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Imagining the Nation through Television Fiction: Memory, Proximity and Daily Life

Àlvar Peris Blanes
UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA
Alvar.Peris@uv.es
ORCID: 0000-0002-2323-2766

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the importance of television (especially TV fiction) in the imaginary of Nations. With this end in view, we first look at the role played by television as an instrument of socialization, as well as its ability to consolidate and naturalise an imaginary based on the dissemination of various ideological representations of reality. Second, we explore the ritual function of television and its incarnation in daily life, routines, and the family setting of the broad masses. It is a dimension that studies on the nation and nationalism are increasingly taking into account as central factors in the process of national construction — especially regarding the fostering of a sense of belonging and in imagining an abstract community. Last but not least, we focus on television fiction because it makes up the lion's share of the programmes in most TV stations and is probably the most relevant narrative we can find in contemporary societies. Among the various discursive strategies shaping this definition of the nation, we examine the construction of the story of the nation's past and present (in which the stories are set within nationally-defined regions and spheres) and the tactical resort to cultural and linguistic proximity.

Keywords: *television, national building, ideology, daily life, TV fiction*

Corresponding author: Àlvar Peris Blanes. Universitat de València, Facultat de Filologia, Traducció i Comunicació, Departament de Teoria dels Llenguatges i Ciències de la Comunicació. Alvar.Peris@uv.es

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INTRODUCTION

The media perspective has been part and parcel of studies on national phenomena for several years now (Özkirimli, 2005; Eley and Suny, 1996). However, this has not always been so. It is true that authors such as Karl Deutsch (1996), Ernest Gellner (2001) and Miroslav Hroch (2001) placed greater or lesser stress on communication in the construction and consolidation of the nation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, it was the new approach adopted by Benedict Anderson — for which he coined the term 'imagined community' in the 1980s (1983) — that really changed the field. Anderson's insightful term revealed that nations are what they are thanks to a plethora of cultural, discursive and representational materials used in national management. These materials give collectives meaning and enable one to grasp their existence and the world they dwell in. These processes

are deployed in many directions, which depend on the orientation given by these materials. Understanding Nations as 'imagined communities' swept away the old paradigms, charting a new way forward. The term also facilitated new theoretical approaches to the concept of nation because, among other things, it acknowledged the nation as a narration. Indeed, this definition of the nation became influential some years later on (Bhabha, 1990). From this perspective, the nation is the result of a historical, contingent process and is merely the product of constantly shifting stories and discourses. It is not homogeneous and unchanging but rather is something that is in a constant state of flux. One might say that the media play a leading role in representing today's social world. If we accept this premise, it seems reasonable to argue that media discourse plays a key role in the contemporary configuration of nations. Indeed, some researchers — such as Schlesinger (1991) — go so far as to refer to nations as 'communicative entities'. Yet others openly speak of "mediatic nations".

Among the media, television's traits make it key in providing the elements with which people imagine Nations. These include: the use of the narrative strategies found in popular literature and folklore; elements of oral tradition; TV's role as a mass-consumption product that is part of the lives of many. Such things make it "a cultural practice more than simply a technology", in Raymond Williams' (2003) words. It is "the bard of modern times", as Fiske and Hartley (2003) would say. In the rest of the paper, we shall delve into the relationship between television and the construction of the imaginary of Nations. In doing so, we will stress television fiction because: it: is one of the major entertainment genres; commands the greatest loyalty among viewers; most contributes to consolidating certain discourses on and representations of national phenomena.

TELEVISION'S IDEOLOGY, MYTH AND RITUAL POWER

There can be no doubt that media culture has become the dominant culture today. It is an economic force for socialization, capable of replacing traditional institutions such as the school, church, the family, and even the State when it comes to generating thought, value and taste. In particular, it plays a key role in creating identification models. In this light, we can infer that the media plays a leading role in the formation of a society's and a collective's imaginary. According to Castoriadis, this imaginary goes beyond the purely psychoanalytical realm to allude to a set of symbolic networks, and a 'magma' of significant texts and daily practices that are not false (for they have not been invented out of thin air) but are not real either. This is because societies at any given point in their history decide what they are and what their place in the world is. Put another way, "we cannot understand a society without a unifying factor that gives it meaningful content and that is woven through symbolic structures" (Castoriadis, 2003a: 278). From this perspective, one of the main features of the social imaginary is that it means nothing and everything at the same time (Barthes, 1994). It lies in the realm of what is implicit, what is taken for granted, and the symbolic. As a result, social institutions are articulated as social actors, 'representing and expounding society', as Castoriadis puts it. The national phenomenon can also be understood in this way, that is to say, an imaginary meaning that is shared by society through a myriad of things that are collectively represented, reflected, regulated, and fêted as being 'national' (Castoriadis, 2003b: 317). Nations therefore become symbolic spheres (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2002; Carey, 1998).

For Montserrat Guibernau (1997: 125–131), the use of symbols is a common strategy for forging awareness of belonging to a community. It is a signal of mutual recognition that distinguishes a national "us" from a foreign "them", tracing invisible frontiers that are cognitive in nature. At the symbolic level, national identity is something that makes us aware of belonging to a nation (Schlesinger, 2002: 36). The symbol cannot be deduced and is not natural. Rather, it is the result of a significant activity that remains implicit, enshrining the value that members of a community wanted to confer on it at a given moment. Symbols unite the population by using shared elements on the one hand, and by hiding or down-playing differences to the point where these disappear altogether. This is how nations

and the sense of belonging they engender have swept the board because they bring together people of different cultural and social origins. However, their success is not (nor cannot be) absolute. This is because in any society, there are people who do not feel represented by national symbols and choose to stay on its fringes. Yet others have been excluded during the building and modelling of national society. Furthermore, symbols (and the concept of the nation itself) are constantly evolving. This leads to their reinterpretation and even recreation to prevent them becoming merely decorative. meaningless stereotypes.

By contrast, if the symbols representing the nation remain static or are interpreted in a limited, unvarying way, they cease to be useful for mobilising national feeling among the masses. In such cases, symbols become little more than dusty relics. Guibernau (1997: 128) notes that symbols need to be refashioned for new contexts and for each age. He adds that new symbols also need to be found to maintain and boost national cohesion.

There is unanimous agreement that media discourse shapes symbolic material, nurturing the social imaginary of contemporary societies (Abril, 1997). Edgar Morin had an inkling of this in the mid-twentieth century, when he saw the imaginary as lying at the heart of the mass media scene (1962). This link has strengthened over the last few decades, with media culture now regulating most social relations. The media may also have a retroactive impact on imagined communities. This is because the media not only construct material on which the imaginary is based but disseminate it in an intensive fashion. In so doing, they turn the imaginary into a sphere that is highly charged with symbolic meaning. In particular, television is probably the most widely-used tool for managing collective awareness thanks to its ability to mobilize whole constellations of symbols and discourses on the national scene day in, day out.

Clearly, television's representation of this symbolic material is not neutral because it stems from a given view of reality. Put another way, when we represent the world around us, we always have an angle from which we see things. In this respect, one can say that all representations are ideologically-tinted because they are necessarily based on personal interpretation. This subjectiveness can be seen in the selection of subjects for discussion, their protagonists and a host of other aspects. The set of symbols and representations of the nation shown on TV are similarly affected. That is because they depend on the vision given of one's Nation and of foreign ones. Indeed, here one of the most important questions concerns who or what has been included in this representation of the nation. By the same token, one also needs to ask who or what has been left out and why. From Foucault, we know that power is a social phenomenon found and exercised in all walks of life. It can be seen in the daily practices of individuals and institutions, and circulates through all levels of society and social relations. One can therefore say that a culture of representation is also a culture of power. In all likelihood, this means that the representations of the nation imposed by the various television channels in a given territory coincide with those of the dominant nation. This marginalises other nations and/or minority/subordinated cultural identities or even renders them invisible. This circumstance obliges one to explore key concepts of critical theory following the re-readings made by Neo-Gramscian authors in British Cultural Studies (Hall, 2003, 1998). These key concepts include ideology and — above all — hegemony. One of the main features of hegemony is that it allows one to represent particular interests as collective ones, such that protesting against said interests is considered contrary to 'Common Sense' or 'abnormal'. Thus a whole set of symbols, values and beliefs that are deeply ideological can be taken for granted and banished from debate. The process is similar to the one where a symbol is transformed into a myth, defined by Roland Barthes as a historically-contingent semiological structure that naturalises ideologically-rooted notions. The myth does not attain this aim by hiding or avoiding reality. Rather, it achieves it by turning the semiotic process into an unchallenged fact such that texts cannot be interpreted in any other way (Barthes, 1994: 224–225). Barthes considered that in today's Culture

of the Masses (in which the mythological and national dimensions are heightened), nations find staunch allies in the media, which naturalise interpretations of national origins, symbols, traditions, heroes and heroines, and give them a sense of normality and authority at any given moment in history. Cinema has been and continues to be a powerful audio-visual tool for conveying national myths. Yet the very nature of television makes it especially good at naturalising ideological representations of reality and hence at coming up with new myths (Fiske and Hartley, 2003). Sometimes television is referred to as a 'shaman' (Dayan and Katz, 1995) because of its hypnotic, gregarious, 'tribal' gifts. Here, one can say that television today plays the role of the 'fireside storyteller' of yore.

'Ritual function' (Imbert, 2003; Fiske and Hartley, 2003; Kellner, 2002; Abril, 1997; Silverstone, 1996) furnishes the best explanation of television's co-operation with the 'symbolisation of order' (Abril, 1997: 159). According to Gonzalo Abril (1997: 172), ritual gives myth effect. Thus the myths (and oral narrations in general) of our culture constitute a cyclical ritual both at the 'story' level (what is told) and 'discourse' level (the telling). Both story and discourse legitimise and justify the myths. Myths thus take form through ritual processes, which in turn shape how myths are experienced and give meaning to our world. In doing so, these processes create a framework for both creating and maintaining an ideologically-rooted sense of security. In the first case, April (1997): 168) explains that from the cultural anthropological point of view, the ritual efficacy of television is based, among other things, on giving form, tempo and order to daily life. In addition, television takes pride of place in people's living rooms and hence in their daily rituals. This ritual function acquires special meaning from the perspective of socialisation and of obtaining normative consensus (especially on matters bearing on the 'nation'). In this respect, the importance of television lies not only in its remarkable capacity to ideologically represent the nation but also in the way it forms part of a daily, family cultural ritual. Precisely because it is part of the daily grind, it naturalises many of the nation's representations, discourses, traditions and symbols.

Hence the need to delve into the relationships between television, daily life, and national construction processes.

DAILY LIFE AND THE NATIONAL FAMILY OF VIEWERS

For some time now, studies on the nation and nationalism have begun to focus on the cultural forms found in daily life as one of the key factors in the process of National Construction. Here, special attention has been paid to the sense of belonging in an 'imagined community' and how this is consolidated (Eley and Suny, 2015: 81). The nation's building blocks are not only built official practices of an institutional nature but also the mundane experience and daily routines that mark our lives and forge links with others within shared frames of time and space. Eley and Suny argue that we are 'national' when we: vote; watch the Six o'clock News; follow national sport; see the repeated iconography of landscape and history in TV advertisements; lap up the visual references in films depicting the nation's daily life and politics (2015: 96).

Social order is one of the foundations of daily life. In general, people need to follow routines and traditions, and pursue myriad activities in organising their daily lives. Repetition and sequences foster confidence and stop us falling prey to the 'chaos' represented by uncertainty (Silverstone, 1996: 16–17)[1]. Above all, making life routine can also take collective form. The nation is strengthened through this collective desire to maintain a degree of social order. Here, the nation takes on a normative nature, symbolically enshrining daily practices and behaviour. The pace and routines of daily life are structured in temporal and spatial terms. Our decisions shape our daily lives but nobody would deny that external factors also

1 De Certeau (1988) and others (Highmore, 2003; Lefebvre, 1991) have, by contrast, been more interested in highlighting how daily life is also a suitable sphere for creation, the disruption of order and appropriation. Without denying this possibility, we should like to stress the habits, routines and rituals that people perform in an unreflexive fashion and that have a gregarious, alienating component.

have a bearing on our behaviour. For example, both technology and the media shape our daily habits, as several authors have pointed out (Morley, 1996; Giddens, 1993). Television is the medium that most affects the lives of the masses throughout the world.

Clearly, television can mean different things to different people. Indeed, it can mean different things in the life of an individual or even different things at a given moment. For example, it may be the main source of: information; knowledge: entertainment; even sensationalism and titillation. This "Colonisation of the most basic levels of social reality" (Silverstone, 1996: 17) forces us to think very carefully about television and analyse it and from various angles. Television is deeply rooted in our daily lives. As Gérard Imbert (2003) puts it, "Television is a celebration of the ordinary". Political, economic, and social phenomena seen on TV are taken as facts. This makes television a powerful tool for ideological transfer that cannot be ignored or belittled. Here, TV gives us both the best and the worst of worlds, depending on the use we make of it. The way the nation is represented is also influenced by television. It therefore behoves us to examine such representations. Over time, television has become a central object in the symbolic and material universes of modern societies and has far-reaching affective and emotional implications.

Over the years, first radio and then television have adjusted to major shifts in the daily routines of their audiences (Morley, 1996). Here, TV reception should be seen as a central routine because it is now an integral part of daily life. David Gauntlett and Annette Hill (1999) showed that the first thing many people do when they get home is to switch on the telly. Many watch a given programme while they have lunch or supper. Others forget TV when they break with their daily routine and become hooked once they go back to the daily grind. Clearly, not everyone has the same daily routine and viewing habits. Yet the link between the two is stronger than one might think. There are peak viewing hours too — with the biggest audiences in the evening. This is what the Americans call 'Prime Time'.

As a result, TV programming is based on most people's habits. However, many people also organize their daily lives depending on the programme schedule. In other words, there is a dynamic interaction between programming and viewers' fitting their habits to what is on 'the box'. This mainly happens because of the cyclical weekly scheduling of TV programmes. The schedule is then split into daily and hourly slots. While newspapers are published every morning and magazines every week or month, TV channels schedule their programmes at certain times of the day and/or on certain days. This schedule is repeated week in, week out, throughout the season. Thus on the one hand, the viewer knows everything about his favourite series, the weather bulletins, quiz shows and what is on the next day (as do hordes of other viewers). On the other hand, the serial, repetitive nature of television content turns viewing into a ritual, a habit that creates a sense of security, trust and proximity — one might almost say familiarity between the viewer and the TV broadcaster.

Some years ago, James Lull (1988) argued that cultures had their own "sense of time", which influenced the way TV was watched. As Carey wrote: "Nations do not only exist in historic time but also in media time" (1998: 44). One only needs to look at programme schedules to see how these vary between countries, even within The European Union. In Spain, Prime Time is more or less between 9–10 p.m. and Midnight. This is when the late-night news and the star product of the day (be it a fiction series, a film or other entertainment programme) is broadcast. By contrast, The United Kingdom's Prime Time begins between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., which is when people have supper. Viewer behaviour patterns vary in other parts of the world, for example in Japan and India. This 'national synchronisation' has been commented on by Tim Edensor (2015, 2002), who reveals patterns that are more important than one might think.

At the same time — as Gauntlett and Hill (1999: 129) argue — television routines are the embryo of many social relations. Many viewers consume certain TV products, especially fiction series and 'reality'

shows. They then talk about these to their workmates, classmates, friends and family about what happened in the episode shown that day or week. However, this viewing also helps drive conversations of a social, political or moral nature, strengthening individuals' commitment to their own nation. Television has no rival when it comes to building collective imaginaries that people can recognise and identify with. Despite the advent of new digital devices and the Internet, no other medium can speak to so many people at the same time as television. In fact, potentially all members of a nation can watch the same programme at the same time, allowing citizens to imagine themselves as a whole. These 'sacred, daily rituals of belonging', in which the national sphere enters the private one leads to what David Morley (2000: 107) calls the "national community of viewers". However, this nationalising process (as with others) creates tensions and resistance.

This issue directly takes us to what is familiar and predictable — categories that are equally part of the nation's daily life. According to Morley (2000: 3), the articulation of the 'domestic family within the 'symbolic family' (here, 'the nation') is heavily influenced by the media and communication technologies. That is why it is worth tying micro-structural analyses on households, families (and the domestic realm in general) in with contemporary debates on the macro-nature of the nation and cultural identities. The 'household' has often been considered a field in which memory (and hence identity) play an important part. This identity can express solidarity and unity or aloofness and lack of integration. In an age of 'de-territorialised globalisation' (Giddens, 2000), such notions are in a state of continual flux. The movement of people from one land to another for whatever reason (whether from free will or under duress) is changing what we think of as 'home'. In any case, the media (especially television) play a key role in the home. Despite everything, the home still has powerful connotations of welfare and safety.

The fact that the television set usually occupies pride of place in people's living rooms shows that 'watching the box' is an important household ritual. Little by little, the television set has become a symbolic object in the home. While other bits of household technology also have symbolic meanings, 'the telly' is special. The TV set has almost become a 'totem'. It is generally given prominence in a leisure area of the home (usually the living room). Indeed, the distribution of the living room furniture is usually dictated by where the TV is placed. This is why the television has become a key contemporary reference point in homes and a consumer status symbol on a par with the car, fridge and washing machine (Hartley, 2000). As Morley (2008: 232) again notes, television has become a fetish, given an ethereal, almost magic meaning, capable of drawing one's attention even when it is switched off. This kind of veneration has been watered down over the last few years given that many households now have more than one TV set. Nowadays, almost every member of the family has his or her own TV set. This means the telly has penetrated into places that were formerly unthinkable — such as bedrooms. This, among other things, has utterly changed the way people watch TV. In the past, it was watched in family as a highly social activity whereas today, many people watch it on their own. This social change has been boosted by technology (for instance, by smartphones and tablets). At the same time, television continues to be part of the home. Thus one might watch certain programmes, channels or presenters with certain people to give one a feeling of 'being at home' in the national sense.

Television has therefore become a basic element of the family system. One should note that 'the family' has often been used to metaphorically refer to the nation. One might therefore say that the nation's imaginary as a 'big family' takes form through television (among other symbols), which acts as a mediating nexus. In this sense, television links home life to the collective life of the nation. Naturally, when television brings the outside world into the home, it may also destabilise this imagined nation or at the very least, make it more complex and harder to pin down. In any event, most TV representations orient social relations, and

cultural and linguistic frameworks. The spatial and time perceptions in these representations basically continue to be national ones. One of the most powerful weapons for engendering a feeling of a fictitious 'national us' is to incorporate ideological elements on the nation in those programmes that are watched daily. This makes those elements appear normal and a matter of 'common sense'. 'Banal Nationalism' — Michael Billig (2006) — or "Daily Nationalism — Edensor (2002) — take on special meaning in television fiction. Such entertainment may appear innocent and seem to have little to do with forming identities and even less with the nation. Yet the truth is that such television fantasies have been shown to have enormous impact on both the building and dissemination of national projects.

NATION AND TELEVISION FICTION

Fiction is one of the main television genres, forming the backbone of TV network schedules around the world. This applies to both generalist and specialist channels. As Manuel Palacio states, "From the very beginnings of television, fiction has been one of the key elements for social and cultural legitimisation of the medium" (2001: 143). In general, TV fiction builds huge audiences, giving networks a great deal of social and financial clout. Fiction series are at the heart of a network's production and marketing strategies and are a key to its audience positioning. Indeed, networks bet so heavily on TV fiction that they only broadcast it to Prime Time audiences. The fiction format determines when a programme is broadcast. The programme may be a daily one (the case of soap operas and series), a weekly one (as in the case of most series) or one-offs and 'specials'. Going beyond the importance of daily serials in building a national imaginary, Dayan and Katz (1995) argue the importance of TV events in national construction. Furthermore, television fiction creates both an industry and a market. Networks outsource their production, helping to build a home audio-visual sector. TV fiction is often sold abroad (sometimes with foreign viewers in mind), greatly boosting profits and yielding cultural 'benefits' by helping to project the nation in a given way overseas.

In any event, if there is one reason why television fiction has such a big impact on contemporary culture, it lies in the remarkable way it configures the public sphere and the collective and national imaginary. This is so because the very nature of the medium means that TV plays a 'story-telling' role (Tous, 2010). We agree with Milly Buonanno that TV fiction is "The most important narrative corpus of our time and maybe of all time" (1999: 59). In this respect, we do not share the post-modernist vision of the demise of the great narratives, at least with regard to the nation. In our view, the establishment of narrative models and canonic myths in the culture of the masses (especially in their most popular versions) turns TV fiction into a decisive sphere for formulating the kind of nation that will end up being the hegemonic one. Very little has been written on the link between television fiction and the construction of the national imaginary. Given the evident importance of this topic, we find this dearth of material wholly unjustifiable (Peris Blanes, 2015, 2012; Rueda Laffond, 2014, 2011; Rueda Laffond and Galán Fajardo, 2014; Galán Fajardo and Rueda Laffond, 2013; Castelló, 2010, 2007; Castelló, O'Donnell and Dhoest, 2009; López, Cueto Asín and George Jr., 2009; Dhoest, 2009; Rueda Laffond and Coronado Ruiz, 2009, Buonanno, 2009).

In many of these studies, a link is made between the main narrative strategies and themes used by TV fiction to imagine the nation. These are summarised below. First, there is TV's ability to churn out fiction that employs a sentimental, public discourse on the past, replete with photogenic landscapes and hammed historical figures. The end result is soap opera on the nation's present for consumption by a broad audience. Second, TV fiction puts the action in a given, well-defined space that lies within the national borders. Third and last, the kind of representation of a nation's cultural and linguistic traits speaks volumes on the national imaginary. All these features reveal the importance of grappling

with the concepts of 'nation' and 'national identity' through TV fiction.

Practices concerning memory and mythology of the present

Historical fiction is one of the most prolific fields when it comes to building a national imaginary. The reason lies in such fiction's ability to weave tales that serve up the temporal continuities the nation wants. This idea is expressed by 'media memory' — a term defined by various authors (Rueda Laffond and Coronado Ruiz, 2016: 8). The concept is an ambiguous, many-faceted one that stresses the way the present weighs heavily in representing the past. The stress on the present not only shows up in anachronisms but also arises from a mish-mash of factors influencing the configuration, circulation, and (mis) appropriation of myths, symbols and traditions for use in the present. This public discourse on the past, whether it be critical or legitimising, forms part of the politics of memory in which television (especially TV fiction) plays a key mediating role. It is a deeply controversial issue because political and ideological interests are at work that usually bear on the national imaginary.

During the Franco Dictatorship in Spain, the focus was always on ensuring that TV fiction never questioned the regime's nationalist interpretation of history. That is why Spanish TV fiction stressed the adaptation of literary classics that did not rock the boat and that were similar to what was being turned out by other European TV networks at the time. In any case, the symbolic national universe peddled from the neo-Fascist beginnings of the dictatorship proved so powerful that much of it survived General Franco's death. With the transition to democracy, TV fiction had to adapt to a new political and social context with the creation of new national cultural myths that were in keeping with democratic discourse. This was the case of *Curro Jiménez* (TVE, 1977–1978/1981). The Spanish series depicted a man of Order, with a moderate political and social discourse that enshrined a "patriotism without politics" or a "national populism" (García de Castro, 2002: 83) that Spain's rulers were keen to put across at the time. The attempt to get to grips with Spain's bloody not-so-distant past seems to have been renewed in recent years with the heated debate on the territorial model of the Spanish State and far-reaching legislative changes (for instance, the Historical Memory Act). Among other series produced in this context were: *La Señora* (TVE, 2008–2010) and the follow-on *14 de abril. La República* (TVE, 2011), with were set in 1920s and 1930s Spain; the soap opera *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (TVE, 2005–2012), a long-running series covering the period of grinding poverty and political repression following The Spanish Civil War (1936–9); *Águila Roja* (TVE, 2009–2016), focusing on Spain's Golden Age; *Hispania* (Antena 3, 2010–2012), covering Iberic Celt Viriat's struggle against The Roman Empire. These are some of the most mythifying episodes of the official, popular memory in creating a common past for the Spanish nation.

The first series was based on Queen Isabel of Castile and her grandson. Its historiographic and political treatment followed the 'official' (or 'Castilian') version of Spain's history, with Isabel and crew being depicted as the founders of what would later become today's Spanish State. Specifically, the Isabel series (which dragged on for three seasons) banged away at the idea that the union of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon was "a good thing" because it saw off Catalonia's bid to manage its own affairs. The 'message' of a strong, united, imperial Spain running through the series *Carlos V. Emperador* also seemed intended as a dreadful warning to those living in the less-than-glorious present. In general, these television fiction series allow one to imagine a national link that remains unchanging. A particularly significant case here is the *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (TVE, 2015–present) series. This is one of the big surprises sprung by Spanish State Television. It features a team of bureaucrats (the country has more than most) who belong to different periods of Spain's history and whose job is to make sure that no changes are made to (Spanish) history as we know it. The Ministry has a labyrinth of tunnels that link the present to any period in the past. It as if 'being Spanish' were a natural condition of those living in this territory over the millennia (Rueda Laffond and Coronado Ruiz, 2016).

In addition, there are TV fiction series that are based in the present and which provide a "popular historiography of national daily life" (Buonanno, 1999: 267). A first

group comprises series dealing with social customs. These productions create an immediate ideological discourse on events in daily life. They therefore focus on the affective, family aspects of the home as an imaginary place projecting a vision of the nation (Medina, 2008; Huerta Floriano and Sangro Colón, 2007). A paradigmatic example of these folksy series giving form to the national imaginary during the dictatorship was *Crónicas de un pueblo* (TVE, 1971–1974). During the 1980s, a fair number of series were produced that sought viewer identification through the realism of their characters and situations. These series provided the first representation of the social changes in Spain at the time. One of the best-remembered ones was undoubtedly *Verano azul* (TVE, 1981), considered the first Spanish family series reflecting the customs and values of the period. Others were *Las chicas de hoy en día* (TVE, 1990) and *La mujer de tu vida* (TVE, 1991–1992), which represented the democratising, modernising spirit of the period. This new kind of TV fiction sought to legitimise the 1978 Spanish Constitution as a foundational myth and the new social and collective imaginary. This trend was consolidated with the arrival of private TV stations in the early 1990s, with series such as *Farmacia de Guardia* (Antena 3, 1991–1995) and above all, *Médico de familia* (Telecinco, 1995–1999) — a series that was hugely popular and that forever changed the way Spanish networks created TV fiction.

A second group of fiction series tried to portray daily life in a more realistic way — warts and all — avoiding the sugary vision conveyed by other productions (Castelló, 2007: 108–109). Here, one can speak of realism rather than the folksiness often found in comedies, family series and historic series. In general, these 'realistic' fiction series are confined to one genre and they commonly reflect professional spheres (such as policing, the medical profession, journalism). In the Spanish case, these themes were adapted from American fiction series. Examples here are *Turno de oficio* (TVE, 1986), set in a Law Firm, and *Brigada Central* (TVE, 1989–1990, 1992), which follows events in a police station.

Then came *El comisario* (Telecinco, 1999–2009) and *Hospital Central* (Telecinco, 2000–2012), one of the longest-lasting series and that was most in touch with what was happening on the street. Their purpose was to instil citizens with certain values and attitudes regarding a wide range of issues, conflicts and topics of public debate in a rapidly-changing society. Thus these series covered issues such as immigration, rising drug abuse among the young, criminal gangs, abortion, euthanasia, religion, incurable diseases such as AIDS and cancer. In doing so, they provided media guides on what the nation should be thinking and doing.

The nation's spheres and territories

According to Edensor (2015), people's feeling of belonging to a nation is strongly conditioned by spatial dimensions, both in terms of symbolic landscapes and famous places on the one hand, and in more mundane contexts on the other (daily places such as streets, shopping centres, public buildings and so forth). Naturally, this does not mean that these places remain unaltered but rather (as with culture), they are in state of flux, changing as the world does. We do not share the views of those scholars who consider that TV treats space in a 'de-territorialised' fashion, robbing places of their symbolic meaning so that they no longer act as identity markers (Imbert, 2008: 83–84). We accept that home interiors have become more homogeneous and globalised over the last few years. The same process can be seen in other areas such as bars and cafeterias (in the 'IKEA style', as Gérard Imbert puts it), which have acquired new meanings as places of socialisation. Yet nobody can deny that the concierge's room in *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena 3, 2003–2006) or the mansion in *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010–2015) are spaces that refer to the Spanish and the British imaginary, respectively. In any case, the territorial representation of a nation is not limited to interiors. City and regional locations are also liberally used to show us the setting to enrich the many local references that pepper the dialogue and crop up in the characters' deeds and travels. Enric Castelló (2007: 162) explains that one of the purposes of exterior shots is to show viewers what the nation is like.

If one takes Spanish television fiction as an example, one can quickly see that Madrid plays an overwhelming central role in both family and historic series (Rueda

Laffond and Coronado Ruiz, 2016). This presence may be more implicit (given that sitcoms have virtually no exterior shots) or more evident (for example in series in which Madrid is simply another member of the cast). It is highly likely that most Spanish producers of fiction are based in the Capital but this is a lame excuse for having Madrid hog the limelight if the aim is to integrate the whole of society in the same national project. The British, for example, have long grasped that one cannot set all fiction series in London. Both public and private channels make an effort to place their stories in other cities and areas of the country. The series *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960–present), for instance, told the story of a working-class district of Manchester — a city thousands of viewers visit each year to discover the streets that inspired the series. TV3 [the Catalan Public Broadcasting Corporation] also makes an effort to set its series in various parts of Catalonia so that nobody feels left out. This explains why groups have citizens have not complained that Barcelona is over-represented (Castelló, 2007: 163–164) — something that shows that it is no easy task to decide what represents the nation. That said, there are signs that Spanish TV fiction is slowly getting the message. For example, over the last few years there have been series such as *El Príncipe* (Telecinco, 2014–2016), set in a district of Ceuta, and *Mar de plástico* (Antena 3, 2015–present), set in the market gardening area of Almeria. Some other series have also opted for a wider geographical representation of Spain.

Rueda Laffond (2011: 27) argues that spatial representation in historical fiction should not be evaluated purely on the basis of sets or locations where the action occurs. He believes that the narratives and metaphors explaining certain events and collective processes also need to be weighed in the balance. Here, TV fiction evokes historic locations as frameworks into which myriad symbols are stuffed (often in a way similar to that found in fairytales). Series such as Isabel and *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (TVE, 2001–present) are good examples of this. Laffond maintains that the 'historic areas' proposed by the media story-telling become 'exceptional' locations because of their protagonism, allowing past events to be selectively treated from the standpoint (or bias) of the present (Rueda Laffond, 2011: 30). The author sees these TV representations of historic locations as a "geography of memory" that plays a decisive role in configuring hegemonic meanings of the past. Once again, Madrid is at centre stage in political and memory terms, in which attempts to 'fix' the national history (in more than one sense) has long been a theme in Castile's age-old obsession with centralisation. Another notable aspect in this televisual "geography of memory" is invocation of the national spirit, which has even been reflected in the title of some TV productions (Mikos, 2009). This is the case of Hispania, whose story is that of the struggle against a foreign invader, and *Plaza España* (TVE, 2011), a sitcom full of stereotypes, set in a Castilian village during The Spanish Civil War.

At the same time, spatial location can also be linked to the trotting out of stereotypes based on proximity strategies and materials recognised by viewers. The inclusion of ordinary, daily areas in the historical narrative makes it easier to deploy and condense broad-spectrum appeals to community consensus based on supposed national affinities and differences. Here, one can employ Rueda Laffond's (2011: 37) idea of "ordinary common ground" in the representation of the daily aspect of historic space . In this case, the series *Amar en tiempos revueltos* is interesting because it takes place in an imaginary Madrid square that "has played a dramatic, historic role in symbolising ordinary Spanish folk as a whole" (Rueda Laffond, 2011: 32). The representation of the home as the centre of the action is a defining characteristic of series such as *Cuéntame cómo pasó*. Here the home of the protagonising family (Alcántara) is in Madrid, which once again is the key location. In the series, historic fiction is liberally mixed with the family context, following a 'demotic turn' (Turner, 2010). This provides a nostalgic, kid-glove treatment of a past that can easily be identified by most people and that seems both close and accessible. This "topography of normality", in Rueda Laffond's words (2011: 37) again puts citizens at the centre of historic events, portraying the socialisation patterns of a new collective political culture.

Cultural and linguistic proximity

One of the narrative strategies most used by TV fiction to win viewers' hearts is to use elements of "cultural proximity" as defined by Joseph Straubhaar (2007). Such elements lie within a clearly national framework. TV fiction's 'banal nationalism' is a stew cobbled together from: the frequent appearance of national writers, politicians and singers in the stories; the 'pat' reinterpretation of the cultural traits associated with these celebrities; a social context rooted in daily life and larded with stereotypes. If we take the Spanish case as an example, one can see that the vast majority of TV fiction enshrines what Rueda Laffond and Galán Fajardo have termed "the cultural essence of Spanishness" (2014: 11), dwelling on the habits, customs and other cultural quirks associated with 'Spanish national identity'. That is to say, folklore, bull-fighting, Flamenco music and dance, religious festivals and so on. There has also been a spate of recent TV films on Spain's so-called 'High Society', the Monarchy, those who formed the elite during the Franco dictatorship, bull-fighters, singers of 'Spanish' songs and so forth. As Rueda Laffond and Coronado Ruiz (2009: 101) point out, such stuff puts a new gloss on the symbols and 'identity' of a deeply conservative mental universe". These productions can be split into two main groups. On the one hand, there are those protagonised by Spain's political and social elite during the last thirty or forty years. Such series aim to highlight "the history of the present from the angle of national memory" (Rueda Laffond and Galán Fajardo, 2014: 18). Examples are *23-F. El día más difícil del rey* (TVE, 2009) [on the failed coup d'état in 1981] and *Adolfo Suárez, el presidente* (Antena 3, 2010). On the other hand, there are fiction series on show business celebrities. These exercises in hagiography milk popular nostalgia for all it is worth. Examples include *El joven Raphael* (Antena 3, 2010), *Carmina* (Telecinco, 2011), on Carmen Ordóñez, and *Mi gitana* (Telecinco, 2012), on Isabel Pantoja, among a host of others. They all give a rose-tinted vision of Spain during the dictatorship. This telly vision of the past is light years removed from the debate on the need to modernise Spain promoted by certain political and social sectors. While such nostalgic bunkum draws many viewers, it also turns a lot of people off.

One should also note Spanish fiction's gift for portraying the way vulgar folk live, act and speak. This is something that has a long tradition in Spanish literature, theatre and cinema. Indeed, for some scriptwriters, producers and experts, it is a distinctive feature of Spanish TV fiction (Cabana, 2007; García de Castro, 2002). This approach to TV fiction is particularly marked when it comes to comedy such as *Los ladrones van a la oficina* (Antena 3, 1993), inspired by a work by Jardiel Poncela, and *Hostal Royal Manzanares* (TVE, 1995–1998), with Lina Morgan as the protagonist. There are also more recent series aimed at a broader family audience, such as *Los Serrano* (Telecinco, 2003–2008), Aída (Telecinco, 2005–2014) and *La que se avecina* (Telecinco, 2007–present). These go overboard when it comes to slang and highly stereotyped characters. In general, the scripts are based on situations that are shared by most of the audience, making them instantly recognisable. Clearly, humour is a powerful element for procuring cultural and national proximity. Yet one can only exploit its full scope when a group shares the same reference points. In any case, popular narrative (which is characterised by simplicity and dwelling on the nitty-gritty of daily life) is also one of the hallmarks of historical TV fiction in Spain. This focus on daily life goes hand-in-hand with an appeal to viewers' memories and nostalgia and is often accompanied by the kind of melodrama one sees in soap operas.

In addition, there is the language issue — something of considerable importance in those regions that have more than one official language. If we take the Spanish case, the amount of Spanish TV broadcasting in languages other than Spanish [Castilian] is virtually zero and reflects nothing of Spain's considerable cultural and linguistic diversity. Various recent studies exploring the role played by Spanish TV fiction in national construction reveal the way Castilian monolingualism sweeps all before it (Rueda Laffond and Galán Fajardo, 2014). For example, it is symptomatic that in series such as *Isabel*, in which the Crown of Aragon is the protagonist, there is not a single character (not

even a court servant) who uses Catalan as his or her mother tongue — in itself, a gross distortion of historical fact. This was probably not King Ferran's case, given that he came from an Aragonese family (Trastàmara) that had Castilian as its mother tongue. The Borjas [Borgias] are a different kettle of fish. This family of Valencian origin gave Rome two popes: Calixtus III and Alexander VI. It that as well as using Latin, it seems they communicated with one another in the Valencian dialect of the Catalan of the period. This absence of Catalan from Spanish TV fiction is also scandalously apparent in productions such as in the mini-series *Ojo por ojo* (TVE, 2010), set in the revolutionary Barcelona of 1920, *Habitaciones cerradas* (TVE, 2015), also set in Barcelona (this time between the end of the 19th Century and the present). There is also the case of Aida Folch a character in *El Ministerio del Tiempo*, a Catalan burgher in late 19th Century Barcelona who always speaks in Castilian even (incredibly) to her Catalan kith and kin. When it is easier to hear Thai (without subtitles) spoken on a Spanish TV fiction series than it is to hear Catalan, Basque, or Galician — which is the case in the series *La Embajada* (Antena 3, 2016) — one knows which way the wind is blowing when it comes to defining the nation on the TV screen. Apparently, most viewers find the absence of Catalan, Basque and Galician 'normal' in Spanish TV fiction series — something that reveals how narrow (and narrow-minded) this general cultural conception of 'modern' Spain is. It is more than likely that were these languages to be used with subtitles, it would foster greater appreciation of Spain's cultural and linguistic diversity. This in turn would spur greater recognition and comprehension of 'the other'.

CONCLUSIONS

Some argue that communication technology — specially satellite, cable and the Internet — are boosting TV offerings and will break the shared view television has provides hitherto. This, they insist, will weaken the nation as an imagined community and feeling of belonging to a nation. The corollary, so goes the argument, is that this trend, together with the fact that many homes already have several TV sets, will fragment audiences and make TV viewing increasingly individual. This phenomenon ties in with the growing separation between the television system and the Nation State. With the ability to access contents from other networks around the world at any given moment, TV consumption is more conditioned by the viewer's preferences than by national programme schedules. Media globalisation has broken the television ritual of 'national communion' because it is increasingly hard to gather with one's fellow-countrymen for a given broadcast at a given time. Put baldly, technology and access to global content are crossing the symbolic bounds of the home and hence of the nation.

While we readily accept that consumption patterns have changed but we do not share the views set out in the foregoing paragraph. All the indications are that television will remain open, catering to both generalist and specialist audiences and continue to attract the lion's share of viewers each day in most countries. Indeed, some broadcasts (mainly of sports events but also some fiction series and other programmes) are capable of drawing huge audiences — something that makes us believe that television will continue accounting for much of the nation's viewing habits. In this respect, television content continues to draw viewers' interest, regardless of whether the programme is watched live on a TV set or 'on demand' on a computer screen or other device. Perhaps the 'shared' aspect of viewing will become less important as a result but most audiovisual content consumed is still offered by TV networks. The perception is that if we want to take part in a common social life, one has to see certain TV programmes that establish the national agenda and subjects of debate. Here, TV fiction continues to have a big impact on the population. That is why TV stations need to take a responsible attitude when representing the nation through their fiction series. The extent to which these series reflect our national imaginaries will depend largely on how programme narratives are written and told.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Àlvar Peris received his PhD in Audiovisual Communication from Valencia University (UV), where he has taught since 2003. His lines of research are the analysis of audiovisual contents and formats and the media construction of identities. Dr. Peris is the author of numerous scientific papers in scholarly journals, and has published monographs and collective books on Cultural Studies and History.