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V Martín Jiménez, I Reguero Sanz, JV Pelaz López (2016): “Television and the development of a new Spanish national identity in Transition (1976-1979)”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 71, pp. 141 to 159.  
<http://www.revistalatinacs.org/071/paper/1088/08en.html>  
DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2016-1088en](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2016-1088en)

# Television and the development of a new Spanish national identity in Transition (1976-1979)

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This article examines how Spain’s national television network (Televisión Española-TVE) played a key role in paving the way for decentralisation and the creation of autonomous communities during that country’s transition to democracy. **Method.** The findings it reports are based on a content analysis of programs about national and regional diversity and identity broadcast by TVE from 1976 through 1979, a review of existing literature, material drawn from the archives of the authors and in-depth interviews conducted with journalists affiliated with TVE during that period. **Results.** Our findings show that TVE supported the decentralisation agenda of the centre-right coalition government of Adolfo Suárez by offering compelling programming that promoted acceptance of regional cultural and linguistic diversity and helped create an atmosphere in which autonomous regions could be created without rupturing national unity. **Discussion.** This study confirms that television played the dual role of furthering the Suárez agenda and providing the public with the background information and facts they needed to realize that embracing regional diversity and self-autonomy was crucial to future political and social harmony.

## Keywords

Televisión Española; national identity; regional consciousness; Spanish transition.

## Contents

1. Introduction. 2. Method. 3. The regional question: decentralisation linked to democracy. 3.1. Models for other regions: proto-autonomous governments in Catalonia and the Basque Country. 3.2. The 1978 Constitution and the restoration of Statutes of Autonomy for Catalonia and the Basque Country. 4. The role of television in the development of regional and national Spanish identity. 5. Television programming during the Spanish Transition: a forum for news and debate on territorial restructuring. 5.1. News and reporting designed to foster public acceptance of new dual identities. 5.2. Debate regarding territorial reorganisation in Spain. 6. Conclusions. 7. References. 8. Notes.

Translation by **Jenni Lukac**,  
Linguistic Services - Spanish to English translation and copyediting.

## 1. Introduction

The research reported in this paper is based on the premise of statehood put forth by Max Weber, who defined a state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (1977: 43-44) and whose concept of a nation was “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own”. It therefore follows that for the purposes of this study, the term “nation” is assumed to have cognitive, evaluative, and emotional connotations not conveyed by the word “state” (Tajfel, 1981: 264).

A nation-state is built upon the machinery of a pre-existing state by means of a process of nationalization that may suppose either the rejection of a former power structure or a growing sense of national identity on the part of its subjects (Ramos, 1995: 35-36). During the first stage of its transition to democracy (1976-1979) following the death of dictator Francisco Franco, Spain underwent a negotiated constitutional and political reconstruction transformation that embraced the idea of national unity but respected plurality at the regional level.

The architects of this process of national reconstruction had to deal with two major stumbling blocks: the first being a number of entrenched peripheral nationalisms that had hardened under decades of a policy of rigid centralization and forced uniformity under the Franco regime, and the second in the form of widespread popular opinion that the nationalistic aspirations and divergent cultural identities of some regions of Spain were not necessarily compatible with the concept of national unity.

Given that national identity is a social construction (Berger and Luckmann, 2013), the government of President Adolfo Suárez had to make use of social mechanisms that would facilitate the formulation and reformulation of a common understanding of a new, shared identity. During an interview published in *El País*, Suárez told journalist Juan Luis Cebrián that he personally believed all Spaniards should be kept informed of the positions, demands, and preoccupations voiced by Basques and Catalans during the process of national reconstruction in the interest of avoiding potential divisions and animosities between Spaniards throughout the peninsula, adding

[My party], “the UCD, embraces a concept of state that differs considerably from that of the previous government. It acts upon the assumption that the centralized state has reached a crisis

because it is no longer possible to manage the affairs of millions of people from the top down. It is therefore necessary to restructure the state and transfer governmental powers to regional levels in order to meet the demands of society effectively. Therefore, no one is in a position to claim that what we have now is some kind of circus; we have simply embarked on a process transferring state power to the regional level, which in addition to the functional benefits this will offer, will also help us to deal with political challenges that may arise in Catalonia or the Basque Country.” (Cebrián, 1978).

Taking into account the political circumstances of the period and Adolfo Suárez’s professed intention to use television news and commentary to sell the concept of decentralisation to the Spanish people, the study reported in this paper sought to analyse the role that Spanish public television played in the construction of a new Spanish identity. As such, it expands upon previous studies that explored the relevance of this medium in political processes related to the Spanish Transition and its social function in the development of a new culture of democracy (Palacio, 2012; Martín Jiménez, 2013). Building on this prior scholarly recognition of television’s importance during Spain’s transition to democracy from the perspective of public information and during this period promoted political decentralisation in Spain and fostered the emergence of regional identity.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine the degree to which the editorial line and discourse pursued by TVE supported the political and administrative restructuring of Spain as a state that embraced regional diversity and promoted strong regional identities after nearly forty years of dictatorially imposed centralism.

## 2. Method

The research reported in this article was based on a content analysis of relevant historical footage drawn from the archives of Televisión Española, a thorough review of bibliographic material and statements made by journalists who had worked for Spanish public radio during this period drawn from the personal files of both authors.

The first step was to select a sample of the programs that were broadcasted by the state television between 1976 and 1979, which were related to the subject of the investigation. The sample of historical footage analysed was based on the results of a search of news and debate programs contained in the TVE database (ARCA). The keywords used to identify relevant material were “autonomías” (autonomous regions) and the proper name of the different territories agreed by way of Article 151 of the 1978 Constitution.

Material gathered from the TVE database was viewed and coded to facilitate a qualitative analysis that would provide deeper insight into the messages regarding national and regional identity that TVE had transmitted to the Spanish public during the initial years of the Spanish Transition referred to by historians as the “period of consensus”.

The interviews, which were conducted ‘face-to-face’ or in depth with the journalists who were in charge of the TV programs that have been analyzed, were the next step in the methodological triangulation of this research. The aim of this method is to contrast the information gathered and to develop a deeper and personal understanding of the contents analyzed.

### 3. The regional question: decentralisation linked to democracy

One of the first challenges the Suárez administration faced was the “regional question” – an ongoing debate on regional rights and sovereignty that had loomed over Spain since the end of the nineteenth century and appeared to have been resolved when Catalonia and the Basque Country were accorded statutes granting them a certain degree of autonomy during the Second Republic. Nonetheless, this nascent shift towards regional autonomy under Republican rule was almost immediately counteracted by a new recentralisation of power that began in July 1936 with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and lasted until 1976, the year that marked the dissolution of both the Franco dictatorship and its forty-year campaign to resurrect the notion of a “unified and imperial” Spain (Almuiña, 1991: 430). With the advent of democracy, regional autonomy emerged again as one of the most crucial issues to be resolved—a feat that would require the consensus of a wide spectrum of political forces and involve some very high-stakes horse trading.

The exiled Spanish Socialist Workers Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español or PSOE) had declared its support for a “federal republic of nations that would together form a Spanish state” at a congress held in Suresnes, France in 1974, recognizing the right of each to self-determination and acknowledging “the existence of other regions, which by virtue of their distinguishing characteristics should enjoy the right to establish governmental entities conforming to their individual particularities” (Sánchez Cornejo, 2008). In its 1975 manifesto, the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España or PCE) upheld the right of peoples to determine their own political destinies, stating that any new democracy to emerge in Spain must be multinational and recognizing Catalonia, the Basque Country (Euskadi) and Galicia’s rights of self-determination. Coordinación Democrática, better known as *Platajunta* [1], called for the full, immediate and effective exercise of the rights and liberties corresponding to all of Spain’s nationalities and regions (Powell, 2001). Andrés de Blas summed up the political status quo in his statement that “the rigid centralism of Franco’s regime had relegated any voice in favour of decentralisation to the periphery of the opposition” (De Blas, 1978: 155). The only political party to disagree on this issue was Alianza Popular (AP), which held that “the unity of Spain is unquestionable” (Pelaz, 2002: 91) and completely rejected the idea of drafting statutes for individual regional communities.

The ratification of the Law for Political Reform in December 1976 paved the way for President Suárez to work with the *Comisión de los Nueve*, a newly created negotiating committee composed of nine members of the opposition. Together they began to articulate the “multinational and multiregional” nature of the new Spanish state, which was to respect “nationalities” within Spain that had their own historical identities (Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia) as well that of the country’s other regions (Powell, 2011: 16).

#### 3.1. Models for other regions: proto-autonomous governments in Catalonia and the Basque Country

The first democratic general elections to take place in Spain in forty-one years were held on June 15, 1977. Returns showed that

“Spaniards had voted in favour of a rupture with the past, reducing an ample field of competing fledgling political parties to the four that would shape the political future of the country: the

UCD and the PSOE emerged as the two main contenders and the AP and the PCE represented the minority opposition, although a number of candidates allied with Catalan and Basque nationalist parties also won a significant number of seats in parliament” (*Las Cortes*) (Castro, 2010: 283).

*Pacte Democràtic per Catalunya* (Democratic Pact for Catalonia) and the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Nationalist Party of the Basque Country) “won the majority in their respective communities” (Soto Carmona, 2005: 89) although with different margins of victory.

Catalans voted heavily for leftist parties (PSC-PSOE, PSUC and *Esquerra Republicana*), which together won 24 out of the 47 benches that corresponded to that region. In response the results of the election, the Suárez government established contact with exiled Catalan leader Josep Tarradellas, who subsequently travelled to Madrid to meet with both Suárez and King Juan Carlos. After two months of negotiations between Tarradellas, who had held prominent political positions during the Second Republic, and the centre-right Civil Governor of Barcelona Salvador Sánchez-Terán, an agreement was reached to provisionally restore the *Generalitat* [2] (the regional government of Catalonia suppressed by Franco) under the political leadership of Tarradellas. In September of 1977, one million citizens of Barcelona turned out to celebrate the *Diada* [3], Catalonia’s national holiday, for the first time since the fall of the city at the end of the Spanish Civil War and demand Catalan self-determination. This public demonstration put pressure on Suárez to agree to Catalan demands for autonomy. On September 29 of that year, the provisional reestablishment of a Catalan government with limited powers was made official by a decree backed by all major parties in the Spanish Parliament, fruit of what is known as the “Perpignan Agreement” in reference to the French city in which Tarradellas had lived during his thirty-eight years of political exile. Tarradellas’ victorious return to Barcelona is best remembered by a speech he delivered from the balcony of the *Generalitat* building in the city’s Saint Jaume Square, in which he uttered his famous statement “*Ciutadans de Catalunya, ja sóc aquí*” (Citizens of Catalonia, here I am at last).

The process of decentralisation in the Basque Country proved to be a more complicated affair. The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) won the first free elections held in that region by a very small margin: 29% compared to the 28% garnered by the PSOE. The PNV had adopted a much harder political stance than its Catalan counterpart, “attributing alleged historical rights to the Basque people’ that could not be accommodated in Suarez’s scheme for self-determination within a Spanish state” (Pelaz, 2011: 43). In December 1977 the government issued a decree creating the General Basque Council, an entity under the leadership of Socialist Ramón Rubial that did not cover Navarre but did include representatives of all the Basque political parties who had won seats in the Spanish Parliament in the general elections.

The proto-autonomous government frame works established by means of decree-laws in Catalonia and the Basque Country served as models for Galicia, Valencia, Aragon, the Canary Islands, Asturias, Murcia, Extremadura, the Balearic Islands, Castile-Leon, Andalucía and Castile-la Mancha, none of which harboured strong nationalist sentiments with the relative exceptions of Galicia, Valencia and the Canary Islands. We agree with Pelaz (2011) that there were three important motives behind the decision to create semi-autonomous regional governments throughout Spain, the first being the Suárez administration’s desire to avoid repeating tactical errors committed by governments during the Second Republic (1931-1936), one of which had been a concession of special administrative status to a few select regions that provoked feelings of hostility and resentment in

others. The second was that the creation of proto-autonomous structures throughout Spain would set the groundwork for the determination of the relative competences each should have at some future date. The third was that the concession of mechanisms for limited self-determination to Catalonia and the Basque Country would awaken latent nationalist sentiment in other regions driven by a natural desire for equal status and privileges.

### **3.2. The 1978 Constitution and the restoration of Statutes of Autonomy for Catalonia and the Basque Country**

When the new constitution was put to a national referendum on December 6, 1978, 87.8% of the vote went in favour and a mere 7.8% against its adoption. A high abstention rate of 32% was attributed to strong resistance in the Basque Country, where only 43% of eligible voters approved the document. The final text of the new constitution was fruit of compromise and consensus between representatives of the main political parties at that moment: Miguel Herrero de Miñón, Gabriel Cisneros and José Pedro Pérez Llorca from the UCD, Gregorio Peces-Barba from PSOE, Jordi Solé Tura from PCE-PSUC, Manuel Fraga Iribarne from AP and Miquel Roca for the Catalan Group.

Roca had originally intended to represent the interests of Basque as well as Catalan nationalists, but the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) refused to support a constitution that did not contemplate the restoration of its *derechos forales*, historic rights guaranteed in royal charters granted centuries before. According to Roca, “the Basques understood that I represented a form of nationalism distinct from their own that they could not embrace. They were never enthusiastic about participating in the process and preferred to watch from the sidelines without making any commitments” (Castro, 2010: 255-256).

Peces-Barba further observed

“They formed a block with the Catalans and were the ones who decided that Roca should represent the interests of both parties. This posture squared with the rest of rhetoric they employed to justify a decision taken earlier to not participate in the referendum for the Constitution” (Castro, 2010: 296).

Article 2 of this document states “The constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards” and goes on to say that it “recognizes and guarantees the right to self-government of all the nationalities and regions of which it is composed and the solidarity among them all” without specifically mentioning which regions the word “nationality” applies.

A number of authors consider Article VIII, which deals with the territorial organisation of the State, to be the most controversial section of the document. Prego has observed that it is the “most ambiguous and contradictory” point, adding that “it was not drafted on the basis of consensual opinion but rather as a summation of the diverse and irreconcilable positions held by the parties at the negotiating table” (Prego, 2000: 79) and in Tusell’s opinion, “the formula finally adopted has proved to be inopportune, inadequate, and glaringly ambiguous” (1999: 133).

The Constitution contemplated two routes a community could take to exercise its right to self-government: one laid out in Article 143 that entailed a long, five-year process leading to full autonomy, and another fast-track process established in Article 151 that contemplated immediate autonomy for “historic communities” and any other regions whose self-government initiative were ratified by the majority of the electorate in each of its provinces. The Basques and Catalans pursued Statutes of Autonomy on the basis of Article 151. Both opened negotiations with President Suárez and the Constitutional Committee of Congress in the summer of 1979. Once approved by Parliament, the Statutes of Guernica (for the Basque Country) and Sau (for Catalonia) were submitted to public referenda on October 25, 1979 and were subsequently enshrined in law on December 18 of that year.

#### **4. The role of television in the development of regional and national Spanish identity**

Regionalist and nationalist identities that had been forcibly held in check by the Franco regime found an outlet in the incipient Spanish Transition [4]. Adolfo Suárez stressed that democracy was “a communal project” (Soto Carmona, 2005: 65) that entailed the acceptance of the identities and special characteristics of certain communities within Spain.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the premise that nationhood, as opposed to statehood, is an expression of how diverse social actors define their own particular realities (Pérez-Agote, 1995). As such definitions are collective and socially determined, it stands to reason that it is possible to construct and reconstruct them mediatically, as Pérez-Agote suggested when he posed the theoretical question

“To what extent does the success of a social definition of a collective reality hinge not so much on its being a true reflection of a given reality but rather the ability of its initial promoters to convince a large number of other people to accept it and thus transform it into the irrefutable truth? From this perspective, such a feat would be a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy” [Merton, 1964] (1995: 111).

In other words, if we accept the premise that nations are essentially imagined communities (Anderson, 1983: 15), it follows that truthful, objective scientific definitions of a separate and exclusive reality are far less important in rooting the idea of nationhood in the collective imagination than communicating that reality in a way that makes it credible and acceptable to a target community.

In the 1960s, Vance described people’s feelings of identification with a given territory as “regional consciousness”, defining that term as

“A homogenous area with physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of neighbouring areas... [which as part of a national territory is] sufficiently unified to have a consciousness of its customs and ideas... [and] thus possesses a sense of identity distinct from the rest of the country” (1968: 13).

This definition implies that a region has two simultaneous realities (Jiménez Blanco, 1977: 53-54): an objective reality rooted in “a number of physical, demographic, cultural and historic characteristics that distinguish it from other regions”, and another subjective and psychosocial reality “that runs parallel to regional, cultural, political and economic issues”.

Fustel de Coulanges believed that regional and national identity was largely subjective, pointing out “what distinguishes nations is neither race nor language. Men feel in their hearts that they belong to the same people when they share a common stock of ideas, of interests, of affections, of memories and of hopes” (Dumoulin, 2000: 233).

One of the many objectives of a study on subjective regional/national identification carried out by the Spanish Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) [5] in the 1970s was to determine the strength of regionalist sentiment in Spain at the regional community level. The table below provides the results of CIS surveys conducted for two of the years covered by the research reported in this article (1976 and 1979) for nationalities [6] considered to be “historic”: Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia [7].

**TABLE 1. Scale of relative subjective regionalism: Catalonia [8], Basque Country-Navarre [9] and Galicia (1976)**

	Catalonia		Basque Country	Galicia
	Barcelona	Rest of Catalonia		
High	28	35	47	66
Medium	49	30	27	19
Low	19	21	22	14
NR/DK	4	4	4	1

Source: Table based on data drawn from García Ferrando (1982: 323-371-441)

**TABLE 2. Scale of relative subjective regionalism: Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia (1979)**

	Catalonia		Basque Country	Galicia
	Barcelona	Rest of Catalonia		
High	39	44	60	73
Medium	46	34	26	9
Low	13	10	9	16
NR/DK	2	2	5	3

Source: Table based on data drawn from García Ferrando (1982: 323-371-441)

An analysis of CIS data shows that levels of subjective regionalism [10] in these three regions fell in the medium-high range in 1976 and rose between that survey and a subsequent survey conducted in 1979. Public interest in autonomous status mounted as the CIS study progressed and the issue of nationalist aspirations took on an unprecedented importance in Spanish politics (Pelaz, 2011: 11). Studies of identity have always tended to focus on moments of change, as it is at these points of juncture that one can best observe “some variety of collective social consciousness borne out of



common interests and track the activities of organisations (associations, labour unions, pressure groups, etc.) that seek to defend group interests” (Castelló, 2008: 32).

Although regionalist and nationalist sentiments were not offshoots of the Transition period, we hypothesize that the Suárez administration, being sensitive to the demands of specific regions, did its best to promote the idea of a decentralized Spain as a means of creating a favourable climate for the construction of a “State of Autonomous Regions”. The administration’s main tool for selling this concept of governance would be Televisión Española, which was the most attractive of all the media options at his disposition. Television audiences were growing in Spain during this period – it is estimated that there were 60 million TV sets in Spain in 1977. TVE was also the only broadcasting company operating in Spain at the time of the Transition. Without competitors and under government control, it enjoyed a total monopoly on agenda setting by means of this medium.

As Morley has frequently pointed out, the mass media (in the instance of this study represented by TVE) fulfill a signal function in the symbolic construction of and interaction with of what he refers to as a “national family”. We agree with Castelló that any study of mediatically constructed identity must have three objects of analysis: a message’s intended meaning at the time it is produced by a given media outlet, the discursive thrust of the media text disseminated and the construed meaning of this message for, and effect upon, its intended audience (2008: 258).

It logically follows that shifts towards democracy “are impelled by the emergence of [social] movements and the media, which provide spaces for debate and an ideological arena. The expression of plural identities is therefore closely linked to freedom of expression” (2008: 38). Finally, it should be noted that the hypothesis from which this study started out was that a positive image of a decentralized Spain transmitted by TVE created an atmosphere of public opinion favorable to the creation of a “State of Autonomous Regions”—even in parts of Spain that lacked a strongly rooted sense of regional identity. Therefore, we sought to confirm or refute our conviction that the Suárez administration instilled an awareness of regionalist and nationalist identities in the minds of the public by means of a media campaign that transmitted a dominant discourse –which is to say a narrative backed by the government and accepted in the country’s mainstream political and economic communities.

## **5. Television programming during the Spanish Transition: a forum for news and debate on territorial restructuring**

According to historian Javier Tusell, at the time of Spain’s shift to democracy:

“To the greater part of Spanish society, for whom the country’s long history as a centralist State had made prior decentralisation initiatives part of a long forgotten past, a [territorial] reorganisation of the State was as revolutionary, if not more revolutionary, than the passage from Franco’s dictatorship to a democratic system. From the viewpoint of Spanish society in 1975, the question could be summed up in the following terms: there was a consensus that Spain was a state, but while for the majority it was both a state and a nation, for a few significant minorities it was a state but not a nation” (1997: 106-107).

Conscious of this polarization of public opinion, the Suárez administration encouraged TVE to include content that highlighted regional diversity in its programming in a bid to convince Spanish citizens that plurality and national unity could be and must be considered compatible (Anson, 2014: 175).

The Spanish Transition was a period of profound transformation and national reconstruction during which the recognition of individual regional identities, especially in communities seeking to be self-governing, became a sine qua non for the consolidation of a unified state. The forging of a national democratic state hinged upon the public's acceptance of plurality.

### 5.1. News and reporting designed to foster public acceptance of new dual identities

Spanish television played a vital role in the process of decentralisation by broadcasting a number of programs that focused on the construction of the proposed state of autonomous regions and celebrated Spain's cultural and regional diversity. One of them that fit this mold was *Informe Semanal*, a prime-time weekend show that presented a wrap-up of the week's most important events and new stories.

*Informe Semanal* debuted in 1973 under the direction of journalist Pedro Erquicia. Rafael Anson Oliart, who became General Director of Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE) shortly after Adolfo Suárez was appointed prime minister by King Juan Carlos, decided to retain Erquicia as director of the show, which continued to be broadcast every Saturday evening on the network's Channel One. Rafael Martínez-Durbán, a member of his team, took over the show when Erquicia left to become TVE's New York correspondent in September de 1978 (Magro, 2003).

Throughout the early years of the Transition, the program focused heavily on the profound social and political changes occurring in Spain in addition to addressing international news and events and provided coverage of the major moments in the democratizing process underway from a social as well as a political perspective.

As part of its strategy of educating the public and promoting pluralism, *Informe Semanal* presented regional languages that had been suppressed during the Franco dictatorship in a positive light, framing the coexistence of Castilian and Spain's other languages as a phenomenon that enriched Spain as a nation. One example of its treatment of this topic was a programme broadcast in 1976 under the title of *A la búsqueda de la lengua perdida* (In Search of a Lost Language), which sought to convey the idea that

“Spain's linguistic pluralism is not the threat to national unity that some fear it to be, but rather a part of our nation's rich heritage. (...) As a democracy, Spain must do away with historical and cultural prejudices that insinuate that any one of its citizens should feel ashamed of his or her traditions and language. A first great step in the right direction on this issue was taken last December with a decree that protected regional languages as an integral part of the nation's heritage” [11].

This report justified the measure taken by the Spanish government by pointing to examples of other European countries that had successfully embraced pluralism, and noting that “Switzerland is an

example of a country that has rejected the relentless uniformity of a single language and whose recognition of four official languages has not led to a disaster of national proportions” [12]. Rafael Anson, director of RTVE during this period, has publically stated that transmitting the idea that such issues “were not unique to Spain” was one of the strategic objectives of Spanish television during the Transition (2014: 194).

*A la búsqueda de la lengua perdida* went on to trace the origins and evolution of Galician, Catalan and *Euskera* (Basque) and support bilingual education in the regions in which these languages were spoken, stressing that it was the key to preventing “a linguistic breach between children’s experience at home and in the classroom that could hinder social integration” [13].

The program concluded with the pleas of teachers working in *ikastolas* (the word in Basque for schools in the Basque Country that taught classes in the native regional language) for more government commitment to education in *Euskera*, which they considered crucial to prevent education in that language “from becoming a privilege solely reserved for the children of wealthy families”. The voiceover that rounded out this episode of *Informe Semanal* suggested “it would be a good idea to promulgate other decrees guaranteeing respect for the customs and traditions of every region of Spain and the freedom to speak and employ their languages” [14].

An interview journalist Diego Carcedo conducted with the grandmother of José Luis Arrasate in Berriz (Basque Country) shortly after ETA kidnapped Arrasate in early 1976 is a good example of TVE’s proactive position on linguistic plurality. Initially unaware of the transcendence of recording the woman speaking her native language, he recalls the local reaction to the interview, which was broadcast containing the original statements in *Euskera* accompanied by simultaneous translations in Castilian:

The evening the program was broadcast, I had supper in a restaurant there. The emotional reaction of people watching the show was tremendous; they told me it was the first time they had ever heard *Euskera* spoken as part of a newscast. People were weeping, there was a tremendous commotion, and not one of my superiors at TVE ever called me on the carpet for what I’d done [15].

Coverage of issues related to regional self-determination was one of Erquicia’s priorities from the very beginning of the Transition. Even before the programs cited above, *Informe Semanal* had run a report on the negotiations paving the way for the creation of autonomous communities titled *Autonomías: más cerca* (Autonomous Communities: closer to being a reality) [16].

In September 1978, the program featured *Generalitat y preautonomías* (The *Generalitat* and proto-autonomous government), a segment that provided a detailed history of Catalonia, documented the region’s many demands for self-government and reported on the normalization made possible by the restoration of *Generalitat* [17]. As Magro recalls in the book *Informe Semanal: 30 años de historia*, this documentary began with the restoration of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia and traced its origins to 1410 “when King Martín I, known as the Humane, died without descendants, leaving the government in the hands of twelve members of the *Diputación General de Cataluña*, a governing institution known in modern times as the *Generalitat de Cataluña*” (2003: 50). The most striking thing about this program is that that it spoke frankly about the public disenchantment that had followed normalization:

“Many had started out with the impression that [the restoration of] the *Generalitat* would provide the answer to all, or almost all, of the grave problems that Catalonia had articulated.

This was followed by disillusionment. Political parties knew that the *Generalitat* did not come with a magic wand and its way forward as a governing body would be long and difficult” [18].

The program attributed this wave of disenchantment in part to the transitional process then in a proto-autonomic phase and framed the approval of the Constitution, which would pave the way for a Catalan statute of autonomy, as a pivotal event that would dispel current feelings of frustration [19].

*Informe Semanal* took up the issue of regional self-governance again in 1979 with a program produced by Rafael Martínez-Durban about negotiations on Basque autonomy, and later that year, following the approval of statutes of autonomy for Catalonia and the Basque Country, sent teams to both regions to prepare reports on the atmosphere leading up to each referendum. Journalist Baltasar Magro reported from the Basque Country that placards bearing the word “Bai” (“yes” in *Euskera*) could be seen everywhere throughout the provinces of this region, noting the effort had “not been in vain: the democratic political movements that represented almost 90% of the Basque electorate supported the proposed statute of autonomy” (Magro, 2003: 51).

During the June 1977 general election campaign, TVE also broadcast seventeen news segments directed by Fernando Ónega and Lalo Azcona under the collective title *España, paso a paso* (Spain, step by step). These programmes, each of which highlighted one of Spain’s regions or non-peninsular territories (the cities of Ceuta and Melilla), featured interviews with local political candidates and background footage that described the region or city in which the particular program was produced and were broadcast by TVE’s local affiliates in each location. Although intended for broadcast on national channel one as well, they were assigned a time slot that attracted a minimal audience [20].

Regarding *España, paso a paso*, Ónega remembers:

“It was a clandestine show broadcast “after the flag”, which is to say after the official transmission schedule was over [21]. Being a program that pushed the envelope to its limits, it was shown secretly off-schedule. The idea was to show Spain’s regional plurality, the diversity of its political spectrum, the latest cultural trends, organized protests, etc. It was an innovative revolution in Spanish television that had very little repercussion because its unofficial time-slot. We didn’t know the program would end up being shown after hours when we produced it, but it ended up being broadcast at an hour when there was practically no audience and could have almost no impact” [22].

TVE also addressed the issue of regional self-determination and the cultural plurality of Spain during the weeks leading up to the December 1976 referendum on the Law for Political Reform. The General Director of RTVE at that time has pointed out that public service announcements about the Law for Political Reform were broadcast in Catalan, Galician and *Euskera* during this period to guarantee that all Spanish citizens felt included in the process and diversity within national unity was demonstrably recognized (Anson, 2014: 194).

Another key instance in which TVE’s programming addressed the construction of a pluralist state was a January 19, 1977 report on the legalization of the *ikurriña* (official flag of the Basque Country) during which journalist Eduardo Sotillos displayed an image of the banner unfurled as he delivered

the groundbreaking news to a national television audience. Remembering the occasion, he observes that

“Television was the mechanism through which things were legalized; the legality of something had to be announced on television for people to really believe it. I remember when the *ikurriña* was legalized and I decided to display it during my daily news program. We debated before the show how to include it without provoking a lot of public backlash. You’ve got to remember that members of the *Guardia Civil* [state security forces] had been murdered for removing that flag from flagpoles. In the end, we decided to show an image of the flag while I explained the significance of its colors and design” [23].

## 5.2. Debate regarding territorial reorganisation in Spain

Throughout the early years of the Transition, Spanish national television provided a forum for debate that was part of an unprecedented journalistic effort to inform the Spanish public about the country’s undeniable diversity and raise its awareness of the positive possibilities that the creation of autonomous communities would offer [24].

TVE produced a number of programs designed to explain the initial steps of the process of constructing a state of autonomous regions to the public. In June 1978, it ran a special two-part edition of *Opinión Pública* devoted to the topic under the title *Las autonomías* (autonomous regions) [25]. The objective of this ambitious project was to tap public opinion about the creation of autonomous communities while the country’s new constitution—and most particularly the article of that document that dealt with territorial reorganisation—was in the process of being drafted. To this end, the network hired ECO, a company specializing in public opinion polls, to conduct a custom survey on the issue, the results of which were analysed by experts and members of the Spanish parliament during the second of the two programs.

This program provided a clear and reassuring picture of public opinion on territorial reorganisation based on the results of a professionally conducted survey showing that three out of four Spaniards were at least somewhat familiar with the concept and six out of ten were willing to accept the idea that certain regions would have a greater degree of self-determination [26]. Presenters not only provided data but also explained the nature and limits of self-government in autonomous regions, described how territorial reorganisation would affect the national economy and discussed a number of related issues including whether every region would equally benefit from having an elected president.

In November 1978, TVE’s popular debate show *La Clave* (The Key) offered a segment in which parliamentarians representing the full political spectrum in Spain at that time debated the issue of regionalist and nationalist identity [27]. Each segment of *La Clave* featured a film related to a specific topic that was subsequently addressed by a round table of national and international politicians and experts on the subject (Palacio & Ciller, 2014). The segment in which parliamentarians addressed the issue of regionalist and nationalist identities within Spain started out with a viewing of Vincent Sherman’s 1952 Hollywood epic *Lone Star*. Apart from Jean Baptiste Durosele (Professor of the History of International Relations at the Sorbonne in Paris), the visiting panelists were all representatives of political parties: Manuel Fraga Iribarne (Alianza Popular), Enrique Curiel (Partido Comunista), Luis Fajardo (Partido Socialista Obrero Español), Miguel

Herrero de Miñón (Unión de Centro Democrático), Javier Arzallus (Partido Nacionalista Vasco) and Miguel Roca (Convergencia Democrática de Cataluña).

During the Transition, TVE added a number of programs with a debate format to its programming, many of which addressed political issues (Martín Jiménez, 2014). Throughout 1978—the year that the country’s new constitution was drafted and approved—these programs focused mainly on the most controversial points of that document, including its articles on territorial reorganisation and the creation of autonomous communities. The principle objective of this type of programming was to inform and educate citizens about the contents of the text, which once approved in December 1978 would mold the country’s destiny going forward.

Outstanding programs in this category included *Cara a Cara* (Face to Face), which focused on constitutional consensus [28] and *Tribuna del parlamento* (Parliamentary Forum), a series fully devoted to the new constitution [29]. *Tribuna del Parlamento* was a groundbreaking program broadcast during the constitutional process that explained and debated each chapter of the document as it was being drafted. Throughout July 1978, it addressed the issue of autonomous communities. This program was more an ongoing chronicle of parliamentary activity than a space for debate in that it offered constant news updates and analysis of recent parliamentary debates [30].

*Cara a Cara* on the other hand, whose name reflected the program’s objective of engaging two guest experts with different perspectives or political standpoints in a face-to-face debate, conformed to a strict thirty-minute debate format. According to Martín Jiménez,

“Although it was designed to engage guests in a dialectic confrontation, given the spirit of consensus that TVE sought to promote at the beginning of the Transition, on most occasions the debate constituted a constructive dialogue intended to give the public a deeper understanding of a specific current political or economic issue” (2014: 130).

*Constitución y consenso* (Constitution and Consensus), a segment broadcast in July 1978, is a prime example of this program’s ongoing efforts to educate the public about the constitutional process. Although the invited guests were both members of the team that had drafted the document then being debated in parliament, they were affiliated with parties at differing ends of the political spectrum: José Pedro Pérez Llorca with the incumbent UCD and Gregorio Peces-Barba with the opposition party PSOE. Throughout the program, both men defended the content of the new constitution, the ends to which it had been written and the spirit of consensus it represented. One of the points they dwelled on at length was the territorial reorganisation of Spain into the autonomous communities contemplated in the constitution, which they stressed did not impose “a uniform model” and would “resolve longstanding problems”, improve the State organisationally and help pull many regions out of the stagnation they currently suffered. According to both, the formula would be “freely organized communities rather than communities forcibly imposed from the national level” [31].

## 6. Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that during what is referred to as the “years of consensus” of the Transition, Televisión Española promoted the decentralisation of the Spanish state by informing and educating the public about the distinct characteristics of the country’s various regions. It used its

unique position as a mass medium outlet in an expanding sector and its agenda-setting power as a monopoly to craft a public discourse in favour of regional identities that helped convince Spanish citizens to embrace a new model of territorial organisation.

TVE took advantage of its position as a state broadcasting company to produce programs that stimulated public debate and promoted respect for regional diversity within the framework of national unity. This matches the official concept of a Spanish national identity, which was the object of this study. Our thesis that Spanish state television used its position to promote the UDC's message of regional diversity was amply demonstrated by the TVE's dual perspective on a potentially divisive question looming over territorial reorganisation – what it would hold for Spain's "historical nationalities" and what it would imply for other Spaniards as well – and its concerted efforts to create a conciliatory vision of this change that met the expectations of the entire country. By its actions, TVE helped avoid a revival of the resentment between communities and regions that had surfaced during the Second Republic.

Catalonia and the Basque Country shared center stage in the majority of the programs analysed. This can be explained by TVE's commitment to a dual perspective on the issue of territorial reorganisation, which called for explaining the regional particularities and historical precedents upon which both communities based their respective demands for self-autonomy to the public. Our findings indicate that TVE made a concerted effort to transmit positive images of both regions from both a journalistic and a didactic perspective, conscientiously explaining the defining aspects of their identities such as language and cultural traditions and appealing to viewers as members of a national community.

It is therefore possible to affirm that during the early stage of the Spanish Transition (1976–1979) Televisión Española met its obligations as a public service by promoting the idea of a dual regional and national identity. At a crucial juncture in modern Spanish history, it simultaneously promoted cultural diversity and solidarity in a successful bid to make Spanish society as a whole understand that national unity would be impossible to achieve without a genuine acceptance of regional pluralism.

## ❖ Funded research

The research reported in this article was conducted as part of a more comprehensive study carried out under the title "Televisión y cultura popular durante el franquismo: Programación, programas y consumo televisivo, 1956-1975" (Television and popular culture during the Franco era: programming, programs, and television consumption, 1956–1975) ref. HAR2011-27937.

Dates:

-Start of the research study: 20 July 2012

-Completion of the research study: 31 December 2015

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## 8. Notes

1 Platajunta emerged in 1976 as a fusion between Junta Democrática (promoted by the PCE) and Plataforma de Convergencia Democrática (led by PSOE).

2 *La Generalitat* (in Spanish, *La Generalidad*) refers to a system of self-government established in the Spanish autonomous region of Catalonia.

3 *La Diada* (also officially known as the *Día de Catalunya*), is celebrated every September 11 in Catalonia. Within this autonomous region it is also referred to as the *Fiesta Nacional de Catalunya*.

4 The terms ‘Regionalist consciousness,’ and ‘regional identity,’ etc. refer to the perception on the part of citizens in autonomous regions that they are residents in a geographically determined administrative unit within Spain, whereas ‘nationalistic consciousness’ and ‘nationalistic identity’ refer to the concept of a region being a nation within the Spanish state. The latter should be distinguished from ‘Spanish’ nationalist sentiment, which places the unity and integrity of the ‘Spanish nation’ above regionalist sentiments and regional nationalist aspirations.

5 Until 1977 the official name of the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas was the Instituto de Opinión Pública.

6 In deference to the term adopted for inclusion in the Spanish Constitution, we have used the word ‘nationalities’ when referring to Spain’s ‘historic communities.’

7 Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia were given the status of ‘historic’ communities or regions based on their demands for separate Statutes of Autonomy during the era of the Second Spanish Republic.

8 The 1976 and 1979 surveys divided the population of Catalonia into two categories: ‘Barcelona’ and ‘the rest of Catalonia’.

9 As it was not yet clear whether the Basque Country and Navarre would band together as a single autonomous community, they were lumped together as a single region for the purposes of the 1976 survey.

10 As the strength of regional identities has waxed and waned continuously throughout the history of Spain, the formation of regional identity should be understood as an open and fluid process.

11 TVE broadcast, *Informe Semanal. A la búsqueda de la Lengua Perdida*, 10 April 1976

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 Interview with Diego Carcedo. Personal archive of authors.

16 TVE broadcast, *Informe Semanal. Autonomías más cerca*, 5 November 1978

17 In November 1977, *El País* published an editorial piece written by González Casanova that included the following statement: “To mark the occasion of Mr. Tarradellas’ return as the president of the provisional *Generalitat* of Catalonia, Radio Televisión Española has made an unprecedented effort to move public opinion in a favorable direction regarding [the concept of] autonomous regions, to the end that many Spaniards have begun to view them in a positive light. After watching this program, friends in Madrid have personally approached me to express their indignation at having been deprived for so many years of the knowledge of the demands for self-government put forth by Catalonia and other communities throughout their histories, [a situation that] implicitly supposes a profound lack of knowledge regarding the history of Spain.”

18 TVE broadcast, Informe Semanal. Generalitat y preautonomías. 16 September 1978.

19 *Ibid.*

20 (*Tele-radio 1014*, [30 May – 15 June], 39).

21 TVE's programming day ended at midnight with an image of the flag of Spain accompanied by the Spanish national anthem, after which a test pattern appeared on home TV screens. The sign off ritual was a signal to viewers that, at least in theory, programming had concluded for the day and no more programs would be presented until the following morning.

22 Interview with Fernando Ónega. Personal archives of the authors.

23 Interview with Eduardo Sotillos. Personal archives of the authors.

24 During 1980s, TVE broadcasted a number of programs of “La víspera de nuestro tiempo” that focused on the state of autonomous regions and celebrated Spain's cultural and regional diversity from historical point of view. For a deeper analysis see: M. A Paz Rebollo y J Montero Díaz (2015): “Usos públicos de la historia en la Transición española. Divulgación histórica y debate en Televisión Española (1978 a 1985)”. *Historia y Política*, nº 33, Madrid, pp. 275-302.

25 TVE broadcast, *Opinión Pública. Las autonomías*. 30 November 1978.

26 *Ibid.*

27 TVE broadcast, *La Clave. Los parlamentarios ante las nacionalidades*. 30 November 1978.

28 TVE broadcast, *Cara a cara. Constitución y consenso*, 11 July 1978.

29 TVE broadcast, *Tribuna del parlamento. La Constitución*, 17 April 1978. *Tribuna del parlamento. La Constitución en el Congreso: las autonomías*, 31 July 1978.

30 TVE broadcast, *La Constitución en el Congreso: las autonomías*, 31 July 1978.

31 TVE broadcast, *Cara a cara. Constitución y consenso*, 11 July 1978.

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### How to cite this article in bibliographies / References

V Martín Jiménez, I Reguero Sanz, JV Pelaz López (2016): “Television and the development of a new Spanish national identity in Transition (1976-1979)”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 71, pp. 141 to 159.

<http://www.revistalatinacs.org/071/paper/1088/08en.html>

DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2016-1088en](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2016-1088en)

Article received on 26 December 2015. Accepted on 6 February.  
Published on 10 February 2015.