

This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 30 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Edited by Rob Stone, Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison  
and Alex Marlow-Mann

## The Routledge Companion to World Cinema

Rob Stone, Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison, Alex Marlow-Mann

### Popular cinema/quality television

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315688251.ch10>

Paul Julian Smith

**Published online on: 27 Sep 2017**

**How to cite :-** Paul Julian Smith. 27 Sep 2017, *Popular cinema/quality television from: The Routledge Companion to World Cinema* Routledge

Accessed on: 30 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315688251.ch10>

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT**

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## 10

# POPULAR CINEMA/QUALITY TELEVISION

## The audio-visual sector in Spain

*Paul Julian Smith*

### Industry, academy, theory

In 2013 the Spanish auteurist film journal *Caimán* (previously *Cahiers du Cinéma Española*) published a special supplement on the “Other Cinema” in Spain. Transparent in their attempt to confer prestige and create cultural distinction, the various critics praised a young cohort of austere, low budget filmmakers taken to be distinct from an assumed Spanish commercial mainstream.

In 2014 Belén Esteban, arguably the most controversial figure to emerge from Spanish reality TV and its vulgar celebrity culture, was sent by national network Tele5 to Morocco in order to investigate social conditions in Spain’s southerly neighbour (Tele5 2014). Right-thinking commentators were horrified by this latest evidence of *telebasura* (trash TV).

It would seem, then, that cultural gatekeepers still have no difficulty in enforcing the long-standing dichotomy between elite art cinema and trash mass TV. Yet other sources suggest otherwise. The annual survey of OBITEL, the Ibero-American survey of television fiction in 2013, was on the topic of social memory, a theme particularly appropriate for Spain. And the Spanish section of the report, coordinated by Charo Lacalle, was entitled “Fiction Resists the Crisis.” Lacalle records positive factors in the Spanish TV sector: average daily viewing in 2012 reached a new record of 246 minutes (OBITEL 2013: 280), with series fiction as the most popular format, occupying 21.8 per cent of the schedule.

Showing proof of audience fidelity to local drama, swashbuckling romance *Águila Roja* (Red Eagle, 2009–, Spain) was the most watched programme for the fourth year running (2013: 282), in spite of government cuts to RTVE’s budget that limited the length of its season (2013: 285). No fewer than 32 different local titles were broadcast, with a total of 36 per cent being set “in the past” or “historic” (2013: 296); and the top ten exhibited a wide range of genres (from adventure and drama via mini-series and dramedy to comedy and fantasy) (2013: 299). Social questions treated by these shows, said to be “highly topical”, include prejudice against women and gays, the insecure job market, the housing crisis, and euthanasia (2013: 300). Of the only two titles that failed to connect with the national audience, significantly one was a failed version of the classic US sitcom *Cheers* (1982–1993, USA) (2013: 384), suggesting that foreign formats hold little attraction for viewers in Spain. Spanish TV drama thus both explored the country’s past, connecting with social memory, and reflected

on the present, engaging with urgent contemporary issues. This is a valuable combination that is not to be found in all territories. Nevertheless, analysis of the audio-visual sector in Spain, particularly a comparison of popular cinema and quality television, offers a valuable case study for understanding the shift in the cultural status of television relative to an aesthetic revolution that challenges the privilege of cinema and creates new tensions in World Cinema.

If the Spanish television drama so eagerly consumed by mass audiences should not be tarred by the brush of *telebasura* reality programming, Spanish cinema, conversely but consistently, cannot solely be identified with the art movies promoted so determinedly by *Caimán*. In spite of media concentration on the precarious Other Cinema (whose audiences are as low as its budgets), the seventh annual edition of “Spanish Film Screenings” (otherwise known as “Madrid de Cine”) which I attended in the capital on 18–20 June 2012, at the height of the economic crisis, told a more complex story. Intended as the major professional event for the promotion of Spanish film to foreign buyers and specialist journalists, “Madrid de cine” is organised by FAPAE (the producers’ association), ICAA (the film academy), and other bodies including the Madrid tourist authority. There was once more a “padrino” (“godfather”) for the event. This year it was Enrique Urbizu (director of *No habrá paz para los malvados* [No Rest for the Wicked, 2011, Spain], at the time the most recent feature to gain the best film award at the Goyas or Spanish Oscars). Representing Spanish national cinema, Urbizu gave delegates an evocative and informative talk on “the light of Madrid” high above the city in the tower of the Cibeles Palace.

In spite of a dramatic fall in production, things at Madrid de Cine seemed surprisingly positive. A FAPAE report at the event suggested that, out of a total of 199 features made in 2011 (the fourth highest figure in Europe), the number of titles screened abroad had increased (by 21 per cent), as had the number of countries in which they were seen (by 15 per cent). In Mexico alone distribution had risen to 36 titles, higher than ever before. Ironically, then, just as Spain boasts a greater number of tourists than it does inhabitants, so its cinema earns twice the income abroad than it does at home (in 2011 the figures were €185 million abroad versus just €90 million domestically).

Although Spanish cinema may be fully globalised, what I argue here, however, is that Urbizu’s audience-friendly feature marked the beginning of an unanticipated trend: the reconnection of Spanish cinema with its own public. It did so via the neglected but popular genres of romantic comedy and thriller. As we shall see, the so-called *género negro* (police or detective drama) is a unique example of commercial film that is held by influential taste communities to be compatible with cultural distinction.

Independent of these industrial or quantitative trends, recent academic research, qualitative by nature, has also suggested that the dominant paradigm of auteur cinema/popular TV might be under pressure. Sally Faulkner’s *A History of Spanish Film* (2013) goes beyond the auteur canon, rereading the history of Spanish film by focusing on a new corpus of titles that are placed between high and low culture. Similarly, Vicente J. Benet’s *El cine español: una historia cultural* (2012) locates distinguished auteurs such as Víctor Erice and Carlos Saura in their social context and juxtaposes them with supposedly trashy sexploitation and youth movies. Meanwhile Samuel Amago’s *Spanish Cinema in the Global Context* (2013) likewise combines analysis of the artistic taste for reflexivity with the less cerebral trends current in the popular genres and the movie marketplace. In recent television studies, meanwhile, Manuel Palacio has offered a minute study of the TV of the transition, arguing convincingly for the medium’s decisive role at that decisive time as a kind of pedagogy of democracy in a new Spain (2012). This is a vital function that Palacio, the doyen of Spanish television studies, had previously highlighted in his general history of Spanish television (2001).

Beyond the academic sphere, there are signs that Spain is finally acknowledging the shift in the cultural status of television relative to cinema, which allows for the adoption of an aesthetic attitude toward the long despised medium. After decades of virulently attacking TV, *El País* has boasted since 2012 in Natalia Marcos a specialist reviewer of television fiction (previous columnists limited themselves to humorous political commentary), albeit one whose perspective is restricted mainly to US dramas. Local television fiction was vigorously defended from the Left when it was dismissed by a Partido Popular politician as being simply a way to “pass the time”. Spanish series now have an established festival (in Vitoria) and regularly host movie-style premieres in one-time picture palaces on Madrid’s Gran Vía. Meanwhile the TV screenwriters association vigorously campaigns for recognition of their members’ creative work. Tentative mechanisms of legitimation have thus emerged for the medium of television fiction.

If we pull back from such anecdotal signs of change in the Spanish audio-visual habitus, we might turn, or return, to current developments in the long-running scholarly debate on quality TV. From Europe, Milly Buonanno has recently contested the overwhelming academic focus on the HBO canon, characterised as it is by novelty, edginess, narrative complexity, and cinematic ambition (2014: 9). This bias, she suggests, has served to conceal European traditions of quality that are based rather on cultural prestige and respectability (2014: 19). The new trend in favour of aesthetics in Anglo-American TV studies (Jacobs and Peacock 2013), meanwhile, has scholars arguing against the use of “cinematic” as a term of praise for quality television and championing a sensitivity to the distinctive qualities of the electronic medium, even as that medium is newly placed in the privileged aesthetic situation that was once reserved for high culture.

Adopting a yet more theoretical perspective toward the Spanish context of crisis (financial, political, cultural), we might also appeal here to Bourdieu. The latter speaks in the context of post-May 68 France of the “dispossession” and “maladjusted expectations” of the former cultural elite. These terms are defined by Bourdieu’s exegete Ivan Ermakoff as, respectively, “a situation where people do not get what they feel they are entitled to” and one where people “cannot fulfil their aspirations” (2013: 98). Like Bourdieu’s *soixante-huitards* before them, then, the established film community in Spain employ a perverse negative strategy characterised by the “adherence to a behavioural script at odds with the strategic imperatives imposed by shifting constraints”. In Ermakoff’s words the once privileged but newly dispossessed “draw on their stock of culturally shaped expectations and on their experience of past practices [. . .] highlight[ing] the relative salience of symbols and past events in the collective memory of the group” (2013: 101).

The annual Goya ceremonies that combine self-defeating protests of entitlement with appeals to once uncontested symbols of an august past (ritual attacks on government policy and acts of mourning for deceased eminences) follow Bourdieu and Ermakoff’s pattern. Historically this strategy, which I suggest has now been challenged by the emergence of quality genre film, has promoted a disconnection of the Spanish public from a dispossessed and maladjusted film establishment.

### Televsual cinema?

In what remains of this chapter I will propose a new paradigm for the Spanish audio-visual sector at this time of changing habitus. First, I argue for the salience of a new cinema hostile to earlier auteur or current “other” film, a popular school that is steeped in televsual culture, but cannot be reduced to it. Second, I argue for the importance of a new quality television that sets itself apart from ordinary TV through aesthetic and social ambitions that might be



Figure 10.1 *No habrá paz para los malvados* (*No Rest for the Wicked*, 2011, Spain, Enrique Urbizu), starring José Coronado, is an internationalised production with clear local referents. ©AXN/Audiovisual Aval SGR/Canal+ España/Generalitat Valencian/Instituto de Crédito Oficial/Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Visuales/Lazonafilms/Manto Films/Telecinco Cinema.

called (*pace* the aestheticians) cinematic, but draws still on the specificities of a medium now fortified by its convergence with the internet and social media. I focus in film on the thriller as a relatively rare and problematic genre; and in television drama on a (more broadly defined) law and justice genre, which is also little practised in Spain.

My first text is Urbizu's already mentioned *No Rest for the Wicked*, a brutally efficient thriller which both swept the boards at the Goyas and attracted a domestic audience of almost 700,000 (Figure 10.1). When a corrupt cop (José Coronado, veteran of quality TV series such as Tele5's pioneering *Periodistas* (Journalists, 1998–2002, Spain) drunkenly shoots three dead in a Madrid nightclub, he sets off a double hunt: his own for the sole witness to his crime and that of a woman judge who takes on the murder investigation.

With its expert suspense and action sequences, *No Rest for the Wicked* might seem to be a fine example of that internationalised production that is content to follow the US lead. But this slick genre film has clear local referents. In an early sequence Coronado stands in a wasteland in front of the four new skyscrapers that have come to symbolise the unsustainable boom and bust of the Spanish economy. And it is a shock to see an actor warmly remembered as a dashing leading man now so battered and grizzled. Moreover, half way through the film, the thriller veers into politics as the criminal cop blunders into the preparations for an Islamist terror atrocity similar to that which struck Madrid in 2004.

In interview at Madrid de Cine, Coronado noted the close connection between the three media of film, television and theatre across which jobbing actors now move at will. Likewise, Urbizu's practice shows that skilled directors can make apparently abstract genre films that draw on a US TV aesthetic and yet connect closely with the concerns of local cinema audiences: one actor noted, also at the Screenings, that the film's title had been borrowed for placards in street demonstrations during the continuing economic crisis. Genre cinema thus proves to be

an invaluable means for addressing urgent socio-political concerns as it moves upmarket and embraces quality scripting, performance and cinematography.

Following this template, three years later *El Niño* (The Kid, 2014, Spain/France, Daniel Monzón) combined Goya-winning technique (for both special effects and sound) with genre conventions. This drug smuggling thriller thus boasts big budget action, beginning in medias res with a taut chase sequence and indulging throughout in frequent helicopter and boat pursuits set and shot in the picturesque Straits of Gibraltar. Newcomer Jesús Castro as the titular youth who will become initiated into narcotics trafficking across the watery border is presented unapologetically for our visual pleasure. This is especially true of a skinny-dipping sequence that the neophyte actor repeatedly claimed in interview to find especially trying. Confirming this appeal to facile visual pleasure at the expense of more challenging subject matter, the young Spaniard's cross-cultural romance with a young Moroccan woman is sketchily and unconvincingly depicted.

It is precisely through casting, however, that *The Kid* establishes its claim, beyond the genre limitations of popular cinema, to quality. Castro is paired with gruff Luis Tosar as his police nemesis, a consecrated actor trailing Goya wins not least as star of prison drama *Celda 211* (Cell 211, 2009, Spain/France), the previous feature from director Daniel Monzón. Likewise, a pliant press stressed the lengthy preparation time spent in pre-production (some five years), a labour intended to serve as guarantor of the second movie's cultural capital. *El País* even praised the character development displayed by Tosar's clichéd troubled police officer (Ordoñez 2015), appealing to a psychological complexity that, beyond the dynamic plotting of the thriller, is often held to be a criterion for artistic quality in cinema.

Yet, striking a balance with the rival television medium, Jesús Castro would later be cast in the second season of police drama *El Príncipe* (2015–2016, Spain) on Tele5, the most popular free to air national network in Spain. And in fact, as we shall see, the latter's first season had fully anticipated the feature film in both its North African setting and focus on geopolitical tensions between Spain and Morocco. Highly accessible and pleasurable, then, *The Kid* is an extreme case of my new paradigm: a popular genre film that engages newly emergent mechanisms of legitimation to achieve a degree of that cultural distinction once reserved for auteur or "other" cinema.

*The Kid* was swiftly followed in theatrical release and critical consecration by serial killer movie *La isla mínima* (Marshland, 2014, Spain) by Alberto Rodríguez, hitherto known for youth films sometimes starring Spanish television's biggest crossover star, Mario Casas (*7 vírgenes*, 7 Virgins, 2005, Spain; *Grupo 7*, Unit 7, 2012, Spain). As period fiction is ubiquitous on television but relatively rare in a feature sector where budgets are now reduced by the crisis, *Marshland's* setting in the Transition to democracy already engages a televisual register. TVE's storied *Cuéntame* (Tell Me, 2001–, Spain) has explored the period for over a decade; and *La chica de ayer* (Yesterday's Girl, 2009, Spain), broadcast by private free to air network Antena 3, had been a time travelling police drama set in the same post-Franco era. Moreover, corrupt cop Javier Gutiérrez had been intimately known to Spanish audiences over the preceding five years as the sidekick in TVE's highest rated series, the already mentioned period romance *Red Eagle*.

Beyond format and casting, the serial killer genre, rarer of course in Spain than in the US, is indigenised here by its placing in a precise temporal and spatial context that owes much to television's perceived closeness to a local audience. Gutiérrez's character is thus not simply a bent cop whose conduct of a multiple murder case of young women is not to be trusted; he is also a veteran of the Francoist security forces who, it is revealed, took part in extra-judicial killings.

Moreover, as in *The Kid*, a transnational-style criminal plot is transformed through a distinctive Andalusian location, in this case the treacherous and picturesque marshland of Doñana.

Frequent aerial shots of this distinctive landscape, with its intricately geometric patterns of land and water, are used both for aesthetic effect (the film won the Goya for best cinematography once more) and narrative function (the placing of lost characters in an extreme and disorientating environment). The film uses this very precise setting as part of a general critique of the Transition in an invocation of historical memory that would be amenable to Left-leaning and telephobic taste-makers at newspapers such as *El País*. Indeed, in a reality effect that reinforces *Marshland's* expert recreation of the period through production design, the opening credits show documentary footage of the time.

Yet the casting once more of *niño du jour* Jesús Castro in a sinister co-star role distances *Marshland* once more from the past practices of period filmmaking now identified with a dispossessed and maladjusted film establishment. The presence of new intermediatic star Castro, plus his fellow TV-recognisable cast, thus reconfirms *Marshland's* clear connection with my new paradigm of audience-friendly, but expertly realised, genre cinema.

In these thrillers, then, the televisual mode is engaged in part through the familiarity of the actors, who serve to domesticate a somewhat distant Hollywood genre. But these features remain cinematic in the tensions they display between their generic constraints and their continued aspiration to aesthetic and thematic ambition. As we shall now see, the same perilous equilibrium is seen in three recent television series that fall broadly into the law and justice genre, one that is as problematic in Spanish TV as it is in Spanish cinema. Here, so-called cinematic television (the label applied to special or event programming) takes over the aspiration to national narrative once embodied by auteur cinema without abandoning the seriality that is the defining characteristic of long-form TV drama.

### Cinematic TV?

Educated Spaniards would no doubt be surprised to learn that my first example of quality television is Antena 3's drug-dealing drama *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (You Don't Get to Heaven Without Tits, 2008–2009, Spain), a rare Spanish adaptation of a Colombian original. After all, the Latin American *telenovela*, which was once widely shown in Spain, is now spurned by critics and audiences alike as a low quality import. Inspired no doubt by the knowingly salacious title (and sometimes showing little knowledge of the actual content of the series that ran for three seasons between 2008 and 2009), politicians and academics alike have attacked the show for its supposed reactionary ideology. Thus we are told that it imposed impossible standards of female beauty, promoted the desirability of violent crime and sex, and reduced women, mesmerised by fatally attractive gangster lovers, to Cinderella-style passivity.

Yet significantly enough the changes made by the Spanish producers to the original Colombian format reveal television's new aspirations to psychological and narrative complexity in the former country. The main plotline remains teenage Catalina's relationship with the criminal kingpin known as El Duque. But the complication here is that she is in love with him and he treats her tenderly, among other things opposing her desire for the breast implants referred to in the series title. (Conversely the Colombian series begins with a brutally pragmatic episode in which the young heroine fails to make the grade as a prostitute because of her ostensibly deficient cup size.) Indeed, in the star-making role for Miguel Ángel Silvestre as El Duque, his oft displayed physique, warmly appreciated by female fans, displaces female anatomy as a source of visual pleasure for the viewer.

Unexpectedly, once more Antena 3's adapters set this central and newly romantic story amid multiple new plot strands that complement and complicate its meaning. Thus they invent a police inspector who is obsessed with taking down the seductive narco capo but serves as

a problematic embodiment of the law in that he is himself addicted to prescription drugs. Catalina's family, now elevated to lower middle class from the humble deprivation they endured in Colombia, includes a single mother whose tentative romance with a factory owner (played by distinguished film veteran Fernando Guillén Cuervo) provides as reciprocal and respectful a version of heterosexual romance as any feminist academic could hope for. El Duque's conflict with the incoming Colombian narcos who call him "españolito" gives rise to uncommon reflections on a crisis-ridden Spain's newly submissive relationship with Latin America.

Beyond these narrative and thematic complexities, technical credits are also high. There are frequent well-chosen exteriors, placing a transnational plot within a recognisable Madrid setting. For example, the lovers tryst in the Parque de Occidente with the Palacio Real standing proudly behind them or enjoy a hotel room with an ominous view of the hulking Telefónica tower on the city skyline outside. When El Duque is forced to flee his home territory, three episodes are even set and shot in the Colombia that remains exotic to Spanish viewers.

Yet the Madrid locations also suggest that the series, in spite of its cinematic complexity and scope, aims for televisual closeness and domesticity. After a difficult day Catalina makes her daughter a "Spanish omelette", national comfort food. Fans proudly recognise the actress who plays Catalina's frenemy Yéssica (who grooms her young classmates as precocious prostitutes) as a Galician, just like them (María Castro would later go on to play the more sympathetic protagonist of *Vive cantando*, 2013–2014, Spain, a softer-focused musical drama). Silvestre for his part, fielding obtrusive enquiries about his physique and nude scenes to the Spanish press (as "kid" Jesús Castro was later to do), invokes his own workaday origins in Valencia. The production and reception of this show, then, are fully indigenised in a way attempted by the localising thrillers I studied in the first half of this chapter, but one that was able to extend deeper and longer into audience affections over three top-rated seasons.

*You Don't Get to Heaven Without Tits'* feminisation of the audience is reinforced in a very different example of quality TV, *El tiempo entre costuras* (The Time in Between, 2013–2014, Spain, Iñaki Mercero/Norberto López Amado/Iñaki Peñañel) (Figure 10.2). Invoking the mini-series that is for Buonanno the epitome of European-style authoritative canons of quality, this period



Figure 10.2 *El tiempo entre costuras* (The Time in Between, 2013–2014, Spain, Iñaki Mercero/Norberto López Amado/Iñaki Peñañel), starring Adriana Ugarte, offers some of the most glamorous and intensely pleasurable visuals ever seen in Spain ©Antena 3 Televisión/Boomerang TV.



romance, a literary adaptation, ran for just eleven feature length episodes. And exploiting the convergence of film and TV aesthetics, it offered some of the most glamorous and intensely pleasurable visuals ever seen in Spain, whether on big or small screen.

*The Time in Between* is a big budget historical drama about a seamstress-cum-spy. Although broadcast by Antena 3 once more, it is made by Boomerang, an independent production company less known but more versatile than its rivals. Initially a period piece may not seem so novel. Antena 3's schedule is itself awash with costume drama with daily serials *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (To Love Is Forever, 2005–, Spain) and *El secreto de Puente Viejo* (The Secret of Puente Viejo, 2011–, Spain) occupying some three hours each afternoon in the post-lunch “sobremesa” slot. In their quest for event programming, however, so alien to the daily rhythm of soap and *telenovela*, Antena 3 kept their prestige serial under wrap for almost twelve months, waiting for the right date and building anticipation. The broadcaster was rewarded with an extraordinary rating, averaging five million, and a 25.3 per cent share over the course of the series.

The key innovation (and attraction) of *The Time in Between* is that it is quite literally a costume drama. Initially alone and unaided, the protagonist comes to run the most fashionable dressmaking studio in her native Madrid, where she has moved after a period in Morocco. Much action in later episodes takes place in Lisbon, where Sira seduces a businessman in league with the Nazis. Her true love, however, is a freedom fighter whom she pretends to disdain in order to protect his life. But more frequent and dramatic scenes show the normally self-controlled Sira hugging and sobbing with a female English friend (“Love hurts, darling!”).

As Sira sacrifices her relationships with her lover and long lost father to her somewhat mysterious espionage mission, it might appear that the series is simply a remake of the Hollywood woman's movie: she is a Mildred Pierce who has swapped a baking dish for a sewing machine. The theme of the absent father and uncertain paternity seems similarly taken straight from Latin American *telenovela*, even though that genre is, as mentioned earlier, no longer successful in Spain.

However, three elements move *The Time in Between* onto a different level. The first is the extraordinary care given to mise-en-scène. Every shot is perfectly composed and curated, from (of course) the parade of exquisite costumes to the luxurious authentic locations. Even when Sira is forced to waylay a chicken truck for a secret mission (her pencil skirt means she needs to be carried on board in the driver's arms) she drapes her hair in a cerise chiffon scarf. But given the fact that the narrative focuses precisely on fashion as women's work and feminine guiles (Nazi ladies also come into Sira's orbit drawn by her unparalleled skill with a needle), the extravagant display of wardrobe, apparently incongruous in the context of war-torn Europe, is thematised and does not feel superfluous to the plot.

A second related element after the sumptuous look is the performance by star Adriana Ugarte, who is perfectly (and differently) coiffed and attired in each scene. As we have seen in the case of *You Don't Get to Heaven Without Tits*, Spanish series are normally ensemble by nature. It is thus highly unusual that one actor should carry a whole drama on her elegantly-clad shoulders. Moreover, Ugarte, who is in almost every shot, gives a highly controlled performance that could not be further from the melodramatics of classic Hollywood or modern *telenovelas*. She brings a sobriety and intensity to a potentially soapy plot whose distinction is intensified by the remarkably leisurely pace of a narrative that seems (like Sira herself) somehow suspended in time.

This brings us to the final characteristic of the show: its relation to history. The grand narrative of the Civil War and Nazism is glimpsed only tangentially through costume, women's work (which comes down to the same thing here), and female psychology, both individual and collective (Sira gathers a crowd of faithful followers at her studio). In spite of this indirect engagement with historical context, then, *The Time in Between* could be read as a revival of

Spain's mini-series of the 1970s and 1980s, which were invariably literary adaptations of the classics. Like, say, TVE's *Fortunata y Jacinta* (Fortunata and Jacinta, 1980, Spain/France), a prestigious adaptation of the novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, *The Time in Between* boasts unusually high production values that are (as mentioned earlier) currently inaccessible to Spanish directors in feature film, whose budgets have (as also mentioned earlier) been cut with the crisis.

The ample Antena 3 budget transforms everyday television into an aesthetic object offering intense visual pleasure. But where the classic serials of the Transition served (as Palacio has shown) to educate Spaniards in the new responsibilities of democracy, the moral of *The Time in Between* is more diffuse and private, focusing as it does on female self-realisation, both emotional and economic. *The Time in Between* thus bids for a quality demographic, which, unlike the family audience still sought by most Spanish series, coincides with the tastes of adult, childless, and professional women. It is telling that after Sira suffers a miscarriage she is not tempted to have another child.

In the same year as Antena 3's *The Time in Between*, Tele5 broadcast expert police series *El Príncipe* (2014–2016, Spain), also set in North Africa, in this case the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. *El Príncipe*, named for a real life neighbourhood, engages not only with the drug dealing we saw in *You Don't Get to Heaven Without Tits* but also (and I believe this is unprecedented) with Islamist terrorism. And the casting of José Coronado as a corrupt cop means that he brings with him memories of his very similar role in feature film *No Rest for the Wicked*. Yet *El Príncipe* also stages a complex and involving love affair between another Christian cop (who is in fact an undercover secret agent, played by Álex González) and a Moslem teacher (Hiba Abouk), the first time that a Spanish actor of Arab descent had been offered an above the title role in a TV series or indeed film. This theme is explored at once more subtly and sexily than in the similar thriller *The Kid*, which was released after *El Príncipe*'s first season was shown.

By dealing with one of the most charged topics in contemporary Spanish politics and society, jihadism and the relation with a Moslem minority little represented in the media, *El Príncipe* clearly aspired to the status of national narrative. And its aesthetics are also of the highest quality. Rather than shoot on (dangerous) site, the production team employed the Digital Backlot supplied by Stargate Studios, known for quality US shows *Mad Men* (2007–2015) and *The Walking Dead* (2010–), and used, it was claimed, for the first time in Europe. The high-speed car chase sequence with which the first episode opens would not be envied by *The Kid*. And the labyrinthine plot, with its expert cliff-hangers and reversals, is based on a script that, rarely in Spain, was preconceived as an artistic whole, one in which every beat is perfectly placed.

Yet it is precisely at this point that *El Príncipe*, an ostentatious example of cinematic TV in its aesthetic, is most televisual. Its narrative effect depends wholly on the seriality of long-form television and its emotional payoff on viewers' continuing cohabitation with its characters (some of the most sympathetic of whom turn out to be terrorists). Indeed the series' density makes the subsequent feature *The Kid* feel shallow and hollow ("child's play", perhaps) by comparison. And *El Príncipe*'s mediation on cross-cultural romance (and violence) charts the complexities of both in a way no Spanish film has to date.

## Conclusion

It was in the wake of *El Príncipe* that Tele5 squandered their newly acquired prestige by sending to Morocco, in the footsteps of their prize-winning fictional police officers, despised reality star Belén Esteban. It might appear, then, that each medium will return to its own level. Yet I have argued that, in this new media paradigm for Spain, the emergent genre cinema also appeals to the televisual virtues of closeness or locality in order to indigenise the foreign genre of the thriller;

and, that when viewed on a wide screen TV, the aesthetics of the features and series I have treated fully converge. It is significant that after *Marshland* triumphed at the Goyas its producer Mikel Lejarza described his company Atresmedia (parent company of Antena 3) as a “group committed to cultural creation” and to “the management of audiovisual content” (in general) for an audience that he had no hesitation in calling “intelligent” (Premios Goya 2015).

Spanish television drama has thus achieved a distinctive brand of quality that hybridises Buonanno’s European virtue of cultural respectability (seen in *The Time in Between*) with the more novel and edgy American tone (seen in *El Príncipe*), both of which seem to chime with viewers. And after the problematic period I cited via Madrid de Cine at the start of this chapter, Spanish cinema also achieved a historically large share of its home market in 2014, due in part to the last two films I discussed here. More surprisingly yet, the press, including *El País*, celebrated their genre status as thrillers, praising both the commercial and the artistic success of the year’s cinema (Ordoñez 2015).

But I would suggest, finally, that, rejecting the dispossession and maladjustment of the film establishment as they have in the appreciation of an expert popular cinema, viewers and scholars of Spanish media (as well as those of many other nations) should also pay closer attention to current TV series: expertly crafted national narratives that attract audiences larger and longer lasting than any feature film.

## References

- Amago, S. (2013) *Spanish Cinema in the Global Context*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Benet, V. J. (2012) *El cine español: una historia cultural*, Barcelona: Paidós.
- Buonanno, M. (2014) “Quality Television and Transnational Standards”, lecture presented at Graduate Center, CUNY, November 21.
- Caimán* (2013) “El otro cine español”, Special Supplement, *Caimán* 19 (70).
- Ermakoff, I. (2013) “Rational Choice May Take Over”, in Gorsky, P. S (ed.), *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 89–106.
- Faulkner, S. (2013) *A History of Spanish Film: Cinema and Society 1910–2010*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Jacobs, J. and Peacock, S. (eds) (2013) *Television Aesthetics and Style*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- OBITEL (2013) “Memoria social y ficción televisiva en países iberoamericanos”, *OBITEL. Observatorio iberoamericano de la ficción televisiva*, <https://blogdoobitel.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/obitel-2013-espanhol.pdf>.
- Ordoñez, M. (2015) “Hora punta del cine español”, *El País*, 7 February, [http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2015/02/04/babelia/1423068329\\_126196.html](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2015/02/04/babelia/1423068329_126196.html).
- Palacio, M. (2001) *Historia de la televisión en España*, Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Palacio, M. (2012) *La televisión durante la Transición española*, Madrid: Cátedra.
- Premios G. (2014) “La forja de una carrera”, 13 March, <http://premiosgoya.academiadecine.com/actualidad/detalle.php?id=471>.
- Tele5 (2014) “Los ojos de Belén: Marruecos”, *Tele5*, 2 February, [www.telecinco.es/losojosdebelen/a-carta/ojos-Belen-Marruecos-T01xC05\\_2\\_1748280198.html](http://www.telecinco.es/losojosdebelen/a-carta/ojos-Belen-Marruecos-T01xC05_2_1748280198.html).