

# COMUNICAR EUROPE / COMMUNICATING EUROPE

## SPAIN, TELEVISION CO-PRODUCTIONS AND THE CASE OF PEPE CARVALHO<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article will look into the case of a European television co-production: *Pepe Carvalho* (1999), a Spanish-Italian-French series based on the adventures of private detective created by writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. Taking account of production and reception issues, it will address the complexities of using media in the process of European construction. The main objective of this text is to observe the manner in which cinema and television are interwoven into the collection of actions that are working towards the idea of Europe as a community, looking into processes that give meaning to the collective transmission of European values. The article will focus specifically on the way in which critics and media scholars collaborate as spurs or brakes in the processes of 'comunicar Europa' / 'communicating Europe'.

**Keywords:** Spanish television, European co-productions, global television, literary adaptations.

### 1 Building Europe through the Media

Michael Bruter, in his already classic book *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (2005), establishes different variables to measure Europe's cultural identity processes<sup>2</sup>. Bruter, among others, speaks about the circulation of news, of symbols of integration (flags, passports, the Euro, etc.), and the spread of European languages. Nevertheless, the British essayist makes little mention on the role of audiovisual media in social processes building upon a European identity. He only refers to cinema and television (and, of course, the Internet) forming an integral part of the everyday life of Europeans and media ultimately constituting one of the central cultural elements in the elaboration of a public sphere that is shared by all European citizens.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

As van de Steeg and Risse (2010) have noted, Europe is a collective identity in construction:

A European public sphere does not pre-exist outside social and political discourses. Rather, it is being constructed through social and discursive practices creating a common horizon of reference, and, at the same time, a transnational community of communication over issues that concern 'us as Europeans' rather than 'us as British, Germans, French, or Dutch'. The question on the emergence of a European space enabling transnational communication relates closely to issues of collective identity. In fact, one could argue that the Europeanization of public spheres constitutes one of the mechanisms by which European identities are constructed through discursive practices.<sup>3</sup>

In an in-depth study on the symbols used to project the idea of a European identity (such as a common currency, a flag, an anthem and even a 'Europe Day'), Johan Fornäs (2012) has already noted how the rise of modern media not only can't be ignored, but is critical to how the European identity is built in a fragmented context:

Europe is no self-evident cultural or social unit. There is a deficit of channels for communication between its multinational citizens. A shared European public sphere is only in its infancy. But community may possibly not need to build on every member participating in exactly the same forum. Since the differentiation of television and other media forms into many divergent platforms and channels, this is not even true for any nation. Instead, Europe, like today's nation states, is crystallised by loosely combined 'sphere of publics' - networks of communication where no single medium or arena gathers all citizens but where their mutual exchanges produce a dynamic and heterogeneous totality, which is also not quite closed to the outside, but has permeable boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

Television has been central to producing images, narratives and symbols that have helped construct a European communications space. Early television generations had their first shared experience of Europe by watching programmes circulated via the Eurovision network. Many Europeans cannot forget such eurovisual memories as the opening music of Eurovision broadcasts, cannot forget the Eurovision Song Contest, the New Year's Concert of the Vienna Philharmonic, the ski jumps of the Four Hills Tournament, the program *Jeux Sans Frontières* (1965-1982, 1991-1999). On the other hand, bilateral and trilateral co-production agreements - such as the Co-Production Agreement between Austria and Spain in 1970 or the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production in 1992 - have marked attempts that took place after World War II and which helped shape a European communications space.

## 2 Co-producing Europe

For several decades co-productions have been a common practice in the European film industry. They were first based on bilateral agreements and later became part of the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production and the Council of Europe's Eurimages Fund. In the context of television industries, Europe has generated similar co-production practices among countries.<sup>5</sup> The basic rule of co-productions is simple: co-financing agreements, promoted by European programs, must be established among at least three partners from at least three different countries. One classic definition of co-productions given by Carla Johnson (1992) emphasized the potential of co-productions to enhance international cooperation. According to Johnson, co-productions are: "(a) collaborative efforts to make television accessible across international borders; (b) cooperative efforts where nationals of more than one country

<sup>3</sup> Marianne van de Steeg and Thomas Risse, *The Emergence of a European Community of Communication: Insights from Empirical Research on the Europeanization of Public Spheres*, KFG Working Paper Series, No. 15, August 2010, Kolleg-Forschergruppe (KFG) „The Transformative Power of Europe“, Freie Universität Berlin, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Johan Fornäs, *Signifying Europe*, Intellect, 2012, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> For a historical context see: André Lange and Jean Luc Renaud, *L'avenir de l'industrie audiovisuelle européenne*, Institut européen de la communication, 1988.

are involved in one or more of the tasks – financing, script-writing, pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution of television programming”<sup>6</sup>. The combination of efforts by the partners enables therefore, projects that are economically more ambitious and which could act as a defence mechanism for local markets against the inflow of American productions.

As Manuel Alvarado (2009) has argued, co-productions are “all about money and profit and gain”<sup>7</sup>. The idea of Europe as a marketplace was the basis of [1989 'TV Without Frontiers' Directive](#), which was adopted in the face of the early eighties' technological revolution and the growing deficit with the US in audiovisual trade<sup>8</sup>. With this emphasis on economics, the issue of circulation with regards to media commodities has remained under-researched, as I will argue in the coming paragraphs.

Economic, political and cultural factors all play a role in co-productions. Co-productions are an investment in national culture by governments and a transnational marketplace opportunity for producers. The opposite is also true: “some governments may have a primary goal of strengthening a national film industry for economic reasons, while some producers may use international co-production money to make their artistic visions possible”<sup>9</sup>. This being said, co-productions - understood in the strictest sense as collaboration in terms of capital, technical and professional forces with the purpose to create an audiovisual product – may be understood as offering little in terms of shaping European identity or as being a mechanism for building upon a common European space.

In fact, in many cases co-productions were understood as being nothing more than a commercial project with financial and economic gain, allowing the co-produced work to gain easier access to the markets and various subsidies established by national regulations. As Philip Schlesinger (1993) stated when talking about the cultural policies and collective identities in Europe:

What these observations suggest, then, is that there is something inherently improbable about asking people to consume television as if they already had a European imagination. We could term this the *fallacy of distribution*, according to which it is supposed that distributing the same cultural product leads to an identity of interpretation on the part of those who consume it<sup>10</sup>.

Such approaches to co-productions thus, offer little in terms of understanding how co-productions help shape European collective identities. Eggo Müller (2010), on the other hand, has argued that the notion of circulation is critical to understanding European identity in relation to television:

Crucial questions here are how the extensive exchange of programmes and formats affects the notion of television as a purveyor of national identity, whether it helps to build a European identity, or whether contemporary television programmes and formats become more and more 'faceless' in terms of cultural specificity and national identity in order to travel more easily on a global market<sup>11</sup>.

In this article, we argue that co-productions are a basic element in the process of connecting Europe and creating a shared European space. Central to this, is a multicultural understanding of co-productions, something that may seem contradictory if we consider that, traditionally, television emerged out of the stable borders of the nation-states. Television creators have been characterized by being well-rooted in their native culture, while not being attached to

<sup>6</sup> Carla B. Johnson, *International Television Co-Production: From Access to Success*, Focal Press, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Manuel Alvarado, 'Afterword', in Albert Moran, ed., *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, Intellect, 2009, p. 309.

<sup>8</sup> “It is therefore necessary to promote markets of sufficient size for television productions in the Member States to recover necessary investments not only by establishing common rules opening up national markets but also by envisaging for European productions where practicable and by appropriate means a majority proportion in television programmes of all Member States”. [Television without Frontiers \(TVWF\) Directive](#), Council Directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture*, Temple University Press, 2008, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Schlesinger, 'Wishful Thinking: Cultural Politics, Media, and Collective Identities in Europe', *Journal of Communication*, 43, 2, 1993, Spring, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Eggo Müller, 'European Crimewatches: *Aktenzeichen XY's* European Circulation in a Comparative Perspective', *Media History*, 16, 1, 2010, p. 90.

something more generic, such as a European identity<sup>12</sup>. The definition of “Europudding” - a derisory term for European co-productions – is evocative in this sense:

Take a story that crosses the borders of two or more Member States in the European Community. . . . Preferably historical subjects are recommended. (Take care not to favour any single national perspective or choose a subject that could offend the national sensibility of any of the other EC Member States). . . . Add a writer and director from these same Member States then gently solicit investment from their domestic television networks. . . . Fold in the appropriate number of actors and technicians from each country. . . . Yield: Two hours plus of a deal driven fictional ‘screen entertainment’ devoid of distinctive contour or flavour<sup>13</sup>.

Needless to say, multicultural understandings of co-productions require a re-examination of the national boundaries of television history.

Co-productions occupy a symbolic space that is not accounted for by the official narratives of the nation-state. It is a new, uncertain space between our image of the other and ourselves that reflects the ambivalence inherent to the construction of a collective identity and that breaks the canons of ‘official interpretations. For Fickers and Johnson (2010), the history of transnational television in Europe is a valuable way to observe this complex process:

Television can catalyse or inhibit processes of political or cultural change; it can function as the social cement of a nation and foster collective individuation and participant isolation. When looking at the flows of television - for example, at television formats or programmes - television can at the same time stimulate cultural diversity and standardize narrative or aesthetic conventions; it can both - by the way of subtitling or dubbing - promote the other and make it feel familiar<sup>14</sup>.

To illustrate further how co-productions have been engaged in a process of communicating Europe, we will specifically focus on the case study of the first season of the television series *Pepe Carvalho* (1999), a Spanish-Italian-French series of six ninety-minute episodes about the adventures of a private detective created by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. We will focus on how the series have promoted the formation of a European identity through their production and release, while this identity has been questioned by the critical reception of the series in Spain, Italy and France. This interest in both the national differences and the European common ground shaped by these series is consistent with Eggo Müller’s advocacy of a synthetic approach to transnational flows in European television:

For the comparative study of European television and the analysis of the circulation of programmes and formats in Europe, a ‘synthetic’ approach seems to be promising: an approach that aims at differentiating and generalizing at the same time. Such an approach will help to understand how European television creates a more homogeneous, transnational system of television production and distribution and at the same time allows for localizing meanings and discourses<sup>15</sup>.

### 3 The production of *Pepe Carvalho*

The writer from Barcelona, [Manuel Vázquez Montalbán](#), is probably one of Spain’s contemporary writers whose work has been most widely translated to other languages. In fact, for decades he has been one of the most important Spanish references for the Iberian detective novel. This privileged place is not surprising given the writer’s view of

<sup>12</sup> See our previous ideas about this topic in Manuel Palacio, ‘Elogio posmoderno de las coproducciones’, *Cuadernos de la Academia*, nº 5, May, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> William Fisher in *Sight & Sound*, quoted in Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture*, Temple University Press, 2008, p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson, ‘Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach. Introduction’, *Media History*, 16, 1, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Müller, ‘European Crimewatches’, 2010, p. 92.

the world (leftist, antifrancoist and nihilist), which has made him a role model for many readers, especially in countries like Spain and Italy, countries where the author has enjoyed great prestige until his unexpected death in 2003. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that a European co-production based on his work was to become successful. In 1986, the Spanish broadcaster TVE, the French Antenne 2 and Radio Télévision Luxembourgeoise produced together *Las aventuras de Pepe Carvalho* (1986), an eight-part series directed by Argentinian Adolfo Aristarain<sup>16</sup>. **Eusebio Poncela** played the main role in the eighties co-production *Las aventuras de Pepe Carvalho*. During the early 90s, Montalbán's work was acknowledged by various prizes: he won the Spanish Premio Nacional de Narrativa (National Prize for Narrative) in 1991, the European Union Prize for Literature in 1992, whereas in Italy he was awarded the international Flaiano Prize in 1994.

In his acceptance speech for the European Union Prize for Literature, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán declared: "I accept the prize as a symbol of a future European culture, which must be profoundly mixed, euroasian, euroafrican, euroamerican"<sup>17</sup>, a statement which emphasizes his visions of Europe and cultural ties to different European regions.

The co-production *Pepe Carvalho* can be seen as bearing the characteristic of European series. In order to enhance its European appeal, the creators of the series tried to reduce national identifiers in the original text, fomenting multicultural elements instead. The most obvious practice was to eliminate Spain as the main scene of action. Thus, the plot of the series begins in Pepe Carvalho's offices in Barcelona, but later on, his adventures of solving different cases take him, his girlfriend and occasionally, his assistant to different areas in France or Italy. This was done despite the fact that the different episodes showed no sign of multilingualism, which would have only been natural considering that the action takes place in different countries.

It was Spanish, French and Italian producers together that initiated the idea of a television co-production based on the adventures of detective Carvalho. The production process for *Pepe Carvalho* was not unusual: the production company Cartel (at the time, one of the biggest in the Spanish media industry), in collaboration with the Institut de Cinema Catalá (Catalan Film Institute - a public institution), reached an agreement with Tele 5, the Spanish television channel (owned by the Italian company Fininvest), to develop an adaptation of some of the detective stories written by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. Several partners were added to the initial Spanish production core which, according to official information, contributed to 40% of the production costs. One partner was Italian (Solaris Cinematografica) and the other one was French (Tanaïs Productions), each of them contributing 30% of the budget<sup>18</sup>.



Fig. 1. In the opening credits, the producing companies are listed acknowledging their nationalities<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Despite of the talent involved, Vázquez Montalbán was not fond of this first adaptation. A funny clip from *Las aventuras de Pepe Carvalho* showing how Biscuter (Ovidi Montllor) cooks and serves Pepe Carvalho's (Eusebio Poncela) favourite meal, can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9b2rwXd7f2Y> (retrieved on 20-07-2012).

<sup>17</sup> Diego Muñoz, 'Vázquez Montalbán gana el Premio Europeo de Literatura con la novela 'Galíndez'', *El País*, 20 November 1992, [http://elpais.com/diario/1992/11/27/cultura/722818810\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1992/11/27/cultura/722818810_850215.html) (10-07-2012).

<sup>18</sup> Isabel Clarós, 'El retorno de Pepe Carvalho', *La Vanguardia*, 13 May 1998, p. 11, <http://hemeroteca-paginas.lavanguardia.com/LVE01/PUB/1998/05/13/BAR19980513-011.pdf> (10-07-2012).

<sup>19</sup> Screenshot of the opening credits taken by the authors for illustrative purposes only.

The directors had the freedom to develop each episode as they thought fit. Consequently there were no unifying criteria in the making of the series. The episodes, depending on where they were set, were filmed by directors with somewhat established careers in the film industry in their respective countries, such as the Spaniards Enrique Urbizu and Rafael Monleón, the Italian Franco Giraldi (whose father was Slovenian) who directed two episodes, the Algerian Merzak Allouache and the French Emmanuelle Cuau.

A central decision in the co-production of *Pepe Carvalho* was the choice of actors who played the characters in Vázquez Montalbán's stories. The main roles were played by well-known performers in their respective countries. The Spanish/Catalonian actor Juanjo Puigcorbé played Pepe Carvalho with an attitude and behaviour much more cosmopolitan than the usual Catalanian. The Italian actress Valeria Marini played Charo, the detective's girlfriend, who starred – allegedly at her own request – not as a prostitute but as the manager of a nightclub, imitating closely the main character in the Hollywood production *Pretty Woman* (1990) through her sophisticated purchases. The French/Algerian actor Jean Benguigui played the role of Biscuter, Carvalho's assistant and a faithful defender of the idiosyncrasies of Catalanian football and gastronomy. Omero Antonutti, Maurice Bénichou, Manuela Arcuri and Walter Vidarte also appeared in some episodes. It goes without saying that during the shoot the actors performed in their mother tongues and were later dubbed by local actors, who in some cases emphasized the local accent and in others displayed a more neutral use of the language.

In a personal interview, Enrique Urbizu, the director of the first episode of the series ("El hermano pequeño / Il Fratellino / Le petit frère"), talked about the preparations for shooting<sup>20</sup>. The preparatory meetings were held in Madrid, at Cartel's headquarters. There was no pre-set language: the attendees spoke Spanish or Italian, but translation was available. Filming of the first episode began in Barcelona, where the interior shots (the office or Carvalho's house) were also filmed, and continued with those scenes shot in France and in Italy, then returned to Barcelona, where the final scenes were shot.

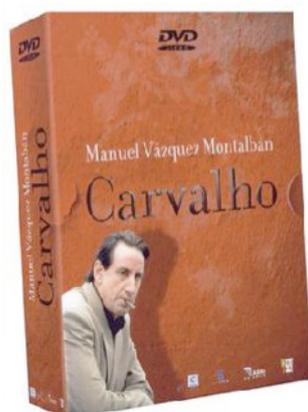


Fig. 2. The 2005 DVD edition of *Carvalho*, lacking any reference to the second season of the series<sup>21</sup>.

Rubén Amón, the correspondent in Italy for the daily newspaper *El Mundo*, published a chronicle on the filming of the "Italian" episodes of the series. In the article, he included some statements made by the director Franco Giraldi, who spoke about Pepe Carvalho being a Mediterranean detective. For him, Carvalho embodied the challenge that a stronger Europe presents to American agents forged in the James Bond style. An ex-CIA agent, an ex-political prisoner and an ex-communist, Carvalho is basically a post-modern character trying to conquer globalization<sup>22</sup>. Regardless of the fact that everybody knows that James Bond is European and that the Mediterranean has several different shores, Giraldi does point out to some characteristics of Europe presented in *Pepe Carvalho*. For instance,

<sup>20</sup> Urbizu, Enrique, interview with the authors at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 23 June 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Promotional image of the DVD edition of *Pepe Carvalho*, distributed by SAV Entertainment. Source: <http://www.dvdgo.com/dvd-pack-carvalho/1287168/111528> (10-10-2012).

<sup>22</sup> Rubén Amón, 'Pepe Carvalho a la italiana', *El Mundo*, 5 November 1998, <http://www.elmundo.es/1998/10/05/television/05N0088.html> (10-10-2012).

Pepe is deeply marked by his past, which has made him more cynical than wise. Perhaps for this reason, he has no superiors, follows no dictates of governments and does not subordinate his work to the structures of power or the dictates of foreign policy. In each episode, the director is knowledgeable about the places of power and corruption in each city/country presented and the localization feel genuine. Carvalho has a police contact, a friend and a lover in each city, all played by famous European actors who are easily recognisable by viewers. He moves around Europe as a free agent, enjoying Europe's best luxuries, such as good hotels and magnificent restaurants, while he appears unaware of the (legal and linguistic) barriers between these different European places.

While the production of *Pepe Carvalho* exhibited the series as a truly European product, these European features of *Pepe Carvalho* became complicated and challenged in the reception of the series in different countries.

#### 4 The Reception of Pepe Carvalho by Television Critics

The series *Pepe Carvalho* was pitched as a European co-production by the producers who aimed at guiding the viewers' and critics' readings of the show by positioning it as a European work, indirectly contributing to the creation of a European communications space. This becomes clear in the press releases that were prepared for the launch of the series in Spain. A headline that appeared in the daily newspaper *La Vanguardia* introduced the series as such: "Tele 5 abre el domingo la serie europea *Pepe Carvalho*" ("Tele 5 begins the European series *Pepe Carvalho* on Sunday")<sup>23</sup>.



Fig. 3. The Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* labels *Pepe Carvalho* as "European series".

The series were shown in 1999 on Tele 5 in Spain, on Rai Due in Italy and on ARTE in France. In Spain, the series never won a large audience and the reviews were generally not positive. What is however relevant in the reception of *Pepe Carvalho* is how television critics disregarded the European remit of the co-production, which was very much advocated in the launch of the series. Instead, they focused on 'national' interpretations of the series. To demonstrate this, we have selected examples from Spain, Italy, and France.

In Spain, the Catalanian Josep Maria Baget Herms, who has been the most notable television critic, wrote a review on the episode entitled "El delantero centro ser  asesinado al amanecer / Il Centravanti   stato assassinato verso sera / L'avant centre sera assassin    la tomb e du jour" (directed by Franco Giraldi), an episode in which the scriptwriters

<sup>23</sup> Editorial Staff, *La Vanguardia*, 17 February 2000, *Vivir* section, p. 11, <http://hemeroteca-paginas.lavanguardia.com/LVE01/PUB/2000/02/17/LVG20000217011VIB.pdf> (10-10-2012)

changed the location of the pre-Olympic Games from Barcelona to Perugia<sup>24</sup>. The plot of the episode engaged with topics such as football and real estate and other topics that speak to television viewers across Europe, such as: drugs, father-son relationships, the philosophy of the “loser”, or the pride that comes with being part of a small town.



Fig. 4-5. The episode starts with a football practice in Barcelona, but soon moves to Perugia for the actual matches<sup>25</sup>.

Baget Herms' review did not mention any of these themes and their potential affinity to Europe, instead it focused on stereotypes of atelophobia present in Spain. The reviewer wrote:

Outside of his context (Barcelona and Spain), Carvalho becomes a less than believable character, and in the “El delantero centro será asesinado al atardecer (The centre forward will be murdered at dawn)” we again find him in Italy, as adviser to an athlete who is threatened by death, which affects what he holds most dear: the world of football. However, the storyline lacks credibility and falls into the most conventional stereotypes about real estate speculation around stadiums and the famous *appalti* (n.a. Italian for ‘public works’), showing that tenders for public building projects in Italy are always won by firms with close ties to the Mafia. Basically, Pepe Carvalho seems to be more of a series with Berlusconi roots and this makes the character and his legions of followers to lose out.<sup>26</sup>

It was ironic for Baget Herms to talk about the “Berlusconi roots” of the series, considering that Berlusconi, the owner of the media holding company Fininvest, has been many times associated with the Italian mafia<sup>27</sup>.

In *Storia della Televisione italiana*, of which several editions have been published in Italy, Professor Aldo Grasso focused his reviews exclusively on the first episode: “El hermano pequeño / Il Fratellino / Le petit frère” (directed by Enrique Urbizu). The episode is set in the city of Barcelona and deals with the links between the illegal financing of political parties and certain cases of economic corruption<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> The episode (with French dubbing) is available on YouTube in France only: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQI5aYkKi3Q> (retrieved on 20-07-2012).

<sup>25</sup> Screenshots of the episode taken by the authors for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>26</sup> Josep Maria Baget Herms (2000), ‘La nueva estética de Pepe Carvalho’, *La Vanguardia*, 28 March 2000, “Vivir” section, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Josep Maria Baget Herms (2000), ‘La nueva estética de Pepe Carvalho’, *La Vanguardia*, 28 March 2000, “Vivir” section, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> The episode (with French dubbing) is available on YouTube in France only: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzocglZNg3Y> (retrieved on 20-07-2012).



Fig. 6-7. Pepe Carvalho walks the (sometimes) sordid streets of Barcelona<sup>29</sup>.

Grasso's entire review is based on a comparison between the values of Vázquez Montalbán's text and the various deficiencies of the adaptation. In his words:

Abandoned to the affected performance of Juanjo Puicorbé (his assistant being better than him) and the always unbelievable Valeria Marini, the adventures of a socialist Spanish politician, scapegoat of a corrupt intrigue, reveal the sordid side of reality, making one of the most interesting stories of the Spanish writer disheartening artificial.<sup>30</sup>

"La soledad del manager / La solitudine del manager / La solitude du manager" (directed by Merzak Allouache) is an episode set in Paris about illegal arms trade (missiles sold to Saddam's embargoed Iraq) by multinational corporations headquartered in France and indirectly controlled by a neo-Nazi organization in the heart of Europe<sup>31</sup>.



Fig. 8. Pepe and Charo share a moment of intimacy in a typical Paris café<sup>32</sup>.

In France, the French-German channel ARTE's webpage provides commentaries on all of the episodes of the series, making this a very rich source of information<sup>33</sup>. The commentaries are generally very descriptive but lack references to European aspects of the series. They mostly focus on how Carvalho's universe represents some topics usually associated with Spain.<sup>34</sup> They make no mention about Valeria Marini on the streets of Paris nor do they venture further than describing the exotic behaviour of the Spaniards, such as the behavior of Carvalho's assistant Biscuter, played by

<sup>29</sup> Screenshots of the episodes taken by the authors for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>30</sup> Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, Garzanti, 1999, p. 673.

<sup>31</sup> The episode (with French dubbing) is available on YouTube in France only: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5kwRAdaHZI> (retrieved on 20-07-2012).

<sup>32</sup> Screenshot of the episode taken by the authors for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.arte.tv/fr/Les-films/558778.html> (01-06-2012).

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.arte.tv/fr/la-serie/1464842.html> (01-06-2012).

the French-Algerian actor Jean Benguigi:

Pepe Carvalho swims counter current and paradoxically it is Biscuter who intervenes in this modern world. When going to Paris, Biscuter finds the choucroute inedible and takes with him 'jamon Serrano', while wearing a Pulp Fiction cap. In another instance, the French racist cop played by Maurice Benichou addresses Pepe by talking to him about his 'Mediterranean arrogance'<sup>35</sup>.



Fig. 9. Biscuter can't hide the tasty contents of his suitcase<sup>36</sup>.

The critical reception of the series in France focused on issues related to nationality or the European aspects of the project, but only to stress the superficiality of this multinational approach. In *Libération* Edouard Waintrop links the representation of the urban space to the nationality of the director of the episode:

The Algerian director (Omar Gatlato) estimates that, since the Olympics, Barcelona has become a city too modern, too European. We therefore expect that it gives us a hard version of the French capital. But no, he drags his "recurring hero" into a four-star Paris hotel and flashy buildings. (...) Only Rafael Moleon Gravilanes, director of the last episode, was a bit experienced with the streets of the Catalan capital at nightfall, and included this (slightly) in the detective's universe<sup>37</sup>.

Other publications such *Le Figaro* presented the series exclusively as a Spanish-Italian co-production and this was a way to distance France (and themselves) from a product whose cultural pedigree was in question<sup>38</sup>. Thus, the reviewer relied on stereotypical images of Spain in France, for instance, by referring to Carvalho and his aide Biscuter as Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. For Jacques Baudou in *Le Monde*, the simplicity of the series was too obvious:

The detective stories are often Manichean, demonstrative and transform Montalbán's hero into a kind of Robin Hood who faces the powerful world, only armed with his cigar, his insights and his coolness. He was thus able to expose all by himself, in Paris, an arms trafficking multinational, infiltrated by a small Nazi group – hello, credibility!<sup>39</sup>.

Although the series were received negatively by both viewers and television critics, this was not the end for *Pepe Carvalho* on TV. With the blessing of Vázquez Montalbán and most of the main cast returning (including Puigcorbé and Benguigi, but not Valeria Marini), a second season was produced four years later, in 2003. Telecinco and its production division Estudios Picasso left the project, along with the Italian financiers. The new partners for the French channel ARTE were two Spanish regional television channels, Television de Galicia and Television de Catalunya,

<sup>35</sup> 'Pepe Carvalho: La solitude du manager', in ARTE Cinema & Fiction, [http://archives.arte.tv/fr/archive\\_34058.html](http://archives.arte.tv/fr/archive_34058.html) (10-04-2012).

<sup>36</sup> Screenshot of the episode taken by the authors for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>37</sup> Waintrop, Edouard, 'Sur Arte, les héros de Montalbán perd sa saveur. Les six épisodes oublient l'atmosphère trouble des romans', *Libération*, 10 September 1999, <http://liberation.fr/medias/0101291769-sur-arte-le-heros-de-montalban-perd-sa> (10-07-2012).

<sup>38</sup> Nataf Isabelle, 'Un privé très public', *Le Figaro*, 10 September 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Baudou, 'Pepe Carvalho met les pieds dans le plat', *Le Monde*, 19 September 1999.

which received the support of the Institut del Cinema Català. This new season had four episodes: “Cita mortal en el Up & Down / Rendez-vous avec la mort au Up and Down” (directed by Laurent Jaoui), “El premio / Le prix” (directed by Fabrice Cazeneuve), “La rosa de Alejandría / La rose d’Alexandrie” (directed by Rafael Monleón) and “Los mares del sur / Les mers du sud” (directed by Philippe Venault).

In the new co-production, the international setting of the first season was replaced by a more grounded setting in the Barcelona of the new millennium. It became clear that the production of this second season was driven by the interest of framing Pepe Carvalho as a Catalan hero. In an article about the premiere of the first episode, Vázquez Montalbán talked about the production of this second season with the use of Catalan language in both the series and the novels:

The producers talk about a more cosmopolitan Carvalho, who now speaks for the first time in Catalan. I know this has the same impact that J.R. first had when speaking Catalan [referring to the the soap-opera *Dallas* which was dubbed in Catalan during the 1980s to promote the use of the language], but I think it is an important step”, said Montalban, when he announced the future Catalan edition of the novels featuring the detective<sup>40</sup>.

In the second season, the encounters of Pepe Carvalho with regional institutions are frequent: he meets the Catalan police, the “mossos d’esquadra”, in the episode “Cita mortal en el Up & Down / Rendez-vous avec la mort au Up and Down”<sup>41</sup>. He is shown reading the Galizian newspaper *La Voz de Galicia* in “La rosa de Alejandría / La rose d’Alexandrie”<sup>42</sup>.



Fig. 10-11. Pepe Carvalho and some regional cultural elements shown during the second season of the series<sup>43</sup>.

These second series were broadcast only on regional channels in Spain and were never released on DVD. It is now a piece of invisible television, and even ARTE, which produced it and broadcast it, doesn’t include any reference to this second season on its webpage devoted to *Pepe Carvalho*. This is a perfect example of the fate reserved for most of the television fiction produced by the regional channels in Spain. These productions, with a few exceptions (e.g. the Catalan-Andalusian miniseries about immigration *La Mari* broadcast by TV3-Canal Sur in 2003), get marginal ratings and receive little media coverage, even when they feature famous actors. After a single broadcast, such series are destined to oblivion.

<sup>40</sup> Manuel Ramos Martín, ‘Puigcorbé repite como Pepe Carvalho en un telefilme de TV-3’, *El País*, Barcelona Edition, 15 July 2003, [http://elpais.com/diario/2003/07/15/catalunya/1058231256\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2003/07/15/catalunya/1058231256_850215.html) (10-07-2012).

<sup>41</sup> The episode (with French dubbing) is available on YouTube in France only: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08wTnXdB4LA> (20-07-2012).

<sup>42</sup> The episode (with French dubbing) is available on YouTube in France only: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm2zMs1u284> (20-07-2012).

<sup>43</sup> Screenshot of the episode taken by the authors for illustrative purposes only.

## 5 Conclusion

The case of *Pepe Carvalho* highlights different characteristics of European co-productions. The series employ different mechanisms so as to target the average European audiences, such as shooting on location in well-known places in Europe or using actors who are popular in their home countries. These mechanisms attempted to emphasize a European work that was multicultural in nature. Despite the European address and the multicultural nature of this co-production, the reception of the series by television critics demonstrates that the evaluation of *Pepe Carvalho* still relied on interpretative frameworks specific to the nation-state, despite the multicultural character of the series and their transnational circulation.

The television series *Pepe Carvalho* escapes the derisory labelling of "Euro-pudding" commonly used in reference to European co-productions. It presents a detective, originary from cosmopolitan Barcelona, who goes to other European cities to solve cases of corporate corruption and organized crime, a production strategy that facilitated the transnational circulation of this television production. On the other hand, the different directors of the first season reflected different trends in the European filmmaking tradition, which imprinted yet another transnational characteristic on the series.

However, while the production of *Pepe Carvalho* has attempted to promote different transnational features of the series, these transnational features become complicated by the reception of the series in different national contexts. The reception of *Pepe Carvalho* in Spain, Italy and France points out to the fact that this European co-production has been interpreted from national perspectives, which marks European identity more as an abstract concept than a recognizable reality. The trips taken by detective Pepe Carvalho were interpreted as a ploy to include localizations of the co-financing countries. The different acting styles of the Spanish, French and Italian actors were seen rather as reminders of cultural differences than as an attempt to create a multicultural production with a European appeal. The plots of the different episodes were criticized for being either too simple or too complex in reference to the social realities of the different countries. As a result, television critics have been more interested in highlighting the inconsistencies in the storyline with reference to national social realities than in appreciating the richness of its diversity.

Co-productions have been considered to be an important driving motor in the development of a European audiovisual industry and a valuable platform for transnational exchange between television professionals and broadcast institutions. However, the effectiveness of co-productions in shaping a European identity remains questionable. While production practices behind co-productions may aim at creating a European product that speaks to audiences across different countries, reception practices related to co-productions emphasize such attempts at *Europeanness* fail when interpreted within national contexts. *Pepe Carvalho* integrated cultural elements from different European countries and it was this multicultural approach with a European remit that enabled national critiques of the series being an artificial product created in a laboratory, just like many other European co-productions. In the current European context, while money and people seem to easily cross borders, the European imagination of citizens of different European countries seems to be left behind.

A proper process of communicating Europe that media texts, such as co-productions, could fulfil would entail converting 'Europeanness' into ties that give meaning to collective identities based on the everyday life of Europeans. For the transnational circulation of media texts to become successful, it needs to transcend readings in which the point of view of the national public sphere predominates. This would help erase national borders by shaping an ambivalent space in the construction of a collective European identity, a space in which transnational circulations take over national readings of media texts.

## Biography:

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