



# Elements of national and cultural identity in Spanish television fiction productions distributed by the platform RTVE Play

## Elementos de identidad nacional y cultural en la ficción televisiva española distribuida por la plataforma RTVE Play

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** During the last decade, several audiovisual platforms have proliferated in the Spanish media environment. One of them is RTVE Play, a free service offered by the *Radio Televisión Española* corporation (Spanish Radio and Television). It includes dozens of audiovisual productions financed by the institution, broadcasted by its linear television channel *La 1* or created specifically for the Internet. **Methodology:** This article analyzes a sample of the 30 series premiered between 2018 and 2022 to research what features of Spanish national and cultural identity construction can be found in them. Thus, it explores what referents and discourses about the national context are available in the audiovisual works of RTVE Play. Using a coding sheet applied to the analysis of the pilot chapters of the fictions in the sample, several categories are considered, such as anthroponyms, locations, language, national symbols, social issues raised in the narrative, among others. **Results:** The results obtained evince little abundance of strong identity elements and scarce diversity in the representation of autochthonous cultural forms of some regions of the country with notorious specificities. **Conclusions:** Some aspects that exceed the categories used, such as the recurrence of women as main characters in roles requiring significant authority, suggest possible research lines for future studies about the most recent fictions financed by RTVE.

**Keywords:** national identity, television, public service, TV series, streaming.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Durante la última década han proliferado diversas plataformas audiovisuales en el entorno mediático español, entre ellas, RTVE Play, servicio gratuito ofertado por la corporación Radio Televisión Española. En ella, se ofertan decenas de producciones audiovisuales financiadas por la institución, emitidas por su cadena de televisión lineal o creadas expresamente para Internet. **Metodología:** Este artículo analiza una muestra de las 30 series estrenadas entre 2018 y 2022 para investigar qué rasgos de construcción de identidad nacional y cultural española pueden hallarse en ellas. Así, se explora qué referentes y discursos sobre lo nacional están disponibles en las obras audiovisuales de RTVE Play. Partiendo de una ficha de codificación aplicada al análisis de los capítulos pilotos de las ficciones de la muestra, se analizan categorías como antropónimos, localizaciones, lengua, símbolos nacionales, cuestiones sociales planteadas en la narrativa, entre otras. **Resultados:** Los resultados obtenidos evidencian poca abundancia de elementos marcadamente identitarios y escasa diversidad en la representación de formas culturales autóctonas de algunas regiones del país con notorias especificidades. **Conclusiones:** Algunos aspectos que exceden las categorías utilizadas, como el protagonismo recurrente de mujeres en roles con marcada agencia, sugieren posibles líneas de desarrollo para estudios futuros sobre las ficciones más recientes financiadas por RTVE.

**Palabras clave:** identidad nacional, televisión, servicio público, series de ficción, *streaming*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that in recent years a great opportunity has opened up for the production and distribution of audiovisual content at the international level (Lotz, 2021) thanks to the rise of OTT (over-the-top) operators, which also constitutes for public broadcasters a new scenario in which to redefine and strengthen their public audiovisual service mission (Medina, & Ojer, 2011) by using digital platforms (Bonini et al., 2021). Rodríguez, & Maroto (2022) indicate that these contents broadcasted on the platforms "entail a transformation of the communicative strategy of the corporate identity of television" (p. 156) and of the values of a public entity that have expanded from the classic inform, educate and entertain to the more recent ones: universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability and innovation (European Broadcasting Union, 2014). These social and cultural factors are vital for common use and cohesion, particularly universality, which must reconcile the sensitivity of citizenship and the union of society in a context of diversity of communities and cultures (Campos-Freire et al., 2018).

The Spanish public entity has undergone a process of "platformization" (Bonini et al., 2021) and has a website that, according to Medina, & Ojer (2011), "is well organized, innovative and seeks to provide public service content, regardless of commercial demands" (p. 93). In addition to having an offer of attractive and personalized content, it responds to the social values of its identity (Rodríguez, & Maroto, 2022; Eguzkitza et al., 2023). Fiction is among the contents hosted on the public television platform, which has also taken advantage of the development of transmedia narratives that encourage audience interaction (Formoso et al., 2018; Rubio, 2021). In the academic field, for example, the case of the fiction *El ministerio del tiempo* (TVE: 2015-2020) from different approaches: historical and identity (Rueda, & Coronado, 2016), transmedia expansion and fandom phenomenon (Establés-Heras, 2016). Other researches focused on audiovisual products broadcasted by the public broadcaster, such as Maroto, & Rodríguez (2022) whose object of study are the female characters of the series *HIT* (RTVE: 2020-). Regarding the commercial strategies carried out in *Águila Roja* (RTVE: 2009-2016) and *Isabel* (RTVE: 2012-2014) the work of Franquet, & Villa (2014) has been published as well as the research by Formoso et al. (2015) that analyzes the implications of the online broadcasting of these fictions for production and reception.

In this new global media context, the production of national fiction increases the debate about the construction of national identity by the media (Casetti, & Di Chio, 1999), responsible for presenting a cohesive culture, way of living and socializing (Arias, 2009). In this sense, Larraín (2000) wonders whether national identity is destined to disappear as a consequence of globalization when individuals from different regions come into contact with each other through television images, and Fecé (2001) raises the dichotomy between homogenization/identity or global/local in the information society and technological development.

As Anderson (1983) pointed out earlier, nations are, to a large extent, "imagined communities", and the discourses on what they are and/or can be are collectively constructed, with the crucial intervention of the media. Therefore, it is worth asking what discourses, referents and imagery about the nation are present in a medium as relevant and influential as television is. Prieto (2012) examines the most outstanding characteristics of Spanish national identity through different textual and audiovisual expressions that make up the "Spanish imagination". In the context of fiction series, works focus on productions for regional television (Castelló, 2004), especially on the construction and representation of Catalan cultural identity by the public channel TV3 (Fecé, 2001; Lacalle, 2007).

After the pioneering contributions of authors such as Palacio (2001, 2006), & Smith (2007, 2016), which focused on how TVE historically constructed and disseminated discourses about the nation in its television creations, with a special focus on its fictions during the transition period with a strong pedagogical approach, there is a certain lack of research on the contribution of RTVE to the construction of the Spanish national identity during the last years, taking into account its characteristics as a public service and the possibilities of internationalization of its contents through the RTVE Play platform. In a context of decisive industrial and technological transformations, it is relevant to pay attention to how the corporation tries to adapt with this new resource at hand, and this is the main objective of this research that tries to fill a gap in the current academic literature.

### **1.1. Theoretical framework**

The development and implementation of OTTs has transformed the production and distribution of content (Lobato, 2019; Lotz, 2021), although it is true that there have been different stages and strategies. Thus, the Report for the Reform of the State-Owned Media (2005) did not include a specific plan despite the fact that the opportunities for RTVE were evident (Medina, & Ojer, 2011). The implementation of digital services, linked to budgetary issues derived from the economic crisis (Eguzkitza et al., 2023), came after the so-called "post-network era" (Franquet, & Villa, 2014).

In 2000, the web was implemented, although, as Eguzkitza et al. (2023) indicate, in a very limited and progressive manner. According to Medina, & Ojer (2011) in 2008 it became a competitive, innovative and interactive page with a wide variety of contents (Arjona, 2009; Medina, & Ojer, 2011), in order to have larger audiences and participation (Franquet, & Villa, 2014) and to unify, in addition, the official information, since there were series that had their own site, such as *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (RTVE: 2001-2023) (Rubio, 2021). In 2017, PlayZ is incorporated, which includes programs and fictions aimed at the audience belonging to generation Z (Rodríguez, & Maroto, 2022), and which contains short and direct spaces created by young people to be distributed on mobile devices and social networks (Eguzkitza et al., 2023). Years later, in 2021, there is a change in the platform's name: RTVE Play<sup>1</sup>(Eguzkitza et al., 2023), which continues to be free of charge and to disseminate culture, sports and national information (Rodríguez, & Maroto; 2022). The broadcaster's reports stress the public service role of the channel (Díaz, & Berzosa, 2020) and state that "RTVE's values refer to those of freedom, equality, pluralism and tolerance, on which democratic coexistence is based" (Díaz, & Berzosa, 2020, p. 102).

In relation to the aforementioned values and principles of public service, television is considered to be a means of cultural transmission (Ramos-González, & Rico-Martín, 2014) by which identity can be developed and disseminated. The aspects that make up cultural identity and allow individuals to identify themselves as belonging to it are, among others, the geography of the territory where they live, the language they speak, political institutions, social and family relationships and other characteristics (Castelló, 2004). Globalization accelerates social change and, with it, the transformation of identity, defined as the result of a product "that has been constructed and reconstructed over time and that is closely related to the cultural particularities of each geographic region and the characteristics that identify peoples at a given historical moment" (Arias, 2009, p. 10). Identity implies a process of cohesion in relation to culture, the way of living and socializing. Melucci (1982) notes three elements in the review of the different meanings of the term identity: (1) the notion of permanence, (2) the notion of unity, and (3) the relational character. Referring to this author, Covi (1994) adds that identity requires a balance between "self-perception" and "heteroperception", which implies considering how the group perceives itself and how it is perceived by others. Identity is therefore a two-way process: (1) the construction of "imagined communities" through shared social and cultural categories —religion, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality— with which individuals identify and define themselves, and (2) the reference to "others", whose opinions are incorporated and from whom individuals want to differentiate themselves (Larraín, 2000).

In the contemporary media context, the process of globalization has transformed the cultural environment due to the international distribution of information, ideas, knowledge and values through the mass media. This phenomenon can lead to an identity crisis in some sectors when different geographical areas adopt foreign behaviors due to the cultural influence of the media (Arias, 2009).

Scholars refer to the concept of "imperialism" derived from technological development and globalization that involves the formation of collective identities through new identities that substantially modify the original ones (Castelló, 2004). In opposition to the theories on cultural imperialism and Americanization Buonanno (1999) proposes the "paradigm of indigenization", that is, "the process by which forms and expressions of external cultures, elaborated by other societies, are appropriated, reworked and restituted by one or several local societies" (p. 20).

Two other relevant concepts here are "cultural proximity" and "cultural discounting". The former refers to the consumption of cultural projects guided by the attractiveness for the audience of recognition, familiarity and identity with their expressive and creative forms: culture, identity and language. The audience gets pleasure and fulfills a need by finding itself in the products it consumes —social worlds, customs, lifestyles, accents, faces and landscapes, etc.—, so that local audiences prefer local products (Buonanno, 1999; Straubhaar, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> This platform should not be confused with RTVE Play+, launched as a paid service for the international market.

On the other hand, " in a culture other than one's own, materials have a less attractive power for local audiences, a lower value compared to domestic materials; cultural discount it is precisely this reduction in value" (Buonanno, 1999, p. 37), which is called cultural discount. To overcome both phenomena, in a global, heterogeneous and multicultural market, it is necessary to develop a high degree of universalism: formulas, structures, themes, characters, values that are potentially accessible and recognizable to members of different cultures (Buonanno, 1999).

The responsibility and influence of the media on national identities is accentuated in the current audiovisual market in which digitalization allows the international distribution of local content (Castelló, 2004). In this research, and following Larraín's (2000) warnings, the influence of television over identity development should not be simplified:

Television puts people in contact with distant worlds and shows other cultures and other possible ways of life. In this way, it helps to contextualize and relativize the absolutism of one's own or national way of life. However, television can also help in the creation and recreation of national traditions (Larraín, 2000, p. 29).

In order to explain the influence of television on the social and cultural reality of the audience, Tan et al. (2022) propose three theories:

- 1) Cultivation Theory: which is based on the concept that television shows a distorted but uniform and persuasive image of reality that is internalized by viewers,
- 2) Social Cognitive Theory: which focuses on the fact that behaviors and values are learned and accepted through repetition and viewers feel competent to adopt them after watching them, and
- 3) Cognitive Functional Theory: which indicates that the values and behaviors represented on television are accepted and adopted by the audience when they are easy to learn and the audience perceives them as useful to obtain rewards.

Indeed, Smith (2016) argues for greater academic attention to the television medium, traditionally less addressed than the film medium regardless of its priority consumption by the audience. Television is involved in the processes of identity by means of the transmission of discourses that hierarchize, include, exclude and give meaning to certain social facts and, thus, construct the social reality of the viewers (Crovi, 1994). Supporting this idea, in the work on audiovisual fiction in Catalan television, Fecé (2001) concludes that "the media contribute to the organization of stories about identity" (p. 240), & Castelló (2004) expresses that "the history of communication and cultures is full of examples in which the media have developed a role in identity and in the creation of myths and symbols" (p. 50).

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this research is to analyze which are the features of Spanish national identity development present in the fiction produced by the public service corporation RTVE which is distributed through the RTVE Play platform. The aim is to determine whether, from the public entity, a national identity imagery is being built/reinforced.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research has reviewed previously published works on RTVE's strategies as public television in the digital environment (Medina, & Ojer, 2011) and the RTVE Play platform in relation to the network's values (Rodríguez, & Maroto, 2022), texts on the influence of television in the construction of national and cultural identities (Crovi, 1994; Larraín, 2000) and the concepts of "indigenization", "cultural proximity" and "cultural discount" developed by Buonanno (1999).

### 3.1. Sample

In order to verify the national identity features present in the fiction produced by the public broadcaster and distributed in the RTVE Play platform, a sample was analyzed, which was elaborated according to the following criteria:

- belonging to RTVE Play,
- the complete series is in the catalog, and
- its premiere has taken place between 2018 and 2022.

Based on these premises, the sample was composed of 30 series as can be seen in Table 1<sup>2</sup>. From these fiction series, the pilot episode has been analyzed as it establishes the concept of the series and its essential characteristics (Dunleavy, 2018), see Table 2<sup>3</sup>.

Before analyzing the episode, a series of criteria on formal aspects of the productions studied were indicated. Thus, in addition to the title of the series, data were collected and analyzed on: production company, duration of the episode, number of seasons, number of episodes, broadcasting outlet (on conventional television, on the platform or both), name of the director/s, scriptwriter/s, creator/s, as well as the number of people in each of these departments. The format and genre of the fiction programs have also been identified, distinguishing both concepts. As these two terms present some controversy, it was decided to follow the work of Saló (2003), since it has allowed to determine the different options of genre and format presented by television series. Following the author, the first concept is applied from a thematic perspective that refers to the content of the series. On the other hand, the format classifies these projects according to formal aspects and modes of production. Thus, the categories used by the format are: situation comedies, dramas, procedurals, daily serials, tv-movies, miniseries, anthology, soap-opera and genre: western, horror, crime, suspense, drama, comedy, musical, war, historical, psychological, fantastic, romantic, documentary.

The sample, as indicated, is composed of 30 audiovisual fiction works released between 2018 to 2022. As for the genre the predominant one is comedy as it is identified in 23,3% (n=7) of them. If the two-genre categorization is taken into account, drama combined with other genres, such as historical, romance, police procedural, etc. can be found in 13 fictions, that is, 43,3%. In terms of format, webseries is the predominant format (n=14; 46,6%), followed by drama (n=10; 33,3%). Minority formats are: miniseries (n=3; 12%) and procedural, daily serial and sitcom with one fiction work each. Only 14 programs (46,6%) have been programmed in RTVE Play and the rest in "linear" and digital television. In terms of duration, the fiction series with the longest duration is *Promesas de arena*, with 1:26:44, and the shortest one is *Limbo*, with a duration of 9 minutes and 7 seconds. The average duration is 46 minutes and 17 seconds. It should be noted that the fictions that are broadcast exclusively on the platform have a considerably shorter duration, no more than 30 minutes and most of them are around twenty minutes long, compared to those broadcast on conventional television, which are usually around one hour long. As for the number of seasons, 26 fiction productions have only one season, three fiction productions have 2 seasons and only one has 3 seasons, representing 86,6%, 12% and 4%, respectively.

Regarding the people in the directing role, men predominate over women by majority, a trend that is repeated among scriptwriters. A total of 53 directors have worked in these fiction programs and an average of 1,76 per episode. The fiction programs with the most directors, specifically 4, are *Dos vidas* and *HIT*. The average number of scriptwriters is higher than that of directors, specifically, 3,26 per fiction series (98 in total) and the series with more scriptwriters are *Hospital Valle Norte* and *Sabuesos*, with 11 scriptwriters each. The series with only one scriptwriter are: *Ser o no ser*; *El Continental*; *Antes de perder*; *El punto frío*; *Irreal* and *Abducidos*. It should

<sup>2</sup> Table 1. RTVE Play fiction series technical specifications (<https://bit.ly/49vIESL>)

<sup>3</sup> Table 2. Pilot episode of the RTVE Play fiction series (<https://bit.ly/48cXUTA>)

be noted that these series, which are made to be broadcasted only on platforms, have a scriptwriter, except for *El Continental*, which has only one scriptwriter, something unusual in a fiction program of more than one hour in length. One more category that has been analyzed is the increasingly relevant role of the creator. It is true that not all fiction programs have it, in fact, it is not specified in 10 cases, but others have up to 3 creators, such as *Néboa* and *Sabuesos*.

### 3.2. Method

For the analysis of national identity, the elements of identity development set forth by Castelló (2004) will be taken into account:

- geographical location (an element of proximity that is an essential characteristic of cultural identity, taking into account two perspectives: where the series was filmed and where the action takes place),
- outdoor locations and architectural settings (arrangements, urban spaces),
- anthroponyms (autochthonous names and surnames),
- economic and professional activity,
- identity symbols (flags, colors, icons, typical dress, companies),
- social conflict (current affairs, sports, politics),
- native language (accents, expressions),
- humor, music and folklore,
- other elements (popular characters, family relationships and roles, cuisine, sports, religion, commercial brands or artistic references).

During the analysis, a double visualization of each of the pilot episode was carried out in order to complete the coding sheet<sup>4</sup> prepared on the basis of the aforementioned criteria.

Following the viewing, 30 coding sheets were filled in (1 per each pilot episode) and an overall analysis and interpretation of the results was carried out. In addition, to strengthen the analysis, numerical data have been provided and several significant variables have been counted to show the occasions in which certain aspects are developed or manifested in the analyzed fiction productions.

## 4. RESULTS

The analysis of the selected sample has provided different results depending on the categories taken into account: in comparison with the greater abundance of relevant elements in relation to some fiction series, in other series the factors of identity formation have been scarce or even absent. Among the categories that have yielded the most results, those of anthroponyms and geographic location stand out.

In the field of anthroponyms, there is a majority use of conventionally Spanish names and surnames: as an example, those contained in the oldest series of our sample, *Abducidos*, with characters named Aníbal De Vicente, Irene del Valle, Lola Martínez or Jesús Expósito; or in the most recent one, *Ser o no ser*, with names such as Javier, Paula or Óscar and surnames such as Yanes and Santos. Exceptions are only seen in specific cases of fiction productions set outside Spanish territory, such as *Promesas de arena* (in Libya, with local names such as Hamid or Hayzam) or some developed in autonomous communities with their own languages, such as Galicia (see the case of *Néboa*, with surnames such as Souto, Viqueira or Beceiro). In relation to this category, it should be noted that the scarcity of relevant characters of other nationalities in these fictions is striking. Although 14 of the 30 series (46,6%) feature characters of other nationalities, they almost always appear in secondary roles:

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<sup>4</sup>The coding sheet can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3StuGtO>

for example, a young man of Moroccan origin, Hisham, in the comedy *Historias de Alcafrán* or, related to crime, several African immigrants and lower-class Muslims in the police series in *Malaka*.

In terms of geographical locations, there is a certain degree of diversity within the Spanish national framework, since some fiction productions are set in other autonomous communities beyond the Community of Madrid. They are developed explicitly in Catalonia: *Boca Norte*, *Drama* and *Ser o no ser*; in Andalusia: *La otra mirada*, *Malaka* and *Grasa*; in Galicia: *El punto frío*, *Antes de perder* and *Néboa*; in Extremadura: *Inés del alma mía* and *Sequía*; in Aragon: *La caza. Monteperdido*; and in Castile-La Mancha: *Historias de Alcafrán*. Overall, 13 of the series (43,3%) are explicitly set in other communities. In these fiction series, clearly recognizable exteriors appear at different moments of their narratives, although in general they are not abundant.

Except for some cases such as *La caza. Monteperdido* or *Malaka*, where the local and/or human landscape is very relevant to configure the aesthetics and narrative of the series, the most usual thing is that the most recognizable locations are used in transition shots or in montage sequences to set and contextualize the action, but shooting is rarely developed around such recognizable spaces. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the case of *La otra mirada*, where the *Giralda*, the Cathedral of Seville, the *Archivo de Indias*, the *Parque de María Luisa*, the *Plaza de España* and the *Triana* Bridge appear in several brief moments of the pilot episode. An example of scarcity is the inclusion of some shots of the surroundings of the *Mercat del Born* in Barcelona in the pilot episode of *Drama*. To this it should be added the number of fictions that are set, to a greater or lesser extent, outside the Spanish territory, with 4 significantly, that is, 13,3% (*Dos vidas*, *Fuerza de paz*, *Inés del alma mía*, *Promesas de arena*) and one in a slight way (*La otra mirada*). The relative plurality of autonomous communities where these fictions have been shot points to a certain diversity in the images offered by these fictions financed by national public television. However, given the scarce emphasis on recognizable locations, it can be interpreted from a more industrial perspective, motivated by the desire to dynamize, not so much the narratives, but rather the audiovisual production beyond Madrid (for example, the series *Drama* is a co-production between RTVE and the well-known Catalan production company "El Terrat").

In relation to this category, two phenomena can be observed. On the one hand, in some fiction series there are invented places that allude to some geographical region to incorporate certain local cultural aspects into the narrative as a setting, but no real locations are identified: this is the case of the *La Mancha* village in *Historias de Alcafrán*, the Galician Island of *Néboa* or the Libyan city of *Fursa* where the humanitarian cooperators of *Promesas de arena* work. In total, this would be the case of 6 fiction works, which represents 20% of the sample. On the other hand, the recurrence of fiction works set in territories with little or no cultural identifiers, "deterritorialized" beyond assuming Spain as the setting, is striking: this is the case of *Sabuesos*, *Limbo*, *Cupido*, *Diarios de cuarentena* or *Yrreal*, among others, totaling 7, which represents 23,3%.

Linked to the geographical aspect, the almost absolute predominance of Spanish as the national language can be pointed out. With the exception of *Drama*, where the characters use Catalan in several scenes, there are no dialogues in Basque or Galician in the analyzed fiction works. This represents barely 3% of the total, undoubtedly a very low figure in terms of representation of the national linguistic diversity, especially if it is taken into account that, according to Molina (2023), around 25% of Spanish citizens use co-official languages. At most, some isolated words in Galician can be pointed out in specific fiction works such as *El punto frío* or *Antes de perder*, and the variation of accents in some of the fiction works whose regional setting is more recognizable: for example, Andalusian accents in *La otra mirada* or *Malaka*, or Galician accents in *El punto frío* or *Néboa*. Although the predominance of Spanish in TVE's fiction programs may be understood as an element of interest for the distribution and attractiveness of Spanish audiovisual in the Ibero-American space (Straubhaar, 2002), it is true that it reflects little of the linguistic diversity existing within the Spanish territory.



As for national identity symbols, in general terms, few can be found. In *Historias de Alcafrán*, in the town hall located in the center of the village, the Spanish flag can be seen next to the flag of Castile-La Mancha and the flag of the European Union, but this is an exceptional sight. The Spanish flag is usually integrated in the uniforms and institutional buildings of security forces such as the Civil Guard or the Police. In this respect, if we consider institutions such as the aforementioned as national symbols, there is a certain recurrence, especially because several fiction works (at least 6, 20%) contain elements of criminal investigation: *El punto frío*, *Malaka*, *La Caza*, *Monteperdido* and *Sequía*. Moreover, in *Fuerza de paz*, for example, the army is present. Beyond the above, isolated examples can be cited, such as the Spanish flag that appears in the Spanish embassy in Lisbon in the pilot episode of *La otra mirada*. In regional terms, samples of typical local culture are scarce: in *La otra mirada*, the Andalusian flamenco dress appears, or in *Néboa*, regional costumes and a local carnival are shown (this represents only 6% of the sample).

Regarding professional activities, as mentioned above, civil guards and policemen are repeatedly observed due to the criminal investigations in several fiction works. The Police, as part of the local institutions of a town (mayoress, teacher, music band...), appears in fictions such as *Historias de Alcafrán*. As a variation, it is worth mentioning the main character of *Sabuesos* who is a detective. Other fictions focused on professional fields are *Promesas de arena*, about humanitarian cooperators, and *Hospital Valle Norte*, about health personnel. There is also a place for the field of education, with teachers and students of different types in series such as *La otra mirada*, *Hit* or, to a lesser extent, *Ser o no ser*, *Drama* (where the main character is a private teacher) or *Boca Norte* (where young managers of the Barcelona cultural center of the same name, where courses and workshops are held, appear). In relation to the media, it is worth mentioning the journalists of *Abducidos* or the television actors of *Colegas*. In some of the fiction programs, there are emerging professional activities, such as that of content creator in the case of *Wake Up*.

In relation to social issues, it is worth mentioning the clear prominence of women in most of the fictions. In 7 of them, they play the leading role and in 14 they appear as co-protagonists, which represents a relevant 70% of the sample. In addition, they intervene in roles and with behaviors that break with the most deeply rooted patriarchal conventions. Several narratives present women in roles traditionally assumed by men, such as the policewomen in *La caza*, *Monteperdido*, *Malaka* or *Néboa*, or the main character of *Inés del alma mía*, who embarks to the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many narratives either explicitly or implicitly integrate feminist perspectives that promote women's empowerment and agency in the public space: as examples, it can be mentioned the narrative approach of *Antes de perder*, where two women break with their lives to flee by car, emulating the protagonists of *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1990); *La otra mirada*, where the arrival of a new feminist teacher to a women's academy in 1920s Spain entails the awareness of her students, or, again, *Inés del alma mía*, whose leading character flees from paternal authority for loving reasons and ends up linked to military campaigns in Chile.

Some of the fiction works present LGTB+ characters in secondary roles, such as *Boca Norte*, *Historias de Alcafrán* or *Promesas de arena*, although a certain lack of diversity can be appreciated here, since the characters in the aforementioned fiction works are all homosexual men. However, the main character in *Ser o no ser* is a young trans man, being this an exceptional fact in Spanish television fiction, since they do not usually appear in series (Marcos et al., 2023). In this regard, it is also worth mentioning the scarcity of migrant characters or characters of other nationalities, which are not very common and almost always in secondary roles.

It is relevant in this section to point out the recurrence of the issues of young people, especially in the series produced directly for Playz, such as *Boca Norte*, *Drama*, *Bajo la red* or *Ser o no ser*, in which topics such as the discovery of sexuality, the promotion of tolerance towards sexual and gender diversity, the use of birth control products, addiction to pornography or labor precariousness appear. *Bajo la red* also highlights issues of cybersecurity and networked education. All this generates new models of national identity for young people, which are present in the analyzed fiction programs aimed at this target. In this respect, the public production

of fiction programs for young people can be linked to the pedagogical vocation that public television has traditionally had, promoting democratic values from the moment of the transition.

In terms of music and typical folklore, they only appear occasionally, as in a passage of the pilot episode of *Néboa*, the use of flamenco in *La otra mirada* or flamenco and rumba in *Grasa*. As for local cuisine, in the Galician *Néboa*, foods such as seafood or empanadas or barely mentioned references such as torrija or paella in *Abducidos* are named and seen.

Finally, it is worth highlighting an aspect that does not appear in the categories proposed by Castelló (2004), but that has been pointed out by authors such as Palacio (2001, 2006) or Smith (2016) in relation to the national discourses proposed by TVE fiction productions: the use of the historical past as a narrative framework to make memory of the past, imagine the present or collectively glimpse the national with shared referents. As Hobsbawm, & Ranger (1983) proposed as a precursor, tradition and shared historical and cultural references are key elements to build national identity. In this sense, it is worth mentioning several fiction works set in different significant moments of Spain's historical past (5, 16,6%): *Inés del alma mía* is contextualized in the times of the Spanish conquest of America, specifically linked to the conqueror Pedro de Valdivia in Chile; *La otra mirada* is set in Seville during the 1920s and, in the same decade, *El Continental* is set in Madrid. For its part, *Dos vidas* alternates two timelines, one in contemporary times and the other set in the former Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea; *Abducidos* is set in 1968 and in the Prado del Rey facilities of Televisión Española and is linked to the popular crime magazine *El Caso*. Thus, processes of memory and shared cultural history are activated, sometimes limited to milder references, such as the 1990s TV series *Compañeros* (Antena 3, 1998-2002), one of whose main actors plays a transcript of himself at present in the fiction work *Colegas*, where widely known references are also briefly used, such as the music of the TVE series *Verano azul* (1981-1982).

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Audiovisual fiction works play an important role in the processes of construction of collective imagery, creating and reinforcing identities, since it allows showing all kinds of realities to the audience, and can influence the way of seeing and understanding reality. In this respect, public television, as it has been shown throughout this study, can play a fundamental role in the transmission of the elements that make up the national cultural identity, something particularly relevant in the Spanish context, due to its cultural diversity and its co-official languages.

After analyzing several features of national identity in the fiction production of RTVE and distributed through RTVE Play, it can be affirmed that scarce results of national identity have been found in the contents, especially as far as the different languages, national symbols or traditions are concerned. The resulting aggregate data, derived from the files of each viewing, offer, in general, low indicators in relation to most of the variables. The data analyzed do reflect a certain interest in developing contextualized contents in the different geographic parts of the country, but this hardly leads to the representation of identity samples specific to each region. This is especially noticeable in the cases of regions with a language other than Spanish, such as Catalonia, the Basque Country or Galicia. In these cases, it is most common for the language to be fleetingly integrated into the dialogues, through the introduction of some expression or words in the conversations, but not constantly. That is to say, there are few cases in which a character speaks directly in these languages, Catalan, Basque or Galician, despite the fact that there is a high degree of bilingualism in these Communities. The names of the protagonists of the stories, for the most part, have very common Spanish anthroponyms. The situation is similar with the representation of the folklore of the different autonomous communities, which, with some exceptions, is hardly shown. When more local features appear, they are usually concentrated in a single fiction piece, as in the case of *Néboa*, for example. It should be pointed out that, in a case like the one mentioned above, local imagery is used to provide the fiction with mystery and visual appeal, so it does not respond so much to a promotion of identity as to a resource to feed the plot. This scarcity in the identity elements of

imagery so specific to the Spanish cultural variety may be due to the will to access other audiences in an international context interested in contents that are not so markedly local.

For a global reflection on the results of this research, it is appropriate to dwell on the very objectives of the public corporation in terms of commitment to cultural dissemination. In this sense, the institution states on its website that:

[...] is committed to a corporate culture model that integrates diversity into the company's strategy. [...]. We have the obligation to reflect diversity in different areas: racial, cultural, linguistic, sexual, population, age or religious beliefs, among others (RTVE, n.d.).

Therefore, some data from the study could be linked to a commitment by RTVE to represent the changes that have taken place in the Spanish national identity, especially in relation to significant advances in terms of equality, sexual and gender identity, as reflected in many of the plots and characters analyzed. Thus, the contents produced would focus more on making this type of identity evolution visible than on representing and emphasizing Spanish regional diversity, which suggests possible lines of research to be developed in the future. The media are an important source of dissemination of symbolic resources that determine the construction of identities and contribute to the preservation of national identity. For all these reasons, it will be of utmost importance to continue researching and collecting data to find out whether the public broadcaster promotes new actions that promote the dissemination and preservation of the cultural specificities (or differences) of certain communities through the creation of new audiovisual content (Fecé, 2001). Nor can it be overlooked that, in countries like Spain, where territorial identities are at the center of many social discourses, especially in politics, it is particularly important to analyze the opportunities provided by new platforms, such as RTVE Play, to promote cultural diversity through public audiovisual products.

For future research, it would be possible, and necessary, to incorporate additional methods to explore how audiences dialogue with public television digital content in terms of national identity. For example, surveys or interviews with viewers could be conducted to know in what terms they perceive issues related to identity in the corporation's own production fictions. In this regard, it is worth asking what degree of influence such identity-related elements have on their perception of the national reality. Likewise, the statistical explorations carried out here could be developed longitudinally with data collection every several years, in order to estimate how the variables considered here evolve and whether the elements of national identity fluctuate, whether they increase or decrease.

In this respect, it is essential to consider the role of RTVE as a generator of national discourses, especially in a context of audience fragmentation due to the new screens available, and to what extent it can maintain its hegemonic position while contributing to national cohesion, also in a context of a diversified global audience. Such insights, moreover, could have practical implications for RTVE policy makers and content producers: how to build new fiction works where identity elements are more present? how can they be well aligned to establish the necessary coordinates of modernity and social progress? could the creation of original contents of the corporation be expanded to other broadcasting forms and media spaces? These questions will guide future lines of research that will complement and strengthen the results and conclusions achieved here.

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