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***"Ouch, Spain!": The Comedy of Identity and the Trauma of Invisibility in DagoII Dagom's Oh! Espanya***  
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# "OUCH, SPAIN!": THE COMEDY OF IDENTITY AND THE TRAUMA OF INVISIBILITY IN DAGOLL DAGOM'S *OH! ESPANYA*

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between (in)visibility and politics as represented in Dagoll Dagom's popular sitcom *Oh! Espanya* (1996). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Hannah Arendt, and television studies, the author examines the ways in which the series comments on, and to a large degree contributes to maintain, the relations of domination and subordination between the Catalans and Spain at the level of representation and recognition.

A Catalan man loses his identity papers in Madrid and becomes invisible. He then appears (so to speak) in a television programme, and as viewers from all over Spain call in to say they know him, he returns to visibility. These are the main events in the central episode of Dagoll Dagom's popular sitcom *Oh! Espanya* (1996). Under its light-hearted and humorous appearance, this series raises important issues related to representation, politics, and subjectivity. Indeed, the question of visibility is the point of contact between the two meanings of the term "representation", as symbolic process and as political process, and the media are one of the main arenas where the politics of representation is played out. The media, as Larry Gross points out, "are likely to be most powerful in cultivating images of events and groups about which we have little first hand opportunity for learning" (11). These groups, what we call "minorities", are often absent from media images, and when they are not, in most cases their images are produced from the point of view of the majority for the consumption of the majority. Thus minorities, says Gross, "share a common media fate of relative invisibility and demeaning stereotypes" (12).

This phenomenon is tantamount to what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic domination". Those who occupy a dominant position impose as legitimate their categories of perception and classification, of vision and di-vision of social reality, and maintain them through the use of symbolic violence. Invisibility is the ultimate form of symbolic violence, as it denies the existence of those who find themselves

invisible. Or, in other words, to be invisible means to not be recognized by those who occupy a position of legitimacy. Yet symbolic domination requires, Bourdieu argues, the complicity of those in a subordinated position (*Ce que parler veut dire* 36). Complicity in this case involves the adoption of a point of view on one's own social and political being that is determined by dominant categories of perception. Thus the struggle for visual recognition is entangled in ambiguities, ambivalences, and misrecognitions. For example, access to visibility within dominant parameters might be mistakenly interpreted as symbolic emancipation.

Furthermore, visibility is a political issue. According to Hannah Arendt, visibility is central to politics because politics takes place in the public space, which is a world of appearance: not appearing in the public world—not being seen or heard—means not existing as a political subject. As Dean Hammer claims in an essay on Arendt's politics of visibility, "The loss of visibility threatens the very possibility of politics, for if we are not at home in the world and we are not able to see each other, then we lose the connection to and love of a plural world that gives rise to debate, disagreement, and discourse" (334).

The Catalans, as a national minority, are subject to a considerable degree of invisibility. However, Catalan invisibility is only partial due to the existence of Catalan-identified audiovisual media. In this case the issue is not so much the absence of images, as the position these images occupy within the market (are they hegemonic? are they for minority consumption?), the point of view expressed by these images (to what extent do they rely on dominant categories of perception sanctioned by the Spanish state?), and whether they have the ability to create a certain self-referentiality that would allow the Catalan viewers to be at home in the world *as Catalans* (in other words, to see themselves and the world *in their own terms*). The issue, then, is whether it is possible to engage, from a Catalan-centred point of view, in a symbolic process of construction of social reality that manages to posit its own categories of perception and di-vision as legitimate and unquestioned, to produce and disseminate a national narrative able to compete successfully for loyalties and adhesions (both rational and affective; on the part of both consumers and producers), and thereby to delimit a cultural and media space—both industrial (as a system of production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods) and symbolic (as a universe of reference).

The construction of a Catalan cultural space has been a central element of cultural policy in Catalonia for the past twenty-five years: this process is what we call *normalització cultural*. My contention, as I have argued elsewhere (Fernández, "Com aprofitar-se dels febles"), is that *normalització* is the expression of a wide crisis of cultural

models which is characteristically postmodern, and which is threefold. Firstly, it is a crisis of legitimization discourses produced by the commodification of culture resulting from the efforts to build a market and an industry for Catalan culture, and as an effect of the creation of the Catalan autonomous community, a kind of political structure that Manuel Castells terms a "quasi-national state" (52), and which by its own nature can only generate weak legitimization of policies, discourses, and institutions. Secondly, it is a crisis of value production, in which the selection mechanisms of Catalan culture, due to the structural changes experienced since 1976, have failed to achieve the desired canonizing effects, leading to a generalized relativisation of the value of cultural products, so that value judgements such as "all Catalan literature is mediocre" or "all Catalan cinema is bad" become not only possible but also relatively common. Lastly, it involves what I call a crisis of identification, affecting both identity discourses and the processes of (symbolic) representation. I argue that the identity categories active in Catalonia until the Restoration of the constitutional monarchy at the end of the 1970s have experienced a process of fragmentation and redefinition that has dissolved the consensus around what it means to be Catalan today. These changes (among them the exceptional character of the immigration waves of the 1960s) have exceeded the capacity of the symbolic, rhetorical, pragmatic, and institutional resources available to Catalan society in order to represent itself in all its complexity, to the extent that they constitute a process of Catalan national deconstruction.

The Catalan public broadcaster, Televisió de Catalunya (TVC), plays a central role in this dynamic. Its main network, TV3, presents itself as having a privileged relationship with the Catalan audience. As its slogan claims, TV3 is "la teva": both "la TV" and "your television" (as Catalan and as public). This slogan suggests that TV3 is a central arena for symbolic struggles regarding representation, competing national narratives and competitions for hegemony. As Josep Gifreu has written in *El meu país*, TV3 has had a crucial role in promoting "una alternativa d'imaginari televisiu català al de referència dominant espanyol" (148) that has been rewarded with a great success among the viewers. At the same time, however, it finds itself in a weak position within a market dominated by Spanish networks (TVE, Tele 5, Antena 3), which control 70% of television consumption in Catalonia (Gifreu 149), and regulated by laws that do not take into account the linguistic and cultural plurality of Spain and that explicitly bar TVC from reaching the entirety of its potential market (Gifreu 146-47, 150). Thus Gifreu, in view of this problematic situation, articulates a rather pessimistic reflection:



En un món marcat per la globalització de les comunicacions i de les economies, les televisions presents a l'espai del català havien i haurien de contribuir a revitalitzar la memòria col·lectiva i a vertebrar projectes de futur en un sentit alhora integrador i plural. Ara bé, com podien i podrien les grans cadenes realment existents reflectir i recrear la cultura catalana si els seus interessos bàsics, implícits en la programació i les activitats narratives i editorialitzants, responen als de la cultura espanyola i en castellà, l'única realment hegemònica a tots els territoris de l'Estat? (151)

The sitcom I examine in this article, *Oh! Espanya*, is very useful to understand the workings and effects of the processes I have described above. Written and performed by the prominent theatre company Dagoll Dagom, and produced by Ovideo TV for TVC in 1996, *Oh! Espanya* was a sequel of a previous programme for TVC, *Oh! Europa* (1993). The series was broadcast between September 1996 and January 1997 in prime time (at 21:20, after the evening news) (Vilches *et al.* 29), and it was as successful as its predecessor: according to *Avui*, it achieved an average audience of 9.7% or 580,000 viewers, equivalent to a share of 26.9% ("Oh! Espanya! acaba el periple per l'Estat"), a remarkable result considering that it was competing with the football league on Antena 3 TV and with Tele 5's popular sitcom *Todos los hombres sois iguales* ("Oh! Espanya! cierra hoy su odisea autonómica"). *Oh! Espanya* and *Oh! Europa* share a number of elements: the same cast, music by Jaume Sisa (who collaborated with Dagoll Dagom in two of the company's most successful shows in its early days: *Antaviana* and *Nit de Sant Joan*), and a similar plot structure, featuring the adventures of a group of tourists. In *Oh! Europa*, each of the characters had won a prize offered by a savings bank, consisting in a holiday tour of Europe by coach; each of the thirteen episodes was set in a different country. The sequel, *Oh! Espanya*, starts with a reunion of the group some time after the first journey. The group decides to organise a new trip, but this time without a guide, visiting the different "regions" of Spain. Thus each of the seventeen episodes takes place in one of the *comunidades autónomas* in which Spain was organised after the 1978 Constitution.

The series's focus on the Spanish "regions" points to an emphasis on both identity and difference which translates into the representation of diversity. The group of travellers includes a mixture of ages (from an elderly couple, Miquel and Emília, played by Xavier Massé and Montserrat Carulla, to Deulofeu júnior, played by Marçal Cruz); a young married couple, Robert (Marc Cartes) and Fina (Rosa Gàmiz) as well as a gay character, Óscar (Paco Alonso); and different political positions, from the rather conservative Josep Maria Deulofeu (Pep Cruz) to left-wing school teacher Enric Cassanyes (Josep-Lluís Bozzo, one of the directors of Dagoll Dagom). The programme, in fact, achieves a remarkable balance: it both gestures towards the acknow-

ledgement of a wider Catalan-speaking community through the presence of Valencian traveller Clementina (Inés Díaz) and reflects to some extent the demographic makeup of Catalan society, in that some of the characters are Castilian-speaking, notably Deulofeu's wife Trini (Teresa Urroz), who has lived in Palamós for over twenty years yet hardly utters a word of Catalan and is sometimes the vehicle for Catalanophobic prejudice ("Desde luego, cómo sois los catalanes! Os creéis el centro del mundo", she says in the first episode).

The individual episodes focus on the discoveries made by the Catalan tourists in each territory they visit, often confronting their own prejudices about Spain, but also confirming the dominant clichés of what is "typical" in each region: thus we follow the characters in their experience of *orxata* in València; flamenco, bullfighting, and superstition in Andalusia; working class activism and cows in Asturias; food, religious conservatism, and terrorism in Euskadi; and Cervantes and the *comedia* in Castilla La Mancha. The group's discoveries are assisted by guest stars from each of the *comunidades*, from Raúl Sender, Lita Claver and José Coronado to Cristina Hoyos and Fernando Guillén Cuervo, all of them well-known figures to Catalan audiences.

The programme's narrative around the adventures of a group of tourists departs from generic conventions: the sitcom, as we know, is usually set in the household or in a family setting or in the workplace (Hartley 66). However, as Jane Feuer points out, "the sitcom seems to require the presence of a quasi-familial structure in order to satisfy the needs of the viewer. The TV viewer is always addressed by the sitcom as a member of a family — 'from our family to yours'" (68). In the case of *Oh! Espanya*, the group of travellers operates as an extension or a surrogate of the family and, by extension, of the national community. This last remark is confirmed by the fact that the trip is "autogestionat" (self-managed) and decisions are made in parliamentary style, thus working as an allegory of the democratic system, its problems, advantages, and limitations. The series's lighthearted interest in politics is partly expressed by a certain attention to historical memory. For example, the last episode, devoted to Catalonia, focuses on the memory of the resistance against Francoism, assuming a lack of knowledge about it on the part of the audience and the younger characters, and tells the (true) story of the kidnapping of the image of the Mare de Déu de Núria prior to Franco's visit to the shrine in 1962. This political element also allows Dagoll Dagom to "incidir de forma lateral en las problemáticas que preocupan al español medio: el paro, la vivienda, la corrupción, el terrorismo, el medio-ambiente, la droga, etcétera" (Dagoll Dagom 5). Thus the sitcom, in the case of *Oh! Espanya*, becomes "the perfect format for illustrating ideological conflicts while entertaining an audience" (Feuer 70).

Yet if *Oh! Espanya* pays attention to social reality, its plots occasionally include fantastic elements. In the "Navarra" episode Trini becomes a Basque-speaking witch who saves the soul of a Carlist general's ghost. In Galicia, Miquel and Emília encounter the Santa Compañía, while in "Andalusia" Emília becomes a healer with supernatural powers. And the last episode, "Catalunya", shows the group travelling back in time, thanks to divine intervention, so that they can help the Catalan anti-Franco activists be successful in their action.

Thus, while the series aims to be in "contacto con la realidad social del país" (Dagoll Dagom 5), a tension exists between this and two other aspects of the series. On the one hand, the characters' journey throughout Spain is a pretext to turn otherness and identity into comedy material, mostly through clichés and stereotypes. On the other hand, *Oh! Espanya* indulges in the fantastic as a mechanism for mobilising or resolving the plot. The series thus simplifies (social) reality or evades it altogether. Furthermore, the series deals with the relationship of the Catalans with Spain, and so it raises all sorts of issues related to identity and national difference, historical memory, subordination and symbolic violence, and ambivalence. These issues are, in fact, elements a political fantasy about (in)visibility and recognition articulated by the sitcom and that the present article analyzes. What are the ideological implications of the use of stereotypes and of Dagoll Dagom's take on the relations of domination and subordination between the Catalans and Spain, in terms of representation and recognition? What is the role of the fantastic in the series? What are the implications of the national fantasy of *Oh! Espanya*? To what effect are the issues of visibility and recognition brought to bear in the programme? And how does it participate in the construction or deconstruction of a Catalan national narrative?

The stated purpose of *Oh! Espanya* expresses the best of possible intentions: to promote mutual knowledge and tolerance among the peoples of Spain. As Dagoll Dagom's series project and production notes claim:

El mensaje básico que se pretende transmitir es *el concepto de tolerancia, respeto y confianza entre las distintas gentes y las distintas hablas del Estado Español*.

Ante la crispación que, demasiadas veces, preside las relaciones entre las Comunidades, pensamos que hay que oponer una idea de *mútuo [sic] reconocimiento y comprensión*. Ante la indiferencia, interés. Ante la pequeñez de miras, extroversión. Desdramatizar, en definitiva, unas relaciones que no siempre están presididas por la cordialidad y apostar por la idea de que la variedad de culturas, de lenguas y de tradiciones es una riqueza y no un problema. (Dagoll Dagom 9; emphasis in the original)



This aim is truly commendable, but it is also problematic on a number of counts. Firstly, the above statement presupposes the existence of a conflict, manifested in the "crispación" that characterizes the relationship between the "Comunidades". Thus the parameters of the historical conflict between Catalonia and the (Spanish) State are displaced and rewritten, so that this national conflict now becomes a petty and provincial rivalry between "regions" (referred to using the terminology adopted by the new constitutional order), and Spain appears as the neutral mediator between them and as the shared space—the nation—where differences are transcended. The (objective) historical conflict seems to have been superseded, and the constitutional framework that established a new division of Spain into "Comunidades autónomas" is naturalized—with a certain degree of ambivalence, expressed by the phrase "Estado español", which provides some distance from the rhetoric of Spanish nationalism.

Secondly, these stated aims misrecognize the relationship between the parties in the conflict. Since the problem is the "crispación" that presides the relationship between regions, this relationship is assumed to be one of equal partners who can grant each other recognition. Thus, the objective fact of the subordination of Catalonia is obscured by the assumption of a mutual lack of recognition. On the other hand, the statement of aims wrongly believes that a lack of recognition is the same as a lack of knowledge. The pedagogy towards Spain promoted by Dagoll Dagom (like much of the discourse production of Catalan politics vis-a-vis the Spanish master) seems to assume that power relations of subordination and domination can simply be changed by disseminating "good" knowledge in order to fight mutual ignorance. The "good" knowledge to be circulated, however, has not been produced by the State nor legitimated by its (dominant) point of view, and therefore will not be recognized as knowledge. In other words, there seems to be a belief at work here that the Catalans are in a position to promote the diversity of Spain as a positive value among their peers (the other "regions"), but this belief ignores the fact that the power to promote such change in the schemes of perception and division of the national reality resides with those instances that control the means of production and dissemination of legitimate knowledge, such as the educational system, that are ultimately in the hands of the State. The programme is thus promoting the value of diversity among those who already share it.

And finally, there is a paradox at the heart of *Oh! Espanya*: as with its predecessor, *Oh! Europa*, here the characters embark on a journey towards the encounter of the Other, and so Catalan difference is constantly (and necessarily) emphasised. At the same time, however, precisely because the conflict is formulated not in terms of subor-



dination but of rivalry and the Spanish constitutional framework is naturalized, the parameters of difference between the Catalans and their Other(s) are the dominant ones sanctioned by the Spanish state, mostly in the form of "regional" stereotypes.

In this respect the first episode ("Aragó") is truly revealing: in a long flashback at the start of the narrative, we learn how the decision about the trip around Spain was made. The members of the *Oh! Europa* group meet for a reunion at a Cuban restaurant in Barcelona's Poble Espanyol, and as they walk around the park they discover how little they know about Spain. As Fina argues, they have travelled extensively "per l'estranger", but not so much "per Espanya". This self-avowed lack of knowledge, together with Trini's reproach that the Catalans are slightly narcissistic, prompts Enric (the school teacher) to pompously quote Salvador Espriu's famous exhortation in *La pell de brau* for Spain to respect and cherish its linguistic and cultural diversity. Such strong interpellation, added to plentiful evidence of the characters' ignorance of basic aspects of Spanish geography (is Santander in Castilla la Vieja or Castilla la Nueva?, they wonder), leads Senyora Emília to provide the ideological imperative for the second journey: "hem d'aprendre a coneixe'ns i a estimar-nos" — a statement that does not refer to the Catalans' knowledge of, and love for, their own country, but interpellates them as members of the wider Spanish community, in what amounts to a Catalan version of contemporary Spanish nationalism, visually evoked by the Poble Espanyol itself.

The insistence on the need for mutual recognition and on the lack of knowledge of Spain on the part of the Catalans, however, is contradicted by the fact that the deeper knowledge provided by the sitcom is based on "regional" clichés and stereotypes and on the imagery of tourism. The credits sequence uses images of postcards from different locations in Spain as background; and each episode contains a "videoclip" in which a song by Jaume Sisa is adapted to the musical style of each "region", while the lyrics and the pictures refer to the main elements in the "regional" character and the principal tourist attractions. But if "regional" clichés are thus re-presented and re-confirmed, at the same time the series disavows them. At the start of the "Andalusia" episode, we are confronted with a scene in Seville where every possible Andalusian stereotype is present, from the *sevillanas* and the bullfighter to the *señoritos* and the *jomaleros*; but as the camera pans away, we realise that the Catalan travellers had unwittingly stepped in the middle of a film shooting. Later on, however, Senyora Emília discovers that she has miraculous healing powers, and the entire neighbourhood, moved by characteristically Andalusian superstition, queues outside the hotel to seek her aid. Andalusia is thus presented as both modernised and still superstitious.

As Michael Real states, "Stereotypes, racial and otherwise, serve as shorthand codes of representation and social control. Myths construct narratives around types and stereotypes, and in the words of Kellner, 'the myths of a society are the bearers of its ideologies'" (225). The simultaneous re-presentation and disavowal of stereotypes is, I would argue, what creates the conditions for the fresh look at Spain—the new, modern, democratic Spain—that both the characters and the audience should adopt; in other words, it is the means of creation of a new Spanish mythology. Of course, this mythology is not to be taken too seriously (after all, *Oh! Espanya* is a comedy), but there is a residue that produces an effect of naturalization. The series, indeed, takes for granted as a given reality the legal framework that divides Spain into seventeen "comunidades autónomas", and as the arena where competition among peers takes place. In the "Euskadi" episode, for example, a *txapela*-sporting Basque confronts Deulofeu with the unlikely statement that "La cocina vasca es la mejor cocina de España", thereby inventing a culinary rivalry between Catalonia and Euskadi framed within the parametres of vision and di-vision of reality sanctioned by the Spanish state.

At the same time, however, the distance resulting from the assumed lack of knowledge of this naturalized reality leaves room for a certain ideological malleability. In other words, the sitcom is not simply "reflecting" Spanish reality, but actively constructing it. For example, in the episode "Castella-Lleó", school teacher María administers a dictation exercise to her pupils, and carefully utters the following words under the approving gaze of a school inspector: "España es una realidad pluricultural". Dictation is not simply a scholastic exercise developing grammatical accuracy: it also involves the imposition of definitions and ideologies that become unquestioned and universally accepted through their circulation in the educational system. But in this particular case, there is a contradiction between the text dictated and the objectivity of Spanish social reality, including legislation, dominant discourses in Spain, cultural policy and behaviour of the markets. María's dictation appears almost as a magical act performed by the programme, aiming at performatively transforming social reality by its very utterance; yet, rather than achieving this effect, it merely feeds into an already existing belief structure.

Furthermore, the construction of a new mythology entails the deconstruction of another one, and the symbolic confusion associated with the treatment of historical memory in the series is an element in this dynamic. This is clear in the episode "Astúries", which focuses on the revolutionary background of Asturias and plays with the cliché of the importance of the workers' movement in that territory. The Catalan tourists get lost and end up in a mining village's tavern where a strike

is being planned; but the communist flags displayed throughout the tavern sport an obviously incorrect design of the hammer and sickle symbol, and a most unlikely CNT poster (in communist Asturias!). The series obtains much of its comical effect from these confusions and inaccuracies, but I would argue that other effects are achieved as well. For symbolic confusion has a systemic nature in *Oh! Espanya*, and contributes to articulate the Catalans' ambivalence regarding their own identity and Spain.

Symbolic confusion is perhaps an effect of this ambivalence. An example would be the lyrics of the song in the central episode in the series, "Madrid", on which I shall concentrate from now on. The song adapts the same melody of all the "videoclips" to the style of a *chotis*, and starts with the following words: "És Madrid la capital i d'un país inexistent. I Està ple de burocràcia oficial, I però més plens estan els bars, I i quin ambient!" The claim that Spain does not exist is surprising, not only because it contradicts the very premises of the show (a journey around Spain), but also because it could be argued, following Pierre Bourdieu (*Raisons pratiques* 101-33), that it is precisely Spain, as the holder of state structures, who defines reality within its borders. If the song's claim can be made, it is as an effect of a belief, or a fantasy, that the existence of Spain is not quite "real" because it does not acknowledge the "reality" of its internal diversity: hence the need to return to the relationship between its constituent parts in order to give rise to a more "real" Spain. This is, in fact, the internal logic of autonomist or federalist discourses that are so common in Catalan politics. However, far from turning these discourses into comedy material, *Oh! Espanya* seems to align itself with them, as the song's lyrics suggest, thus evoking the interrogator's response in Orwell's 1984 to Winston Smith, who doubts the existence of Big Brother: "It's you, who doesn't exist!" (quoted in Zizek 86).

The episode "Madrid" (significantly the central chapter in the series) integrates all the elements in my discussion so far, and links them, through the dramatization of a similar interpellation, to issues of identity, visibility, and recognition. The episode starts with the arrival of the characters to Madrid. Locked in a traffic jam, the group discusses its plans for its stay in the bustling Spanish capital. Óscar, stereotypically gay, wants to see as many celebrities as possible, given that "Madrid es la capital del show business, y aquí están todos, todos, todos". Meanwhile, the other members of the group debate whether to visit the Congreso de los Diputados —the home of Spanish democracy— or the Museo del Prado, mimicking a parliamentary debate between government and opposition, complete with references to cultural policy. The opening scene thus sums up Madrid's two main aspects: it is the political capital of the Spanish state, the site of democratic power



and decision-making, but also the centre of the media industry, the makers of hegemonies who have the power to decide who will be universally known and recognized in the Spanish public sphere. Importantly, the first aspect is explicitly presented as political—therefore affecting the common interests of the group—whereas the second is associated with a camp gay man who sees no political dimension to his sexuality.

Eventually the group agrees to go to the Prado, and visit the parliament the next day. Trini then starts collecting identity documents in order to obtain the necessary permit; but Senyor Miquel, the oldest traveller, discovers that he has lost his DNI, and anxiously decides to go to a police station immediately to report the loss. As he leaves, his wife, Senyora Emília, explains to Trini and Deulofeu that “durant la guerra es va quedar sense documents durant molts anys, i ara els considera la cosa més important del món”, to which Trini replies: “Es natural”.

This exchange is relevant because it suggests that Miquel has a fetishistic relationship with his identity documents: having lost the civil war and spent many years in exile in Mexico, Miquel has invested an enormous amount of energy in his papers, as a symbol of his own existence in the world; losing his documents amounts to losing the fetish that sustains his fantasy of belonging to a political community that guarantees his public existence as a citizen, and therefore his eligibility to participate in the common project of a Catalan democracy.

What is surprising is that for the other characters this relationship is perfectly normal or “natural”; Senyora Emília even says later that Miquel “ha perdut la identitat”. This is surprising not only because there is nothing natural or normal about fetishism; it also indicates a confusion between identity and citizenship, and between individual and collective identity. Identity documents, issued by the state, denote an entitlement to citizenship, but don’t necessarily say anything about an individual’s personal, social, or national identity. Identity, by contrast, is a complex social or symbolic process, the outcome of the interaction between *identification* (what group I think I belong to), *differentiation* (the other groups I don’t belong to) and *recognition* (how others perceive me). To put it in Bourdieu’s words, identity is “cet être-perçu qui existe fondamentalement par la reconnaissance des autres” (*Ce que parler veut dire* 141). Yet, as we will see in a moment, the loss of the papers is directly associated with the fragility of a form of identity that transcends the individual, and the recognition that matters here is not social but strictly formal and political.

This confusion is the crux of the event that mobilizes this episode’s plot, as well as the source of its humorous effect. This event is Miquel’s traumatic experience at the Madrid police station. In a panoramic shot of an office, we see two civil servants behind a counter, one of

them dealing with the public; a queue has formed, and Miquel is first in line. Cut to a medium shot of Miquel and the mustachioed *funcionario*, to whom Miquel has explained that he has lost his identity card. Prompted by the official who serves him, Miquel starts to give his personal details, but this proves a difficult task: he utters his name (Miquel Capdevila i Puigserinarell) according to Catalan pronunciation, which makes the official extremely confused (indeed, he thinks "Miquel" is Basque), so in a most pedagogical manner Miquel explains the intricacies of Catalan phonetics. This exchange is cross-cut with medium shots of a female official having lunch at her desk and showing disdain in her face as Miquel speaks, as well as with panoramic shots of the rest of the queue as it gets impatient. A woman retorts as Miquel teaches the official the basics of Catalan: "Ahora le están dando un cursillo de polaco"; she later interpellates him: "En Madrid el catalán no existe". Miquel's speech—a strange combination of Catalan and Mexican accents—emphasizes his otherness to a man carrying a copy of the newspaper *ABC*.

When Miquel's data are entered into the computer, something extraordinary happens: "Aquí dice que usted no existe. Desaparecido en el año 1939", says the official. Startled, Miquel protests: "¡Pero eso es inadmisibile! Aquí estoy, ¿no me ve?". The funcionario, however, does not dispute the official truth: "Oiga, que yo soy un mandao". The impatient citizens at the queue also dismiss Miquel's objections: "Oiga, ¿no le están diciendo que no existe? ¡Pues no discuta, hombre!", says the woman. As Miquel, utterly confused, leaves the queue, a panoramic shot of the office stresses the public character both of the discussion that has just taken place and of the police station as a state-owned space.

Miquel thus confronts a terrible fact: the bureaucratic structures of the State have not rectified the effects of Francoism, and while Spain might have become a democracy, its ideological innards remain the same and negate Catalan identity. This realization has serious consequences for Miquel. Cut to a panoramic shot of the hotel reception; the mysterious non-diegetic music and the ticking of a clock indicate that something strange is happening. Miquel nervously enters the frame; he tries to attract the attention of a receptionist and a waiter, but they ignore him. He has indeed become invisible to those who do not acknowledge his existence: "com si no existís!", he mutters.

Thus identity and recognition are literally performative here (and this is why the events in these scenes are funny: a symbolic process is taken literally). As Miquel feels his torso with his hands in order to confirm his material existence, his body starts to turn translucent. Later, when his wife Emília returns to the hotel, he explains, totally agitated, what has happened to him, and concludes: "Sóc un fantas-



ma!". Miquel's ghostly appearance is the effect of a "crisi d'identitat", but there seems to be a certain disagreement as to what has caused it. Whereas for Miquel the cause of his disappearance is that "Per a ells [the Spanish] no existim!" (and so his invisibility is the consequence of a political conflict that affects him as a member of a group), Fina's explanation that "com que aquí ningú creu en la seva existència, ell, pobre, està començant a posar-la en dubte" reduces this crisis to a strictly personal, private matter.

This tension also manifests itself in the possible interpretations of these scenes. From a psychoanalytic point of view, for example, it could be said that the computer evidence of Miquel's lack of existence amounts to an eruption of the Real: his fetishistic identification with the identity papers issued by the State is revealed to be nothing but a fantasy and this leads to the collapse of all ideological crutches, thus haunting the Catalan subject with the spectre of non-existence. However, and while this reading is to some extent valid, as we will see later, we need to account for the political and intersubjective nature of Miquel's identity crisis, which is articulated in terms of visibility, historical trauma, public presence, and stigmatization.

The denial of existence Miquel has been subjected to has radically transformed his self-perception and allo-perception, in that his whole person(a) has now been reduced to his trauma, and he has been profoundly stigmatized. His stigma, however, is paradoxical, because its mark cannot be seen. An invisible man is a freak, a monster — an error of classification, a catastrophe in the order of things. Yet monstrosity, as Kathleen Stewart reminds us, is directly related to visibility: the word monster 'hearkens back to the Latin terms *monere*, to warn, and *monstrare*, to demonstrate' (248). The monster is to be shown as a warning of something unnatural or dangerous: "It is alarming and so demands interpretation or explanation and yet it is also unreadable" (*ibid.*).

Miquel's monstrosity, however, is paradoxical because it is invisible. His stigma as a Catalan is similar to that of homosexuality, in the sense that "it doesn't show". His return to visibility is thus a precondition for entering a struggle for legitimacy; what is at stake in this struggle is whether he will stay as an unclassifiable freak or as a normalized deviant, locked into a marginal, non-universal identity, or whether, on the contrary, he'll gain the power to be seen, and see himself and the world, in his own terms.

According to Hannah Arendt, visibility is central for politics. Politics takes place in the world of common affairs, and participation in it requires public appearance, that is, being seen and recognised by others as a unique individual. The essential characteristic of the public sphere is plurality, and plurality, says Susan Bickford, "means that *who*



we are is unique. If humans did not have this quality of uniqueness, we would not need speech nor a space in which to speak to one another" (316). The "who" that makes each human unique is "a public identity, not an intimate one" (Bickford 317); it manifests itself by appearing, speaking and acting in the presence of others. Our social circumstances—race, gender, ethnicity, class or religion—are, in principle, not a part of our public identity, because they are transcended in the public realm. However, stereotyping and stigmatization on the basis of these circumstances may lead to the exclusion of some people:

Stereotypes, by focusing on qualities of "what-ness", avoid another's personhood, "denying them their variousness and complexity", their equality and individuality. If my membership in a group is the only lens through which I am perceived, then I cannot appear as a person with a unique story and singular opinions. Human plurality is blocked by assumptions that I am simply a representation of others who look and sound like me. (Bickford 318)

At the same time, however, ethnicity, gender, or class may be integral parts of our public identity, "because they are the contexts in which we learn to speak and think the languages that shape us and enable us to give voice to our unique selves" (Bickford 320). Indeed, as Dean Hammer puts it, "Issues of identity become political, for Arendt, when they give us visibility in a world of appearance" (322). And to be denied visibility is the same as being "deprived of reality" (Arendt, quoted by Bickford 318), or in other words, of existence.

Thus the cure for invisibility is recognition. Miquel's return to visibility and public existence takes place in the concluding part of the episode. He is vanishing fast, and a member of the group has an idea: she contacts a friend who works at a television station—for television "és l'únic lloc on ho poden arreglar". In a sequence that presents the episode's conflict resolution, we are shown a panoramic shot of a television studio in which a programme it is about to be broadcast live. Fina, Emília, and Meritxell are nervously getting ready for the start of their segment; between the first two women there is what looks like an empty chair, occupied by the transparent body of Miquel: when asked "Com es troba?", he replies, "No em trobo!" The programme, *La aguja en el pajar*, in which the audience help find missing people, starts. The conductor (Tino Romero) introduces Miquel's case and interrogates the three women, inviting them to provide details about the invisible man's predicament. Emília explains in her rather poor Spanish, before breaking up in tears: "Él formó parte de la generación que hicieron la guerra, ¿sabe? Él luchó por sus ideales, por Cataluña, por la república, y por la democracia. Y cuando llegó aquí se encontró con que esto la gente todo esto no lo sabe, ¿sabe? Y él, él lo que quiere es ser, es demostrar que..." After these explanations, the conductor

asks the viewers to call if they know Miquel. Fade to the programme identification image and signature tune. Cut to a three-shot of Enric, Clementina and Ventura in the hotel, who are anxiously discussing the programme (the programme's music is in the background), followed by a high-angle shot in which they and the rest of the Catalan tourists debate how to help Miquel; Ventura says, "Ens hem de convèncer de que sí existeix el senyor Miquel". Sitting in a circle, with a television set in the background, the group hold hands and repeat with their eyes shut, "El senyor Miquel existeix, el senyor Miquel existeix". Cut to the television studio. Viewers start to call, beginning with María (from the "Castilla-León" episode) who certifies the existence of Miquel, whom she describes as "una bellíssima persona". This is the first in a "ronda de llamadas desde todos los puntos de la amplia geografía española", including not only La Rioja and Asturias, but also the Basque Country and Galicia; in these two cases, the callers—who had met the protagonist in the relevant episodes—speak in their respective languages, and the conductor converses with them (in Spanish television!) in these languages as well. Meanwhile, and almost miraculously, Miquel's body starts to become translucent, which prompts a jubilant reaction both in the hotel and among the studio audience. The last call comes from Madrid: it is the civil servant from the police station, who sheepishly acknowledges that Miquel's inexistence was "un error burocrático lamentable" and apologises. Miquel is now fully visible.

The episode's happy ending, with Miquel's exultant return to visibility, raises a number of relevant points. Firstly, Miquel's trauma becomes a spectacle, and his predicament is solved not in the political arena where it originated, but in the media. *La aguja en el pajar* is a parody of the reality TV shows (or *telebasura*) that characterized Spanish television in the 1990s, plagued by poor regulation and no clear separation between private and public models of broadcasting. Here what is presumably a private station becomes the scene in which an act of historical reconciliation and reparation is held, and so pretends to offer a public service (in order to make a profit, of course). On the other hand, by offering a parody of this genre, TVC ("la teva") resists and differentiates itself from the new Spanish model and stresses its commitment to public service, but at the same time it renounces any ambitions to become the forum where celebrities—those who are known and recognised—are made, thus acting as a resonance box for the Spanish cultural and media space. Significantly, the conductor of *La aguja en el pajar* is Tino Romero, a well-known Catalan actor and television presenter who appears in Dagoll Dagom's programme as a Spanish celebrity.

Secondly, Miquel's predicament is presented as strictly personal and private, and therefore politically irrelevant. The relevant social



circumstances (his Catalan identity) that have been denied are discussed obliquely and in strictly personal terms. This is a consequence of the nature of the genre parodied here leads Dagoll Dagom to focus on the more sentimental or emotional aspects of Miquel's trauma, thus precluding a more rational approach. The close-ups of the three Catalan women present at the studio and the emotions in their facial expressions stress the recourse to sentimentality that characterizes conflict resolution in the episode. Accordingly, the audience are asked to show their empathy with Miquel's pain.

In an essay on the rhetoric of pain in American identity politics, Lauren Berlant argues that identity politics operates as a form of "national sentimentality" (44) whereby relations of domination and subordination are not expressed in terms of a "rational subjectivity", but of a "utopian/traumatized subjectivity" (47) in which the trauma or wound of subordination becomes fetishized evidence of identity (43). American identity politics, says Berlant, is based on collectivizing the experience of particular identities, and on the assumption that identification with pain on the part of privileged subjects will lead to social change; subaltern pain is not considered universal, but deemed intelligible (55). Therefore, "trauma stands as [the] truth" (Berlant 56) of a subaltern subject whose access to the universal is denied by its negation, stereotyping, and its locking into a "collective, and therefore subuniversal" identity. Moreover, subaltern pain is public because it makes those who suffer it "*readable*, for others" (Berlant 56).

Readable, I would argue, is the same as susceptible of being normalized, intelligible within certain symbolic parameters that allow the expression of empathy. Empathy, however, does not have the depth of engagement demanded by recognition. The callers "feel Miquel's pain"; they express their empathy or identification with pain expected by the reality show; but empathy is not the same as recognition, because it empties the trauma of its political content. Although the historical origins of the wound are acknowledged in Emília's intervention, history is reduced to the events lived by individuals, and so its consequences are depoliticized: Miquel was defeated in the Civil War (fighting for a shared political project), but now he just wants "to be" (individually). Furthermore, the reoccurrence of the aggression, which lead to Miquel's invisibility in the first place, was nothing but an administrative error, so it has no relevant political dimension (and to think otherwise would then be paranoia). Thus Miquel is recognised not as a Catalan (that is, the specificity of his identity is still unacknowledged), but as a "*bellísima persona*" (almost in the sense of "some of my best friends are Jewish").

But let's face it: what we are *really* dealing with here is the recognition of Catalan identity by the Spanish state, yet in *Oh! Espanya*



a problem of collective identification is presented as an individual trauma that only affects the person who suffers it directly. Miquel "ha perdut la identitat", says his wife Emília, but the "identity" Miquel has lost can only be defined socially. Why is it, then, that the other Catalans in Madrid do not vanish in the same way? For, obviously, the invisibilization of a Catalan as *Catalan* should entail that of all the others (an outcome, in fact, that would have a much larger comedic potential). At this point it would be useful to remember Hannah Arendt's position vis-à-vis her Jewish identity:

Arendt herself felt the reality of her Jewishness: "for many years I considered the only reply to the question, Who are you? to be: a Jew." If attacked as a Jew, Arendt argued, one must respond in that identity; not to do so would be "nothing but a grotesque and dangerous evasion of reality." By "a Jew" she did not mean "a special kind of human being" but was rather indicating a "political fact." And responding "in terms of the identity that is under attack" means challenging interpretations of that fact, not denying its worldly reality. (Bickford 326)

Thirdly, what we see on television (both *La aguja en el pajar* and *Oh! Espanya*) is a fantasy of recognition that also involves that of the Basques and Galicians as differentiated cultural and national realities within *la España plural*. But at the same time this fantasy that grants us public existence reinforces the general framework — political, institutional, and symbolic — where mutual recognition is supposed to take place, that is, Spain. In this sense television appears, in Michelle Hilmes's words, as "the great mediator" — the site at which cultural beliefs, values and controversies meet daily to affirm our central core of ideology and myth" (214). Interestingly, the television sets showing *La aguja en el pajar* provide a visual link between the scenes discussed here (involving the Catalan tourists at their hotel, and the different viewers who call the programme from their respective locations), thus creating the effect of simultaneity necessary for imagining a national community (Anderson, *Imagined Communities*). The nation is here, in fact, the community of viewers who watch the same programme and participate in the act of recognition of one of their peers. Thus Miquel returns to the visibility defined by the dominant Spanish categories of perception: he is not a Catalan freak anymore, but "una bellísima persona", a Spanish citizen resident in Catalonia.

However, the episode's resolution obscures the objective conditions of the identity conflict that *Oh! Espanya* dramatizes humorously. Recognition here comes from the same level, from the other components of the system, not from that level in which the trauma was originated. The trauma was caused not by the individual civil servant who makes an administrative error, but by the State itself.

Madrid (that metonymy for the State the Catalans are so fond of using) therefore appears as the forum in which conflicts are resolved, not as the locus from which the aggression was launched. The Spanish media (the State's ideological apparatuses, to use Althusser's terminology) are presented as mere facilitators of the liturgy of recognition in which Tino Romero acts as officiating priest; they do not appear as active and interested participants in the invisibilization. Even the Spanish king is involved: at the end of the episode he secretly appears as a mysterious motorist who tells Miquel how happy he is about his return to visibility. But the king is shown simply as an impartial spectator who has watched the programme and expresses empathy. Thus the State, its apparatuses, and its highest representative see their objective characteristics obscured and made invisible, and acquire the appearance of a neutral judge in what seems an allegory of the Restoration of the constitutional monarchy, as a restoration of ideological order.

Earlier in this article I argued that in *Oh! Espanya* the group of travellers acts as a surrogate of the family structure and, by extension, of the national community. The episode we have examined here, "Madrid", concludes with the resolution of a historical conflict at the level of representation, and presents Spain as a big, happy, and united family where all its members enjoy recognition of their uniqueness. In this sense, *Oh! Espanya* shares the conservative patterns of the domestic sitcom. As Michelle Hilmes has written on the classic American sitcom *Cheers*:

[it] opened up the family environment, re-creating many of its structures but allowing a greater diversity of membership and a greater flexibility in the relationships among members. This in turn allowed different kinds of issues to be addressed — issues that went beyond the limited scope of the intrafamily conflict. [...] However, the basic mandate of the domestic sitcom form remained: introduce a conflict that can be explored, maintained, and finally diffused. Whatever the composition of the family, it must not be allowed to fragment under pressure. Whatever the conflict, the family must remain together, unshaken. (216-17).

The domestic sitcom thus follows an imperative that power structures must stay unchanged regardless of the nature of the conflict that mobilizes the narrative. Similarly, in *Oh! Espanya*, conflict resolution is not the outcome of a political deliberation aimed at reaching justice and reparation, but the consequence of accepting a dominant political logic that prevents the roots of conflict from being acknowledged.

In this respect, the recognition granted to Miquel, and by extension to the Catalans, in *Oh! Espanya* is also a misrecognition in complicity with symbolic domination. The fantasy that gives rise to this

misrecognition —almost a premonition of Rodríguez Zapatero's *España plural*— is based upon an avoidance of political reality and the ambivalent adoption of a dominant point of view. For this reason, *Oh! Espanya* is an eloquent example of the cultural politics of Catalan regionalism in the 1980s and 1990s. The programme's producers thus shy away from exploring the possibility of resistance articulated by Hannah Arendt and elaborated further by Susan Bickford; "In our world, social identity is a political fact even if often a hidden one; one way to 'resist in terms of the identity that is under attack' is by insisting on its publicness, and using that publicness to redefine the terms of identity: to make faces" (Bickford 327). Nevertheless, there are signs of resistance in the episode we have examined in this article. As they visit the Museo del Prado, the Catalan tourists, regardless of their language or place of origin, are noisy, rude, and out of place, behaving inappropriately and irritating the museum wardens. They disrupt the smooth Spanish narrative of greatness, pride, and unity, and make themselves seen and heard. This might be a much more productive model of visibility and recognition for groups that, like the Catalans, are subject to symbolic domination.

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