Ideology in the media contents: Study on TV series addressed from the perspective of the Culture of Peace

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Abstract

Almost all the studies analyzing the media influence on the ideology and the world view are focused, at least in Spain, on news programs and political speeches. However, we are working on the hypothesis that the entertainment programs (movies, TV shows, soap operas, video games, etc.) can have even more influence on people's ideology, attitudes and beliefs than the news programs and the political speeches themselves. This paper sets out the conclusions obtained from the analysis of the main Spanish TV series in the year 2011, linked to a sample of 2024 citizens, with the aim of detecting correlations between the ideology of the audience and the prevailing ideology in the discourse of the own series.

1. <u>**Introduction**</u>

There exists an important gap when studying and addressing research works on ideology and mass media which, among other factors, comes from the fact that when we talk about ideology in the media, we almost instinctively focus our attention on the information content or the editorial and partisan lines of the newspapers. And ideology exists not only in the news or in the political statements, but in any human cultural expression, and the entertainment media content is a clear example of this. (Durham and Kellner, 2012; Kellner, 1995; Thompson, 2001).

To enrich and advance knowledge about this subject, we want to focus on the non-informative contents, namely on those audiovisual products that we consume not to be informed, but to spend a good time or to disconnect from reality (Baran, S.J.; Davis, D.K., 2009).

Therefore, we start from the theoretical assumption link to cultural studies, which states that the media contents consumed for entertainment are more influential, from an ideological point of view and in the long term, than the educational or informative contents (although information is also entertainment). We start from the idea formulated in the 60s that the process of socialization (and acceptance of ideas) is more effective through recreation and plays, and the great value in our social life of the informal against the formal (Giddens, 1964).

However, every media and cultural product, although its vocation is to entertain (and a priori non-formative) has a socializing dimension, that is, it has the ability to educate or to show ways of understanding life. What ideology do the Simpsons have or project? What cultural model does *A Game of Thrones* promote? Can the script of a TV game

show be used to legitimate a particular political, cultural or social model? Are there correlations between the ideology of our favourite series and our own ideology? To answer these questions, I want to set up an Observatory on Ideology in the Media, a project our undergraduate and graduate students can join and live in the flesh how really exciting social research is.

Ideological and editorial policies of the contents with an informative vocation are obvious and well-known, whereas these matters usually pass more unnoticed by the fiction audiences, since it is consumed to spend a good time, to escape or to disconnect from everyday problems. We say such and such a newspaper is right-winged, or that other newspaper is left-winged, but we usually are not aware of such-and-such comedy being more conservative or progressive.

In addition to starting from the theories on mass media and culture, it must be considered what has been written to date about public opinion. Until the nineties (and even the early 2000s) extensive literature on public opinion, persuasion and mass media can be found. Most of these works are essays and reformulation of classical theories such as the agenda theory. However, it is difficult to find empirical analyses. Thus, the essays and theories by Perloff, McCombs, Lakoff, Van Dijk, Thomson, Giddens, Adorno and Chomsky, among many others, have been very useful for the theoretical background of this research.

Nowadays, and the fruit of experience in persuasion campaigns, we know that the media discourse influences people's opinions, but we do not know scientifically how a film or a cartoon specifically contribute to create opinions and ideas. In the long term, we know

that disseminating over and over certain kind of messages, in a context acceptable to the public, can foment certain personal attitudes, clichés and even very solid beliefs.

Having said that, we wish to set up as a starting hypothesis that some TV comedies (where we appreciate the equality between men and women, or a natural treatment of gay people) have contributed much more to the gender equality or to the normality of homosexuality, than the governments' advertising campaigns or the political discourses. Besides, these issues such as equality or naturalness of individual sexuality are not targeted in a news program. However, they work very well when they are included in a fiction discourse, they create dailiness while at the same time set an example (pedagogy through the media) to build popular culture. This happens because we learn by imitation without feeling the pressure of the learning process, and the media contents present imitable or reproducible models of social relations (Habermas, 2002; Giddens 2010; Perez Tornero, 1994).

Besides, we wish to propose for the academic debate (without defending that our position is clear) that the media messages disseminated through entertainment contents are more convincing than any other kind of contents, because the psychological barriers are relaxed since we are not paying attention to the persuasive purpose of these contents (Perloff, 2003; Simons, 2001). In this way, the objective of this paper is to make a first exploration on what kind of ideology is disseminated by fiction TV series, to discover how these contents affect to (if they do) or have a close relation to the opinions and world views of individuals.

On the other hand, when we talk about ideology, we do not mean a set of slogans and fixed ideas link to any particular political currents or parties (Van Dijk, 1998). In my previous studies and research, I had a special interest in how the Culture of Peace could

be promoted by the media campaigns developed by public administrations (Cortés, 2007). That work took me to two landmarks that have triggered the line of research I open through this paper: **1. Institutional advertising campaigns are not actually useful for influencing the beliefs of people within a reasonable time**, and **2. Ideologies can be simplified to two of them, under the matrix of the parameters of the Culture-of-Peace Theory**. (Cortés, 2011; Galtung, 1996; Muñoz and Molina, 2009; Fisas, 1998).

Peace and violence interact within six dimensions where human beings develop their interrelations. We regard violence as any situation or action that provokes suffering or derangement/disorder to the people, animals, or the environment, even if it is not consciously intended. The six planes we refer to are:

- **Nature**: human beings, animals, plants, microorganisms, etc. Ideologies can be concerned about nature or not (e.g. we found in society the political debate whether it is more important the environmental balance or the energy costs link to consumption and to a particular model of growth).
- **People:** vital needs, dignity, social, individual or ethnic identity. Some ideological models are focused on the individual, others on the group, some on the similarities and others on the differences. Some ideologies affirm
- that each person gets what they deserve, while others believe that in some aspects the individual is born within a social framework that can mark their entire life.
- **Society**: gender, generation, social class, nationality or religion (e.g. in some societies we see violence because we find a marked gender inequality, endorsed even by the law, while in others women have reached legal equality.

- **World**: State's territorial systems: Western countries vs. Eastern countries. North and South. Within the state: capital city, civil society, rural world or urban areas.
- **Time**: Violence is not only synchronic, but it can also pass on from generation to generation or appear within a certain lapse of time.

Thus, people can interact with violence or peace in each one of those six planes in a direct or indirect, cultural or structural way (Galtung, 1996). To outline the ideological model of an individual we have to pay attention not to their actions (impossible to measure without invading their privacy) but to their opinions. People can consider themselves peaceable, and be committed to gender equality, although at the same time can defend, for example, many kinds of structural or cultural violence such as bullfighting or death penalty. If we link the Culture of Peace to the political theory, we would can say that the Culture of Peace is in the conceptual universe of the liberating progressive ideologies (taking into account how wide, complex and heterogeneous this group of ideologies is), and the culture of violence is in the universe of authoritarian and conservative ideologies (also heterogeneous and complex). To reduce that complexity and to simplify the exposition and communication of the results, we use the only distinction between ideology of peace and ideology of violence, being aware of the many nuances we miss on this first approach. In the following section, we shall explain in more detail the methodology we have followed in this work and how we have defined the ideological profile of those polled.

2. **Methodology**

The main objective of this paper is to detect whether there is a correlation between the ideology projected by TV series and the ideology of the viewers that watch those series, and also to observe whether people's ideologies influence the selection of those series.

It can be seen as banal, but it is not. The debate is taking place, because, while a person that plays violent video games such as *GTA* can be commonly branded as violent or as being consuming something objectionable, a person who has on their bookcase *The Godfather trilogy* is not thought to be the same. In other words, in some cases we make statements as if there were a correlation between the selection of the cultural products and the personal behaviour and opinions and in other cases we do not make them. In this paper we are going to discover what is true about this in regard to the consumption and selection of the favourite TV series.

To approach the subject of study we have defined (to study the correlations that could there be between the ways of seeing and understanding the world and the media consumption, we have displayed and crosschecked the data from three research basic tools in Social Sciences:

- **Survey** on a sample of 2204 people in the provinces of de Malaga, Madrid and Barcelona.
- **Content Analysis** of the nine TV series with the largest audiences produced and broadcast in Spain in 2011.
- **In-depth interview** with 57 people, in order to contrast, control and filter the results obtained in the survey.

We have taken a poll of 2024 people from the provinces of Malaga, Madrid and Barcelona, from both rural and urban areas and from the social groups, following the classification

of the population made by the *Mosaic Types*, a tool employed in advertising and marketing for the segmentation of markets and publics. In the polls we have also tried that the number of polled from each social group, is proportional to the socioeconomic reality of the country

The questionnaire is divided into four blocks of questions:

- In the first block, age and sex of the person polled is collected, as well as their level of education.
- In the second block, the aim of the questions is to know which the media consumption of the individuals polled is: what they watch on TV, which newspapers they read, which are their favourite programs or series, etc.
- In the third block of questions, the aim is to reveal how the person polled thinks about ideological and cultural issues such gender equality, the advisability of a tax system for distribution of incomes, militarism, religious questions, among many other subjects. To prepare the questions of this block we have followed a matrix (recreated from the studies of culture of peace by Johan Galtung) based on the two cultural models, the cultural model of peace and the cultural model of violence, which can be complemented with the matrix of values of a democratic social model against an authoritarian social model.
- The last block of question seeks to know the way the person polled votes (although this is not relevant to the study, since in Spain, the vote is strongly linked to the family tradition, and the results could be highly contradictory if we pay attention to this variable).

On the other hand, once the polls have been carried out, and according to the preferences of our polled and to the audience data, the series to be analysed were selected. The tool used has been a content analysis through traces of critical analysis of the discourse. From each series a minimum of three episodes has been analysed and every analysis have been submitted to a second blind review to minimize the influence of the researcher's own ideology on the results of the study.

In addition, 57 of the 2004 people polled attended an in-depth interview about the same aspects from the questionnaire, to serve as control and filter the distortions of the results, which always are provided by the polls.

Subsequently, once the results of the polls, of the content analyses and of the in-depth interviews (on the favourite series), the data collected from these three research tools were crosschecked, which gives solidity and consistency to the results presented here in an informative and preliminary way.

Therefore, we have conducted a research that reveals new data about media consumption and ideological influence in Spain; we hope this will be the first of a long series of studies that help to better understand the world, or more precisely, human beings. We hope that you will enjoy this first report and find it academically or professionally; or according to the uses and gratification theories, simply for your enjoyment.

3. <u>Analyses and preliminary results</u>

Six of the nine series studied are dramas, two are comedies and one is science fiction, which prevent from polarization in the results that can be affected by the genre, since, for example, in a comedy coarse, ironic and bad taste narrative resources can be used,

which in a drama can ring erroneous alarm bells in our content analyses. This, on the other hand, invites us to continue to improve this research tool for future works.

In this section we present, in a summarized way for reasons of space in a publication of this kind, the preliminary results obtained for each TV series studied:

3.1 *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (To Love in Troubled Times)[1]

Production company: Diagonal TV

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: History/Drama

TV Channel: TVE

Amar en tiempos revueltos is the most viewed TV series in the prime time slot. It started to be played in September 2005, but it is from 2008 when gets its best ratings of audience ratings. Nowadays we can say that after six years of broadcasting continues to maintain its some 3 million viewers every day. This series has reached up to 28% of audience Share in its best times.

In spite of the apparent neutrality of the series, in its attempt of historical documentation to reflect the society at that time, we can guess a tendency towards the Culture of Peace in its viewers. This audiovisual work intends to include characters that reflect the different social groups of the period (Spanish Civil War and early Franco years), but paying more attention to the pro-republican democratic sector. Accordingly, these characters stating to be against the dictatorial regime and having more progressive ideas appear in all the seasons providing the backbone around which the rest of characters included in the plot of the audiovisual work comes and goes. In addition, we can point out its treatment of some common issues (immigration, homosexuality, death penalty)

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[1] Content Analysis by Santiago Sánchez de Castro and Leticia Fuentes Alaminos

from an inclusive and peaceable point of view. Also, according to our polls, the audience of this series mostly vote for progressive parties (only 12.5% affirm to vote right winged parties.

Moreover, almost all the viewers of this series consider positive to pay taxes for the social construction, and that for the interest of the country the investment in education is more important than the investment in Defence.

3.2 *El Barco* (The Ship)[2]

Production company: Globomedia

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: Drama/Action

TV Channel: Antena 3

The series *El Barco* is aimed at a young audience. The average audience for the first season exceeded four million viewers, always over 20% Share.

This series projects a cultural model far from the principles of equality and respect, since it makes continuous use of arguments based on aggressiveness and violence. It is particularly serious how the gender issues are addressed in some passages of this work: the sexist approach of the script, the characters' psychological construction and the use of man-to-woman violence are totally against the principles of equality and represent a model of violent behaviour where it is even justified and exemplified the gender-related violence. Its treatment leaves out what is common or collective to strengthen individualism and to promote "the culture of least effort." The characters of the series demand rights, and at the same time they show a lack of commitment to obligations and responsibilities.

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[2] Content analysis by Ana Isabel Morales Campoy and Andrés Calvo Serrano

In regard to the situation in the political spectrum of the viewer's whose favourite series is *El Barco*, we have observed that in the items where the question was "which political party you vote for? the answers were mostly for the big parties, PP-PSOE, while to the question of how they ideologically consider themselves to be, 18% declare to be on the left, 36% on the centre-left and centre-right and an amazing 45% define themselves right-winged, very right-winged or extreme right-winged

The ideology projected by this series tends basically towards the culture of violence, and its audience, although with more moderate answers than its discourse, also tends towards the culture of violence in the set of item of the questionnaire.

3.3 *Aída* (Aida)[3]

Production company: Globomedia

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: Comedy

TV Channel: Telecinco

This series is one of the most viewed in Spain. In its premiere had 36% Share and has continued to maintain very good ratings in the following nine seasons. The series projects a cultural model closer to the culture of peace, a fact that coincides with the results obtained from its audience.

The series takes place in a working-class area in Madrid where typical characters are parodied, mainly a progressist who lived through May 68 (but from Spain, which gives him certain naivety) and an extreme right-winged nostalgic of the Franco regime. As a humoristic resource, the series takes to extremes the commonplaces and clichés link to the political ideologies of these two characters, the own values of both characters

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[3] Content analysis by Ana Isabel Morales Campoy and Andrés Calvo Serrano

perfectly matching the values of the culture of peace (the progressist) and the culture of violence (the extreme right-winged). All that addressed from the humour.

In this series we do not observe any defined political tendency, nor do we detect notable political/ideological self-definitions.

3.4 _14 de abril. La República_ (14 April. The Republic)[4]

Production company: Diagonal

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: History/Drama

TV Channel: TVE

La República has obtained some far from negligible 17% Share. This series close its first season over three and a half million viewers. This series has been played on Mondays from January to May 2001. Issues such as sexism, violence, peace, environmentalism, religious references, immigration and racist attitudes have been taken into account.

This series is set in Spain during the Second Republic, and it echoes the conflicts of this period, being very much present religion, male chauvinism and political polarization. This series was criticized by some conservative media because they consider it was too progressive. This series project both peace and violence, but the values of the culture of peace are favoured in the discourse projected by the script.

In this series, most of its audience declare themselves to be left-winged or centre-left-winged in the polls, and also their answers to the items clearly turn towards the culture of peace.

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[4] Content Analysis by Emilia Luque Bueno and Ana Isabel Morales Campoy

3.5 *Hispania, La Leyenda* (Hispania. The Legend) [5]

Production company: Bambú Producciones, SL

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: History/Drama

TV Channel: Antena 3

The average audience of this series in 2011 (its second season) is about 15% Share.

This series, maybe because of its historical approach set in the Roman Hispania, presents a cultural and ideological model where the man is the leader, and the woman is a shrewd weaver of power behind the scenes, which is linked to a very conservative view of the cultural role-play and characteristics appropriate for men and women. In its discourse the great importance of having a good army is presented, and therefore, the relevance of solving the problems through force, which makes the ideological model of the series turn towards the culture of violence.

However, we do not find through our polls a definite ideological tendency in its audience, as we find viewers with a high rate in culture of peace and also viewers with a high rate on culture of violence, and this neutralize the capacity of defining ideologically the audience of this series.

3.6 *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (Tell me how it happened)[6]

Production company: Grupo Ganga

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: Drama/History

TV Channel: TVE

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[5] Content Analysis by Javier López Aranda and David Polo Serrano
[6] Content Analysis by Hermes Cañizares Alzórriz and Amanda Serrano Barton

The series *Cuéntame cómo pasó* has as target public middle age people, over forty years old. The average audience has suffered ups and downs during its broadcasting. But we can affirm that in 2011 had an average four and a half million viewers and an average Share over 22%, which is a very important Share.

This series narrates the experiences of a family and their environment from the 60s to the advent of democracy. The sociological model is in fact of culture of peace, in spite of having a highly softened historical approach to Franco's dictatorship.

100% of the people polled affirm to believe in democracy and that you must participate in the political decisions. However it is significant that, bearing in mind the previous answers, 50% of the polled consider that immigration is harmful for the economic level of the country. In spite of that, the values of the culture of peace prevail in the rest of items.

3.7 *Gran Reserva* (Grand Reserve) [7]

Production company: Bambú Producciones

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: Drama/Thriller

TV Channel: TVE

The average audience in its first season was over three and a half million viewers, always close to 20% Share. The premiere of the first episode was played on 15 April 2010, obtaining 20.9 Share.

This is a serial of love, revenges and quarrels. The framework of the series is set in the wine-growing world of La Rioja. It brings into line the country, the city, wine containers and parties, never highlighting any dearth or poverty.

[7] Content Analysis by Pilar Tejero Durán and David Polo Serrano

The series *Gran Reserva* projects a cultural model far from principles of equality and respect, constantly using arguments based on evil and violence. The social differences are particularly latent in the series. The sexist approach of the script and the psychological construction of the characters clearly turn towards the culture of the violence. However, the audience tends towards the culture of peace.

3.8 *Los Protegidos* (The Protected) [8]

Production company: Ida y vuelta

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: Science Fiction

TV Channel: Antena 3

This is a series played at prime time and classified as a series for general audiences, aimed at families. It maintains an important place within the television landscape, with 18.2 % average; this is an average of 3.360.000 viewers, which invited to the production of a second season, also with great success, although a little reduced with 15.09 Share.

With *Los Protegidos* we have a fantasy drama where children with magic powers, through different circumstances, are let alone and eventually join and form a new family to appear normal and survive (importance of belonging to a group). A tendency towards sexist stereotype can be appreciated, although it is neutral as for culture of peace or of violence.

With respect to the use of direct violence in the narration, we emphasize that the main objective of a character is to kill his brother because he abandoned him when they were children.

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[8] Content Analysis by Marta Lupión Lozano and Rosario Serrano

The audience of this series clearly tends to the culture of peace (In almost all the items the answers were in favour of the culture of peace) and they declared themselves mostly progressist.

3.9 *La que se avecina* (What Is Coming Near) [9]

Production company: Mediaset

Year of broadcasting: 2011

Genre: Comedy

TV Channel: Telecinco

In this series the experiences of a residents' community, where all of them get on badly, are narrated. This series had in its premiere 28.8% Share and it has enjoyed large audiences in all its seasons.

Sexism and violence are the most frequent resources where scriptwriters seek humour and jokes. We also see a light tendency to sexism with respect to the narrative treatment of men and women. The psychological profiles are outlined with rough strokes, men's obsession being sex, and women's obsession money.

The series, although neutral, maybe because it is a comedy, turns slightly towards the culture of violence, and its viewers are also neutral but turning slightly towards the culture of peace.

4. Conclusions and discussion

After analyzing the nine series with most audience in the social sample we have worked with, we can order our ideas to draw the conclusions from this study and bring up some

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[9] Content Analysis by Marina Guadix and David Polo Serrano

questions for discussion and debate. We show below a table with every series analyzed for this paper, the ideological tendency they promote in its discourse and, in parallel, the ideological tendency of the public consuming them.

Table 1

**Ideology in Spanish Series and Ideology of their Audience[10]**

TV Series	Ideology of the Series	Ideology of the Audience
Amar en tiempos revueltos	Culture of Peace	Culture of Peace
El barco	Culture of Violence	Neutral-Culture of Violence
Aída	Culture of Peace	Neutral
14 de abril La República	Culture of Peace	Culture of Peace
Hispania	Culture of Violence	Neutral
Cuéntame cómo paso	Culture of Peace	Culture of Peace
Gran Reserva	Culture of Violence	Neutral- Culture of Peace
Los Protegidos	Neutral	Culture of Peace
La que se avecina	Neutral-Culture of Violence	Neutral

Source: own compilation

Chart 1

Ideology in the series produced in Spain 2011

[10] Explanation to understand the table: We use the label **Culture of Peace** when most items of the content analysis or the people's answers (in the survey a Likert scale have been used), are linked to the Culture of Peace, with at least a result of +3; **Culture of Violence** when most items of the content analysis or the people's answers are linked to the Culture of Violence with at least a result of −3; **Neutral** when adding up algebraically all the items the result is 0; **Neutral-Culture of Peace** when the value of the algebraic sum of the items is between +1 and +2; and we use **Neutral-Culture of Violence** when the value of the algebraic sum of the items is between −1 and −2.

Ideology of the series analyzed

■ Culture of peace ■ Culture of violence ■ Neutral-culture of violence ■ Neutral

11%
11%
45%
33%
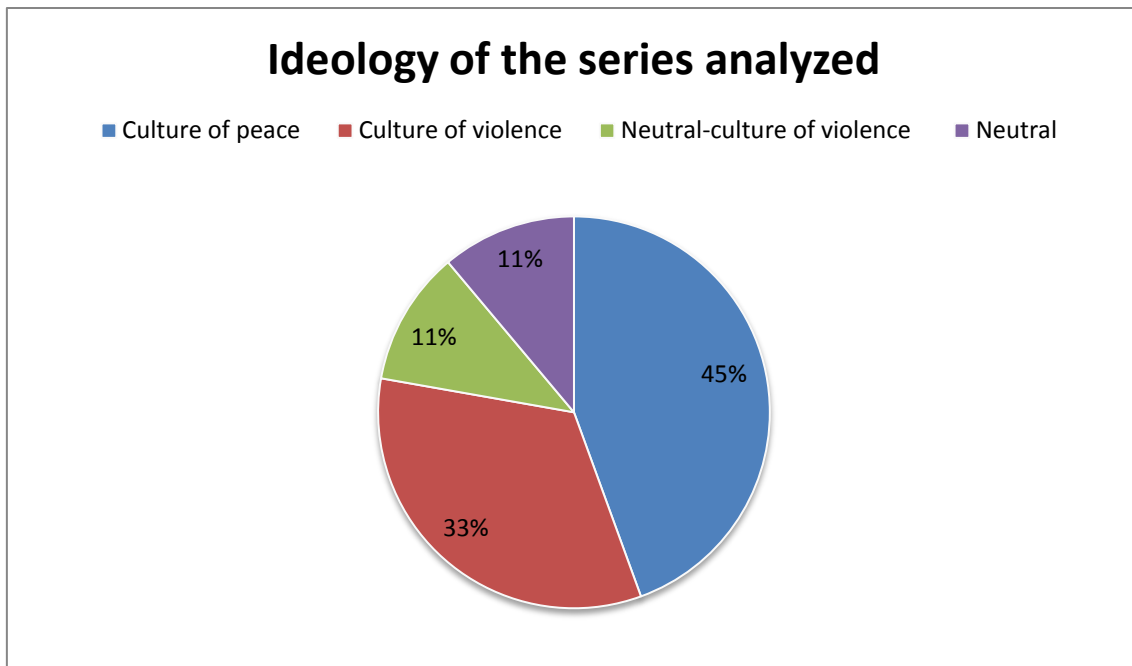
Source: own compilation

Once the data have been ordered, what we observe first is that half of the series studied tend to an ideological model of Culture of Peace, while the other half tend to the Culture of Violence. Only one series have been qualified as neutral, because in the content analysis, even finding in its discourse aspects of peace and of violence, the algebraic sum of both aspects was zero.

In regard to the ideology of the audiences (of the public linked to each series), the percentages of Culture of Peace (45% of the population studied) are similar to those of the TV series, however, the overall result for the viewers of series with Culture of Violence turn towards neutrality. This may be so owing to a masking, by the person polled, of certain positions or opinions before the pollster. We must take in account that people usually hide those opinions, although they feel are right, they do not consider them to be politically correct.

Chart 2

Ideology of the audiences

■ Culture of peace   ■ Neutral   ■ Neutral-culture of peace   ■ Neutral-culture of violence
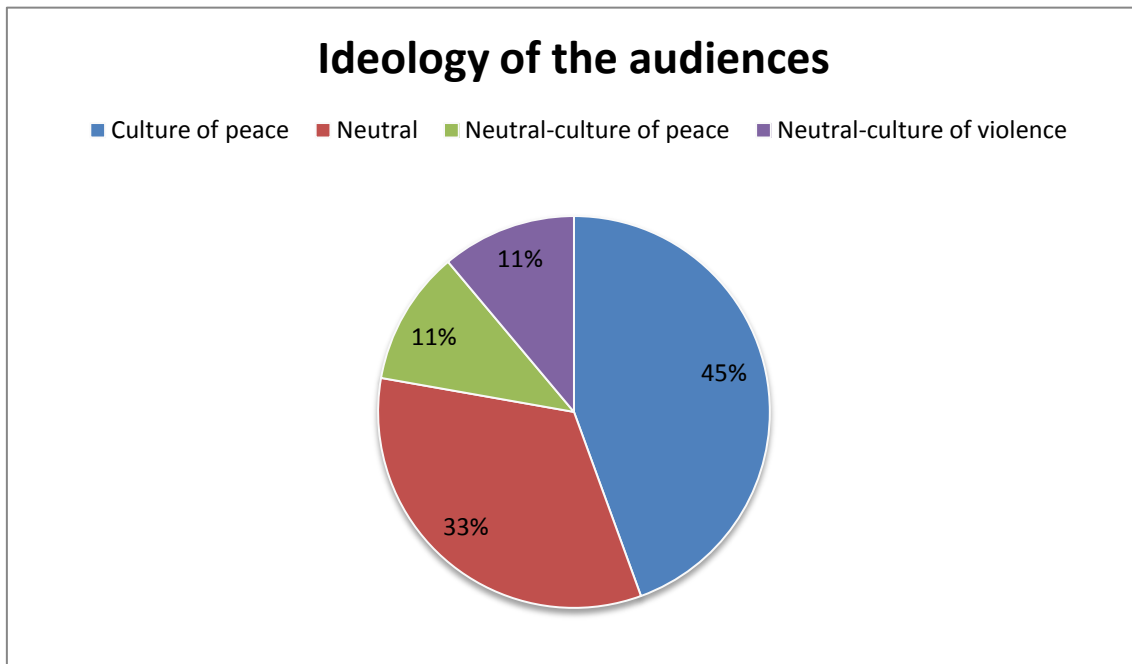
Source: own compilation

What we can certainly affirm, not taking into account any value judgements that are found outside the data obtained, is that there is a direct link between the ideology of the series and their audience when the ideological model is Culture of Peace. However, when we are observing series whose ideological model is Culture of Violence, their public appears neutral, which actually indicates that in this case their audiences are much more heterogeneous, which makes them to be ideologically blurred although individuals were ideologically (this is not the case).

This can lead us to think that the contents of the culture of violence could be more ambivalent and commercial for the TV stations because the public would not reject them on the basis of their ideological aspects. Taking this matter to the common political labels, we can affirm that there could be an important tendency for progressive people not selecting a series according to its ideology, while people considered

conservative certainly discriminate some series against others according to their ideological model.

We have confirmed these questions through the in-depth interviews, where progressive people perfectly stand TV series with conservative characters an discourse and they understand it was part of the script, while most conservative public simply decided not to watch a particular series because they considered that it was very liberal or more directly, and I literally quote one answer: "I don't watch that series because is about reds and faggots."

Therefore, it can be stated that, not on the basis of this answer that could be isolated, but for the sample studied as a whole, that people whose ideological model tends to culture of peace and to progressism are more open-minded and complex when it comes to consuming cultural products, particularly TV series.

However, this conclusion, obtained from the series, which demonstrates that the progressive public is more open when it comes to consuming TV series, cannot be obtained for other cultural products such as news (newspapers, e.g. have a readership with a clear ideological profile). This provides a partial answer to the proposed objective of detecting whether there is a correlation between the ideology projected by the television series and the ideology of their viewers. In either case, this debate opens a new query and invites to continue the research in this area.

In the introduction we set the example that commonly there are people that consider violent those people who have fun with violent video games, while they do not make the same value judgement about a person excited by film noir. What we have made evident, partially at least, is that the selection of violent cultural products is not directly

linked to the ideology of the viewer consuming them, although, surprisingly, we have not detected the same phenomenon in the opposite case.

In any case, what certainly is established and allow us to continue this line of research is that there exist correlations, not sufficiently studied, between either the ideology projected by the cultural products and their influence on society or about the influence of society on the ideological construction of the cultural products. Be that as it may, there is still some jungle left to explore.

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