

The dialectics of multiculturalism: Constructing 'new citizens' in Spanish public broadcasting

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Abstract

This article reflects on the symbolic and material bases of multiculturalist ideology as it manifests itself in particular cultural practices taking place across the European Union (EU). To explore some of these dynamics, I focus my discussion on *Babel*, a Spanish public broadcasting production partially funded by the EU, which aims to promote intercultural dialogue through exposing viewers to different aspects of immigrants' lives in Spain. The analysis highlights how, while explicitly endorsing multiculturalism and developing a pro-immigration stance, *Babel's* stories also promote a restricted and restricting image of desirable immigrants. Thus, the show's resignification efforts rely mostly on an implicit but systematic association between cultural similarity and economic productivity in its representations of acceptable immigrants. The article's conclusion argues for the need to re-theorise the co-constitutive relationship between 'cultural' and 'economic' aspects of multiculturalist practices at large, as well as the specific shapes that they take in Western European societies.

Keywords

Babel, dialectics, European Union, immigration, multiculturalism, public broadcasting, Spain

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Introduction: 'new Europe', old habits?

(De)constructing multiculturalism in the European Union

Europe is home to a wide variety of people. This diversity brings richness to our cultures, economies and societies. (European Commission, ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm)

One of the defining characteristics of the European Union (EU) seems to be its permanent state of identity crisis. Starting with the Treaty of Paris, which established the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 (Warleigh, 2004), the main motor behind the first steps towards a unified European space was the desire to avoid intra-continental armed conflict and create a strong economic unit that could compete with Asia and North America. As Braidotti puts it: 'Fundamentally ... the European unification process was the price that member states were made to pay for their belligerence and for the Holocaust' (2006: 70).

The initial goals of economic convergence and military cooperation were achieved progressively through different treaties signed in Rome (1957), Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2000) and Lisbon (2007). However and in spite of these important steps towards economic and political integration, EU governments continuously have faced the challenging task of 'selling Europe' to the citizens of the different nations involved in the various unification processes – especially those located in the West. Thus the successive negotiations, economic adjustments and enlargements to expand the 'European club' to new states have been consistently perceived in non-institutional spheres as taking place at the highest bureaucratic levels, and in detriment of laypeople's actual needs and desires (Warleigh, 2004). Today, the idea of a 'new', strong and united EU is at a crossroads once again, as the worst recession in the history of the region is pushing not only particular groups, but also entire nations towards a peripheral, precarious status where painstakingly won rights are no longer a guarantee.

The constitutive instability, scepticism and even rejection of the EU can be seen as exemplifying the intrinsic relationship between its economic and/or material and its symbolic dimensions, which also have played a fundamental role in the framing of the issues considered as obstacles for the consolidation of a European project (Fleras, 2009). Thus, the stress on the need of a shared European identity has greatly influenced contemporary debates about what the EU is or should be, which inevitably are tied to decisions about what countries, people and ways of life can be unproblematically placed within its borders, and which ones should be detached from the so-called 'new Europe' (Gündüz, 2010).

In addition, the anxieties provoked by an increasing perception of disintegration of traditional values and scarce resources across the EU have led to a progressive distancing, at the national level, from embracing the diversity preached by the EU institutions, and towards an official discourse that consistently proclaims the 'failure of multiculturalism'.¹ Thus, the current commonplace in the EU public sphere presents the inadequacy of cultural politics as the preferred explanation for all kinds of clashes among groups. Often, this position is linked to arguments about the supposedly excessive tolerance of host countries towards non-dominant practices, which is seen as feeding dangerous internal

radicalisms (see Bredstöm, 2009; Lentin, 2008). Thus the contradictions embedded in multiculturalist ideology allow for practices such as the indefinite detention of the children of asylum-seekers (Fekete, 2007), the systematic deportation of Eastern European Roma (Martínez Guillem, 2011) or the incarceration *en masse* of post-colonial immigrants (Wacquant, 2008) to occur within, and not in opposition to, a general commonsense understanding of the EU as a progressive, egalitarian and post-racist society – in contrast with pre-Second World War Western Europe, but also with contemporary non-western societies (Lentin and Titley, 2012).

In light of this situation, many progressive thinkers and activists across Western European states have embraced and defended multiculturalism in an attempt to place themselves in opposition to the conservative, anti-immigration attitudes that often accompany critiques of multiculturalism-oriented policies. This has left some anti-racist organisations who are suspicious of multiculturalist ideology in a difficult position, where they must craft an in-between argumentative space that can question the different policies informed by neoliberal understandings of multiculturalism, without reinforcing a xenophobic backlash (Lentin and Titley, 2011).

The disassociation of multiculturalism and diversity from notions such as integration or equality has become a frequent rhetorical move in the contemporary European public sphere, no longer restricted to conservative politics. However, as Lentin and Titley point out, we need to be careful in our interpretations of this backlash and the ‘recited truths’ (2012: 11) upon which it is built. First, as they explain, multiculturalism in these accounts is constructed mostly as separate from liberalism, rather than one of its many discourses that ‘shape racialized exclusion in a post-racial socioscape’ (2012: 90). In this context, a supposedly different, ‘liberal’ account of societal relations is put forward, through which ‘culture, post-race, is elevated ontologically while race-thinking remains immanent’ (2012: 132). What looks like anti-multiculturalism discourse, in Lentin and Titley’s reading, becomes a way to justify an “unapologetic” demand for compensatory conditionalities, gestures and restrictions ... towards the racialized’ (2012: 124), which still operates within (multi)culturalist logics. As they put it:

[T]he insistence on core values and cultural discipline in integration discourses does not suggest a rejection of multiculturalism, but rather its recalibration. In other words, the problem is not culture but an excess of (their) culture. That political problems shaped by geopolitical conflict, neoliberal transformation and attendant human mobility should be understood primarily as cultural and requiring cultural solutions, suggests that the crisis of multiculturalism is symptomatic rather than causal. (2012: 127)

In this study I build on this nuanced critique of culturalist ontology as embedded in many integrationist projects, in order to highlight the complexities and specificity of the western EU context, especially when compared to other settings such as Canada or the USA, where the notion of multiculturalism – at least in public settings – is questioned much less readily. Needless to say, working within a western/non-western dichotomy has proven to be very useful when exploring Anglo-American contexts, where the raise of culture is generally tied to 20th-century concerns with identity politics: concerns that, scholars rightly argue, are very different from those found in

post-colonial contexts, although often they have been forced to fit into them (Eagleton, 2003; Shome, 2012). However, while putting forward a much-needed reconsideration of the supposed universality of many western ideals, the emphasis on a homogeneous, neoliberal multiculturalism stemming from a one-dimensional West simultaneously risks to situate multiculturalism as exactly that, an ideal – even if only for the West (see Shome, 2012).

In contrast, in this project I will try to illuminate distinctions, not between a centre and its peripheries, but among different western societal models. My goal is to develop a reflection on conflicts and contradictions within those regions that enjoy a ‘certain level of historico-political culture’ (Gramsci, 1971: 129) as a way to better explore the relationship between social conditions and particular practices. As Terry Eagleton puts it, ‘if “They” are not all the same, neither are “We”’ (2003: 34). Thus it is important to recall that the politics of recognition of difference that tend to accompany multiculturalist thinking have been regarded as problematic in many western critically-oriented accounts, mostly coming from the Marxist tradition. For example, McLaren (1993) argues that multiculturalism gets in the way of what he sees as a needed ‘shared vision of democratic community’, pushing us towards ‘endorsing struggles on which the politics of difference collapse into new forms of separatism’ (1993: 207). Similarly, Žižek sees multiculturalism as a reification of culture, a kind of ‘racism with a distance’ through which ‘cultural communities are ... irreducibly particular and incommensurable’ (in West, 2010: 253). Lastly, Eagleton has challenged what he sees as a problematic, liberal and/or cultural relativist foundation of multiculturalism, which precludes all forms of communitarianism beyond associations of a local kind, since it ‘has no view on the question of whether prancing around in a leather apron is in principle more or less valuable than the democratic management of the economy’ (1994: 6).

It is in this complex intersection of cultural theories and praxes that the present study must be situated. The different scenes sketched above constitute the background against which I intend to reflect on the tensions embedded in particular cultural practices taking place across the EU. In order to develop a detailed exploration of some of these dynamics, I will focus the present discussion on *Babel*, a current Spanish Public Broadcasting (RTVE) production partially funded by the EU, which aims to promote intercultural dialogue through exposing viewers to different aspects of immigrants’ lives in Spain. My goal is to examine *Babel* as a cultural artefact that can help us shed light on the symbolic and material bases of multiculturalist ideology as it manifests itself in the show, thus developing a dialectical approach to this construct that emphasises the need to study ‘all the activities [in society] and their interrelations, without any concession of priority to any one of them we may choose to abstract’ (Williams, 1961: 45). Thus, ultimately the analysis will be geared towards showing that different aspects of societies, sometimes isolated as either ‘economic’ or ‘cultural’, are understood better not as separate from each other, but rather as co-constitutive.

This discussion will begin by offering a brief account of Spain’s in-between position as a relatively new country of immigration in the EU. Next, it presents a close examination of the object of study: the Spanish public broadcasting programme *Babel*. The analysis highlights how the show’s rhetoric operates within an overall goal of promoting multiculturalism, understood as a mixture of intercultural dialogue and good integration practices,

which are seen as the main necessary components of ‘living together’ in contemporary Spain. As part of this overarching goal, *Babel* is clearly invested in reformulating the dominant, negative connotations of the terms ‘immigrant’ and ‘immigration’. However, I argue that in contrast with the show’s more explicit rhetoric, this reformulation is not accomplished by presenting audiences with a multiplicity of (different) cultures – which actually risks reinforcing some groups’ otherness in important ways – but mostly through a systematic incorporation of those perceived as culturally similar or economically productive into representations of acceptable immigrants. As this analysis will show, presenting new citizens as already like ‘Us’, or otherwise as economic givers – that is, contributing to Spain’s economy while staying away from the state’s resources – is a crucial part of the resignification processes taking place in *Babel*. In light of these findings, the article’s conclusion reflects on the need to embrace the symbolic and material aspects of contemporary keywords such as multiculturalism, integration or diversity, as well as of the processes of exclusion and inclusion that they may facilitate.

Spain as a new country of immigration

Together with other Southern European countries such as Greece or Italy, Spain has experienced a rapid transformation in the last three decades: a former (although relatively recent) ‘sender’ of immigrants, nowadays Spain is an established ‘host’ country for such diverse populations as North Africans, Eastern Europeans or Latin-Americans² (Arocena, 2011; Kleiner-Liebau, 2009; Ortega-Pérez, 2003; Triandafyllidou, 2001). In 1981, there were 200,000 immigrants in Spain. Currently, 4.7m people living in this territory – 11 percent of the total population – are foreign-born (Burkhart, 2010). In the 10-year period between 1998 and 2008, Spain attracted more than six million immigrants, and about five million more have settled there since 2000 (Royo, 2009), making the country the biggest recipient of immigrants in the EU, the most multi-ethnic and the second country in the world, after the USA, in terms of the absolute number of immigrants received (Carcelén et al., 2009; Royo, 2009).

Unsurprisingly, recent dramatic changes in the composition of Spanish society, together with the different political measures (not) adopted to address them, have taken place in parallel with a remarkable increase in native hostility towards immigrants. Whereas throughout the 1990s immigration was never among the top three main concerns expressed by citizens, by 2004 it had become one of the most important problems for the Spanish population, together with terrorism and unemployment (Triandafyllidou, 2001). The 2004 national survey also revealed that more than half of Spaniards agreed with the statement: ‘There are too many foreigners living in Spain’, and that almost 60 percent expressed agreement with the statement: ‘Immigration and insecurity are closely related’ (Encarnación, 2004: 171). In spite of this, xenophobic attitudes seem to be less pronounced in Spain than in other EU countries, especially with regards to support for political institutions: the Spanish extreme right-wing, anti-immigration party *Democracia Nacional* is not nearly as popular as its counterparts in neighbour countries such as France or Italy (Lubbers et al., 2002).

In their attempts to make sense of this reality, some scholars have emphasised ‘the history of immigration in Spain, the country’s political culture, its economy and the

institutional landscape of political forces formed in the post-Franco era' (Encarnación, 2004: 183), whereas others refer to the unique configuration of the Spanish state with relatively independent regions (*autonomías*), which already challenges traditional understandings of the nation. This would have allowed Spaniards to 'take advantage of their "national" experience of being a multinational state, characterised by linguistic and cultural difference' (Triandafyllidou, 2000: 388). However, even if we accept Spain's generally tolerant position with regards to the presence of immigrants, it is important to point out that this does not preclude systematic marginalisation and exploitation, once these immigrants enter the labour market. In fact, as reported by different studies (Cachón, 1997; Solé and Parella, 2003), the immigrant population of Spain is highly concentrated around the sectors with 'the worst employment conditions in terms of human capital, labour relations, working conditions and wage levels', such as 'domestic service, agriculture, unqualified jobs in the hotel and catering sector, unskilled construction workers and the retail sector' (Solé and Parella, 2003: 123). When taken together, these so-called '3D jobs' – dirty, dangerous and demanding (Cachón, 2009) – are the main source of income for 76.1 percent of foreign workers with a valid work permit. Moreover, 'non-EU immigrant labour force suffers from negative discrimination compared to native workers, in terms of both access to jobs and to working conditions, independently of their educational levels, qualifications or prior work experience' (Solé and Parella, 2003: 121).

Often, the different modifications in Spanish immigration law have been justified with the argument that they needed to be more in line with EU directives (Corkill, 2000; Richards, 2009). When putting Spanish immigration policy into the broader European perspective, we find an interesting dynamic by which immigrants are both unwanted and desired, since there is a kind of narcissistic pleasure derived from being the target of unsolicited immigration. As Santaolalla suggests:

[D]espite the strong and often unacknowledged racism in contemporary Spain ... Spaniards derive a certain gratification from the fact that the new phenomenon of large-scale immigration (mostly from North Africa) constructs their country as a desirable, economically advanced nation. (2002: 18)

In fact, immigrants contributed greatly to Spain's 'economic miracle' between 2000 and 2008: 'most of the 772,000 new jobs created in Spain in 2006 went to immigrants (about 60 per cent)' (Royo, 2009: 21).

However, just as immigrants were the primary beneficiaries of Spain's economic boom, they also have been greatly affected by the current economic crisis: according to official sources, 295,141 people left Spain during the first half of 2011. This number, when combined with the 224,382 new arrivals during the same period, leaves a negative migration of 70,759; of these 'lost' citizens, 63,172 were immigrants (Nogueira, 2011). Among those who stay, the situation is equally dramatic: in 2007: 11.8 percent of immigrants could not find a job in Spain. Today, one-quarter of the current 4,333,269 unemployed people in the Spanish territory – the highest number in the history of democratic Spain – are immigrants, which constitutes around 35 percent of the overall immigrant population.

Media and migrants

A significant number of studies, both within the humanities and the social sciences, have focused on issues affecting Spain as they relate to its recently acquired condition of destination country for immigrants. Scholars have examined elite immigration discourses (Bañón Hernández, 2003; Ferriz Núñez and Ridaó Rodrigo, 2008; Lario Bastida, 2008; Zapata Barrero, 2007), the influence that news media discourse may have on perceptions of immigrants (Martínez Lirola, 2008; Saura Sanchez, 2008), the ways in which newcomers construct their identities in a predominantly hostile context (del Teso Craviotto, 2008), the role of specific products, such as advertising, in facilitating immigrants' integration into their new societies (Carcelen et al., 2009), and the most recurrent tropes in film representations of the phenomenon of immigration (Ballesteros, 2005).

When examining media research on immigration, both at the Spanish and EU levels, it is important to note that most studies concentrate on products about immigrants that are not necessarily for them (see for example, Smelik, 2003 or the collection of essays edited by Frachon and Vargaftig, 1997). This can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the fact that, as Ballesteros argues, most of these representations emphasise the 'shocking character and tragic potential' of the immigrant experience, which in the end targets 'passive but voyeuristic [European] spectator[s]' (2005: 4), but is not aimed at consolidating public interest or activism with regards to the reality of immigration.

However, there is also a European tradition, especially in 'older' immigration countries, of media products designed for immigrant audiences. Focusing on the German context, Kosrik (2000) points out that these kinds of programmes were designed, first, as a way to orient immigrants to their new environment, as well as a means of providing a 'bridge to home' that could facilitate coping with the experience of being a guest worker. According to Kosrik, there has been an important evolution in this kind of public service product, and thus '[a]s the former guest workers have turned into ethnic minorities, broadcasters have reconceptualised the mission and responsibility of public-service broadcasting toward immigrants and toward the "multicultural society" as a whole' (2000: 320). This entails a shift in focus from 'orientation-help' to 'integration help' that can prepare immigrants for 'a permanent life in the Federal Republic' (2000: 326) – which is also an attempt to incorporate native audiences, since integration now is no longer seen as a process concerning migrants alone, but one that pertains to inter-ethnic relations.

Analyses such as Kosrik's are extremely valuable, in that they expose a series of important tropes present in current media products sponsored by many EU governments: as she demonstrates, integration, tolerance and mutual knowledge are at the basis of most of the recent projects of this kind. However, this kind of analysis certainly could benefit from a closer examination of how programmes define what all those notions mean and entail, both explicitly and implicitly. A more detailed look at the actual texts, with the goal of problematising how multiculturalism is understood and then promoted, can assist us in this task. In the next section I conduct such analysis, focusing on a media product aimed at performing an integrating function in the Spanish context.

Babel: constructing new citizens

On 4 October 2009, the Spanish public broadcaster Radio Televisión Española (RTVE) introduced a new public service programme, *Babel*. According to its creators, the aim of this weekly production was to provide a window into contemporary Spain, taking as its point of departure the undeniable presence of an important immigrant community in this country. As reported on RTVE's website, *Babel* would present an opportunity to show how 'immigrants live here; their work, their hobbies, their culture' (RTVE, nd). Moreover, the producers added, its goal was to 'uncover and highlight how [immigrants'] contributions enrich society and make all of us, immigrants and natives, new citizens, new Spaniards' (RTVE, nd). This two-way approach to the phenomenon of immigration was presented as stemming from a perceived urgency to account for the reality of a heterogeneous Spanish society, and to contribute to the promotion of productive dialogue between different groups. Thus, presenting the viewer with a wide range of immigrant experiences was seen as a necessary step on the road to overcoming prejudice, as demonstrated by the producers' concluding statement: '[W]e are convinced that mutual knowledge is the basis of harmonious living together in 21st century Spain' (RTVE, nd).

Therefore, *Babel's* format is not only designed with immigrant audiences in mind, but it addresses 'the entirety of Spanish citizens, not only immigrants, offering a new way of knowing more about ourselves through knowing them better' (RTVE, nd). To this end, its weekly 30 minutes are divided into four regular sections: *El reportaje* (The Report) 'offers a plural look at general current affairs, fomenting life together and mutual knowledge'. In *Sabores del mundo* (Flavours of the World) 'we discover that food is culture, a distinctive element of communities'. *Caleidoscopio* (Kaleidoscope) is 'made up of everyday stories in order to encourage life together and mutual knowledge', and *Personajes* (Relevant people) 'offers the voices of all those protagonists of a diverse Spain' (RTVE, nd).

For this analysis, and in order to obtain a general sense of the contents of *Babel*, I reviewed a total of 232 programmes aired between October 2009 and May 2011. The stories featured in these broadcasts corresponded to the four different sections as follows: 63 were features in 'The Report', 56 belonged to 'Kaleidoscope', 53 featured 'Relevant People' and 60 introduced viewers to 'Flavours of the World'. I then conducted a thematic coding of the stories featured in 'The Report' and 'Kaleidoscope' in order to better account for the variety of topics that these introduced. This categorisation revealed a series of predominant themes across the two sections, which in many ways paralleled the main features of 'Relevant People' and 'Flavours of the World'. Next, and drawing on the episodes' synopses available through *Babel's* official website (www.rtve.es/television/babel/), I developed a more detailed account of the different surface and latent understandings of the acceptable immigrant which can be observed through the issues addressed in the different stories narrated.

'The multicultural Spain': becoming citizens through cultural sharing

As seen from the producers' statements quoted previously, one of the defining characteristics of *Babel* is its commitment to promoting mutual knowledge, understanding and

respect among people with different origins as the bases of harmonious social relations in Spain. In recognition of its contribution towards these goals, *Babel* was recently awarded the television show diversity award by the Catalan Consell de l'Audiovisual. When referring to the show's merits, the jury 'highlighted [*Babel*'s] way of showing intercultural conviviality and its contribution to society's enrichment, portraying immigrated people's everyday lives, as well as listening to their stories and their recipes' (Mesa para la Diversidad en el Audiovisual premia al programa *Babel* en TVE, 2011).

In this section I focus on *Babel*'s rhetoric of multiculturalism as represented in the stories that make up its different sections. I argue that *Babel* clearly takes multiculturalism as its starting point, presenting it as an unavoidable reality as well as a desirable practice or policy in contemporary Spanish society. On its official website, for example, *Babel* is presented as a 'diversity magazine' aimed at 'trying to discover and highlight how [immigrants'] contributions enrich society' (RTVE, nd). Thus, overall, *Babel* puts forward a strong celebratory tone in relation to cultural diversity, presenting it as mostly a source of enrichment for '21st century Spain'.

Based on my review of episodes, I also argue that telling the stories of 'multicultural Spain', as the producers assert, involves three main and related strategies. All of these contribute to constructing a non-threatening image of immigrants as, on the one hand, benefiting from intercultural dialogue initiatives promoted mostly by independent organisations or individuals, and on the other, as sources of a series of commodifiable customs. First, *Babel* introduces a general frame of good practice for intercultural dialogue in different challenging contexts such as the school, neighbourhood or workplace, thus placing a strong emphasis on mutual knowledge and tolerance – mostly promoted by non-institutional associations – as the most important aspects leading to social harmony. Second, often the stories aimed at reflecting the enrichment resulting from Spain's multicultural reality are located in the realm of customs, both native and foreign, presenting them as the arena where living together takes place. Third, in this context the show consistently associates immigrant groups with their different traditions – related to clothing, festivities or food – as a way to enhance not only their familiarity, but also their economic value in the eyes of Spanish audiences.

A consistent frame of reference highlighted in these narratives is that of educational settings. Here, *Babel* tells the stories of specific proposals developed by schools in order to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse student population. One of these initiatives is discussed in the report 'Reformulando la convivencia' (Reformulating Living Together). In this episode, *Babel*'s correspondents travel to three different Spanish schools, located in Almería, Bilbao and Barcelona, in order to learn about the changes implemented to their curricula as a consequence of immigration. As they explain:

[I]n an increasingly multicultural society, if there is a place where it becomes necessary to set the bases for living together from a very young age, that place is the school. Immigration has forced many elementary schools and high schools to reformulate their curricula and create new forms of inclusion for all students, regardless of their origin. (Reformulando la convivencia, 2009).

Apart from the school, another context where *Babel* highlights the multicultural reality of contemporary Spanish society and the need for intercultural exchange is the neighbourhood.

Through these reports the audience learns, for example, about the challenges that the concentration of immigrants in particular areas poses for harmonious social relations: as seen, for example, in the report 'Un barrio, muchos mundos' (One Neighbourhood, Many Worlds), introduced in the following way:

Everybody in Bilbao knows about the multiculturalism of one of the old town's parts of the city, the San Francisco neighbourhood, but they also know about its poverty, its prostitution and its delinquency. A second urban and social reform plan has managed to improve some of the problems of this neighbourhood, one of the areas in the Basque country where a higher number of immigrants live. Here there are many associations that continue to work in order to improve the lives of their neighbours. Through them, we take a look at the lights and shadows of the many worlds existing in the San Francisco neighbourhood. (Un barrio, muchos mundos, 2010)

An overall salient characteristic worth mentioning after examining these 'reports' is that, regardless of whether they focus on the school, neighbourhood or other spaces where contact among different groups is a reality, there is an overwhelming reliance on non-profit associations, individual initiatives and/or immigrants' voluntary work as the main sources of material support towards the minimisation of the risks associated with immigrants' social exclusion. To name just a few, the reports 'Una escuela de vida' (A School of Life), 'En buenas manos' (In Good Hands), 'Una ayuda que no tiene precio' (A Priceless Help), 'Pequeños cisnes mestizos' (Little Mestizo Swans) 'Educación para el cambio' (Education for Change), 'Bibliotecas para todos' (Libraries for Everyone), 'Voces y música' (Voices and Music), 'Paradojas de la inmigración' (Paradoxes of Immigration) and 'Florencia Amengual' all centre around private initiatives, non-institutional organisations and/or the help provided by volunteer immigrants as facilitating the different opportunities for intercultural exchange and education.

Thus, a significant component of *Babel's* narratives focus on intercultural dialogue as an important starting point for addressing the different challenges posed by multicultural Spain. In addition, a second strategy identified in the show when representing immigration shifts the focus from the sometimes-challenging reality of growing diversity towards an emphasis on the enrichment aspects of multiculturalism. This stress is mostly present in the stories featured in the regular 'Kaleidoscope' section. As described on *Babel's* website, this section is 'an example of how immigrant population's presence in our country, with different origins, has made us richer with their contributions and cultural and religious manifestations' (RTVE, nd). The general tone in these stories is light and optimistic, as they try to show harmonious living together in contemporary Spain. The different episodes take the audience to places throughout the country where immigrants fully participate in local cultural traditions, ranging from artisanal sewing to religious festivities or traditional gastronomy. At the same time, Spaniards are shown as open to and interested in – even appropriating – cultural practices from other countries related to clothing, music or food.

In 'Pasión por La Passió' (Passion for The Passion), for example, *Babel* narrates the story of the small town Esparraguera in Catalonia, where

more than 1200 voluntary people, counting technicians and artists, make possible every year this play [The Passion] about the last days in the life of Jesus Christ. The show has become one of the openings towards integration for new neighbours coming from other countries. This is the case of Matea, who came from Bosnia 13 years ago and plays the flute in the orchestra. It is also the case of Silvana, who came from Uruguay 10 years ago and lives in Esparraguera. (Pasión por La Passió, 2010)

Through these group-specific episodes centring on a particular practice, *Babel* intends to highlight immigrants' 'contributions to Spanish society'. Notably, these contributions all prioritise the realm of what Gans (1979) called the symbolic realm of ethnicity, thus serving mostly an expressive function. In other words, part of the show's strategy when promoting multiculturalism involves presenting immigrant groups in terms of a series of expressive customs that can be easily incorporated into Spanish society. Thus, episodes such as 'La llamada del Candombe' (The Candombe Call), 'El grito de Mexico' (Mexico's *grito*), 'La danza de la libertad' (The Dance of Freedom), 'Guardarropa multicolor' (Multicolored Wardrobe), 'Melodías afroandinas' (Afro-Andean Melodies), 'Diwali, la fiesta india de la luz' (*Diwali*, the Indian festival of light) or 'Indonesia en un batik' (Indonesia in a *batik*), all define particular groups in terms of their dances, instruments, clothing, celebrations or food.

The topic of food even has its own regular section, *Sabores del mundo*, where *Babel*'s reporters and its audience venture inside immigrants' houses as they prepare a typical dish from their country and explain the secrets of their recipe. Thus this section invites the audience to learn different steps in the preparation of, for example, Pakistani *masala*, Colombian *sancocho* or Moroccan *pastillas*, and it suggests the possibility of enriching the Spanish culinary repertoire with these exotic meals.

A final observation with regards to *Babel*'s presentation of immigrant traditions as a way to promote multiculturalism can help us problematise the explicit emphasis on 'living together and mutual knowledge' with which the producers introduce the general 'The Report' and 'Kaleidoscope' sections. This has to do with the frequent link established in these stories between a particular activity brought to Spain by immigrants, and the impact that it has on the Spanish economy. This connection is an important part of, for example, the episode titled 'La danza de la fertilidad' (The Fertility Dance), where first, a specific dance associated with Moroccan women is introduced, and then is linked to all kinds of business opportunities based on the consumerism of artefacts related to this tradition. Thus, reporters introduce the audience to a bellydancing school, to then visit a 'shop that sells appropriate clothing for this kind of dancing'. The store is presented as 'evidence of the many businesses that have flourished around this oriental dance'.

Other episodes within this theme have an even more explicit economic tone, as they define immigrants by the consumer needs that they bring with them. In this context, the different stories present the audience with revitalised sectors and even completely new kinds of businesses that are successfully operating in Spain now, thanks to these immigrant needs.

In 'Nuevos clientes' (New Customers), immigrants are presented as 'customers' with 'needs' that require native store owners to 'adapt' and, in the process, economically revitalise their stores:

Panela, coconut milk, *mote* ... and many more. These are products that make up the everyday diet of many immigrated people who, until recently, were completely unknown here. But things have changed, and many Spanish stores have already adapted to these new customers' taste, incorporating these new products into their regular supplies. Moreover, in some cases, such as the cereal and legumes or butcher's shops, this has helped them cope with some bad times in the business. A whole world of flavours in order to address the needs of a new group. (Nuevos clientes, 2010)

As these examples show, a considerable portion of what makes immigrants' traditions attractive, and thus suitable for incorporation into 'multicultural Spain', is their potential to generate business opportunities for Spaniards. Through stories that present immigrants as active consumers, *Babel* paves the road towards their acceptability, while at the same time setting the cultural and economic ideological bases on which the possibility of becoming 'new citizens' rests.

Through the examples featured above, I have argued that an important way in which *Babel* contemplates the possibility for immigrants to become new citizens is through stories that emphasise the need for intercultural dialogue, and the benefits derived from cultural exchange. However, *Babel's* unproblematic embracement of diversity and multiculturalism is informed also by a series of assumptions that go beyond a surface reduction of immigrants' integration to the symbolic level. As seen in the different thematic threads outlined, the development of a more acceptable image of the immigrant often is achieved through a celebration of difference that is intrinsically tied to its economic aspects.

'The productive Spain': becoming citizens through economic giving

Babel's explicit emphasis on cultural exchange as the source of mutual knowledge and tolerance, eventually leading to harmonious living together, is definitely not a surprising finding, given the show's overall purpose of promoting the acceptance of immigrants among Spaniards that will facilitate their integration. However, there are at least two elements in the episodes explored so far that point to the economic dimension of immigration as a constitutive element influencing the extent to which intercultural dialogue is seen as a viable, and even a desirable, practice. First, as mentioned previously, most of the initiatives discussed in the different 'The Report' and 'Kaleidoscope' sections reveal a lack of institutional involvement in the development of good practice. Second, there is a consistent discussion of traditional immigrant practices as linked, or directly leading, to new opportunities for the Spanish economy to diversify and thus develop.

In this section I take a closer look to this other, more latent theme that permeates *Babel*. Based on the thematic coding of the episodes aired in the last three years, I argue that *Babel's* stories demonstrate that a crucial part of what makes immigrants suitable for cultural exchange, tolerance and living together, is their perceived economic status. Unlike its approach to multiculturalism, even though the show does not provide an explicit statement of purpose regarding the need to emphasise 'the productive Spain', a careful look at the stories that make up *Babel* shows that the celebration and commodification of difference on their own cannot allow immigrants to 'become citizens' (Castles, 2005). Instead,

a crucial aspect of the construction of acceptable immigrants in *Babel* involves highlighting their (perceived) cultural and class similarities, and otherwise their contribution to the Spanish economy, together with their independence from the Spanish state's resources. The show develops these associations through the consistent featuring of occupation-centred stories about immigrants, focusing either on highly-qualified professionals in order to underline their class extraction or on low-skilled and often exploited third country nationals as a way to highlight their economic giving.

One aspect of the pervasiveness of economic aspects in the construction of the new citizen can be observed in the stories related to the different occupations to which immigrant communities have access in Spain. This is an especially recurrent topic in *Babel*: of all 119 of the stories analysed in 'The Report' and 'Kaleidoscope', 25 deal explicitly with immigrant occupations. Moreover, the 53 stories featuring 'Relevant People' also centre mostly on their professions. The occupations portrayed across these different pieces constitute a diverse representation of immigrants in terms of the sectors in which they are employed, as well as their educational and skill levels. Thus the different stories depict immigrants who are shepherds, fruit collectors, miners or retailers, but also researchers, actors, artisanal workers, elite athletes, voluntary workers, intercultural mediators, business owners, writers or musicians.

Even though it is important to point out the diversity of occupations that make up these narratives about immigrants, what is more relevant for the purposes of this discussion is the broader context in which these work-related stories are embedded. In this sense, and beyond the variety of professions portrayed, there is a more salient, overarching feature across these episodes: the consistent emphasis that *Babel* places on the significant contribution that immigrants make to the Spanish economy through these activities. In the case of stories focusing on third country nationals, immigrants often are represented as willing to engage in all kinds of unwanted jobs, even when they are over-qualified for them, thus generating new opportunities for those economic sectors that have been abandoned by Spaniards.

'De oficio, pastor' (Occupation, Shepherd), for example, presents the stories of four different immigrants who are learning how to be shepherds: an occupation that is presented as on the verge of extinction due to the lack of new recruitments among Spaniards, as well as an integration opportunity for newcomers:

They came with empty pockets, after travelling a thousand roads, hoping to carve a better future. Dima, Youseff, Fara and Libardo participate in one of the courses taught at the newly-established school of shepherds, which aims to facilitate the labour market integration of young immigrants. They receive the theoretical training necessary to handle the care of cattle and then put it into practice in a farm offered by the Castilla y Leon government in the town of Gomecello. The effort, perseverance and determination to learn a job in the end get their reward. (De oficio, pastor, 2010)

The focus on unwanted, precarious or underpaid occupations is at the centre of many other episodes, thus creating a consistent representation of some immigrants as not only important sources of labour, but also as concentrating on particularly unpopular sectors and/or spaces: 'Vivir del cuento' (Living through Storytelling), *Animar el verano*

(Entertaining the Summer), 'Futuro incierto en la mina' (Undertain Future in the Mine), 'Sierra Nevada', 'Petroquímica de puertas abiertas' (Open Door Petrochemistry) or 'Vámonos al pueblo' (Let's Go to the Village) all focus on different occupations and locations that are presented as still productive, thanks to immigrants.

Taking occupations as its starting point allows *Babel* to place many immigrants' stories within a generally positive atmosphere. This focus, together with the previously discussed emphasis on intercultural exchange, is crucial when challenging the more widespread problem narrative within which the media typically discuss immigration (see van Dijk, 2005) – which is one of the show's explicit goals. However, as these examples show, many of the immigrant occupations featured in *Babel* also reinforce their location as 'Others within' (Triandafyllidou, 2001). Thus, their contribution to the Spanish economy is celebrated, but at the same time their access to the labour market is limited to those kinds of work that do not threaten the positions that those with unquestioned access to fundamental rights occupy. In this process, a specific image of the 'new citizens' starts to emerge: namely, those who can function as a commodity without endangering what is still perceived as a separate core, whose exclusionary nature and privileged status remain untouched.

A further kind of recurrent occupation-related story in *Babel* focuses on highly-skilled professionals. This theme is represented mostly by the section 'Relevant People', which is devoted almost in its entirety to present the life and work of what the show considers 'relevant people' from a wide variety of countries who now reside in Spain. As described on *Babel's* website, this section 'presents the voices of those relevant and/or popular people who, despite not having been born in Spain, live and work in our country and can be considered new citizens' (RTVE, nd).

What is striking about this section is that almost all of the people portrayed in it are artists or highly-qualified professionals. Some examples include a university professor, an oenologist, writers, dancers, singers, a theatre director or a glass worker. Moreover, most of these people's stories are introduced by a narration of their reasons for relocating to Spain. These are presented almost always as an unproblematic choice related to personal relationships, or opportunities for professional development and not as an unwanted result of material need. Thus, the 'relevant people' unproblematically presented as new citizens correspond to a very narrow stratus of society located at a particular intersection between occupation and class.

Another theme identified in the occupation stories of *Babel* works to broaden the meanings of immigration through a disruption of the rigid preference hierarchy established by EU immigration laws. Thus in these stories, there is a consistent presence of low-skilled and/or illegal immigrants together with a discussion of the unique challenges that they face. As with the examples previously discussed, an emphasis on economic contribution is also at the basis of this broadening of the notion of citizenship. However, in these stories the possibilities for immigrants to become new citizens are restricted more clearly to economic giving. Thus, the inclusion of these less desirable, unskilled or even undocumented workers takes place within a general frame of maximum productivity. In short: they give, but do not ask for anything.

In addition, the 'economic giving' theme can be observed in the different occupation stories embedded in a social issues background. The focus on most of these

episodes is on how the specific reality of contemporary Spain, which manifests itself in the conjunction of economic, legal and cultural aspects, affects immigrants in general, or a specific group within the immigrant community. Structural factors such as the economic recession, new legal frameworks or dominant cultural norms frame the narratives about how immigrants struggle to make a living in Spain. Thus some stories highlight the intersections between different disadvantaged positions and how these maximise risks for non-citizens: for example, the effects of a combination of economic and legal precariousness are seen in stories about immigrants who have lost their jobs and do not have access to state welfare, or those who have no choice but to be exploited in the black market.

Thus an important part of these narratives focuses on the difficult working conditions of many immigrants, but also – and importantly – it emphasises immigrants' lack of dependence on the state's resources. Thus, the protagonists of the different stories – mostly so-called 'third country nationals' – overcome the outcomes of their precarious positions not by making use of the public system guaranteed by the welfare state, but through interpersonal networks and/or individual solidarity. For example, an Ecuadorian construction worker who lost his job due to the economic recession relies on the income of his sister, who also provides him with housing; other unemployed immigrants turn to non-profit organisations run by their co-nationals for help; and exploited illegal workers get legal assistance from volunteer lawyers. Moreover, when their problems cannot be solved through these means, the possibility of going back to their countries of origin is presented as a viable, even desirable, alternative. This emphasis on self-sufficiency runs through reports such as 'Retratos de la crisis' (Crisis Portraits), 'El sueño se acabó' (The Dream Is Over), 'Acampados sin destino' (Camped without a Future) or 'A cualquier precio' (At Any Price).

The episodes analysed in this section demonstrate the pervasiveness of occupation-centred stories as part of *Babel's* strategy of constructing new citizens. As seen in the stories about highly-qualified professionals, the path towards new citizenship does not involve economic giving when the subjects at hand are perceived as sources of cultural or class desirability. Rather, Spain's capacity to attract these desirable immigrants is celebrated through stories about their choice to relocate to this country, and what they find appealing about it. However, with regards to low-skilled workers, the occupation-centred stories serve a rather different set of purposes. First, they present immigrants as an important source of labour in the most unwanted sectors, contributing to the Spanish economy mostly through engaging in jobs that are not being claimed by Spaniards. Second, they highlight their economic self-sufficiency and independence from the state, as their often exploitative conditions are almost never addressed through institutional means. In conjunction, these two elements turn many immigrants into economic givers: contributing to the capitalist system but not using its resources. In these narratives, new citizens are portrayed as filling the holes of Spanish economy or opening up new employment possibilities (mostly for other immigrants), but they never fully embody the material benefits that come with being an unquestioned member of Spanish society. In the end, justifying these immigrants' status as new citizens involves, for the most part, portraying them as useful economic units, while at the same time normalising the lack of institutional structures that guarantee their protection.

Conclusion

In this study I have tried to reflect on the symbolic and material bases of currently dominant understandings of multiculturalism in the EU, as well as the different dynamics of exclusion and inclusion that they may facilitate. The need to focus on the cultural and economic nature of this and other ideological constructs becomes apparent when analysing an artefact such as *Babel*, where the difference-oriented dimensions of intercultural contact are embraced through apparently innocuous, even positive representations of the immigrant experience that, at the same time, normalise their restricted access to equal life chances. As this analysis has shown, delving into the regulation of the position of those regarded as outsider minorities requires an important deconstructive tour through the recurring tropes nowadays associated with immigration, such as integration, diversity or multiculturalism.

At a broader level, this study also evidences the need to interrogate the current embracing, both within and outside of academia, of an exclusively identity-based version of culture (see Eagleton, 203), as well as its potential to preclude a much-needed expansion of the uses of culture in relation to a common material way of life (Williams, 2005), as well as to equality. As seen in *Babel*, the extent to which particular groups within a nation are presented as culturally distinct is directly proportional to 'the extent that they are economically distinct' (Calavita, 2005: 154). Thus, poverty and need are essential in the process of highlighting certain bodies and practices, and not others, as markers of diversity – even when it is presented as 'good' diversity.

My analysis of *Babel* has highlighted how, in its quest to present viewers with a 'plural, appreciative look at immigration', the show systematically embraces 'multicultural Spain' as the preferred ideological space where the integration of immigrants can take place. This involves a consistent reliance on a series of good practices, mostly confined to the realm of traditions, to foment dialogue and mutual understanding among groups.

However, and despite this official embracing of the symbolic, commodifiable aspects of culture – such as clothing, music or food – as the main driving force towards living together, a close analysis of the different episodes also reveals that the possibilities for intercultural dialogue are intrinsically tied to the perceived potential for immigrants to contribute to a 'productive Spain'. In this sense, and through the constant presence of occupation-centred stories, *Babel* normalises non-EU immigrants' economic exploitation and/or independence from the state's resources. At the same time, the show tries to disrupt the commonsense, negative connotations of the term 'immigration' through stories that focus on those whose motivation to relocate to Spain is not associated with need – mostly via the inclusion of highly-qualified professionals whose contributions are presented as crucial for the country's economic development. As a result, the range of acceptable immigrants is extended through their location in the non-threatening realms of cultural proximity and economic self-sufficiency.

Based on these findings, I would argue that the representations in *Babel* offer an undeniable space for a much-needed recognition of certain groups in Spanish society, but also that this recognition is tied intrinsically to their racialisation. In other words, even though the inescapable relation between immigrants' economies or cultures and their degree of Otherness does not explicitly rely on 'race', it enables a hierarchical classification through which some groups and not others are seen as suitable sources of cultural

exchange and cheap labour, while at the same their status as new citizens is celebrated unproblematically vis-à-vis their lack of institutional protection. In this sense, the kind of multiculturalism embraced by *Babel* can be interpreted as a strategy of whiteness (Fine, 1997; Frankenberg, 2002; Garner, 2007), since the different practices emphasised when constructing particular immigrants as acceptable reveal an intrinsic relationship between nationality, social class, ethnicity and cultural identity that separates ‘Us’ –those who do not need to earn their belonging – from ‘Them’: those who need to be placed in an unthreatening realm in order to be accepted.

As I hope to have shown throughout this article, apparently innocuous or even apparently benign contemporary keywords such as ‘integration’, ‘tolerance’ or ‘multiculturalism’ do not operate in complete opposition to systemic inequalities, and in fact may contribute to reinforcing them in very powerful ways. As Lentin and Titley (2011) put it:

[H]ighly essentialist and racialized visions of culture, indexed to a shifting vocabulary of values and ways of life, are not exceptional remnants or resistant contradictions in a socioscape permeated with the language, imagery and affective attractions of diversity. They are made and assembled in and through it. (2011: 27)

Overall, the ‘meanings and practices chosen for emphasis’ (Williams, 2005: 39) in the Spanish show *Babel* point to the constitutive relation between the so-called cultural and the economic spheres of society. As the EU continues to struggle through the most devastating crisis in its history, I would argue that this relationship needs to be at the core of our analyses as a way to understand better the origins, development and alternatives to the different practices carried out in the name of an ‘integrated Europe’.

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Notes

1. In recent years, the prime ministers of Germany, Spain and the UK have all publicly referred to multiculturalism as a failure (see Shome, 2012).
2. In Spain, most immigrants (EMI, 2007) come from Latin America and they represent 55.3% of the immigrant population, followed by those from Eastern Europe (25.6%), North Africa (13.3%) and China/Asia (5.9%).

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