

Gender and Sexual Dissidence on Catalan and Spanish Television Series

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An Intercultural Analysis

By

Silvia Grassi

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

Since Fernández’s and Llamas’s remarks, more than a decade has passed, one which has certainly bought an increase in the amount of work related to gender and sexual dissidence studies in Spanish and Catalan academia. However, I would argue that the lack of institutional support and interdisciplinarity denounced by Llamas is still a fair criticism to be made of the attitude Spanish and Catalan universities demonstrate towards these disciplines. The first field to pay attention to a gender perspective

¹ ‘Is growing, I don’t know if it is improving yet’.

was sociology, which remained for many years the main focus of gender scholars in Spain, as is demonstrated by the rich bibliography found in the Centro de Estudios de la Mujer.² The same observation can be applied to the studies of sexual dissidence with pioneers such as Ricardo Llamas and Francisco Vidarte (1999; 2000), and Óscar Guash (2000; 2002), who also contributed to introducing queer theory into Spanish and Catalan academia. In September 2007, José Ignacio Pichardo Galán published an article in the gay magazine *Zero*, in which he commented on how queer studies in Spain had concentrated more on sociological subjects than on literary criticism. He lamented that many critics ignored the homoerotic content of Spanish literary masterpieces and how the sexual preferences of some canonical writers might have influenced their works.

According to Raitt, one of the main functions of literary studies of sexual dissidence is precisely to retrieve ‘the pearls of our lost culture’ (1995), rediscovering, on the one hand, texts which had been deemed as sexually heretical and, on the other, exposing the homoerotic subtexts of major classics which had been bowdlerised to fit the heteronormative literary canon. In an interview for the La7 network, commenting on Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Mémoires d’Hadrien*, the openly gay Italian politician and poet Nichi Vendola also stresses literature’s role in recuperating concealed stories in order to create a sense of belonging for those people who feel excluded from heteronormativity. In particular, he talks about how literature was a source of homoerotic and homoaffective referents absent in the Italy of his childhood and adolescence—a time which the Italian politician describes as a world in which there were no words to name his feelings. The friendship between Achille and Patroclo in Omero’s *Iliade*, Eurialo and Niso in Virgilio’s *Eneide*, and Cloridano and Medoro in Ariosto’s *L’Orlando Furioso* offered a range of images and stories about same-sex relationships which contrasted with the stereotypes so pervasive in the Italian society of the 1960s-1970s. Finally, Vendola remembers the publication in 1977 of a small book, entitled *I neoplatonici*, written by Luigi Settembrini, an Italian patriot, in the 1858. This short novel, which portrays a happy and passionate love story between two teenage boys, remained concealed for more than a century because its publication was considered inappropriate due to the homoerotic content and the prestige of its author.³

It is precisely for this reason that, in the Anglo-Saxon contexts, since the 1970s scholars belonging to studies of sexual dissidence have

² http://mujeres.usal.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=111&Itemid=60.

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

considered as a crucial aim of their research the reconstruction of a genealogy of a 'gay and lesbian literary tradition', veiled by the established literary criticism. Bibliography and anthologies such as Brian Reade's *Sexual Heretics* (1970), Ian Young's *The Male Muse: A Gay Anthology* (1973), and *The Lesbian in Literature*⁴ (1967; 1975; 1981) were published. However, the antiessentialist approach promoted by poststructuralist theories problematises the concept itself of a 'gay and lesbian literature':

If sexuality is no longer thought of as a basically natural drive unchangeable throughout human history, then the notion of a 'homosexual tradition' running from classical Greece to twentieth-century modernity will itself be an ideological construct, tied to a specific moment in the construction of modern 'sexual identity'. (Pustianaz 2000: 149)

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

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

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

ser’,⁵ Gibson comments in an article published in *El País* on 16 January 1998.⁶ Lorca’s surrealist drama, *El público*—which advocated the right to erotic freedom, especially of same-sex desires, against sexual repression—was written in 1929–1930, but it was only published in 1978, after the end of Franco’s regime. Most of his *Sonetos del amor oscuro*, dedicated to his lover Rafael Rodríguez Rapún, remained unpublished until 1986.⁷ The following year, between 26 November 1987 and 2 January 1988, TVE1, the main channel of Spanish State-owned television, broadcast a six-part miniseries entitled *Lorca, La muerte de un poeta*. Based on Ian Gibson’s *La represión nacionalista de Granada en 1936 y la muerte de Federico García Lorca* (1971) and directed by the prestigious director Juan Antonio Bardem, this miniseries represented a break from the Spanish television panorama of those years. Indeed, Lorca’s sexuality—and its impact on his work—is at the core of the story together with an historical reconstruction of the years which preceded the Civil War.

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

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

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

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

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

Also published abroad, *Lesbian Realities/Lesbian Fictions in Contemporary Spain* (2011) is one of the most exhaustive sociological and cultural analyses of politics and representations of female sexual dissidents in Spain. However, the contribution of Spanish scholars to this book focuses on sociological studies—Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio's 'Politics and Language: The Representation of Some "Others" in the Spanish Parliament' and Marta Sofía López Rodríguez and Yolanda Sánchez Paz's 'Living Out/Off Chueca', for example—whereas among five essays dedicated to literature only one is contributed by a Spanish scholar, namely Inmaculada Pertusa-Seva's 'Flavia Company: From Lesbian Passion to Gender Trouble', confirming the predominance of the sociological perspective with respect to literary studies detected by Galán.¹⁰

Indeed, Spanish literary referents of homoerotic desire among women were initially given even less attention than their male counterparts. The Spanish official literary canon—male, white, and heterosexual, as Lunati

⁸ After the publication of this book Roig was expelled from his order.

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

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

describes it¹¹ (2007: 78)—already discriminates against female writers and poets and, therefore, sexually dissident female authors have to face a double exclusion. Catalan poet Maria Mercè Marçal exposes this lack of female referents in literature and criticises the subordinate position suffered by female writers in a falsely neutral cultural universe, dominated by the masculine perspective (1998). This discrimination prevents the creation of a female literary tradition and thus a female literary genealogy (Lunati 2007: 88). It is interesting to notice, however, that one of the first novels to narrate the love and sexual relationship among two women was written by a Spanish author, Ángeles Vicente. The book is entitled *Zezé* and was published in 1909. Moreover, activist and poet Lucía Sánchez Saornil, who was one of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*, a feminist anarchist association (1936-1939), published many poems which were explicitly homoerotic. However, it was not until 1996 that an anthology of her work saw the light, in which literary critics Rosa María Martín Casamitjana comments on the discrimination imposed on Lucía Sánchez Saornil by the Spanish intellectual and cultural world for being a woman and for her anarchist militancy. Nonetheless, even though she briefly mentions the poet's 'lesbian inclinations' (1996: 10), Martín Casamitjana does not consider this element important for her analysis of Saornil's work, since she ignores this angle of interpretation to focus instead on Saornil's anarchist and feminist ideals, understood through an heteronormative perspective. However, in 2010, the feminist journal *Letras Femenina*, dedicated a whole number to 'lesbian visibility' in contemporary Ibero-American literature, art, and cinema, indicating an increase attention to artistic productions by female sexually dissident authors.

As far as Catalan female literary referents are concerned, there is another consideration that needs to be borne in mind. In the formation of a Catalan literary canon the national and linguistic aspects have prevailed relegating other factors to the shadows. As Francesca Bartina argues, scholars have long ignored issues of gender and sexuality in Víctor Català's¹² *Solitud* (1905), which are crucial to understanding the novel (2001: 198). Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del diamant* (1962) was firstly analysed from a feminist perspective only by Anglo-American scholars. The homoerotic content of Maria Mercè Marçal's poems was also initially

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

¹² Víctor Català is the pseudonym of Caterina Albert.

censored by the Catalan intellectual world. As Laia Climent maintains in *Maria-Mercè Marçal: cos i compromís*, the poet was initially excluded from the history of literature because she breaks the norms of patriarchal society and her work does not fit the esthetic patterns of the established canon (2008: 204). Josep-Anton Fernández also maintains that the ‘historicist paradigm’ around which Catalan literary studies are ‘methodologically structured depends heavily on the concept of national literature’ (Fernández 2000a: 1). Therefore, the history of Catalan literature and culture has been mostly studied as the history of the construction of a national literature and culture. He concludes that ‘nationality is thus the central [...] tenet of Catalan Studies’ (Fernández 2000a: 1). However, Climent’s works on Marçal (2002; 2008), Angie Simonis’s analysis of the works of Carme Riera and Montserrat Roig (2011) and Maria Àngels Cabré’s (2011) research into ‘contemporary lesbian literature’ are clear examples of how the situation is changing in Catalan literary criticism and aspects such as gender and sexuality are attracting more attention. As Lunati comments, ‘[a]vui, però, des de posicions crítiques diverses, la problematització de la idea mateixa d’un canon o la seva pluralització sembla inajornable’¹³ (2007: 82).

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

In this respect, Fernández suggests a twofold strategy, according to which the demands for equal rights for sexual dissidents are to be the basis for a wider agenda for social equality, and ‘to prevent the reproduction of

¹³ ‘Today, however, from different critical positions, the problematisation of the idea itself of a canon or the pluralisation of this idea seem unpostponable’.

hierarchies on this field of plural identities, efforts would be made to generate an epistemology of multiplicity and complexity' (2000a: 209-210). This strategy will create what he defines as 'queer nationalism' which would universalise the point of view of minorities and constitute a dynamic identity model. Referencing Braidotti (1994), Fernández concludes by affirming that the 'Catalan queer self would be a nomadic subject, one related to a territory but not attached to it' (2000a: 210). This tension between sexual and national patterns of identity is also unveiled in Timothy McGovern's study of Galician poet Antón Lopo's *Pronomes*. After describing the double marginality suffered by Lopo for the use of a marginalised language and his sexual preferences, McGovern wonders: 'If gay/lesbian/queer/bisexual/transgender writing in Spain must rely on always marking its difference from a heterosexist canon, how does it fit into the Galician project?',¹⁴ (2006: 149).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first part of the book focuses on the construction of gender roles in Catalan soap operas. I have chosen to concentrate on this genre because it allows me to apply the paradigms of analysis that Anglo-Saxon feminist scholars have elaborated for the content of soap operas and the viewing

¹⁶ 'Trilogy of Life, Love, and Sex'.

practices of their audiences to a corpus of material which has rarely been analysed through this perspective. This angle has proven to be fascinating also from a personal point of view. Indeed, the research I conducted for the first part of the book required confrontation with my prejudices and skepticism towards a television genre which I had always regarded as superficial. Instead, my investigation has allowed me to see how soap operas can be an interesting object of analysis as far as their construction of gender roles and identities and their treatment of gender-related issues is concerned. Moreover, in this part of the book, I have chosen to focus only on the Catalan context since this choice provides me with a coherent body of material, in which it was possible to isolate paradigms of analysis and compare and contrast them with those elaborated for British and American soaps. The advantage of a comparative approach is that if texts reveal something of the society in which they are successful, then 'questions of local or global culture may be addressed through textual analysis' (Liebes and Livingstone 1998: 156).

Unlike Latin American *telenovelas*, which have never been broadcast on the Catalan public television service, some American and British soap operas were dubbed in Catalan and broadcast by Catalan television: *Dallas* was broadcast between 1983 and 1992, while *EastEnders* between 1987 and 1996 with the title *Gent del barri*. Catalan television began to produce its own soap operas precisely while these programs were being broadcast. The presence of American and British soaps on Catalan television in the same time frame as the first Catalan soap was being produced justifies my choice of comparing and contrasting Catalan soaps with their American and British counterparts. Moreover, as the reader will notice, many bibliographical sources I employ in the first part of the book come from Anglo-Saxon contexts. This choice is justified by the fact that soap operas have been analysed from a gender perspective predominantly by British and American scholars. Another important strand of work on this television genre comes from Latin America (Martín-Barbero 1987, 1995, 2001), but these studies focus more on other aspects, such as the recreation of a national imagery or the portrayal of social conflicts. Moreover, the attention given by feminist television criticism to the genre of soap opera is mainly concerned with the 1980s and 1990s, which explains why a significant component of the theoretical sources which inform the first part of the book dates from the late twentieth century period. The first part of my book aims precisely to see to which extent this theoretical background can be applied to my examination of the content of Catalan soaps and the viewing practices adopted by the audience for them.

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

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

The first part is entitled ‘Gender Roles in Soap Operas: A Comparative Analysis of Catalan, British, and American Serials’. In the first chapter, entitled ‘A Call to Action: Television as a Site for Feminist Struggle’, I examine how feminist criticism, with all its diverse and contradictory strands, has approached television studies. I describe the different methods employed by liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism to analyse how television content constructs gender roles. I then illustrate the shift proposed by poststructuralist feminism from content analysis to an inspection of viewing practices.

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

In the third chapter, entitled ‘Soap Opera: A “Female” Genre?’, I query the predominance of the genre of soap opera in feminist television studies; I investigate the association of soap operas with an audience constructed as female and the (negative) connotations derived from this construction as a ‘female’ genre, inserting it in the more general concept of ‘women’s

picture', which I examine through a wide range of texts taken from literature and cinema, paying particular attention to the genre of melodrama.

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

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

In the sixth chapter, 'Are Soap Operas a Safe Place? An Analysis of Models of Family and the Construction of a Sense of Community in Soaps', I compare and contrast American and British soaps in their representation of community and families. In the American ones, I underscore how a sense of community is not constructed at all, since the drama serials generally focus on one family, whereas in British soaps a

sense of community is crucial. This difference is also due to the diverse way in which American and British soaps represent women as either a source of disruption or maintaining of the order within the narratives of the soaps. In this aspect, I argue that Catalan soaps follow the path established by British drama serials in representing a sense of community.

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

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

The second part of the book, entitled 'Sexual Dissidence on TV: A Comparative Analysis of Catalan, Spanish, British and American Series', complicates the pedagogic aspirations of television as far as the depiction of non-heteronormative feelings and relationships is concerned. In the first chapter, entitled 'Do Words Count? A Terminological Clarification', I explain why I do not employ the terms 'homosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian', or 'queer' in order to refer generally to people who are excluded from heteronormativity. Indeed, all these terms have been developed in specific social and political contexts and they express a precise sense of identity: some people might feel comfortable in defining themselves as gay but others might refuse this label and I do not consider that I can impose this or any other term on people. Therefore, I only use these terms when I refer

to a particular person who I know for sure defines himself or herself as such (for instance, this is the case of lesbian activist Empar Pineda and queer scholar Liana Borghi). Instead, when I am talking in general terms, I employ the expressions ‘sexual dissidents’ and ‘people excluded from heteronormativity’ since, beyond the debate between essentialism and constructionism, the focus on my book is on the social and cultural constructions of the meanings which surround relationships and feelings among people of the same sex and, in particular, the role that television plays in these constructions. In this sense, I problematise the use of the words ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’ and, despite the notorious expression ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (1984) elaborated by Adrienne Rich, I explain my choice of the term ‘heteronormativity’. I argue that this term explicitly refers to the ‘sex system’ denounced by Gayle Rubin, which sanctions certain sexual behaviours while imposing a status of ‘neutrality’ on others (1999: 170).

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

In the third chapter, ‘Why Television Counts: The Importance of Non-Heteronormative Media Images’, I query the role of television in giving visibility to non-dominant discourses and in expanding the range of feelings and desires seen in the public sphere. I illustrate the exclusionary role performed by the process of stereotyping, which functions as a mechanism of discrimination. Starting from the conviction that homophobia is a social issue rooted in discourses and cultural representations, I stress the importance of examining how television series construct sexual dissidence and non-heteronormative feelings. However, I also uncover the ambiguity and inadequacy of the criteria which have usually been employed by Anglo-Saxon scholars to evaluate such representations. I question the validity of the quantitative and qualitative approaches mostly employed in this evaluation by LGBT organisations. These approaches are based on the paradigm of ‘positivity’, that is the pretension of evaluating a sexually dissident character or a non-heteronormative storyline through a positive-

negative scale, which is infused with a clichéd notion of ‘realism’: a sexually dissident character is judged as ‘negative’ if he/she is not ‘realistic’. However, when more accurate and verisimilar images are demanded, an epistemology of realism is implied in which the function of the media is held to be the mirroring of the real world. Instead, I interpret media not as an objective or universal representation of the world, but as a specific cultural construction and I argue that their representations contribute to the construction of determined identities, not mirroring or distorting them. Therefore, in this part of my book, I distance myself from this approach as it is not my intention to determine whether or not an image represents a ‘positive’ portrayal of people excluded from heteronormativity, simply because I do not believe such an aim can be achieved considering that these people are not a homogeneous group with a unified identity. On the other hand, following the ‘semiological guerilla warfare’ approach proposed by Umberto Eco, I share the interpretation of television criticism as an instrument which can help audiences decode programmes and gain consciousness of how television polices the boundaries of meaning, thus contributing to the deconstruction of prejudicial practices.

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

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

In the sixth chapter, entitled ‘Constructing a Collective History’, I explain how poststructuralist theories have complicated the concept of a collective history for those people excluded from heteronormativity. Nonetheless, even recognising its fictitiousness and arbitrariness, I stress the usefulness of this strategy. I also examine the role played by Catalan

and Spanish television in narrating non-heteronormative relationships set in other periods of times, especially during the dictatorship.

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

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

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

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

PART 1

GENDER ROLES IN SOAP OPERAS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CATALAN, BRITISH, AND AMERICAN SERIALS

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

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

CHAPTER ONE

A CALL TO ACTION: TELEVISION AS A SITE FOR FEMINIST STRUGGLE

While British cultural studies were firstly concerned with issues related to class and ethnicity, scholars working at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary and Cultural Studies were pioneers in studying how these issues, and others, related to gender. Publications such as *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination* (1978) evolved out of the collective work of authors such as Charlotte Brunsdon, Marion Jordon, Dorothy Hobson, and Christine Geraghty, who were committed to understanding popular culture as a site of struggle over meaning (Hall 1980).

According to Catherine Lumby, 'if feminism is to remain engaged with and relevant to the everyday lives of women, then feminists desperately need the tools to understand everyday culture' (1997: 174). Indeed, analysing how patriarchal ideology excludes, silences, and oppresses women inevitably leads to the analysis of the processes and practices that produce ideas about what it means to be a woman in culture (McCabe and Akass 2006: 108). In this sense, gender representations in the media, especially television, on account of 'its constant accessibility' (Brown 1990: 18), acquire a significant importance, due to 'the power of representation to promote or contest domination' (Moseley and Read 2002: 238). It is precisely this pervasive and omnipresent nature of television which makes it such a fascinating and, at the same time, complex object of analysis:

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

It is no surprise, then, that television, and media in general, are included in Louis Althusser's (1989) definition of 'Ideological State Apparatuses, (ISAs)', that is social institutions such as family, religion, the political system or, precisely, the media which 'operate as overlapping or "overdetermined" ideological influences which develop in a people a tendency to behave and think in socially acceptable ways' (Brown 1990: 18).

The reiteration of similar perspectives by these multiple social institutions is used to reinforce and perpetuate the ideology of the dominant groups and their 'hegemony', in Antonio Gramsci's words (1975). The Italian philosopher explains how 'hegemony', as opposed to 'dominion', is not imposed through coercive power but rather through persuasion, that is making subordinated groups interiorise their status of being dominated. This 'intellectual and moral direction', as defined by Gramsci, is naturalised and universalised because it comes from so many different sources that it turns into common sense. However, he also argues that the praxis of cultural hegemony is neither fixed nor monolithic. Similarly, Mary Ellen Brown argues that these hegemonic ideological positions 'have to be consciously accepted by people before they become part of the cultural practice of various group and subgroups within society, even though the particular ideological position in question may go against their interests' (1990: 18). Therefore, Gramsci concludes, people have to be continually won over to any ideological position and the potential for opposition always exists. Consequently, such ISAs as the media have 'continually [to] convince and re-convince [their] subjects or audiences, through various types of repetition' (Brown 1990: 18). Entertainment plays a crucial role in this sense because even without being 'primarily a vehicle for the transmission of ideas [...] even the most emotionally saturated entertainment will also produce ideas, and these will certainly be locatable in terms of ideology' (Lovell 1981: 47) and even fictional shows convey strong messages about 'what is normal, good, strange, or dangerous' (Capsuto 2000: 1). Similarly, Milly Buonanno argues that television narratives should be approached as an 'interpretative practice' (2008: 72) which contributes to a redefinition of 'shared conceptions of what is normal and what violates the norm' (2008: 75).

From a contrary position, John Fiske and John Hartley maintain that television is forced by its own constraints and contradictions to give 'freedom of perception to all its viewers' (1978: 19), and they interpret television texts as polysemic sites for the potential generation of ideological meaning. According to this view, television contains within it 'the contradictions which enable viewers to understand the play of

ideology' (Brown 1990: 18). Moreover, television texts are not isolated; rather, they gain meaning through the interaction not only with other media but also with broader cultural forms. In addition, one ought not to forget that 'the audience' itself is not an unproblematic and homogeneous category, but is instead 'composed of differing social and cultural groups [who] can use television texts for their own purposes and in different ways from each other' (Brown 1990: 15).

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

As far as artistic forms are concerned, feminist critics locate the issue of women's exclusion from the artistic establishment in its 'inherent androcentricity' and its 'inability [...] to convey an experience that women recognise as congruent with their own' (Brown 1990: 39). Rachel DuPlessis expands on this discrimination suffered by women in the established culture by stating that 'all forms of dominant narrative [...] are tropes for the sex-gender system as a whole' (1985: 43). Therefore, contemporary feminist criticism exposes the hegemonic nature of the relationship between narrative and ideology, circumscribing both processes of creation and interpretation, as well as consumption. Even if these arguments were initially elaborated for literary and artistic expressions, I argue that they are equally applicable to feminist television criticism. Indeed, television programming is mostly produced by men, even those programmes which specifically target a 'female audience', as if this were a monolithic and unproblematically defined group.¹ According to Brown, the absence of the representation of female experience and voices in dominant narrative forms 'conspires with the sex-gender system at large to maintain the marginal status of women, their ideas and their art' (1990: 39). This is why feminist analysis of popular culture is important to the politics of feminism and to women's struggle to be able to narrate their own experiences with their own voices.

¹ This is particularly true for the genre of soap opera, as I will discuss later.

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

Liberal feminism was concerned with women’s struggle for equality in the public work sphere, that is, women’s demands for equal access to jobs and institutional power; Marxist feminist scholars linked specific female oppressions to that of other groups—ethnic minorities, the working class, and so forth—and to the larger structure of capitalism; radical feminism considered women as fundamentally different from men and its aim was to advance women’s specific needs and desires; and later, in the 1980s, influenced by postmodernism, another strand usually known as poststructuralist feminism was developed, influenced by antiessentialist theory, which considered ‘men’ and ‘women’ to be socially constructed subjects, rather than natural categories. Antiessentialist theorists examined the processes through which female subjectivity is constituted in patriarchal culture. In this view, the ‘feminine’ is not something outside of, or untouched by, patriarchy, but integral to it. A pioneering scholar in this branch of gender studies is Judith Butler (1990; 1993), who argues that both gender and sex are cultural constructions, performances to be repeated and subject to regulatory norms rather than natural categories. This view had a considerable impact on studies which examine the production and circulation of gender constructions in different arenas, one of the most pervasive being television, as I have previously argued.

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