

European Journal of Communication

<http://ejc.sagepub.com>

The Production of Television Fiction and Nation Building: The Catalan Case

Enric Castelló

European Journal of Communication 2007; 22; 49

DOI: 10.1177/0267323107073747

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/22/1/49>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *European Journal of Communication* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ejc.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 2 articles hosted on the
SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/22/1/49#BIBL>

The Production of Television Fiction and Nation Building

The Catalan Case

■ *Enric Castelló*

ABSTRACT

■ A nation needs its own fiction. It is for this reason that many countries have used fictional narratives to create a self-image. This article describes the role that fictional television series play in the process of nation building and proposes an analytical model that is based on quantitative and qualitative methods. It is argued that national identity is promoted through referential elements in fictional discourse, most of which are territorial and linguistic, although some are historical, institutional and cultural. It is also argued that the process unfolds in a politically controversial space of contestation where national culture is defined. The author studied the production of fiction on Catalan public television from 1994 to 2003, analysing content and documentation and carrying out in-depth interviews with scriptwriters and managers. The article points out how important cultural policy and production dynamics are in determining the kind of nation that is being represented. ■

Key Words cultural policy, nation building, national culture, national identity, television fiction

Problem: how does nation building work in fictional television series?

The issue of how television can be used to spread images of the nation should be tackled from a constructivist theoretical frame and should take into account sociocultural representation theories. As Wiley (2004) argues, in a

Enric Castelló is lecturer in communication studies at Rovira i Virgili University, C/ Sant Pau, 4, 43003 Tarragona, Spain. [email: enric.castello@urv.cat]

European Journal of Communication Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore) www.sagepublications.com, Vol 22(1): 49–68. [10.1177/0267323107073747]

globalized world, the problems related to nation building and nationality are becoming stronger, not weaker. Globalization, he says, requires a new paradigm for studying national issues, one that rethinks nationality as an organizational logic. On the other hand, Philip Schlesinger considers that rather than determining what effects communication and cultural products have on identity, we should be asking ourselves how to analyse collective identity and how important communication is in the process (Schlesinger, 1991: 172).

Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson formulated 'constructivist' and 'language-based' theories of national identity (Louw, 2005: 101). Both theorists gave the printed press a crucial role in the formation of modern nation-states. Gellner (1983) argued that nation-states were the best organizational order for new capitalist industrialization. States applied nationalist policies to create, to 'invent', nations, which would be a construction of nationalism. National cultures were spread by printed media, while education instilled its values. On the other hand, Anderson (1983: 15) described the nation as an 'imagined community', 'limited' and 'sovereign'. This author noted the relevance of the press, as a necessary tool to develop and distribute the collection of national images. Some important authors have turned to the Andersonian approach to nation because of its link with communication (Gilroy, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Stratton and Ang, 1998; Barker, 1999; Petrie, 2004; Louw, 2005).

But what exactly do we understand by 'nation building'? Vincent Mosco (1996: 200) states that it is a political economy process. We agree that nation building is more than a political or a cultural question led by governments; it is also an economic strategy for determining the most appropriate way of consolidating an economic system based on industry, commercial relations and professional know-how. Maybe no research can consider mass media messages to be the only centre of the nation building process. We must accept that national identity, as a collective identity, is defined not only by the producers' proposal. However, we argue that, above all else, it must be known how the production process works, how television defines the nation, on which terms cultural policy is involved in the process, and which economic and political factors must be taken into account. This approach is similar to that of other authors who focus on production processes (Ferguson and Golding, 1997). We accept the active audience paradigm, but as Nicholas Garnham (1997) ironically asked, who could think that the production discourse orientation has nothing to do with the meaning captured by the audience?

However, nation building also contains a narrative and symbolic dimension in the text. Power relations are the key to planning narratives of

nation. Homi Bhabha (1990) provides an interesting concept of nation, based on the narrative theory, but which also takes into account extra-textual elements. This approach to nations as a narrative form, as discourse, draws nation closer to language and to metaphor, and means that nation has symbolic and figurative links with ideology and power networks. Media are at the centre of this scheme, and as several authors have pointed out, they are crucial in the nation building process (Schlesinger, 1991; Drummond et al., 1993; Cormack, 1994; Newcomb, 1997; Barker, 1999; van den Bulck, 2001; Watson, 2002; Louw, 2005). Barker (1999) noted the crucial importance for any debate on culture, identity and television of the affirmation that identities are formed inside and through representation. Likewise, we can add that television is perhaps the most important communication mechanism for spreading these representations. National identity is built not only on a representation of the self, but also on the televised contrast between ourselves and others in news, current affairs or debate programmes (Terribas, 1994; Louw, 2005), and fiction and drama series (Griffiths, 1993; O'Donnell, 2002; Dhoest, 2004; Thornham and Purvis, 2005).

National culture is conformed as a site of contestation where diverse political versions of the nation are constantly debated (Schlesinger, 1991), and this contest is also played out in drama series. Television dramas are ideological and cultural products that project a point of view about our society and our nation through their narrative ideology. That process must not be used to repress and impose a narrow conception of culture and nation. Some authors have highlighted that national culture can also provide social values and promote social cohesion (Keating, 1996; Kymlicka, 2001; Petrie, 2004).

Studies in television fiction have a long tradition and researchers have focused on soap opera and drama series and their implications on social representation or their impact as cultural products (Dyer et al., 1981; Buckingham, 1985; Ang, 1985; Liebes and Livingstone, 1998; Moran, 1998; Caughie, 2000; Tufte, 2000). But few authors have gone into the relation between national identity and serial fiction (Griffiths, 1993; O'Donnell, 2002; Fecé, 2003; Dhoest, 2004; Castelló, 2004; Petrie, 2004). However, the relevance of fictional drama to the construction of national identity is an accepted fact. This article is a contribution to the debate on nation building through television fiction and is based on wide-ranging research focused on Catalan production between 1994 and 2003. Although some authors have studied Catalan fiction and national identity (O'Donnell, 2002; Fecé, 2003), the issue needs further in-depth analysis because of its complexity and the implications for political and production processes.

Our main research question was: how does nation building work in fictional television series? In order to provide an answer, we studied

26 television productions broadcast between 1994 and 2003 by the public channel *Televisió de Catalunya* (TVC), which is the major regional television channel in Catalonia, a European stateless nation within the Spanish state. TVC has been an important tool for cultural and national projection, particularly for the Catalan language in television (López et al., 1999). The Act that created TVC in 1983, approved by the autonomous parliament of Catalonia, specified that the channel must serve to promote Catalan language and culture. This is the main reason why all of its programmes are in Catalan and why the content tries to reflect what is considered politically to be the national culture. For this reason, cultural policies and narrative mechanisms play an intensive part in this nation building process. The selection of a stateless nation does not mean that other public television channels do not use television for flagging the nation. Nationalism is not only common cultural and political practice in remote, stateless or impoverished regions, but also in western democratic states, where the practice is more banal and the nation is flagged day by day, in a more institutionalized context (Billig, 1995).

Method: mixing quantitative and qualitative data in production research

How are researchers dealing with cultural and national identity, and communication? An analysis of 67 articles published on the issue in three major European journals¹ between 1993 and 2003 shows us that almost half (43 percent) focused on the political economy of communication (production and economic systems, laws, communication structures and companies, etc.), while the other half were shared out among discourse and content analysis (22 percent), ethnography and history (21 percent) and theoretical discussion (10 percent). A few researchers take a mixed approach. Douglas Kellner (1997) has pointed out that studies on cultural products must try to be multiperspective, dealing with political and economic questions, as well as textual and reception analysis. David Deacon et al. (1999) speak of methodologies as a 'tool box'. Researchers should know which tool is the best in each situation and be able to use the one that is most suitable. Other authors have suggested that these research methods should be combined, and have invited quantitative and qualitative measurements (Ferguson and Golding, 1997).

Larsen (1991) argues that quantitative analysis can complement qualitative analysis in fiction studies. He adds that qualitative content analysis, which is regarded as being an exegesis, is a fruitful method for studying drama series. On the other hand, Newcomb (1991) proposes two main

qualitative methods for analysing television fiction: in-depth interviews and participant observation. These ethnographical methods are, in our opinion, valid for cultural analysis. But in historical studies, such as ours, it is difficult to apply participant observation, which is more appropriate for ongoing production processes in which the researcher can attend working sessions.

We used part of O'Donnell's model (1999) to analyse social representation and ideological hegemony in soap operas. His approach considers that television fiction is an ideological creation and that a well-designed narrative analysis should make it clear what kind of society is being represented. This proposal is based on several levels of narrative analysis, to which we add some other methodologies so that the results can be compared. We focused on production analysis, which means that we had to study not only the processes within a political and economic context, but also the cultural product itself. The analysis was divided into three levels:

1. *Historical, economical and political*: shedding light on extra-textual factors, discussing the period and going over institutional and organizational aspects.
2. *Production and programme*: researching into the channel's production system, decision-making and programme strategies.
3. *Content and narrative analysis*: looking into textual factors and working on the ideological aspects of representation and referentiality.

We analysed 26 productions broadcast over a 10-year period (1994–2003), which means that our research has a historical dimension and this was the main reason for excluding two things: first of all, we focused on production because we could not see how to plan a consistent analysis of reception and the validity of its results – this handicap has also been pointed out by O'Donnell (1999); second, we discarded participant observation and centred on in-depth interviews, so we worked on series that had already been produced, not ones that were in the process of being produced. More specifically, our 'tool box' consisted of the critical analysis of periodicals and documentation, in-depth interviewing, content analysis and narrative analysis.

Critical documentation research involves the close reading of published and non-published information on production. This means that we worked on articles published in the press, economic reports on fiction production, working papers for professionals provided by the channel, domestic criteria documentation and other types of material (from the bibliography published on each production to websites). The core periodical material consisted of 125 articles published in the press at the beginning and the end of each production. This is when the main plots, characters, production matters and

other issues are described. We also consulted news and reports published on fiction production in TVC and we were supplied with the bibles² and work papers we needed.

Explaining the content analysis plan briefly is a complex matter. The content was analysed before the interviews and regarded as a complementary method, useful for a content approach. Our core work was basically qualitative but, like Larsen (1991), we considered quantitative analysis to be a good complement and a valid tool. Our content analysis design was based in the works of Krippendorff (1980), Riffe et al. (1998) and Wimmer and Dominick (2000). As we believe that nation building is a process that is mainly based on representation, we defined the 'referential element' as our unit of analysis. Thus, a meaningful unit (Riffe et al., 1998: 63) is defined as any referent contained in a text that expresses a cultural or national symbolic meaning. The units were organized into 15 thematic categories: symbols, territory, institutions, population, language, social affairs, social agents, religion, history, art and literature, folklore and traditions, gastronomy, sport, commercial and environmental. Each referent was also assigned to a 'national' category: Catalan,³ Catalan-language frame,⁴ other nationalities in the Spanish state,⁵ Spanish, nations inside the European Union and non-EU nations. Not all referents were placed in these national categories, but they were all organized in the thematic one.

We entered each referential element into a database and coded them with descriptive information (see Table 1 for an example). The 'national category' of each element is also considered to arise from its symbolic contextual reality (the US flag and the Scottish kilt are in fact pieces of cloth, but they have national and cultural meanings).⁶ However, some referential elements were non-national (for example, home environment or social matters) but had cultural and social meanings that were taken into account. Referents were coded according to social and cultural criteria: for example, territory (within the national frontiers), language (national language), brand names (where the company's head office is located), artists (place of birth), folklore and gastronomy (national traditions) and history (nationally relevant passages). Most of them, such as territory and language, are clearly socially objectified. However, if there was any doubt about the nationality of the reference, the coder did not put it in the category. When the reference appeared directly in the text or in the image, the category 'explicitness' was marked as 'yes' (y). Implicit references were few and far between (3.4 percent of the total) and appeared only at particular moments: for example, when a character says 'here' to refer to the city, or has to go to the town council (the city in which they live is understood).

Table 1 Entry for a referential element

Id:	128	Explicitness:	y
Production:	5	Thematic Category:	ter
Episode:	15	National Category:	a
Sample:	A	Second origin info:	g
Sequence:	1	V:	0
Minutes:	0:00–3:03		

Localization: Rieras' parents flat (Aleix's grandfather)

Reference:	Portbou
Image:	Siset and Aleix sitting in the dining room
Sound:	Siset and Aleix's conversation

Description: Siset explains to Aleix that someone has entrusted him with the making of a scale model of the railway station of Portbou

Table 1 gives an example of one referential element. The entry records that the element number 128 is from the 15th episode of production number 5 (*Secrets de família – Family Secrets*) and is part of random sample (A). It also says that it is in the first sequence between minutes 0:00 and 3:03. The element is explicit (y) and its thematic category is 'territorial' (ter), Catalan (a) and, more specifically, from Girona (g). It makes no judgement (V = 0). In fact, it is an allusion to the town of Portbou. The description tells us that a character, Siset, is explaining to his grandson Aleix that someone has entrusted him to make a scale model of Portbou's railway station, a historical building in the town.

Our data consisted of 2784 fictional episodes and 90,155 minutes of air time. We designed two samples with different objectives: a random stratified sample and a purposive sample (Riffe et al., 1998). The random stratified sample was used when we wanted to distinguish between the diverse nature of the data. Four fictional genres were considered: tele-novela,⁷ drama series, comedy and sit-com. We analysed 405.5 minutes of fiction, proportionally distributed into genre representation (stratification). This represents 0.45 percent of the data, which was coded by one researcher. The purposive sample was selected for special textual reasons. We analysed six episodes from several productions (241.2 minutes) whose stories were based on identity and cultural matters. In total, the sample

consisted of 20 episodes and more than 10 hours. A validity exercise was carried out on this content analysis and, following the advice of Wimmer and Dominick (2000),⁸ we used a simple validity formula that gave us an index of 0.84 (1 is highest), which means that some elements were coded differently while others were not detected. The main reason for this level of reliability was the complexity of the category system applied. This second examination was carried out by the same coder a few months after the first one and took into account 0.5 percent of the total sample.⁹ The data collected were used in a relational database.

Following Thomas Lindlof's guidelines (1995), we interviewed 23 managers and main scriptwriters involved in the production of the television series studied. We designed semi-structured questionnaires on matters related to creative and decision-making processes. We began with middle-level technical managers (drama department managers and domestic script coordinators), went on to creative scriptwriters (main creative staff, plot and script developers) and finished with the top executive managers of TVC (programming and production managers). This was a strategically planned sequence to get the best answers from the main staff responsible. The result of the work was a total of 23 hours, 13 minutes and 14 seconds of interviewing, transcribed and edited in a document consisting of 1214 interactions.¹⁰ We grouped similar answers together and dealt with several issues, trying to relate the qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the content analysis carried out before the interviews.

Our initial impression was that Catalan references were predominant, but that elements from other cultures were also present. We also believed that the Catalan elements were territorially diverse, perhaps conditioned by the greater population of Barcelona. The content analysis design was based on four main hypotheses: (H1) there is a predominance of domestic national referential elements in the text; (H2) identity is also constructed from the contrast between 'we' (domestic national referential elements) and 'they' (alien national referential elements); (H3) the nation built in fiction presents diversity (territorial in representation of regions, linguistic in representation of different dialects and spellings and urban/rural); and (H4) national referents are based on territorial and language elements, more than on historical or folkloric elements.

Results: referential elements on territory, language and other cultural issues

We compared the data resulting from the various methods utilized. Most of the fiction production between 1994 and 2003 was of the genre telenovela

Table 2 National referential elements in Catalan television fiction

<i>National categorization</i>	<i>Random sample</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Purposive sample</i>	<i>%</i>
Catalan	189	62.17	303	50.92
Catalan linguistic frame	5	1.64	9	1.51
Other nations in Spain	3	0.99	3	0.50
Spanish	64	21.05	245	41.18
European nations (EU)	22	7.24	26	4.37
Non-EU nations	21	6.91	9	1.51
Total	304		595	

(70.1 percent of the total time), but TVC also produced drama series (17.9 percent), comedy (8 percent) and sit-com (4 percent). Our documental analysis showed that there are few written guidelines in fiction production. Basically, the information that the scriptwriters and main creative staff receive from managers is the budget per episode – which can range from €24,000 to €180,000¹¹ – and some important conceptualization aspects about the series.

We counted a total of 1230 referential elements in more than 10 hours of fiction. In a random stratified sample, there were 1.26 elements per minute, while in the purposive sample this increased to 2.99 – which tells us that the purposive sample was quite well selected. We assigned 899 referential elements to the national category (for distribution, see Table 2).

The quantitative results of the content analysis enable us to reflect upon the four hypotheses. Both the random and purposive samples demonstrate a predominance of domestic referential elements (Table 2), so the first of our hypotheses (H1) seems to have been supported. However, the high presence of Spanish referential elements in the purposive sample (41.18 percent) shows that H2 is also quite well supported (Table 2). These elements were presented in situations in which discourse swung between Catalan and Spanish. The index falls to 21.05 percent in current fiction, when the plots do not focus on history, culture or identity matters. The fact that there was such a high number in the purposive sample – episodes selected because their plot is about identity – indicates that identity has also been built around the recognition of otherness. In particular, Catalan fiction has reflected Spanish culture and nation as the ‘otherness’. So the quantitative data only show presence but the qualitative analysis reveals that the aim of this presence was contrast. On the other hand, H3 is refuted. Most television fiction serials (87.21 percent of the total time)

Table 3 Thematization of cultural and referential elements in TVC serial fiction

<i>Category</i>	<i>Random sample</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Purposive sample</i>	<i>%</i>
Home environment	160	31.43	99	13.73
Territory	91	17.88	177	24.55
Language	60	11.79	82	11.37
Commercial	57	11.20	33	4.58
Institutional	30	5.89	31	4.30
Social affairs	25	4.91	12	1.66
Social agents	24	4.72	14	1.94
Art and literature	22	4.32	19	2.64
History	14	2.75	98	13.59
Folklore	10	1.96	41	5.69
Gastronomy	7	1.38	20	2.77
Sport	5	0.98	29	4.02
Symbols	3	0.59	38	5.27
Population	1	0.20	13	1.80
Religion	–	–	15	2.08
Total	509		721	

are located in the city and region of Barcelona (not shown in the tables), while other places in Catalonia are underrepresented, even if we take into account the proportion of population living in these regions. So, the national vision of television fiction is quite centralist. Territorial references in the text, however, were basically Catalan (72.53 percent in the random sample and 57.06 percent in the purposive sample; not shown in the tables), but most of these domestic references were to Barcelona. The data on language suggest that characters are prone to use a standard oral language characteristic of Barcelona. Finally, H4 is also supported because many of the nationally labelled referential elements are related to territory and language matters. Language had to be dealt with carefully because we could not count all the times that characters spoke Catalan. All the productions were entirely in this language and this predominance is substantive enough for the cultural representation. So the linguistic elements that we took into account were the explicit references to language in the text, the presence of language on signs, posters, etc. or in the media (press, television, etc.), special language uses and presence (spellings, for example), and other normalization uses. Other languages were hardly detected: for example, in more than 10 hours of screen time we only recorded 70 cases

of Spanish being present. This shows that in this time sample, Catalan fiction only presented seven Spanish interventions per hour. The most usual types of reference were related to aspects of the home environment (Table 3), which were not categorized as 'national' but which have some cultural meanings.¹² The next categories in the ranking in Table 3 are territorial and linguistic referents, which were nationally categorized.

Other important issues appear in fiction. One is about advertising and product placement. Our analysis of the fictional content sequence by sequence revealed numerous identifiable brands. We decided to count them as referential elements with cultural and national meanings. Some important, well-recognized Catalan brands appeared (Cacaolat chocolate milkshake or Estrella Damm beer). These are Catalan-based companies, closely connected with Catalan society.¹³ Institutional and governmental referents also appeared (e.g. autonomous police force; military forces, etc.). As we thought, history, folklore, symbols (flags, anthems, etc.) and other kinds of referents were less frequent. But in the purposive sample, which deals with identity, there are more of these typified elements. We consider that even though they do not usually appear in daily fiction, they are important to define nation and national culture.

Nevertheless, quantitative data are basically descriptive and rather than providing answers, they raised many more questions. The first of these questions has to do with 'quality': How do these elements appear? What kind of ideological narration do the plots provide? What society is represented in the fiction? Other important questions, the answers to which are not in the audiovisual text, are about 'operation': What factors determine this narration of the nation? Does this nation building process have political guidelines? Qualitative narrative analysis and interviews gave rise to other interesting results, which, crossed with quantitative data, began to define the map of our phenomenon. First, we noted that the territory was represented basically in transitional landscapes between sequences and in a few outdoor sequences, in which typical buildings or landscapes were inserted. Sometimes, this location has the function that we have titled 'showing the country'. In some productions, fiction gives a message about territory by trying to use towns that give an image of quality of life. This occurs, for example, in productions located in Sitges (a touristy town on the Mediterranean coast); in Montbrió del Camp (a spa resort, also near the sea) or in the region of Penedés (a vine growing area, mainly rural).

Location is precisely one of the factors determined by the production policy of the channel. TVC managers gave two main reasons for locating a fiction in a particular city or town. The first has to do with money. There is a tendency to locate the stories near the centre of production (close to

Barcelona) because they are cheaper to produce. So, closer location means lower expenses. As some managers pointed out, lack of budget prompted less outdoor shooting. Second, after 1995, when TVC located its first fiction outside Barcelona, the channel started the policy of asking for the collaboration of public and private organizations. So, town councils and some of the main local corporations were asked to provide production facilities. Managers recognize that without this public and private help, most productions would have not been feasible. Likewise, one of the channel's political intentions is to decentralize, although this is not always possible. Finally, we should point out that the participation of town councils or important private corporations in the production of fiction did have an influence on representation. For example, the mayor of Sitges gave some guidelines about how the fiction should represent the town;¹⁴ similarly, guidelines were given in the Penedés region.¹⁵ Managers and scriptwriters also concurred that a series often becomes a tourist platform for a region. To sum up, there are centripetal and centrifugal forces in territorial representation in fiction. Decision-making depends not only on the story creation plan, but on production, economic and political issues.

As far as the language issue is concerned, we noted two basic tendencies: normalization and standardization. Normalization appears in extra-textual and intra-textual mechanisms. The fact that the fiction is acted out in the Catalan language is one of the main reasons for its existence. Most managers and creative staff agree on this point. On the other hand, an intra-textual mechanism normalizes the language. The society represented in fiction is quite monolingual in Catalan, which contrasts with the reality of the huge pockets of Spanish-speaking people living in the region. In this respect, fiction reflects a normalized Catalan-speaking nation and the bilingual reality is misrepresented. However, Spanish can also be heard in fictional series, mostly in justified cases. Spanish speakers are often immigrants trying to prosper in Catalonia. Catalans usually respect their traditions, but answer them in Catalan and, after a few weeks, the newcomers begin to pronounce their first Catalan phrases. For Oleguer Sarsadenas (pers. comm., 9 February 2005), programming manager between 1989 and 1995, this issue is related to 'convention' and he argues that the cultural policy of the channel applied a 'linguistic' ellipsis as is done in other countries.

Political guidelines have an important role in language representation, because the language is the cornerstone of the definition of Catalonia as a nation. Not all scriptwriters agree with these policies. Even though most of them consider that the main function of TVC is language normalization, a minority think that fiction should be more faithful to the bilingual reality, and some of them say that there are occasional conflicts

between scriptwriters and managers on this point. For example, scriptwriter Lluís Arcarazo (pers. comm., 22 November 2004) says that TVC put pressure on him to make one of his immigrant characters speak in Catalan but that he always argued for the character talking in Spanish.

TVC has also implemented a considerable task of standardization with its series. Most characters speak a centralized version of correctly spelled Catalan. The channel has a language department that works on texts, is present on set at the moment of shooting and corrects every script. They try to apply a 'correct' model and always search for the most 'genuine Catalan' expressions and language structures, often removing Spanish imitations. They also work on accuracy to show how things must be said properly in Catalan. These language policies have their defenders and detractors. Those in favour of the policy argue that TVC has been the most important tool for domestic language in the last 20 years and fiction, as one of the most popular types of programme, is like a daily language lesson. For the others, fiction is not a language course and this standardization of the text blurs differences among characters. Scriptwriters who plead for minimizing standardization think that this criterion impacts in two different ways: First in naturalistic programmes (telenovela and drama series), standardization reduces realism because characters lose credibility. On this issue, director Eduard Cortés (pers. comm., 22 January 2005) argues that the fact that every character talks correctly reduces credibility and blurs differences between them. Second in humorous programmes (comedy and sit-com), it sometimes makes it difficult to crack language-based jokes. Normalization and standardization have a great impact on the national representation model provided by fiction series, and are a good example of how the 'imagined' community can be created through fiction. Some managers and scriptwriters agree that over the years both functions have been decreased in favour of fidelity and humour.

But other elements referring to society and culture must also be taken into account. Social issues like serious illnesses, sexual freedom, intercultural relations, intergenerational misunderstandings and family crises arise in the plots. Rather than dealing with political questions, these issues usually focus on social conflict that generates an emotional response but which has a political background. The transmission of values is one of the main functions of television fiction guidelines, as most managers have recognized. The way in which social problems are discussed in fiction gives us an idea about the type of nation that is being promoted. Social issues such as drugs, abortion, compulsive gambling, teenage problems and so on reflect the problems of society, which means that nation building is not only based on cultural or linguistic construction, but also on the social project that is represented. In the case of Catalan fiction, as O'Donnell (2002) has also

pointed out, telenovelas present a communitarian society, which has little in common with the individualism that so characterizes neoliberal society. All these issues are the driving force behind the plot in realistic fiction: the telenovela and drama. Comedy and sit-com also take up some of these issues but play with the 'politically correct' line to create funny situations. Comedy, then, makes it possible to deal with serious things, which are usually quite sensitive, in a more casual way. In general, scriptwriters and managers believe that fictional series have an important didactic function, similar to that of other national contexts (Ruoho, 2001; O'Donnell, 1999).

Throughout the period studied, TVC also produced historical series such as the comedy *La memòria dels Cargol* (*The Snails' Memory*) and the drama series *Temps de silenci* (*Time of Silence*). The first is a parody of the history of Catalonia based on the history of a family (whose surname is Snail) between the medieval conquest of the Muslim territories and the 20th century. The second is a drama based on the story of three families during the Franco regime. These series focus on the Spanish repression of the Catalan nation in particular historical periods and from different points of view. However, these points of view, especially that of the comedy, are self-critical. As Joan Lluís Bozzo, the main scriptwriter of *La memòria dels Cargols*, explained, in the comedy they tried to communicate the message that Catalonia is not independent because the Catalans did not want to be so at various moments in its history (pers. comm., 3 November 2004).

In comedy, historical, folkloric and cultural matters have all served as the object of humour. For example, in *Plats bruts* (*Dirty Dishes*), the most successful Catalan sit-com, Catalan-ness is sometimes used as a *leitmotif* for the comic situation. For Sergi Pompermayer (pers. comm., 1 December 2004), one of the main scriptwriters of this production, what differentiates Catalan from Spanish sit-coms is precisely this capacity to laugh at oneself. The main objectives of the urban sit-coms produced between 1999 and 2003 were to engage a new audience in Catalan-language fiction and counter the serious image of fiction that had been transmitted by drama and the telenovela.

Narrative analysis allowed us to synthesize storylines (themes, socio-historical background, plots) and main characters (social class, origins, professions, etc.). We found that the main national character represented in the series studied is the middle-class, urban Catalan speaker, who works as a professional (lawyer, doctor, teacher, business manager) or in the services sector and small shops (bars, chemist's, grocer's shops, etc.). These people respect national traditions such as gastronomy and festivities, but have a modern way of life. In general, but especially in fiction created by Benet i Jornet – one of the most important scriptwriters of the period – the message is that 'modernity and tradition are compatible'.

Conclusion: defining the national scenery

Cultural policy is usually regarded as the management of national cultural goods. But it is more than this. We might consider cultural policy as a broad political action, which includes communication policy. Although we understand the criticisms of McQuail (1997), who believes that a serious cultural policy cannot justify close protection of a national culture, it must be said that in a highly liberalized cultural market where technological access is not guaranteed, medium-sized and small cultures need political help to make their existence possible. This would be an eco-cultural policy that does not go against effective cultural management and respect for cultural pluralism.

One of the main goals of public channels addressed to cultural minorities or broadcast in minority languages is to provide such groups with a medium of expression. This is the field of cultural politics. As Fecé (2003) points out, this political action may sometimes be presented as 'natural', but in our study most creative and management staff at TVC recognized that their series were subject to certain political guidelines. We can sum up this political action as five sets of parameters within which creative staff and production companies can manoeuvre:

1. *Language promotion*: the language of all serials must be Catalan. Presence of Spanish must be explained in the text and must serve to foster language attitudes that are good for the health of Catalan.
2. *Cultural promotion*: fiction must engage with Catalan culture and society. So channels like TVC are expected to produce fiction located within Catalonia, which deals with its society and its traditions.
3. *Territorial promotion*: serials must give a good image of Catalan territories. So the cities are always good places to live and to pursue a professional career. The involvement of regional companies and institutions in the production determine how the fiction represents the territory.
4. *Promotion of social awareness*: storylines must raise awareness of social problems. Serials, then, show the 'right way', the 'way to cope with conflict'. This involves giving politically correct messages about how to deal with such issues as immigration, violence, the generation gap, health problems, etc.
5. *Promotion of national normalization*: this means that fiction must not be used to aggravate social tensions surrounding national conflict. Series must show cultural coexistence and solutions to day-to-day conflicts. They must represent Catalonia but in a moderate way. Series should not present hard line national conflict.

We have noted that territory, language and cultural proximity are the essential issues transmitted by the political framework. They are not only political and cultural, but also economic. This is why nation building in cultural production studies must not only focus on textual descriptions if they are to understand whole processes but also take into account the economic and production frame. Within this political framework, we have identified other messages that have been politically suggested to scriptwriters as social problems that should be dealt with. Outside this framework, creative staff have freedom to develop their stories as they wish and to attain the most important goal of any television fiction: audience ratings and quality entertainment. Most creative staff do not feel restricted; indeed, there is general agreement among scriptwriters that TVC provides a broad framework and their work is carried out in reasonable freedom. The staff involved in the production process understand that TVC, as the main producer, has the right to establish the aforementioned guidelines.

Between 1994 and 2003, TVC applied a policy of home production that has tried to comply with the mandate of promoting cultural and linguistic Catalan-ness. This policy has meant that certain criteria have been transmitted to the television managers and scriptwriters who work within this political frame. These production dynamics can be similar to those of other public television channels. Nation building in television fiction is a process underway not only in those channels that depend on regional or non-stateless nations, but also in big public corporations and even private ones. Michael Billig (1995) says that 'banal nationalism' appears when nation and national culture is 'naturally' present in our daily routine (the flag at school or in the post office, in the language we use in our official dealings with the administration, etc.). This is perhaps the most advanced stage of nationalist politics, when the national frame is taken for granted and simply not discussed. In stateless nations this is not possible, so symbols of nation must coexist with symbols of state. But in fiction, convention enables this national idea to be presented in a banal form.

In the production of fiction, the nation building process is much more than the mere presence of cultural and national referential elements within a narrative about our culture and our society. Here, the nation becomes the stage, a kind of scenery, the place where the story happens; that is, an 'imagined place' where people lead their lives in a normalized way within what is considered to be the national culture.

Notes

1. *Media, Culture and Society*, *Gazette*, *The International Journal of Communication Studies* and *European Journal of Communication*.

2. The bible is the main working document for scriptwriters of long-running television fiction series.
3. This category was subdivided into the four regions of Catalonia (Barcelona, Tarragona, Girona and Lleida) to measure territorial diversity.
4. The Valencian country, Balearic Islands, Rosselló (South of France) and the Catalan-speaking fringe of Aragon are the Catalan-speaking territories considered by nationalist linguistic determinists to comprise the Catalan nation, but we decided to differentiate 'Catalan' (strictly referring to Catalonia) from 'Catalan language frame' (other territories in which Catalan is spoken)..
5. Basque and Galician.
6. Berelson (1952) described several categorization examples in which nationality could be used. For example, he proposed such categories as American, British and Other European.
7. Telenovela is a fictional genre close to soap opera, originally developed in the South American countries and adopted in Latin countries.
8. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) apply the easy validity formula proposed by Holsti (1969) where Reliability = $2M/N1+N2$ (M is the number of coincidences in both codifications; N1 is the number of decisions in the first codification and N2 in the second).
9. Although a second coder is recommended for the reliability test, the research was part of a doctoral project so this was not possible.
10. We consider 'interaction' to mean a question/answer item, but sometimes it refers to a comment/answer. All interactions were identified by number.
11. TVC says that a cheap telenovela can cost €24,000, while a quality drama or comedy would cost about €180,000 per episode. This budget affects the external sequences, number of characters and locations. Evidently, these amounts have changed over the years, depending on inflation.
12. The way in which the house is laid out, furniture and other aspects of the family environment have cultural meanings. For more detail about home environment referents, see Castelló (2004, 2005).
13. We believe that some brands have important cultural and national meanings. For example, Guinness for Ireland and Ferrari for Italy are among the important companies or brands whose image is closely linked to a particular nation or culture.
14. Specifically, the council wanted to represent the town as a wealthy place, near Barcelona, where people can pursue their professional career, and, if possible, to avoid association with the stereotype of Sitges as a 'city for gays'.
15. Wine producers from Penedés had influence over the plot of *Nissaga de poder* (Lineage of Power).

References

- Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Ang, Ien (1985) *Watching Dallas*. New York: Methuen.
- Barker, Chris (1999) *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Berelson, Bernard (1952) *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. New York: Hafner.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1990) 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation', pp. 291–322 in H.K. Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.
- Billig, Michael (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Buckingham, David (1985) *Public Secrets: Eastenders and its Audience*. London: British Film Institute.
- Castelló, Enric (2004) 'Mecanismos de construcción de la identidad cultural en las series de ficción: el caso de la televisión autonómica en España', *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* 20: 45–77.
- Castelló, Enric (2005) 'Sèries de ficció i construcció nacional. La producció pròpia de TVC 1994–2003', doctoral thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Caughie, John (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cormack, Mike (1994) 'Programming for Cultural Defence: The Expansion of Gaelic Television', *Scottish Affairs* 6: 114–31.
- Deacon, David, Michael Pickering, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock (1999) *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis*. London: Arnold/Oxford University Press.
- Dhoest, Alexander (2004) 'Negotiating Images of the Nation: The Production of Flemish TV Drama, 1953–89', *Media, Culture and Society* 26(3): 393–480.
- Drummond, Phillip, Richard Paterson and Janet Willis (eds) (1993) *National Identity and Europe: The Television Revolution*. London: British Film Institute.
- Dyer, Richard, Christine Geraghty, Marion Jordan, Terry Lovell, Richard Paterson and John Stewart (1981) *Coronation Street*. London: British Film Institute.
- Fecé, José L. (2003) 'Teleseries de producción propia e identidad nacional', pp. 285–304 in V. Sampedro (ed.) *La pantalla de las identidades. Medios de comunicación, políticas y mercados de identidad*. Barcelona: Icaria.
- Ferguson, Majorie and Peter Golding (eds) (1997) *Cultural Studies in Question*. London: Sage.
- Garnham, Nicholas (1997) 'Political Economy and the Practice of Cultural Studies', pp. 56–73 in M. Ferguson and P. Golding (eds) *Cultural Studies in Question*. London: Sage.
- Gellner, Ernest (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gilroy, Paul (1997) 'Diaspora and the Detours of Identity', pp. 299–346 in K. Woodward (ed.) *Identity and Difference*. London: Sage.
- Griffiths, Alison (1993) 'Pobol y Cwm: The Construction of National and Cultural Identity in a Welsh-Language Soap Opera', pp. 9–24 in P. Drummond, R. Paterson and J. Willis (eds) *National Identity and Europe: The Television Revolution*. London: British Film Institute.
- Holsti, Ole R. (1969) *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Keating, Michael (1996) *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia, and Scotland*. New York: St Martin's Press.

- Kellner, Douglas (1997) 'Critical Theory and Cultural Studies: The Missed Articulation', pp. 12–41 in J. McGuigan (ed.) *Cultural Methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Krippendorff, Klaus (1980) *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Kymlicka, Will (2001) *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Larsen, Peter (1991) 'Textual Analysis of Fictional Media Content', pp. 121–34 in K.B. Jensen and N.W. Jankowski (eds) *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Liebes, Tamar and Sonia Livingstone (1998) 'European Soap Operas: The Diversification of a Genre', *European Journal of Communication* 13(2): 147–80.
- Lindlof, Thomas (1995) *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- López, Bernat, Jaume Risquete and Enric Castelló (1999) 'Spain: Consolidation of the Autonomic Model in the Multichannel Era', pp. 333–88 in M. de Moragas Spà, C. Garitaonandia and B. Lopez (eds) *Television on your Doorstep: Decentralization Experiences in the European Union*. Luton: University of Luton Press.
- Louw, Erik (2005) *The Media and Political Process*. London: Sage.
- McQuail, Denis (1997) 'Policy Help Wanted: Willing and Able Culturalists Please Apply', pp. 39–55 in M. Ferguson and P. Golding (eds) *Cultural Studies in Question*. London: Sage.
- Moran, Albert (1998) *Copycat TV: Globalisation, Program Formats and Cultural Identity*. Luton: University of Luton Press.
- Mosco, Vincent (1996) *The Political Economy of Communication*. London: Sage.
- Newcomb, Horace (1991) 'The Creation of Television Drama', pp. 93–107 in K.B. Jensen and N.W. Jankowski (eds) *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Newcomb, Howard (1997) 'National Identity/National Industry: Television in the New Media Context', pp. 3–19 in G. Bechelloni and M. Buonanno (eds) *Television Fiction and Identities: America, Europe, Nations*. Naples and Los Angeles: Ipermedium.
- O'Donnell, Hugh (1999) *Good Times, Bad Times: Soap Operas and Society in Western Europe*. London and New York: Leicester University Press.
- O'Donnell, Hugh (2002) 'Recounting the Nation: The Domestic Catalan Telenovela', pp. 243–68 in S. Godsland and A. White (eds) *Cultura Popular: Studies in Spanish and Latin American Popular Culture*. London: Peter Lang.
- Petrie, Duncan (2004) *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Riffe, Daniel, Frederick Ficco and Stephen Lacy (1998) *Analyzing Media Messages*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ruoho, Iris (2001) *Utility Drama: Making of and Talking about the Serial Drama in Finland*. Tampere: University of Tampere Press.
- Schlesinger, Philip (1991) *Media, State and Nation: Political Violence and Collective Identities*. London: Sage.

- Stratton, John and Ien Ang (1998) 'Multicultural Imagined Communities', pp. 135–62 in David Bennett (ed.) *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, Charles (1997) 'Nationalism and Modernity', pp. 31–55 in R. McKim and J. McMahan (eds) *The Morality of Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Terribas, Monica (1994) 'Television, National Identity and the Public Sphere: A Comparative Study of Scottish and Catalan Discussion Programmes', doctoral thesis, University of Stirling.
- Thornham, Sue and Tony Purvis (2005) *Television Drama: Theories and Identities*. New York: Palgrave.
- Tufte, Thomas (2000) *Living with the Rubbish Queen: Telenovelas, Culture and Modernity in Brazil*. Luton: University of Luton Press.
- Van den Bulck, Hilde (2001) 'Public Service Television and National Identity as a Project of Modernity', *Media, Culture and Society* 23: 53–69.
- Watson, Iarfhlaith (2002) 'Irish-Language Broadcasting: History, Ideology and Identity', *Media, Culture and Society* 24: 739–57.
- Wimmer, Roger D. and Joseph R. Dominick (2000) *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, 7th edn. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Wiley, Stephen C. (2004) 'Rethinking Nationality in the Context of Globalization', *Communication Theory* 14(1): 78–96.