interview-based study of adolescents’ health issues, Paroski (1987) finds that these teenagers use television to learn about such issues and Kielwasser and Wolf (1992) argue that they can feel isolated in part due to the scarcity of television characters with which they can identify. Gross maintains that these young people ‘historically had only stereotypes to tell them who they were’ (Gross 2001: 13).

As Dyer (1977) argues, there is a distinction to be made between social types and stereotypes. The former act as general and necessary classifications of people and roles according to cultural categories and as ‘una simplificación de la experiencia’ which ‘contribuye a facilitar la representación de conceptos en textos populares, que por naturaleza rehuyen [sic] la complejidad y la novedad’<sup>151</sup> (Mira 1999: 274). Stereotypes, by contrast, are representations which reduce people to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits. Thus, ‘stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes “difference”’ (Hall 1997: 258). Therefore, stereotyping constitutes an operation of power and plays

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<sup>151</sup> ‘A simplification of the experience [which] contributes to facilitating the representation of concepts in popular texts, which naturally shy away from complexity and novelty’.

an exclusionary role within the social and symbolic order separating 'those who live by the rules of society (social types) and those whom the rules are designed to exclude (stereotypes)' (Dyer 1977: 29). Similarly, Mira maintains that the process of stereotyping is not innocent since it always carries a 'carga de ideologización',<sup>152</sup> especially when it is used against people who do not enjoy the approval of hegemonic ideologies, as in the case of those excluded from heteronormativity. Therefore, he concludes, 'los estereotipos homosexuales son importantes porque preceden a la experiencia que la sociedad tiene de nosotros y en gran medida la determinan. Su presencia en los medios de comunicación los convierten en un asunto político'<sup>153</sup> (1999: 274). Consequently, stereotyping is a useful tool to establish who is "us" and who is "them", functioning as 'a staple mechanism of racism' (Barker 1999: 75). Barker's considerations—originally formulated for examining racist practices in the representation of ethnic minorities—can, in my opinion, be applied also to the study of representations of non-heteronormativity offered by the mass media.<sup>154</sup> Barker criticises the interpretation of racism as an individual phenomenon, which ignores the fact that it is indeed a matter of 'patterns of cultural representation deeply ingrained within discourses, practices, and subjectivities' (1999: 74). Similarly, Avtar Brah also stresses the importance and the consequences of politics of representations, which includes television, when he states that 'it is necessary for it to become axiomatic that what is *represented* as

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<sup>152</sup> 'Weight of forming ideology'.

<sup>153</sup> 'Homosexual stereotypes are important because they precede the experience that society has on us and, to a great extent, they determine such experience. Their presence in the mass media makes them a political issue'.

<sup>154</sup> Gayle Rubin also compares racist practices with the system of sexual oppression. She argues that 'sexual morality has more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. It grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged' (1999: 153) and that '[t]he system of sex law is similar to legalized racism' (1999: 159). However, she maintains that, although '[s]ex is a vector of oppression', this system 'cuts across other modes of social inequality, sorting out individuals and groups according to its own intrinsic dynamics. It is not reducible to, or understandable in terms of, class, race, ethnicity, or gender' (1999: 160-161).

the “margin” is not marginal at all but is a *constitutive effect of the representation itself*. The “centre” is no more a centre than is the “margin” (1996: 226).

Likewise, it is also a risk to consider homophobia as an individual phenomenon, instead of a social issue, also rooted in discourses and cultural representations. However, the criterion that should be used to evaluate such representations, and in particular television’s representation of people excluded from heteronormativity, is not clear. A quantitative approach seems, apparently, relatively easy to apply, especially in the American context, where GLAAD—Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation—publishes every year its ‘Where We Are On TV’ report, which has been illustrating a slight but constant increase of non-heteronormative images on American small screen. GLAAD President Jarrett Barrios very optimistically comments that this increase ‘reflects the shift in American culture towards greater awareness and understanding of our community’ (GLAAD 2011: 3), even if he admits that ‘many members of our community still do not see stories reflecting their lives’ (2011: 3-4). With this comment, however, he is only criticising the lack of black and transgendered characters on television, thus not questioning the quality of those television representations or, indeed, whether this quantitative increase is necessarily a positive thing in itself. At first glance, this quantitative improvement seems all for the good, but the simple visibility of non-heteronormative images is not beneficent per se. Visibility tends to be unquestionably regarded as progress and this is particularly true as far as people excluded from heteronormativity are concerned, since their feelings and desires have been defined so much by the problems of invisibility and subliminal coding.

However, it is necessary to point out the complexities and also the dangers of this new visibility, without perceiving it as an unambiguous sign of real and meaningful social integration, celebration, or even acceptance, of diversity. Jarrett Barrios gives a rather simplistic interpretation of the

relationship between media images and audiences' sensibilities when he declares that 'the recent critical and commercial success of shows like *Modern Family* and *Glee* clearly indicate [sic] that mainstream audiences embrace gay characters and want to see well-crafted stories about our lives' (GLAAD 2011: 3-4). On the other hand, I do not believe it is constructive to surrender oneself to nostalgic pessimism and think that 'most changes in depictions of gay people since 1972 are purely cosmetic' (Mitzel 1992). This subject, by contrast, needs a rich, textured, and subtle analysis, and avoidance of populist extremes because visibility is never simple. Writing about black popular culture, Stuart Hall remarks that often 'what replaces invisibility is a kind of carefully regulated, segregated visibility' (1992a: 24). Similarly, renée hoogland recognises that the rapid expansion of the consumer market has unquestionably enabled non-dominant groups to enter the realm of popular culture, but she also warns that 'such cultural incorporation does not always turn out to be an unmixed blessing' (hoogland 2000: 170). Both Hall and hoogland, then, acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity of the concept of progress in media representations.

If the quantitative approach is not as clear-cut as it might seem, it is even more difficult to evaluate qualitatively non-heteronormative images offered by the media. LGBT rights associations consider that one of their tasks is to weigh upon the mass media to present positive images of the lives of people they aspire to represent, but what 'positive' means exactly is difficult to determine in any absolute sense. As Dyer illustrates, one of the main debates which surround this issue concerns the question of whether positive means 'the degree to which [gay and lesbian life] is like straight life or the degree to which it differs from it' (1990: 245). However, when more accurate and verisimilar images are demanded, an epistemology of realism is implied in which the function of the media is held to be the mirroring of the real world and the consequent illumination of our understanding of it. However, media are not an objective or universal representation of the world, but a specific cultural construction. As



already mentioned, representations are constitutive of certain identities, not a mirror or a distortion of them. Therefore, Hall (1996) has proposed a new kind of politics of representation which registers the arbitrariness of signification, that is, rather than demanding 'positive' images, it promotes representations which themselves explore power relations.

These debates, however, have found little space in the analysis of television content. Television is still governed by the realist/naturalist convention, which purports to 'show things as they really are' rather than acknowledging that television itself is a constructed representation from a particular perspective. The narrative structure of realism is organised by a 'metalanguage of truth' (McCabe 1981: 218) which privileges and disguises the editorial position. Thus, 'the narrative discourse simply allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation', in this way achieving 'its position of dominance' because it conveys only one position, which becomes the only source of knowledge (McCabe 1981: 218). Some writers have argued that the convention of realism precludes television from being a vehicle of 'radical democracy' (Barker 1999: 162) because it fails to deconstruct the way its narratives work, offering instead simply another authoritarian account of the world. On the other hand, critics such as Janet Wolff have suggested that realism still remains the most effective mode of communication and that it is simplistic to tax this mode of representation with being always inadequate. In her opinion, 'the techniques and styles of cultural intervention are [...] closely connected to the context and conditions of its occurrence', thus 'realism may be the only possible language of communication for a particular audience' (1981: 93).

Therefore, coming back to Dyer's criterion, representations of non-heteronormativity have always been evaluated through a paradigm of

'positivity'<sup>155</sup> calculated as the degree to which they represent 'gay and lesbian life' as being 'just like straight life', which in this evaluation is interpreted as the paradigm of 'realism'. In my chapter, I will distance myself from this approach as it is not my intention to determine whether or not an image represents a 'positive' portrayal of people excluded from heteronormativity, simply because I do not believe such an aim can be achieved considering that these people are not a homogeneous group with a unified identity and, precisely because of this diversity, what could constitute a positive or verisimilar image for some can be negative or unrealistic for others; while some people may identify with a character and believe that he/she reflects some aspects of himself/herself, others may find that the same character has nothing to do with them or their lives. Once more, 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). Therefore, following the 'semiological guerilla warfare'<sup>156</sup> approach proposed by Umberto Eco, I share the interpretation of television criticism as an instrument which can help audiences decode programmes and gain consciousness of how television polices the boundaries of meaning, thus contributing to the deconstruction of prejudicial practices.

## **2.4 Normalisation: Who Has the Right to Belong to a Normal Country?**

As I have already maintained in the previous chapter, television series can be interpreted as 'cultural products that project a point of view about our society and our nation through their narrative ideology' (Castelló 2007: 51). This

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<sup>155</sup> The term 'positivity' in this context is a neologism. I employ it in order to define a theoretical paradigm according to which media representations are evaluated following a positive-negative scale, as I have explained in the introduction.

<sup>156</sup> The term was coined by Eco in the lecture 'Per una guerriglia semiologica' given as part of the Vision '67 conference in New York in 1967.

function carried out by television may become more visible in case of a publically funded channel aimed at supporting a national imagery of a stateless nation, such as Catalonia, but this does not mean that state television channels do not perform this role of 'flagging the nation' (Billig 1995). However, the function of constructing cultural identity is complex and contradictory and television should be regarded as a resource of identity proposals on which audiences can draw. As Barker maintains, '[t]elevision does not construct identities in the manner of a hypodermic needle but provides materials to be worked on' (1999: 7), stressing the active role played by viewers in appropriating and deploying meanings and identities constructed by mass media.

As I have already illustrated, the construction of identities on Catalan television has been examined by scholars mainly through the perspective of the role it plays in sustaining a Catalan national imagery and the process of 'normalisation' of Catalan language and culture. Former director of *Televisió de Catalunya* Mònica Terribas explains the meaning and aspiration of this process: 'Our country isn't typical, but it has a television [service] that's typical from the point of view of any Western democratic country'. Therefore, Catalan television 'is a normal TV station for a country that wants to be normal' (Piquer 2010-2011: 50). However, this process entails many complex questions such as what it means to be a normal country and who deserves to belong to this normal country and under which conditions. I find it interesting to examine how the normalisation process carried out by Catalan television has influenced its depiction of sexual dissidence.

In order to achieve this aim, it is crucial to reprise the pedagogical aspirations Catalan public television service has always explicitly claimed, as I have illustrated in the previous chapter quoting the interviews I conducted with Esteve Rovira—who stresses television's aim of socially educating the audience—and Josep Maria Benet i Jornet—who defines his series as didactical.

This pedagogical objective is also evident in the representation of non-heteronormative characters, as stated in *El cor obert* number 6, one of the podcasts dedicated to *El cor de la ciutat*: ‘El personatge homosexual [...] tenia un objectiu de normalització. S’havia de presentar la seva realitat com un problema per ell o per l’entorn que s’havia de solucionar i això tenia un objectiu molt important que era conscienciar a la societat’.<sup>157</sup> Scriptwriter Toni Cabré defends these aspirations claiming that Catalan television has helped ‘the homosexual cause’ introducing new values and ‘making the audience more tolerant’ (quoted in Ortega 2002: 70). Therefore, this approach follows the paradigm of positivity which I have presented at the beginning of the chapter and the same Cabré admits that initially non-heteronormative characters could not be ‘standard people’ with weaknesses and could not be responsible for negative actions. According to Cabré, the producers and the writers feared that the most conservative sectors of the population would have linked those behaviours to their sexual preferences: ‘Els nostres homosexuals havien de ser bons, encantadors, és a dir, que no els tractàvem amb la normalitat que dóna la creació de personalitats de ficció amb la possibilitat de donar-los qualsevol tipus de matís’<sup>158</sup> (quoted in Ortega 2002: 70).

This approach towards the representation of sexual dissidence was evident in the first non-heteronormative character on Catalan television—or any television channel in Spain for that matter. The character of Xavier was included in the Catalan soap opera *Poblenou*, broadcast in 1994 from 10 January to 26 December. In a multi-episode storyline Xavier helps a woman, Charo, restarting a new life away from her abusive husband, saving her several times

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<sup>157</sup> ‘The homosexual character [...] served a purpose of normalisation. The series had to represent his reality as a problem—either for him or for his family and friends—that had to be solved. This had a very important aim which was to raise awareness in society’. The download of the podcast was previously available on this page <http://www.tv3.cat/elcordelaciutat/corobert.html>. However, the service has been deleted.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Our homosexuals had to be good, lovely, that is to say, we did not treat them with the normalcy which the writer usually uses in the process of creating characters with the possibility of giving them any kind of nuance’.

and contributing to his imprisonment. In this way, Xavier is represented as a person with whom viewers—and not only those who feel excluded from heteronormativity—can identify. Furthermore, on several occasions, the series prompts the audience to identify with Xavier’s point of view against his brother-in-law, Antonio, whose homophobia is presented as ridiculous and gross. Also worthy of note here is that, being a soap opera based on a limited number of characters, *Poblenou* includes Xavier in all its episodes escaping that criticism which American media scholar Steven Capsuto launches against those series who relegate sexually dissident characters to a single-episode arc, ‘preach[ing] tolerance without ever having to show it or sustain a commitment to it’ (2000: 72). In this narrative structure, he argues, people excluded from heteronormativity are depicted as a ‘them’ and not part of an ‘us’ (2000: 72). By contrast, Xavier is represented as part of the family which is the main focus of the series. Yet, unlike all the other characters, Xavier’s intimate and domestic life with his partner, Eugeni, is never shown on camera and the audience never sees them in their home, as they do with all the other family units.<sup>159</sup>

The audience finds out about Xavier’s sexual preferences through a scene in which he interacts with Eugeni. The nature of their relationship has not been explicitly stated at this point but, thanks to their dialogue and their behaviour, it is immediately clear to the audience that the two men are involved in a love relationship: ‘Tot el que és meu, és teu. Jo he fet el pas, Xavier. La meva dona ho sap tot. Ara només faltes tu’.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, according to his storyline, when he was young, Eugeni was unable to accept his sexual preferences and got married. He and his wife, from whom at the beginning of the series he is separating, have an

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<sup>159</sup> However, two years later, Catalan television avoided this omission in the soap opera *Nissaga de poder* with the couple formed by two young women, Mariona and Inés. Although their presence in the series was inferior of that of heteronormative couples, the two women were shown in their apartment and the viewers had access to their family life as any other family unit. Finally, in subsequent series such as *El cor de la ciutat* and *La Riera* this distinction is not detectable anymore.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Everything that is mine, is also yours. I have made my move, Xavier. My wife knows everything. Now it’s your turn’.

eleven year old child, Pau. A significant part of Eugeni's story is dedicated precisely to the difficulties his child faces in accepting his father's sexuality and his relationship with another man.

The narrative formula of a father coming out to his son was pioneered by American television in the 1970s with the TV movie *That Certain Summer*, broadcast on 1 November 1972 on ABC, but it has been rarely used since then.<sup>161</sup> Catalan television reprises this paradigm of representation but incorporates significant changes. In the initial part of Eugeni's storyline, *Poblenou* follows this paradigm by presenting the sexually dissident character as being already separated from his wife and as having begun a relationship with a man. However, the Catalan series differentiates itself from the 1970s American paradigm by depicting Eugeni as a man who has resolved any conflict related to his sexual preferences; his only concern is the social pressure and prejudice his son could suffer because of them: 'M'agradaria poder-li dir: "Mira Pau, aquest és el meu company"',<sup>162</sup> he confides to a friend.

Moreover, *Poblenou* presents another shift compared to the narrative structure of *That Certain Summer*, which ends with the son running away and refusing to talk to his father. On the other hand, in Eugeni's storyline, these happenings only represent a segment in the middle of the story arc. When Xavier decides to organise a chess tournament for children and Pau wants to subscribe, the boy—who does not know that he is talking to his father's partner—lies to him: 'No en tinc, de pare. El meu pare és mort',<sup>163</sup> he answers when Xavier asks him if he has learnt to play chess from his father. However, after this initial reaction, thanks also to his admiration for Xavier, the boy begins to change his attitude and, when his father has an accident, he feels

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<sup>161</sup> This narrative formula was also partially reprised by David Leavitt's novel *The Lost Language of Cranes*, published in 1986 and adapted to a TV film broadcast on BBC Two on 9 February 1992. However, its narrative structure presents two important differences compared to the narrative formula I am examining: the son is not a teenager but a young adult and both he and his father are sexual dissidents.

<sup>162</sup> 'I would like to say to him: "Listen Pau, this is my partner"'.  
<sup>163</sup> 'I don't have a father. My father is dead'.

guilty for the time they have lost and he decides to tell his mother he wants her to concede the joint custody. At the end of the series, Pau is planning a Christmas holiday with his father: 'Suposo que hi anirem tots tres, oi?',<sup>164</sup> the boy says looking at Xavier, who jokes, 'S'està tornant molt modern aquest fill teu, eh?'.<sup>165</sup> In the last image of them together, the three characters are walking along the seafront with Pau holding his father's hand and hugging Xavier. In this way, Eugeni and Xavier were not only the first same-sex couple represented on television in Spain, but they also formed with Pau the first homoparental family to be displayed on the small screen in this country. In conclusion, although reprising a formula pioneered on American television in the 1970s, *Poblenou* adapts it to a different historical context by showing the son as accepting of his father's sexual preferences and their new family unit.

A parallel storyline explores the difficulties faced by Martí, Xavier's fourteen year old nephew, in accepting his uncle's sexuality. Martí has a very close relationship with his uncle and admires him deeply. Xavier is also the only member of the family who encourages the boy to follow his passion for art and not to hide his talent. Therefore, the series explores the boy's disappointment due to the incompatibility between the image he has of his uncle and the prejudices he has learnt about the 'mariques', which means 'poofters' in Catalan—a word that the boy often employs. Martí feels uncomfortable every time his uncle is around and does not want to be touched by him. As with Pau's storyline, a strong event has to happen for the boy to change his attitude. In this case, Xavier is wrongly accused of murder and is imprisoned—an event which prompts Martí to realise how much he misses his uncle. The boy apologises by giving Xavier a shirt on which he has printed one of his drawings.

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<sup>164</sup> 'I guess we are all going, the three of us, aren't we?'

<sup>165</sup> 'Your son is becoming very modern, isn't he?'

However, the didactical tone of the series as far as the acceptance of people excluded from heteronormativity is concerned can mostly be seen in Xavier's coming out to his sister, Rosa. Xavier has never told his sister about his sexual preferences because of her conservative ideas about family and relationship. When speculations begin to circulate in the district about Xavier's sexuality, Rosa confronts him: 'No seria hora de [casar-te]? Què portessis un vida normal?',<sup>166</sup> she asks him. Xavier questions the concept itself of normality, since everybody lives their life differently and 'el que és normal per uns, no ho és gens pels altres'.<sup>167</sup> Finally, Rosa asks him without circumlocution and Xavier admits that those speculations about his sexual life are true: 'Em sap greu per tu, però és cert. Sóc homosexual'.<sup>168</sup> As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, at the beginning of the series, Rosa is depicted as an insecure woman, always worried about appearances, so much so that she does not divorce her husband even if they sleep in separate rooms: 'Això és el que m'allunya de tu: la preocupació pel que diran. Jo no m'he d'amagar de res perquè no faig mal a ningú. I si la gent parla, se m'en fot!',<sup>169</sup> his brother straightforwardly tells her. Again, Xavier is not conflicted about his sexuality and, on the contrary, he lives his sexual desires serenely. The difficulties of his situation are portrayed as derived entirely from the prejudices of those around him. When his brother-in-law finds out about Xavier's sexual preferences, he rants: 'Només em faltaria això ara, un *maricón* a la família! [...] Quin fàstic em fan aquesta mena de *payos*'.<sup>170</sup>

In the depiction of characters' reactions to Xavier's coming out, *Poblenou* reverses a stereotype which links a younger age to a wider acceptance of emotions excluded from heteronormativity. Indeed, Antonio's homophobic

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<sup>166</sup> 'Is it not time to [get married]? To live a normal life?'

<sup>167</sup> 'What is normal for some people, is by no means normal for others.'

<sup>168</sup> 'I am sorry for you, but it's true. I am homosexual.'

<sup>169</sup> 'This is what makes me different from you: the concern of what others will say. I don't have to hide anything because I am not hurting anyone. And if people talk, I don't give a damn.'

<sup>170</sup> 'That's all I need now, a poofter in the family! [...] These guys disgust me.'



comments and Rosa's fears contrast with the opinion expressed by Victòria, Antonio's aunt. As I have already commented in the previous chapter, Victòria defends Xavier's right to live his life without having people's prejudices interfering with his relationship and she forces Rosa to evaluate her priorities: 'Què és més important? El que dirà la gent o la felicitat del teu germà?'.<sup>171</sup> Finally, Rosa apologises to her brother for her reaction and, during the course of the series, she becomes increasingly aware of how much the two men love each other, so much so that she helps them reconcile after a quarrel. Therefore, *Poblenou* presents a didactical strategy but, contrary to Capsuto's opinion, the series sustains its commitment to expanding the range of images which could be seen until that moment on television in Spain, including non-heteronormative relationship and family, which enjoy a long and rich story arc.

Another aspect of the explicit pedagogical aim performed by the character of Xavier lies in the challenging of certain stereotypes often associated with sexual dissidence, such as the confusion between sexual preferences and gender non-conformism. Indeed, in its interpretation of 'normalisation', Catalan television has excluded for years those bodies which do not confirm to the rules of the gender binary system—an exclusion which was understood as a strategy to challenge those stereotypes which associate 'feminine' and 'masculine' traits to those men and women respectively excluded from heteronormativity. However, Aina Pérez Fontdevila criticises precisely this limited conception of the responsibility of public television service in giving visibility to sexual dissidence. She attacks the normalisation process labelling it as a 'malentesa i ignorant correcció política'<sup>172</sup> since it is interpreted only as 'el desmantellament d'aquell estereotip que representa la lesbiana com a *marimacho* i el gai, com a marieta'<sup>173</sup> (2001: 144). Indeed, as has already been argued, the process of

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<sup>171</sup> 'What is more important? What people will say or your brother's happiness?'

<sup>172</sup> 'Misunderstood and ignorant political correctness'.

<sup>173</sup> 'The dismantling of that stereotype which represents the lesbian as butch and the gay as effeminate'.

normalisation is ambiguous and, following Hall's theories on representation which I have illustrated in the first part of the chapter, the increase in the share of screen time afforded to non-heteronormative characters and relations requires further scrutiny. Fontdevila argues that the cost of the participation in what Foucault defines as 'regime of visibility' is often the homogenisation and, as a consequence, the further marginalisation of what does not fit the rules of this regime (2011: 143). In her opinion, the dominant politics of the 'GL(TB) movement'—and she deliberately inserts into brackets those letters that most problematise gender binary and an essentialist interpretation of sexuality—promotes a concept of normalisation which encourages the separation between sexual preferences and gender inversion 'afavorint una patologització de la darrera al servei de la despatologització de la primera'<sup>174</sup> (2011: 145).

This exclusion of gender non-conformist characters was a rule until very recently on Catalan television but the series *La Sagrada Família*, broadcast from 18 January 2010 to 11 December 2011, might demonstrate an intention of moving away from the application of a normalisation process to the representation of sexual dissidence. At the core of this series there is an apparently ordinary family unit composed by a married couple and their three children. However, through its sarcasm, the series mocks and dismantles the image of the family as an idyllic unit of cohabitation and precisely the dysfunctional aspects of this family are depicted as positive. The first sentence the audience hears is through the voice off of the mother and states: 'La família és com el cul: cadascú té el seu i no n'hi ha dos d'iguals. Però en el fons només hi ha dos tipus de famílies: les que tenen conflictes i les que fan veure que no en tenen'.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, the members of this family could be interpreted as being

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<sup>174</sup> 'Favouring a pathologisation of the latter in order to de-pathologise the former'.

<sup>175</sup> 'Family is like your backside. Each person has his/her own and there are no two the same. However, there are ultimately two kinds of family: those who have conflicts and those who pretend they don't have them'.

caricatures of various social types such as the materialistic girl, the religious grandmother or the hippie—exposing through clever irony the mechanism of stereotyping, that is the strategy of exaggerating certain traits in order to reduce, essentialise, naturalise, and fix difference, as denounced by Hall (1997: 258). As far as sexual dissidence is concerned, this function is entrusted to the character of Eduard, who is the forty year old partner of Ivan, the twenty year old son of the central family. This character presents a humoristic display of some of the stereotypes often associated with male sexual dissidents such as an attachment to musical icons and cultural referents, an attraction towards younger men, a predisposition to dramatise any situation, and gestures that, from a gender conformist mindset, would be deemed as ‘effeminate’. Therefore, this character represents a move away from the paradigm according to which Catalan television has mainly depicted male sexual dissidence and which have systematically avoided any acknowledgment of the presence of those stereotypes associated with men excluded from heteronormativity.<sup>176</sup>

However, Fontdevila maintains that, while Catalan television seems prepared to laugh about these stereotypes as far as men are concerned, this is not the case with regard to female sexual dissidence. She argues that female sexual dissidents enjoy a scarcer tradition of media representation and, in general, of social visibility. Consequently, she concludes, ‘a la televisió no és encara el moment de la paròdia’<sup>177</sup> with the stereotypes associated with women excluded from heteronormativity: ‘M’espanta que [...] encara no se’n puguin riure, de nosaltres’<sup>178</sup> (2011: 145). *Les formes de discriminació per motius d’orientació sexual i d’identitat de gènere en els mitjans de comunicació audiovisual*—a set of recommendations proposed by the Fòrum d’entitats de persones usuàries de

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<sup>176</sup> As I will set out in the next section of the chapter, this series also escapes the essentialist paradigm of the representation of sexuality.

<sup>177</sup> ‘On television it is not the time for parody yet’.

<sup>178</sup> ‘I am scared about the fact that *we* seem to be out of bounds for humour’.

l'audiovisual<sup>179</sup>—includes a chapter entitled 'Overcoming stereotypes', in which it is suggested that television should offer 'a plural and diverse image' of female sexual dissidents, challenging the stereotyped binary which describes them as either unattractive women with a masculine appearance or as very beautiful and graceful (2010: 9), thus appealing to the erotic imagery of the male audience. Therefore, as far as female sexual dissidents are concerned, the concept of a 'plural and diverse image' only concentrates on physical characteristics, which contrasts with the urgent need signaled by the document to present a 'plural and diverse image' of men excluded from heteronormativity as far as age, social class, and ethnicity. The different suggestions proposed by the document on approaching the depiction of male and female sexual dissidence lend weight to Fontdevila's argument that there is still a different sensibility towards—and different rules for—the depiction of men and women excluded from heteronormativity.

The normalisation process is evident also in the representation of same-sex relationships and couples. In this case as well, it is interesting to consult what *Les formes de discriminació per motius d'orientació sexual i d'identitat de gènere en els mitjans de comunicació audiovisual* suggests. In the section entitled 'For a correct visibility'—and this title already exemplifies the 'positivity' approach supported by the authors of the document—television should avoid the association of sexual dissidence with promiscuity (2010: 8). Indeed, the dominant paradigm in the depiction of same-sex relationships in Catalan television is that of the monogamous couple and, in some cases, of the nuclear family: Xavier and Eugeni in *Poblenou* (1994), Mariona and Inés in *Nissaga de Poder* (1996-1998), Raquel and Isabel in *Laberint d'ombres* (1998-2000), Isabeleta and Charlotte and Max and Iago in *El cor de la ciutat* (2000-2009), Arlet and Dani

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<sup>179</sup> This forum was created on 4 September 2001 by the Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya, the independent authority which regulates audiovisual communication in Catalonia. The forum 'was created to provide an opportunity to exchange knowledge and ideas, and meet the demands of civil society in this sector', as stated on the Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya's official website. <http://www.cac.cat/web/forum/index.jsp?NTg%3D&MQ%3D%3D&>.

in *Infidels* (2009-2011), Xavi and Esteve in *Ventdelplà* (2005-2010), Balló and Nandu in *La Riera* (since 2010), just to mention a few. Exceptions to this paradigm are rare and mainly to be found in the soap opera *El cor de la ciutat*, broadcast from 11 September 2000 to 23 December 2009. The presence of a significant number of sexually dissident characters in this soap allows the writers to explore different kinds of non-heteronormative relationships. In the seventh series, the characters Max and Enric, respectively twenty and seventeen years old, begin a relationship that, after a tumultuous start due to Enric's difficulties in accepting his sexual desire and love for another young man,<sup>180</sup> stabilises itself as a monogamous relationship. However, in the following series, Max and Enric face a crisis and, following the example of Edu and Valentí, two friends of theirs, they decide to try an open relationship. The soap does not impose any negative judgment on this choice and the failure of the relationship is blamed on the fact that Max has never really felt comfortable with this type of relationship, which he has accepted only as an extreme attempt to get Enric back. Indeed, Edu and Valentí are depicted as a happy couple and their arguments in favour of their choice are presented as being just as valid as Max's preference for a monogamous relationship: 'cada parella ha de trobar la seva manera de funcionar i nosaltres hem trobat aquesta',<sup>181</sup> Edu explains to Max vocalising the moral of the series; 'el que és fonamental en una parella monògama és la fidelitat: si tu t'en vas amb un altre trenques la norma i el més normal és que t'en carreguis la relació. En la parella oberta funciona igual, només que les normes són diferents'.<sup>182</sup> After breaking up with Enric, Max forms a stable and monogamous relationship with another young man, Iago. Therefore, the series depicts several types of same-sex relationship, open and

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<sup>180</sup> This aspect will be dealt with more exhaustively in the next section of the chapter.

<sup>181</sup> 'Each couple has to find their own way to work and we have found this one'.

<sup>182</sup> 'What is fundamental in a monogamous couple is fidelity: if you have sex with someone else, you break the rule and, most probably, terminate the relationship. An open couple functions the same way, but rules are different'.

monogamous, and each of them is presented as a valid option as long as all parties concerned agree with the option.

When it comes to female sexual dissidence, it cannot be said that *El cor de la ciutat* explores the same plurality of possible cohabiting arrangements which it envisages for men outside of heteronormativity. Although there are three female characters who could be defined under these terms—Isabeleta, Noèlia, and Charlotte—, they are given a smaller amount of screen time and their relationships are the object of a less complex analysis. At the beginning of the series, the character of Isabeleta is married to a man and, being a member of a religious congregation, she lives her life and her sexuality under very strict norms. However, the appearance in the fifth series of Noèlia, a cheerful and uninhibited woman, upsets Isabeleta's certainties. The two women begin a friendship not exempt from sexual tensions, which end up surfacing. However, even when they begin to have sexual intercourse, they never form a couple in the strict sense of the word due to Noèlia's refusal to channel her feelings and sexual desires into what she interprets as a traditional relationship. On the other hand, during the eighth series, Isabeleta begins a monogamous relationship with another woman, Charlotte, and through artificial insemination they have a son, forming a nuclear family.<sup>183</sup>

Another exception to the dominant paradigm of representation of same-sex relationships is included in the soap opera *La Riera*, which has been broadcast since 10 January 2010. At the beginning of the serial, Joan-Antò Balló, a rich forty year old businessman, has an open relationship with a young unemployed man. However, this relationship soon ends and, at the moment of writing, this character is involved in a monogamous relationship and his partner and he are preparing their wedding ceremony. This character also breaks with the normalisation process as far as other aspects are concerned. As I

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<sup>183</sup> The relationship ends due to the different ideas the two women have on how to bring up their child: Isabeleta's congregation is against the use of vaccination and medicine and Charlotte is worried that her partner's faith will end up compromising their son's health.

have illustrated with quotes from Toni Cabré and excerpts from *El cor obert*, sexually dissident characters tended to be represented as model citizens, always responsible for positive and brave actions such as those carried out by Xavier to save Charo from her abusive husband in *Poblenou*. On the other hand, Balló is depicted as a cynical selfish businessman, who is also responsible for illegal behaviour in order to defend his economic interests. Indeed, the podcast I have already mentioned concludes precisely by explaining that an evolution has occurred which allows for the termination of the 'didactical era'. According to the podcast, it is not necessary to be so politically correct anymore, and the writers are allowed to create a wider range of sexually dissident characters: 'Podem atrevir-nos a fer personatges que, a part de ser gais, que és una part de la seva personalitat molt important, poden ser dolents, poden fer coses que no siguin tan ben acceptades per la gent'.<sup>184</sup>

However, this distancing from the 'positivity' paradigm has so far resulted in only a few exceptions to the previous rule and the depiction of sexual dissidence on Catalan television still seems largely to follow those recommendations presented in *Les formes de discriminació per motius d'orientació sexual i d'identitat de gènere en els mitjans de comunicació audiovisual*, which exemplify precisely that paradigm. Nonetheless, it is fair to point out that the evaluation of media images according to the positivity approach is not only present on Catalan television but, as I have already commented, is the dominant paradigm adopted by LGBT associations such as GLAAD in the United States. Ricardo Llamas and Paco Vidarte expose the risks of this approach, which not only involves the issue of media representation but also of political strategies to claim civil rights: 'La primera consecuencia derivada de este modo de proceder es la tendencia generalizada en los medios de comunicación y dentro de una gran parte de los responsables de los colectivos

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<sup>184</sup> 'We can dare to create characters that, besides being gay, which is a very important aspect of their personality, can be bad and do things which are not socially acceptable'.

de homosexuales, así como de una gran mayoría de la población gay y lesbica, a intentar enseñar en público lo más digno de la propia fauna'<sup>185</sup> (1999: 12). They criticise this approach which ends up linking the rights, freedom, and dignity of those excluded from heteronormativity to their public image. This strategy of 'natural selection', they argue, is only willing to grant rights and space to those individuals who best adapt to the environment and, in this case, to the homophobic environment (1999: 13). They conclude that, in this way, respect and equality are confunded with 'la normalización y la homogeneización'<sup>186</sup> or, even, the 'heterosexualización'<sup>187</sup> of behaviours, customs, hobbies, and methods of protest (1999: 14-15).

These polarised positions are exemplified in the debate on marriage equality, which is now at the centre of politics in the United Kingdom and in the United States and led to the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Spain in 2005. In the inaugural conference of the European Forum on the Right to Marriage and Adoption, which was held in Barcelona on 24-26 May 2002, the Honorary President of the Coordinadora Gai-Lesbiana and former General Secretary of the ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association) Jordi Petit argued that marriage and adoption for same-sex couples would imply a deep change in the public image of sexual dissidence, since marriage has always been based on the notion of a reproductive 'heterosexuality'. Petit emphasised the novelty of this battle, which according to him was not present in either the gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 1970s or in queer activism of the 1980s. According to the Catalan activist, the public presence of same-sex couples claiming their rights contributes to the change of the social image of sexual dissidence as linked to sexual practice, thus contributing to the 'normalisation'

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<sup>185</sup> 'The first consequence derived from this way of proceeding is the generalised tendency in the mass media and among a large number of those in charge of homosexual collectives to try to show in public the most decent part of their own fauna, and this is true also of the vast majority of the gay and lesbian population,'.

<sup>186</sup> 'Normalisation or homogenisation'.

<sup>187</sup> 'Heterosexualisation'.



and the overcoming of prejudice. He adds that this presence also contributes to defining the self-image of sexual dissidents, bringing the idea of the stable relationship into the realm of possible identities of any person who loves or desires another of the same sex<sup>188</sup> (Petit 2002: 1).

On the other hand, Llamas is critical of those groups which have promoted the 'integración discreta en sistemas de tolerancia'<sup>189</sup> (1994: 168) as a way to accede to a subjective status which could transcend the dimension of corporeality (1994: 168). In this process, sexual liberation and promiscuity became the scapegoat, whereas the couple—interpreted as a socially recognised institution and as the legitimate model of cohabitation—was presented as the model to be emulated. In his opinion, the self-censorship of 'the gay community' towards certain sexual practices and attitudes in order to achieve social respectability retrieved 'viejos demonios del activismo de los años setenta, que nunca habían muerto del todo: el sexo como consumo alienante, "el ambiente" como gueto, como cárcel o espacio comercial de libertad vigilada, la "identidad" como confirmación del estigma, la pluma como confirmación de misoginia'<sup>190</sup> (1994: 168). Moreover, Llamas defines marriage as a 'reivindicación estrella'<sup>191</sup> (2003: 85), and warns that a non-discriminatory legislation does not guarantee that the prejudice, the violence and the discrimination will disappear: 'La igualdad formal en términos legislativos [...] no señala el término de nada porque la discriminación continua'<sup>192</sup> (Fouz 2003: 85), he concludes signalling as an example gender violence and discrimination against women.

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<sup>188</sup> <http://www.cogales.org/doc.pdf/forum2002.pdf/CATIN01.pdf>.

<sup>189</sup> 'Discrete integration in systems of tolerance'.

<sup>190</sup> 'Old demons of the activism of the 1970s, which had never completely died: sex as alienating, "the gay district" as ghetto, prison or commercial space of supervised release, "identity" as confirmation of the stigma, effeminacy as confirmation of misogyny'.

<sup>191</sup> 'The issue that attracts all the attention'.

<sup>192</sup> 'Formal equality in legal terms [...] does not signal the end of anything because discrimination continues'.

Similarly, Raquel Platero stresses how first civil unions and then gay marriage have monopolised the effort of LGBT associations over the last twenty years to the detriment of other issues such as labour discrimination and homophobic harassment (2007: 146). In this way, she argues, the rights of sexual dissidents are presented as linked to parenthood and concepts such as family and marriage more than they are to a struggle for individual civil freedoms (2007: 135). In an article entitled 'Dictadura sexual heteronormativa', published in *Avui* on 29 April 2008, Bernat Dedéu depicts an even harsher picture commenting on the generally young age of the individuals in same-sex couples who get married. In particular, he criticises what he defines as an heteronormative conduct, that is to say, he explains, the deliberate acquisition of theoretical formalities of heterosexual marriage such as monogamy or the undertaking of masculine/feminine roles. Dedéu also contests the political correctness which silences those people who do not recognise themselves in this family model. This same criticism has been expressed by Russell T. Davies who, contesting the harsh reaction to his series *Queer as Folk*<sup>193</sup> among certain sectors of LGBT activism, emphasised the censorship imposed on certain expressions of non-heteronormative realities: 'To be severe about it, people in relationships are then pointing at people on the scene who are having one night stands [...] and there is a real judgmental attitude [and they say] "You are wrong, I am ashamed of you and I don't want you to be seen and, especially, I don't want you to be seen by straight people"'.<sup>194</sup>

To my knowledge the only series which has examined this debate and the polarised positions which it raises is the American adaptation of *Queer as Folk*, which was broadcast on the cable channel Showtime from 3 December 2000 to 5 August 2005. At the end of series four, a character called Michael legalises his stable and monogamous relationship with his partner, Ben, in

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<sup>193</sup> The series was broadcast on Channel 4 from 23 February to 13 April 1999 with a two-part concluding broadcast on 15 and 22 February 2000.

<sup>194</sup> Commentary track included on the DVD release of *Queer as Folk* during the fifth episode.

Canada. Michael's best friend Brian reproves him for making this choice, and defines the couple's life as 'petit-bourgeois, mediocre, conformist, assimilationist'. On the other hand, Michael reprimands Brian for what he perceives as his immature and superficial behaviour. Michael replies to Brian's criticism regarding his interpretation of family by saying: 'The point is not when did I change. It's why haven't you!'. Brian's scorn explodes in an enraged monologue against the priority which issues such as marriage and adoption have acquired within the 'gay community':

What would be practical, Theodor? To get married? Move to the suburbs? Become a home-loving, child-raising, God-fearing imitation of a heterosexual? And for what? So that I can become another dead soul, going to the mall and dropping my kid off at school and having barbecues in the backyard. [...] I am queer! And to anyone who takes pity or offense I say: 'Judge yourself'.

The judgmental attitude criticised by Russell T. Davies is depicted through the fictional character of an out lesbian Congresswoman, member of the Human-Rights Committee, who convinces Michael to give a public speech against Proposition 14—a law which closely resembles the real Proposition 8 that was actually discussed in California in that period. The Congresswoman explains to Michael what they are trying to achieve in that public meeting: 'We want to show the general population that the gay community is not just the transvestite and leather daddies they see at the Gay Pride parade, but for the most part is people like you, like them, with a partner, a home, a family'. Michael agrees to read a speech but, once he notices that his friends—among them a transsexual—are moved at the back of the room and far from the cameras, he decides to depart from the script:

Sure, in a lot of ways, I am just like you: I want to be happy, I want security, a little extra money in my pocket...but in many ways, my life is nothing like yours. Why should it be? Do we all have to have the same life to have the same rights? I thought that diversity was what this country was all about. In the gay community, we have drag queens, leather daddies, trannies, and couples with children: every colour of the rainbow.

Therefore, the series tends initially to present the prejudices and bias of both sides represented by Brian and Michael and their discrepant opinion on issues such as family, marriage, and adoption. However, the American version of *Queer as Folk* does not convey any negative judgment towards the different choices the characters make.

This kind of reflection is rare in a television series but it is important to remember that *Queer as Folk*, broadcast on a cable channel in the United States, presents as protagonists a numerous group of sexually dissident characters. This is hardly the case with the vast majority of television series, which, at most, include a small amount of sexually dissident characters inserted in an heteronormative context. Moreover, as I have already argued in the previous chapter, television series tend to personalise social issues and to avoid political debates. For instance, storylines dedicated to marriage between people of the same sex began to appear on American television in the early 1990s, when no American state recognised either the right to marriage or civil union for same-sex couples. Therefore, these storylines depoliticised the discrimination suffered by same-sex couples, focusing on the preparations for the wedding and the ceremony itself disregarding the social and juridical context.

The debate which surrounds the issue of marriage equality was depicted on Catalan television in two storylines—the marriage between Esteve and Xavi included in *Ventdelplà* in its fifth series (2008) and the marriage between Balló and Nandu included in the fifth series of *La Riera* (2013-2014). However, as I am about to illustrate, Catalan series' treatment of this issue is very different from the one included in *Queer as Folk*. The cable network's series presents the discrepant positions on marriage and adoption of two sexually dissident characters—a discussion which exposes the contradictions embedded in the two stands exemplified by the characters of Michael and Brian in the American *Queer as Folk*. On the contrary, the two Catalan series I am examining here do not call into question the validity of monogamous relationships and the nuclear

family as the preferred model of coexistence and social pillar. The debate depicted in these series only involves heteronormative characters, who positioned themselves as being in favour or against the marriage of the same-sex couple, following the same structure I have illustrated in the previous chapter. This structure is clearly elucidated in Esteve Rovira's interview in which the director of *La Riera* explains that, in his opinion, the output of a public television service needs to embrace different positions about a certain social issue, covering all the options, so that the viewers can make up their own mind. In his words:

[N]osaltres hem de crear una colla de personatges [...] que es posicionin a favor o en contra, és a dir, hem de donar totes les opcions i que l'espectador prengui part. Com a tele pública [...], no haig de prendre partit. Haig de fer que els personatges prenguin partit i que l'espectador que és prou intel·ligent tingui la seva postura davant dels fets.<sup>195</sup>

However, despite Rovira's claims for the neutrality of public television service, in both the storylines I am about to examine Catalan television undoubtedly sides with those in favour of marriage equality, clearly presenting the characters against the marriage of same-sex couples as homophobic and biased.

In *Ventdelplà* Xavi and Esteve, who have been living together in the United States, return to their hometown to get married. The series depicts the different reactions this marriage produces among the inhabitants of the small country town. Llibert, the mayor of Ventdelplà, is enthusiastic about officiating for the ceremony but he soon finds himself at the centre of harsh criticisms. The position against the marriage of the two young men is espoused by two middle-aged characters—a man and a woman, in order to avoid the link between homophobia and a determined gender. When Llibert announces the news in the

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<sup>195</sup> 'We have to create a group of characters [...] and they express their opinion in favour or against, that is to say, we have to give all the options and it is the viewer who takes part. Working for a public television service, [...] I don't have to take sides. The characters take sides and the viewer, who is intelligent enough, will have his/her own position towards the facts'.

bar, Rosalia attacks his choice, employing the word 'abnormal' and 'revolting' to define the marriage between two men:

**Rosalia:** Dos homes! A Ventdelplà es casen dos homes i els cases tu!

**Llibert:** Però, Rosalia, els matrimonis homosexuals són normals avui en dia, no sé de què t'estranyes.

**Rosalia:** Normals? Tu trobes normal que dos homes es casin? Quin fàstic!<sup>196</sup>

The same attitude is demonstrated by the character of Paco, whose attempted jokes about who will carry the bouquet and the bridal gown betray his homophobic prejudices. He also defines Xavi and Esteve's wedding as a 'spectacle': 'Només pensar-hi em pixo de riure. Ja se sap qui dels dos porta el ram? [...] Llàstima que l'Esteve no deu tenir pas un vestit d'aquests de cua, si no jo mateix m'ofereixo portar-li i així també participo de l'espectacle'.<sup>197</sup> Paco finds it insulting that, after coming out of the closet and, in his eyes, exhibiting themselves walking hand in hand around the town, the two men have now decided to come precisely to Ventdelplà to get married. After calling them 'marietes', which means 'poofers' in Catalan, Paco continues by affirming how revolting it is to imagine two men performing sexual acts: 'Veure dos *payos* petonejant-se i imaginar-te'ls allà al llit, collons quin fàstic!'.<sup>198</sup> These reactions reinforce Llibert's conviction of the importance of officiating at the ceremony: 'Mentre hi hagi gent com tu, tot el que es pugui fer per normalitzar la situació dels homosexuals és poc. Així que els casaré!'.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, the mayor's position demonstrates that stand on normalisation criticised by Fontdevila and Llamas

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<sup>196</sup> **Rosalia:** Two men! In Ventdelplà two men get married and you're going to perform the ceremony!

**Llibert:** But, Rosalia, gay marriages are normal nowadays, I don't understand what it is that you don't get.

**Rosalia:** Normal? You think it is normal that two men get married. How disgusting!'

<sup>197</sup> 'Just thinking about it makes me roar with laughter. And do we know who carries the bouquet? [...] Too bad Esteve doesn't have a bridal gown, otherwise I'd offer him a hand carrying it and I'd also take part in the circus'.

<sup>198</sup> 'Seeing two guys kissing and imaging them in bed, how disgusting!'

<sup>199</sup> 'While there are people like you, anything that can be done to normalise the homosexuals' situation is not enough. That's why I am going to perform the ceremony'.

and also exposes the pedagogical aspirations of Catalan television in 'socially educating' the viewers, as has already been illustrated.<sup>200</sup>

This same approach is evident in *La Riera's* treatment of the issue of marriage of and parenting by same-sex couples. In this soap opera the homophobic position is exemplified by the character of father Bernat, a priest who throughout the series has embodied the bigoted and often hypocritical aptitude of the Church towards issues such as abortion and non-heteronormative sexuality. In one memorable scene, Bernat discusses the definition of marriage with Balló and the priest affirms that the union between a man and a woman is the only 'real' marriage labelling Balló and Nandu's wedding a 'circus': 'Casar-se no és cap pallasada. El casament és una cerimònia que marca un dels dies més importants en la vida de una persona, és el compromís d'unió de un home i una dona davant de Déu'.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, he harshly attacks the right of same-sex couples to adopt, claiming that the law should protect those who are more vulnerable such as children. However, Balló exposes Bernat's hypocrisy since the parish was responsible for concealing the child abuse committed by a priest: 'No em vagis de sant tu ara, ni tu ni ningú d'aquesta parròquia ha sigut mai capaç de demanar perdó a les víctimes i a les seves famílies pel que va passar aquí. Ningú!'.<sup>202</sup> While the parish was not willing to protect those children, Balló states, he and his partner will raise their daughter in an 'ambient sa, ple d'amor i de comprensió'<sup>203</sup> and will protect her from anything and anyone.

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<sup>200</sup> *Ventdelplà* was awarded in 2008 by the LGBT organisation H20 for its portrayal of the LGBT community.  
<http://reusdigital.cat/noticies/ventdelpl-guanya-reus-un-premi-la-normalitzaci-de-lhomosexualitat>.

<sup>201</sup> 'Getting married is not a circus. Marriage is a ceremony which marks one of the most important days in the life of a person, it is the promise of union between a man and a woman before God'.

<sup>202</sup> 'Don't pretend to be a saint. Neither you nor anyone in this parish has ever been able to ask for forgiveness from the victims of what happened here and their families. Nobody'.

<sup>203</sup> 'A healthy environment, full of love and understanding'.

Therefore, this storyline, just like Xavi and Esteve's, is a clear example of Catalan television's pedagogical aspirations and its explicit aim of challenging homophobic positions. Although this is undoubtedly a laudable intent, I have also illustrated how the depiction of the issue of marriage equality does not call into question the assumption that marriage and the nuclear family are and should be fundamental pillars of society. Therefore, while dismantling subjective homophobic positions, *Ventdelplà* does not really question heteronormativity. One of the main limits of Xavi and Esteve's storyline is that it concentrates on the opinions expressed by the inhabitants of the town, none of whom is a sexually dissident character. Therefore, unlike *Queer as Folk*, which presents a debate between two sexually dissident characters over their discrepant interpretation of relationship and family, *Ventdelplà* presents a debate among those who recognise themselves in heteronormativity—a debate which evolves around whether or not sexually dissident people have the right to be included within the institution of marriage.

## **2.5 Television's Construction of Sexual Dissidence: The Dominant Paradigm of Essentialism**

In this section, I will explore how the debate between essentialism and constructionism has influenced the construction of sexual dissidence on television. I will outline the paradigms of television representation which refer to the extremes of this debate and between those who argue that sexual preferences are an essential innate component of a human being and those who argue that the sexual and sexuate subject is socially constructed. I will then examine the extent to which the construction of sexual dissidence in Catalan and Spanish television series fits into such paradigms set up in Anglo-Saxon contexts. However, I will begin this section by setting out how this debate has evolved throughout the years, outlining the different standpoints which have



constituted it and illustrating how often these different positions coexisted. Therefore, my aim in this theoretical introduction is to complicate the account which sees essentialism as linked to the gay and lesbian liberation movement and constructionism as linked to queer theory since both interpretations of sexuality have longer roots and more tortuous paths.

Indeed, the origin of the essentialist approach can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century with the development of psychiatry—a field which played a crucial role in influencing the modern conceptualisation of sexuality, as argued by several authors such as Michel Foucault (1978), David Halperin (1990), and Harry Oosterhuis (2000). One of the first scientists to embrace an essentialist interpretation of sexuality was German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. ‘The Einstein of Sex’<sup>204</sup>, as he came to be known, published a pamphlet in 1896 entitled *Sappho und Sokrates oder Wie erklärt sich die Liebe der Männer und Frauen zu Personen des eigenen Geschlechts*<sup>205</sup> in which he states:

It is not homosexuality which causes homosexuals to suffer but rather prejudices towards them. The endless fearful concealment of an inborn condition, the dread of discovery, of blackmail, of arrest—all this must ruin even the strongest nerves.

Hirschfeld’s interpretation of sexual preferences as a congenital condition was a crucial aspect of the sexologist’s support of the legalisation of sexual acts among men on the basis that ‘what is natural cannot be immoral’, following Nietzsche’s famous quote. He also contributed to establishment of sexual studies as a scientific field with the foundation of the Institute of Sexual Science, whose motto was ‘Justice through Science’, reflecting the conviction of his founder that a better scientific understanding of sexuality would eliminate

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<sup>204</sup> Rosa von Praunheim’s 1999 fictional biopic inspired by the life and work of Magnus Hirschfeld bears this title. I have taken the quote which follows from this film.

<sup>205</sup> It is worth noting that, unlike many physicists, Hirschfeld also studies same-sex desires and practices among women.

hostility toward sexual dissidents.<sup>206</sup> This belief would later be shared by the homophile movement, which also attempted to change discriminatory laws based on scientific arguments.

For homophile activists as well as Hirschfeld the interpretation of sexuality as an innate characteristic of a human being was fundamental in their political strategies. The essentialist approach was favoured by the social context since, after the war, (male) sexual dissidents had become more visible thanks to their increasing concentration in big cities, especially New York and San Francisco. Rubin observes an interesting connection between these processes of sexual migration, the 'modernization of sex' and the 'system of continual sexual ethnogenesis' (1999: 156). In her opinion, these migrations 'increased opportunities for voluntary communities to form' (1999: 156). Similarly, Stephen Murray argues that '[i]n modern, Western, industrial societies, homosexuality has acquired much of the institutional structure of an ethnic group' (1979). However, this distinctive 'homosexual identity' defended by the homophile movement was unequivocally masculine and female sexual dissidents did not enjoy a significant representation.

This ethical approach was, initially, called into question by gay and lesbian liberationists, who understood their movement to be a challenge to the system which represented certain gender roles as natural and established heterosexual privilege. Gay and lesbian liberation claimed that sexual dissidence had the potential to liberate forms of sexuality unstructured by the constraints of sex and gender. Early liberationists argued that categories such as 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' were to be assumed only for strategic political purposes, but should later be abandoned once gender distinctions were no longer meaningful. This rhetoric was very pervasive in the early stages of

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<sup>206</sup> In 1919, Hirschfeld also co-wrote with Richard Oswald and produced through his Institute of Sexual Science *Anders als die Andern*, one of the first films to portray sexual dissidence in a sympathetic way. The film is about a man who is blackmailed by his male lover and decides to come out to denounce the crime. This plot would later be retold in the Basil Dearden's 1961 film *Victim*.

the movement. For example, Judy Grahn argues that 'if anyone were allowed to fall in love with anyone, then the word "homosexual" would not be needed' (quoted in *Third World Gay Revolution* 1992: 258). Dennis Altman hopes for the creation of a new human for whom distinction between masculinity and femininity would be irrelevant and for 'the end of the homosexual' (1971). Similarly, the Gay Revolution Party's Manifesto stated that the 'gay revolution will produce a world in which all social and sensual relationships will be gay and in which homo- and heterosexuality will be incomprehensible terms' (1992: 344). This critique of gender as an oppressive construction and the denaturalisation of gender is one of the main connections between early liberationists and queer theory. Commenting on the liberationist classic *Out of the Closets* (1972), Michael Warner observes that 'many insights and aspirations now associated with queer theory have long histories' (1992: 18).

However, gay and lesbian liberation was never a monolithic or even a coherent social movement. Allen Young, for instance, conveys a rather simplistic and fairly optimistic image of the movement when he states that 'gay liberation also has a perspective for revolution based on the unity of all oppressed people—that is, there can be no freedom for gays in a society which enslaves others through male supremacy, racism and economic exploitation (capitalism)' (1992: 25-26). This utopian portrayal of gay liberation tends to hide the hierarchical structure existing within the movement and avoids problematising its overwhelmingly male, white, middle-class, and educated perspective.

Analysing the specific political positions within the movement of women who defined themselves as lesbians was a difficult task which encountered indifference and even resistance both from gay liberationist and feminist organizations alike. On the one hand, the feminist movement was careful to distance itself from lesbianism, even considering it damaging for the movement, as expressed by feminist Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*

(1965). On the other hand, gay liberation tended to marginalise models that would accommodate feminist demands. As Laurie Bebbington and Margaret Lyons point out, the relationship between sexual dissidence and feminism was an opportunity to confront the role of those men defined as gay 'in a patriarchal society and to recognize the ways in which your sexism oppresses us, as lesbians' (1975: 27). As Adrienne Rich—author of the highly influential essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'—argues:

Lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through 'inclusion' as female versions of male homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatised is to erase female reality once again. [...] I perceive the lesbian experience as being, like motherhood, a profoundly *female* experience, with particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities we cannot comprehend as long as we simply bracket it with other sexually stigmatized existences.<sup>207</sup> (1986: 318-319)

Rich further stresses the difference of male and female sexual dissidents' experiences by harshly criticising what she calls 'patterns of anonymous sex among male homosexuals, and the pronounced ageism in male homosexual standards of sexual attractiveness' (1986: 318). In conclusion, Rich argues that those men defined as gay, in so far as they are men, are part of an oppressive social structure which feminism and lesbianism is committed to overthrowing (1986: 68).

The representation of male sexual dissidents as the epitome of patriarchal values recurs in the writing of several lesbian scholars, such as Luce Irigaray's 'When the Goods Get Together' (1981) and Marilyn Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement: Another View of Male Supremacy, Another Separatism' (1983). Reprising Frye's argument, Sheila Jeffreys goes as far as arguing that 'gay men can be seen as the conformists to male supremacy

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<sup>207</sup> Luce Irigaray also notices how the patriarchal regime collapses 'lesbianism' into the general category of 'homosexuality', which she maintains is only the expression of male experiences. This is why she proposes the term 'hommo-sexualité', from 'homme', which in French means man (1977).

because they choose to love those whom everyone is mandated to love under this political system, that is, men' (1994: 468). The argument is controversial, to say the least, because, as Jagose observes, by emphasising the gender of the sexual interest, Jeffreys seems to ignore the fact that men who defined themselves as heterosexuals are, like women defined as lesbians, attracted to women (Jagose 1996: 51). In conclusion, Frye explicitly states that 'far from there being a natural affinity between feminist lesbians and the gay civil rights movement, I see their politics as being, in most respects, directly antithetical to each other' (1983: 145). However, feminists' analysis of how gender functions in licensing heterosexuality as normative and their examination of sexuality as institutional rather than personal played a significant role in the development of poststructuralist theories. As Rosemary Hennessy observes, while the connection between 1970s feminism and 1990s queer theory has been largely ignored, the latter in fact owes to the former the heritage of a 'rich and radical tradition' (1994: 93).

However, in its second phase, gay and lesbian liberation evolved into a social movement 'so culturally concretised and elaborate that the tenets and values [it] represented came to be seen as hegemonic, and were resisted in turn by further marginalised groups' (Jagose 1996: 58). Gay and lesbian liberation began to advocate a sexual revolution, but it increasingly consolidated itself into a civil rights movement whose main aim was obtaining equality for a marginalised group. The sense of disillusion with the shift from more radical aspirations to assimilationist politics is clearly conveyed by Altman: 'The thrust of the gay movement over the past decade has been [...] towards the idea that all that is involved is the granting of civil rights to a new minority' (1982: 211). As Steven Seidman argues, this evolution is mirrored by the shift from the liberationist to the ethnic model of sexual identity, the former being based on 'a notion of an innate polymorphous, androgynous human nature' (1993: 110), while the latter emphasises community identity and cultural difference. The

liberation model aimed to challenge the constraints of a sex/gender system based on the homo/hetero and feminine/masculine binaries. The ethnic model constructed 'the gay identity' as analogous to an ethnic minority, that is, as a distinct and identifiable population. The aim of the ethnic model is to establish sexual dissidents as a legitimate minority group, whose 'official recognition would secure citizenship rights for lesbian and gay subjects' (Jagose 1996: 61).

Finally, since the success of the ethnic model of sexual identities depends on the extent to which it has legitimised gay and lesbian identity in the dominant culture, this version of the movement has difficulty in absorbing or controlling challenges to its authority from groups which are even more marginalised. Black activists and scholars began to criticise the construction of this identity and its predominance of a white perspective (Jagose 1994: 14-16). In the same way, the assumptions that structured the core of the ethnic model of gay identity were challenged and critiqued by non-normative sexualities which confront it in its uncritical acceptance of dominant understandings of sexuality, figuring the sexual field through the binary opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

This criticism was reprised by queer theory in its aim of exposing the incoherent relation between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire, denouncing the opportunistic interpretation of the variables which constitute the system of heteronormativity, based precisely on the binary between the categories of 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality'. Therefore, queer theory challenges 'the familiar distinction between normal and pathological, straight and gay, masculine men and feminine women' (Hanson 1993: 138) and defies the notion of a natural sexual desire, which was interpreted instead as fluid and impossible to categorise. This debunking of the naturalness and stability of sexuality and gender developed in the context of poststructuralist theorization of identity as unstable and unfixed. As Stuart Hall argues in his essay 'The question of cultural identity' (1992), the poststructuralist conception of identity

is indebted to many intellectual movements, among which feminism certainly deserves a mention. As I have already illustrated, there are many common elements between radical and poststructuralist feminism and queer theories. Their interpretation of the notion of a universal female identity that associates all women as a fictitious construction which disregards factors such as ethnicity, class, or sexual preferences undoubtedly represents an important theoretical background for queer theory's refusal of a universal concept of a gay identity. One of the scholars who most contributed to the development of queer theory from a feminist perspective was Judith Butler. Exposing the constructed status of the feminist 'we', she wonders which criteria are used to create the category of women, who fits and who is excluded from such a category, contesting the implication that all women share the same interests and perspectives (1990: 175).

Moreover, poststructuralism has also opened the door for the examination of 'masculinity' as a gender construction. Indeed, in *Privilege: A Reader* (2009) Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber explain that the category of gender is invisible for men as the category of race is invisible for white people. This invisibility of masculinity as a constructed category had already been examined by many feminists, who had criticised the identification of 'the feminine' with the gender category—an interpretation which considers the masculine as carrier of a supposed neutrality and universality. Monique Wittig, for instance, states that '[g]ender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the masculine not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general' (1983: 64). Peter Middleton argues in *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture* that, since men have produced theories and modes to understand subjectivity and power, these theories and modes are in fact a universalisation of the male 'I' (1992: 3).

Josep-Antòn Fernàndez and Adrià Chavarria also examine how women have been constructed as the Other, the negative term through which the man has presented himself as a neutral and objective term, a universal subject (2003). As Catalan poet Maria Marcel Marçal states, occidental thought has always been dominated by the masculine perspective, which however is masked as neutral (1998:10). Indeed, the distinction between soul (or mind) and body, so pervasive in the Western philosophical tradition, and the association between the former with the masculine and the latter with the feminine supported this hierarchical relationship (Spelman 1982). As a consequence, the 'hypercorporealisation' of certain human categories determines their loss of freedom and autonomy, as well as of the ethical, social, and political dimension of their existence (Llamas 1994: 142). In order to escape this hierarchical dualism between mind and body, Elizabeth Grosz proposes the development of an 'embodied subjectivity'. In her opinion, 'corporeality must no longer be associated with one sex [...], which then takes on the burden of the other corporeality for it. Women can no longer take the function of being the body for men while men are left free to soar to the heights of theoretical and cultural production' (1994: 22).

Fernàndez and Chavarria illustrate that the fact that most social and political discourses on gender focus on women allows the role of men as sexuate subject to remain unquestioned, untouchable, and invisible (2003: 10). However, since the universalisation of the male 'I' is one of the precepts of patriarchal domination, a project of resistance against this hegemonic interpretation of masculinity requires reflection about men as sexuate subjects. That is why it is important to analyse representations: if masculinity is a social construction, it achieves its role through images, practices, and discourses. Literary, cinematographic, and television texts provide us with valuable material to understand how the parameters that define masculinity are produced, reproduced, and transformed, how they are made visible or are



masked. However, television narrations have been generally excluded in the unveiling of masculinity as a gender category and, as far as media representation is concerned, cinema has attracted most of the attention from gender studies scholars (Cohan and Hark 1993; Lehman 2001; Grant 2011). Regarding Spanish and Catalan academia specifically, this kind of study is more recent and also tends to exclude television series as an object of analysis. Àngels Carabí and Marta Sagarra's *Las nuevas masculinidades* (2000) includes several essays which examine the construction of masculinity from different points of view—philosophical, psychological, and as a cultural production. However, this last argument focuses on cinema and the press and, when television is very briefly mentioned, the discussion regards the representation of masculinity in advertising. Josep-Anton Fernández and Adrià Chavarría's *Calçasses, gallines i maricons: homes contra la masculinitat hegemònica* (2003) also represents an example of an extensive examination of hegemonic constructions of masculinity, covering a wide range of topics, from more traditional fields—philosophy, literature, and linguistics—to more unconventional subjects, such as a study of cuisine from a gender perspective. Nevertheless, television—and media in general—are excluded from this analysis. Jesús Martínez Oliva's *El desaliento del guerrero: representaciones de la masculinidad en el arte de las décadas de los 80 y 90* (2005) focuses on representations of masculinity in visual art, while Daniel Gabarró Berbegal (2005; 2010; 2011) has dedicated most of his academic work to the study of the relations between masculinity and homophobia and transphobia, paying particular attention to the role performed by the school system in perpetrating rigid and sexist gender roles.<sup>208</sup> Finally, an innovative approach is followed by Gerard Coll-Planas and Maria Vidal, who, in *Dibuixant el gènere* (2013), employ both words and images to analyse masculinity as a cultural construction.

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<sup>208</sup> I will deal with this issue later in the seventh section of this chapter.

This deconstruction of masculinity and femininity as gender categories is a fundamental step in order to examine how such constructions operate as a regulatory tool which privileges heteronormativity by reframing 'heterosexuality' as a discursive production based on the sex/gender binary system, and which suppresses and erases any kind of incongruence and ambiguity. Indeed, the establishment of the category of homosexuality also implies the establishment of its antithesis, the category of heterosexuality, which is constructed as empty of a predetermined content. According to Llamas, the category of heterosexuality 'no facilita información, no tiene implicaciones, no está (social, económica o políticamente) determinada, no señala un carácter, un estilo de vida, un comportamiento'<sup>209</sup> (1998: 27). None of the debates on constructionism versus essentialism initially paid attention to the analysis of heterosexuality, whose naturalness was taken for granted. However, poststructuralist studies opened a door to the analysis of heterosexuality as a social and cultural category. In 1995 Jonathan Katz published *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, in which discourses from different fields, from medicine to media, are analysed in order to expose the constructed nature of the heterosexual category. Wheeler Dixon concentrates on the construction of heterosexuality and gender roles in cinematic texts (2003). In the Spanish and Catalan context, this field of studies has developed more recently with works such as Óscar Guash's *La crisis de la heterosexualitat* (2000) and, with Antoni Donat, *Sociologia de la sexualitat: una aproximació a la diversitat sexual* (2002). Moreover, Josep-Anton Fernández dedicates a chapter to the construction of 'compulsory heterosexuality' in *El Gai saber: introducció als estudis gais i lèsbics* (2000). Llamas also argues against the currently prevalent interpretation of sexual orientation and the distinction between 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality' as a semantic pillar in our society:

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<sup>209</sup> 'The "heterosexual" category does not provide information, does not have implications, it is not (socially, economically or politically) predetermined, it does not indicate a character, a life style, a behaviour'.

Es absurdo que la sociedad se estructure en ‘homos’ y ‘hetero’ cuando hay muchos otros ejes que estructuran muchísimo más, desde la clase social hasta la edad, por ejemplo, que son cosas que segmentan, a mi manera de ver, los colectivos humanos de una manera muchísimo más importante, la nacionalidad, el origen de campo o ciudad, etc.<sup>210</sup> (Fouz 2003: 86)

‘Homosexuality’, in this context, is the paradigm which serves to explain the social and sexual order, the exception, and the anomaly which confirms and legitimises the norm (Butler 1993: 309-310).<sup>211</sup>

Therefore, queer theory and its delegitimation of the ethnical approach towards sexuality is deeply linked to the poststructuralist context in which it was developed. As Donald Morton writes, queer ‘has to be understood as the result, in the domain of sexuality, of the (post)modern encounter with—and rejection of—Enlightenment views concerning the role of the conceptual, rational, systematic, structural, normative, progressive, liberatory, revolutionary, and so forth, in social change’ (1995: 370). In order to understand the importance of this context in the development of queer theory and an antiessentialist approach towards sexuality it is interesting to reprise Montserrat Lunati’s description of postmodernism as a cultural wave which

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<sup>210</sup> ‘It is absurd that society is structured into “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals” when you have many other principles which are much more structural, from social class to age, for example, or nationality, whether you come from the countryside or a city, which are aspects that divide up human collectives, from my point of view, in a much more significant way’.

<sup>211</sup> It is also worthwhile to point out that the category of homosexuality has very often, especially in pivotal moments in history, been used as a way to indicate and denigrate the ‘other’. As Mangeot argues, ‘homosexuality’ is the attribute reserved for the enemies (1991: 56). For instance, it has often been constructed as a phenomenon typical of other geographical or national realities (Voltaire [1764] 2010). ‘Homosexuality’ was not spared even in ideological clashes. Soviet writer Maxim Gorki was convinced that homosexuality flourished in fascist societies: ‘Exterminate all homosexuals and fascism will vanish’, he stated in 1934 (Tornow 1992: 281). In other contexts, supposed immoral behaviours were ascribed to lower classes and non-white ethnic groups (Chauncey 1982-1983). However, this depiction of non-white societies as sexually less constrained was also characteristic of writers such as Jean Genet, André Gide, and Juan Goytisolo whose stories set in the Maghreb are always replete with sexually passionate figures who contrast with the portrayal of Europe as sexually repressed. Jaime Gil de Biedma also narrated his liberating sexual experiences in Manila in the 1950s in contrast with a repressive and frustrating Spanish society. As Alberto Cardín argues, these lands were employed as ethnographic proofs of Western sexual limitations (1989: 25).

questions traditional centres of reference, giving visibility to the marginal, the ex-centric, to those whose existence has been denied or recognised only under arbitrary dominant values: 'El postmodernisme s'interroga sobre les certeses absolutes, sobre el desig d'homogeneïtat i unitat que oculta les diferències, i aquesta interrogació deixa pas al que és heterogeni, híbrid, provisional, diferent'<sup>212</sup> (2007: 69).

However, while constructionism is often linked to poststructuralism and queer theory, this interpretation of sexuality has deeper roots. An article which pioneered this approach is Mary McIntosh's 'The Homosexual Role' written in 1968 in Great Britain in the context of the reform of the sodomy law in England and Wales, which decriminalised sexual acts in private between two men, both of whom had to have attained the age of twenty-one. In Greenberg's words, this article pointed the way towards considering 'homosexuality as a social role whose origins and changing content could be studied historically' (1990: 5). Therefore, she proposes an analysis of 'homosexuality as a social category, rather than a medical or psychiatric one' (1968: 192), emphasising the historical and contextual nature of the sexual.

McIntosh's article denaturalises homophobic strategies, which, in her opinion, take place through the practice of social labelling of 'homosexuals' as having a deviant condition. She argues that this labelling process operates as a mechanism of control in two ways: it helps provide a clear-cut threshold between permissible and forbidden behaviours and it serves to segregate the deviants from the others. As she explains, 'the creation of a specialized, despised and punished role of homosexuals keeps the bulk of society pure in rather the same way that the similar treatment of some kinds of criminal keeps the rest of society law-abiding' (1968: 183-184). In this homophobic process, McIntosh emphasises the responsibility of the medical community, in particular

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<sup>212</sup> 'Postmodernism questions absolute certainties, the desire of homogeneity and unity which conceals differences, and this questioning gives way to what is heterogenic, hybrid, provisional, different'.

psychiatrists, who she defines as 'diagnostic agents in the process of social labelling' (1968: 184). In her comment, McIntosh recognises psychiatrists' constitutive role in categorising sexual patterns, their impact on legal processes, and their effect on individual lives.

This role would be further examined by Michel Foucault, who defines psychiatry as one of the 'agencies of normalization' (1978). However, he also complicates the relationship between such agencies and the subjects they aspire to control since, he argues, marginalised sexualities are not simply victims of the operations of power, they are produced by those same operations: 'For two centuries now, the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied; and if it has carried with it taboos and prohibitions, it has also, in more fundamental ways, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic' (1978: 53). In his opinion, the creation of the notion of sex allows the gathering under an artificial unity of 'anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified' (1978: 154). Therefore, in his opinion, power does not only have a repressive role, but also a productive one. He refuses the binary opposition between ruled and rulers and describes, instead, relations of power as multiple relationships which take shape in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions. Structures of power, he argues, are relational: 'where there is power there is resistance' (1978: 95) and resistance is 'coextensive with [power] and absolutely its contemporary' (1988: 122). Like power, resistance is also multiple and unstable and circulates in discourse. Therefore, not only does discourse produce and reinforce power, but also 'undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (1978: 101). Foucault applies this relation between power and resistance to sexuality:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (1988: 110)

Llamas also stresses the coincidence between power and resistance, arguing that '[l]a politización de las realidades lésbicas y gays en sus facetas de resistencia y activismo social es, en buena medida, el corolario lógico de su politización desde instancias ajenas'<sup>213</sup> (1998: 10). In his opinion, the act of naming 'homosexuality' gave it a certain existence. However, it also constituted it as objectified, alienated, and heteronomous because its meanings are determined from outside (1998: 50). Therefore, it is the normative power exerted by discourse which creates the subjects it aims to control (Lunati 2007: 272). Indeed, the content and form of repressive contexts shape the content and form of 'militant' discourses:

[E]l discurso 'militante' nace determinado por la ordenación represiva que [los discursos desde la exclusión] llevan a cabo. Nace por la necesidad de racionalizar la propia vida y las condiciones en que ésta, en su conflicto con diferentes formas de prejuicio y hostilidad, se desenvuelve.<sup>214</sup> (Llamas 1998: 349)

Foucault also recognises that 'silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance' (1978: 101). I argue that these contradictory relations between discourse and silence on the one hand and power on the other are useful to explain the different social and political reaction to the

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<sup>213</sup> 'The politicisation of gay and lesbian realities in their aspects of social resistance and activism is, in large part, the logical corollary of their politicisation by external factors'.

<sup>214</sup> 'The "militant" discourse is born determined by the repressive order produced by [the marginalising discourses]. It is born out of the necessity of rationalising your own life and the conditions in which this life is carried on, in its conflict against different forms of prejudices and hostility'.

categories of male and female sexual dissidence. In the United States and in Great Britain, sexual acts between men were punished by law. This legislation was at the same time the result of and the reason for male sexual dissidence's visibility and it also allowed strategies of resistance. The invisibility of female sexual dissidence, on the other hand, protected it from juridical measures but it also initially curtailed its possibility of organising a resistance. One of the first activists to point out these contradictions was Anna Rueling in the 1904 conference of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. In her speech 'What Interest does the Women's Movement have in Solving the Homosexual Problem?', she urged a collaboration between the female movement and the 'homosexual cause' and she denounced a 'lesbian silence':

In general, when homosexuality is discussed, one thinks only of the Uranian men and overlooks the many homosexual women who exist and about whom much less is said because—I would almost like to say “unfortunately”—they don't have to fight an unjust penal code which resulted from false moral views. Women are not threatened with painful trials and imprisonment when they follow their inborn drive to love. But the mental stress that Uranian women endure is just as great, or greater, than the burden under which Uranian men suffer. (1997: 143)

Likewise, lesbian activist Empar Pineda explains the invisibility imposed by Franco's dictatorship on female sexuality, in general, and on those women identified as lesbian, in particular: 'A la pràctica, a les lesbianes no se'ns va aplicar la Llei de perillositat social. Però, si no existíem, com se'ns podia aplicar? [...] No vam patir la repressió física que, ben al contrari, sí van patir els gais i les persones transsexuals. Però varem patir una repressió molt singular, molt específica: la negació de la nostra existència'<sup>215</sup> (2008: 12).

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<sup>215</sup> 'In practice, the Ley de peligrosidad social was not applied to lesbians. But, if we did not exist, how could it be applied to us? [...] We did not suffer the physical repression that, on the other hand, gays and transsexual people suffered. However, we suffered a very singular and specific repression: the denial of our existence'.  
<http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/dasc/01Departament/08Publicacions/Ambits%20tematics/LGTB/08movimentimatges/movimentimatges.pdf>.

Foucault's theories also concentrate on how, at the end of the nineteenth century, psychiatry contributed to the development of a conceptualisation of sexuality as an essential and intrinsic aspect of a human being. Moreover, by annexing sexual irregularity with mental illness and defining a normal sexual development, psychiatry defined this essence as 'deviant' (1978: 36). According to Halperin, before the nineteenth century, there was not a conceptual system which allowed each person to be ascribed a fixed and stable sexual orientation (1990: 26). Therefore, in this context, '[l]a perversión ya no es cuestión de un momento de debilidad, o de una tentación, o de una pasajera incontinencia del deseo. El sujeto perverso lo es en todo momento. Aunque no haga nada'<sup>216</sup> (Llamas 1998: 274). Previously, the juridical texts concentrated on the punishment of the 'act' of sodomy:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonic codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. In the nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault 1978: 43)

Similarly, Caroline Bingham also distinguishes between the 'sodomite' of the sixteenth century and the 'homosexual', by ironically commenting on the example of Mervyn Touchet, Earl of Castlehaven, who was executed for sodomy in 1631: 'While from the twentieth-century viewpoint Lord Castlehaven obviously suffered from psychosexual problems requiring the services of an analyst, from the seventeenth-century viewpoint he had deliberately broken the Law of God and the Laws of England, and required the simpler services of an executioner' (1971: 465). Llamas notices that, in this shift,

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<sup>216</sup> 'Perversion is no longer a question of a moment of weakness, or a temptation, or a fleeting incontinence of desire. The perverse subject is such in any given moment. Even if he/she does nothing'.



“el sexo” pasa a constituir un factor primordial de inteligibilidad de la vida (de “sentido”), y de articulación del poder (de “legitimidad”)<sup>217</sup> (1998: 10).

Yet, several scholars have criticised the constructionist approach to sexuality defining it as backwards and even reactionary. First of all, some gay and lesbian scholars and activists such as John Mitzel (1992) and Dale Carpenter (2002) have emphasised the risks entailed in a sentiment of ‘queer nostalgia’<sup>218</sup> (Davis 2004: 58) towards a conception of sexuality in pre-modern times described as idyllic: ‘By far the most common type of same-sex relationship in pre-modern Europe [...] was that of ‘lovers’—i.e. two women or two men united by affection, passion or desire with no legal or institutional consequences for status, property, household and so on’ (Boswell 1994: 56). Moreover, the words homophile and gay were used precisely for their wider connotations and to escape that reductive interpretation of sexuality—and ‘homosexuality’, in particular—as merely a question of sexual practices. As Llamas maintains, ‘el corolario lógico de la reducción de la persona a las supuestas manifestaciones visibles de la sexualidad íntima [...] es la

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<sup>217</sup> “‘Sex’ begins to constitute a primordial factor of intelligibility of life (of “meaning”), and articulation of power (“legitimacy”).’ Although these theories have been mainly elaborated in the context of poststructuralism, I have already illustrated that the antiessentialist approach has important precedents. For instance, according to Llamas, the report elaborated by Alfred Kinsey in 1948 on male sexuality had already supported a pre-modern interpretation of sexuality. By ascertaining that thirty-seven per cent of the male, white, adult population of the United States had experienced, at least once, complete sexual intercourse with another man—by ‘complete’ Kinsey meant orgasm—it presented an idea of sexuality which was determined by practices, not essence, and that concepts such as ‘homosexuality’ and ‘heterosexuality’ could only be used as adjectives (1998: 333).

<sup>218</sup> I borrow this definition from Glyn Davis, who states that ‘there is a queer nostalgia for difference and alterity [...]. There is, it would seem, a queer desire for a time when being gay/lesbian was still dangerous, furtive, criminal’ (2004: 58). However, it is interesting to elaborate furthermore this process of nostalgia. Although Nishant Shahani recognises the dangers of nostalgia and its ‘reification and essentialization of the past’, he argues that it is the ‘very act of reinterpretation which gives nostalgia its performative (and potentially reparative) uptake’. In this interpretation, ‘nostalgia is not merely an ontological return to a preexisting historical moment—instead, it is inevitably implicated in the act of representation that is mediated by the contingencies and interests of the present’ (2012: 158).

hipersexualización fantasmática de “la homosexualidad”<sup>219</sup> (1998: 35). In this process, all aspects of the life of a person run the risk of being reduced to the sexual acts he prefers to practice.<sup>220</sup>

A radically different opinion is expressed by Leo Bersani in his notorious essay ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’, in which he accuses the gay liberation movement of having diverted attention away from sex practices in order to focus on a theoretical conceptualisation of sexuality: ‘the penis has been sanitized and sublimated into the phallus as the originary signifier; the body is to be read as language. [...] The phallocentrism of gay cruising becomes diversity and pluralism; representation is displaced from the concrete practice of fellatio and sodomy to the melancholy charms of erotic memory and the cerebral tensions of courtship’<sup>221</sup> (1987: 220). Butler also presents an interesting

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<sup>219</sup> ‘A logical corollary of reducing a person to the supposed visible manifestations of his/her intimate sexuality [...] is the surreal hypersexualisation of “the homosexuality”’.

<sup>220</sup> In this sentence I am employing the male pronoun because this process of hypersexualisation has only affected male sexual dissidents. The definition of ‘lesbianism’ has never been based on sexual practices and, on the contrary, female sexual dissidents have always been subjected to a de-sexualisation. In *Elementi di critica omosessuale*, Mario Mieli maintains that, in a phallocentric interpretation of sex, women are reduced to a hole, and thus to an empty space (1977: 106). In Mieli’s opinion, heterosexual categories are then applied also to sexual intercourse among men and, in this process, those who carry out a ‘passive’ sexual role are identified as women (1977: 143). But then again, the terms passive and active in themselves connote respectively a negative and a positive meaning for a sexual role. As Armand de Fluvià argues (2010), in this interpretation, ‘un home penetrat esdevenia una dona, perdia la seva condició de mascle’ [a penetrated man would become a woman and lose his condition as a male] <http://www.armanddefluvia.com/articulos/detalle/76>. This identification with women is evident in the use of female names in many languages in order to insult those men who have sexual intercourses with other men: ‘Nancy’ in English, ‘Marica’ in Spanish, ‘Checca’ in Italian. According to Llamas, within this patriarchal understanding of sex, sexual intercourse between men might be intolerable but is at least conceivable. On the other hand, a sexual relationship between two women is considered a double negative, not involving penetration, the fundamental sexual act according to a phallocentric interpretation of sex (1998: 63). As Butler ironically comments, ‘[o]ne might ask here whether lesbian sexuality even qualifies as sex within hegemonic public discourse. “What is it that they do?” might be read as “Can we be sure they do anything at all?”’ (1996: 60).

<sup>221</sup> Bersani is here particularly criticising Weeks’s opinion, according to which the most distinctive aspect of ‘gay life’ is its ‘radical pluralism’ (1985: 218). He is also referencing Foucault’s argument according to which ‘for a homosexual, the best moment of love is likely to be when the lover leaves in the taxi’ since ‘the homosexual imagination is for the most part concerned with reminiscing about the act’ (Fall 1982-Winter 1983: 11). Foucault also argues that ‘what most bothers those who are not gay about gayness is the gay life-style, not sex acts

point of view when she applies to the sphere of sexuality Nietzsche's quote from *On Genealogy of Morals* 'there is no "being" behind the doing, acting, becoming'. In her opinion, there are no gender and sexual identities beneath the expression and performativity of such identities, which therefore do not exist in an essentialist mode (1990: 33). Indeed, she maintains that sexual orientations are never fixed but open to cultural reformulations (1990: 114). David Greenberg expresses a similar opinion in *The Construction of Homosexuality*, in which he takes an antiessentialist approach in order to study how same-sex desires have been constructed as deviant. Greenberg argues that many people establish a sexual identity before practicing any sexual acts, whereas many people practice certain sexual acts without consequently considering themselves to be a member of any sexual community (1988). Óscar Guasch criticises the 'gay identity' precisely for attaching a 'meaning' to love and sex between two men, in a way that each man who falls in love with another man is immediately classified as gay, even against his will: 'Se trata de un proceso imparabile y reduccionista que define de forma unívoca y claustrofóbica la identidad de las personas'<sup>222</sup> (Ledda 2011). Likewise, bell hooks calls into question the very notion of sexual preference, arguing that it limits the autonomy of a person and falsely indicates an interest in all members of the sex that is designated as the object of desire (2000: 157).

However, the debate between essentialism and constructionism is complex and defies any simplistic solutions. Llamas, whose work has performed an important role in the introduction of queer theory in Spanish academia and activism, warns of the risk of dismissing and underestimating

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themselves' (Fall 1982-Winter 1983: 22). I find this assertion strongly problematic since the definite article 'the' in front of 'homosexual imagination' and 'gay life-style' presumes the existence of one unique way of interpreting sexuality and relationships among those who define themselves as gay, which is objectionable.

<sup>222</sup> 'It is an unstoppable and reductionist process which defines in a univocal and claustrophobic way people's identity'. <http://www.pikaramagazine.com/2011/04/oscar-guasch-ser-macho-matael-sociologo-tarragones-especializado-en-sexualidad-e-identidades-masculinas-habla-entre-otras-cosas-sobre-el-miedo-de-muchos-hombres-a-ser-tratados-como-mujeres-un>.

sexual categories and their influence in providing a frame of reference for social and cultural practices in favour of civil rights (1998: 274). Likewise, Sedgwick maintains that:

[S]ubstantial groups of women and men under this representational regime have found that the nominative category 'homosexual', or its more recent near-synonyms, does have a real power to organize and describe their experience of their own sexuality and identity, enough at any rate to make their self-application of it (even when only tacit) worth the enormous accompanying costs. If only for this reason, the categorization commands respect. (1994: 83)

Bersani also considers erasing sexual categories to be a perilous operation. He embraces Edwards Stein's interpretation of constructionism as 'the view that there are no objective, culture-independent categories of sexual orientation, no one is, independent of a culture, a heterosexual or homosexual' (1990: 340) and stresses the importance of questioning the natural status of 'heterosexuality'. However, despite recognising the category of 'homosexuality' as homophobically cultivated, Bersani notices that it also 'includes within it an indeterminacy and a mobility inimical to the disciplinary designs facilitated by the assignment of stable identities' (1995: 5). Bersani concludes that in rejecting the existence itself of sexual categories and identities derived from sexual preference, queer theory tries to put in place 'a resistance to homophobia in which the agent of resistance has been erased: there is no longer any homosexual subject to oppose the homophobic subject' (1995: 56), thus eliminating, in his opinion, the indispensable grounds for resistance to hegemonic regimes of the normal (1995: 4).

As Seidman argues, '[i]dentity constructions are not disciplining and regulatory only in a self-limiting and oppressive way; they are also personally, socially, and politically enabling' (1993: 134). Cindy Patton strongly disputes queer theory stating that, inasmuch as identity discourse is a rhetorical game with rules and strategies, queer theory, with its emphasis on the critique of essentialism, has misrecognised the nature of this game. She further praises the

strategic use of identity discourse, interpreted as ‘a strategy in a field of power in which the so-called identity movements attempt to alter the conditions for constituting the political subject’ (Patton 1993: 145). Therefore, in her opinion, identity claims are not only descriptive, but performative, and thus imply a call to action: ‘Identity is an issue of deontology, not ontology; it is a matter of duties and ethics, not of being’ (1993: 148). In particular, she stresses the capacity of the rhetoric of identity of implying or re-narrating a history (1993: 162)—a role which I will examine in the next section of the chapter.

These theories and the debate between an interpretation of sexuality as an essential identity and a conceptualisation of sexuality based on acts inform my examination of television characters and storylines. These polarised positions are ironically presented in a dialogue between the character of Kurt Hummel, a high school student, and Sue Sylvester, coach of the cheerleader team, in the American series *Glee*, which has been broadcast on FOX since 19 May 2009:

**Kurt:** It’s my dad. He is the most important thing in the world to me. I love him and I’m afraid I might be losing him because of my...sexuality.

**Sue:** Sexuality? How old are you? Sixteen? Have you even kissed a boy?

**Kurt:** No.

**Sue:** Have you ever kissed a girl?

**Kurt:** No.

**Sue:** Then, how can you possibly now what you like? See, that’s the problem with your generation: you’re obsessed with labels!

In the following paragraphs, I am going to demonstrate that the essentialist approach is the prevalent interpretation of sexuality articulated by television narratives. This angle is very clear in those storylines which present teenagers as their protagonists, since their sexual identity is often determined before having any kind of sexual experience, thus presenting sexuality as an essential and intrinsic aspect of a person, not determined by sexual practices. Let us take as an example the coming out scene of the first non-heteronormative

teenage character on American television, Enrique Vasquez on *My So-Called Life*, broadcast on ABC from 25 August 1994 to 26 January 1995. 'I'm gay...I've actually never said it...out loud', he tells his best friend but, when sex is introduced to the conversation, he immediately points out 'not that I know what I'm talking about or anything, because I never, you know,...experienced this'. Therefore, Enrique expresses what he perceives to be his sexual identity through a term which defines a sexual category, explicitly stating that this sense of self is not related to any sexual act. This approach is also detectable in the representation of other teenage characters on American television such as Jack McPhee in *Dawson's Creek*—broadcast on The WB from 20 January 1998 to 14 May 2003—and Kurt in *Glee*, defining a paradigm which repeats itself throughout the years. This paradigm sharply contrasts with the coming out scene of Nathan Maloney, a fifteen year old character included in the British drama *Queer as Folk*. In coming out to his best friend, Nathan does not employ any term indicating a category of sexual identity to define himself; instead, he describes the sexual acts he has practiced the night before: 'I met this bloke, Stuart Jones, had sex, shagged until six in the morning'. This narrative choice contrasts with the common coming out scene, which involves a character stating the perception of his/her sexual identity, indicating precisely an interpretation of sexuality as an essential aspect of an individual, something that 'you are' instead of something that 'you do'.

This paradigm is also followed by the storyline of the first non-heteronormative teenage character in a Spanish series, Santi in *Al salir de clase*, broadcast on the privately funded channel Telecinco from 8 September 1997 to 12 July 2002. Santi was included in the third series (1999-2000) and his storyline closely resembles that of Jack in *Dawson's Creek*, which was introduced the year before: there are initially no hints that the character defines himself as anything but straight and only after a few episodes does the audience find out about his 'secret' through the insensitive behaviour of person who outs him—his teacher

in Jack's storyline, while as far as Santi is concerned it is his sister who exposes his sexual preferences to their mother:

**Hermana:** Para que luego digan que los homosexuales son sensibles...

**Santi:** ¡Cierra tu boca o te la cierro yo!

**Hermana:** ¿Por qué te pones así? Mamá es muy abierta, ¿verdad mamá?

**Madre:** ¿Pero me queréis decir esto de qué va?

**Hermana:** Es gay. Tu hijo [...] es homosexual.<sup>223</sup>

Therefore, Santi and Jack are deprived of their autonomy in their coming-out experiences. As in the paradigm established by the depiction of Enrique's sexuality in *My So-Called Life*, *Al salir de clase* represents an interpretation of sexual identity as completely disconnected from any concrete sexual or emotional experience: not only has Santi never had sexual intercourse but the audience is also told that he has never been in love with or had a crush on a teenage boy. Therefore, this series portrays a conceptualisation of sexuality as an inherent aspect of a human being, since Santi develops the definition of his sexual identity not linking it to a concrete sexual or emotional experience.

An essentialist approach is also detectable in the depiction of Max, included in *El cor de la ciutat* and the character of Fer, included in the series *Física o Química*, broadcast on the Spanish privately funded channel Antena 3 from 4 February 2008 to 13 June 2011. Max's coming out storyline is introduced in the third series (2002-2003), when the character is seventeen years old, while Fer's coming out happens at the very beginning of the series, when the character is fifteen. However, their representation fits less clearly within the two paradigms I have presented. Indeed, although neither of these two boys has ever had a sexual experience with or even kissed another male teenager, the

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<sup>223</sup> **Sister:** And then they say homosexuals are sensitive...

**Santi:** Shut your mouth or I will shut it for you!

**Sister:** Why do you react like that? Mom is very open minded, aren't you mom?

**Mother:** Can someone tell me what is going on here?

**Sister:** He is gay. Your son [...] is homosexual'.

awareness of their sexual preferences and, thus, their sense of identity is depicted as being strictly developed through their feelings and desire for a male person. Therefore, even if these series do not present an interpretation of sexuality as determined by sexual practices, they do not convey a preconceptualised notion of identity as completely dislocated from experience either. Fer's coming out scene is indicative of this approach. After Rubén, the boy he loves, commits suicide, Fer talks to Julio, Rubén's brother:

**Julio:** ¿Tú no le odias?

**Fer:** No. Cómo iba a odiarle si era...alguien increíble.

**Julio:** Él también te quería.

**Fer:** Sí, pero no tanto como yo a él...Y ojalá le tuviera aquí delante para tener por fin el valor de decírselo.<sup>224</sup>

Max's coming out scene follows a similar pattern although the addressee in this case is the teenage boy who is the object of his desire and feelings. Moreover, unlike Fer, Max has had a sexual experience with a girl, his best friend Caterina, who suggested having sexual intercourse with her to clarify his doubts:

Jo m'ho vaig fer amb la K, ja ho saps. Però no volia. I quan ho vaig fer, em vaig adonar perquè no volia, perquè no m'agradava. [...] No és que no m'agradés ella...és que no m'agraden les noies. [...] És que...qui m'agrada...ets tu...No sé si sóc...bé, suposo que sí, només sé que m'agrades.<sup>225</sup>

Therefore, as far as the characters of Fer and Max are concerned, their sense of identity is initially not so clearly developed in a sexual category as is the case with Enrique, who since the very beginning employs the term gay to

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<sup>224</sup> **Julio:** You hate him, don't you?

**Fer:** No. How could I hate him if he was...someone incredible.

**Julio:** He loved you too.

**Fer:** Yes, but not as much as I loved him. And I wish he could be right here in front of me and that finally I had the courage to tell him'.

<sup>225</sup> 'I did it with K, you know that. But I didn't want to. And when I did it, I realised why I didn't want to, why I didn't like it. [...] It is not that I didn't like her...it's that I don't like girls. [...] It's that...the person I like...it's you...I don't know if I'm...well, I guess I am, I just know that I like you'.



define himself. In their coming out scenes, Fer and Max do not utter any term which conveys a sexual identity; instead, they express their feelings for another male teenager and Max even explicitly comments that he is not sure if these emotions are necessarily indicative of a determined sexual orientation. Thus, in this depiction of coming out storylines, sexuality is interpreted more as a 'relation' based upon feelings and desires for a concrete person than an abstract identity.

These considerations can be applied also to Mariona, the first female non-heteronormative television character in Spain. It was included in the soap opera *Nissaga de poder*, broadcast on Catalan television from 28 January 1996 to 3 May 1998. However, it is necessary to point out that the age of this character differs from that of Max and Fer, since Mariona is a young woman who has just graduated. Yet, as with the two teenage characters, she does not develop her sense of sexual identity through any sexual experience: 'A mi els nois no m'agraden',<sup>226</sup> she tells her aunt, who laughs thinking it is a joke: 'I què, t'agraden les noies?'.<sup>227</sup> When the girl answers affirmatively, her aunt sits next to her:

**Tia:** Però...has tingut relacions...vull dir, has fet l'amor amb noies?

**Mariona:** No.

**Tia:** I amb nois?

**Mariona:** Tampoc.

**Tia:** Així, com pot estar-ne tan segura?

**Mariona:** Perquè ho sé!<sup>228</sup>

Therefore, in Mariona's storyline too, sexuality is not depicted as linked to sexual acts and, yet, as with Max and Fer, her sense of identity develops

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<sup>226</sup> 'I don't like boys'.

<sup>227</sup> 'And what do you like? Girls?'

<sup>228</sup> '**Aunt:** But...have you ever had relations...I mean, have you ever made love with girls?

**Mariona:** No.

**Aunt:** And with boys?

**Mariona:** Either.

**Aunt:** So, how can you be so sure?

**Mariona:** Because I know!'

through her love and desire for another girl, Inés, thus being linked to a concrete emotional experience. Mariona is portrayed as very confident about her feelings and desires for another girl: 'No m'importa si els altres m'accepten o no',<sup>229</sup> she straightforwardly says to her aunt. This confidence clashes with Inés's insecurity and fears, which originate the first storyline on a Catalan or Spanish series revolving around a character excluded from heteronormativity who lives her emotions and desires in a conflicted way. This narrative structure of presenting at least two non-heteronormative characters with different approaches and reactions towards their sexual preferences was reprised in other series, for instance *El cor de la ciutat* and *Física o Química*. Both series analyse through a counterpoint structure the relations two characters have towards their feelings and desires: untroubled as is the case with Max in *El cor de la ciutat* and Fer in *Física o Química* or conflictive as far as Enric in the former and David in the latter are concerned. I have already illustrated in the previous chapter that one of the strategies carried out by *El cor de la ciutat* in its depiction of social issues was precisely to present more than one storyline, diversifying the narrative treatment of such issues (Gómez 2011: 6). However, this range of experiences does not include sexually dissident teenage girls. Indeed, all the teenage characters involved in the kind of storylines included in the two series—Max, Enric, and Edu, in *El cor de la ciutat* and Fer and David in *Física o Química*—are boys who, sooner or later, come to define themselves as gay. Therefore, teenage boys who define themselves as bisexual and transsexual teenagers are also excluded from this depiction.

The characters of Max and Fer are represented as being very confident about their desires and emotions and what they consequently perceive to be their sexual identity as gay. Max's coming out scene with his step-father, Dani, is very indicative of Max's confidence towards his sexuality. When Dani tells his son that he has seen his friend Edu with another young man—'És marica, ho

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<sup>229</sup> 'I don't care if other people accepts me or not'.

sabies? Anava amb un altre noi. Quan els he vist morrejar-se...'<sup>230</sup>—, his disgusted attitude generates Max's anger:

**Max:** Jo també ho sóc.

**Dani:** Què dius?

**Max:** Sóc gai.

**Dani:** Mira, si és una broma, no fa gràcia.

**Max:** No és cap broma. Ho sóc, m'agraden els nois.

**Dani:** Max, no tens ni idea del que estàs dient. Tu ets normal, com tothom, com jo.<sup>231</sup>

Max never allows his step-father's homophobia to undermine his self-confidence and self-esteem and when Dani brings him to a psychologist, Max makes it clear to his step-father that he is not confused and that his sexual orientation is a fact, not a phase or a subject about which they should have a debate: 'Jo no estic confús! Sé perfectament el que vull, el que m'agrada i el que no. I si et fot, t'aguantes!'.<sup>232</sup> Therefore, Max's problems derive entirely from his step-father's inability to accept the sexual identity to which his son feels he belongs, not from any inner conflicts towards it. This attitude of rejection on the part of Max's stepfather contrasts with his adoptive mother's: 'A mi m'és igual si t'agraden els nois o les noies, això no és el que compta. El que compta ets tu'.<sup>233</sup> In my interview with Esteve Rovira, he explains that, when the series had to deal with issues such as prejudices and social perceptions on sexual dissidence, the policy was to present a wide range of characters who express different opinions, so that the viewer could develop his/her own point of view. This same structure of narration is to be found in the coming out story of

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<sup>230</sup> 'He is a poofter, did you know that? He was with another boy. When I saw them kissing...'

<sup>231</sup> 'Max: I'm also gay.

**Dani:** What are you talking about?

**Max:** I'm gay.

**Dani:** Listen, if it's a joke, it isn't funny.

**Max:** It's no joke. I am, I like boys.

**Dani:** Max, you have no idea what you are talking about. You are normal, like everybody, like me'.

<sup>232</sup> 'I am not confused! I know perfectly what I want, what I like, and I what I don't. And if you have problem with it, tough!'

<sup>233</sup> 'I don't care if you like boys or girls, it doesn't matter. What matters is you'.

another teenage character in the series, Enric, whose parents' homophobic stance contrasts with his grandfather's embracement of Enric's sexuality: 'A mi m'és exactament igual que t'agradin els nois o que t'agradin les noies. Mentre estiguis amb una persona que val la pena i us respecteu',<sup>234</sup> his grandfather says when he finds out.

However, Enric's coming out storyline, included in *El cor de la ciutat* in its seventh series (2006-2007) as well as David's, included in *Física o Química* in its third series (2009) are completely different from Max's and Fer's plots. Indeed, Max's and Fer's confidence in their sexuality clashes with the difficulties Enric and David have to overcome before accepting their desire and feelings for another teenage boy. Their stories follow a very similar pattern and both begin with a sudden and unexpected kiss the two teenagers give to their object of desire—Max and Fer, respectively—before rushing off. However, when Max confronts Enric about what happened, the confused boy denies having any feelings or desire for him—'A mi no em van els tíos. [...] Deixa'm en pau. Jo no sóc gai, t'ha quedat clar?'<sup>235</sup>—while when Fer tries to talk to David, the latter acts like nothing at all has happened. Both Enric and David begin a relationship with a girl in order to avoid facing feelings that scare them and, yet, they constantly go back to Max and Fer, expressing their attraction for them only to refuse to acknowledge any meaning behind their acts: 'Ayer no sé lo que me pasó, se me fue la cabeza. [...] No me marees, tío... que yo no soy como tú',<sup>236</sup> David tells Fer after their second kiss. Enric explains to Max that he does not know if he is gay but that, in any case, he would prefer not to be:

**Max:** Això no és una cosa que és pot escollir, ho ets o no ho ets.

**Enric:** Jo no ho sé encara. A vegades penso que sí però minuts després penso que no...jo no sóc com l'Edu...<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> 'I absolutely don't care if you like boys or girls just so long as you are with someone worth it and you respect each other'.

<sup>235</sup> 'I don't like boys. [...] Leave me alone. I am not gay, have you got it?'

<sup>236</sup> 'I don't know what happened yesterday, I lost my mind. [...] Don't confuse me...I am not like you'.

<sup>237</sup> **Max:** This is not something you can choose, you either are or you aren't.

Edu is Max's friend who, according to a gender conformist mindset, would be deemed as 'effeminate'. In this scene, therefore, the series exposes how the limited and unvaried images dedicated to male sexual dissidents affect the self-perception of those male teenagers who, despite feeling attraction for other teenage boys, do not recognise themselves in those images. However, instead of conveying prejudices towards the way Edu expresses himself, Max simply tells Enric that 'cadascú és diferent'.<sup>238</sup>

Finally, Enric and David are able to come to terms with their sexual attraction and feelings for Max and Fer but more time is required for both of them to come out publically. A similar dialogue in the two series takes place, in which the two boys' fears of letting people know about their sexuality are exposed. In *El cor de la ciutat*, it is Enric's grandfather who prompts his grandson to find the courage not to hide his relationship with Max. When the grandfather overhears Enric denying in front of his friends that he is gay, he confronts his grandson about it and the boy justifies his behaviour by commenting that his sexuality is something private.<sup>239</sup> However, the grandfather exposes the hypocrisy behind this privacy discourse and the real reasons for Enric's denial: 'La gent sap o sabrà que ets gai. I què? [...] El problema no és que siguis homosexual, el problema és que ets un covard i tens

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**Enric:** I don't know yet. Sometimes I think I am but minutes later I think I am not...I am not like Edu...'

<sup>238</sup> 'Each person is different'.

<sup>239</sup> This same issue had already been touched on in Mariona and Inés's storyline. Despite her confidence, Mariona is in fact reluctant when it comes to telling her father about her sexuality and her relationship with another girl. 'M'agradaria que ho sabés tothom. Vull dir que no em vull amagar' [I would like everybody to know about it. I mean that I don't want to hide], Inés tells her after witnessing a scene in which Mariona lies to her father. However, Mariona tries to justify her behaviour by commenting precisely on her right to privacy: 'tampoc cal fer de les nostres vides una bandera. Jo només vull viure tranquilament amb tu, estimar-te...com qualsevol altra parella' [We don't need to spend our lives going round waving a flag. I only want to live quietly with you, love you...to be like any other couple]. Yet, this argument is presented more as an excuse than a conviction and serves, mainly, to cover up the girl's fear of her father's rejection. Her concerns prove to be right when she comes out to her family and she and Inés are thrown out of the house.

por del que diguin de tu. El dia que t'acceptis com ets, aquell dia començaràs a ser persona!'.<sup>240</sup> In *Física o Química*, it is Fer who confronts David after the latter lies about their relationship to their friend Julio. David defends himself by affirming that he does not need to explain his sexuality to anybody:

**David:** He estado pensando y sé lo que quiero. A ti.

**Fer:** Sabrás lo que quieres pero eres incapaz de decirle a uno de tus mejores amigos la verdad.

**David:** ¿Y eso, por qué es tan importante? ¿No te vale con que te lo diga a ti? No tengo que hacer una bandera de nada, ni tengo que gritar lo que siento.<sup>241</sup>

However, both boys overcome their fears and ultimately define themselves as gay both in private and in public. Therefore, both *El cor de la ciutat* and *Física o Química* present a narrative pattern which follows the coming out storylines of two teenage boys, one of them confident and the other conflicted about his sexuality. However, what the four boys have in common is that, ultimately, they all form a determined sexual identity which is coherent with the sexual acts they practice. Indeed, as far as Enric and David are concerned, the initial lack of correspondence between their professed sexual identity as 'straight' and their feelings for and attraction to teenage boys is depicted as a repression and incapability of accepting their 'true' sexual orientation. Therefore, in the television representations I have examined, the incoherence between sexual acts and the sexual identity they should indicate is only present in those storylines which deal with the inability of a character to accept his/her sexual desires towards a person of the same sex. In this way, television narratives mostly ignore that approach towards sexuality evidenced

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<sup>240</sup> 'People know or will know that you are gay. And so what? [...] The problem is not that you are homosexual, the problem is that you are a coward and you are afraid of what people will say about you. The day you accept yourself as you are will be the day you begin to be a real person'.

<sup>241</sup> **David:** I was thinking about it and I know what I want. You.

**Fer:** You might know what you want but you are unable to tell one of your best friends the truth.

**David:** And why is this so important? Isn't it enough that I'm telling tell you? I don't have to become a flag-waver for anything or yell what I feel'.

by Greenberg, according to which people may practice sexual acts without consequently defining themselves through a sexual identity.

There are rare exceptions which take this angle into consideration and the most notable example is the series *Bob & Rose*, a six-episode British drama broadcast on ITV, from 10 September to 15 October 2001. This romantic comedy narrates the story of Bob, a man who defines himself as gay who falls in love with a woman, Rose, and his struggles to come to terms with these feelings: 'We did it, I know we did. I don't know how we did it, but we did. And now I am all over the place because I've never done it and I've never wanted to do it and I just went a bit mental because...the thing is...I want to do it again...', he tells Rose after their first sexual intercourse. However, Bob's love for a woman does not change his perception of his sexual identity: 'I was born gay, I'm gay now, I'll die gay, I'll have a gay gravestone'. When he comes out to his parents—in other words, when he tells them he is having a relationship with a woman—and he realises his father is happy about the news, he states that he still perceives his sexual identity as he has always had: 'There are still men. I only fancy men. I fancy men and her'. He stresses this point also when he expresses his feelings to Rose: 'I love you. [...] I don't want to change. I am not changing. I am just adding a bit on top and that's you Rose Cooper because I love you'.

Therefore, the series presents a character who lives an apparent non-correspondence between the way he has always perceived his sexual identity, as a gay man, and his sexual desire and feelings for a woman. However, this relation is not represented as contradictory inasmuch as the series precisely emphasises the complexity and incoherent nature of human sexuality, which escapes categorisation. This story was inspired by real events which happened to a friend of the writer of the series, Russell T. Davies. The openly gay television writer remembers his own prejudices when his friend, who had always defined himself as gay, confessed to him his feelings for a woman: 'there

I was, as prejudiced as the next bastard, completely unprepared to allow this couple to fall in love. I was acting out of fear, the same fear I'd condemned in every homophobic thug', he states in an interview in *The Observer*, published on 2 September 2001.<sup>242</sup> This same interpretation of sexuality is also found in Davies's latest creation, the science fiction drama *Torchwood*—broadcast from 22 October 2006 to 15 September 2011<sup>243</sup>—in which he has invented a world where the concept itself of sexual orientation and gender categories simply does not exist and the main character, who is suddenly catapulted to twenty first century Cardiff, struggles to understand the way current society structures love and sexual relationships. This series includes the character of Ianto Jones, a man who defines himself as straight but falls in love with another man: 'It's weird, it's just different, it's not...men, it's...just him, it's only him', he tells his sister. Therefore, as in *Bob & Rose's* case, *Torchwood* presents a character whose self-perceived sexual identity should not correspond with the gender of the person for whom he feels emotional and sexual desires, but this series does not depict this relationship as contradictory.

Another character who defies the dominant paradigm in the construction of sexual dissidence on television is Brittany, a teenage girl included in the series *Glee*. Since the beginning of the series, this teenage girl has sexual intercourse and romantic relationships with teenagers of both genders. Yet, Brittany never links her desires and feelings to any sense of identity and she is the only central teenage character, excluded from heteronormativity, whose storyline does not include any kind of coming out scene: Brittany likes people of both genders, she never questions the reason for her sexual desires and everybody around her simply takes this as a matter of fact. However, as I have demonstrated, this approach is very rare in television's depiction of characters

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<sup>242</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2001/sep/02/features.review67>.

<sup>243</sup> The first series was broadcast on BBC Three, the second on BBC Two, while the third and the fourth were moved to BBC One. However, the last series was a British-American coproduction and the series debuted on American cable network Starz.



excluded from heteronormativity and, as far as sexually dissident teenage characters are concerned, is a unique case.

As far as Catalan television is concerned, I am going to examine two storylines which defy essentialist paradigms and question the coherent relation between 'sexual identity' and 'sexual acts'. The first storyline I am going to analyse is included in the series *Infidels* broadcast on Catalan television from 26 March 2009 to 15 March 2011. The protagonists of this story are two young women, Arlet and Dani, who have always defined themselves as straight and both have a relationship with a man. However, at the beginning of the series, Arlet and Dani meet and fall in love. On the one hand, the two women do not perceive their emotions and desires as contradictory with their sense of identity but, on the other hand, the series does not present their backstories about relationships with men as a symptom of repression or denial of their 'true identity'. Although in the course of the series the two women seem to develop a precise sense of their sexual self, defining themselves as 'lesbians', this assertion is again called into question when Arlet and Dani decide to have a child. Indeed, the couple asks their friend Toni to have sexual relations with Arlet to impregnate her and, during the sexual intercourse, the woman has an orgasm. However, this event does not prompt her to question her sexual identity nor does she interpret the sexual pleasure she has felt with Toni as contradictory with her perception of her sexual self.

Similarly, distancing from an essentialist interpretation of sexuality is portrayed in *La Sagrada Família*. As I have already illustrated, this series also questions the aim of 'normalisation' of sexual dissidence and, I argue, it is not a coincidence since often the rhetoric of normalisation is strictly linked to an essentialist conceptualisation of sexuality. As I have already mentioned, the series includes two sexually dissident characters, Ivan and Eduard. In one episode, the series presents an ironic criticism of both the homophobic interpretation of constructionism—which sees sexual dissidence as an illness

which can be cured—and an essentialist approach to sexuality. When Mariona, Ivan's distant cousin, comes to Barcelona, Ivan's grandmother convinces her to seduce the young man. In an hilarious scene, the grandmother argues that the only reason why her grandson is marrying Eduard is because he was the first person to ask him: 'El problema de l'Ivan és que és massa bona persona i a la primera persona que se li va posar davant, li va dir que sí. I vam tenir la mala pata de que va ser l'Eduard aquest'.<sup>244</sup> Indeed, according to the grandmother, if a girl had asked Ivan first, her grandson would have accepted the proposal because 'he cannot say no to anybody'. Therefore, Ivan's sexuality was just a question of 'bad luck' in his grandmother's opinion.

However, an essentialist conceptualisation of sexuality is also questioned. Before attempting to seduce Ivan, Mariona wants to ask for a priest's approval and to take confession. From the dialogue the audience clearly understands that the priest is a sexual dissident as well and tries to dissuade the girl from her plan. Reprising Mariona's argument that Ivan cannot know for sure he is 'gay' because he does not have a 'point of comparison', the priest asks her what she would feel if someone told her that she cannot know she is not a 'lesbian' because she has never been with a girl. Nonetheless, in a subsequent scene, the audience finds out that, instead of dissuading her, the priest's assertion has convinced the girl that a person, in order to find out his/her 'sexual identity', needs to perform sexual acts. Then, since she is a virgin, she decides that she wants to have sex with a woman and a man, in this order, to understand who she really is. Therefore, the grandmother's attempts to make Ivan question his 'homo' sexuality ends up with Mariona's questioning her 'hetero' sexuality.

However, these few exceptions aside, the impact of poststructuralist theories was scarce on television depictions and the debates on representation

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<sup>244</sup> 'Ivan's problem is that he is too good and he said yes to the first person who asked him. And it was just our rotten luck that the first person to come along was this Eduard'.

in this medium focus on the supposed accuracy and positivity of characters and storylines, according to an interpretation of television as a reflection of reality instead of an institution which actively contributes to the construction of that reality. However, as I have pointed out, television is aimed at a wider audience that is not necessarily familiar with poststructuralist theories and, thus, the few television texts which were inspired by these theoretical backgrounds were often the target of severe criticism from some LGBT activists. This was precisely the case with *Bob & Rose*, which prompted a wave of controversy among the 'amorphous beast, the Gay Community', as Davies defines it (2001), since many activists feared that the series would reinforce the prejudice of 'gay sexuality' as just a phase, which can be overcome or cured. Davies rejects these criticisms:

The problem was, and the problem persists, that [his friend and his girlfriend] just don't fit any of the labels. I'm still wary of taking the media-friendly, chattering-classes stance that labels don't matter, that we should chuck them in the bin; I'm labelled gay, and I love that label, I need it. Equally, if you're working in a car factory and you've been closeted for the entire 50 years of your life, you're carrying an awful and important label. They aren't easily shrugged off. But maybe we need more labels. Like, five million more, and that's just for starters.

## 2.6 Constructing a Collective History

The debate between essentialism and constructionism, their conflicting perspectives on sexuality, and the political and theoretical stands they imply also open up a debate on the epistemological validity of examining same-sex desire in other historical periods and in different cultural contexts. According to poststructuralist theorists, essentialists present a category of homosexuality, which is Eurocentric and contemporary, as universally valid and apply it to other historical or cultural contexts.<sup>245</sup> This operation, as Llamas argues, 'implica

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<sup>245</sup> However, as Dynes (1990) and Boswell (1990) point out, this tendency to employ categories in an anachronistic and Eurocentric way is not an issue which only affects studies of sexual dissidence, but social sciences in general.

siempre el ejercicio de una forma de violencia conceptual, ya que al hacerlo se impone una falsa coherencia sobre sucesos, gentes o lugares'<sup>246</sup> (1998: 25). Therefore, works produced by Weeks (1977), Blackwood (1986), Halperin (1990), and Boswell (1980) should not be interpreted as studies about 'gay and lesbian people' of other periods or places.

Nonetheless, these remarks are not meant to dismiss the importance of historical approaches in studies of sexual dissidence. Even recognising its fictitiousness and arbitrariness, I do not ignore the positive consequences brought by a construction of a collective past for people who suffer discrimination. As Llamas writes, '[l]esbianas y gays carecen de una historia, de un acervo de referentes, de imágenes, de mitos'<sup>247</sup> (1998: 78). Italian politician and poet Nichi Vendola, who is openly gay, recalls in an interview given to *La7's* network that, when he was a teenager in the 1970s, the magazine *Panorama* published an edition entitled 'The Third Sex'. Despite the fact that the article still used theories from the early twentieth century, Vendola remembers that:

Quel giorno vi era la scoperta che non ero l'unico al mondo [...] e la solitudine con cui avevo cercato nella mia biblioteca una risposta ai miei sentimenti, a quello che sentivo maturarmi dentro, finalmente quella solitudine cominciò a finire perché intravidi l'orizzonte di una moltitudine umana che viveva quei problemi.<sup>248</sup>

Derek Jarman, despite the fact that he considers that it is not sustainable to attach the label gay to people of other historical periods since '[t]hey may have had the same sexual preferences but "gay" is a late twentieth century concept' (1993: 30), also recognises that '[w]hen I was young the absence of the

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<sup>246</sup> 'Always implies the exertion of a form of conceptual violence, since this process imposes a false coherence on events, people, or places'.

<sup>247</sup> 'Lesbians and gays lack a history, a heritage of referents, images, myths'.

<sup>248</sup> 'That day I found out I wasn't the only one in the world [...] and the solitude which had accompanied me in my search in the library for an answer to my feelings, to what I could feel was growing inside me, finally that solitude began to disappear because I glimpsed at the horizon a human multitude which was living the same problems I was'.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI3pbLG34Pw>.

past was a terror' (1993: 30). Indeed, the creation of a past sets the base for organising the present and projecting a future. As Llamas points out, the general indifference towards oppression and discrimination against sexual dissidents has also prevented the creation of a 'gay and lesbian collective memory' (1998: 97). The memory of all those men and women who were killed by the Nazi or the Stalinist dictatorships for their perceived sexual deviance is still very often ignored by official commemorative days:<sup>249</sup> 'La controvertida cuestión de la presencia de lesbianas y gays en el espacio de los referentes públicos tiene otra cara: la cara de la ausencia. [...] Todo lo que, si se deja en ese espacio de lo no dicho, nunca pasará a la memoria colectiva ni a la cultura histórica de los pueblos'<sup>250</sup> (Llamas 1997: 163).

It is from within the framework of this perspective that many scholars felt the need to recover stories of repression and militancy about those people excluded from heteronormativity. Whether these stories can be included in a 'Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transsexual History' might be disputable from a poststructuralist perspective, but the urgency of unveiling those stories was felt by many scholars, regardless of their theoretical background. I have already mentioned, for example, the historical works of scholars such as Weeks, Halperin, and Boswell, who have different opinions in the debate between essentialism and constructionism. In her overview of American contemporary

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<sup>249</sup> The exclusion of sexual dissidents from the 'anti-fascist memorial culture' propagandised by the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic was unveiled by Heiner Carow's film *Coming Out* (1989), as examined by Ryan Prout (2013). Examining how this film challenges the German Democratic Republic's rhetoric about 'memory' and its exclusion of any non-heteronormative realities, Prout states: 'The homosexuals who lost their lives in the camps were killed twice [...]; once by the Hitler regime and a second time by a communist regime which did not want to remember all the victims of National Socialism'.

<http://www.jgcinema.com/single.php?sl=coming-out>.

<sup>250</sup> 'The controversial question of the presence of lesbians and gays in the space of public references presents another face: the face of absence. [...] Everything that, if it is left in this space of the untold, will never become part either of the collective memory or the historic culture of peoples'. On 28 September 2005, for the first time, the Catalan Government officially commemorated those people who were persecuted for their sexual preferences or for being transsexuals during Franco's dictatorship. In 2007, the Spanish Parliament approved the Ley de memoria histórica, which aimed to recognise the victims of the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship.

history, Sarah Schulman reclaims the right of sexual dissidents to narrate their own (national) history: 'I realized that few of the people I mention or the events or organizations that I describe have ever made it into the history books', she states in the introduction (1994: xix).

Most of the studies of this kind focus on Anglo-Saxon contexts, while in Spain this historical research has received little attention, although there are some exceptions, such as Rafael Carrasco's study of the repression of sodomy in Valencia analysed through the juridical texts during the Spanish Inquisition (1985), and Ramon Roselló's research on sexual habits in the Reign of Mallorca (2003). However, several studies have been published on contemporary history such as Mira's *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (2004) and Francisco Vázquez García's *Los invisibles: Una historia de la homosexualidad en España, 1850-1939* (2011),<sup>251</sup> although the historical period on which most of this kind of research concentrates is Franco's regime: Arturo Arnalte (2003), Armand de Fluvià (2003), Fernando Olmeda (2004), and Nathan Baidez Aparicio (2007) focus on the oppression of people identified as 'sexual deviants' and their struggles for resistance during the dictatorship. Argentinian filmmaker Martín Costa is preparing *Invertidos, la ley contra el deseo*, which he defines as '[u]na película sobre un aspecto poco tratado de la memoria histórica en España: el de las personas reprimidas y marginadas por sus preferencias sexuales, por sentir y amar diferente'.<sup>252</sup>

However, the development of this historical perspective has until been now necessarily partial because most of these studies focus on male stories and desires. In Spanish history, love and relationships among women are still largely invisible, as well as the lives of transsexual people, although it is fair to

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<sup>251</sup> It is interesting to notice that both authors choose in their titles the indefinite article instead of 'the history' to put an emphasis on the necessarily personal and partial perspective, according to a poststructuralist approach.

<sup>252</sup> 'A film about an aspect of historical memory in Spain which has been little dealt with: that of people who were repressed and marginalised for their sexual preferences, for feeling and loving differently'. <http://invertidoslaleycontraeldeseo.blogspot.it>.

remark that this criticism does not only refer to Spain but to historical studies of sexual dissidence in general. An important breakthrough was *Amazonia, retos de visibilidad lesbiana* (2007), edited by Angie Simonis. It examines historical and contemporary invisibility of 'lesbian identity' not only in society at large but also within the self-affirmation discourses of sexual dissidence. Another example is provided by a collection of essays edited by José Benito Eres Rigueira and Carlos Villagrasa Alcaide entitled *Homosexuales i transsexuales: els altres represaliats i discriminats del franquisme, des de la memòria històrica* (2008). The book includes an essay, written by Thaïs Morales and Raquel Platero, on the issue of the invisibility of female sexual dissidents during the regime and Fernando Sáez's biographical account of the story of transsexual activist Silvia Reyes, who was arrested more than fifty times during the dictatorship. In 2003 Jordi Petit published *25 años más: una perspectiva sobre el pasado, el presente y futuro del movimiento de gays, lesbianas, bisexuales y transexuales*, which traces the recent history of the LGBT movement in Spain, without disregarding any of its components. Moreover, in 2006 Martín Costa created *Transexuales hoy*, a documentary on the situation of transsexual people in contemporary Spain, and which includes many interviews with transsexual people who have, for once, the chance of speaking in the first person of their experiences.

On 12 April 2011 Catalan television broadcast an episode of *L'endemà*—a documentary series which deals with how people face a difficult situation in their life—dedicated to transsexualism.<sup>253</sup> The episode has as its stated didactical function the challenging of misconceptions, such as the confusion between transsexualism and sexual preferences and the erroneous perception of this condition as having psychological origins. However, besides this scientific approach, the power of the episode relies on the personal experiences narrated by six transsexual people—four of whom have undergone a sex change from

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<sup>253</sup> <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/3463250/Transsexuales>.

male to female and two from female to male.<sup>254</sup> Among them, Marta Salvans's story is the one which most interests me for my reflection on the representation of the repression suffered by transsexual people during the dictatorship. Almost sixty years old, Marta could not begin her sex-change when she was young due to the socially repressive situation. She tried to explain her perceived gender identity to her father—her mother had died when Marta was little—but she was harshly rejected. It was in this situation that Marta met Gloria and fell in love with her. They are still married and have a daughter. Gloria has always known Marta's self-perceived gender identity and she and their daughter were precisely the ones who encouraged Marta to pursue her dream of having a female body, in spite of her age. Indeed, Marta began her sex-change treatment in her forties and this tardiness has obviously had an impact on the transformation of her body which is much less profound than what she would have wanted: 'Si alguna vegada em miro, me n'adono que he fet tard, no ens enganyem. Vull dir, a la meva edat ja he fet tard per tenir el cos que potser m'hauria agradat a mi tenir'.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, Marta's story allows the audience to reflect on the consequences exerted by the strict sexual and gender roles promoted by the dictatorship and the legal and social repression of those people who did not confirm to such roles. As I have already set out, this is an aspect of the regime's repression rarely dealt with even in attempts to recover the historical memory of the regime's victims.

If there have recently been some efforts to recover tragic stories and dark moments of the past, there is still an emptiness as far as 'everyday stories of precarious banality' of sexual dissidents of other historical moments are concerned (Llamas 1997: 164; Fouz 2003: 91). On 25 November 1995, at the end of the first march against homophobia at a national level in Spain, queer group

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<sup>254</sup> This episode constitutes an exception since female to male transsexualism is usually disregarded even in those rare depictions of transsexualism which there are.

<sup>255</sup> 'If sometimes I look at myself, I realise that I left it late, let's not fool ourselves. I mean, at my age, I left it late to have the body that maybe I would have wanted to have'.



La Radical Gai went to the place where the Cine Carretas in Madrid once stood to put up a commemorative plate, which stated: ‘A todos los maricas que en las tinieblas de este local [...] lograron sobrevivir a duras penas la persecución de una sociedad homofóbica y represiva’.<sup>256</sup> The Cine Carretas was a movie theatre which was also known as a place where sexual encounters between men occurred. José María Cervantes, in an article published on 24 September 1986 in *El País*, defined the Carretas as ‘la catedral del morbo homosexual’, frequented by ‘hombres de doble vida, terapeutas de cintura para abajo, aventureros sexuales que buscan a tientas, en lo oscuro de la sala, un alivio a sus sentimientos de ansiedad a través del amor urgente y del ligue rápido y anónimo’.<sup>257</sup> Not all LGBT associations agreed that the Cine Carretas deserved an homage for being a symbol of hidden shadowy lives—and, I would venture, also for being a place for sexual encounters—but the disappearance of these symbols of a threatened survival is not to be celebrated:

[M]ucha gente en la actualidad está viendo cómo su historia y experiencia, lo que han vivido, tanto en los momentos más felices como los de persecución y de miedo, pueden desaparecer; pueden llegar a no formar parte nunca de una memoria colectiva porque ésta aún está definida en términos heterosexistas.<sup>258</sup> (Llamas 1997: 166)

Similarly, commenting on what she defines as the scarce effort of the LGBT movement to remember its own past, Empar Pineda quotes a verse of the Catalan song ‘Jo vinc d’un silenci’: ‘Qui perd els orígens, perd la identitat’.<sup>259</sup> Pineda warns that ‘no podem permetre’ns el luxe d’ignorar el nostre passat més

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<sup>256</sup> ‘To all the queers who, in the shadows of this place, managed just about to survive the persecution of a homophobic and repressive society’.

<sup>257</sup> ‘Cathedral of homosexual morbidity [frequented by] men with a double life, practitioners of below the belt therapy, sexual adventurers who fumble in the darkness of the room in search of fast love and anonymous quickies as a relief from their anxious feelings’.  
[http://elpais.com/diario/1986/09/24/madrid/527945061\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1986/09/24/madrid/527945061_850215.html).

<sup>258</sup> ‘Many people nowadays are seeing how their stories and experiences, what they have lived through, both in their happiest moments and in those marked by persecution and fear, can disappear and never become part of a collective memory because this is still defined in heterosexist terms’.

<sup>259</sup> ‘Who loses his/her origins, loses his/her identity’.

proper, ni podem oblidar d'on venim, com varem començar i quines experiències hem anat acumulant en aquests trenta anys'.<sup>260</sup> She concludes that, if the dictatorship had denied both 'our existence' and 'our history', then sexual dissidents and transsexual people could not make the same mistake (2007: 13).

In the following paragraphs, I will analyse two television series—one broadcast on Catalan television, the other on La1, one of the two Spanish state owned channels—the narratives of which are set during the dictatorship. I will particularly focus on how they try to unveil those very often concealed stories of love and sexuality among people of the same sex. From 17 January 2001 to 10 April 2002 Catalan television broadcast a series entitled *Temps de silenci*. The series begins in 1935 and, originally, it should have ended in 1975 with Franco's death but its success convinced Catalan television to extend it until 1998. In its first series, *Temps de silenci* depicts the everyday lives of a group of characters, narrating their love stories, their family problems, as well as economic and social struggles, against the background of the Civil War and the dictatorship. Among the characters there is also Doctor Frederic Ribalta, a man who marries a woman, Isabel, despite being in love with her brother, Llorenç. The series depicts the repressive social and legal context, which prevents Frederic from living or even expressing his feelings and desires.<sup>261</sup> In the early 1940s, the birth of his child causes Frederic to question his choices. He tries to tell the truth to Llorenç first—'Estimo la teva germana però potser em vaig equivocar. A vegades, penso que no m'hauria d'haver casat. [...] Els amors s'han de viure,

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<sup>260</sup> 'We cannot afford the luxury of ignoring our recent past, neither we can forget where we come from, how we began, and which experiences we have been accumulating in these thirty years'.

<sup>261</sup> Indeed, during the first years of Franco's regime, sexual acts between men were punished by the Ley de vagos y maleantes, although this law did not explicitly indicate 'sexual perversion' as illegal, as the Ley sobre peligrosidad y rehabilitación social would from 1970 to 1979. However, the law still criminalised 'public scandal'—a measure which was often employed after the dictatorship to repress expressions of affection between people of the same sex. A clear example was the arrest in 1986 of two young women for kissing in public, near the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. The law was finally repealed in 1995.

Llorenç, si no t'acaben ofegant'<sup>262</sup>—and, then, to his secretary Victoria: 'Em sento atrapat. Com si visqués la vida d'una altra persona. [...] Em sento perdut. Sóc aquí quan vull ser a una altra banda'.<sup>263</sup> However, in neither scenarios does he manage to express what he really wants to say. It is his baby's death which prompts Frederic to confess to Llorenç his feelings for him: 'Hi ha una altra persona. Estimo una altra persona. Encara no te n'has adonat?'.<sup>264</sup> This time he does not need to complete the sentence as Llorenç understands the truth. Frederic's love, however, is not acceptable for his brother-in-law, who asks him to stay with his sister and never to betray her with another man, which Frederic promises to do.

Since Frederic never follows his desires and emotions, *Temps de silenci* depicts the difficulties of a man in accepting and expressing his feelings for another man during the years of the dictatorship, but the series does not represent a love or a sexual relationship between two men. Such a storyline would be tackled a few years later by *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, broadcast on La1 from 27 September 2005 to 16 November 2012. Inspired by *Temps de silenci*—the two series were produced by the same company, Diagonal TV—the Spanish series is set between 1936 and 1957, thus concentrating on the Civil War and the first years of the dictatorship. *Amar en tiempos revueltos* focuses on a larger number of characters compared to the Catalan original and, in the sixth series, which develops in 1954-1955, the character of Ubaldo Ramos Guzmán is introduced.<sup>265</sup> Ubaldo is a wealthy man and works for the Guatemalan

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<sup>262</sup> 'I love your sister but maybe I made a mistake. Sometimes, I think I shouldn't have married. [...] Love stories must be lived, Llorenç, otherwise they end up drowning you'.

<sup>263</sup> 'I feel trapped. As if I were living somebody else's life. [...] I feel lost. I am here but I would like to be somewhere else'.

<sup>264</sup> 'There is someone else. I am in love with someone else. Haven't you grasped that yet?'

<sup>265</sup> In its first series, *Amar en tiempos revueltos* had already narrated the story of Sito Robles, a young man unable to accept his feelings for his best friend Ángel, who is a priest. In one scene, after the two men have been drinking, Sito tries to kiss Ángel but he is vehemently rejected. The day after, Sito tries to explain his feelings to his friend: 'Llevo mucho tiempo luchando contra mis sentimientos. Sé que están en contra de la naturaleza y no deberían ser así. No puedo dejar de pensar en ti. No como amigos...' [I have been fighting these feelings for a long time. I know

embassy—a job he loses after the 1954 coup d'état in his country. He is married to Irene, but he falls in love with Richi, a dancer he meets in his wife's dance academy. The scene where they understand their mutual interest is significant since it unveils the legal and socially repressive context by showing how the two men are forced to have an implicit conversation, in which they are apparently talking about their love for dancing but they are really trying to express their attraction to each other. Ubaldo and Richi cannot run the risk of exposing themselves, especially Ubaldo considering the prestigious institutional position he still retains at this moment:

**Richi:** No hay que privarse de hacer lo que a uno realmente le gusta. Cuando yo supe que lo que realmente me gustaba en la vida era...bailar, no me atrevía a decírselo a nadie. Lo hice contra mi deseo todo lo que pude pero no tenía fuerzas. Es inútil, al final las ganas de...bailar acaban saliendo a la luz.

**Ubaldo:** Fuiste muy valiente. Algunos de nosotros nos vemos obligado a...bailar en la oscuridad, donde nadie nos vea.<sup>266</sup>

Another interesting consideration about this storyline is that, unlike Isabel, Irene knows about her husband's sexual preferences. When Ubaldo and Irene met, they both needed each other: he had to silence the speculations that were spreading about his sexual preferences and she wanted to escape from prostitution. However, theirs is not a marriage of convenience, but a relationship based on a profound friendship and respect: it is a 'distinct' love story, as Ubaldo defines it and the series depicts it as such, without prejudices or moralism.

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they are against nature and they shouldn't be like this. I can't stop thinking about you. Not like friends...]. Ángel thinks they should not see each other anymore. Therefore, this storyline closely resembles Frederic's plot since it depicts unrequited love.

<sup>266</sup> **Richi:** One should not deprive oneself of doing what one really wants. When I knew that what I really liked was...dancing, I didn't dare to tell anyone. I did everything I could to go against my desires but I couldn't bear it anymore. It's useless, in the end the desire to...dance ends up coming to the surface.

**Ubaldo:** You were very brave. Some of us are forced to...dance in the darkness, where nobody can see us'.

As I have already set out, stories of repression of those people excluded from heteronormativity are rare and, thus, the story of Ubaldo and Richi in a popular television series broadcast on the main State owned channel is of significant importance. However, there is another storyline in the series which acquires, possibly, even more relevance for my analysis: the love story between two women, Ana and Teresa. As I have argued, stories about love and sexual relationships between women and the discrimination they suffered during the regime are so scarce that this storyline immediately attracted attention and was given an award by the LesGaiCineMad festival for depicting two women who 'came to terms with their homosexuality with courage in oppressive times'.<sup>267</sup> Moreover, their story has inspired many videos on YouTube, where fans have edited their most significant moments into romantic music videos with soundtracks such as Aerosmith's 'I don't miss a thing'<sup>268</sup> and Il Divo's 'Regresa a mí'.<sup>269</sup>

Their story begins when Teresa finds a job in a prestigious clothes shop in Madrid where Ana is pretending to be a shop assistant, when she is actually the daughter of the rich owner. Therefore, the two women have a different social background: Ana is a wealthy educated woman, who has studied abroad, while Teresa belongs to the lower class. According to lesbian activist and member of the Federación estatal de lesbianas, gays, transexuales y bisexuales, Boti García Rodrigo, the different social level is fundamental to understanding the contradictory reaction the two women have towards their desires and emotions for one another.<sup>270</sup> Indeed, while Ana accepts her feelings for her friend, Teresa is confused, scared, and ashamed. After their first kiss, Teresa is shocked and keeps repeating 'lo siento, no sé porque lo he hecho. Lo siento'<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/839722/0/amar/revueltos/gay>.

<sup>268</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsT3\\_A8wcls](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsT3_A8wcls).

<sup>269</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIXipkF2PJA>.

<sup>270</sup> <http://www.rtve.es/television/20100827/lesbianismo-franquismo-amor-condenado/344498.shtml>.

<sup>271</sup> 'I am sorry, I don't know why I have done it. I am sorry'.

but Ana calmly replies 'Me ha gustado'<sup>272</sup> and kisses her again. This inability to face the situation and her will to escape from temptations causes Teresa to marry a man, Héctor. The different perception the two women have of their sexuality allows the series to depict, on the one hand, the social and cultural conventions and the sense of guilt they generate in Teresa, preventing her from following her desires. After a passionate kiss, Teresa refuses to acknowledge what had just happened:

**Teresa:** No, no. No somos nada.

**Ana:** Sí, Teresa. Nos queremos.

**Teresa:** Ay, Dios santo! No me puedo creer que esté oyendo estas barbaridades.<sup>273</sup>

As Pineda explains when commenting on the regime's erasure of female sexuality, especially when sexual desires were addressed to women, '[e]n aquells ambients, negadors de la teva existència i del teu desig lèsbic, era molt difícil descobrir i reconèixer que t'agradaven i t'atreien les dones, i que et despertaven desig sexual'<sup>274</sup> (2007: 12). Precisely these difficulties are portrayed by the character of Teresa. On the other hand, through the character of Ana, the series also illustrates a self-confident woman, indifferent to prejudices and willing to fight in order to live the life she wants: 'He perseguido la felicidad inútilmente durante muchísimos años y ahora que la he encontrado no pienso renunciar a ella',<sup>275</sup> she tells Teresa after their first sexual encounter. 'Nada y nadie podrá impedir que te ame. Porque no hay barreras lo suficientemente grandes por este amor que siento para tí'.<sup>276</sup> Teresa does not want to spend the

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<sup>272</sup> 'I liked it'.

<sup>273</sup> '**Teresa:** No, no. There's nothing between us.

**Ana:** Yes, Teresa. We love each other.

**Teresa:** For God's sake. I cannot believe I am hearing all this nonsense'.

<sup>274</sup> 'In those environments, which negated your existence and your lesbian desire, it was very difficult to find out and recognise that you liked and felt attracted to women, and that women awakened in you sexual desire'.

<sup>275</sup> 'I have been looking for happiness all my life, in vain, and now that I have found it I am not going to give it up'.

<sup>276</sup> 'Nothing and nobody will be able to stop me from loving you. Because there are no barriers high enough for this love that I feel for you'.

night there, sleeping with Ana, but before exiting the room, she finds the courage to tell her friend that she loves her. The two women begin a secret love affair but when Héctor finds out the time has come for Teresa to take a final decision and she chooses to live her life with Ana, despite the consequences. Ana's economic situation allows the two women to escape and live in a country house, owned by her family. In the last series, Ana and Teresa come back to Madrid to convince Héctor to emancipate his wife, and thus this final part of their storyline exposes the juridical discrimination to which women and wives were subjected during Franco's dictatorship. Héctor does not put up obstacles to Teresa's emancipation and, in the end, he confesses to Teresa that he feels grateful towards her: 'Gracias, por enseñarme que hay que luchar por lo que uno quiere, con todas tus fuerzas'.<sup>277</sup> Therefore, the series follows Teresa's transformation from a confused and scared person, always worried about maintaining social appearances, to a strong confident woman, willing to live out her feelings and desires.

In conclusion, *Amar en tiempos revueltos* was a successful attempt by a popular television production, shown in a prime time slot, to depict the love and sexual relationships among people of the same-sex during the regime. For 'giving visibility to the historical memory of the LGBT collective', the Spanish series received the Baeza Diversa award 2012.<sup>278</sup> It is also interesting to examine the different way the display of affection between the two couples is depicted. Ubaldo and Richi are constantly worried about been seen and they avoid touching in public, whereas Ana and Teresa walk down the street holding hands and hug each other in public. If we take into consideration Pineda's account, this depiction is verisimilar since she explains how, unlike men, women could hold hands and even kiss each other and 'mai es pensava que es tractés d'una relació amorosa, sexual. [...] Un implacable i sempre present "el

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<sup>277</sup> 'Thanks, for teaching me that you must fight for what you want, with all your strength'.

<sup>278</sup> <http://www.rtve.es/television/20120914/amar-tiempos-revueltos-recibira-premio-baezadiversa-2012/563300.shtml>.

que no ha d'existir, no existeix" distorsionava les mirades i ajudava a no veure el que de fet es tenia davant dels ulls'<sup>279</sup> (2007: 13). However, as I have already examined, this possibility of expressing their affection, as well as the fact that female sexual dissidents generally avoided the brutal repression to which their male and transsexual counterparts were subjected, was due to the negation of their existence. Employing Foucault's analysis of the relations between power and resistance, I have examined how invisibility can be a double-edged weapon for those people excluded from social imagery in general and heteronormativity in particular.

## **2.7 Television's Depiction of the Role of the School System in Sustaining Heteronormativity**

As I have examined in the previous section, recovering the concealed stories of sexual dissidents is a crucial act of resistance against 'the sex regime' defined by Rubin. In the last few years, a discussion has taken place, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, about the role which should be performed by the school system in challenging the monopoly of heteronormativity. Several authors have emphasised the importance of the role of educators in favouring a climate of communication and integration, in challenging stereotypes, and acknowledging the existence of sexual dissident practices, abandoning a presumption of universal heterosexuality (De Vito 1981; Bass and Kaufman 1996). As far as the Spanish and Catalan contexts are concerned, I have already mentioned Gabarró's studies of the role of the education system in transmitting heteronormative gender and sexual roles (2005; 2010; 2011). Similarly, Raquel Platero and Emilio Gomez's *Herramientas para combatir el bullying homofóbico* (2007) criticises precisely the heterosexism of the education system, which only

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<sup>279</sup> 'Nobody would ever think that it was about love and a sexual relationship. [...] An implacable and ever-present "what shouldn't exist, doesn't exist" distorted people's gazes and helped to make invisible what people in fact had before their very eyes'.



transmits 'models of heterosexual behaviours and traditional genders' (2007: 34). The suicide of a teenage boy in the Basque Country drew attention to the issue of homophobic bullying in schools in Spain. On 10 May 2008 *El País* published an article provocatively entitled 'Antes muerto que gay', in which psychologist Alba Payás Puigarnau tries to explain how some teenagers who do not identify with heteronormativity can reach the point of committing such a drastic gesture: 'En llegar a secundaria ya tienes claro que si eres gay eres marica, y esto significa que eres diferente o anormal y por tanto serás alguien a quién humillarán o golpearán. Y aunque la mayoría de los chicos aprende a esconderse [...], el coste de negar su propia condición tiene un precio muy alto: empiezan a odiarse a ellos mismos'.<sup>280</sup> Similarly, Llamas warns that:

[E]n determinados contextos, la inexistencia absoluta de referentes de cualquier tipo que ilustren la posibilidad de no ser, amar, o desear como el régimen de sexualidad exige, aún es muy frecuente. En espacios sociales donde "la homosexualidad" está por completo definida desde el régimen de exclusión (de censura, de distanciamiento, de escarnio), se establece una desafección tan absoluta que, en ocasiones, puede llevar al suicidio.<sup>281</sup> (1998: 156-157)

The education system plays a fundamental role in transmitting non-heteronormative referents, especially to teenagers, who are particularly apt to be affected by the lack of role models. On 1 July 2009, the Catalan Government published a report entitled *La presència LGBT a l'àmbit educatiu*. In the introduction, Professor Mercè Otero Vidal states that the school system cannot hide, marginalise or disrespect non-heteronormative feelings and desires. She criticises the serious lacunae in affective and sexual education in schools and

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<sup>280</sup> 'When you get to high school, it is already clear to you that if you are gay, you are a fairy, and this means that you are different or abnormal and, consequently, you will be humiliated and hit. And, although most teenagers learn to hide [...], the price of denying their own condition has a very high price: they begin to hate themselves'.  
<http://www.ampgil.org/mm/file/antesmuertoquegay.pdf>.

<sup>281</sup> 'In certain contexts, the absolute inexistence of referents of any kind which illustrate the possibility of not being, not loving, or not desiring as the regime of sexuality demands, is still very frequent. In social spaces where "homosexuality" is completely defined by the regime of exclusion (censorship, distancing, derision), such an alienation so absolute becomes established that, on occasions, it can even lead to suicide'.

urges the creation of a welcoming environment in order to reinforce the self-esteem of those students who feel excluded from heteronormativity: 'És una qüestió afectiva, de sentiments i de comportaments i cal assumir la naturalitat i la pluralitat de la sexualitat i desterrar-ne els tabús. Hi ha persones d'orientació gai i lèsbica en tots els àmbits i classes socials, en totes les èpoques i cultures. La seva visibilitat depèn de l'acceptació social de l'entorn i evidentment la seva invisibilitat és un senyal de discriminació'<sup>282</sup> (2009: 3). On 31 May 2012, during the celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, the President of the Catalan Parliament, Núria de Gispert, stressed the importance of school in fomenting respect for diversity and she supported awareness starting from an early age of the range of sexual options and identities in order to disarm the violent rejection towards some of them.<sup>283</sup>

Television series have largely ignored the role of school in transmitting to children and teenagers the knowledge of the range of sexual options. One exception is constituted by the series *Infidels*. The character of Arlet works as a teacher in a primary school. In one episode, Arlet gives her pupils the task of writing a composition about their future and she is astonished to realise how homogeneous the aspirations of the children are: 'Pel que sembla, d'aquí a uns anys, tots estareu casats, tindreu cotxes grans, cases grans',<sup>284</sup> she tells a group of boys in the aisle. However, Arlet tries to explain to her pupils that there are

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<sup>282</sup> 'It is a question of affection, feelings, and behaviours, and we need to assume the naturalness and plurality of sexuality and banish its taboos. There are people with gay and lesbian orientation in all fields and social classes, in all periods and cultures. Their visibility depends on the social acceptance of their environment and, obviously, their invisibility is a sign of discrimination'.

<sup>283</sup> [http://www.parlament.cat/web/actualitat/noticies?p\\_id=115629340](http://www.parlament.cat/web/actualitat/noticies?p_id=115629340). In 2006 the Spanish Congress passed an education reform which introduced the school subject 'Educación para la Ciudadanía y los Derechos Humanos' aimed at transmitting values of 'self-esteem, personal dignity, freedom, and responsibility'. One of its main objectives was teaching a 'respectful approach towards diversity', also as far as sexuality is concerned. <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/01/05/pdfs/A00677-00773.pdf>. On January 2012 the Spanish Minister of Education José Ignacio Wert announced that the school subject would be eliminated. [http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2012/05/18/actualidad/1337372224\\_754584.html](http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2012/05/18/actualidad/1337372224_754584.html)

<sup>284</sup> 'As far I can see, in some years time, you will all be married, you will have big cars, big houses'.

other options and she suggests that maybe one of them might have a boyfriend one day but the boys start to laugh in embarrassment: 'No rigueu tant, eh? Que algú de vosaltres potser té nòvio. Que passaria alguna cosa? Jo només vull que sapigueu que estigueu amb qui estigueu, estarà bé'.<sup>285</sup> The following day the father of one pupil comes to school to confront Arlet. After saying that neither he nor his wife has a problem with 'the kind of life' the teacher leads, he warns her that the fact that they respect 'her option' 'no significa que hakis de fer-ne una bandera'.<sup>286</sup> Indeed, he explains, his son came home the day before and asked his parents whether they would get angry if one day he married his best friend, Adam. When the teacher explains that she was only trying to 'open doors', the father angrily replies: 'No li diguis que es pot enamorar d'un nen perquè no és així com el volem educar'.<sup>287</sup>

This reflection of the role of educators in challenging heteronormative values is rare, as I have already observed. More frequent has been the depiction of homophobic bullying in school environments, especially on American series, which have been paying attention to the issue since 1994, with the character of Enrique in *My so-called Life* (1994) first and Jack in *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) later. *Glee* (2009-present) in its first and second series has dedicated one of its most important storylines precisely to the discrimination and violence suffered by the character of Kurt in the school environment because of his sexual preferences. The series also represents the lack of support the teenage boy receives from the school board, thus critiquing the responsibility which is often held by school authorities and the indifference which legitimises homophobic practices. However, it is through another character, Karowsky, that *Glee* deals with the relation between school bullying, internalised homophobia, and suicide. Unlike Kurt, Karowsky is depicted as being unable to deal with his

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<sup>285</sup> 'Don't laugh. Maybe one of you will have a boyfriend. And what would be wrong with that? I only want you know that, whoever you will have a relationship with, it's fine'.

<sup>286</sup> 'You don't have to start waving a flag about it'.

<sup>287</sup> 'Don't tell him that he can fall in love with a boy because this is not how we want to raise him'.

sexual preferences. When his secret is found out, he becomes the object of ridicule and offence and his Facebook page is invaded by homophobic slurs. The teenage boy cannot bear the humiliation and, lacking support from his family, he tries to commit suicide by hanging himself in his room. He is found in time, but his extreme gesture prompts reflection among some teachers about their roles as educators. *Glee* has also dealt with the homophobic bullying suffered by Santana Lopez, a teenage girl who is in love with another girl, Brittany. Her feelings enter the public domain because of a friend of her who, accidentally, outs her. The series examines the sexism which accompanies homophobic ignorance in bullying towards girls who do not recognise themselves in heteronormativity: 'Girls like you are a challenge, you just need the right guy to straighten you up' is the kind of comment Santana has to suffer from many male schoolmates. Moreover, since its third series, *Glee* has introduced a transgender teenager, Adam 'Unique' Wade, who allows the series to explore the experiences and feelings of a young person who does not feel her genetically male body reflects her own identity, which she perceives as female. Through this character the series also deals with transphobic bullying.

However, this attention paid by several American series to this issue does not find any corresponding concern in Spanish and Catalan series. Therefore, the lack of attention homophobic bullying had received until very recently in Spain is reflected in the scarce presence of storylines dealing with this issue in television series. The topic is only briefly touched on by Enric's storyline in *El cor de la ciutat*. However, the series does not employ this plot in order to reflect on the role of educational institutions in challenging the reductive interpretation of gender and sexual roles. The storyline is more focused on exposing the social pressure imposed on teenagers who feel sexual attraction for people of the same sex by depicting Enric's friends' homophobic prejudice and violence. In one scene, Enric and his friends find two young men kissing in a car park. When one of them remains alone, the gang begins to insult



**Fer:** Pues...pues que sí que...que sí que...no es fácil.<sup>291</sup>

Irene suggests that her student takes his time to realise what he really feels and be comfortable with his emotions and desires before confronting others about them: 'No dejes que nadie nunca te haga decir lo que no quieres, ni que te etiqueten'.<sup>292</sup> However, the teacher understands that Fer is still feeling isolated and decides to invite members of a local LGBT collective to give a lecture on 'homosexuality and homophobia'. Other members of the teaching staff do not agree with Irene, deeming the subject 'too controversial'. Irene accuses them of being indifferent to what some students are going through and emphasises how important it is that they do not feel like 'they are the only ones in the world'. The series also shows how some of Fer's friends avoid him because they are afraid of being the object of the same attacks and jokes, thus highlighting how the pain of those who suffer bullying does not come only from those who perpetrate the violence but also from the lack of solidarity from those who, despite not sharing homophobic prejudice, do not intervene for fear of being targeted themselves. The lecture given by Irene clearly has a didactical aim addressed to the young audience of the series: 'Mucha gente cree que la homosexualidad es una enfermedad pero la única enfermedad, el único problema es la homofobia que, al igual que el racismo, es odio al diferente'.<sup>293</sup> Irene also talks about the sense of guilt that homophobia causes in young people, as well as their fear of expressing their feelings and sexual preferences openly. At the end of the lecture, Irene asks the class if anyone wants to intervene but Fer is too afraid to speak. However, another male student stands up and talks about his experience: in this way, Fer finds out there is someone else in the school who is facing the same difficulties as him. Finally, after a

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<sup>291</sup> **Irene:** Let's see, what would you tell Gorka and the others, if you had the courage you say you lack?

**Fer:** Well, well that yes...that yes...it is not easy'.

<sup>292</sup> 'Never let anybody force you to say what you don't want or put a label on you'.

<sup>293</sup> 'Many people think homosexuality is an illness, but the only illness, the only problem is homophobia which, just like racism, is hatred of what's different'.

group of students organises a cruel joke at his expense and humiliates him in front of the whole school, Fer has the courage to face his bullies and come out: 'El mundo es lleno de hijos de puta y si no serán Oliver y Gorka serán otros. Y yo no pienso cambiar lo que soy',<sup>294</sup> he tells his best friends.

Therefore, *Física o Química* can be viewed as an attempt to deal with the issue of homophobia in the school environment and the responsibility of school as an educational institution to challenge discrimination and violence towards people excluded from heteronormativity. Spain has begun to face this issue relatively late compared to other European countries such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands and it can be argued that this issue has not yet become the subject of a wide public debate as in those other countries. The general indifference towards homophobic and transphobic bullying and the tardiness and inadequacy with which it is being dealt with by Spanish and Catalan institutions is also reflected by the scarce presence of storylines dedicated to this issue in Spanish and Catalan television series. This absence contrasts with an exhaustive presence of such storylines on American television. The number of storylines dedicated to school bullying in American series has allowed for a wider representation of experiences, which involve teenagers with conflicted feelings about their sexual preferences and teenagers who are confident with their self-defined sexual and gender identity. Moreover, although these plots have mainly involved teenage boys, there have also been one girl and one transgender teenager in these representations. On the other hand, as I have argued, there has only been one storyline dedicated to homophobic bullying so far in a Spanish series and this necessarily limits the range of experiences that can be narrated.

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<sup>294</sup> 'The world is full of morons and if it is not Oliver and Gorka, it will be somebody else. And I am not going to change who I am'.

## 2.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined how sexual dissidence has been constructed in Spanish and Catalan television series. After a theoretical introduction, in which I have set out my terminological choices, I have explained that a sexual dissidence perspective has been mainly disregarded in Spanish and Catalan media studies. Indeed, the former have mainly focused on an examination of Spanish television as an instrument employed by Franco's dictatorship in supporting the dominant values and the status quo it proposed. The latter has concentrated on the role performed by Catalan television in sustaining a national imagery, in its task of 'normalisation' of the Catalan language and culture. I have examined how the concept of 'normalisation' is of crucial importance in order to understand Catalan television's interpretation of its pedagogical role as far as sexual dissidence is concerned and of its adoption of the 'positivity' approach.

I have queried this approach and its position as the dominant criterion with which to evaluate television's construction of sexual dissidence. First of all, I have complicated the quantitative approach by questioning the assertion that an increase of non-heteronormative images on television unequivocally reflects an improvement in the understanding of the complexities of sexuality. Although visibility tends to be unquestionably regarded as a sign of progress, I have presented the theories elaborated by Stuart Hall and renée hoogland, which acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity of media representations. Moreover, I have set out the difficulties in evaluating qualitatively images of sexual dissidence offered by the media. Considering that LGBT rights associations indicate as one of their tasks to weigh upon the mass media to present positive images of the lives of people they aspire to represent, I have argued that it is difficult to determine in any absolute sense what 'positive'



means exactly. As far as this issue is concerned, I have concluded that when more accurate and verisimilar images are demanded, an epistemology of realism is implied in which the function of the media is held to be the mirroring of the real world and the consequent illumination of our understanding of it.

Consequently, I have adopted an interpretation of media which sees them not as an objective or universal representation of the world, but a specific cultural construction. In this understanding of media, I have assumed that representations are constitutive of certain identities, not a mirror or a distortion of them. Therefore, I have distanced myself from the 'positivity' approach as it was not my intention in this chapter to determine whether or not an image represents a 'positive' portrayal of sexual dissidents. Indeed, I have expressed my belief that such an aim cannot be achieved considering that people excluded from heteronormativity are not a homogeneous group with a unified identity. Precisely for this reason, the same media representation which could constitute a positive image for some could be deemed as negative by others. For this reason, I have chosen to follow the 'semiological guerilla warfare' approach proposed by Umberto Eco, sharing his interpretation of television criticism as an instrument which can help audiences decode programmes and gain consciousness of how television polices the boundaries of meaning, thus contributing to the deconstruction of prejudicial practices.

One of the aims of my chapter has been to demonstrate that, as far as Catalan television is concerned, its adoption of the 'positivity' approach is strictly linked to the 'normalisation' process which it pursues. I have set out the complex issues entailed by this role questioning what it means to be a normal country and who deserves to belong to this normal country and under which conditions. From this perspective, the pedagogical aspirations of socially educating the viewers—in Esteve Rovira's words—proclaimed by Catalan television played a crucial role. Josep Maria Benet i Jornet's definition of Catalan series as didactical is important if we are to understand their aim of

'normalisation' as far as sexual dissidence is concerned. I have illustrated scriptwriter Toni Cabré's conviction that with this approach Catalan television has helped 'the homosexual cause', in his words. With these premises I have examined the character of Xavier in the series of *Poblenou*, who in my opinion perfectly demonstrates the link between the positivity approach and the didactical aspirations on Catalan television.

I have also examined the various aspects which characterised this approach, such as the exclusion of those who do not fit in the clearly demarcated gender binary. I have illustrated Aina Pérez Fontdevila's criticism of the interpretation proposed by Catalan television of the responsibility of a public television service in giving visibility to sexual dissidence. I have then examined the few exceptions which do not follow this paradigm, in particular, the character of Eduard in *La sagrada família*. However, I have illustrated how the distancing from the positivity approach which this character represents has never involved a female sexually dissident character. Another element which characterises the positivity approach is the dominant representation of the stable monogamous couple and the exclusion of other forms of relationship. However, I have pointed out that this approach is not only prevalent on Catalan television, but is also the dominant paradigm employed in the evaluation of images of sexual dissidence and also invests many of the political strategies adopted by LGBT movements in their quest for civil rights. Following this, I have illustrated those few voices which have criticised this paradigm, focusing mainly on the debate which has surrounded marriage equality and how this debate was dramatised in the American adaptation of British drama *Queer as Folk*. Despite the presence of some exceptions mainly depicted in *El cor de la ciutat*, the depiction of the issue of marriage equality on Catalan television is distant from this perspective and fits perfectly the didactical aspirations claimed by the Catalan public television service.

I have also explored how the debate between essentialism and constructionism has influenced the depiction of sexual dissidence on television. I have outlined the paradigms of television representation, elaborated in Anglo-Saxon contexts, which refer to the extremes of this debate. Next, I have examined to which extent the construction of sexual dissidence in Catalan and Spanish television series fits into such paradigms. My analysis focused on the representation of sexually dissident characters in *El cor de la ciutat* and *Física o Química*. My conclusion is that Catalan and Spanish television series mainly adhere to the essentialist paradigm of sexuality in their representations of non-heteronormative characters, although more recently some exceptions seem to demonstrate a willingness to complicate this approach, dominant until now.

Finally, despite the critical attitude I have demonstrated towards the positivity and essentialist paradigms, it is worth mentioning that the process of inclusion of sexually dissident characters has been less polemical in the Spanish and Catalan contexts than in the American one. For instance, in 1994 a kiss between two men in the series *Melrose Place* was censored after many complaints received by CBS, as reported by an article published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on 15 July 1994. In the meantime, Catalan television was showing a kiss between Xavier and Eugeni in the series *Poblenou* without stirring any controversy. Another example is the storyline narrated by *Glee* in its third series (2011-2012) about two teenage boys in a relationship who lose their virginity. This caused outrage among conservative sectors which called for a boycott of the series. On Catalan and Spanish television, series such as *El cor de la ciutat* and *Física o Química* have often shown teenage couples, including same-sex ones, in bed together without ever causing such reactions. As observed by Llamas:

Se ha vivido un proceso que yo no sé si en algún lugar del mundo se ha vivido como se ha vivido aquí y de manera, además, tan poco polémica. Aquí, de no haber gays y lesbianas en la televisión, empezaron a multiplicarse [...], daba la sensación de que estaban

tratando de recomponer o de recuperar [...] décadas perdidas.<sup>295</sup>  
(Fouz 2003: 94)

Indeed, having included their first non-heteronormative characters in 1994, television in Spain and Catalonia had to make up for more than twenty years of there being a complete absence of sexually dissident characters when compared to American or British television. Judging from the quantity of sexually dissident characters included in Spanish and Catalan series, this aim has been achieved. However, as I have argued throughout the chapter, evaluating the complexity of the construction of sexual dissidence on television is a far more complex task than counting.

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<sup>295</sup> 'I do not know if anywhere else in the world they have experienced a process like the one we had here, one which provoked, furthermore, so little polemic. Here, from there being no gays or lesbians on television at all, the number started to multiply [...]. It seems like they were trying to put back together or make up for [...] the lost decades''.

# Conclusion

My thesis was conceived as an attempt to explore the fruitful interactions between Catalan and Spanish media studies and gender and sexual dissidence studies. Although there has been a significant increase in the amount of work regarding gender and sexuality in Catalan and Spanish academia, I consider that the connection between these fields and television studies has not attracted the attention it deserves.

I argue, therefore, that examining television and the meanings it produces is a crucial exercise for scholars in gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence. Stuart Hall examines how television is implicated in 'the provision and the selective construction of [...] social imagery, through which we perceive the "worlds", the "lived realities" of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible "world-of-the-whole"' (1997: 140). In this way, he emphasises the role of television as a mediator between individual and collective experiences. Similarly, Thompson suggests that people appropriate television's messages and meanings, incorporating them into their lives and their sense of themselves as situated in time and space. Thus, the meanings which people produce interactively with television texts are woven into their identity projects (1995: 43).

These theories acquire significant importance if considered through a gender and sexual perspective. Interpreting homophobia as a social phenomenon rooted in discourse and cultural representations, the importance of deconstructing the meanings produced by the medium of television on gender roles and sexual dissidence becomes apparent. Adopting an interpretation of television criticism as an instrument which can help audiences decode programmes and gain consciousness of how television polices the boundaries of meaning, my thesis aimed to analyse such discourses in Catalan

and Spanish television series. My examination of television narratives was informed by a cultural studies perspective and shares the aspirations of this academic field, that is to say, the deconstruction of discriminatory practices, particularly sexist and homophobic ones in the case of my thesis. In order to achieve this purpose, discourses which are supposedly aimed at challenging demeaning media images of women and people excluded from heteronormativity also need to be analysed. It is my contention that gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence have not only a responsibility to dismantle sexist and homophobic discourses, but also to question the strategies used to disrupt them.

I have tried to follow this approach in my comparative analysis of Catalan and Spanish series with British and American television programming in their construction of gender roles and sexual dissidence. In my thesis, I have identified both patterns of representation in Catalan and Spanish series which resemble Anglo-Saxon programming and those which differ. As far as the first chapter is concerned, on the one hand, I have detected a profound difference between Catalan and American traditions of the soap opera genre. On the other hand, I have found several similarities between Catalan and British soap operas. This resemblance is evident in all three of the aesthetic traditions taken into consideration: entertainment, melodrama, and realism. However, in my analysis, I have also ascertained differences between Catalan and British soaps, mainly in their attachment to an epistemology of realism.

I have pointed out that Catalan drama serials have adopted an interpretation of the aesthetic values of realism which still play an important role in British culture. Indeed, as several Catalan directors and scriptwriters acknowledge, soaps such as *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* were the referents which directly inspired the first Catalan series. However, there are also important differences to do with the way in which Catalan soaps apply conventions of realism to the fictitious worlds they create as compared to their

British counterparts. In the light of my analysis, I have determined that these differences are related to the aim pursued by Catalan television of sustaining a national imagery clearly defined as distinct from the Spanish one. I have noticed that the dedication to this purpose can contradict in certain aspects the epistemology of realism that Catalan soaps claim to follow.

I have also queried the didactic aspirations which are prominent in the content of Catalan series. Both Esteve Rovira and Josep Maria Benet i Jornet emphasise the role of soaps in transmitting values and messages. In terms of this goal, Catalan programming also resembles British drama serials which have been defined as teacherly texts precisely because of their depiction of social themes. However, I have also stressed the risks and contradictions entailed in these aspirations, which are significantly evident in the construction of meanings surrounding sexual dissidence.

In the second chapter, I have queried what I have defined as the 'positivity' paradigm in the evaluation of sexually dissident characters, emphasising the contradictions of an approach which presupposes a homogeneity among people excluded from heteronormativity regarding their perception of their sexuality and sexual identities. I have also unmasked the potentially exclusive nature of 'normalisation' discourses around non-heteronormativity, especially for those who do not fit in the clearly demarcated gender binary and those who do not recognise themselves within the structures of the nuclear family.

I have paid particular attention to how the 'positivity' paradigm relates to Catalan television's pedagogic aspirations and its interpretation of its responsibility as a public television service to give visibility to sexual dissidence. I have also unveiled the connections between the 'positive' paradigm and an essentialist representation of human sexuality. After outlining the debates between essentialism and constructionism, I have isolated the paradigms of television representation, elaborated in Anglo-Saxon contexts,

which refer to the extremes of this debate. I have then examined to which extent the construction of sexual dissidence in Catalan and Spanish television series fits into such paradigms. My conclusion is that Catalan and Spanish television series mainly adhere to the essentialist paradigm of sexuality in their representations of non-heteronormative characters, although more recently some exceptions seem to demonstrate a willingness to complicate this approach, dominant until now.

However, my exposure of the contradictions inherent in discourses of 'normalisation' of marginalised gender and sexual realities and experiences should not be interpreted as a complete dismissal of their function. I do understand that, in a society in which discrimination based on gender and sexuality is so pervasive, such discourses on television may play an important role in raising awareness or provoking a sense of identification, especially in young viewers. In order to appreciate the potential value of discourses of normalisation, one has simply to consider the attachment that many teenage viewers feel to storylines such as those of Kurt and Blaine and Santana and Brittany in *Glee*, Fer and David in *Física o Química*, and Max, Enric, and Iago in *El cor de la ciutat*; or to consider the numerous accounts of actors playing non-heteronormative characters who explain how fans have approached them to tell them how their characters have influenced their lives.<sup>296</sup>

As far as this process of identification is concerned, we have to take into consideration another aspect which I have only briefly touched on in my thesis. Indeed, even recognising the hegemonic role played by the medium of television in constructing and transmitting discourses on gender and sexuality, it is impossible to ignore the potentialities offered by the internet in this process. In the first chapter, I have emphasised how the internet allows television

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<sup>296</sup> An example is the interview given by Spanish actor Luís Merlo to the Cuatro's programme *Eva Hache* on 16 January 2006. Merlo, who played the sexually dissident character Mauri in the popular Antena3's series *Aquí no hay quién viva*, reported the experience of many teenagers who told him that they had been encouraged by his on-screen character when explaining their sexuality to their parents. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9BeCNi4FDE>.



viewers to comment on their favourite series, characters, and storylines through ‘instantaneous online platforms’, such as forums and blogs (Rivera 2012: 215). In Rivera’s words, these cyberspaces can provide an ‘alternative public sphere’ (2011: 296), in which viewers can engage in discussions and interchanges of information and experiences. However, this ‘participatory culture’ (Jenkins 2006: 290) offers television audiences not only alternative ways to consume television programming, but it also invites them to participate in the creation of new content inspired by their favourite programmes. Thanks to the so-called fan-fiction phenomenon, fans can write new scenes to include in their version of an episode or write an entirely new series based on one or two characters. In such virtual spaces there are neither censorship nor restrictions as far as the creative material is concerned;<sup>297</sup> anyone can participate regardless of where they are; and the texts are available for free. Most of the time there is not even the requirement of user registration.<sup>298</sup> It is useful at this point to reprise Barbrook’s description of internet users as ‘[u]nrestricted by physical distance’<sup>299</sup> and his emphasis on the spirit of collaboration which reigns in these blogs and websites: ‘[u]nconcerned about copyright, they give and receive information without thought of payment’ (1999: 2).

Particular attention deserves to be paid to the use that people are making of the popular video-sharing platform YouTube. I have briefly mentioned in the second chapter how viewers of *Amar en tiempos revueltos* have edited the most

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<sup>297</sup> There can be age restrictions for the participants depending on the content of the scenes or storylines.

<sup>298</sup> Some examples are the Tumblr page dedicated to Max and Iago: <http://maxandiago.tumblr.com>; the Facebook page dedicated to Fer and David: <https://es-es.facebook.com/pages/fer-y-david-fisica-o-quimica/169880146425182>. The fan-fiction phenomenon is particularly evident as far as Kurt and Blaine’s storyline is concerned. The amount of Tumblr pages, Facebook pages, blogs, and websites dedicated to the love story between these two teenage male characters in *Glee* is enormous.

<sup>299</sup> Although it is definitely true that the internet is allowing people from different parts of the world to interact and collaborate on the creation of fan-fiction, I should point out that the so-called ‘technological gap’, that is to say, the exclusion of millions of human beings from the opportunities offered by the internet, has widened the wealth gap between developed and developing countries.

significant moments of the love story between Ana and Teresa into romantic music videos, which are then uploaded on YouTube. These mash-ups focused on Ana and Teresa are far from being exceptional. On the contrary, most television storylines which involve non-heteronormative characters are being re-edited by fans who are also creating alternative series based on these characters. Two pertinent examples for my thesis are the YouTube channels dedicated to the Max-Enric-Iago storyline<sup>300</sup> from *El cor de la ciutat* and the Fer-David storyline from *Física o Química*.<sup>301</sup>

I argue that, although these videos are created primarily for leisure, they are nonetheless charged with a significant political denotation. Here I intend the term ‘political’ in its etymological meaning derived from the Greek word ‘polis’, which means community. By manipulating the scenes extracted from television programmes, spin-off series completely centred on same-sex couples are created. In the original television series these storylines are inserted in an heteronormative context which is disrupted by these recreations, which operates a shift from periphery to centre—a shift that Stuart Hall considers an intrinsic characteristic of post-modernity (1998: 44). Sally Munt points out that people excluded from heteronormativity ‘are particularly adept at extracting [their] own meanings, at highlighting a text’s latent content, at reading “dialectally”, at filling in the gaps, at interpreting the narrative according to [their] interjected fictional fantasies, and at foregrounding the intertextuality of our identities’ (1992: xxi). If we dwell for a moment on her interpretation of the reading process of texts from non-heteronormative points of view, my definition of these videos as ‘political’ becomes clear.

As far as the Max-Enric-Iago storyline is concerned, there is another interesting consideration to be made. The home-edited videos about them are all subtitled in English allowing this story to circulate also among an audience

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<sup>300</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEE7748E1501B570C>;  
<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5CC4888C3D6245DF>.

<sup>301</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71qNrWtcx9o>.

that does not understand Catalan, which was the original target audience. Thanks to Alejandro0720 and evama1977, who run the YouTube channel, many people around the world can watch and comment on this love story. In this way, they are able to see a plotline that might relate to their experiences of living out a marginalised identity—something with which their national television broadcasters may not provide them—and connect with people who might share them—something that can be difficult in their own countries. For some people who live in difficult political, cultural, or family contexts, these YouTube videos can perform an ‘escapist’ function, and I have already dismantled in the first chapter the negative connotations usually associated with this word. When I introduced the subject of YouTube in our conversation, Esteve Rovira told me that he had received letters from American male viewers in their forties who lived in Utah. As he explained to me, he was glad that a love story initially conceived for a Catalan audience could reach people in other countries through a ‘universal’ subject such as ‘homosexuality’: ‘L’homosexualitat és universal, aleshores és igual d’on sigui la sèrie, el que troba l’espectador, sigui de la punta del món que sigui, és l’interès’,<sup>302</sup> he told me.

If we analyse YouTube from this perspective, we come to understand Castells’s definition of the internet as an ‘ágora electrónica’<sup>303</sup> (2001: 180), that is to say, a virtual space through which ‘procesamos nuestra creación de significado’<sup>304</sup> (2001: 259):

Como Internet se está convirtiendo en un medio esencial de comunicación y organización en todos los ámbitos de la actividad, es obvio que los movimientos sociales y los agentes políticos lo utilizan y lo utilizarán cada vez más, transformándolo en una herramienta

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<sup>302</sup> ‘Homosexuality is universal, then it doesn’t matter where the series is set, what the viewer finds is the connection, even if he/she is on the other side of the world’.

<sup>303</sup> ‘Electronic agora’.

<sup>304</sup> ‘We process our creation of meaning’.

privilegiada para actuar, informar, reclutar, organizar, dominar y contradominar.<sup>305</sup> (2001: 179)

In conclusion, for scholars who aim to examine the socially constructed meanings around gender and marginalised sexual experiences, the internet and its possibilities for reshaping communicative patterns are an essential object of study, just as the medium of television is.

Allow me to delineate some final considerations about the contexts in which I invite interpretations of my thesis. If, according to Guba and Lincoln's definition (1994), cultural studies are committed to examining the world with the overt aim of producing transformations of the social order, then gender studies and studies of sexual dissidence aim at exposing the contradictions and limits of the gender binary system and of heteronormativity.

This objective necessarily implies that the definition of what these fields of study could or should be is a political one. Weeks argues that although studies of sexual dissidence are undoubtedly 'pluralist, disputatious [...] often full of tensions and divisions' (Weeks 2000: 4), they are rooted in a specific if broad political and cultural stance, 'one claiming sexual justice' (Weeks 2000: 5). In Weeks's definition, this academic area is, more than anything else, a 'standpoint perspective':

It is concerned with understanding the way in which a hierarchy of sexual values and sexual power is constructed. With the categorizations of sexuality as they have emerged and changed over time and with the ways in which the development of these hegemonic forms have subordinated various category of people. (2000: 9)

These same considerations can be applied to the field of gender studies and its aim of understanding how a gender binary system is socially

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<sup>305</sup> 'Since the internet is becoming an essential medium of communication and organization in every sort of activity, it is obvious that social movements and political agents are using it and will use it more and more, converting it into a privileged tool for taking action, informing, recruiting, organising, gaining power, and for resisting it'.

constructed and how it subordinates those varied and diverse categories of people included under the label 'women'.

Finally, if gender studies and the studies of sexual dissidence constitute a 'dialogue across disciplines, experiences, and differences' (Weeks 2000: 1), a problem of translation must be recognised. Most of the academic material produced in these fields, especially as far as media and television studies is concerned, is written and published in English. Therefore, there is a problem of literal translation, which is fundamental, but there is also a problem in the translation of theories and paradigms. Indeed, most discussions within these fields are dominated by Anglo-Saxon issues, norms, and values, which may or may not be applicable in other cultural contexts. My thesis aspires to make a contribution to this dialogue among cultural and linguistic contexts in my attempt to apply critical paradigms of gender and sexual analysis elaborated by British and American scholars reading Anglo-Saxon television programming to the Spanish and Catalan contexts.

# Appendix 1

## ENTREVISTA: ESTEVE ROVIRA

(Barcelona, 18 de maig de 2010)

Silvia Grassi: Voldria començar l'entrevista parlant del gènere de la telenovel·la que sempre ha tingut un gran èxit a Catalunya. Quines són les raons, segons vostè, d'aquest èxit?

Esteve Rovira: La proximitat de les històries, sens dubte, siguin properes o no, vull dir la proximitat física, d'històries que passen al nostre país, en el nostre entorn, a les nostres ciutats, als nostres pobles. Sigui la sèrie diària del migdia o una altra setmanal com *Ventdelplà*, que en el fons es nodreix del mateix tipus d'històries. Crec que és la proximitat, el tipus de personatges que la gent reconeix pel carrer d'alguna manera.

SG: M'imagino que és per això que TV3 va decidir, amb *Poblenou*, fer productes propis perquè fins aleshores transmetia sèries de televisió estrangeres, britàniques.

ER: Cert. Jo crec que TV3 s'emmiralla en la BBC d'alguna manera. Per exemple, per a l'última que hem fet, *El cor de la ciutat*, que ha durat 10 anys, els referents són *Els veïns* o *Eastenders*, totes aquestes sèries que a Anglaterra fa anys i anys que s'emeten. També perquè l'únic referent que hi havia aquí, en aquest país, parlo de Catalunya i parlo d'Espanya també, eren algunes sèries o culebrotos sud-americans. Per la cadena, era apostar per una cosa nova, a nivell estatal,

perquè TV3 va ser la primera a tot l'estat de fer una sèrie així, com *Poblenou*. Jo recordo que el cap de programa, que llavors era l'Oleguer Sarsanedes, va fer una visita a la BBC i quan va tornar va dir que havia parlat amb el cap de programa de la BBC i que li havia dit: 'si fas una sèrie de històries que passin al teu país tindràs èxit segur'. Va voler provar-ho i va ser una aposta personal del cap de programa, fer *Poblenou*. I va ser un èxit brutal. La prova és que fins i tot es va vendre a Antena3 Televisión en el seu moment, i la van doblar al castellà.

SG: Aquesta és una pregunta que volia fer-li perquè encara que no sempre, moltes vegades els productes catalans no tenen el mateix èxit quan van fora de Catalunya. És així? Potser per aquesta representació que es fa d'un imaginari molt propi, català, que no sempre connecta amb la resta de l'Estat espanyol?

ER: Jo crec que hi ha una mica d'això però ja ho estem superant també. Vull dir que sobretot a les primeres èpoques, quan es van fer sèries com *Poblenou* o *Secrets de família*, sí que hi havia un component local molt important perquè també era una part de l'èxit, crec jo, de fer que la gent d'aquí ho sentís seu, però això va anar canviant quan vam fer *El cor de la ciutat* o sèries setmanals, com *Porca misèria* o bé *La memòria dels cargols*. Per què? Perquè ja eren temes menys locals, eren temes oberts a la possible venda a altres televisions, i gens locals, sobretot. *El cor de la ciutat* és la història d'un barri d'una ciutat com Barcelona però...

SG: Podria passar a qualsevol altre lloc...

ER: Podria ser Londres, Madrid, són històries quotidianes de gent normal i corrent. La que estem fent ara, *La Riera*, és la història d'un matriarcat. El meu referent, a l'hora de crear *La Riera*, va ser *Cinco hermanos, Brothers and Sisters*, una sèrie americana setmanal. Aleshores *La Riera*, si tu la treus del context del Maresme, de famílies riques amb problemes...

SG: N'hi ha a tot arreu.

ER: A tots als països del món. De fet, al proper Festival de Cannes, *La Riera* es presenta com una sèrie perfectament exportable: la rodem amb alta definició, amb format cinematogràfic, és a dir, amb tota una colla de avenços tècnics que fan que tingui un look i una imatge absolutament cinematogràfica, perquè es pugui vendre.

SG: Parlant de *La Riera*, s'ha passat des d'*El cor de la ciutat* que era una sèrie d'un barri de classe treballadora a una amb una família burgesa. Per què aquesta diferència, aquesta voluntat d'històries noves?

ER: Sí, per la novetat i sobretot per la varietat, és a dir, si fem una mica de memòria... veníem de *Nissaga de poder*, que era una sèrie també de burgesia vitivinícola. Sobre les vinyes del Penedès. D'aquí anem a una sèrie també de classe alta, com era *Laberint d'ombres*, però era un thriller en el fons, la història de noia rica, noi pobre amb un assassí pel mig. D'aquí creiem que amb *Nissaga* i *Laberint d'ombres* teníem el *cupò* d'històries de classe social alta ja cobert i la tele va creure que als telespectadors els vindria molt de gust anar a les arrels, és a dir, a històries de gent del carrer, que tu, com a espectador, veiessis en aquests personatges el teu veí o a tu mateix, i d'aquí neix *El cor de la ciutat* i és clar que la vam encertar: deu anys en antena i un quaranta-cinquanta per cent de *share* els primers anys. Hem tingut capítols especials que ni un Barça-Madrid, amb un milió i mig d'espectadors. Evidentment, no hi havia trenta cadenes, com ara, sinó que n'hi havia quatre. Crec que l'èxit del *Cor* va ser apostar per una història de proximitat amb molts personatges.

SG: Una sèrie coral.

ER: Molt coral. Eren noranta personatges, gairebé. Amb *La Riera* tornem, després de deu anys fent una sèrie de gent del carrer, de barris mitjos-baixos, tornem una miqueta als elements de la burgesia, una història d'un matriarcat però també amb altres trets que no havíem fet ni a *Nissaga*, amb una dona sola



tirant endavant amb quatre fills, un restaurant... I a partir d'aquí tota una colla de personatges que envolten aquests principals, però en tot cas no és una sèrie coral com *El cor*, que tenia noranta personatges. Amb *La Riera*, anem cap als trenta.

SG: Ja sigui una sèrie com *El cor de la ciutat*, o com *La Riera*, una característica fonamental de la telenovel·la són les emocions: la representació de les emocions. Bourdieu va dir que la televisió en general està vivint un procés de dramatització, s'intenta fer les coses sempre més sensacionalistes. Per vostè, aquesta crítica, es podria fer a TV3?

ER: No, jo crec que no. En el cas de les sèries, no busquem tant l'efectivitat, ni el *morbo*, sinó explicar històries. Jo crec que l'èxit del *Cor* i de *La Riera* també és explicar històries que estan al carrer. No ho sé en el cas d'altres televisions, però sí en el cas de TV3 com a televisió pública, i en el meu quan em fan l'encàrrec de dirigir *El cor de la ciutat* o *La Riera*, o fins i tot, en un altre nivell, la pel·lícula *Serrallonga*. Quina és la meua mirada com a director davant d'un fet i d'una història que expliquem? Per exemple, en el cas d'una història contundent que hem fet a moltes sèries perquè passa a la vida: un personatge està malalt, que té un tumor. El guió et ve, ja se sap que els guionistes, de vegades, tenen aquesta tendència al sensacionalisme, per portar audiència, pel motiu que sigui. Han escrit que el personatge no pot sofrir aquest patiment que té, no pot aguantar-lo i se suïcida. Un altre cas, en *El cor*—i a *La Riera* l'introduïm aviat també—hi ha un personatge, el Max, un nen de setze-disset anys, que creu que té tendències homosexuals, que és homosexual però té dubtes. Aleshores, la resolució podria ser: 'això és dolent' o 'això és bo'. Són dos exemples, no? Una malaltia i aquest fet. Jo crec que, com a director, i la cadena també, com a televisió pública, no podem donar un missatge que la solució al càncer sigui el suïcidi; i com a televisió pública no podem dir que ser homosexual és dolent però tampoc no podem dir que és bo. A veure, és una sensació molt personal, no? Es pot fer el

que es vulgui, cada televisió tindrà el seu món, però en funció del *morbo* d'una audiència, no ho puc permetre, i la tele no vol ni jo vull dir que la solució al càncer és el suïcidi. Explica'm aquesta història del personatge que no vol patir més i es vol suïcidar però que sigui l'espectador qui jutgi, no la televisió. És a dir, nosaltres hem de crear una colla de personatges al voltant d'aquest personatge que té càncer i que es posicionin a favor o en contra, és a dir, hem de donar totes les opcions i que l'espectador prengui part. Com a tele pública, jo no puc donar l'opció que el millor és suïcidar-se, o matar-se, o també la contrària, és a dir, no haig de prendre partit. Haig de fer que els personatges prenguin partit i que l'espectador que és prou intel·ligent tingui la seva postura davant dels fets. En el cas del noi homosexual, exactament igual: la mare prenia posició a favor, 'ets el meu fill i t'estimaré fins al final'. El pare, en contra, i els personatges joves tots a favor, '*no pasa nada*', '*no passa absolutament res*', però hi havia uns altres que li deien *maricón*. Sí que sempre, com a autor, tu prens part d'alguna manera, però que no sigui evident i que, sobretot, sigui l'espectador que jugui, ja que també és una manera d'involucrar-lo.

SG: Parlant de l'homosexualitat, TV3 va ser pionera aquí, a l'estat espanyol, amb *Poblenou*. I aquesta voluntat d'incloure temes socials, sempre hi ha estat, o aquesta és la meva impressió com a espectadora de TV3. Es podria dir, doncs, que les sèries de televisió transmeten valors?

ER: Sí, sens dubte.

SG: I com us plantegeu la inclusió d'alguna cosa que passi a Catalunya? Discutiu si d'aquest tema, se'n pot parlar? Com funciona la inclusió d'un tema social?

ER: És un tema que pertany més al món dels guionistes, però que parlen molt amb el director de la sèrie: 'ens agradaria tractar això o això altre'. Sí, jo crec que es tracta de basar-te en què tens al teu entorn, no? Quantes vegades neix una

sèrie perquè tu has conegut algú que li ha passat això? I aquesta espurna et fa pensar que aquí hi ha...

SG: ... una bona història...

ER: ... una bona història, però sens dubte que la nostra feina també és educar socialment i explorar temes. Ara en tenim un a *La Riera* molt dur, però no per això deixarem de tractar-lo: és el de la pederàstia per part del Mauri, un tema que es va treure el divendres passat. Aleshores, aquí sí que, com a televisió, però a través dels personatges, no com a televisió, tots rebutjaran el personatge, tots el rebutjaran amb més o menys matisos, això sí, però és un tema massa dur per agradar, és a dir, com a tele pública el que direm és *esto es jodio* però existeix, per això ho tractem.

SG: Això és molt interessant perquè jo volia preguntar-li si hi havia tabús, perquè, és clar, el tabú més gran de la televisió normalment és aquest, la pederàstia, és un tema que no es tracta mai i vosaltres el tracteu. Hi ha temes que no es poden tractar a Televisió de Catalunya?

ER: A mi no m'han dit mai: 'això no es tracta'. A mi el que m'han dit i, de fet, jo ho he compartit, és 'atenció com ho tractem'. Amb el tema de la pederàstia sobretot, les ordres del cap de dramàtics i de la Mònica Terribas, la directora, era 'sí, però no vull que estiguem mesos i mesos i mesos tractant amb *morbo* aquest tema', perquè és delicat. Ara, és un tema que està allí i desgraciadament, ara més que mai, amb els escàndols dins de l'Església. Aleshores l'hem de tractar però amb molta cura. Per això el personatge està molt ben definit, amb l'actor hem parlat a fons de les sensacions que ha de tenir el personatge, estem assessorats per psicòlegs i psiquiatres, pels Mossos d'Esquadra, perquè la trama que tractem, que és la pederàstia, en el fons, conté una subtrama molt forta que és 'atenció a internet'. Els Mossos fan xerrades a les escoles, amb els nens i les nenes, 'compte amb als xats perquè mai hi ha al darrera qui tu creus que hi ha'.

No se sap qui hi ha al darrera d'un xat, no? Aleshores, de rebot, ens permet explicar els perills d'internet. Estem assessorats pels Mossos d'Esquadra en aquest aspecte, ells veuen molt bé que tractem el tema. Sabíem que seria delicat. Hem parlat amb gent que pateix aquest tema. La percepció que tenen els psicòlegs és que un pederasta mai té la sensació d'estar fent res dolent, és el que volem explicar, que ell es creu que és incomprès per la societat, que ell simplement s'enamora de persones, però, coi, que són de dotze anys! En fi, és una mica el cas de dir que no hi ha tabús, però, en un cas així, al contrari del cas de l'homosexualitat o el cas del càncer en què els personatges es posicionen a favor o en contra, i el públic pren la seva posició, aquí tenim que els personatges es posicionen tots en contra però amb matisos: 'si no ha tocat la nena, no és el mateix. Sí, és execrable però no ha abusat d'ella'. És a dir, aquí hi haurà matisos, que l'espectador també vegi que això existeix.

SG: Vostè ha parlat dels Mossos d'Esquadra i me'n recordo de la Sílvia Sabaté parlant del càncer, deia que va parlar amb molts doctors i amb persones que el van patir. Això passa molt sovint, que consulteu gent que ha passat per l'experiència que tracteu?

ER: Ens intentem assessorar molt bé. A *La Riera* tenim dobles assessors de cuina. Després, si vols, veurem el plató, veuràs que hi ha una noia que és una periodista de cuina, però també hi ha un xef que està tot el dia amb nosaltres. I més encara en casos com la pederàstia. O, per exemple, els Mossos ens assessoren a nivell legal en trames més comercials, com per exemple, el Claudi, que és un xantatgista, un immoral, un amoral, sempre t'assessoren amb 'una denúncia es fa així' o 'compte perquè si tu denunciés després no és tan fàcil com sembla retirar la denúncia'. Perquè també volem reflectir la realitat, no tant un món fictici.

SG: Perquè sigui més realista.

ER: És clar.

SG: Parlant de tabús, no sé si es pot utilitzar la paraula tabú, però si és veritat que hi ha una gran absència en les sèries catalanes: la política. Els personatges no discuteixen mai de política, de polítics. Per què això?

ER: Jo crec, no ho sé amb altres casos, però amb nosaltres, a les sèries diàries, és perquè no tenim temps de seguir l'actualitat. Nosaltres, a vegades, ens ho hem plantejat. No hi ha cap directriu per part de la cadena. Sí, hi ha una directriu per part de la cadena, menteixo: aquí no es fuma, que els personatges no fumin, no ho veuràs mai. Això sí que és una política de cadena: '*aquí no se fuma*'. I de vegades hi ha seqüències en què estaria molt bé, però no es fuma, és l'única imposició, entre cometes. Com a no fumador em sembla fantàstic, però de vegades treu credibilitat a alguns personatges.

SG: Sí, és veritat, que podria servir per crear...

ER: ... unes atmosferes, uns ambients, en fi, això sí, que no veuràs *ni Dios* que fumi. Però, parlàvem de tabús, no?

SG: Sí, si hi ha, per exemple, una voluntat explícita de no mullar-se, diguem, perquè cap personatge és de Convergència o socialista.

ER: En absolut. No hi és. Simplement, al nivell de sèrie diària, com que nosaltres tenim els guions del que s'emet avui quatre mesos abans, de vegades voldríem parlar de 'hi ha eleccions a la Diagonal', o fer una crítica a no sé què, però quan s'emet, tu l'has escrit fa quatre mesos, l'has gravat fa tres mesos, l'has muntat fa dos mesos i mig, ja no tens l'actualitat, és impossible. Per això, pot semblar que mai parlem d'eleccions, però és impossible, faríem política-ficció.

SG: Es parlaria de temes que ja no són d'actualitat.

ER: Hem buscat la manera de dir 'escrivim una seqüència, la deixem oberta per quan s'apropi el dia'... però quan és el dia de la seqüència no és el dia de

l'emissió del programa. Pots no haver inclòs res perquè hauries de gravar una setmana abans i fer el muntatge i després fer l'àudio...no hi ha manera. Amb altres sèries setmanals se n'ha fugit específicament, però no crec que sigui per cap imposició de la cadena, en absolut.

SG: Vostè va dir que l'única directiva és la de no fumar. Per tant, la influència política, el canvi entre Convergència i socialistes, això no arriba a les sèries de televisió.

ER: A mi no em va arribar res, res.

SG: Perquè sempre es parla de la influència política que tenen, no només a Catalunya, a tot arreu, els mitjans de comunicació públics.

ER: Segurament, i també a Catalunya deu passar una mica més al món dels telenotícies, a l'altre apartat de la tele, que és el món de la notícia. Però nosaltres vam viure el canvi polític en *El cor de la ciutat*, amb els governs de Convergència mai hi va haver cap interferència; el no fumar ja hi era, això sí, fa temps, però cap connotació política. Vam explicar històries duríssimes durant els anys d'*El cor de la ciutat* i la sèrie, al nivell cultural, va rebre premis. La Generalitat va premiar *El cor* l'última temporada com la millor sèrie dramàtica, pels seus valors, per ser un refugi... van passar quatre mil actors per *El cor de la ciutat*. No, no, en absolut, ho haig de negar rotundament, no hi ha cap mena de pressió perquè es tracti res, les direccions opinen, quan els guionistes ens presenten les històries, jo sóc el primer a voler l'assessorament també de la direcció, 'eh, m'ha tocat això, us sembla bé?', et poden dir 'compte amb això, compte amb això altre', un 'no' no l'hem tingut mai.

SG: Ara volia parlar d'un tema que és molt important a Televisió de Catalunya en general, que és la llengua. Sempre hi ha hagut, no discussions, però diferències d'opinió: representar el català com a llengua pròpia del país, amb un

ús quasi exclusiu, o representar una societat més bilingüe, amb un ús més important del castellà. Vostè, què opina d'això?

ER: Una cosa és la política de cadena que és la que és: TV3 va néixer per a l'ús i el foment de la llengua catalana, si no, no existiria segurament, no? En aquest aspecte jo crec que TV3 ha nascut per això i ha de ser així, si no, no tindria raó de ser. No hi ha cap altra cadena de radiotelevisió que emeti en català. Només Televisió Espanyola tenia un petit apartat fa uns anys a La2. Dit això, jo crec que la ficció, sobretot la ficció, ha de reflectir la realitat social i la realitat és que és bilingüe. Vol dir, això, que a totes les sèries, des del punt de vista de cadena, els personatges s'han d'expressar en català? No tenim cap prohibició, de cap de les maneres, que no hi hagi un personatge que sigui castellano-parlant, però sí que la cadena demana que els personatges castellano-parlants facin l'esforç també d'anar-se integrant i parlar de tant en tant en català, i això és una cosa que jo comparteixo com a director. Tenim ara mateix la Valeria que parla castellà, és argentina, però veurem que a poc a poc dirà algunes frases, algunes paraules en català. L'únic és veure la voluntat d'integrar-se dels que vénen de fora.

SG: Una diferència entre el que ha de ser la representació d'una realitat i la d'una voluntat, com si diguéssim, d'una projecció d'una societat, de com es voldria que fos?

ER: De convivència, a més a més. També, una mica, des de la sèrie, volem donar una sensació de normalitat: tu em parles en castellà i jo et contesto en català. Oi que ens entenem tots dos, no hi ha cap problema, no? Normalment, a la vida real, el que passa és que els catalano-parlants tenen tendència a canviar d'idioma, cap al castellà, i això tampoc ajuda a què els nous vinguts...

SG: ...s'integrin i aprenguin català...

ER: ... s'integrin. I al final el que passa a *La Riera* i a totes les que hem fet és que hi ha castellans que s'expressen en castellà i els catalans els contesten en català.

Donem un punt de normalitat perquè molts castellans entenen el català però els costa parlar-lo. Però si m'entens, per què no et puc parlar amb el meu idioma? Aleshores, intentem reflectir que, a les sèries de ficció, els castellano-parlants a poc a poc s'integrin i, de tant en tant, utilitzin alguna frase en català, però com a element d'integració i ja està.

SG: Jo trobo molt interessant també com ha canviat l'ús del català perquè, al principi, era un català molt correcte, molt estàndard, i ara s'accepta més un català de diferents registres, no? I me'n recordo que al principi hi havia queixes de directors i de guionistes que deien que aquesta obsessió, entre cometes, per la correcció, complicava una mica la representació.

ER: Feia perdre una mica la frescor. Tu el veies i deies 'no parlem així al carrer'. A poc a poc, els lingüistes han fet una feina, i també els directors, d'intentar convèncer que s'ha de parlar correctament, però que també has de tenir en compte com es parla al carrer, perquè la gent s'ho cregui.

SG: Perquè sigui més realista. I parlant sempre de la llengua, perquè, com vostè ha dit, TV3 va néixer amb un objectiu sociolingüístic, d'intentar millorar el coneixement del català, que durant quaranta anys va ser una llengua prohibida i reprimida. Ara que és la llengua vehicular del sistema escolar de Catalunya, vostè creu que encara té aquesta funció TV3, per exemple, per als immigrants?

ER: Sí, jo crec que la té. Tot i que ara hi ha immersió lingüística, paradoxalment, al nivell de carrer jo crec que es va perdent el català, és a dir, no sé per què passa això. Hem tingut una immigració tan forta de Sudamèrica que dels sis milions que érem fa cinc anys ara en som set i mig; és un milió i mig de persones que no tenen el català com a llengua pròpia i no volen fer l'esforç. I no els critico: difícil és ja per ells deixar el seu país, anar a un altre i és fàcil que tu, si el teu idioma és el castellà, i aquí tots l'entendem, no facis l'esforç. Però hi ha gent que el fa, l'esforç, no? En aquest aspecte crec que la tele no hi té res a veure.



Una cosa és el que passa a l'escola, on està clar que tots els adolescents creixen dominant perfectament els dos idiomes, però almenys a la ciutat, almenys a Barcelona, vas pel carrer i tots parlen castellà, parlen castellà entre ells. I, per això, encara crec que és bo que els adolescents vegin les grans pel·lis d'èxit, com ens va passar a nosaltres, a mi, quan jo tenia els meus vint i pocs, que va néixer TV3 i de cop i volta veies sèries parlant català. Tota la vida havia vist cinema parlat en castellà, i, de sobte, no t'agrada, és com un idioma nou. Aquí, a les sèries i al món de la tele, s'ha acceptat, vull dir, la gent consumeix TV3, de fet és la més vista en aquest país. Vol dir que hi ha una feina feta, que la gent ha après a escoltar i veure els grans actors de Hollywood en català. Però al cinema encara no passa això.

SG: Sí, és veritat, també volia fer aquesta pregunta, d'aquesta gran diferència entre el cinema i la televisió. Joan Fuster va dir que un país no té identitat si no té la seva pròpia cultura de masses. Això, amb TV3, va funcionar magníficament, va fer una feina que tothom va reconèixer que era una feina molt important, però no ha passat el mateix amb el cinema català.

ER: Això va passar molt amb el teatre, perquè la gran llengua vehicular del teatre és el català, també es fan obres en castellà i molt bé, però vas al teatre i no t'estranya gens veure una obra en català. Al contrari, veus una obra en castellà i dius uhm, perquè crec que és un peix que es mossega la cua. Què passa amb el món del cinema? A les grans distribuïdores, a les *majors* no els interessa doblar al català per més que la Generalitat els ajudi. Ara saps que hi ha un intent amb una llei que ni els empresaris la volen. Tenen por que no hi vagi gent. És clar que no hi va gent, però no hi va gent perquè no tenen opció. Fan una pel·li en català i n'estrenen cinc còpies: una a Barcelona, una a Girona... Diuen que no hi ha gent, és clar que no hi ha gent, perquè tu no em dones les opcions, no? Si n'hi hagués més, cinquanta per cent i cinquanta per cent, de còpies... escolta, si la gent ho veu per TV3, per què no al cinema? La gent, quan s'hi acostuma, ja no

té problemes. El problema és que anar al cinema i sentir-lo en català encara és una cosa atípica. És atípica i aleshores costa, costa més.

SG: Això va ser molt interessant per als nens quan va néixer TV3; els nens per primera vegada podien veure dibuixos en català. I és clar, un nen té una relació amb la televisió que és molt més propera que la que hi té una persona adulta. Per què no haurien de fer-ho també amb el cinema?

ER: Jo crec que hauríem d'anar més enllà amb el cinema, però això és una qüestió de generacions. La nova llei del cinema, el doblatge, *vale*, però anem al subtitulat. En idioma original i subtitulat en català i en castellà. La tele t'ho permet, el DVD t'ho permet, pots veure els subtítols en l'idioma que vols. El primer pas és el doblatge en català, però a la llarga ni català ni castellà, res: subtítols. Que puguis triar l'opció que vols, no? Però jo, com a catalano-parlant que sóc, no puc anar al cinema i triar perquè només m'ofereixen un idioma. Hauria de tenir el dret de veure aquesta pel·li en català, per què no? O subtitulada en català, per què no? En aquest aspecte jo crec que sí, la tele encara té feina a fer. Estic parlant de Barcelona ciutat, estem parlant d'una aglomeració de tres milions de persones. És cert que a la Catalunya interior tot això canvia bastant, el català és l'idioma més vehicular i tu vas a Osona i els nens immigrants i no immigrants parlen català entre ells. Però aquí no, a Barcelona, no. Sembles tu, l'estranger. Ets català i vas en tren amunt i avall i dius 'sóc l'únic que parlo català'.

SG: Parlant també de la construcció d'un imaginari propi, la professora Ann Davies, parlant de la televisió basca, va dir que, després de la transició, va intentar donar una imatge diguem-ne rural, d'una arcàdia, per representar les tradicions, l'essència del País Basc. Jo tinc la impressió que TV3 va fer el contrari, tenia la voluntat de representar una societat molt moderna, molt dinàmica.

ER: Sí, europea, més propera al continent.

SG: I si és així, les sèries més recents com *Ventdelplà* o *Lo Cartanyà*, que han escollit poblets petits, és un canvi d'orientació en aquest sentit?

ER: No, jo crec que són qüestions puntuals. Jo crec que TV3 sempre ha tingut vocació de líder i vocació de modernitat però segurament les històries que TV3 explica en les seves sèries són històries que passen en un poble o en un altre entorn. No hi ha un canvi de tendència, crec que és més aviat el contrari. TV3 ha tornat a ser la primera tant pel que explica com al nivell tecnològic: va ser la primera a fer sèries, ha sigut i és la primera a emetre en alta definició i ha sigut i tornarà a ser la primera a emetre en 3D. I també amb els formats de programes d'entreteniment. *L'Afers Exteriors del Mikimoto*, l'han copiat totes les cadenes. Totes! I amb èxit també. Sempre som els primers, això és el que volem seguir sent. Jo crec que amb les sèries hi ha hagut una altra cosa boníssima: que ha creat un *star system* propi que no existia i ha fet que els nostres actors siguin molt valorats pels catalans, però també fora. Tu veus *Hospital Central* i sembla *El cor de la ciutat 2*. Han passat tots per allà. I parles amb directores de càsting de Madrid o directors, col·legues meus, i és que els actors catalans són molt valorats. Primer, per la qualitat interpretativa, segon, per pencaires, per la puntualitat, per l'estudi rigorós dels seus personatges, hi ha tot un entorn que ens diferencia, fins i tot a Madrid. El que passa, de vegades, és que les produccions catalanes—abans en parlava, no?—no tenen prou èxit a les Espanyes. Però també passa a l'inrevés, vull dir, grans sèries que a Espanya funcionen com *Manos a la obra* o comèdies que semblarien més casposas, moltes vegades, aquí no tenen èxit. Segons els barems, d'audiència, i cada dia els veig, el que agrada aquí és diferent del que agrada allà... Un altre cas molt clar: per què aquí a Catalunya agrada tant *Mister Bin* i a Espanya no? L'han emès totes les televisions autonòmiques amb zero per cent d'audiència i aquí l'han emès trenta vegades. Per què? Doncs perquè el caràcter català és diferent, ni millor ni

pitjor, de l'espanyol, només diferent; aleshores, l'humor nostre, és semblant a l'anglès, segurament, i l'humor de les Espanyes és més *gàrrulo*, no ho sé, és menys intel·ligent. Jo considero *Mister Bin* un personatge intel·ligentíssim i aquí agrada molt i a fora no. No ho sé...

SG: La construcció d'un imaginari propi, es fa també a través dels productes propis, com Estrella Damm o Cacaolat, que moltes vegades es mencionen o s'ensenyen? És només una qüestió comercial o hi ha una voluntat de mostrar productes propis?

ER: Crec que és una suma de les dues coses, però bàsicament és una funció comercial, són productes propis que van a un públic propi. Cacaolat es ven molt bé aquí, també a fora, suposo. Cacaolat és el patrocinador de *La Riera* i *El cor*. És un públic que és el seu. Aleshores hi ha elements comercials però també elements identitaris. Però jo crec que és més el comercial. Jo patrocino i TV3 cobra.

SG: Hem parlat de la producció però, sempre, quan es parla de sèries de televisió és molt important saber com es reben, com s'interpreta un producte com *La Riera* o *El cor de la ciutat*. I en aquest cas és molt interessant una nova plataforma que s'ha creat fa uns anys, YouTube. Amb totes les sèries de televisió, no només les catalanes, hi ha col·lectius que seleccionen imatges, retallen, per fer, diguem, noves sèries i noves interpretacions. Això va passar amb *El cor de la ciutat*, amb el personatge del Max, per exemple.

ER: I tant!

SG: El col·lectiu homosexual està utilitzant moltíssim YouTube per penjar sèries de televisió.

ER: Jo vaig rebre cartes d'uns espectadors americans, de Utah, concretament, uns senyors de 40 anys que la van enviar a l'actor i l'actor me la va reenviar a mi, perquè veiés la força del que fem aquí a vegades. Eren sobre el personatge

del Max i parleven dels personatges homosexuals... Això et dóna una idea de la força que té aquest mitjà i la del YouTube, aquesta eina que realment s'ha utilitzat per a tot això.

SG: En la meua tesi jo analitzo també aquestes interpretacions i llegint els comentaris que es poden veure a YouTube, he vist que hi ha molta gent a la Xina, molta gent de països on l'homosexualitat és un crim o un problema molt greu, que ha rebut molt bé aquest personatge, s'hi sent identificada encara que sigui un personatge de Catalunya.

ER: És això, tocar temes que no són locals, que són...

SG: ... universals.

ER: L'homosexualitat és universal, aleshores és igual d'on sigui la sèrie, el que troba l'espectador, sigui de la punta del món que sigui, és l'interès, no? Crec que aquesta és la grandesa d'aquest mitjà també, qualsevol cosa que fas arriba a tot arreu. I després hi ha la faceta aquesta, de països com la Xina, en què està penat, que és delictes, per tant aquest personatge es converteix en una finestra, una vàlvula d'escape.

SG: El que no poden veure a les seves televisions, imatges o personatges com aquest.

ER: No, no poden veure res d'això.

SG: Ara un tema molt diferent. M'agradaria saber la seva opinió sobre una qüestió que sembla no tenir final, que és la controvèrsia entre TV3 i el País Valencià. Per què hi ha aquesta controvèrsia, d'entrada?

ER: No ho entenc.

SG: Per què al País Valencià no es vol que es vegi TV3?

ER: Has fet molt bé la pregunta. El tema és per què el País Valencià no vol. Nosaltres aquí rebem el Canal 9. I allà ara es tanca Catalunya Ràdio. No ho puc entendre de cap de les maneres, aquesta sensació que tenen que els volem menjar; que li diguin el nom que vulguin, el valencià és el mateix que el nostre i si això no ho volen veure així és igual, diguem-li a tot el català valencià, jo parlo valencià. Jo crec que és una qüestió de mareig polític. No puc entendre-ho d'una altra manera.

SG: És veritat que hi ha, i sempre hi ha hagut, al País Valencià, prejudicis, conflictes amb Catalunya. Però també hi ha d'haver una raó política, en el sentit que TV3 sempre ha estat una televisió força crítica en general i també força oberta.

ER: Sí, és capdavantera en aquest aspecte també. És la més oberta.

SG: Sobretot si la comparem amb la televisió pública espanyola que va tenir dificultats amb el Partit Popular, i ara amb el govern que té el País Valencià...

ER: És l'enemic número u, Catalunya, pel govern del PP valencià. El que passa és que també s'observa una mica al nivell social. No fa massa vaig tenir una experiència parlant amb una noia de Castelló. Li vaig dir: 'ostres, ets de Castelló, parles català?' i em va fotre un moc: 'Jo parlo valencià, no parlo català'.

SG: A mi em va passar també.

ER: El que passa és que jo li dic 'em sembla molt bé, jo també parlo valencià, ens podem entendre en el nostre idioma' i ella em diu 'no, perdona, no és el mateix'... 'Perdona, sí que és el mateix'. És posar portes en el camp. És absurd. M'estàs dient una bogeria tan gran, digue-li valencià, com si li vols dir murciano, m'és igual, però és evident que parlem el mateix. El que passa és que deuen tenir la sensació que nosaltres els tractem com si parlessin un dialecte. Primer, el parlen molt poc, perquè ni el president seu parla català mai, o valencià.

D'altra banda, potser pensen que volem colonitzar València... Però això és una cosa que no passa a les Illes.

SG: Parlant dels Països Catalans, com és l'audiència a les Illes Balears? TV3 té també un gran èxit?

ER: El programa més vist a les Illes Balears és *La Riera*. Ja ho era *El cor* en els seus moments i ara ho és *La Riera*. Sí, té molta penetració, TV3. Una altra cosa és que IB3 és molt jove, és una tele molt jove. Jo vaig parlar no fa massa, arran de la pel·li que vaig fer, *Serrallonga*, amb el Director General d'IB3 perquè, d'alguna manera, la seva família estava connectada amb aquest bandoler, amb aquest personatge, i li havia agradat molt la pel·lícula. Em deia que el problema d'IB3 és que ha nascut sense suport social, o sigui, va néixer per una decisió política del PP, per tenir un instrument polític. El govern actual té una tendència més integradora amb els col·lectius socials, i vol que sigui més oberta. Però els illencs no tenen com a referència IB3, de cap de les maneres, tot i que està bé que hi sigui, tot i que també la seva llengua materna, d'IB3, és el català, o el mallorquí, o el balear, digue-li com vulguis. Però, a les Illes, la referència és TV3. A València també ho era, fins que la van tancar, fins que van tancar els repetidors. Esperem que els dos governs es posin d'acord, però desgraciadament l'última notícia és que ara és Catalunya Ràdio la que cau. No ho sé, quan al País Valencià es veia TV3, una de les sèries més seguides era *El cor de la ciutat*. Quan encara *Serrallonga* es va poder veure a València, va ser la sèrie més vista, sens dubte. I vam rebre moltes cartes de gent que deia 'tant de bo Canal 9 dediqués els diners a fer sèries de qualitat com feu vosaltres'. Però hi ha, d'una banda, una raó política i, de l'altra, un sentiment popular, tenen la sensació que ens els volem menjar.

SG: Però la tancada de TV3 va provocar moltes polèmiques. Acció Cultural i molta altra gent van intentar defensar TV3, o sigui, que potser és una societat també dividida en aquest aspecte.

ER: Sí, sí, dividida, sens dubte.

SG: M'agradaria concloure l'entrevista amb una crítica que va fer la professora Imma Tubella a TV3. Va dir que va ser una eina de normalització lingüística i cultural extraordinària però que no va tenir tant d'èxit, o el mateix èxit, a l'hora de ser una eina de normalització nacional. Vostè comparteix aquesta crítica? Ella va fer aquesta crítica el 1999: era justa a l'època o era equivocada? I, en aquests onze anys, què ha passat?

ER: Jo la comparteixo fins a un cert punt; crec que en aquell moment TV3 hagués estat bé que hagués estat més agosarada, però crec també que va ser realista en el seu moment. Jo crec que d'allà a aquí ha plogut molt. Realment, sí que en alguns moments TV3 ha ensenyat més les urpes per reivindicar un món nacional que fins a aquell moment se centrava només en el tema lingüístic. Ara bé, jo crec que el tema lingüístic és molt important perquè la cultura catalana també és nació i el tema lingüístic és cabdal en aquest aspecte. Jo crec que sempre es pot ser més agosarat, crec que TV3 és una de les televisions més independents que té l'Estat espanyol respecte del seu govern, i en aquesta època que vivim ara, amb la Mònica Terribas al capdavant, encara ho és més: és impensable veure un Canal 9 en què la directora d'una televisió entrevistí el Montilla i gairebé li estigui demanant que dimiteixi pel tema de les nevades, amb aquell sarcasme que només la Mònica Terribas sap imprimir a les seves entrevistes, però és que ve el president de Convergència i Unió i el *machaca* igual, i el president d'Esquerra Republicana, i també.

SG: També en l'entrevista que va fer a Zapatero, ella va ser molt crítica.

ER: Potser TV3 pot donar lliçons a moltes televisions, tot i que crec que Televisión Española ha canviat moltíssim des de l'època aznariana. També ha anat per aquest camí una miqueta. Però, TV3, sens dubte, podia haver fet més. Crec que en el seu moment va anar amb peus de plom perquè ja era un



problema tenir una tele en català. Recordem que quan va néixer TV3, el director general de Televisión Española va dir 'no està malament que creixin unes teles folklòriques'. I, en canvi, a TV3, per néixer, des de l'inici, li van posar totes les traves del món.

SG: I això, el que acaba de dir ara, encara és així? O sigui, a la resta de l'Estat espanyol encara hi ha un...

ER: No, jo crec que no, parlo de traves, vull dir amb Televisión Española, eh? Perquè veia que el seu nivell d'influència anava minvant. Ens posaven traves, com, per exemple, quan els reporters havien d'enviar les cintes per avió i no podien fer enllaços directes. Era molt complicat. Jo crec que no, que ha canviat molt, tant que *Serrallonga* és, després de molts anys, la primera vegada que dues televisions públiques coprodueixen una pel·lícula de sis milions d'euros. I que són coproductores totes dues. No havia passat mai fins aleshores. I a partir d'aquí han col·laborat produint altres sèries com *Ull per ull* o altres pel·lícules com *Les veus del Pamano*. Jo crec que en el futur l'únic destí és col·laborar. Davant de tot el que ve, amb tants canals, l'única sortida és que les televisions públiques facin pinya i produeixin juntes.

SG: Moltes gràcies per l'entrevista.

ER: De res.

## INTERVIEW: ESTEVE ROVIRA

(Barcelona, 18 May 2010)

Silvia Grassi: I would like to start my interview talking about the soap opera genre, which had always been very successful in Catalonia. Which are the reasons for this success in your opinion?

Esteve Rovira: The proximity of the stories, undoubtedly, whether they are familiar or not, physical proximity of stories which happen in our country, in our environment, in our cities, in our towns. Whether it is the daily afternoon soap or a weekly soap such as *Ventdelplà*, they all draw on the same kind of stories. I think the reason is proximity, the kind of characters that people recognise in their lives.

SG: I imagine it is for this reason that TV3 decided to produce its own series, such as *Poblenou*, because up to then it had broadcast foreign, British TV series.

ER: That's correct. I think TV3 takes inspiration from the BBC. For example, for the last series, *El cor de la ciutat*, which has lasted ten years, the referents are *Neighbours* or *Eastenders*—all these series that in Great Britain have been broadcast for years and years. The only referents we had here in this country—I refer to Catalonia, and Spain as well—were some Latin American series or soaps. For TV3, it meant to bet on something new, at state level, because TV3 was the first channel in the whole state to produce a series like *Poblenou*. I remember that the Head of Programming back then, Oleguer Sarsanedes, visited the BBC and spoke to the Head of Drama who said to him: 'if you do a series about stories that happen in your country, you will have success for sure'. He wanted to try; to produce *Poblenou* was like taking a personal risk. And it

was such a huge success that it was even sold to Antena3 Televisión and dubbed into Spanish.

SG: This is a question I wanted to ask because, even if not always, very often Catalan TV products don't have the same success when they go outside Catalonia. Why is that in your opinion? Is it because of its representation of a very distinct imaginary that not always connects with the rest of the territories of Spain?

ER: I think there is some of that but we are overcoming it as well. At the beginning, when we produced series such as *Poblenou* and *Secrets de família*, there was indeed a very important local component and I think it was part of their success, since in this way people could feel these series as their own. However, this began to change when we did *El cor de la ciutat*, or weekly series, such as *Porca misèria* or *La memòria dels cargols*. Why? Because they dealt with less local themes, they were open to an eventual sale to other channels and, above all, they weren't local at all. *El cor de la ciutat* is a story of a district in a city like Barcelona but...

SG: It could happen in any other...

ER: It could be London, Madrid, they are everyday stories about everyday people. The series we are doing now, *La Riera*, is the story of a matriarchy. When I was creating it, my referent was *Brothers and Sisters*, a US weekly series. So, *La Riera*, if you take it out of the context of the Maresme, rich families with problems...

SG: You can find them everywhere.

ER: In every country. In fact, in the next Festival de Cannes, *La Riera* will be presented as a perfectly exportable series: we shoot it in high definition, with cinematographic frame, that is, with all the technical advances that allow it to have an absolutely cinematographic look and image, so that it can be sold.

SG: Speaking about *La Riera*, TV3 went from *El cor de la ciutat*, which was a series about working class people, to a series about a bourgeois family. Why this difference? Was it for a need for new stories?

ER: Yes, it was for the novelty and above all for variety. If we cast our mind back...we had just done *Nissaga de poder*, which was a series about a rich wine-making family business, about wine production in the Panadès. After *Nissaga de poder*, we went to another series about upper-class people, called *Laberint d'ombres*, which in fact was a thriller: the typical story of rich girl/poor guy with a murderer thrown into it. Then, we thought we had quite enough of stories involving upper-class people and the channel considered that viewers would like to go to the roots, to stories about everyday people, so that you, as a viewer could see in these characters your neighbour or yourself. That's how *El cor de la ciutat* was created and it's evident that we made the right choice: ten years on air and a forty-fifty per cent share during its first years. We had some special episodes that not even a Barça-Madrid match would achieve, with one million and a half viewers. Obviously, there weren't thirty channels like now, but four. I think that the success of *El cor* was due to the choice of a story of proximity with a lot of characters.

SG: A series with a huge cast.

ER: Yes, there were almost ninety characters. With *La Riera*, after ten years of doing a series about everyday people, about low-middle class districts, we go back to the bourgeoisie, with a story of a matriarchy but with other aspects that we didn't deal with in *Nissaga*. It is about a woman struggling, on her own, with four sons and a restaurant. And around this family, we have other characters, but anyway the cast is not as numerous as in *El cor*, which had ninety characters. *La Riera* has thirty.

SG: Whether it's a series like *El cor de la ciutat* or a series like *La Riera*, a crucial characteristic of the soap opera genre is the representation of emotions. Bourdieu stated that television in general is going through a process of dramatisation, things are getting more and more sensationalistic. According to you, this criticism could be applied to TV3?

ER: No, I don't think so. In the case of the series, we don't look for effectiveness or morbidity, we want to create stories. I believe that the success of *El cor* and *La Riera* is to explain everyday stories. I don't know in the case of other channels, but this is the case of TV3, as a public television service, and my case when I direct *El cor de la ciutat* or *La Riera* or even the film *Serrallonga*. What is my approach as a director to the story that I try to explain? For example, a delicate story that we have dealt with in many series because it is something that happens in real life: the illness of a character, a character suffering from cancer. The script comes and, because sometimes script-writers have these tendencies to sensationalism, to increase audience or for other reasons, they have written that this character can't bear the pain and commits suicide. Another example: in *El cor*—and we will include it soon in *La Riera* as well—there is a character, Max, a sixteen-seventeen year old boy, who feels he might be gay but he has doubts. Then, possible solutions could be: 'this is wrong' or 'this is right'. We have two examples: an illness and this fact. I believe, as a director, and the channel does as well, that we can't pass on the message that the solution to cancer is suicide; and as a public television service, we can't say that being gay is bad, but we can't say is good either. I mean, this is a very personal opinion, you can do whatever you want and each channel has its own views, but I can't allow and the channel doesn't want either, that we say that the solution to cancer is committing suicide just to attract a ghoulish audience. Explain this story, a story of a character that doesn't want to suffer anymore and wants to commit suicide, but with the viewer taking sides, not the channel. I mean, we have to create a group of characters around this character that has cancer and

they express their opinion in favour or against, that is to say, we have to give all the options and it is the viewer who takes part. Working for a public television service, I can't say that the best option is to commit suicide, but I can't say the opposite either, I don't have to take sides. The characters take sides and the viewer, who is intelligent enough, will have his/her own position towards the facts. In the case of the gay teenage boy, it's exactly the same: the mother was in favour, 'you are my son and I will love you until the end', and the father was against it, and some young characters were in favour, 'it doesn't matter at all'. At the same time, there were some others that called him 'poofter'. Therefore, I think it's our duty to explain the environment even though it's true that as an author you take sides somehow, but it doesn't have to be obvious and, above all, it's the viewer who has to be involved.

SG: Speaking about homosexuality, TV3 was pioneer in Spain, with *Poblenou*. This willingness to include social issues has always been important, at least this is my impression as a TV3's viewer. Could we say, then, that TV series communicate values?

ER: Yes, undoubtedly.

SG: And how do you decide the inclusion of something which happens in Catalonia? Do you discuss how this theme could be dealt with? How does the inclusion of a social issue work?

ER: This is more a script-writers' issue, but they discuss everything with the director of the series: 'we would like to deal with this or that'. Yes, I believe that is about taking inspiration from your environment. How many times has a series been created because you have met someone to whom something similar has happened? And this makes you think that there is a story there.

SG: ...a good story.

ER: ...a good story, but there is no doubt that our job is to educate socially and explore topics. Now we are dealing with a difficult one in *La Riera*, but we won't stop dealing with it: Mauri's pederasty, an issue which started last Friday. Everybody will reject the character, everybody will reject him, in one way or another, but this issue is too hard for anyone to be in favour of it; what we will say as a public television service is this sucks but it exists, that's why we deal with it.

SG: This is very interesting because I wanted to ask whether there were any taboos in TV3. Normally, the greatest taboo on television is pederasty, it is an issue that is never dealt with and you deal with it. Are there issues that can't be dealt with in Catalan television?

ER: I have never been told 'this can't be dealt with'. What I have been told, and in fact I agree with it, is 'be careful how you talk about this'. Above all, as far as the issue of pederasty is concerned, the orders from the Head of Dramas and from Mònica Terribas, the TV3's director, were 'yes, but I don't want you to go on for months talking ghoulishly about this issue' because it is delicate. However, it is an issue that exists and unfortunately now more than ever with all the scandals within the Church. That's why we have to deal with it very carefully. That is why the character is very well defined, we have been discussing the character a lot with the actor himself, about the feelings felt by his character; we have psychologists, psychiatrists, and *Mossos d'Esquadra* [Catalan Police] as consultants. There is also a very strong subplot, which is 'be careful with the use internet'. The *Mossos* give talks in schools, with children, and advise about the dangers of chat rooms because you never know who you're really talking to, do you? Then, we take the chance to explain the dangers of the internet as well. The *Mossos* act as consultants in this aspect and they looked favourably on the fact that the series was dealing with the issue. We knew it would be delicate. We have talked with people who suffer from this

problem. The perception that psychologists have that a pederast has never the sensation that he is doing something wrong is the story we want to explain, that he believes he is misunderstood by society, that he simply falls in love with someone but, damn, they are twelve years old! To conclude, we might say that there are no taboos but in cases such as this, contrary to what happen with homosexuality or cancer, when the characters are in favour or against and viewers take their own position, here all the characters are against him, but in different ways: 'if he hasn't touched her, the child, it's not the same; yes it's abominable but he has not abused her'. That is to say, here we have a complex case and the viewer has to see the many sides of it.

SG: You mentioned the *Mossos d'Esquadra* and I remember Silvia Sabaté talking about cancer and how she consulted with lots of doctors and people who experienced it. Is this your usual way of working?

ER: We try to seek very good professional advice. In *La Riera* we even have two consultants in cooking. If you want we can go to the set after and you'll see that there is a food journalist and a chef that stay with us all day long; even more so in cases such as paedophilia. Or, for example, the *Mossos* advise us on legal matters in storylines of more commercial nature. For example, with Claudi, who is a blackmailer, an immoral character, they advise us on how to make a formal complaint or 'be careful because if you make a formal complaint then it is not so easy to withdraw it as it might seem'. We want to reflect reality, not so much a fictional world.

SG: So that everything is more realistic.

ER: Of course.

SG: Speaking about taboos, I don't know if this is the right word, but there is a clear absence in Catalan series: politics. The characters never discuss politics and politicians. Why is that?



ER: I believe, I don't know in other cases, but as far as we are concerned, we don't have time in daily series to follow the current affairs. We have thought about it sometimes. There isn't any directive from the channel. Yes, actually there is a directive from the channel, I am lying: smoking is forbidden, the characters can't smoke, you'll never see it. This is a channel's policy: 'no smoking'. And sometimes there are sequences where smoking would help to construct a character, but we can't, it's the only imposition, within inverted commas. As a nonsmoker, I find it fantastic, but sometimes it takes the credibility of some characters away.

SG: Yes, it's true, it could be useful to create...

ER: ...some atmospheres, moods, anyway, you'll see that absolutely nobody here smokes. However, we were talking about taboos, weren't we?

SG: Yes, there seems to be an intention of not getting involved, not getting your feet wet, so to speak, no character is a member any political party, *Convergència* [centre-right Catalan party] or of the Socialist Party.

ER: Absolutely not. This is not the case. As far as the daily series are concerned, we get the scripts of what we show today four months before; sometimes we would like to talk about 'there are elections in the *Diagonal*', or express a criticism about something. However, when the episode is broadcast, you have written it four months ago, you have shot it three months ago, you have edited two months and a half ago, it isn't current affairs anymore, it's impossible. That's why we never talk about political elections, it's impossible, we would do fiction-politics.

SG: You would talk about things that are not current affairs anymore.

ER: We tried to find a way of writing a sequence, leaving it open for when the day comes'...but there is never a coincidence between the event and the day in which the programme is shown. We can't include anything because you should

shoot it a week before and edit it and then doing the audio...there is no way. Other weekly series have done the same, but I don't think it's because of any imposition from above, absolutely not.

SG: You said that the only directive is the no-smoking one. Therefore, would you say that politics, or the political shift from *Convergència* to socialists, don't interfere with the series?

ER: Yes, I would.

SG: I am making these comments because the political influence on publically funded media, not only in Catalonia but everywhere, is often an object of debate.

ER: For sure and in Catalonia as well, that's probably more the case with news programmes. However, we went through the political shift while we were shooting *El cor de la ciutat* and with the *Convergència* governments there was never any interference; the no-smoking policy had been already in place for a number of years, but without any political connotation. We showed very difficult stories in *El cor de la ciutat* and the series has been given several awards. The Generalitat [Catalan Government] gave an award to *El cor* in its last series as best TV drama for its values and for being a shelter for..., four thousands actors passed through *El cor de la ciutat*. No, no, absolutely not, I have to strongly deny it, there isn't any kind of political pressure, and the general director simply gives his/her own views. When the scriptwriters hand in the stories, I am the first to seek the advice of the general director, 'I have been given this, what do you think?', he/she can say 'be careful with this, be careful with that' but we have never been said 'don't go ahead with it'.

SG: Now I would like to talk about an issue that is very important on Catalan television: the language. There has always been, not discussions, but differences of opinion: representing Catalan as the own language of the country, with an

almost exclusive use of it, or representing a more bilingual society, with a more frequent use of Spanish. What's your opinion about this?

ER: Well, one thing is the channel's policy, which is what it is: TV3 was created for the use and promotion of Catalan language, otherwise it wouldn't exist. I think this is the reason why TV3 was created and it has to be this way, otherwise, it wouldn't exist. There is no other radio-television channel that broadcast in Catalan. There was only a little space some years ago on Spanish public television, on La2. Having said that, I think that especially fiction has to reflect the reality and the reality is that Catalan society is bilingual. Does this mean that in all series, from the point of view of the channel, the characters have to express themselves in Catalan? We have absolutely no prohibition against including a Spanish-speaking character but the channel requires that the Spanish-speaking characters also make some effort to integrate and sometimes speak in Catalan and this is something that I agree with as a director. For example, now we have Valeria, an Argentinean young woman who speaks Spanish, but we'll see how little by little she would utter some words in Catalan. The important thing is to see the willingness to integrate themselves into Catalan society in people who come from outside.

SG: This shows a difference between what has to be the representation of one reality and a desire of projecting a society the way you would like it to be.

ER: Of mutual respect, as well. Moreover, through the series, we would like to give a sense of normality: you speak to me in Spanish and I reply to you in Catalan. Don't we understand each other without any problems? Usually, in real life, what happens is that Catalan-speaking people have the tendency to shift from Catalan to Spanish and this doesn't help the new comers...

SG: ... integrate and learn Catalan...

ER: ... integrate. After all, what happens in *La Riera* and all the series we have done, is that there are Castilians who speak Spanish and Catalans who reply in Catalan. We provide a touch of normality because many Spanish people understand Catalan but have difficulties in speaking it. However, if you understand me, why can't I speak my own language? We try to reflect this, so what happens in the series is that Spanish-speaking people, little by little, integrate themselves and sometimes utter some words in Catalan. We just do it as an element of integration.

SG: I also find it very interesting how the use of Catalan has changed, because at the beginning, it was a very standardised Catalan and now a Catalan of different registers is increasingly accepted. I remember that, at the beginning, there were some complaints of directors and script-writers who stated that this obsession, within inverted commas, for correction complicated the representation of characters.

ER: It didn't sound natural. You would watch and say 'we don't talk like that in our everyday life'. Little by little, linguistics and directors tried to convince Catalan television that you should speak correctly but you should also keep in mind how you talk outside the set, so that people would believe it.

SG: So that it would be more realistic. Going back to the language issue, TV3 was created with a socio-linguistic aim, that of improving the knowledge of Catalan, which had been forbidden and repressed for forty years. Now that it is the vehicular language of the educational system in Catalonia, do you think that TV3 should still have this function, for example, with immigrants.

ER: Yes, I believe it should. Despite the linguistic immersion, I think the Catalan is paradoxically being lost in everyday life. I don't know why this is happening. We had such a significant flow of immigration from South America, from being six millions five years ago, we are now seven and a half; it's one million and a

half people that don't have Catalan as their mother-tongue and they don't want to make the effort of learning it. I don't criticise them for it: it's difficult enough for them to have to leave their country, go to a foreign one, and it's easy that, if your language is Spanish and here we all understand it, you don't need to make the effort. But there are indeed people who make this effort, aren't they? In this respect, I think that what happens on television has nothing to do with what happens in the school, where it's evident that all teenagers grow up having a perfect command of both languages. However, in Barcelona, you walk down the street and everybody speaks Spanish. That's why I think it would be good if teenagers watched successful films in Catalan, the way it happened to us, to me, when I was in my twenties. TV3 was created and suddenly you found yourself watching foreign series in Catalan. All your life you had watched cinema dubbed into Spanish, and you don't even like it hearing it in Catalan, because it's like a new language. Here, on television, Catalan has been accepted. People watch TV3 and, in fact, it is the most followed channel in Catalonia. What I am trying to say is that a good job has been done, that people has got used to listening to and watching great Hollywood actors in Catalan. However, this doesn't happen with cinema.

SG: Yes, it's true, I also wanted to ask you about this huge difference between cinema and television. Joan Fuster stated that a country doesn't have any identity if it doesn't have its own popular culture to sustain it. This has worked magnificently with TV3, which has done a job that everybody recognises as crucial, but it hasn't happened the same way with Catalan cinema.

ER: This is also the case with theatre because Catalan is the most used language in theatre in Catalonia. There are also plays in Spanish and it's very good, but you go to the theatre and you are not surprised at all to see a Catalan play. It's the other way around, you see a Spanish play and say uhm, because I think it's a dog that bites its own tale. What happens then with the cinema? The big

majors are not interested in dubbing into Catalan even though the Generalitat is happy to finance the dubbing. Now, as you know, there is a bill being discussed that not even the cinema-owners want. They are afraid that people won't go to see films in Catalan. Of course they don't go, but people don't go because they don't have options. They make a film and five copies are distributed: one in Barcelona, one in Girona... They say there are no cinema-goers, of course there aren't, but that's because you don't give them the options, do you? Maybe, if there were more copies, let's say a fifty per cent and fifty per cent...if people watch it on TV3, why shouldn't they go to the cinema to see a film in Catalan? It's just a question of getting used to it and then that's the end of it. The problem is that going to the cinema and watch a film in Catalan is still unusual thing. It's unusual, then it's difficult, it's more difficult.

SG: When TV3 was created, this process was very interesting, especially for the children, who, for the first time, could watch cartoons in Catalan. And, obviously, a child establishes a more direct relationship with television than an adult. Why shouldn't they do the same with the cinema?

ER: I think that we should go further with cinema, but this takes generations. As far as the new bill is concerned, the dubbing is fine, but subtitling is a better option. In the original language and subtitled in Catalan and Spanish. Television allows you to do it, the DVD allows you to do it, you can see the subtitles in the language you want, can't you? The first step is the dubbing in Catalan, but ultimately neither Catalan nor Spanish, just subtitles, so that you can choose the option you want. However, as a Catalan-speaking person, I can't go to the cinema and choose because I am only offered one language, Spanish. I should have the right to watch this film in Catalan, why not? Or subtitled in Catalan, why not? In this respect, I think that, yes, television still has some work to do. I am talking about the city of Barcelona, in particular, with a population of three millions people. It's true that in inland Catalonia the situation is quite

different: Catalan is the vehicular language. You go to the Osona area, and immigrant and non immigrant children speak Catalan among themselves. But in Barcelona they don't. It seems that you are the stranger. You are Catalan and you take the train up and down and say 'I am the only one who speaks Catalan'.

SG: Going back to the construction of a Catalan imaginary, Professor Ann Davies, talking about Basque television, stated that, after the Transition, it tried to give a rural image, of an Arcadia, to represent through traditions the 'essence' of the Basque Country. I have the impression that TV3 did just the opposite, there was a clear willingness of representing a very modern and dynamic society.

ER: Yes, European, more similar to the continent.

SG: If that is true, do more recent series such as *Ventdelplà* or *Lo Cartanyà*, which are set in small towns, represent a change of orientation in this sense?

ER: No, they are exceptions. I think TV3 has always had a vocation of leadership and modernity but the stories that TV3 explains in its series are stories that may happen in any sort of town. There isn't a change of orientation, I think it's the other way round, TV3 is again the leader both for its contents and its state of the art technology: it was the first to produce series, then it was the first to broadcast in high definition and it has been and it will be again the first to broadcast in 3D. It has been leader also in the production of other entertainment formats, such as Mikimoto's *Afers Exteriors*, which has been copied by all channels. All! And very successfully as well. We are always the first, and this is what we want to keep doing. I think that with the series there has been another very positive aspect: we have created our own star system, which didn't exist before and our actors are highly valued outside Catalonia as well. You watch *Hospital Central* and it seems you are watching *El cor de la ciutat*

2. All of them have passed through it. And you talk to casting directors in Madrid or directors, colleagues of mine, and the Catalan actors are very well considered: first of all, for the quality of their acting, secondly, because they work very hard; the punctuality, the rigorous study of their characters—they have a great reputation, which distinguishes us, even in Madrid. What happens is that, sometimes, Catalan series are not quite successful in Spain. However, the opposite is also true. Successful series that in Spain work well, such as *Manos a la obra*, or comedies that would seem more eccentric have no success here. According to the audience ratings—I see them every day—what is enjoyed here is very different from what is enjoyed there. Another very clear case: why is it that here in Catalonia we like *Mr. Bin* so much and in Spain they don't? It has been shown in all autonomic channels with a zero per cent of audience and here it has been shown thirty times. Why is that? Well, because the Catalan character is different, neither better nor worst, than the Spanish, just different; then, our humor is similar to the British humor whereas the Spanish humor is more... explicit, I don't know. It's less intelligent, I consider *Mr. Bin* to be a very intelligent character and people like him here but not outside. I don't know...

SG: Speaking again about the construction of a Catalan imaginary, how relevant is the inclusion of Catalan products such as Estrella Damm or Cacaolat, which are often mentioned or shown? Is it just a commercial issue or is there a willingness to representing domestic products?

ER: I think it's the sum of the two things, but basically it has a commercial function, they are domestic products aimed at a domestic audience. Cacaolat sells well here, I imagine that outside as well. Cacaolat is the sponsor of *La Riera* and *El cor*. It has its own audience. Therefore, there are commercial but also identity factors as well. However, my impression is that the commercial side of it prevails. I sponsor and TV3 gets the money.



SG: So far, we have been talking about production but when we talk about TV series is always very important to examine how a programme, such as *La Riera* or *El cor de la ciutat*, is received and interpreted. In this sense, it's very interesting to comment on a new arena which was created few years ago: YouTube. For all television series, not only from Catalonia, there are communities that select images and edit them to create new series and new interpretations. This happened with *El cor de la ciutat* with the character of Max, for example.

ER: Of course.

SG: The gay community is using YouTube a lot to upload TV series.

ER: I received some letters from some American viewers, from Utah, to be precise, some men in their forties sent them to the actor playing Max, and the actor sent them to me so that I could see the impact of what we are doing. They were about the character of Max, since we were talking about gay characters... This gives you an idea of the strength that television and YouTube have.

SG: In my thesis, I also analyse these interpretations and, by reading the comments that have been posted on YouTube, I have noticed that quite a lot of people from China and from other countries where homosexuality is still a crime or a serious problem, have identified with this character, even if it's a character from Catalonia.

ER: This is it, exploring themes which are not local, that are...

SG: ... universal.

ER: Homosexuality is universal, then it doesn't matter where the series is set, what the viewer finds is the connection, even if he/she is on the other side of the world. I believe that this is the greatness of the medium, whatever you do, reaches millions. And then, as you say, it is important for people in countries

like China, where homosexuality is still illegal, to find a character that becomes a window, an escape valve.

SG: And they can't watch on their TV broadcasts images or characters like this.

ER: No, they cannot watch anything like this.

SG: Now a very different theme, I would like to know your opinion about an issue that doesn't seem to have an end, which is the controversy between TV3 and the Autonomous Community of Valencia. Where does this controversy come from?

ER: I don't understand it.

SG: Why is it that TV3 can't be seen in the Autonomous Community of Valencia?

ER: You have formulated the question very well. The issue is why the Autonomous Community of Valencia doesn't want to have access to Catalan television. Here we receive the Valencian Canal 9. And they are now closing Catalunya Ràdio. I can't understand it at all, this feeling they have that we want to eat them; just call your language the way they like, Valencian is the same language as Catalan and, if they don't want to see it this way, it's fine, let's call all Catalan with the term Valencian, I speak Valencian. I believe it's an issue of political confrontation. I can't understand it in any other way.

SG: I wanted to ask about this because it's true that there are and there always have been some prejudices in Valencia, a sort of conflict with Catalonia. However, there must be a political issue as well, since TV3 has always been quite an inquisitive and free channel.

ER: It has been a leader in this respect as well. It's one of the freest.

SG: Especially if compared with Spanish public television, which experienced difficulties when the Partido Popular [right-wing Spanish party] was in office. Now, with the conservative government in the Autonomous Community of Valencia ...

ER: Catalonia is the number one enemy for the PP government in Valencia. This is also evident at a social level. Not so long ago, I had an experience when talking to a young woman from Castelló. I told her 'ah, you are from Castelló, do you speak Catalan?' and what she replied to me was 'I speak Valencian, not Catalan'.

SG: It happened to me as well.

ER: What happens is that I tell her 'It seems fine to me, I also speak Valencian, we can understand each other in our language' and 'no, sorry, it isn't the same'... 'Sorry, it is indeed the same'. It's like placing doors on an open field, it's absurd, call it Valencian, call it Murcian if you want, it doesn't matter, but what it's evident is that we speak the same language. They must think that we treat them like they were speaking in dialect. First of all, they hardly speak Valencian at all, not even their president does it. Maybe they think that we want to colonise Valencia... But this doesn't happen in the Balearic Islands.

SG: Speaking about the Catalan Countries, how is the audience in the Balearic Islands? Has TV3 a great success there as well?

ER: The most watched programme in the Balearic Islands is *La Riera*. It was *El cor* before and now it's *La Riera*. Yes, TV3 has been very well accepted. Another reason might be that IB3 is still a very recent channel. Not long ago, as a consequence of the film I directed, *Serrallonga*, I talked to the General Director of IB3 since his family was connected to the main character of the film. He really enjoyed it. He told me that the problem of IB3 is that it was created without social support, that is to say, it was born out of a PP's political decision in order

to have a political tool at their service. The current left-wing government has a more social-minded policy of integration and wants to make IB3 freer. However, the inhabitants of the Balearic Islands don't have IB3 as a reference at all, even if it's positive that it exists, even if IB3's mother-tongue language is Catalan, or *mallorquí*, or *balear*, call it the way you like. But in the Balearic Islands the reference is TV3. It was the case in Valencia as well, before they closed down the transmitters. We hope that the two governments would find an agreement but unfortunately now they are also closing Catalunya Ràdio. I don't know, when TV3 could be watched in Valencia, one of the most followed series was *El cor de la ciutat*. When *Serrallonga* could be watched in Valencia, it was also the most popular series, no doubt about that. And we received many letters from people saying 'we would like that Canal 9 would spend money to make quality series like you do'. To sum up, we have politics on one side, and the popular feeling that we want to eat them on the other.

SG: The closing down of TV3 caused many controversies; Acció Cultural, and lots of people took part in the initiative to defend TV3, so the Valencian society is divided in this respect.

ER: Yes, there are divisions in the Valencian society, no doubt.

SG: I would like to conclude the interview with a criticism that Dr Imma Tubella made towards TV3. She stated that it was an extraordinary tool for linguistic and cultural normalisation, but it didn't have the same success in being a tool for national normalisation. Do you share this criticism? She said it in 1999: was it right or was it wrong then? And what has happened in these eleven years?

ER: I share this opinion to a certain extent: I think TV3 could have been more daring then, but I also think that it took a realistic approach. It has rained a lot since then. Occasionally TV3 has been more audacious when making language

the most significant identity factor. I believe that the language issue is so important because Catalonia is also a nation and language has always been crucial. I believe that you can always be more bold, I think TV3 is one of the most independent television channels in Spain as far as the relation to its government is concerned. Now, even more than ever, with Mònica Terribas as director. It's impossible to image a Canal 9 director interviewing President Montilla and practically demanding his resignation over the snow incident, with the sarcasm with which only Mònica Terribas can conduct interviews. But it's the same when she interviews the president of *Convergència i Unió* or the president of *Esquerra Republicana* [left independentist party].

SG: She was also very critical with President Zapatero.

ER: Maybe many channels could learn from TV3, even though I think that Spanish public television has changed a lot since the Aznar years. It has also gone down this freer path a little. However, there is no doubt that TV3 could have done more. I believe that when it was created, it behaved cautiously because to have a channel in Catalan was in itself quite a struggle. Let's remind ourselves that when TV3 was born, the General Director of Spanish public television said that 'it is not that bad to have some folkloric channels', while they were being as obstructive as they could be.

SG: And what about now? Is it still like this? In the rest of Spain is there still a...

ER: No, I don't think so. When I say obstacles I am referring to the Spanish public television and to their concern about TV3 undermining their influence. They created all sorts of problems, such as forcing reporters to send tapes by plane and not allowing online connections. It was very complicated. I believe that the situation has changed a lot, so much so that *Serrallonga* has been the first film coproduced by the two public television services with a budget of six millions euros. It has never happened before. And since then, they have

collaborated in producing other series, such as *Ull per ull* or other films like *Les veus del Pamano*. I believe our fate is to collaborate with each other in the future. Especially now with so many channels, the only way out is that the two public television services stick together and produce together.

SG: Thank you very much for the interview.

ER: You are welcome.

## Appendix 2

### ENTREVISTA: JOSEP MARIA BENET I JORNET

(Barcelona, 17 de maig de 2011)

Silvia Grassi: Joan Fuster va dir que un país no té identitat si no té la seva pròpia cultura de masses i m'agradaria preguntar-li quin paper creu tenen les sèries de televisió en la construcció d'un imaginari català propi.

Benet i Jornet: Per mi és una pregunta una mica difícil de respondre. No voldria anar més enllà... però jo crec que les sèries, totes, no només aquestes [telenovel·les], sinó les d'humor, les adaptacions que hi ha hagut, de vegades, de novel·les, doncs sí, jo crec que, d'una banda, ajuden a crear un imaginari català perquè proposen de manera, diríem no massa directa, sense fer cap mena de propaganda, parlar del país. I, fins i tot, de vegades—no es pot anar allà cada dia perquè són molts diners—hem fet referència a Mallorca. Jo suposo que sí. Hi ha una altra qüestió que és més difícil: que els castellano-parlants, que a Barcelona són un percentatge enorme, s'enganxin a TV3. No es fa l'esforç. La senyora que ens porta la casa, que és una senyora molt maca i l'estimem molt, no posa mai TV3, mai. I entén el català i jo li parlo català i castellà, però ella, que és una persona que estima Catalunya, etc, no la posa. Instintivament, va a buscar les altres cadenes nacionals. No sóc optimista; tot i així, jo penso que d'una manera o altra un mínim sí que aquestes sèries i aquestes coses han obert una petita porta. I no únicament a la comunitat catalana, que aquesta la tenim guanyada. De fet, malgrat tot, TV3 acostuma a ser líder d'audiència cada mes

aquí, d'una manera molt continuada. Això vol dir que hi ha algú que ens mira que és castellano-parlant, que s'hi enganxa i ja s'hi queda i això és molt important, molt important, molt important. Jo sempre dic que abans de la guerra hi havia un humorista popular que era en Josep Maria Folch i Torres que va començar fent bones novel·les, complexes i ambicioses, i després va fer un gir i va anar a parar a la literatura infantil sentimental i d'aventura, per nanos, i va tenir un èxit enorme, enorme, enorme. Va aconseguir que els catalans, que parlaven català fessin el petitíssim esforç de llegir en català i d'acostumar-s'hi. Això es va fer a través de la revista *Atlàntida*, i a través d'un còmic que va tenir un èxit enorme perquè el compraven els nens però també el compraven els adults. Es deia *En Patufet* i va fer una literatura, diguem-ne, humil d'ambició, però amb una repercussió social molt important. I, jo, des de el primer dia, vaig pensar, ara estem en una situació molt pitjor perquè no és que la gent parli català i escrigui en castellà, és que tothom a l'escola aprèn a escriure en català i el català, si és que no el saben, però en canvi, després, tornen al castellà. Vam intentar que aquest públic tan ampli també hi entrés. Intentar-ho, ho hem intentat. I és aquest un dels motius pels quals, de tant en tant, com aquell que no fa res, treiem un personatge de parla castellana perquè la gent que ho vegi que sigui castellana, no se senti...

SG: ... exclosa...

BJ: ... sola, sinó que vegin que també parlem de personatges positius que són de parla castellana. A mi m'agradaria molt pensar que amb aquest tipus de coses televisives, senzilles, i que tenen molt poc a veure amb el teatre que jo escric, podem, potser, aconseguir una mica...—no sóc triomfalista, gens, gens, gens, gens—guanyar algú que no ha d'abandonar al castellà en absolut, però que, almenys, s'acostumi al català i que s'hi atreveixi. Si han nascut aquí, és més fotut.



SG: Voldria fer-li un parell de preguntes sobre els continguts de les sèries. Hi ha molts autors que consideren que a les telenovel·les, sobretot les europees, les dones tenen una funció modernitzadora, o sigui, que són la força per als canvis. Hi ha moltes autores feministes que diuen que és per això que un públic femení tan ampli mira les telenovel·les, perquè en els altres formats televisius no tenen aquest paper tan positiu i tan modernitzador. És així?

BJ: A *Poblenou*, com a *La Riera* en aquest moment, sí. El títol *La Riera* fa referència a una riera, però és un doble joc perquè el cognom dels protagonistes és el de la família Riera. La protagonista és una dona gran, la Mercè Riera. A *Ventdelplà* també hi ha una protagonista femenina. A *Poblenou* estava més repartit, però el personatge femení era important i a més a més era el que prenia al final la decisió de separar-se del marit. No era ell, era ella. També a una sèrie que es deia *Laberint d'ombres*, que va ser un desastre, vam posar un parella de lesbianes que eren molt importants com a personatges, una era la mare de la protagonista, a més a més. Es feien petons, encara que no les veiem al llit, però en tot cas veiem una relació normal, acceptada pels altres. Els únics que no l'acceptaven eren personatges negatius. I tot això ho hem anat fent. Hem fet això i aquestes coses però també hem fet moltes altres coses. Hem fet, per exemple...nosaltres hem fet l'Alzheimer. Hem explicat tot el procés de l'Alzheimer. Ho podem fer perquè tenim la sort de treballar a la televisió: truques i dius, 'sóc escriptor de televisió, em dic així i m'interessaria de parlar amb vostès'. I bom! Perquè els interessa molt. Aquesta també és una manera personal, com a experiència, d'entrar en aquests mons, perquè, és clar, els vas a visitar, t'ho ensenyen, t'ho expliquen, parles amb ells quan tens alguns dubtes, per si ho fas malament. O, per exemple, agafar un personatge i fer que tingui un accident i que quedi minusvàlid. Una noia, una noia protagonista quedava en una cadira, i la gent deia quan s'aixecarà, i jo contestava doncs quan hi hagi una manera d'aixecar-se, ja l'aixecarem, no som aquí per fer miracles, sinó per tractar la realitat. Era qüestió de fer aquestes històries sempre d'una manera

positiva, és a dir, agafar aquesta noia que en un primer moment no sap ben bé què li passa, no s'adona que serà per tota la vida. Vaig anar a l'Institut Guttman que s'ocupa només d'aquestes qüestions dels minusvàlids i on, a més a més, el vuitanta% són joves. És terrible, és molt dur. És un lloc preciós, preciós, i no únicament ens van donar explicacions, sinó que ens van deixar l'Institut, una ala en què no hi havia pràcticament malalts, perquè poguéssim gravar i rodar allà. Per exemple, recordo que en un moment determinat, al metge, que era al nostre interlocutor, li vaig dir 'ara et diré una cosa perquè em diguis que no. Molts intenten suïcidar-se'. I li vaig dir, 'ho posaré, no m'ho diràs però en tot cas vull que facin tot el recorregut, primer d'un optimisme eufòric estrany, i al cap de tres mesos fer una baixada a la depressió més forta. I una depressió molt forta significa també el suïcidi'. I ell, 'Per favor, per favor, no facis que passi a l'Institut Guttman', i no, no, passarà fora del vostre control, a casa seva, es llençarà a la piscina i arribarà el noi que es llençarà a la piscina, la traurà i també s'enamorarà d'ella. El que volem és veure com aquesta noia va refent la seva vida, una noia en una cadira de rodes que es converteix en una novel·lista, una novel·lista coneguda, etc. O per exemple, agafar un càncer, però veure tota la evolució del càncer fins a la mort. Com que saps que molta gent que té càncer mira aquesta sèrie havíem de jugar-ho bé. I jugar-ho bé era que des del principi aquest personatge havia d'anar al metge i no hi anava, no hi anava i no hi anava. Llavors el missatge és 'aneu al metge, que molts càncers es resolen'. I llavors vam fer una història d'amor que era molt bonica, tenia un amant que era més jove que ella. Ella es moria mentre mirava la televisió, on hi sortia el noi, que era músic i triomfava en un concert. Quan acabava, agafava unes pastilles que ja tenia preparades. Aquestes coses ens agrada molt fer-les i de vegades han estat polèmiques. Potser ara ha canviat una mica la cosa, però també hi ha la qüestió de les aigües contaminades per excrements de porcs. Hi ha dos focus a Catalunya molts clars amb aquest problema i *patamam*, el vam posar. Els del lloc van dir que què ens havíem cregut, que volíem pujar l'audiència. Van sortir a la

televisió dient 'això no passa'. Jo els vaig dir, 'ho sento molt però en el poble on visc durant quatre mesos no podem beure aigua de l'aixeta perquè ens ho van prohibir per aquest motiu'. O sigui, normalment 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.

SG: En aquest sentit, per tu, la televisió pot ser un agent de canvi social? O sigui, pot tenir un cert tipus de missatge? Hi ha un autor, per exemple, que va definir *EastEnders* com un 'text didàctic' per la seva manera de representar la immigració.

BJ: 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. Aquestes coses les fem. De fet, *EastEnders* era un model. Jo t'he de dir una cosa: ni de *Coronation Street* ni de *Eastenders*, no en vaig veure cap capítol mai. Mai, però ja sabia què eren. No els vam mirar. Sí, sí, tot això ho hem fet. A veure, en definitiva, sí, és didàctic. Som didàctics. Declaradament didàctics, en les sèries.

SG: En aquest sentit pensava també en la representació de la violència de gènere que hi havia a *Poblenou*, que era molt explícita. Recordo el personatge de la Charo que patia violència sexual per part del seu marit i es deia que el fet que fossin casats no era una justificació per a aquest tipus de violència.

BJ: Sí, però hi ha un altra sèrie que es diu *Ventdelplà*, que ara s'ha acabat, i que ha durat cinc anys, en què el motor inicial era una dona que fugia de casa en el

primer capítol. Agafava els nens i se'ls emportava per no aguantar la misèria. Ell la perseguia i li feia mal. Durant les primeres dues temporades aquest tema va ser bàsic. I el motor que va posar en marxa la sèrie va ser aquest, la violència domèstica. A més a més, vam fer una cosa: els personatges no eren de classe popular sinó de classe mitjana-alta, on això sempre queda amagat. No se'n parla. I és evident que n'hi ha. N'hi ha. I ella, a més a més, era metgessa. I això va anar molt bé.

SG: Al Regne Unit hi ha molts estudis que demostren que hi ha nous grups, sobretot estudiants universitaris i adolescents, que s'han aficionat a les telenovel·les. Aquí també passa que vostè sàpiga? Hi ha un públic més enllà del públic femení...

BJ: Ah, sí! Els joves, molt. Més les noies que els nois però ells també, de vegades. No, no, perdona, una cosa que no t'havia dit abans. Aquestes sèries, iestic segur que allà també, no les veuen només la gent popular i les dones, les veuen advocats i polítics i les veu tothom, el que passa és que dissimulen! El meu dentista em deia 'la meva mare es veu aquesta sèrie que tu portes i et pregunta tal cosa' i t'ho explicava. Què dius ta mare, ets tu! I ta mare de passada, si vols, però ets tu que te la mires. I hi ha hagut polítics i metges que ens han trucat per dir-nos gràcies, endavant, ens agraden molt. A més, ens demanen si podríem incloure un problema determinat, perquè els aniria molt bé. Aquestes coses ens han passat constantment en aquest tipus de sèries. [...]. De tota manera hi ha coses molt dolentes, de vegades, a la televisió. Nosaltres ho intentem, encara que segur que també hem fet coses dolentes, però amb una intenció... diríem col·lectiva, és a dir, pensant en el col·lectiu que mira la televisió i que és molt més ampli que el col·lectiu de les dones, molt més ampli. Però no ara, ja des del principi. Les adolescents i els nens també miren les sèries, i totes les classes socials, totes, totes. Els hem 'agafat', tot i que en aquest moment no sé ben bé com és la situació. Aquí, la gent, al menys la gent de parla catalana, els

castellans són un altra història, però si són d'aquí, a la tarda, posen els serials. Ara bé, és diferent amb les sèries no diàries, sinò setmanals. Vam fer una sèrie que es deia *Infidels* i que eren cinc amigues, les protagonistes eren dones, noies entre trenta i quaranta anys. Eren cinc amigues i no era com *Sex in the City*, eren gent classe mitjana, amb problemes reals. Eren històries d'amor, d'amistat, i aquesta sèrie, curiosament, que era molt moderna, a més a més, i que pensàvem 'això serà un crack', tenia un públic tan fidelíssim que quan es va a acabar, es va indignar, va protestar, va enviar cartes. No obstant, a part d'aquest públic, no la veia ningú.

SG: Era un públic molt menys nombrós.

BJ: No la miraven.

SG: Vostè mateix ara ha dit que a la televisió es fan coses molt dolentes i Bourdieu va comentar que la televisió està passant per un procés de dramatització, o sigui, que cada vegada hi ha més sensacionalisme, que les coses s'exageren, sobretot les íntimes. En aquest sentit, TV3, sobretot en les sèries, no ho va fer això? Creu que TV3 està passant per aquest procés?

BJ: No, no. No s'ha fet això. Ni TV3 ni a Televisió Espanyola. No sé si algunes de les privades ho han fet. El que sí fan són concursos, fan concursos, no fan sèries. Em sembla que a TVB, Televisió de Barcelona, hi ha un individu que és conegut per la seva televisió de vegades una mica animal, que fa comentaris sobre la televisió o de vegades fa anar personatges a la televisió per entrevistar-los, però quan parla en general de les coses, se les carrega molt. El que fa aquest payo, que a mi no m'agrada gaire, és posar en qüestió tots aquests tipus d'escombraries televisives. Jo diria que La1 no les fa o, si les fa, les fa molt ben dissimulades. Ara, les altres viuen gairebé d'això. Fan programes terribles, amb persones ignorants. Els hi dius la paraula Shakespeare i es pensen que és una beguda. Vull dir que aquest és el nivell. A una d'aquestes li diuen 'la reina del

pueblo', i això el públic, el públic! 'La Reina del pueblo' o 'la Princesa del pueblo', una cosa així. Però en majúscula, eh?

SG: A Itàlia també tenim molt programes com aquests a les televisions privades, però també a la pública. Jo, aquí, trobo que hi ha una diferència en aquest sentit a Catalunya. O sigui, la televisió pública, a Itàlia, s'ha posat exactament al mateix...

BJ.: Ah, la italiana, molt!

SG: ...al mateix nivell que les televisions privades, amb molts *reality shows*.

BJ: Segurament tot això ve una mica de la televisió italiana.

SG: De Telecinco i Canale 5, sí sí.

BJ: Sí, jo diria que ho vam agafar d'allà perquè Itàlia va començar abans.

SG: Per acabar, unes últimes preguntes. Com us plantegeu un tema social, o sigui, quan voleu introduir un determinat tema, com ara l'homosexualitat o l'Alzheimer, com ho feu? Discutiu l'actualitat, o contacteu una persona que coneixeu...

BJ: Sí i no. Quan es comença a gravar una sèrie ja es tenen escrits tots els capítols. Bé, els capítols no, tenim tota la Bíblia feta. Per tant, sabem on comencem i sabem on anem. Sabem en quin punt i en quin moment posarem un conflicte o una cosa de tipus social, didàctic. Sempre embolcallats per passions i pel que sigui. Però ho sabem des del principi i sabem on anirà a parar. I per tant sí que pot passar, però des del principi ho tenim tot tot preparat. Ens sembla que és interessant posar aquest tema o aquest altre i, llavors, de sobte, si és una sèrie molt llarga, pot passar que vingui algú... Per exemple, un metge de l'Hospital Clínic, que és cap d'investigació, i amic meu, em va trucar i em va dir, 'escolta'm, seria *estupendo* que en aquesta nova sèrie hi hagués algun cas de diabetis'. Em va dir, 'podries tractar d'això?'. I llavors, com

que hi havia molts capítols, doncs vam introduir una nena des del moment en què anava a l'hospital perquè tenia un problema: es desmaiava i es descobria que tenia diabetis. Vam fer tot el procés fins al final en què aquesta nena era capaç de cuidar-se ella mateixa, que és la cosa més important per als diabètics. I per una criatura, encara més. Tot el procés volia dir que cada dia l'havien de punxar: es desespera, tu l'has de punxar, ho has de fer, els pares pateixen, les coses van evolucionant, etc. A més a més, vam fer, com que son serials i hem de fer coses dramàtiques, vam fer que aquesta nena en un moment determinat es quedava tancada en una casa. Sola. Tothom la buscava i no la trobaven i llavors pensaven que quan la trobarien, la trobarien morta. No la trobaven morta perquè la nena havia seguit exactament les pautes que s'han de seguir quan no tens el medicament. Si hagués estat més temps allà... però vam fer just el temps que era possible, ja m'entens. La va trobar la mare que era una dona vídua i veia que havia de deixar-li més llibertat perquè era una dona que la sobrecuidava, no la deixava anar d'excursió, no li deixava fer res. Hem fet tot el seguiment de tots els problemes que tenia una criatura que patís això, ho hem fet. I això era una cosa que, és veritat, no estava prevista al principi, a la Bíblia general, però sempre es poden introduir coses.

SG: I una última pregunta: és veritat que es tracten molts temes socials, però jo he notat que en les sèries de televisió no es parla gaire, o gens, de política, en el sentit estricte. O sigui, no es poden comentar determinades coses? A què obeeix això?

BJ: A la televisió pública no tens dret a citar partits polítics. Jo ho comprenc, la televisió és per a tothom. Per tant, per a tots els públics de tots els partits polítics. El que passa és que se'ns escapa la mà per l'esquerra, això també és veritat. Hi ha hagut algun problema per alguna sèrie que es fa a Madrid, *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, que quan guanyi el PP segur que l'eliminarà. Com a un altra que vam fer uns anys enrere, ambientada en els anys 20, i que era sobre

problemes de l'època, de fàbriques, dels amos i d'enfrontaments forts. Com a *spinoff* d'aquesta sèrie, se n'està fent una altra que es diu *República* i on es parla dels socialistes, es parla dels anarquistes, es parla de la Falange, es parla dels militars, i aquesta ha patit una mica perquè per als diaris de la dreta som el dimoni.

SG: I en quina cadena es transmet aquesta?

BJ: A La1. Totes aquestes que t'he dit són de La1. A les altres només els importa guanyar espectadors, sigui com sigui, de la manera que sigui. Entenc que hagin de sobreviure però... En canvi, és clar, la pública ho permet. Ara ho deixarà de permetre. Aquesta que es diu *República*, estic segur, que com que l'estan fent ja, l'han de passar per nassos, però a partir del març de l'any que ve, tenim clar que Diagonal, que és la nostra, o d'altres productores semblants, no podran tenir accés a la pública perquè les eliminaran totalment.

SG: Hi ha molt control en aquest sentit? A l'espanyola, i també a TV3?

BJ: No, no, quan dic La1, vull dir la d'Espanya en general.

SG: Sí, sí, deia que sé que Televisió Espanyola té molt control polític per part del partit que és al govern. Li demanava si també a TV3 hi havia aquest tipus de control.

BJ: Molt menys, et deixen molta més llibertat. De totes maneres, aquestes que he dit de La1, la veritat és que són de molta llibertat, eh? O sigui, no és que hagin vingut a dir, 'feu *República* o feu una sèrie d'obres'. Això són idees que surten i que resulta que els hi agraden i ho fan. No ho sé, potser ara ho estic pintant massa maco, però hem tingut problemes amb sèries que pensàvem que estaven bé i ens han dit, 'no, això no està bé, no ens agrada i no la volem'. O sèries que han fracassat perquè el públic no les ha mirades o una barreja de les dues coses. Però pel que fa a la temàtica, ens diuen no aneu massa enllà, això sí, aneu amb



compte, que la televisió és de tothom, i tothom vol dir moltes ideologies diferents.

SG: I per acabar, podries fer un comentari sobre tot això que ha passat amb TV3 i el País Valencià? Quina és teva opinió?

BJ: Som molts desgraciats. No ho sé, jo tinc l'esperança que això, un dia... però, és clar, serà molt difícil perquè ara tenen el poder ja definitivament la gent del PP, que governa a València i que a més a més, ara amb el govern central, es posarà més dur. I serà molt difícil, es passen pel..., menyspreen totalment la llibertat de comunicació. El que sempre, sempre, sempre s'ha dit i s'ha demanat és que la televisió valenciana es pugui veure aquí però són tan bèsties, tan bèsties que no els importa gens que la televisió valenciana no es pugui veure aquí, no els importa gens que hi hagi gent d'aquí que es pugui enganxar a programes de la televisió valenciana. Jo penso que això s'hauria acabat arreglant, perquè a les Illes Balears no passa, hi ha una audiència total. A València hi ha una mena d'odi enorme, el PP és anti-valencià, evidentment, encara que els valencians no se n'adonin, volen eliminar el poc que queda de parla catalana a València d'una manera claríssima. Però és clar, hi ha els que se senten valencians i que pobrets surten a protestar i fan accions però és molt difícil, és una situació molt difícil. I ara que el PP guanyarà les eleccions generals, encara serà pitjor, m'imagino. És trist i és indignant i és faltar a la llibertat, el que fa la gent que té el poder. Ells es diuen molt valencians, però en canvi parlen castellà, fan discursos en castellà, no donen possibilitats a l'escola valenciana en català, no tenen més remei que acceptar-la però posen tots els obstacles que volen i poden.

SG: Fins i tot la cultura. Em sembla que hi ha canta-autors que han denunciat que tenen molts problemes per cantar en català a València.

BJ: Sí, és clar, va haver-hi un moment, durant anys i anys, que estaven negant que el valencià fos català. [...] Jo, quan vaig a València, si he de parlar en públic, parlo en valencià i si algú em pregunta 'com és que parles valencià', dic 'no ho sé, perquè és la meua llengua'.

SG: Moltíssimes gràcies per l'entrevista.

BJ: De res.

## INTERVIEW: JOSEP MARIA BENET I JORNET

(Barcelona 17 May 2011)

SG: Joan Fuster once said that a country cannot have a proper identity unless it has its own popular culture. I would like to ask you which role television series play in the construction of a Catalan imagery.

BJ: It is a little difficult for me to answer this question. I wouldn't like to go too far... but I would say that they do play a role. I think that this is the case with all series, not just soap operas, comedies too, and adaptations from novels, which it is something we have done sometimes. On the one hand, they contribute to create a Catalan imagery because we talk about the country although our approach is always subtle, not propagandistic. We can't go there every day because it would be too expensive but sometimes we have done Mallorca-based storylines. Another question, and a more difficult one, is to get Spanish-speaking people, who in Barcelona are a huge percentage, engaged with TV3. For many people, no effort is made at all. I know, for instance, that our cleaning lady, who is a very nice person and we love her to bits, never watches TV3. And she can understand Catalan, I speak to her in Catalan and Spanish, and she loves Catalonia, but she doesn't watch TV3. She instinctively watches Spanish channels. I am not optimistic. Nevertheless, I think that somehow it must be true that these series have opened a little door, and not only for the Catalan-speaking community, which we have already won over. Indeed, despite everything, TV3 is usually leader of audience every month here, and this means that there are some Spanish-speaking people who are faithful viewers of TV3 and this is extremely important. I always say that, before the war, there was a popular humorist, whose name was Josep Maria Folch i

Torres, who began his career by writing good, complex, ambitious novels, and ended up writing romantic and adventurous literature for children, and he had a huge success. Reading his work, the Catalans who were Catalan speakers made the effort to read in Catalan and thus got used to read in Catalan. This was achieved through the *Atlàntida* journal and through a comic publication for children, which had an enormous success because not only children but also adults used to buy it. It was called *En Patufet*. He wrote a kind of literature which was humble in its ambitions, but which had a very important social repercussion. And I think that now we are in a much worse situation since it is not just that people who speak Catalan write in Spanish—everybody in school learn how to write in Catalan, or learn Catalan, if they don't already know it—but the fact that they go back to speaking Spanish. Thus, we tried to find a way to attract this vast audience as well. At least, we tried it. And this is the reason why sometimes, in a casual way, we introduce a Spanish-speaking character so that Spanish people don't feel...

SG: ... excluded ...

BJ: ... alone, that they can see that we introduce positive characters who are Spanish-speaking. Although I am not in any way too optimistic, I would like to think that through these simple television series, which have little to do with my theatre plays, maybe we can attract someone who doesn't have to abandon Spanish at all, if they were born somewhere else, but that, at least, they get used to Catalan and try to speak it. If they were born here, the whole situation is a lot more complex.

SG: I would like to ask you some questions about the series' content. There are many authors who consider that in the genre of soap operas, above all European soaps, women play a modernising role, that they are the forces behind change. There are several feminist authors who believe that this is the reason why a wide female audience watches soap operas because, in other

television formats, female characters don't play such as positive and modernising roles. Is this the case on TV3?

BJ: Yes, this was correct for *Poblenou* and it is now for *La Riera*. The title *La Riera* has a double meaning: on the one hand, it means stream and, on the other, it is the surname of the family whose members are the main protagonists of the series, above all, Mercè Riera, a middle-aged woman and the most significant character. In *Ventdelplà* we also have a female character as the main protagonist. In *Poblenou* it was more balanced but one of the female characters was very important and, moreover, she was the one who took the decision to separate from her husband in the end. It wasn't him, it was her. In another series entitled *Laberint d'ombres*, which was not a success, we introduced a lesbian couple and these characters were very important too. One was the mother of the female protagonist. They kissed and, although we didn't see them in bed, their relationship was represented like any other relationship, and it was accepted by others. The couple was only rejected by those characters with negative connotations. We did all that and we also did many other things. For example, we have dealt with Alzheimer. We have explained all the process of Alzheimer. We could do that because we have the privilege of working on television: you call and say, 'I am a television writer and I would be interested in talking with you'. And *bom!* Because they are interested. And to get to know these worlds becomes a very personal experience, because you visit places, they show you things, they explain things to you, you can talk to them when you have doubts, when you want to make sure that what you are doing is right. Or, for example, take a character and make him/her go through an accident that leaves him/her disabled. There was a main female character that was left in a wheelchair. People were asking me when she would get up from the wheelchair and I used to reply 'when there is a way of getting her up, we will. We are not here to perform miracles, but to depict reality'. The question was how to treat this issue in a positive light, that is to say, showing that at the beginning this girl doesn't

know what to do and doesn't realise that her situation is going to be permanent. I visited the Institut Guttmann, which only deals with disabled people, and the eighty per cent of their patients are young. It's terrible, it's very hard. It's a very beautiful place and they not only informed us, but they also let us use a ward in the building to shoot some sequences. For example, I remember that once I asked a question to the doctor who was the person helping us: 'Now I am going to tell you something and I'm sure that you will deny it: many of them try to commit suicide'. And I mentioned that I had the intention of introducing this aspect, that I would do all the process, first of a strange euphoria, and after three months a strong depression, which could lead to suicide. And he replied: 'Please, please, don't make it happen at the Institut Guttmann' and I assured him that no, the suicide attempt would happen outside their control, at her house: she would throw herself in the swimming pool and a guy would come and save her and also fall in love with her. We wanted to show how this girl would get on with her life and finally become a successful writer. Or for example, when describing the whole evolution of a cancer case, up to the death of the patient. However, since you know that there are people with cancer who are watching the series, we had to play it right. And this meant to show that, from the beginning, this character, who had to go to see a doctor, didn't want to go. Therefore, the message was 'go to the doctor because many cancer cases can be cured'. We also introduced a beautiful love story: she had a younger lover who was a musician and, after watching him playing successfully on a televised concert, she took some pills she had already prepared. We like to do this kind of things and sometimes it could be controversial. Maybe now the situation has changed a little, but there are other issues too, such as the contaminated water due to pig farms. There are two places in Catalonia which have this problem and we dealt with it. These two locations replied that we were lying in order to increase our audience. They denied that this was a problem on television and my response was: 'I am sorry but in the town where I live for four months we

can't drink water from the tap, it is forbidden for this reason'. We usually create romantic, or tragic, or thriller-like stories, it varies. But we also try to deal with real problems, explain them to people, and, by doing that, suggest solutions, if there are any, otherwise we explain what should be done in order to...well, you know what I mean.

SG: Therefore, according to what you are saying, television can be an agent for social change? That is to say, can it send certain messages? There is a scholar, for instance, who defined *Eastenders* as a 'teacherly text' for its way of depicting immigration.

BJ: We have done that as well. We have also included immigrant characters several times. And always from a positive point of view in order to explain that these people are nice and fantastic. We also do tricks. For example we create a situation in which the characters don't know what to do, while the immigrant one knows what to do, and he/she saves the day. Or a girl falls in love with a black man and they end up as a happy couple. We have done this kind of thing. Indeed, *EastEnders* was a model, although I have to confess that I have never watched an episode of either *Coronation Street* or *EastEnders*. Never, but I knew what they were about. Yes, we have done all this. The word that says it all is didactic. We are didactic. Explicitly didactic, in the series.

SG: I was also thinking about the representation of gender violence in *Poblenou*, which was very explicit. I remember the character of Charo who was a victim of her husband's violent behaviour. The message was that not even within marriage violence had any justification.

BJ: There was also another series called *Ventdelplà*, which is now over but has lasted five years, in which the initial drive was a woman who runs away from her house in the first episode. She takes the children with her and escapes in order not to suffer her husband's abuse. He follows and hurts her. In the first

two seasons, this theme was crucial. And the drive that made us began the series in the first place was domestic violence. Moreover, we did something else: the characters did not belong to lower classes, but to an upper-middle class, in which this issue always remains hidden. Nobody talks about this. And of course there is gender violence among the upper classes. She was a doctor too. And this story worked very well.

SG: In the United Kingdom, there have been several studies which demonstrate that there are new groups, above all university students and teenagers, who watch soap operas. Does it also happen in Catalonia? Is there an audience beyond the so-called female one?

BJ: Ah, yes! Lots of young people, more girls than boys, but boys as well, sometimes. And another thing that I didn't tell you: these series—and I am sure this also happens in the United Kingdom—are not only watched by lower class people and women, they are also watched by lawyers and politicians, everybody, but they won't admit it! My dentist would say to me: 'My mother watches this series you're writing and she would like to ask you this'. What are you talking about? Your mother? It's you! And your mother watches it as well, but it is you who watch it. There have been politicians and doctors who have called to thank us and to let us know that they liked our series. Moreover, sometimes, they ask us to include certain themes. These things have happened constantly with this kind of series. [...] However, there are lots of low-quality programmes on television and we have certainly produced some bad ones, but we always have the collective audience in mind, we think of the audience who watches television, which is much wider than just a female audience, much wider. This has been the case since the beginning. Teenagers and children, people from all social classes. We have attracted these types of audience, even though I am not sure what the situation is like right now. Catalan-speaking people—Spanish-speaking people are another story—watch TV3 afternoon



series. As far as weekly series, we did one entitled *Infidels* about five friends; all the protagonists were women between thirty and forty years-old. They were five friends and it wasn't like *Sex in the City*, they were middle-class people with real problems. There were stories about love and friendship and we thought it would be a success. When the series was over, a very faithful audience got indignant, sent us letters and protested, but, beside them, nobody watched it.

SG: It was a more restricted audience.

BT: People didn't watch it.

SG: You said it yourself that on television there are quite a few bad-quality programmes. Bourdieu has stated that television is experiencing a process of dramatization, that there is now more sensationalism, especially when dealing with those more intimate or private aspects of life. In this respect, does TV3, especially in the series, do that? In your opinion, is TV3 following this process highlighted by Bourdieu?

BJ: No, no. We haven't done that. I don't know whether private channels have done something like that in their series. They do game shows but less series. There is a person who works for Televisió de Barcelona and who is known for his aggressive style. I don't like him very much, but he comments on television programmes and invites television celebrities to interview them, but he mostly analyses television programmes. What he does is to question all this television trash. I would say that the Spanish public television doesn't do this kind of programmes or, if it does them, it masks it very well. The other channels basically live thanks to these programmes. They broadcast terrible programmes with such ignorant people. You tell them the word Shakespeare and they think it is a drink. They have this sort of level. One of them is called the queen of the people. The audience calls her like this! The audience! The Queen of the People, or The Princess of the People, or something like that. And in capital letters, eh?

SG: In Italy we also have many programmes like this on private channels, but on public television too. Here, I find that, in Catalonia at least, it is rather different. I mean, in Italy the public television is...

JB: Ah, Italian television... very much!

SG: ... similar to the produced by private channels, with lots of reality shows.

JB: Not only that, but surely all this kind of programmes come from Italy.

SG: From Telecinco, Canale 5.

JB: Yes, I would say that we have taken them from Italy, where they began earlier.

SG: What do you do to introduce a social issue, such as homosexuality or Alzheimer? Do you discuss it? Do you contact someone you know...

BJ: Yes and no. When we start shooting a series, we have already all the chapters written. Well, not the chapters, but the general script. Therefore, we know where we start, we know where to end. We know in which point we will introduce conflicts or social and pedagogical issues. Always hidden in romantic or other types of storylines. These storylines are prepared from the very beginning if we see them as worth-dealing with for whatever reason. However, if a series is very long, it can happen that someone... Well, for example, the Head of Research at the Hospital Clínic, who is a friend of mine, called me and told me 'it would be wonderful if you could include a case of diabetes. Could you deal with this issue?'. Therefore, since there were many episodes, we included a child character and followed her from the moment she went to hospital after fainting a few times. She was then diagnosed with diabetes. We followed the whole process, until the moment when this child was able to take care of herself, which is the most important things for diabetics. And for a child even more. By all the process, I mean that every day they have to have an

injection: you must do it, and although the parent who gives the injection suffers, they see that they get better afterwards. Moreover, because this is a serial and we have to do dramatic storylines, the child found herself alone and locked in a house. Everybody was looking for her but couldn't find her. They feared the worst, that they would find her dead. However, she didn't die because she had followed all the procedures that a diabetic has to follow when he/she doesn't have his/her medicine. If she had been more time alone... but they found her just in time... well, you know what I mean. The mother, who was a widow, finds her and understands that she needs to give her child more freedom because she is overprotecting her—she hadn't let her go on a school trip, she didn't let her do anything. We followed the whole process, with a child living with diabetes, although this storyline was not initially included in the general script.

SG: It is indeed true that you deal with many social issues, but I have noticed that in television series you don't talk very much or not at all about specific politics. Is there a reason for this?

BJ: On public television, you can't mention political parties. I understand it, public television belongs to everybody, to people from all political persuasions. Perhaps we tend to favour a rather left-wing approach, this is also true. There have been problems with a series we are doing in Madrid, *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, which will be certainly eliminated when the PP wins. There was another one we did some years ago, set in the 1920s, about issues of the time between employers and workers and their industrial conflicts. As a spinoff of this series, we are doing another one called *República*, in which we talk about socialists, anarchists, the Falange, the Army. This series has been affected by the criticisms from right-wing newspapers that treat us like we are the devil.

SG: Which channel broadcasts this series?

BJ: La1 [the main channel of Spanish public television]. All these series I have just mentioned are broadcast by La1. The other channels are only interested in attracting audience, no matter how. I understand that they have to survive but... On the other hand, on public television, you can do this kind of things. Now, when the PP wins, they won't allow it anymore. The series *República*, I am sure, they will have to accept because it has already been shot, but since next March we are sure that our producing company, Diagonal, won't have access to Spanish public television because they will eliminate us, no doubt about that.

SG: Is there lot of control in this sense in Spanish public television? And what about TV3?

BJ: No, no, when I say La1, I mean Spanish public television.

SG: Yes, I was just asking whether there is on TV3 the same type of political control...

BJ: Much less, you have a lot of freedom. However, I also have to say that La1 also leaves you a lot of freedom. They didn't come to tell us 'do *República* or do a series about workers'. These are ideas that come to you and, if they like them, they help you produce the series. I don't know, maybe I am being too optimistic here. We had problems with series that we thought would be successful but they told us that they didn't like them, while other series that we liked have failed because they couldn't find an audience. However, as far as the content goes, we are told not to go too far, to be careful, that public television belongs to everyone and everyone means people with different ideologies.

SG: To finish, could you comment on what it is happening between TV3 and the Autonomous Community of Valencia? What is your opinion?

BJ: We are so unfortunate. I don't know, I hope that one day... but it will be very difficult because now the PP is in office in the Valencian Autonomous Government and with soon the PP running the Spanish government it is going

to be very difficult. They have a total lack of respect for freedom in the media. We have always wanted to be able to watch Valencian public television in Catalonia but they don't care whether there are people who would like to do so and enjoy its programmes. I think that we should find a solution, a way of dealing with their attitude because this is not happening in the Balearic Islands, we have a huge following there. In Valencia you find lots of hate, the PP is in fact anti-Valencian and very determined to eliminate the little Catalan language still remaining there. They are very open about it, even though many Valencian people don't seem to be aware of it. There are also those who feel that they are Valencian and they march on the streets protesting and organising initiatives against their autonomous government, but it is very difficult for them. And now, with the victory of PP in the general elections, the situation will be even worse, I would think. It is sad and annoying, they do not respect freedom of expression, this is what now people in power do. They define themselves as very Valencian, but they only speak Spanish, they only do speeches in Spanish, they don't want to give students the possibility of learning Catalan at school, and people have to accept it, they put too many obstacles in their way.

SG: Culture itself is suffering. There are Valencian singers who have publicly denounced the problems they experience if they want to sing in Catalan in Valencia.

BJ: Yes, this is correct, and for many years they were denying that Valencian and Catalan were the same language. [...] When I go to Valencia, I speak in Valencian, if I have to speak in public, and if someone asks me how it is that I speak Valencian I reply that it is my language.

SG: Thank you very much for the interview.

JB: You are welcome.

## Main Visual Texts

*Poblenou* (1994), TV3.  
*Secrets de família* (1995), TV3.  
*Nissaga de poder* (1996- 1998), TV3.  
*Al salir de clase* (1997-2002), Telecinco.  
*Laberint d'ombres* (1998-2000), TV3.  
*El cor de la ciutat* (2000-2009), TV3.  
*Temps de silenci* (2001-2002), TV3.  
*Ventdelplà* (2005-2010), TV3.  
*Amar en tiempos revueltos* (2005-2012), La1.  
*Física o Química* (2008-2011), Antena3.  
*Infidels* (2009-2011), TV3.  
*La Sagrada Família* (2010-2011), TV3.  
*L'endemà, 'Transsexuals'*, 12 April 2011, TV3.  
*La Riera* (since 2010), TV3.

## Secondary Visual Texts

<i>Coronation Street</i> (since 1960), ITV.	<i>Trainer</i> (1991-1992), BBC1.
<i>Dallas</i> (1978-1991), CBS.	<i>My So-Called Life</i> (1994-1995), ABC.
<i>Triangle</i> (1981-1983), BBC1.	<i>Dawson's Creek</i> (1998-2003), WB.
<i>Dynasty</i> (1981-1989), ABC.	<i>Queer As Folk</i> (1999-2000), Channel 4.
<i>Brookside</i> (1982-2003), Channel 4.	<i>Queer As Folk</i> (2000-2005), Showtime.
<i>Howards' Way</i> (1985-1990), BBC1.	<i>Glee</i> (since 2009), FOX.
<i>EastEnders</i> (since 1985), BBC1.	

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