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Globalization, regional television and national identity: The case of *Vaya Semanita/What a Week*

ABSTRACT

This article looks at Vaya Semanita/What a Week, a sketch programme on Euskal Telebista 2 (ETB2), the Spanish-language channel of Basque Television, as a case study for illustrating the complex relationships between regional, national and global television cultures, and between local television and its audiences. It will consider some reasons for the programme's popularity through textual analysis (with particular attention to its representation of Basque national/cultural identity, and to how the sketch format is used for that purpose) and contextual study (the programme's location within its media environment and the socio-historical circumstances of its production, dissemination and consumption). The discussion will be situated within the debates regarding the principles of public service broadcasting and television globalization and within the history of a public broadcasting institution with a mission to express and strengthen national identity. The show can be examined for the insights it offers into Basque national identity and its changes through time.

KEYWORDS

Basque country
comedy
globalization
localization
national identity
television

1. Ondas Prize in 2006 to best television programme; Prize from the Spanish Television Academy to best entertainment programme from an Autonomous Community television in 2004 and 2007; Prize Iparraguirre/Eusko Kultura in 2005. EITB compiled three DVDs of the early series in 2004 and 2005, and two further box sets (date unavailable) of best sketches, distributed by Savor. Borja Cobeaga and Javier Garcia de Vicuña have been directors. Oscar Terol published *Todos nacemos vascos* (2005) and *Ponga un vasco en su vida* (2006), riding the wave of the series popularity. EITB published a collection of scripts in the same year. Sketch writers have been too numerous to list, and have included Kike Diaz de Rada, Susana Terol, Nacho Vigalondo and Diego San Jose.
2. Wikipedia gives share averages ranging from 10.5 per cent in its 2010 season to 17.4 per cent in its 2008 season (http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaya_semanita, accessed 18 June 2012).

INTRODUCTION

Television in Spain offers its viewers a large range of channel choice, from its main nationwide channels to the regional ones in the Autonomous Communities. The digital switchover in 2009 further extended the range of generalist and specialist channels. As is the case in many other countries, this diversified television landscape makes competition for audiences fierce. The main nationwide channels in Spain continue to hold the highest share of audience, and the sometimes heavily subsidized regional public service television often struggles to capture a significant proportion of the audience. This is the background to the ongoing debate regarding the future of regional public service television, its sustainability and the desirability of privatization. Besides the financial cost of subsidizing these channels, the debate often centres around what local, home-produced television can and should offer its community, and what makes that community choose the local television offering over other channels. In this context, successful domestic programmes that have reached a significant percentage of share are worth scrutinizing.

This article examines the remarkable achievement of the sketch programme *Vaya Semanita/What a Week* (2003–12) on Euskal Telebista 2 (ETB2), the main Spanish-language channel of Basque Television. This show occupies a special place within the history of Basque Television due to its continuing success and wide social projection. For most of its seven seasons, it has been, after football matches, the most popular home-produced programme. Besides its continuously high ratings, it has earned several television prizes, generated numerous spin-off products such as books and compilation DVDs, has toured the Basque country in a stage version, inspired similar shows on other Basque channels as well as national Spanish television and employed a range of scriptwriters, high-profile directors and actors.¹ It is a regular topic of conversation within the Basque country and figures prominently in the print media. In an example of audience appropriation, people have dressed as some of the show's most popular characters in carnivals. At its peak some of the programmes reached a share of 30 per cent, doubling the channel's average of 15 per cent, and attracting more viewers than other national or international programmes such as *Operación Triunfo/Operation Victory*, the Spanish version of the *X Factor* or *Lost*, against which it was scheduled (Anon 2006).² Christmas 2011 saw part of the team of the first series return with a Christmas special which was the ETB2 season highlight. During the autumn of 2011 the show underwent a partial change of cast, was retitled *Vaya Semanita: Cambio Radical/What a Week: Radical Change* and moved from the Thursday to the Monday evening schedule. This might indicate that the show is past its heyday, but also that EITB (Euskal Irratia Telebista/Basque Radio and Television) has so far found no reason to axe it, as ratings are still higher than the channel average.

Following the American model of production, the programme is written by a team of scriptwriters led by a head writer. These scriptwriters are predominantly young, in their late 20s or early 30s, and well versed as much in Basque culture as in American and British popular culture. The team has regularly written between 30 and 40 1½- to 3-minute sketches weekly. This fresh output has allowed the programme to stay current, reflecting concerns of the moment, and either developing popular elements or characters or dropping unpopular ones. The sketch format has allowed the content to be frequently recycled in the schedule of the various ETB channels. Furthermore, it has also made it possible for it to circulate on national television in 'zapping'

programmes (shows including sketches and other short format television material from different sources used to 'fill' the schedules) and to be widely available on numerous websites. Sketches can be revisited on the programme website (<http://www.eitb.com/es/television/programas/vaya-semanita>), on YouTube and through Facebook, where news and programme bits are posted regularly. It is also broadcast on other national channels such as MTV España and La Siete. As the show's success grew, the team developed further elements of interactivity with the audience: some examples include a regular slot for studio guests, competitions, including one to hire actors for the following series, downloadable ringtones with songs featuring in the show. The comedic strategies of the sketches are very varied although in general rather mainstream, including parodies, impersonations, stereotypes, characters using recognizable catchphrases, and black and blue humour. In the words of Guillermo Estrada, producer and scriptwriter, while the team's personal tastes might have been more transgressive or absurd, they opted for a type of humour which would be easily accessible to a wide audience (personal communication). Continuity is provided by the presence of the main actor/presenter Andoni Aguirregomezkorta and regular members of the cast, and by recurring situations, characters and themes. The programme uses a studio location for the opening of the show and the interviews, other sets for indoor sketches, and a range of open locations. This range of well-established industrial production, distribution and broadcasting strategies have resulted in a dynamic, multi-platform cultural product which has moved with the times, managed to remain current and gained considerable reach.

This article looks at this landmark programme as a case study for illustrating the complex relationships between regional, national and global television cultures, and between local television and its audiences. It will consider some reasons for the programme's popularity through textual analysis (with particular attention to its representation of Basque national/cultural identity, and to how the sketch format is used for that purpose) and contextual study (the programme's location within its media environment and the socio-historical circumstances of its production, dissemination and consumption). The discussion will be situated within the debates regarding the principles of public service broadcasting and television globalization. One of the missions of public service broadcasting is a 'catering for national identity and community' (Collins 2004: 37); in contrast to this, globalization has been considered responsible for the homogenization of contents and formats and the flattening of difference (Ritzer 1993). What kind of interplay between the local and the global do we find in this programme? *Vaya Semanita* will be placed within the history of a public broadcasting institution with ties, at least in its inception, to the Basque Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco, PNV) in power that saw television as an important tool to express and strengthen Basque national identity, although this expression and strengthening was, at least in the early years, rather limited due to a heavy reliance on foreign content.

The increase of domestic content has improved the fulfilment of ETB's public service mission. *Vaya Semanita* can be examined for the insights it offers into national identity and its reformations through time, an area that has been frequently analysed in other popular cultural forms such as cinema, but not so often in popular televisual forms, and even less so in comedy. Basque nationalist feelings and aspirations have for a long time been a very contested issue not only vis-à-vis the Spanish state, but within the Basque country, indeed so charged that they were inconceivable as a subject matter for comedy. The

programme managed two difficult balancing acts: firstly, while undercutting some prevalent notions of national identity, it also confirmed national bonds by reaching and appealing to a wide and heterogeneous audience, and secondly, while tackling some difficult subject matters hitherto not approached through humour, it provided a much needed vent for its community.

The article also proposes that the programme's success is due to its fulfilment of some of the objectives of public service broadcasting, namely quality, originality, cultural proximity, home production, inclusivity, lack of bias and impact (Collins 2004: 37–40; Lipsey 2002: 11–27; Papathanassopoulos 2002: 11). On the other hand, it also offers the chance to reconsider other aspects of the public service mission, by asking several questions. How does the public service television of a small nation deal with the contemporary complexities of national identity? If a regional television should connect with its community through an accurate and timely representation of its identifying characteristics, and if television genres and formats are becoming increasingly globalized, how is this done successfully? Should the 'entertain' function of public service television be considered as important as the mission to inform or to educate?

BASQUE TELEVISION

A brief summary of the trajectory of Basque Television from its birth to the present day should help situate the show in its immediate media context. EITB, the Basque public broadcasting service, is relatively young. It consists today of several radio stations, a website and six television channels: ETB1, which broadcasts in the Basque language; ETB2, which broadcasts in Spanish; ETB3, the channel for children and young people which uses the Basque language; Canal Vasco, the satellite channel for America; ETBK, a sports channel; and ETB Sat, the satellite channel for Europe, all of which mix both languages. However, Basque Television was born in strained circumstances in the early 1980s, as another episode in the struggles between the Basque and Spanish governments. The first nationalist government (1980–85) disregarded the legal objections laid in its way by the Spanish central government and began to broadcast on the last day of 1982. Article 19 of the *Estatuto de Autonomía* (Statute of Autonomy) stated that the Basque country could regulate, set up and maintain its own television, radio and press. However, the 1980 Statute of Radio and Television gave the central government control over technology using the electromagnetic spectrum, which meant that the Basque government (and subsequently, the Catalan government in 1983) decided to begin broadcasting without approved legislation from the central state (Maxwell 1995: xxii; O'Donnell 2001: 52). Galician television began broadcasting in 1985. A national television had been a long-term ambition of the Basque government, who saw it as an essential tool in 'building the nation' or strengthening the sense of national identity. The nationalist government wanted to create, in the words of Carlos Garaikoetxea, the first Basque president, a television with a rigorous Basque cultural mission, with its own broadcasting centre, its own programmes, and local staff with knowledge of Basque culture and language (Garitaonandia 2004: 197).

At its birth, Basque Television was primarily an instrument of linguistic policy. Its fundamental objective was the normalization of the Basque language and the development of its culture, and therefore, it was an important tool in the transformation of Basque from a minority, rural language

into an everyday urban one. This aspiration was not without its detractors within the Basque country. In the words of the famous writer and ethnographer Julio Caro Baroja, who was asked to join the Administrative Council but soon resigned from it, it resulted in what he called its 'excessive ideological burden', which he considered counterproductive and detrimental to the audience (Garitaonaindia 2004: 201).

The beginning of the Spanish-language channel was also controversial both inside the Basque country and at the national level. The central government saw it as a second act of defiance by the Basque government, which again ignored the legal obstacles and began to broadcast. But in this instance, the use of Spanish language was seen as encroaching onto the domain of Spanish state television and as a weapon for nationalist indoctrination of a larger proportion of the population, even though this was not really the agenda behind this extension of the television portfolio. Mezo (1990) has traced the history of the disputes between the management of the broadcasting system, the nationalist party in government and the Spanish government. The then general controller of EITB, Josu Ortuondo, said that the decision to maintain two different channels responded to the social and linguistic reality of the Basque country, where at that time (and still nowadays) the majority of inhabitants are not fluent speakers of Basque (Garitaonaindia 2004: 200). This criterion of inclusivity was at odds with the foundational goal of the broadcaster, and in Josu Mezo's words, a case of mass media logic winning over linguistic logic.

The declared objectives of the new channel were to secure a wider audience, more advertising income, to improve the use of technical and human resources, and to satisfy the demand from an important sector of the population for local programs in Spanish.

(Mezo 1990)

This dilemma between the nationalist and linguistic project on the one hand and the realities of a competitive mediascape, the media's commercial imperatives and the audiences' interests and tastes on the other has troubled and shaped Basque Television throughout the years.

The 1982 Law behind the establishment of a Basque public service broadcasting organization describes its eight founding principles as follows: (1) objectivity, impartiality and truthfulness of information; (2) a distinction and separation between information and opinion; (3) respect for equality and for diversity in terms of political, social, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and beliefs; (4) defence and promotion of the civic values in the Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy; (5) respect for the rights established in those two legal documents; (6) respect for the honour, public image and privacy of citizens; (7) protection and education of children and young people; and (8) promotion of Basque language and culture. More generally, the preamble described the broadcaster as an instrument for information, an instrument for the fostering of the political participation of Basque citizens, and a tool of collaboration with the educational institutions in terms of promoting Basque language and culture. The journalistic, political and educational perspectives were therefore foregrounded, as a result of the historical circumstances of the birth of the broadcaster towards the end of the democratic transition period, and consequently, in programming terms greater attention was paid to news coverage. A more recent, and extended,

description of the mission of the Autonomous Community televisions is in the 2005 statute of FORTA (Federación de Organizaciones de Radio y Televisión Autonómicas/Federation of Autonomic Radio and Television Organisations), a group established to give these institutions buying power in order to access national and international audio-visual rights (Lopez and Corominas 1995). Here, the mission of the Autonomous Community broadcasters also includes the fostering of a local audio-visual industry and the adaptation of different television formats to their local environment.

In spite of the nation-building agenda at the core of Basque Television, the fictional programming during the first two decades was heavily dependent on imported content and consisted, with some exceptions, of dubbed foreign shows, reruns of American films and Latin American soap operas. It is common for broadcasters in their start-up phase to broadcast a high proportion of cheap imported content, and to gradually build domestic production. In line with the public service remit of the broadcaster, EITB produced news and current events programmes on both main channels, but the majority of the fiction was imported. For many years two distinct worlds coexisted in the schedule of the main channels: the world of local reality and culture in its factual, news and current affairs programmes, and the world of entertainment which consisted of an international mix of fiction shows. This was driven by cost as fiction programmes tend to be more expensive to produce and require the staffing and infrastructure of a local audio-visual industry. Barambones (2007) has shown the predominance of imported series and cartoons during the early years, which made up to 75% of the schedule. Dubbed American and Japanese animation made up a large part of this percentage as the young broadcaster was targeting the young school audience that was learning the compulsory Basque language in the state school system. For the adult audience, American soaps such as *Dallas* and Brazilian and Mexican *culebrones* (Latin American soaps) were part of the regular diet. A particularity of EITB's very international mix of programming was the noticeable presence of German shows, as EITB had struck a deal with Studio Hamburg to train media professionals (Garitaonandia 2004: 197).

But this is not a straightforward story of a regional television suffocating under media globalization. Early analyses of media globalization were negative and pessimistic, following Herbert Schiller's 'cultural imperialism' theory (Schiller 1992). The development of television in Spain and in its regions adds the further complication of the tensions between the central government and the autonomous regions, so that cultural imperialism does not just refer to the hegemony of US content as was the argument by Schiller, but the domination of Spanish centralist television throughout the state. As outlined above, Basque Television had to look outside to fill its schedules and imported programmes from Europe and the Americas. An improvement of its production facilities eventually overcame this dependence. The early theory of 'cultural imperialism' has given way to a reconsideration of this simplistic and one-directional model in favour of the acknowledgement of the two-way traffic between the global and the local (Flew 2007: 32; Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham 1996: 176). More broadly, in television studies the perceived threat of cultural homogeneity has been superseded by a recognition of the intricate interplay between the indigenous and the international. Both globalization and localization (a dimension of globalization) have many definitions and faces, and there is now agreement on the unpredictable and complex currents between them, and their unavoidable interdependence (Tomlinson 1991: 175). Mattelart argues

for enabling the interplay between the local and the global, where transnational cultural flows can be appropriated by local cultures and contribute to the local culture's renewal (2009: 53).

The interlinking between the local and the global in media is particularly visible in the production and the programming of all European televisions, national, regional/local or even pan-European (Chalaby 2002: 183–84). This results in a creative, productive interplay between the traditional, the local and the global in television form and content (Barker 1999: 43). Waisbord and Jalfin (2009: 57–58) summarize four main processes of localization. The first one is glocalization (a term proposed by Robertson (1995: 26) and expanded by Ritzer (2003: 193–97)), which means the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographical areas. This involves two processes: the flexibility of global media business to incorporate local factors, and the ability of local content to be expressed in global ideas and models (Ritzer 2003: 193). The second is domestication or customization, which involves strategies to make international media content less foreign and thus closer to local audiences. The third is hybridization, the blending of local and global media or cultural forms and styles. The last is local production, which refers to the power of local media industries to produce media content and to hold leading positions in their area. One dimension of localization is the persistence of local cultures and local production in spite of the power of multinational media conglomerates, and the confirmation that when given the choice, audiences prefer the local programmes over the imported (Crissell 2006: 150; Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham 1996: 176).

3. The original team, under the leadership of media personality Oscar Terol, left EITB after the first season to create a sketch programme for Spanish television. However, this never reached the desired level of audience and was discontinued. The replacement team, including lead actor Mikel Aguirregomezkorta, built on the first team's success, and with increasing audiences the show grew in length from a 30-minute sketch show to a 1-hour show including interviews with studio guests.

GLOBAL REFERENCES, LOCAL CONTENT AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Like other small public service televisions, Basque Television has resorted to a range of localizing strategies. Only with the gradual development of a local audio-visual industry have they become more varied. During the early years there were two basic strategies: the provision of local news, and the dubbing (and less so, subtitling) into either Basque or Spanish of foreign content. Besides news, current affairs and local sports broadcasts, few locally produced programmes stood out with any degree of success, and they tended to be localized versions of international genres or formats. In Basque, the most prominent and successful was *Goenkale* (1994 to present), a soap opera set in a fictional Basque village, following the fates of a family and their neighbours. This programme continues to be broadcast after seventeen years – having recently celebrated its episode number 3000. In Spanish, one should mention the cookery programme by celebrity chef Karlos Argiñano, who eventually moved to national television. Both shows use established television genres and localize them in terms of casting, location and subject matter. Few other shows managed to reach the target of 15% share, which EITB set up as a measure of success and survival as part of the schedule.

Vaya Semanita was a breakthrough show that has captured and held the public imagination for seven series. During this time it has undergone several changes of format, length and cast.³ Before analysing its content, it is relevant to mention some elements of its production (history) and its dissemination, as they are an important factor in the show's success. *Vaya Semanita* is a production of Pausoka, an independent company that pitched the idea for the show to EITB. While EITB produces news and current affairs in its television centres in Bilbao and San Sebastian, it commissions most of the rest of the

domestic programming from local production companies. This has become possible with the gradual development of a local audio-visual industry. The programme began to broadcast during a period of cessation of violence by ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) in 2005. The timing is significant in a society where politics are pervasive and often tense, both within the community and in relation to the Spanish state. This window of relative calm might have predisposed the broadcaster as well as the audience favourably towards a programme that made Basque politics one of its regular targets, poking fun at matters as sensitive as ETA, which was represented in a series of musical sketches. More broadly, the programme can be seen as another example of the internationalizing and opening-up attitude spreading in Basque society and more visibly articulated in major political/cultural initiatives such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the San Sebastian Film Festival, which can be seen as counteracting the parochialism still alive in certain segments of Basque society. The comedy programme functioned as a 'social barometer' (Medhurst 2007: 11), in tune with a particular moment in Basque history.

The show's novelty is to be found in the content which tackled head-on issues to do with the Basque nation, nationalism and national identity in a way that had not been done before on television. What is significant is how the show has synthesized the localizing motivation of Basque Television and the global dimension of much of its programming. It would be difficult to give a comprehensive account of the hundreds of sketches in the programme's history, and it is precisely the wide range of its output that is to some extent behind its success, offering something to audiences of different backgrounds and ages. Basque life and Basque idiosyncrasies have been at the core of the majority of the sketches, but they are filtered through a plethora of references to international cultural texts, prominently, though not exclusively, from television and film, making the show an example of productive interaction between the global and the local. International films, television programmes and other narratives are populated with local characters, retold by locally famous people, set in specific or archetypal Basque locations.

Basque national identity is represented in two main ways. One is through everyday situations and general concerns of the moment within the Basque country: for example, the fractured and polarized political landscape, the economy, the Catholic church (always presented as trying to adapt to the times), major cultural events, the regional health service, the education system, the problems with finding affordable housing, the greed and questionable practices of the banks, and consumerist culture. The topicality of this material (universal material for comedy) is very localized. For example, the show mocks politicians and political ideology across the whole spectrum of Basque nationalism, from the radical independentists to the conservative Christian democrat *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*. The non-partisanship and impartiality of the references have been one of the show's achievements, and proof of this is that politicians of all colours agreed to be guests on the show. Sketches about the education system compare the practices, resources and philosophy of local private and public universities. Common social practices and customs are also part of the programme's portrayal of contemporary life: the Basque obsession with food and drink; current fashions of younger generations; socializing in small groups of friends who have known each other since childhood; the particularities of the summer holidays on the Basque coast. The Basque language, which has been at the heart of the nationalist project, as one of the constituent features of Basque national identity, is also regularly

sent up. This is done by, for example, providing subtitles when very familiar Basque words are used, by mocking the unusual Basque names favoured by new generations of parents or the difficulties of learning the language at an older age. The show has also paid attention to social changes, for example, the social impact of immigration and the characteristics of new urban subcultures. A recent addition to the recurring 'Cuban girlfriend' sketches is now those involving Chinese or Latin American characters – reflecting the increased presence and visibility of those communities in the Basque country. In this type of sketches, nationhood is contemporary and collective, shaped by a set of common and recent experiences. The nation emerges as a community of shared experiences defined by current events.

In juxtaposition to this notion of national identity as everyday lived experience, there is a second strand running through the show which provides rich comedic material. It mocks discourses about Basqueness interested in foregrounding the 'traditional', involving past history, myths and stereotypes which rest on a static, essentialist, symbolic view of national identity. Many sketches target some revered beliefs of conservative Basque nationalism, which considers Basque society to be predominantly inward looking, attached to community, family and home, proud of the ancient history of the Basques, often described as Europe's oldest people. This traditionalist view can be found in popular texts dealing with Basque culture which emphasize a romanticized past and the survival of old beliefs and practices (Kurlansky 2000; Xamar 2008; Zallo 2006). This view also tends to foreground the nation's history of resistance to, or of compromise with, bigger powers resulting in accounts of a culture that has needed, and still needs, to be defended not only because it is under attack, but also because it is different (Zallo 2006: 19). In other words, in this view of Basqueness tradition is emphasized at the expense of modern features of contemporary society. In this rather regressive notion of Basque identity the idea of the homeland is important, but it is a homeland imagined and represented as the rural, natural world, a world of green fields, forests and mountains. There is a tendency in conservative nationalism to romanticize this rural world, as well as leisure activities associated with nature such as hiking, mushroom picking and mountaineering. These are mocked in numerous sketches. This mythical green Basque country exists in contrast to the territorial disputes regarding the definition of what the Basque country is, in terms of politics and administration, and to the importance of urban life which is the backdrop to the majority of the population. This rural backdrop is used in a series of sketches involving Basque versions of popular folk tales: 'El Patito Feo'/'The Ugly Duckling' becomes 'El Vasquito feo'/'The Ugly Basque', and 'La Bella y la Bestia'/'Beauty and the Beast' becomes 'La Bella y el Beitia'/'Beauty and Beitia' – a common Basque last name. The show mocks the insularity, defensiveness and parochialism of this traditional sense of national identity in sketches where characters have to leave their homeland for work or study, which is invariably represented as a family tragedy, a journey of super-human proportions or a step that needs protective equipment.

The show also targets the essentialist idea of a Basque 'national character', or Basques supposedly being sober, serious, hardworking, reserved, pragmatic, simple. Sketches transform the 'hardworking' quality into a chance for being exploited at work or taken advantage of; 'simplicity' is shorthand for lack of sex appeal. All men are called Antxon, and all women, Maite. A series of sketches from the third compilation DVD presents Basqueness as an affliction, a mutation which assaults a character who undergoes a transformation

from Antonio to Antxon. His concerned wife calls the emergency doctor who pronounces that within three weeks he will become Basque. The gradual transformation will consist of him switching football allegiance to the Athletic (the Bilbao football team), beginning to speak Basque with perfect pronunciation, boasting about his bravery, watching Basque Television and in particular the soap opera *Goenkale*, changing blood type to Rh negative as well as cranial dimensions, wearing the traditional chequered shirt and Basque beret, singing traditional Basque songs and improvising Basque poems, and in the final stage becoming Andoni Aguirregomezkorta, the actor who in the programme stands for the stereotypical Basque male. This shorthand definition of Basque national identity highlights its constructed nature, consisting of features ranging from cultural practices and tastes to physiological characteristics.

The globalizing component of the programme rests in its prominent intertextuality. Of all the comedic forms, sketch programmes are the most intensely intertextual. In their brevity and structure they normally resemble jokes and therefore draw on the audience's knowledge of situations, stereotypes, characters and references. The show's intertextuality also feeds into the representation of national identity as a construct and as discursive. The local references to contemporary life or to traditional discourses of Basqueness are filtered through or inserted into numerous allusions to international texts, predominantly but not exclusively films and television programmes. The Bible, popular European folk tales, sitcoms, both family based and *Friends* style, Hollywood blockbusters, *Southpark*, *House*, *ER*, horror films and *Sesame Street* are only a few of the intertextual references used in the sketches. The contemporary and traditional features of national identity are embedded into a web of global formats and stories, so that the reading and the enjoyment of the sketches activates both localized knowledge and global references. For example, the series of sketches *Euskolegas*, following the mishaps of three male friends sharing a flat, is based on the American series *Friends*, but the three men in *Euskolegas* are from each of the provincial capitals Bilbao, San Sebastian and Vitoria, and the sketches poke fun at the stereotypes about the inhabitants of such cities. *La Cuadrilla* follows the adventures of a group of drinking buddies, but one of them always dies as a result of a prank, to return in the next sketch, as Kenny does in *Southpark*. *Los Santxez* mimics the conventions of the family sitcom but the two sons belong to opposite spectrums of the political landscape, one of them being a radical Basque activist, and the other a member of the police. Two very popular serialized sketches were *La Biblia contada para los vascos/The Bible Told for Basques* (a retelling of the Old Testament making all major characters and places Basque) and *Los cuentos de Aitite Arzallus/Grandad Arzallus' Tales* (where an actor impersonating the former president of the PNV retells classic tales from a nationalist perspective). These parodies use global formats and narratives and insert into them references to Basque idiosyncrasies.

Vaya Semanita is simultaneously very Basque and mocking of dominant versions of Basqueness as they emerge not only in nationalist, political discourse, but also in the often antagonistic Spanish media. The opening up of definitions of Basque national identity allowed by the sketch format is important for several reasons. It is a welcome antidote to the reductive portrayal of the Basque country only in terms of violent radical activity in the Spanish media. It is also a needed antidote to the heavy emphasis in the local media on the everyday political tension that results from different nationalist claims and demands of different sectors of society. It is a true reflection of the diversity

of Basqueness and very recognizable to the local audience, in all its internal incoherence. The open form of the sketch programme allows for inclusivity, a plethora of snapshots of varieties of Basqueness, without favouring or foregrounding one over the other. The polyphonic nature of the sketch show reflects the heterogeneity of modern Basque national identity: rural or urban, Basque or Spanish speaking, radical or moderate, traditional or contemporary, and through the show's intertextuality, always linked to the world beyond.

The new phase of *Vaya Semanita: Cambio Radical* has moved this a step forward by focusing on cultural hybridity and the awareness of the complications of national identity in characters such as Nekane Amaya, 'la gitana abertzale' (the radical nationalist gypsy); Goreti, stylist to the politicians; and Mikel Ugarte, the so-called 'Cool Hunter', a character who returns from London to the Basque country and looks at its idiosyncrasies through the mannerisms and world-view of a *fashionista*. The first character combines two identities which are usually seen as mutually exclusive, the second embodies a skepticism towards nationalist ideology as she only differentiates between politicians in terms of image and style, and the third expresses the transnational flow of contemporary urban culture. Through these new characters, the programme has continued in its representational strategies of national identity as contingent, conflicting and changeable over time.

CONCLUSION

Nogueira's (2006) survey of comedy programmes in the Catalan, Galician, Andalusian and Basque regional autonomous channels highlights their popularity within their schedules, with higher than average ratings, and explains that when these programmes have been transported to national television they have failed to perform as well. This was certainly the case with the first *Vaya Semanita* team, which migrated to TVE1 with a show called *Made in China* that never took off and was discontinued after six episodes. Nogueira gives two reasons for this: the specificity of the humour is the reason for its local success and is also difficult to translate. These locally produced programmes manage a synchronicity with their audiences that is unique to local television. The makers of the show were attuned with the moment in time in Basque society where humour could be used in relation to the complexities of national identity and nationalism, a true sign of the growing stability within the Basque country and the progressive normalization of the political situation. The success of *Vaya Semanita* confirms that when provided with relevant and good quality television, local audiences prefer locally produced programmes. The way forward for local television is to offer their audiences something related to their experience which they are uniquely equipped to provide, even when using modes of production and references that are not autochthonous. In this particular case it is a sophisticated, inclusive and modern view of national identity that reflects the reality of Basque society while linking it to the world beyond. The success of *Vaya Semanita* demonstrates the creative interplay between the local and the global, where transnational cultural flows are appropriated by local cultures and enable them to express local concerns, contributing to the renewal of local cultures. In this particular case of localization, Basque Television has moved on from the adjustment of global format in order to help its audience to understand it, the strategy followed in its early years. Rather it is inserting the local into the global in a demonstration of the inseparability of both, in cultural terms. *Vaya Semanita* ticked most

of the boxes of public service mission in terms of cultural proximity, quality, inclusivity and home-grown production, and also by providing much needed relief through the means of comedy.

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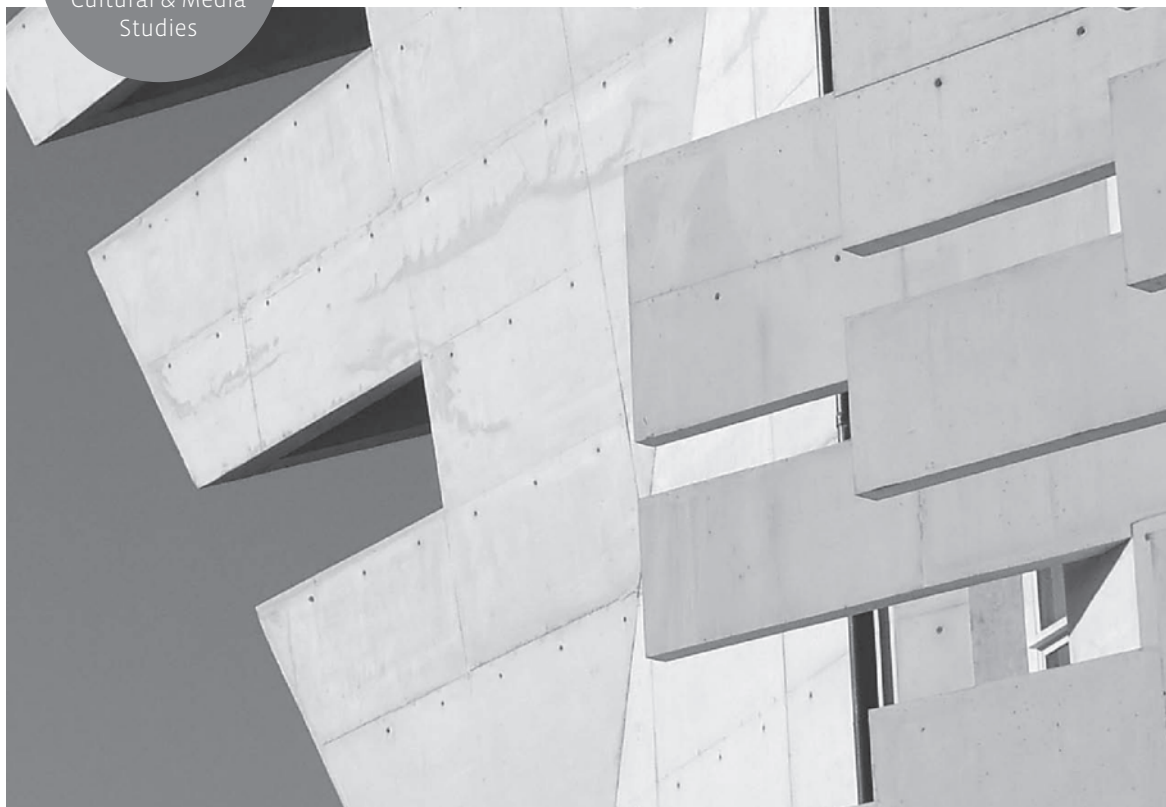
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