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RESEARCH

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## RUPTURE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE TELEVISIVE FICTION ON POLITICAL POWER: THE *BORGEN* CASE

### *Ruptura de los estereotipos de género en la ficción televisiva sobre el poder político: el caso Borgen*

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#### ABSTRACT

The current television fiction lives a golden age, with millions of staunch spectators. TV series are one of the most successful communication products and come to set standards in the organization of our daily lives. Among the most successful series we find the political series, with an interest and massive follow-up. The cathodic protagonists are presidents, first ministers, ambassadors, ministers, advisors, spokespersons, who in their daily work or their rise to power trap the viewer. This research delves into a historical and gender approach, on professional women in television fiction, to see how the different titles have advanced towards a rupture of gender stereotypes, also showing political women. The transcendental example materialized in *Borgen* (Denmark, 2010-2013), which we analyse as case study. The character of Birgitte Nyborg (played by Sidse Babett Knudsen), as Danish Prime Minister, broke the traditional way of doing politics on television. We consider it dissidence in the dominant models, and decipher these dissents: a break with the traditional way of doing politics, by offering a new style, in terms of leadership, thematic competence and conciliation between public and private life.

#### KEYWORDS

Political communication; Political woman; TV series; Gender stereotypes; *Borgen*.

#### RESUMEN

La ficción televisiva actual vive una época dorada, con millones de espectadores acérrimos. Las series de televisión son uno de los productos comunicativos de mayor éxito y llegan a marcar pautas en la organización de nuestra vida cotidiana. Dentro de las series más exitosas encontramos las series políticas, con un interés y seguimiento masivo. Los protagonistas catódicos son presidentes/as, primeros/as ministros/as, embajadores/as, ministros/as, asesores/as, portavoces, que en su quehacer diario o en su ascenso hacia el poder, atrapan al espectador. Esta investigación ahonda en un acercamiento histórico y de género, sobre la mujer profesional en la ficción televisiva, para comprobar cómo los diferentes títulos han avanzado hacia una ruptura de los estereotipos de género, también al mostrar

mujeres políticas. El ejemplo transcendental se materializó en *Borgen* (Dinamarca, 2010-2013), que analizamos como caso de estudio. El personaje de Birgitte Nyborg (interpretada por Sidse Babett Knudsen), como Primera Ministra danesa, rompió el modo tradicional de hacer política en televisión. La consideramos una disidencia en cuanto a los modelos dominantes, y desciframos esas disidencias: una ruptura con la forma tradicional de hacer política, al ofrecer un nuevo estilo, en cuanto al liderazgo, competencia temática y conciliación entre la vida pública y privada.

#### **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Comunicación polític; Mujer política; Series de televisión; Estereotipos de género; Borgen.

### **RUPTURA DOS ESTEROTIPOS DE GÊNERO NA FICÇÃO TELEVISIVA SOBRE O PODER POLÍTICO: O CASO BORGEN**

#### **RESUME**

A ficção televisiva atual vive uma época dourada, com milhões de espectadores acérrimos. As séries de televisão são um dos produtos comunicativos de maior êxito e chegam a marcar pautas na organização da nossa vida cotidiana. Dentro das séries mais exitosas encontramos as séries políticas, com um interesse e seguimento massivo. Os protagonistas catódicos são presidentes, primeiros ministros, embaixadores, ministros, assessores, porta-vozes, que em seus afazeres diários ou em sua ascensão ao poder, prende o telespectador. Esta investigação aprofunda a uma abordagem histórica e de gênero, sobre a mulher profissional na ficção televisiva, para comprovar como os diferentes títulos avançaram a uma ruptura dos estereótipos de gênero, também ao mostrar mulheres políticas. O exemplo transcendental foi em *Borgen* (Dinamarca, 2010-2013), que analisamos neste estudo. O personagem de Birgitte Nyborg (interpretada por Sidse Babett Knudsen), como primeira Ministra dinamarquesa, rompeu o modo tradicional de fazer política na televisão. Consideramos a serie uma discrepância em relação aos formatos dominantes, e deciframos essas discrepâncias: uma ruptura com a forma tradicional de fazer política, ao oferecer um novo estilo, e em relação à a liderança, competência temática e conciliação entre a vida pública e privada.

#### **PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Comunicação política; Mulher política; Séries de televisão; Estereótipos de gênero; Borgen.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current television fiction lives a golden age, with millions of staunch spectators around the world. The television series are a product of leisure, consumed with fervor and with enthusiasm. The public, private, open and paid television chains and platforms offer hundreds of series that the public consumes at will: without ties, without schedules; sometimes in binges of several chapters at a time, other times simultaneously viewing several series at the same time.

They are one of the most successful communication products and come to set guidelines in the organization of our daily lives. Their popularity and ratings continue to grow. People of all ages and all socioeconomic and educational levels are attracted to this type of television fiction product.

Among the most successful series we find an unavoidable plot for the political series, with a massive interest and follow-up, in their respective countries of origin and in the states to which they are exported, in an international and transnational manner. Political communication becomes an ingredient of success. The cathodic protagonists are presidents, first ministers, ambassadors, ministers, advisors, spokespersons, who, in their daily work or in their ascent to power, catch the spectator, who becomes an accomplice. Clinging to the sympathy that the characters and the absorbing and quality narrative rhythm of the series arouse, the followers of series cannot detach themselves from the screen.

This piece of research delves into a historical and gender approach, about professional women in television fiction, to see how different titles have advanced towards a breaking-off of gender stereotypes. The transcendental example, in political series, materialized in *Borgen* (Denmark, 2010-2013), which we analyzed as a case study, and which paved the way for other current television fictions, where women hold high political positions and tear apart patriarchal stereotypes.

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

According to the above, we propose a historical longitudinal study of television series that have shown women in different professions and, more specifically, in recent years, in political work. We consider that there is a before and an after with the Danish series *Borgen* (2010-2013). This becomes an unavoidable object of study, due to its breaking-off of stereotypes. We analyze it from a gender category, analytically and synthetically. Throughout its three seasons, and thirty episodes, it offered a new archetype of the political woman, which many other series have imitated later.

The character of Birgitte Nyborg (played by Sidse Babett Knudsen), as Danish Prime Minister, broke the traditional way of doing politics on television. We consider it a dissidence in terms of the dominant models and decipher those dissensions of *Borgen*, where we see a breaking-off with the traditional way of doing politics, by offering a new style: in terms of leadership, thematic competence and conciliation between public and private life.

It is true that other series disintegrated gender molds in certain aspects. However, they did not subvert totally, like *Borgen*, the outdated patterns, since women remained anchored to traditional stereotypes, following the patriarchal logic.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

In this section, we propose a historical longitudinal study of television series, which have shown women in different professions and, more specifically, in political work, up to the present. The objective is to know that way, analytically and synthetically, until we can state why *Borgen* has broken gender stereotypes, especially in political series.

#### 3.1. How it all started: *I love Lucy*

Television receives definitions, attributes, characteristics and varied criticisms since its birth. It was thought that it would end cinema, although it was not like that. The two screens found different spaces and the possibility of living together as parallel means, which feedback and benefit each other.

The small screen enters the domestic and more private sphere; home. From there, it shows the whole world as a window to the exterior and shots of all the scenes that surround us, closer or further away. Television is witness to the events of today and tomorrow. The storage of daily stories makes it a creator of history by assembling past, present and imagined future. Television captures any time for the viewer and reproduces it to extend it beyond when it happens. It witnesses the recent history of women and we must approach it as an important historical agent, eliminating the prejudices to understand why it makes history alive.

So advanced is television that scholars say it was born before cinema. There were no technical means to implement it in homes, contrary to what happens today. In 1884, Paul Nipkow had already developed a system that made it possible to read an image and transmit the data through electrical impulses. However, people were not prepared to see moving images.

Thus the cinema was born, from 1890 to 1895, as a fair show. It had to amaze the audience to get into their imaginarieness and get the moving images be not just a scarecrow or a humor show. Movies had to tell stories and excite. They achieved it in almost 40 years without direct competition, until the birth of television.

In the 1930s, the small screen was a reality. Society was used to movies; people went to movie theaters to see those stories. Primitive television took advantage of these tastes of the public and was nourished, in its early years, by second-rate film productions. Low-budget films, or unsuccessful films in movie theaters, happened to have a second life with their television broadcast. Although the films could not fill the television grill entirely, because television had a component that cinema did not have: instantaneity.

The recorded products and news soon searched for the immediacy component, to inform in real time. As technical advances reduced the waiting time between news and broadcast, fiction lost space. However, the public got used to it and again demanded the fictions that had moved them. People could enjoy them without leaving home and the fatigue of daily work was better rewarded that way than with unpleasant news.

It was the moment of fiction, movies and series, the other half of that narrative television of the times. And, as fiction and reality cannot be separated in a medium in which they are so united, that primary feedback of cinema and television was

revived. Television needed its own products and could not be supplied only by the cinema. That is why the series were created, with the fictional component inherited from the cinema and the episodic component inherited from the radio. The viewer had to be stuck to the screen every day, every week. Loyalty had to be built, as cinema previously did; and the series were the vehicle to achieve it.

In 1940, there were already 11,000 television sets in the United States. The three great North American *majors* were born: American Broadcasting Company, National Broadcasting Company and Columbia Broadcasting System. Television became a business because it had its own products and a company that grew monstrously had to be managed. In 1951, Lucille Ball, a New York actress, produced and starred in a series of success with just 40 years of age. She was a star in her country, as an actress and as a character, in *I love Lucy*. Her face appeared on postage stamps, it materialized on Mattel's famous Barbie dolls and most importantly: Lucy worked away from home.

As Aguilar (1998, p. 223) says: "Progress is never lineal or uniform. There are times when, despite the efforts of the agitated outposts, nothing moves. But there are other times in which these efforts, which seemed so useless, crystallize in rapid social advances". The television series are a good example of this uneven development and the important thing about Lucy is that she opened the way. She fought for equality and for jobs "previously reserved for men, for improving their social situation and abandoning the role that relegated them to the private sphere" (Galán, 2007, p. 25).

As a witness to the story, television could not ignore women. It managed to be a narrator of the history of the human being and not only of the history of man. For this reason, some scholars define it as "contemporary to the awareness of the feminine condition (emancipation of women, search for equality of rights and opportunities) that is also a characteristic of our century" (Aranguren, 1997, p. 62). Certainly, *I love Lucy* is the first and best example; the antecedent of what will come next. Maybe only of the good things and not of the bad and distorted things because: "Television is a medium that disseminates information, leisure, entertainment, opinion, but in many cases it also transmits culture, values, models of conduct and, of course, images of men and women who can be firmly anchored in gender stereotypes" (Institute of Women, 2007, p. 24).

### **3.2. Consolidation of female prominence: 1970s and 1980s**

Noel Clarasó proposed a script for a comedy entitled *A Home-loving Woman*, in Spain, in 1972. It materialized in a 30-minute pilot episode, with famous actors and actresses of the time. Elena Galán, who is studious of the woman on television, recalls that episode, "in which the wife questions whether or not to get up at eight in the morning to prepare breakfast for her husband" (Galán, 2007, p. 26). She adds: "Little would it fit with the mentality of current women, who have joined the workforce in a massive way and feel more identified with series like *Sex in New York*, *Desperate Housewives*, *The Closer* or *Gray's Anatomy*" (Galán, 2007, p. 26). Women have claimed and won their space, on television and outside of it. The 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of 2000 to 2010 show it with these series, which can educate the public and university students about gender.

On the other hand, criticisms are varied and solid. Radl (2001, p. 120) argues that television offers “an image not adjusted to reality, a quite disturbed image in what refers to the roles of female and male gender”. He adds that there is a “persistence of images that offer underrepresentation and, therefore, a false sub-prominence of women, as well as an overrepresentation and a false super prominence of men” (Radl, 2001, p. 95). These false representations “offer a disturbed image of reality at the same time that they contribute the elements that intervene in a false reconstruction of reality” (Radl, 2001, p. 100).

Rafael Luque (2001, p. 179) speaks directly of pathetic television due to “of variety shows, flabby comedies and low-cut air hostesses”. The author takes this critical approach to defend “a constructivist-interactionist conception that highlights the constructive power of the media and, indeed, the socializing power resulting from the media through the transmission of meanings” (Radl, 2001, p. 101).

These terms are the interesting ones to talk about the television series of the last years until *Borgen*: construction and interaction with the improved reality of women. You have to start the trip in 1985, with *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992). The story of four mature, retired and independent women, who share a house in the sunny city of Miami: “All the protagonists are facing a stage of tranquility, previously unknown and prior to death, especially the character of Sophia. Although none of them died during the seven seasons that the series lasted, with 180 episodes, from 1985 to 1992. Its episodes barely reached 30 minutes and the agility and freshness of its screenplays quickly seduced the audience” (Padilla, 2009, p. 23).

Blanche, Dorothy, Rose and Sophia wanted to enjoy what was left of their lives. They wanted to laugh, have fun, talk, dance, go out with men without commitment. The series was optimistic, bright, humorous. Its protagonists talked openly about sex and contraceptive methods because, to them, there was no taboo subject anymore. There was also room for black humor because Dorothy complained about having to attend many funerals of friends: “This is understood because the city of Miami, and the state of Florida in general, became in that decade the favorite destination of the American retirees. They fled from their respective cities to live their golden age in a land of leisure and good weather” (Padilla, 2009, p. 23).

However, the issue of closeness to death was treated anecdotally and vitally because they wanted to transmit the desire to live to the public, especially older women locked in their homes. *The Golden Girls* showed that there is life in the golden age and that message was the fruit of its success. Antonio Sempere looks for other ingredients of his formula of success. He adds that his character archetypes were very recognizable and “invariably penetrated the audience” (Sempere, 2005, p. 116).

From 1985 you have to jump to 1988 to meet another heroine: *Roseanne*. On October 18 of that year, a series that survived until 1997 was released. As in the case of *I love Lucy*, the actress gave a name and a face to the protagonist and produced the series. Roseanne Barr became Roseanne Conner, an American middle-class housewife who was the head of the household and worked inside and outside home. This successful situation comedy spoke of normal and recognizable problems for the ordinary society: marriage, tight budgets, education of children.

It ended when the audience stopped identifying with the character. The fictional Roseanne won the lottery of the state of Illinois, became a millionaire and could no

longer represent the general public, who had established empathy and fidelity with her. Until then, the series was realistic, constructive and positive because its protagonist was strong, hard-working and courageous. Roseanne was normal, dressed normally and spoke without artifice. The public entered her home and she entered the home of the public:

The role of the identity of people exemplified through the routine of daily life is one of the most common characteristics in audiovisual fiction. Especially in the television medium, through the series, where the social construction of reality is more closely observed. The serial character offered by television allows people to know more accurately the problems that the characters face in their daily lives (Gómez and Jiménez, 2008, p. 515).

The last example came from France in 1985, with historical overtones. *Colette*, a mini-biographical series about the French writer Gabrielle Sidonie, “the author of a hundred books, a pioneer of the women's liberation movement” (Galán, 2007, p. 28). The real protagonist was born in 1873 and married, when she was 20 years, the also writer Henry Gauthier-Villars, nicknamed Willy. He was the first to discover the artistic gifts of his wife. He encouraged her to write and, without shame, he signed her texts as if they were his. In addition, Willy was used to living it up and was unfaithful to Colette repeatedly. She decided to divorce, write with her own name and fight for the rights and freedoms of women. She remarried and divorced again, this time from a journalist working for *Le Matin* newspaper, Henry Jouvenel. She died when she was more than 70 years old, accompanied by a friend, in her sumptuous Parisian apartment, and as a national glory because France said goodbye to her with national funerals. It is understandable that the French television dedicated a series that was exported to all of Europe and was another international historic milestone.

### **3.3. Reinforcement: professional women in the 1990s and 2000**

The 1990s ended up breaking the somewhat antiquated traditionalisms and archetypes of the 1980s, to show the real, modern and credible woman a hundred percent. In addition, the 1990s brought technical and visual advances to television, which, once again, fed on the cinema to use an advanced narrative language: retouching and post-production by computer, narration with multi-camera and *steadycam*. The scenes of any series became more complex and rich in the narrative and the semantic aspects.

Aguilar (1998, p. 225) comments that every fiction scene is the product of many choices: “camera position, objective class, distance, movement, lighting, decoration, tone, temperature and variety of color, characters, distance between ones and others, makeup, costumes, gestures, words, silence, duration, rhythm, etc”. The series of the 1990s and the 2000s used all of this, together with the aforementioned technical advances and the creation of stronger and more independent female characters. Nothing is free: neither the name of the character nor her profession, the actress who performs it, the light that illuminates her or the companions that surround her.

They were and are characters that work inside and outside home. They are no longer Lucy-baker, Lucy-storekeeper, Lucy-advertising actress; but prestigious professionals, valued and fully incorporated into the world of work. They are women from the private and the public spheres; they enjoy their home but are recognized for their work away from home. And they can be protagonists or one more character in a choral series of several interlocutors that have the same importance. It is the example of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), a high school student and a heroine of action at night. It is also the time of *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), a lawyer in a prestigious law firm. Or that of Carrie Bradshaw, a journalist in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). They are known for their work and not for their life at home.

To prove it, we will start with the female doctors and nurses. In 1958, *Mary Britten, MD* was released. The series, with 13 episodes, was the first with a female doctor protagonist. In fact, television female doctors disappeared after this important precedent. In 1972, *MASH* triumphed throughout the world with the fun adventures of military doctors in the Vietnam War. However, the only protagonist of the series was a nurse, not a doctor, and her romantic and sensual nature was accentuated, from her name: Margaret Houlihan, *Hot Lips*.

It took nearly 20 years for women again to become a doctor and a protagonist in fiction, with *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-1998) and *Emergency* or *ER* (1994-2009). The first showed the story of Dr. Mike Quinn. As the story was set in the American West of the early twentieth century, the girl did not receive any support from her family, once her father dies and she goes to a town to pursue her desired profession. In the case of *ER*, the female characters are varied: nurses, doctors and chiefs. It is the best example of that use of advanced film narrative techniques applied to television. Modern, agile, innovative; the series produced by Steven Spielberg was parity and feminist.

The 2000s brought another multitude of medical series, animated by the success of *ER: Strong Medicine* (2000-2006), *Central Hospital* (2000-2012), *Nip / Tuck* (2003/2010), *Hawthorne* (2009-2011), *House, MD* (2004-2012), *Nurse Jackie* (2009-2015), *Hart of Dixie* (2011-2015), *The Mob Doctor* (2012-2013) or *Gray's Anatomy* (2005-2016). In fact, " *House* is considered one of the most egalitarian series, because it includes female characters with power and the protagonist is usually considered rather an agitator than a macho" (Institute of Women, 2007: 99). The roles and functions of the protagonist women are no longer defined according to their sex. Cuddy is strong, has command and will raise the birth of other equally ambitious female doctors. Her success, and that of the series in general, extends throughout the world and revives the medical series and the triumph of *ER*.

The way was well paved for *Gray's Anatomy* (2005-2016), the most important and longest-running choral series of doctors in recent years, starring a woman. In the series, the public and the private, the professional and the personal lives are perfectly mixed because Meredith Gray, Ellis Gray, Cristina Yang, Izzie Stevens, Miranda Bailey, Callie Torres, Addison Montgomery, Erica Hahn and Arizona Robbins are female specialist doctors in their work, they are ambitious and holders of relevant positions, but they are also women who live and feel like the spectators who contemplate them.

The lawyer woman is another important icon of television fiction. *Law&Order* (1990-2009) was the first successful series of lawyers worldwide, but its protagonists were mostly men. Everything changed with the arrival of *Ally McBeal*, in 1997. The actress Calista Flockhart became famous thanks to her extroverted and neurotic but excellent professional character: “*Ally McBeal* tells the story of a young female lawyer who works in a crazy law firm. The firm will soon be known for its eccentricities and for the unusual cases in which it intervenes and usually wins” (García Rubio, 2007, p. 138). Ally was the best on the stand and they came to offer her to be a member of the firm, but in her heart she was a *Cinderella* looking for eternal love.

The following success stories were *Shark* (2006-2008), *Damages* (2007-2012), *The Good Wife* (2009-2016) and *Suits* (2011-2016). Guarinos (2007, p. 108) writes about Patty Hewes, the protagonist of *Damages*. She is far from the precursor Ally McBeal to show us a mature, ambitious, powerful, unbeatable woman that is not concerned at all about her personal relationships and love. She meets the stereotype of *turris ebúrnea*, as “an ivory tower woman, unattainable and therefore more desirable. She is strong, cold and inflexible, easily fetishizable” (Guarinos, 2007, p. 108). And she does not stay in that stereotype: the public will know that she has a human side and that they can identify with her because she is not as unattainable as she wants to look.

The next profession to be considered is that of a journalist. The actress Theri Hatcher played Lois Lane in *Lois&Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993-1997), as the eternal companion of the superhero *Superman*. However, this Lois is New Yorker, modern, independent, hardworking. She does not live in the shadow of the hero, as her antecedent of the original comic. This same character is repeated in *Smallville* (2001-2011), which tells the story of the teenage *Superman*.

Meanwhile, in Spain, male and female reporters of research stood out in *Journalists*, released in 1998 and broadcast by Telecinco up to 2002. Several studies show that the series made a whole generation of young Spaniards enter the communication universities, as they wanted to emulate their television chroniclers, as happened in the United States with *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). Its protagonist is the most famous journalist in the history of television and, probably, the most transgressive.

Gordillo (2007, p. 180) has studied this series in depth and presents its protagonists like this: “Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) is dedicated to writing a weekly column in the fictional newspaper *The New York Star*, public relations Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) has a business of her own, Charlotte York (Kristin Davis) is an art dealer who leaves her job after her first marriage and, finally, lawyer Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) is a partner in a New York law firm. Despite the fact that the four protagonists work on many occasions in their work, it is no more than a mere context that serves as the basis for the main theme of the series: the different sexual and amorous choices of four single and independent girls in New York City”.

The last space of women's professions should be dedicated to that of the household, to that of housewives. *Arrested development* (2003-2013) showed several women who did not need to work until the head of the family is sent to jail for fraud. *Weeds* (2006-2012) narrated the adventures of Nancy Botwin, a widowed housewife, mother of two teenage children, and owner of a large house in a high-class suburb of

Los Angeles. After the death of her husband, she decides to keep the same level of life by becoming the marijuana seller in her neighborhood.

This brief summary already speaks of a different series, highly critical of American conservatism. In fact, it is more radical than its preceptor and immediate example, *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012). This choral series does not only have one housewife, but four: "One of the most paradigmatic series that reflect the occurrence of social reality taking as a narrative axis the daily routine of its characters is represented in the series *Desperate Housewives*. This television fiction shows how a group of neighboring women who are friends, belonging to an upper class neighborhood in the United States, face every day their problems with work, with their family, with their identity and, in short, with their personal relations" (Gómez and Jiménez, 2008, p. 515).

The same author explains its importance in the treatment of female characters: "In the series two areas of action are perceived: one internal (domestic or family) and one external (community). In the interior, the actresses have different or variable behaviors with respect to the outside and, through that ambivalence, the characters are constituted with their manias, their vices and apprehensions. Along with these psychological traits, we know how they dress and what their lifestyles and language are (forms of speaking, tones, verbal and non-verbal communication, etc.). All this is part of their identity as a process that builds their sociological quality; in turn, each character takes a stance as a model or trend to follow" (Gómez and Jiménez, 2008, p. 517).

The series invites people to study its speeches, nonverbal communication, performance, lighting or costumes. It is curious to remember that its creator and main scriptwriter, Marc Cherry, built and rebuilt it several times, because he could not sell his script to any studio. He himself confessed that he found the original idea in his own mother. Both were watching a newscast and a story appeared about Andrea Yates, a woman who had killed her five children, drowning them in a bathtub. Horrified, he asked his mother how a woman could be so desperate and, against all odds, she calmly told him she understood.

The circle of coincidences and the mixture of reality and fiction combine with an important fact. At that time, Cherry was unemployed. He had been out of work for two years, owed \$ 30,000 and had put his house up for sale. He was in lawsuits with his agent because he charged, behind his back, rights to exploit previous scripts.

He thought that he had run out of ideas, that he had to change jobs and that his only relevant work was 11 episodes of *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992) and nobody could remember him for it. He was very wrong. The audience liked *Desperate Housewives* since the day of its premiere because it presented four women who were breakers and without taboos. It went from Miami to California, and from advanced maturity to the syndrome of the forties. The strength of its protagonists turned them into heroines and queens of the small screen until 2012. They planted the nitrate for the new golden age of the television series, where we are right now, where women have a role worth analyzing.

### **3.4. Mention apart: Political women in television fiction**

As we indicated in the methodology, the longitudinal longitudinal study of the television series aimed to analyze and specify how these have shown women in

different professions and in recent years, in political work. We consider that there is a before and after *Borgen*, which becomes an inescapable object of study, due to its breaking of stereotypes. The character of Birgitte Nyborg, as Danish Prime Minister, broke the traditional way of doing politics on television. However, we review and highlight other political series that preceded it or above all, that later imitated its success, repeating the female protagonism in political communication. We order them chronologically, according to their year of beginning of broadcasts, with their title in Spain and in their country of origin:

*Spin City: Loca mayor* or *Spin City* (1996-2002). This American situation comedy lasted 6 seasons on the ABC channel. It was created by Gary David Goldberg and Bill Lawrence. Its protagonist was Mike Flaherty, during the first 103 episodes, played by the actor Michael J. Fox. Flaherty is the deputy mayor of the City of New York and constantly, he has to take care that his boss, the mayor, does not make the decisions wrong and make a fool of yourself. The whole team is composed of histrionic and very funny characters. When the leading actor was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in real life, actress Heather Locklear was hired to play the fictional campaign manager, Caitlin Moore, who helps Mike. Unfortunately, due to the rapid progress of the disease, actor Michael J. Fox left the series and the role went to actor Charlie Sheen, who began to play the new deputy mayor, Charlie Crawford. Since this change, the series fell in audience and ended on April 30, 2002. It was written and produced to the measure of its first protagonist and the viewers did not admit the change. Goldberg, one of its creators, had already triumphed with Michael J. Fox in a previous series of world fame: *Tangled family* or *Family Ties* (1982-1989). In *Spin City* they repeated their perfect harmony, while it was possible due to the state of health of the actor.

*The west wing of the White House* or *The West Wing* (1999-2006). This series was released on September 22, 1999, and lasted 7 seasons or 155 episodes, until May 14, 2006. It was broadcasted by the North American network NBC. He received excellent reviews, great audience data, and numerous television awards, such as Golden Globes or Emmy Awards. Its creator was Aaron Sorkin, screenwriter of the series *Studio 60* (2006-2007) and *The Newsroom* (2012-2014). In film, he also wrote in *A Few Good Men* and *A Few Good Men* (1992), *Malice* or *Malice* (1993), *The Social Network* and *The Social Network* (2010) and *Steve Jobs* (2015), among others. During the filming of the movie *The President and Miss Wade* (*The American President*), in 1995, whose screenplay also signed, he met the actor Martin Sheen. Thinking of him as the American president of fiction, he wrote the series *The West Wing of the White House*, focused on the politics and functioning of the cabinet of the highest president Josiah - Jed-Bartlet. Among his team, throughout the series, we find several powerful female characters: the White House Press Secretary, C.J. Cregg (played by Allison Janney); the assistant National Security Adviser, Kate Harper (played by Mary McCormack); the public relations of the White House, Mandy Hampton (interpreted by Moira Kelly); the communications counselor, Annabeth Schott (played by Kristin Chenoweth); or the First Lady, Abigail Bartlet, incarnated by actress Stockard

Channing in 70 episodes. To know in depth this series, we recommend the interesting reading of the doctoral thesis of Yolanda Rodríguez Vidales (2012).

24 (2001-2010). This series supposed a revolution of the televising language, with a narration loaded with flashbacks and flashforwards and a temporary limit that forced the protagonist to solve a terrorist crime in the few hours that give title to the series. Actor Kiefer Sutherland gave life to federal agent Jack Bauer for a decade and 195 episodes, which inspired many series and films about terrorism, which came later. The American president in the fiction was a woman, in the last two years of 24. The actress Cherry Jones gave life to Allison Taylor, inspired by Hillary Clinton. Apart from it, the series had two other male presidents: David Palmer (2001-2007) and Charles Logan (2005-2010). It was produced by Imagine Entertainment, 20th Century Fox Television, Real Time Productions and TeakwoodLaneProductions; and issued by the Fox network.

*Moncloa, tell me?* (2001). It was a comedy of Spanish situation, issued by Telecinco, since January 10, 2001. The producers were Diagonal TV, El Terrat and Estudios Picasso. Following the style of the American sitcoms, it was recorded in studio, before an audience, whose laughter was incorporated into the chapter's audio. It lasted only one season, with 13 episodes. It was developed, as *The west wing of the White House*, in the Spanish presidential palace, La Moncloa, and specifically, in the press department, headed by Bartolomé (played by Javier Veiga). His team consisted of four women: Laura (played by the actress Ana Rayo), Maria Fernanda (Ana María Barbany), Nieves (Mercè Mariné) and Corporal Pelayo (Dolo Beltrán).

*Madam President* or *Commander in Chief* (2005-2006). Actress Geena Davis played the first American fiction president, Mackenzie Allen, during a 19-episode season. The series was broadcasted by ABC and produced by Battleplan Productions and Touchstone Television. The protagonist does not arrive at the White House by the votes, but by the death of the president with whom he works, Teddy Bridges. This one dies of a sudden cerebral aneurism and we only see him in flashbacks, in 3 episodes. During the first chapter, Mackenzie is on an official visit to Paris, the news is communicated and she is exhorted to resign in favor of Nathan Templeton (played by Donald Sutherland). She accepts, although she changes her mind while she goes to give her farewell speech. She is a strong woman, super intelligent, athlete and mother. Actress Geena Davis won the Golden Globe for Best Actress in dramatic series for this role.

*Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015). This American sitcom was aired on NBC for 7 seasons, between 2009 and 2015. Comedy actress Amy Poehler played Leslie Knope for 125 episodes. Knope is a public official of Pawnee City Council, a fictional city in the US state of Indiana, and is responsible for the area that gives title to the series: parks and recreation areas. In the key of surreal humor, as did *Spin City*, the series tells the political ins and outs of the town hall. The main actress won a Golden Globe as best actress of comedy or musical television series, in 2014.

*Homeland* (2011-2019). Actress Claire Danes plays Carrie Mathison, a CIA agent, who hides her bipolar psychiatric illness at work, and who mistrusts war hero Nicholas Brody, an American marine who claims to have been released after several years of kidnapping in Iraq. She considers that she is lying and preparing a large-scale attack on American soil. After solving that plot, each season delves into a different terrorist crime, in different international scenarios. In the sixth season, the president of the country is a woman: Elizabeth Keane, played by the actress Elizabeth Marvel. It deserves to be cited because the leaders of the Intelligence, before having their first meeting with her, believe that they will be able to deceive her just because she is a woman.

*Political Animals* (2012). This American 6-episode miniseries was broadcast by USA Network, between July 4, 2013, national holiday, and August 8 of the same year. Actress Sigourney Weaver plays Elaine Barrish, Secretary of State, former governor of Illinois and former first lady of former President Bud Hammond (played by Ciarán Hinds). Her husband was unfaithful, she asks for a divorce, and despite his appointment, he wants to keep his family together, since he has two teenage twin sons and one of them has discovered that he is homosexual. In the political arena, we see her managing a crisis with Iran, rescuing a Chinese submarine, and dealing with criticism and scandalous articles about her personally, signed by journalist Susan Berg (Carla Gugino), who wants to end Barrish's career.

*Scandal* (2012-present). This American television series was premiered by ABC (American Broadcasting Company) on April 5, 2012. Until 2017, it has 7 seasons and 106 episodes. It has had a remarkable audience success, registering between 7 and 9 million viewers in the United States. It has also been exported to more than forty countries around the world. In Spain, it is issued by Fox and Four since summer 2013. Its creator is Shonda Rhimes, multimillion-dollar producer thanks to two previous successes: *Gray's Anatomy* (*Gray's Anatomy*) and its spinoff, *Private Practice* (*Private Practice*). The fame reaped by these two series turned Rhimes into a powerful executive within the American television scene and allowed her to materialize another great idea: the story of Judy Smith, press officer of former President George HW Bush. It developed its task at various historical moments, important from communication and information: the 1991 Gulf War and Bush's relations with Iran and Kuwait. After leaving the White House, he created the agency Smith & Company, specializing in crisis resolution and real base to establish the fictitious company Olivia Pope and Associates, center of the television series *Scandal*. Rhimes and Smith had met in 2009 and began developing the series in 2011. Kerry Washington, the leading actress, won the role in February of the same year. From then until now, she plays Olivia Pope, crisis manager or problem solver, inside and outside the White House, in the city of Washington. To know in depth the series, we recommend the works of Padilla (2014a, 2014b and 2014c).

*Veep* (2012-present). The American actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus plays Selina Meyer, vice president of the United States in the series, which becomes president in the third season. She is divorced, has a daughter, gets along pretty badly with the president, is

very inefficient and continues in power thanks to the help and excellent work of Amy Brookheimer (played by Anna Chlumsky), her chief of staff. The leading actress has won dozens of awards thanks to this role, such as the five Emmy awards for best comedy actress in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. The creator of the character and the series is Armando Iannucci, who also devised the political drama *In the loop* (2009). The series is broadcasted by cable network HBO and produced by Dundee Productions and HBO Home Entertainment.

*House of cards* (2013-present). This original North American series by Netflix features Francis Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey). In the first season, he is a congressman in South Carolina, but he reveals to us, in the first person and speaking to the camera, his plan to reach the White House. In the second season, he manages to be named Vice President and ends his presidential project in the third season. His wife is Claire Underwood (played by Robin Wright), who starts as director of an NGO and ends up as First Lady and US Ambassador to the UN. Both are ambitious, cold, hypocritical and manipulative. As secondary characters, we see several women worthy of mention: Linda Vásquez, the White House Chief of Staff of the President prior to Underwood, Garrett Walker; reporter of *The Washington Post*, Zoe Barnes; the Democratic Senator of Louisiana, Cathy Durant; Democratic congresswoman Jackie Sharp; the Attorney General, Heather Dunbar; and the political consultant, Leann Harvey, who joins the fourth season.

*State affairs* or *State of Affairs* (2014-2015). This American series was broadcast by NBC during the years 2014 and 2015, and only had a season of 13 episodes. The protagonist is Charleston Tucker (played by Katherine Heigl). President Constance Payton, of black race, hires her for her experience as a special agent of the CIA in Iraq, and as the bride of her deceased son, precisely in an operation in that country, with Tucker. The agent must make a daily dossier for the governor, choosing and analyzing the national and international crises of the day; while trying to overcome your post-traumatic stress and know why your partner died.

*Madam Secretary* (2014-present). The screenwriter Barbara Hall, also author of libretos of the series *Doctor in Alaska* (*Northern Exposure*), *Urgencias* (*ER*), *Joan of Arcadia* (*Joan of Arcadia*), *Justice Amy* (*Judging Amy*), or *Homeland*, created this series for the NBC, with the production of Barbara Hall Productions, Revelations Entertainment and CBS Television Studios. Its protagonist is Elizabeth McCord (played by Téa Leoni). In the pilot episode, she leaves her job as university professor when the secret service appears at home, by surprise, because President Conrad Dalton wants her to be Secretary of State. Meet the president because in the past, they worked together in the CIA. She has retired, she is a mother, and she wanted a quiet life for her, her husband and her two children, Douglas and Alison. His appointment changes his world, but he does not want to move from his home, nor change the customs and schedules of his home.

*De Fractie* (2015-2016). This Dutch series of the VPRO chain is heir to *Borgen's* fame. It was created by Femke Halsema, a Dutch social democratic politician, ex-

secretary of the ecologist party and former member of the Lower House of Parliament, from 1998 to 2011. The series had 3 seasons and 30 episodes, between 2015 and 2016. It tells the political ins and outs of work of Marise Collee (played by Sandra Mattie), parliamentarian, like Halsema.

#### 4. PRESENTATION AND INTRODUCTION TO *BORGEN*

Professor Asunción Bernárdez Rodal, in her indispensable manual on gender research, explained that television, since the 1990s, had proposed new ways of representing women and *Borgen's* success took place by altering the traditional keys of narration (Bernárdez Rodal, 2015). We consider it an excellent summary to start this section, with a necessary presentation, which precedes our analysis and validates our results.

Also, we recommend the readings by Rodríguez Vidales (2016a and 2016b), who has studied *Borgen* since its possible contributions to real political communication in Spain, thinking about the series that politicians should know; and articles by Santamaría (2001), Peña Acuña (2010), Bandrés Goldáraz (2011), Martín Jiménez (2011), Puebla, Carrillo and Copado (2014), Pareja Sánchez (2016), and Rodríguez and Sedeño (2017), among others.

The series began to be broadcast in Denmark, on September 26, 2010. It would not arrive in Spain until December 6, 2014. It was produced by DRFiktion, and distributed, in chronological order, to Norway, Sweden, Finland, United States, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, South Korea, France, Germany, Japan, Spain, Greece, Italy, Poland, Serbia and Russia, among others. The distributors that made it possible were Danmarks Radio (DR), AVA, Art, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Canvas, Film1 Series, Joongang Tongyang Broadcasting Company (JTBC), Link TV, Lumière Home Entertainment, Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK), Prime Series, Super! Drama TV, Sveriges Television (SVT), Verenigde Arbeiders Radio Amateurs (VARA), WVG Medien GmbH, Yleisradio (YLE) and Warner Bros. Entertainment.

The shootings were carried out in two main places: the exteriors of the Danish Parliament, in the Christiansborg Palace, Copenhagen; and the interiors, in the DRByen studios of Amager, also located in Copenhagen. In total, 30 episodes were shot, divided into 3 seasons of 10 episodes each. The last one was broadcast on March 10, 2013.

The series was created by Adam Price and written by Jeppe Gjørving Gram and Tobias Lindholm. It portrays the world of politics, not without internal conflicts, where the character of Birgitte Nyborg becomes the first woman to obtain the position of Prime Minister in Denmark. Each of *Borgen's* seasons examines the difficulties that the protagonist faces: forming a government with other political parties, overcoming internal crises and communication, and overcoming international conflicts. With this, it perfectly reflects the interaction between politics and the media and, although all names are fictitious, they are equivalent to those currently existing in Denmark.

The title of the series comes from the colloquial term with which the Danes refer to the Palace of Christianborg, where the three powers of the state are concentrated and the office of the Prime Minister is located. As we have pointed out, the series shows real external filming of this location.

## 5. RESULTS: BREAKING-OFF OF STEREOTYPES AND DISSIDENCES IN *BORGEN*

### 5.1. Breaking-off of stereotypes

In order to fully understand the stereotypes that *Borgen* breaks, we consider it necessary, in the first place, to know the classifications given by the various academics. First, we summarize the stereotypes listed by Bernárdez, García and González (2008, pp. 122-129):

Women who only represent beauty and seduction.

Sweet and tender woman that reduces, according to Kaplan, the threat that sexual difference causes in the patriarchal culture.

Pure, beautiful and innocent woman, quite traditional, with “up-to-date” images that have earned the right not to be “so pure”, for example, they are no longer virgins.

The femme fatale, an independent and sexual woman, who represents a threat to the patriarchal domain and therefore can only be a negative character, a perverse woman.

The woman as an enigma and a mystery, a variant of the femme fatale. Her independent nature and the use of violence with dexterity rather than her sexuality, ends up revealing more as something typical of a diabolical being and not of a “normal” woman.

The repressive mother represses her male offspring, preventing their normal development and growth, being responsible for many of their dramas and difficulties.

Sexualized and objectified woman, one of the most traditional ones. Her only function is to be an object of sexual desire to the male protagonist, or to the male gaze.

The role of traditional women, housewives or happy women with the gender destiny that awaits them, appears as a discredited model, without any attraction to young women.

Modern women; the most striking, novel and frequent. Modern and sexually active women, who are more prepared than men to take on the challenges of modern life. Women who no longer need men (or only as partners in sex), who do not have difficulties in reconciling their public and private facets, nor do they suffer conflicts due to the advances produced by the women's liberation movement, which nevertheless does not free them from conventional beauty models (youth).

Sexist stereotype, women dyed by rivalry and envy.

Guarinos (in Loscertales and Núñez, 2007, pp. 106-107) extends this classification, when talking about the stereotypes of characters:

The good, suffering girl, she aspires to be happy with a good husband.

The angel, lamb and wolf skin inside, ambitious and capable of anything.

The submissive, beatific virgin.

The blessed/spinster, single, fiftyish, with religious vocation and repressed personality.

The bad girl, a variety of angel, hunting for a man.

The warrior.

The femme fatale or vamp, bad by nature, men's downfall.

*Mater Amabilis*, a happy housewife, attentive with her children and husband, a good person who does not have much to contribute.

The painful, suffering mother, she observes how her children are mistreated by life and they can mistreat her.

The castrating, dominant mother, she restricts the freedom of action and thought, especially of her sons.

The stepmother, like the previous one but with unnatural children.

The mother of the monster.

The mother without children

Cinderella.

The *turriseburnea*, tower of ivory, unattainable and, therefore, more desirable, strong, cold, inflexible.

The black queen / witch / black widow, monstrous, of intoxicating beauty, perverse.

The rogue opposed to the male hero.

The superheroine of masculine cut to the service of the community.

The *dominatrix*, from the comic, imposing, economically independent.

In *Borgen*, the protagonist becomes Prime Minister since the first episode and also since there, we see her in the last classification of Bernárdez, García and González (2008, pp. 122-129) because she is modern, professional, educated, super competent. She discusses her professional problems with her husband but makes decisions individually. They talk about sex with naturalness and the viewer is a participant in their encounters on the screen. But they are healthy, normal, shared and consensual relationships, until their marriage breaks down, at the end of the first season.

At work, as Prime Minister, Birgitte Nyborg wants to be independent in making decisions, even if she has formed a government with the help of two other parties. She listens to opinions, surrounds herself with a good cabinet, talks to her opponents; all with the aim of doing the best for her country, Denmark. In her public sphere she is the same strong woman that in her private life and, fortunately, we cannot pigeonhole her in any of the stereotypes that Guarinos listed (in Loscertales and Núñez, 2007, pp. 106-107).

## 5.2. Female leadership

As Quevedo Redondo (2016) affirms, there is a new and feminized way of conceiving politics, which prioritizes the emotional components and incorporates another scale of values, betting: "To combat discrimination, use a non-sexist language and apply each criterion of action with identical intensity to men and women" (Quevedo Redondo, 2016). Far from excluding males in this new conception of understanding politics, there is an inclusive component of gender that tends to introduce into the agenda merits considered to be unique to the female universe.

Certainly, we had become accustomed to a masculine leadership style when playing political roles: obstinacy for power, confrontation, and constant rivalry constitute a usual way of carrying out political activity on the part of men.

In *Borgen* we see how the masculine style of implementing politics is replaced by a new leadership, in keeping with the scale of values previously mentioned. The main character of the Prime Minister, Birgitte Nyborg, understands that the exercise of power necessarily involves a paradigm shift. Betting on an egalitarian, communicative, transparent and participative style, where political negotiation is emphasized as a fundamental asset among the different parties.

These are attitudes typical of a new political practice. This is characterized by the prioritization of emotional components and the search for agreements in the face of confrontation or competition. These two ingredients appear as distinctive features of a male model, which seems outdated and lacking in application in the new political reality and the new public space, where women tend to occupy relevant positions in politics.

### **5.3. Thematic competence**

It is another differential feature with respect to the way of presenting and carrying out politics. Thematic competence refers to the tendency to assign gender stereotypes to policies, depending on the gender of the candidate. This way, there will be fields or thematic areas more related to the male candidates or politicians, such as Foreign Policy, Economy, Defense or Energy; against stereotypically feminine themes, such as Health, Culture or Education (Fernández García, 2010).

In the *Borgen* series, the thematic competence inherent in a way of doing politics is completely blurred. We see how the Prime Minister comes to negotiate a complex situation in Greenland, visits the Danish troops in Afghanistan, and challenges a powerful businessman to include a larger number of women in his Board of Directors. Likewise, she appoints a woman as a Minister in the Commerce portfolio, in the first season, breaking dominant stereotypes and passing from one topic to another with absolute normality.

### **5.4. Conciliation between private and professional life**

Historically, power has always been masculine. Men who access politics do not tend to change their behavior or priorities, knowing that it is women who conciliate. Especially complex is to conciliate political activity with the exercise of motherhood. As noted by Tània Verge (2014), on gender differences in terms of conciliation and exercise of power:

Although the traditional patriarchal family has been replaced by other models of the family, men have not yet correspondingly assumed, in general, domestic tasks and care activities. This reduces the time available to women and, therefore, their interest in politics and participation in public life are limited. And it is that certain vital circumstances, such as working full time or having preschool children do not affect, in general, the time available for women and men the same way.

Faced with a traditional vision of exercising power, *Borgen* is a valuable exemplification of the status of equality between women and men. The first season shows both parents working outside home. Due to her political commitment, Birgitte

Nyborg delegates to her husband the burden of taking care of the children and the house, which the latter assumes without reproach or blackmail. Inevitably, we ask ourselves a question: would conciliation be assumed the same way in Spanish politics, by the partner of a councilor, counselor or minister? In this sense, we appreciate in the series not only the adoption of equal roles, but a priority when establishing a conciliation between private and professional life.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Television, as a means of mass and main element of leisure time, interests the public. Children, young people and adults go to it and we must take advantage of it to educate in equality, because it is something more than “the place of the instantaneous, of the playful, of the fun” (Bernárdez, 2006, p. 69). The small screen is not as bad as the critics have wanted to show us. The good-quality fiction series are a good example of this and can become a pedagogical and entertaining vehicle of training in equality.

In addition, human beings think of images and these series are introduced into our favorite forms of leisure. If it is true that “humans grant greater credibility to what we perceive with our eyesight than what we perceive through another channel” (Aguilar, 1998, p. 227), we must take advantage of what television fiction offers. It is necessary to give it credibility, to approach it with wide eyes because it is a source of opinions and feelings and “can influence us more than what the real facts do” (Aguilar, 1998, p. 229).

Gender and the defense of women are not only in the informative part of television. The series shows that it is also in the entertainment and that the audience will imitate the representations of the world that their favorite series offer them. From them they will take archetypes, values and ways of mixing with others. Why not focus on the positive components that have driven women and that have accompanied them in their struggle to conquer their space? Laura Mulvey did it with her feminist theories in the cinema and left teachings to analyze the medium of the small screen. From *I love Lucy* to *Borgen*, there is a lot to learn and to teach.

The main objective of this piece of research was to analyze gender as a category of analysis in the Danish television series, showing how, throughout its three seasons, the series offered a new prototype of a political woman that breaks the traditional way of conceiving her. To understand the relevance of this statement, we have analyzed in *Borgen* what we consider a breaking-off in terms of the dominant models. We have deciphered three typologies of dissidence that allow us to understand a new way of representing women in relation to the exercise of politics.

In particular, we analyzed, first of all, female leadership in the series and demonstrated that there is a new conception of the political exercise tending to include values considered proper to the female universe in the public agenda. Secondly, in terms of thematic competence, we have analyzed that the series also breaks gender stereotypes. We verified that the Danish Prime Minister's way of practicing politics is none other than passing from one topic to another with absolute normality. Finally, regarding the conciliation between public and private life, the series correctly exemplifies the status of equality between women and men, as well as

the adoption of equal roles. It serves as a referent in political socialization, especially for the new generations of women whose objective is participation in political and, therefore, public life.

*Borgen* is a sample of how a television product succeeds on the basis of breaking-off and dissidence with dominant models and gender stereotypes. It makes visible a way of doing politics where gender differences disappear. In short, the series can be considered a reference for those women who want to dedicate themselves to political life without having to choose between private life versus public life.

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