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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The British working class on holiday. A critical reading of ITV's *Benidorm*

Abstract

Informed by the thesis that media representations are influential channels for the birth and reinforcement of discursive constructions, this article will focus on representation in ITV's successful sitcom *Benidorm* (2007—). The corpus analysed includes the show's first four seasons and 2009 special, i.e. all the *Benidorm* materials available on DVD at the time of writing. Given this TV production's subject matter, (1) insights will be provided into Spain's sand-and-sun tourism industry, with particular reference to the resort of Benidorm; (2) *Benidorm* will be placed within the wider British sitcom tradition; (3) humour will be treated as intersecting with power and social structures and so inseparable from social and national discourses; and (4) the interface will be explored between televised humour and the discourses of tourism, with particular reference to current British identity issues such as (4.1) how British classed identities perceive Other(ed) imagined communities, in particular, Spain and the Spanish; and (4.2) how such identities are performed spatially whilst on holiday.

Keywords: *Benidorm*; media representation; national identity; social class; television; tourism

Introduction

Even in the midst of the Internet era, television probably remains 'the major communicative device for disseminating those representations which are constitutive of (and constituted by) cultural identity' (Barker, 1999, p. 29). This assumption has prompted studies on the role played by television drama in the (re)construction of national identities, thus pointing to the direct or indirect 'narration' of the nation (Martín-Barbero, 1993; Allen, 1995; Franco, 2001). However, comedy genres, and particularly sitcom, are yet to receive full academic attention, even if a parallel can also be drawn between successful sitcom and contemporary social history (Mills, 2005, p. 8).

In the light of this, this article will focus on representation in ITV's successful sitcom *Benidorm* (2007—). The corpus analysed includes the show's first four seasons and 2009 special, i.e. all the *Benidorm* materials available on DVD at the time of writing. Given this TV production's subject matter, (1) insights will be provided into Spain's sand-and-sun tourism industry, with particular reference to the resort of Benidorm; (2) *Benidorm* will be placed within the wider British sitcom tradition; (3) humour will be treated as intersecting with power and social structures (Mills, 2005) and so inseparable from social and national discourses; and (4) the interface will be explored between televised humour and the discourses of tourism, with particular reference to current British identity issues such as (4.1) how British classed identities perceive Other(ed) 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991), in particular, Spain and the Spanish; and (4.2) how such identities are performed spatially whilst on holiday (MacCannell, 1999; O'Reilly, 2000; Andrews, 2009, 2011).

The conclusions provided will be informed by the thesis that media representations are influential channels for the birth and reinforcement of discursive constructions (Coleman, 1998; Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003; Becker, 2006; Slater, Rouner & Long, 2006; Simon & Jerit, 2007).

Working-class tourism on the Spanish costas: the case of Benidorm

The twentieth century witnessed the launch of the first national tourist boards in Europe (Barke & Towner 1999, p. 16) and the subsequent advent of the package holiday. This development was signalled through the arrival in Corsica of the first 32 British customers of tourism entrepreneur Vladimir Raitz (Bray, 2001, 2010). Raitz was to turn his attention to Spain in 1954. Prior to this, there were as few as 1.2 million overseas visitors to Spain in 1951, exploring a relatively 'undeveloped' country, coming to terms with its brutal civil war and the emergent Franco regime (Turner & Ash, 1975). In a few short years this would change dramatically and in time Spain would prove to be the 'most fertile ground for the package holiday revolution' (Bray, 2001, p. 21). The low cost of living and the support for tourism from the Franco regime were crucial in the rapid boom of tourism in Spain (see Tremlett, 2006; Lyth, 2009; Buswell, 2011).

The Spanish initially aimed for mass, low-cost tourism with the country's authorities setting about earmarking coastal villages for development (Valenzuela, 1988). In tandem with Spanish authorities, UK holiday companies searched for

destinations that could be developed quickly to meet the needs of British tourists. Benidorm itself perfectly illustrates the mass tourism model that Spain seems to have specialised in. During the 1950s the Mayor of the then village of Benidorm, Pedro Zaragoza, was to become the ‘father of modern tourism’ through his drive to develop Benidorm into a major tourist destination, with the personal support of *el Generalísimo* Franco himself (Tremlett, 2006, p. 101-2). Zaragoza gave support for easy planning permission for hotels creating a large high-rise resort that for Tremlett is ‘crowded a hundred metres up, but... is light and airy on the ground’ (2006, p. 107).

By the early 1970s Spain was already accepting a staggering 34.6 million visitors (destination360, 2013) but its coasts had become primarily dependent on the tastes of Northern Europe’s working class, with this tourist on average spending very little by world standards. As Ritchie (1993) and Tremlett (2006) observe, the Benidorm of the early 21st century has echoes of the British working-class resort of Blackpool (see Webb, 2005). Benidorm is often positioned as a ‘joke’ amongst the British press who sneer at the working class at play (Tremlett, 2006, p. 109). Such reflections echo the findings of Andrews (2010, 2011) and her work on the working-class resort of Magaluf on Mallorca, derided by the monikers ‘Megaruff’ and ‘Shagaluf’.

All in all, Spain has experienced an increase of over 4,000% in the number of international arrivals in the last half-century or so (Bote & Sinclair 1996, p. 65-66). Thus, Benidorm alone receives some 5 million, out of around 50 million visitors a year to Spain — mostly concentrated in the coastal areas of Catalonia, the Balearic and Canary Islands, Andalusia and Valencia, where Benidorm is located (see Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2010). 13 million of these are British, which automatically places the UK as Spain’s first international market.

Audiovisual representations of British working-class tourism in Spain: ITV’s *Benidorm*

Benidorm (ITV, 2007—), created by Derren Litten, stands in many respects as an oddity in the midst of the British mediascape. If seen as an instance of sitcom — it was nominated for a BAFTA award in this category in 2008 and went on to win the ‘Best Comedy’ National Television Award that same year — it is indeed quite exceptional in that it is set abroad, although it does follow in the footsteps of prior British comedy productions set in and around the Costas. If seen as a soap opera (more on this below), it

may be even more of an oddity in that it might well be the only instance of British soap successfully set in a foreign location especially when compared to *El Dorado* (BBC1, 1992-1993). It might be argued that *Benidorm*, which has now seen five series (all secured high ratings being aired at prime time on Friday evenings on ITV1), succeeds precisely where *El Dorado* had failed, somehow domesticating a foreign location by presenting it, as Mick Garvey (one of the characters) puts it, as a kind of ‘Blackpool with sun’ (1.1).

This provides *Benidorm* with that ‘kitchen sink feel’ that has long characterised much British TV fiction (Mills, 2005, p. 37-41). However, unlike traditional British comedy, drama features can indeed be detected (most notably the use of the cliffhanger device, the absence of canned laughter, or the lengthening of the average run of episodes from 30 to 60 minutes from series 3). Still, *Benidorm* is to be primarily read as choral sitcom. As such, characterisation is absolutely fundamental in it, with characters (mostly residents at the Solana Apartments) who are easily recognisable types with an illusion of tridimensionality (Wolff & Ferrante, 1998: 11-12).

The central characters of the show are the Garveys, who can be understood as representative of white (lower) working-class Northern British families that the current UK Government is in a moral panic about (see Jones, 2011). Mick Garvey is a good-hearted Lancashire slob who, in the words of his wife, Janice, is ‘tighter than a fly’s arse’. Janice is the only one that speaks for common sense in this family. Her mother — chain-smoking, foul-mouthed, over-tanned Madge — is a clear example of the ‘unruly woman’ type that so often appears in sitcom (Feuer, 2001, p. 68). She falls for, and eventually marries, Mel, a successful working-class entrepreneur ‘with five sunbed shops in Manchester’. The Garveys also have two children: Michael, a naive, hyperactive young boy best remembered for having ‘dropped a log’ in the pool during his first holiday in Benidorm; and (Chan)telle, a chubby teenage girl and single mother to mixed-race baby Coolio (named after the US rapper). As the show develops the Garveys move from funding their holidays through benefit fraud to Mel paying for their trips.

Regular characters also include a Scottish couple (penny-pincher Donald and good-hearted and ‘very accommodating’ wife Jacqueline, both ‘broadminded’ members of the ‘Middlesbrough Swingers Association’); a ‘posh couple’ (deeply insecure Martin

Weedon and miserable-looking Kate, whose main aim in life is to become a mother, a dream she cannot fulfil since Martin's sperm count is far too low); a mother and son (the instantly likeable, well-intentioned and absent-minded Noreen Maltby and her failure-of-a-son Geoff, played by comedian Johnny Vegas, 'three-times-unbeaten Lancashire quiz champion'), and a gay couple (overweight drama queen Gavin and partner Troy). The only regular characters who are non-residents at the Solana but members of staff are Janey (a rude, middle-aged Liverpudlian who supervises the reception and poolside areas) and, most prominently, Mateo, the only Spaniard in the show.

In typical sitcom fashion, most of these represent 'normal'ⁱ people in an everyday context (in the particular case of *Benidorm*, a cheap, all-inclusive holiday), and are all best seen as flesh-and-blood characters (Mills, 2005: 7), with 'shades and facets of each of them that we can recognise in ourselves and people we know' (Kelsey, 1999, p. 124; see also Brenner, 1992, p. 138), which further justifies the categorisation of *Benidorm* as sitcom.

The polysemy of the humoristic media text. A reading of *Benidorm*

According to Critchley, 'one laughs at jokes one would rather *not* laugh at. [...] Our sense of humour can often unconsciously pull us up short in front of ourselves, showing how prejudices that one would rather not hold can continue to have a grip on one's sense of who one is' (Critchley, 2002, p. 74-75). The complexity of the humoristic text is all the more evident should we consider the specificities of sitcom in general, and British sitcom in particular, the pleasures of which, as Mills reminds us, come largely 'from the context of consumption. Comedy's social role is often assumed to be that it critiques and examines social systems; yet it can also be one which binds groups together at the moment of consumption' (Mills, 2005, p. 142). This somehow accounts for the relatively frequent use of images and references which might elsewhere be deemed offensive, since 'comedy is assumed to function as an arena in which the unsayable can be voiced' (Mills, 2005, p. 144). And, interestingly, it also sheds light on the possible target(s) of the humour found in *Benidorm*.

In the light of this, this article offers a thematic analysis (see Pawson, 1995) of *Benidorm*, providing evidence of recurrent patterns leading to what can be seen as representative images that the show provides of, first, Spain and the Spanish; and,

secondly, British tourists on the Spanish costas. This should prove relevant since Mills identifies one of the main differences between US and British sitcom in that, whereas the former ‘often invites us to laugh *with* its characters’, the latter offers pleasure in us laughing *at* them (Mills, 2005, p. 41-42).

Images of Spain and the Spanish

It can be assumed that the show’s very title, a household name for millions of Britons, must trigger rather specific images of Benidorm and, probably, the whole of Spain in the minds of viewers. It shall indeed be argued that the image of Spain in the English/British ‘imagiNation’ (Redfield, 1999) also transpires in the show. In doing this, we will also be clearly relating *Benidorm* to ethnic humour (Critchley, 2002, p. 12). Let us not forget that, as Hall would put it, ‘all identities operate through exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects’ (1996, p. 15).

Viewers may at first be surprised to find how very little of Spain they get to see in *Benidorm*. Most scenes are shot on the premises of the Solana Apartments, using real Benidorm hotel locations, and this may be seen to be in accordance with the British and US sitcom indoor shooting tradition (Wolff & Ferrante, 1998, p. 6-7) but it also clearly serves a purpose. As Mick Garvey and the Stewarts constantly remind us, why should anyone want to leave the premises or take any spending money with them when theirs is an all-inclusive holiday?

British tourists in this context are not too interested in mingling with the local population — or this is at least what representation in *Benidorm* suggests. Characters generally perceive Benidorm, metonymic for the whole of Spain, as a cheap destination attracting ‘pikey breeders [...] [a]ll sitting in their Primark clothes singing country and western songs while they force-feed their boss-eyed ginger kids buckets of turkey twizzlers’ (Gavin, 1.1). Their first impression of the country involves a mosaic made up of poorly furnished rooms with no air-conditioning (and so too hot to sleep in) (1.1), toilets that do not flush (1.1), pools that are far from meeting the most basic standards of hygiene (1.6) and entertainment venues where the star attraction is a woman in her 60s with one leg up on a chair ‘pulling the flags of all nations out of her vagina’ (1.2).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, most of the Solana residents are presented as showing little or no interest in the local culture — ‘the only culture these people have is between their toes’, as Gavin puts it (2.4). Predictably, they want to eat a ‘good English fry-up’ and not what they perceive to be the local food (‘frogs’ legs and all that rubbish’, Madge, 1.3), including things that ‘are looking at you’ (Janice, 1.5).

Benidorm, presented as ‘Blackpool with sun’ (Mick, 1.6), seems to serve no purpose other than provide some local colour and background images for the show’s plots. Such local colour is based on completely stereotypical, out-of-place images of (mostly Southern) Spain, thus completely ignoring the country’s cultural diversity and, most significantly, the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the Valencian Country, which is home to Benidorm. Flamenco-inspired, Spanish guitar music is often used to introduce a new scene; the pool bar at the Solanas is gracefully ornated by a large two-dimensional figure of a black bull with swinging genitalia as well as a pair of cheap flamenco figurines. Large bullfighting posters welcome tourists at Alicante Airport (3.1). It is, therefore, clear that the image prevails of a hot, fiesta-driven country inhabited by not very hard-working people (‘No wonder these Spanish have a kip in the afternoon’; Janice, 1.1), with dark looks (‘You know what? The tan, the dark hair, the Spanish accent...I think she might be on to something there’; Mick, 3.3) This of course leads to what may easily be seen as a somewhat patronising view of the country and its people, presented as a ‘noble savage’ population at the best of times. This is perhaps best seen at the beginning of series 2, when Martin and Kate arrive at the largely unspoilt town of Altea. The local residents are peacefully engaged in their daily activities: an old lady sweeps the entrance to her quaint, flower-covered house. Someone else gives a flower to Kate as they ascend the quaint steps to their hotel. A Spanish guitar player regales them with an impromptu concerto in front of the church. A well-intentioned local picks up Martin’s wallet which he had inadvertently dropped on the floor.

However, this is nothing but a charming façade concealing a very different reality: Martin and Kate’s room at their quaint little hotel in Altea has been double-booked and they are moved to its sister hotel, the Solana Apartments in Benidorm (2.1). This is certainly closer to the prevailing general image of Spain to be obtained upon watching *Benidorm*. Even though the Spaniards are not to be denied a certain flair and charm, their country is looked down on, sometimes patronisingly (‘Not a bad cup of tea

considering they're foreigners' — Madge, 2.3; 'I wonder if they do pile cream out here' — Madge, 2.3) and often disdainfully. Thus, Madge would ironically wait and see her (foreign-born) local GP rather than a Spanish doctor (1.5):

Madge: 'I've not been [to the toilet] since Tuesday [and it's Friday].

Janice: Don't you think you should see the doctor?

Madge: What, out here? You must be joking. They won't have any English doctors, not out here. I'll wait till I get home, see Dr Kundu.

Janice: Dr Kundu is from Pakistan.

Madge: Oh, yeah. But his wife is from Rotherham.

Not surprisingly, the image of the Spanish Health System is quite poor, featuring hospitals with crammed rooms, unsympathetic, careless staff (Special 2009); or surgeries in which doctors can tell whether somebody is pregnant 'just by looking at you' (Special 2009). The police force do not fare any better: they are naïve enough to believe the silly fibs that Geoff tells them (3.5), and to be outwitted by Mel at a rare critical moment (Special 2009). The same applies to the legal system and justice in Spain. When Mick is arrested after punching Mel in the face, Jacqueline quips: 'if Mel dies, they'll just lock him up in prison and throw away the key' (Special 2009).

Images of Spain and the Spanish are all perfectly summarised in the only significant regular Spanish character: Mateo. Just like another character that might have distantly served as a source of inspiration (Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*),ⁱⁱ Mateo is not played by a true Spanish actor (Jake Canuso). Although some aspects of the character may have been inspired by Manuel (whose utter stupidity Basil Fawlty largely attributed to his being from Barcelona), Mateo, in fulfilling the sexual needs of the British tourist, lives up to the stereotype of a Spanish waiter as perceived in British popular culture (Apter, 1982; Jaworski, Thurlow, Lawson & Ylanne-McEwan, 2003a; Hughes & Bellis, 2006) and seems to embody most if not all of the characteristics that Spaniards are endowed with in the show.

He certainly has the dark good looks that several women romanticise about, and may serve as a poolwatcher, waiter, security guard, receptionist, porter... but also a flamenco dancer (3.5) and even a matador (2.4). Above all, however, Mateo is a ruthless heart-throb who has made it his mission in life to seduce the attractive residents at the

Solana Apartments, both women and men (Troy falls for him, 1.4). But Mateo is not only a 'shifty sod' (1.5) that finds it impossible to remember his romantic conquests from previous years but he can also be easily bribed (2.3), and may well cheat in competitions (2.3) but he is ultimately an unreliable (3.5), superstitious man who resorts to prayer in the face of adversityⁱⁱⁱ (2.5) and is also equally easily outclevered by the British 'technicalities' ('Us Brits have been winning by them for centuries'; Donald, 3.1).

In this light, it can hardly be coincidental that the vast majority of the (mostly explicit but also implicit) occurrences of the word 'Spanish' or 'Spaniard' in the script collocate in contexts with clearly negative connotations.^{iv}

British tourism and social class

Even though *Benidorm* provides images of Spain and the Spanish, analysed above, the fact remains that most of the characters in the show are British. For Lockyer (2010), although the sending up of the diverse dynamics and intricacies of the British class system has been a central ingredient of British televisual comedy since the 1950s, there is a comparatively small number of detailed critical analyses of British class comedy (see Mills, 2005). In drawing on the work of Medhurst (2007), this study utilises a number of his discursive themes drawn around social class that are present in comedy in undertaking its analysis of the characters in *Benidorm*.

In particular, through drawing on Medhurst, the present study focuses upon (1) clashes between members of different classes who are presented as having little, if anything, in common; (2) a critique undermining of the social position of the middle class; and (3) how the experiences, lifestyles and behaviours of specific social classes are ridiculed for the viewer (2007, p.145). In particular, the working-class individual and working-class family unit in the setting of *Benidorm* are key concerns for this article. As Scott (1994, p. 938) reminds us, 'the individual is the basis for allocation to class situations, but the family, as a demographic unit, is central to social class formation'. It should also be noted that particular landscapes (home, the street, work place and, in this instance, tourist sites) are the geographical places where social class is performed and experienced within quotidian lives.

For Wagg (1998), the media have avoided representations of the working class, and where they have been depicted, this has often been based on stereotyping alone. As Jones (2011, p.127) outlines, ‘a YouGov poll at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 2006 revealed that most people working in television thought that Vicky Pollard^v was an accurate representation of Britain’s white working class’. The constructing and transmitting of such stereotypes reveals both the power of the cultural intermediaries. Those holding powerful positions in both old and new media, such as the new middle class, are the ones who are most successful in transmitting ideas concerning which lifestyles are deemed to be desirable and which ones are not (see Lawler, 2005). However, caution is required so as not to position the viewer as a passive consumer of stereotypical representations of social class: the viewer does not just passively consume media images (Skeggs et al. 2008). How social class is witnessed and reconfigured when watching television is dependent not only upon moral positions adopted when viewing shows, but also through the various forms of authority available to the viewer. In the case of *Benidorm*, it can be argued that some viewers will possess various forms of authority and cultural capitals to ‘be in on the jokes’ and stereotypes presented whereas, for others, *Benidorm* will present an accurate representation of the white working-class mass tourist at play — one that is to be either embraced or avoided at all costs (see Jones, 2011).

In consuming specific tourist sites and lifestyle experiences, new social capitals can be gathered, with their value dependent on whom else is present and how that experience is shared (see Mowforth & Munt, 1998). The struggle between different classes for greater value to be given to their cultural meanings and experiences is key to modern tourism. This struggle creates a growing spatial distinction between the middle-class and the working-class tourist, where the middle class seek out ‘unspoilt’ or long-haul destinations away from the mass package-holiday tourist (Curtin, 2010). As Mantecon and Huete (2008) found, middle-class British tourists still head to Spain, but they seek an ‘authentic Spain’ away from the mass tourist resorts. Such developments echo the move of nineteenth-century middle-class tourists in the UK away from British resorts as the working class began to discover the seaside (Swinglehurst, 1982; Barnes & Hoose, 1999).

In engaging with social class it is possible to theorise how tourism developed in different sites and in different ways, where specific places become associated with the

working class (Turner & Ash, 1975; Urry, 2000) whilst others become associated with the middle class (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003; Casey, 2009, Andrews, 2011). The perceived social class of tourist sites and those present within them has consequences for those who may make claims to belong, and those who do not. For example, in *Benidorm* Martin and Kate position themselves and are positioned by the other characters as not belonging. In the third series, as Martin's mother arrives to 'rescue' him from Benidorm, Janice Garvey asks Mick, 'Who is she? She doesn't belong here, she is far too posh' (3.5). Later in the same episode, Madge verbally abuses Martin's wife Kate for being 'that stuck up cow'; in response, Kate strongly rebukes her and her 'council chariot',^{vi} whilst affirming her 'disgust' for the 'dump' that is the Solanas.

In the opening episode of the second series, Martin and Kate are standing at the luggage carousel at Alicante airport. He is wearing a linen suit, whilst Kate has her pashmina casually around her neck. As they discuss the location of their holiday with another tourist (wearing cropped sports trousers and a football shirt), he is bemused that they are not going to Benidorm. He asks, 'Do you know you won't get an English breakfast there?', adding 'there is hardly any British up there, not like in Benidorm'. Both Kate and Martin, through their middle-class identity and knowledge, communicate that to their relief they 'know' this. As they arrive, Altea is (re)presented as the 'other' to Benidorm, tranquil, unspoilt, clean; the 'authentic Spain'. Their relationship with Benidorm can be theorised as 'anti-tourist', where social capital is acquired and maintained (Gustafson, 2002, p. 900).

For the new middle classes, competition for cultural capital in travel involves pursuing authenticity and exclusivity, a crucial axis of differentiation and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). As Lawler (2005) has shown, the middle class are key agents in deciding what experiences, consumption patterns and identities are worthwhile, and which others are positioned as *passé*, tacky or lacking. As the working class gain access to tourist sites and experiences once reserved for the middle-class tourist, the middle class utilise their cultural and economic capitals to seek out new destinations and new experiences that allow them a physical distance away from the working-class tourist. For Lockyer (2010, p.124), such class difference and inequality represent the fluid and dynamic characteristics of social class, where it is continually negotiated, renegotiated and reconfigured across varying social and physical landscapes. In doing so, the middle class create distinction from the working class who have become increasingly close in

spatial terms (see author, 2014). Such distinction is central in marking out working-class tourists, their tastes and bodies as the ‘other’ to middle-class tourism, taste and bodies. Past holidays and experiences consumed are used by middle-class tourists to present themselves as knowledgeable to other tourists (Curtin, 2010). Their narratives frame their class backgrounds, aspirations and cultural capitals — distancing themselves against the mass working-class tourist and the ‘inauthentic’ mass tourism they represent (Mordue, 2009). This middle-class traveller is positioned as *the* desirable tourist by tourist authorities and local councils alike; ‘When we talk about quality we mean acceptable level of... a level of tourists who have a certain spending power’ (Bloc-Els Verds, Spanish town councillor quoted in Mantecon & Huete, 2008, p. 203).

Reflecting the popularity of both the show and resort of Benidorm, the ITV1 (UK) breakfast show *Day Break* ran three days of live programmes from Benidorm in August 2011. In the background of the live camera shots were British tourists, their bodies and appearance making them appear like extras from the show. As these real tourists danced and chanted ‘England, England’ in the background of a camera shot, one of the show’s hosts back in London asked, ‘I wonder what the Spanish really think of us?’ However, through her comment and tone, she positioned herself against this group of tourists, whilst asking middle-class viewers what they and the Spanish think of *them*, the white working-class tourist and the embodied performances of their ‘unsophisticated’ classed identity (see Lockyer, 2010; Skeggs and Wood, 2012).

The research of Andrews (2005, 2006, 2010, 2011) upon working-class tourism in the Mallorcan resorts of Magaluf and Palma Nova has contributed significantly to understandings around working-class mass tourism. One of Andrews’ (2011, p. 3-4) immediate observations concerning both resorts is that they are predominantly ‘British’, white, heterosexual and working class, with neither making much reference to Spanish or Mallorcan culture. Andrews’ description of Magaluf provides imagery not dissimilar to that of Benidorm. The works of O’Reilly (2000) and Bowen and Schouten (2008) have found similar characteristics of resorts and retirement destinations in other areas of Spain. In their research, resorts popular with British tourists and ex-pats appealed to a mainly white, heterosexual, working-class tourist and resident, attracted by both the climate and the familiarity of the many British amenities on offer.

Participants in the work of Andrews understood Palma Nova as offering a 'better class of tourist'; where there was perceived to be less noise and anti-social behaviour. In making claims to better social, cultural and economic capitals, some of her working-class participants position themselves as the 'better other'^{vii} (Andrews, 2010). In *Benidorm*, distinction from other working-class tourists is utilised by The Oracle. On seeing the Garveys arrive (2.1), he comments, 'By 'eck, look at that lot, they're rough... this place is going to the dogs'. In the third series, when the Garveys get into a fight (3.4), Janey, in her attempts to re-take control of the pool area, demands, 'Take your episode of Jeremy Kyle elsewhere' (see Adib & Guerrier, 2001).^{viii} As Andrews shows, ways of 'doing holidays' are not based on a working/middle class binary alone. Working-class tourists draw upon past experiences, tastes and knowledge to access the 'better' resort and create distance from other working-class tourists.

People draw upon the describable features of places in constructing their identities, making claims to belong in certain places by virtue of the type of behaviour or identities other people exhibit (O'Reilly, 2000; Ryan, 2002; McCabe, 2005). Martin and Kate seek out holiday experiences that they understand to have a value that positions them apart from the other characters at the Solanas. They visit the 'Old Town' in Benidorm (1.2) in search for its authentic cuisine, culture and architecture. Interestingly, in the first three series Gavin and Troy (1.2), Donald and Jacqueline (3.3) and The Oracle (3.3) leave the confines of the hotel and head into the old town district too. However, their (exceptional) use of the old town is presented as an engagement with its large gay scene and the commercial entertainment attached. Later, in series four (4.5), Gavin desires to experience the 'real' Benidorm, so his holidaying friend (Kenneth) suggests the 'Benidorm Museum of Culture'. Upon arrival they learn it has been closed for a number of years:

Gavin (angrily): 'Well I would say I was surprised but of course that would be a filthy lie'.

Kenneth: 'I don't understand it, it is in the guide book!'

Gavin (grabbing Kenneth's guide book): '*Benidorm on a Budget*, 1999?'

Gavin's lack of surprise at the closure of a museum dedicated to Benidorm's 'culture' suggests that Benidorm has no culture worthy of a museum. At this point Kenneth suggests a nearby beach:

Kenneth: 'There is a little cove beach down the road'

Gavin (very angrily): 'Well I hope they haven't moved it since 1999!'

On arrival Gavin is overjoyed at finding an undeveloped 'authentic' Spanish cove without another holidaymaker in sight. Unbeknown to Gavin, Kenneth had known all along that the museum had closed down. His interests lie in the gradual arrival of increasing numbers of gay male nude sunbathers, and the sexual exploits they may promise. Other than Gavin, the working-class characters of *Benidorm* are not presented as seeking out Spanish culture, merely the delights of Benidorm's night-time economy or potential sexual exploits as presented on its beaches.

Seeking the authentic in Benidorm?

Much of the action in *Benidorm* takes place in two key areas — around the hotel swimming pool and at the hotel's bar and entertainment venue 'Neptune's'. The concern of the Garveys and other characters present is rarely the search for an 'authentic Spain' (Weller & Lea, 1998; Gustafson, 2002). Their focus is presented to be the sun, all-inclusive alcohol and food, along with the nightly (British) entertainment; as Huete argues, 'Benidorm is a leisure town par excellence' (2003, p. 3). The characters within the show are given little reason to leave the confines of the Solanas, the beach being presented as a threatening, over-consumed, crowded and uncontrolled space that cannot offer the controlled safety of the hotel (1.6).

Mass tourists are positioned as seeking out a series of pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1964; Turner & Ash, 1975; Smith 1978). These inauthentic performances and staged realities are commodified so that tourists can consume cultures in quick, short periods of time. MacCannell (1999), in utilising Goffman's (1972) dramaturgical model, theorises 'layers of authenticity' in the tourism experience. MacCannell suggests that levels of authenticity exist, ranging from a 'front region' — inauthentic social space such as 'Neptune's' — to the back 'authentic region' that tourists may never access. As Jaworski et al. have theorised (2003; see also Jaworski, Ylanne-McEwan, Thurlow & Lawson, 2003), tourists will often have limited contact with locals. Most contact occurs when locals take on the roles of 'helpers, servants, experts or part of the local scenery' (Jaworski et al, 2003:135). In their jobs serving tourists, locals may create the illusion of closeness and friendship.^{ix} For example, the barman Mateo is portrayed as only being polite, helpful or kind when he wants something that usually involves seeking money or

a sexual relationship with one of the tourists. His sexual desires represent other imagery of the hyper sexual Mediterranean man, similar to Costas, the bar owner in *Shirley Valentine* (see Hughes & Bellis, 2006; Casey, 2010).

In a further analysis of authenticity, it is worthwhile drawing upon Cohen's (1988) development of 'tourist modes'. In theorising *Benidorm*, Cohen's 'recreational mode' and the 'diversionary mode' are useful in understanding tourist motivations and experiences of the characters. Cohen's recreational mode positions tourism as just one form of entertainment open to the masses, akin to going to the cinema, or even watching television. Recreational tourists enjoy their trips because they restore physical and mental powers, giving tourists a sense of well-being, as for Gavin and Troy or Donald and Jacqueline, for example. These tourists accept 'make believe' or the pseudo events as described by Boorstin (1964) and embrace 'commercialisation, the inauthentic, the trivial, the buying of signs rather than reality' (O'Reilly, 2000, p. 18). Those tourists characterised by the diversionary mode undertake their holidays in an escape from the boredom and routine of their everyday lives. This type of tourist mode does not establish adherence to a meaningful centre — it only makes Weber's (1983) alienation endurable. It could be argued that the Garveys are representative of this form of doing tourism. Their yearly trips to Benidorm allow them to escape from the harsh economic realities of their lives back in Manchester, before returning to a reality which is seemingly unchanging.

As the characters in *Benidorm* suggest, their quest on holiday may have less to do with authenticity and more with Boorstin's 'pseudo-events' or Bakhtin's (1984) 'carnavalesque'. *Benidorm* represents an atmosphere of freedom reigning, where the everyday ordering of time, work and familial commitment may be suspended and the holidaymaker becomes organised in their own way (see Webb, 2005).

Discussion and concluding remarks

Benidorm invites viewers to ponder how classed identities are performed on holiday. Martin and Kate are represented as clearly concerned with distinction from mass working-class tourists. However, it is the middle-class tourists that are 'out of place and time' in *Benidorm*, where the Garveys and other working-class characters can claim belonging at the Solanas. In other words, Benidorm is presented as a resort where the cultural capital(s) of the British, white, working classes have worth and value (at least,

as perceived from within). Distinction is created against the other, where Martin and Kate (and their associated middle-class values) become ‘dangerously close’ to spoiling working-class holidays and the ‘carnavalesque’ atmosphere of Benidorm.

As some of the working-class characters in *Benidorm* show, working-class tourists draw from understandings concerning a ‘better class of tourist’ or ‘better resorts’ in differentiating themselves from other working-class tourists (Andrews, 2005). The varied working-class characters in the show and the different identity variables that help create an illusion of tridimensionality (Dancyger, 1991), along with references made to the varied lives they have left ‘back home’, remind us that ‘the working class’ are not one homogeneous group. The Garveys may represent the ‘problematic’ white working class (Jones, 2011), but they are just one example of how people ‘do class’ and its complex intersections with lived identities (see Taylor, Hines & Casey, 2011). As the characters perform their varied identities, it is their search for leisure and fun that are the common denominators to their stay in Benidorm. The characters are presented as not seeking access to an ‘authentic Spain’ (MacCannell, 1999). However, as Waller and Lea (1998) have pointed out, measuring what is ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ is fraught with problems.

The continued success of the show and, more importantly, the resort of Benidorm itself, reflects a worth for a much wider engagement with working-class tourism and its embodied experiences. Working-class tourism, as represented in *Benidorm*, may thus suggest that the shift should be made from discussing what ‘authentic’ Spain may be to inquiring into the different experiences and perceptions of Spain, including these resorts and the many experiences they offer.

On the other hand, the fact cannot be ignored that *Benidorm* is a sitcom and, as such, should offer pleasure in us laughing ‘at [its characters]’ (Mills, 2005, p. 41-42). Accordingly, *Benidorm* not only provides interesting insights into British classed experiences of Spain but may also be seen to invite reflection on, if not criticism of, such British classed experiences: ‘humour [...] indicates, or maybe just adumbrates, how [shared life-world] practices might be transformed or perfected’ (Critchley, 2002, p. 90). Thus, viewers may be invited to question Martin and Kate’s othered position in the show, as representative of a social class most characters do not feel they belong to; and even the othered position of Spain and the Spanish.

In this respect, evidence has been provided that this representation is often either patronising or degrading, very much in consonance with the underlying representation of the country found in the numerous articles on the experiences of real working-class British tourists in Spain that become the staple of UK tabloids in the summer months. Before jumping at conclusions, however, it is worth taking into account that this representation often results from the lines said, and opinions expressed, by the different characters. If *Benidorm* is perceived to be ironic about the subsample of the British population therein represented, it might be argued that this potential irony somehow taints their views on the host culture in the show. Indeed, none of these characters seems to know much about the world beyond their little suburban existence. Even Geoff ‘The Oracle’, a quiz champion, is beaten by the Garveys thanks to the valuable contribution of Michael (1.5), who is not even 10 years old. Crucially, however, this may well shed some new light as to how to interpret the resulting image of Spain and the Spanish. In particular, it may cast doubt on the validity of this image as a component of the British working-class imagiNation: humour ‘can provide information about oneself that one would rather *not* have’ (Critchley, 2002, p. 74-75).

Benidorm might thus be seen to distance itself from the views of its characters. Yet, this is not all there is to it. As suggested above, Spain and the Spanish, as re/presented in *Benidorm*, do not exclusively depend on the views that the British characters have of them. Regardless of their opinions, the image remains of a largely inefficient, quaintly retarded country inhabited by a superstitious, easy-to-fool population.

This is also in accordance with another aspect concerning representation in *Benidorm*. It has been noted that characterisation is absolutely essential in sitcom, typically successful sitcom characters being easily recognisable types with an illusion of tridimensionality. This tridimensionality is certainly a fact in *Benidorm*, since characters evolve and become far more likeable as the show progresses. Thus, the Garveys become firmly united as a family. Chantelle matures, taking her new status as a young mother more seriously. Noreen is not the innocent dupe she seems and subtly encourages her son Geoff to evolve as a person, now romantically involved with Chantelle. The Stewarts, in spite of their ‘broad-minded’ approach to life, never really mean any harm and are always ready to help fellow residents. Gavin and Troy are seen to move on to a new stage in their relationship, entering a civil partnership and even accepting Troy’s

well-concealed fatherhood — all of which contributes to the visibility of alternative family units in early 21st century Western societies.

There is, however, one exception, and this is, quite unsurprisingly, Mateo. For this character, there seems to be no past and no future. His selfish, insensitive approach to life remains unchanged. Such characteristics may reflect recent representations of Spain in the British media as selfish (the closing of businesses for siesta), insensitive (the demolition and repossession of British expatriates' Spanish homes) and unchanged (an inability to adapt successfully to harsh economic times). After all, as Jacqueline would put it, 'I'm not being racist, but the Spanish can be a bunch of nutters, can't they?' (Special 2009).

Acknowledgements

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ⁱ Normality extends to the gay couple, Gavin and Troy. They continue the long history of British camp comedy in their bitchy remarks directed towards the heterosexual tourists (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). However, unlike earlier portrayals of gay men as rich and/or hypersexual (Casey, 2007), they are refreshingly real. Their acceptance by the other (heterosexual) tourists belies the diversity that Benidorm embraces. Should this reading be accepted, it could be argued that it is promiscuous Donald and Jacqueline who stand out, positioned as the 'opposites' of the homonormalised Gavin and Troy.

ⁱⁱ *Fawlty Towers* (BBC2, 1975-1979) was a British sitcom that remains a favourite among the British audience even today. Set in a family-run hotel in the English seaside resort of Torquay, one of its most memorable characters was Manuel, a useless Spanish waiter with poor organisational skills and a very poor command of the English language.

ⁱⁱⁱ This certainly mirrors the way the Spanish population is portrayed: Madge, all dressed in white, is mistaken for the Pope (3.6) and many fall on their knees and start praying fervently at the sight of her.

^{iv} Examples abound of the word 'Spanish' being used not to provide any necessary information but as mere epithets. Interestingly, the same usage has been identified by Mădroane (2009) and Wawrzyczek (2010) and for the words 'Romanian' and 'Polish', respectively, in the British tabloid press. Some significant examples illustrating this 'Othering' strategy include:

-Martin (commenting on the Solanas Apartments pay-per-view TV): 'One euro, 30 minutes. All-inclusive, the robbing Spanish bastards' (1.2).

-Troy (apologising to partner Gavin for his short affair with Mateo): 'Gavin, please, I was drunk and some dodgy Spanish waiter jumped me' (1.5).

-Geoff (about Mateo): 'Look, he's trying to bum me now. Get off me, you Spanish poof' (1.5)

-Madge (to Mateo): 'You dirty, twisting, Spanish bastard!' (2.3).

-Gavin's mother: 'I can't stand Spanish waiters' (2.7).

-Mick (to policemen) 'All right. Get your dirty Spanish hands off me' (Special 2009).

^v Vicky Pollard was one of the recurrent characters in *Little Britain* (BBC, 2003-2006). Played by Matt Lucas, abusive, foul-mouthed Vicky can be easily seen as a satirical representation of British urban chav subcultures.

^{vi} Madge, although not disabled, drives around Benidorm in a mobility scooter. Her reasons for undertaking this is that she '*shouldn't have to walk*' whilst on holiday. The association of mobility scooters with council housing reflects a wider belief that 'perfect bodies' represent the wellbeing associated with exclusive holidays, with disabled tourism seen as its inferior 'other' (Shaw and Coles, 2004). The imperfect or impoverished body has been positioned as representing less desirable forms of holiday undertaking (see Waller and Lea, 1998; Casey, 2010b).

^{vii} Social class is but one factor in tourism consumption (O'Connell and Williams, 2005), other identity variables such as age, gender (Andrews, 2011) and sexuality (Casey, 2009) intersect to influence an individual's ability to travel.

^{viii} Jones describes the *The Jeremy Kyle Show* as a place where 'week after week dysfunctional individuals from overwhelmingly working class backgrounds are served up as daytime entertainment fodder [...]: a human form of bear-baiting' (2011: 123).

^{ix} Casey (2009, 2010b) has problematised this simple worker/tourist spatial binary, showing that tourists will and do engage in long term friendships and sexual relationships with locals and other tourists alike.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The British working class on holiday. A critical reading of ITV's *Benidorm*

Abstract

Informed by the thesis that media representations are influential channels for the birth and reinforcement of discursive constructions, this article will focus on representation in ITV's successful sitcom *Benidorm* (2007—). The corpus analysed includes the show's first four seasons and 2009 special, i.e. all the *Benidorm* materials available on DVD at the time of writing. Given this TV production's subject matter, (1) insights will be provided into Spain's sand-and-sun tourism industry, with particular reference to the resort of Benidorm; (2) *Benidorm* will be placed within the wider British sitcom tradition; (3) humour will be treated as intersecting with power and social structures and so inseparable from social and national discourses; and (4) the interface will be explored between televised humour and the discourses of tourism, with particular reference to current British identity issues such as (4.1) how British classed identities perceive Other(ed) imagined communities, in particular, Spain and the Spanish; and (4.2) how such identities are performed spatially whilst on holiday.

Keywords: *Benidorm*; media representation; national identity; social class; television; tourism

Introduction

Even in the midst of the Internet era, television probably remains 'the major communicative device for disseminating those representations which are constitutive of (and constituted by) cultural identity' (Barker, 1999, p. 29). This assumption has prompted studies on the role played by television drama in the (re)construction of national identities, thus pointing to the direct or indirect 'narration' of the nation (Martín-Barbero, 1993; Allen, 1995; Franco, 2001). However, comedy genres, and particularly sitcom, are yet to receive full academic attention, even if a parallel can also be drawn between successful sitcom and contemporary social history (Mills, 2005, p. 8).

In the light of this, this article will focus on representation in ITV's successful sitcom *Benidorm* (2007—). The corpus analysed includes the show's first four seasons and 2009 special, i.e. all the *Benidorm* materials available on DVD at the time of writing. Given this TV production's subject matter, (1) insights will be provided into Spain's sand-and-sun tourism industry, with particular reference to the resort of Benidorm; (2) *Benidorm* will be placed within the wider British sitcom tradition; (3) humour will be treated as intersecting with power and social structures (Mills, 2005) and so inseparable from social and national discourses; and (4) the interface will be explored between televised humour and the discourses of tourism, with particular reference to current British identity issues such as (4.1) how British classed identities perceive Other(ed) 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991), in particular, Spain and the Spanish; and (4.2) how such identities are performed spatially whilst on holiday (MacCannell, 1999; O'Reilly, 2000; Andrews, 2009, 2011).

The conclusions provided will be informed by the thesis that media representations are influential channels for the birth and reinforcement of discursive constructions (Coleman, 1998; Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003; Becker, 2006; Slater, Rouner & Long, 2006; Simon & Jerit, 2007).

Working-class tourism on the Spanish costas: the case of Benidorm

The twentieth century witnessed the launch of the first national tourist boards in Europe (Barke & Towner 1999, p. 16) and the subsequent advent of the package holiday. This development was signalled through the arrival in Corsica of the first 32 British customers of tourism entrepreneur Vladimir Raitz (Bray, 2001, 2010). Raitz was to turn his attention to Spain in 1954. Prior to this, there were as few as 1.2 million overseas visitors to Spain in 1951, exploring a relatively 'undeveloped' country, coming to terms with its brutal civil war and the emergent Franco regime (Turner & Ash, 1975). In a few short years this would change dramatically and in time Spain would prove to be the 'most fertile ground for the package holiday revolution' (Bray, 2001, p. 21). The low cost of living and the support for tourism from the Franco regime were crucial in the rapid boom of tourism in Spain (see Tremlett, 2006; Lyth, 2009; Buswell, 2011).

The Spanish initially aimed for mass, low-cost tourism with the country's authorities setting about earmarking coastal villages for development (Valenzuela, 1988). In tandem with Spanish authorities, UK holiday companies searched for

destinations that could be developed quickly to meet the needs of British tourists. Benidorm itself perfectly illustrates the mass tourism model that Spain seems to have specialised in. During the 1950s the Mayor of the then village of Benidorm, Pedro Zaragoza, was to become the ‘father of modern tourism’ through his drive to develop Benidorm into a major tourist destination, with the personal support of *el Generalísimo* Franco himself (Tremlett, 2006, p. 101-2). Zaragoza gave support for easy planning permission for hotels creating a large high-rise resort that for Tremlett is ‘crowded a hundred metres up, but... is light and airy on the ground’ (2006, p. 107).

By the early 1970s Spain was already accepting a staggering 34.6 million visitors (destination360, 2013) but its coasts had become primarily dependent on the tastes of Northern Europe’s working class, with this tourist on average spending very little by world standards. As Ritchie (1993) and Tremlett (2006) observe, the Benidorm of the early 21st century has echoes of the British working-class resort of Blackpool (see Webb, 2005). Benidorm is often positioned as a ‘joke’ amongst the British press who sneer at the working class at play (Tremlett, 2006, p. 109). Such reflections echo the findings of Andrews (2010, 2011) and her work on the working-class resort of Magaluf on Mallorca, derided by the monikers ‘Megaruff’ and ‘Shagaluf’.

All in all, Spain has experienced an increase of over 4,000% in the number of international arrivals in the last half-century or so (Bote & Sinclair 1996, p. 65-66). Thus, Benidorm alone receives some 5 million, out of around 50 million visitors a year to Spain — mostly concentrated in the coastal areas of Catalonia, the Balearic and Canary Islands, Andalusia and Valencia, where Benidorm is located (see Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2010). 13 million of these are British, which automatically places the UK as Spain’s first international market.

Audiovisual representations of British working-class tourism in Spain: ITV’s *Benidorm*

Benidorm (ITV, 2007—), created by Derren Litten, stands in many respects as an oddity in the midst of the British mediascape. If seen as an instance of sitcom — it was nominated for a BAFTA award in this category in 2008 and went on to win the ‘Best Comedy’ National Television Award that same year — it is indeed quite exceptional in that it is set abroad, although it does follow in the footsteps of prior British comedy productions set in and around the Costas. If seen as a soap opera (more on this below), it

may be even more of an oddity in that it might well be the only instance of British soap successfully set in a foreign location especially when compared to *El Dorado* (BBC1, 1992-1993). It might be argued that *Benidorm*, which has now seen five series (all secured high ratings being aired at prime time on Friday evenings on ITV1), succeeds precisely where *El Dorado* had failed, somehow domesticating a foreign location by presenting it, as Mick Garvey (one of the characters) puts it, as a kind of ‘Blackpool with sun’ (1.1).

This provides *Benidorm* with that ‘kitchen sink feel’ that has long characterised much British TV fiction (Mills, 2005, p. 37-41). However, unlike traditional British comedy, drama features can indeed be detected (most notably the use of the cliffhanger device, the absence of canned laughter, or the lengthening of the average run of episodes from 30 to 60 minutes from series 3). Still, *Benidorm* is to be primarily read as choral sitcom. As such, characterisation is absolutely fundamental in it, with characters (mostly residents at the Solana Apartments) who are easily recognisable types with an illusion of tridimensionality (Wolff & Ferrante, 1998: 11-12).

The central characters of the show are the Garveys, who can be understood as representative of white (lower) working-class Northern British families that the current UK Government is in a moral panic about (see Jones, 2011). Mick Garvey is a good-hearted Lancashire slob who, in the words of his wife, Janice, is ‘tighter than a fly’s arse’. Janice is the only one that speaks for common sense in this family. Her mother — chain-smoking, foul-mouthed, over-tanned Madge — is a clear example of the ‘unruly woman’ type that so often appears in sitcom (Feuer, 2001, p. 68). She falls for, and eventually marries, Mel, a successful working-class entrepreneur ‘with five sunbed shops in Manchester’. The Garveys also have two children: Michael, a naive, hyperactive young boy best remembered for having ‘dropped a log’ in the pool during his first holiday in Benidorm; and (Chan)telle, a chubby teenage girl and single mother to mixed-race baby Coolio (named after the US rapper). As the show develops the Garveys move from funding their holidays through benefit fraud to Mel paying for their trips.

Regular characters also include a Scottish couple (penny-pincher Donald and good-hearted and ‘very accommodating’ wife Jacqueline, both ‘broadminded’ members of the ‘Middlesbrough Swingers Association’); a ‘posh couple’ (deeply insecure Martin

Weedon and miserable-looking Kate, whose main aim in life is to become a mother, a dream she cannot fulfil since Martin's sperm count is far too low); a mother and son (the instantly likeable, well-intentioned and absent-minded Noreen Maltby and her failure-of-a-son Geoff, played by comedian Johnny Vegas, 'three-times-unbeaten Lancashire quiz champion'), and a gay couple (overweight drama queen Gavin and partner Troy). The only regular characters who are non-residents at the Solana but members of staff are Janey (a rude, middle-aged Liverpudlian who supervises the reception and poolside areas) and, most prominently, Mateo, the only Spaniard in the show.

In typical sitcom fashion, most of these represent 'normal'ⁱ people in an everyday context (in the particular case of *Benidorm*, a cheap, all-inclusive holiday), and are all best seen as flesh-and-blood characters (Mills, 2005: 7), with 'shades and facets of each of them that we can recognise in ourselves and people we know' (Kelsey, 1999, p. 124; see also Brenner, 1992, p. 138), which further justifies the categorisation of *Benidorm* as sitcom.

The polysemy of the humoristic media text. A reading of *Benidorm*

According to Critchley, 'one laughs at jokes one would rather *not* laugh at. [...] Our sense of humour can often unconsciously pull us up short in front of ourselves, showing how prejudices that one would rather not hold can continue to have a grip on one's sense of who one is' (Critchley, 2002, p. 74-75). The complexity of the humoristic text is all the more evident should we consider the specificities of sitcom in general, and British sitcom in particular, the pleasures of which, as Mills reminds us, come largely 'from the context of consumption. Comedy's social role is often assumed to be that it critiques and examines social systems; yet it can also be one which binds groups together at the moment of consumption' (Mills, 2005, p. 142). This somehow accounts for the relatively frequent use of images and references which might elsewhere be deemed offensive, since 'comedy is assumed to function as an arena in which the unsayable can be voiced' (Mills, 2005, p. 144). And, interestingly, it also sheds light on the possible target(s) of the humour found in *Benidorm*.

In the light of this, this article offers a thematic analysis (see Pawson, 1995) of *Benidorm*, providing evidence of recurrent patterns leading to what can be seen as representative images that the show provides of, first, Spain and the Spanish; and,

secondly, British tourists on the Spanish costas. This should prove relevant since Mills identifies one of the main differences between US and British sitcom in that, whereas the former ‘often invites us to laugh *with* its characters’, the latter offers pleasure in us laughing *at* them (Mills, 2005, p. 41-42).

Images of Spain and the Spanish

It can be assumed that the show’s very title, a household name for millions of Britons, must trigger rather specific images of Benidorm and, probably, the whole of Spain in the minds of viewers. It shall indeed be argued that the image of Spain in the English/British ‘imagiNation’ (Redfield, 1999) also transpires in the show. In doing this, we will also be clearly relating *Benidorm* to ethnic humour (Critchley, 2002, p. 12). Let us not forget that, as Hall would put it, ‘all identities operate through exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects’ (1996, p. 15).

Viewers may at first be surprised to find how very little of Spain they get to see in *Benidorm*. Most scenes are shot on the premises of the Solana Apartments, using real Benidorm hotel locations, and this may be seen to be in accordance with the British and US sitcom indoor shooting tradition (Wolff & Ferrante, 1998, p. 6-7) but it also clearly serves a purpose. As Mick Garvey and the Stewarts constantly remind us, why should anyone want to leave the premises or take any spending money with them when theirs is an all-inclusive holiday?

British tourists in this context are not too interested in mingling with the local population — or this is at least what representation in *Benidorm* suggests. Characters generally perceive Benidorm, metonymic for the whole of Spain, as a cheap destination attracting ‘pikey breeders [...] [a]ll sitting in their Primark clothes singing country and western songs while they force-feed their boss-eyed ginger kids buckets of turkey twizzlers’ (Gavin, 1.1). Their first impression of the country involves a mosaic made up of poorly furnished rooms with no air-conditioning (and so too hot to sleep in) (1.1), toilets that do not flush (1.1), pools that are far from meeting the most basic standards of hygiene (1.6) and entertainment venues where the star attraction is a woman in her 60s with one leg up on a chair ‘pulling the flags of all nations out of her vagina’ (1.2).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, most of the Solana residents are presented as showing little or no interest in the local culture — ‘the only culture these people have is between their toes’, as Gavin puts it (2.4). Predictably, they want to eat a ‘good English fry-up’ and not what they perceive to be the local food (‘frogs’ legs and all that rubbish’, Madge, 1.3), including things that ‘are looking at you’ (Janice, 1.5).

Benidorm, presented as ‘Blackpool with sun’ (Mick, 1.6), seems to serve no purpose other than provide some local colour and background images for the show’s plots. Such local colour is based on completely stereotypical, out-of-place images of (mostly Southern) Spain, thus completely ignoring the country’s cultural diversity and, most significantly, the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the Valencian Country, which is home to Benidorm. Flamenco-inspired, Spanish guitar music is often used to introduce a new scene; the pool bar at the Solanas is gracefully ornated by a large two-dimensional figure of a black bull with swinging genitalia as well as a pair of cheap flamenco figurines. Large bullfighting posters welcome tourists at Alicante Airport (3.1). It is, therefore, clear that the image prevails of a hot, fiesta-driven country inhabited by not very hard-working people (‘No wonder these Spanish have a kip in the afternoon’; Janice, 1.1), with dark looks (‘You know what? The tan, the dark hair, the Spanish accent...I think she might be on to something there’; Mick, 3.3) This of course leads to what may easily be seen as a somewhat patronising view of the country and its people, presented as a ‘noble savage’ population at the best of times. This is perhaps best seen at the beginning of series 2, when Martin and Kate arrive at the largely unspoilt town of Altea. The local residents are peacefully engaged in their daily activities: an old lady sweeps the entrance to her quaint, flower-covered house. Someone else gives a flower to Kate as they ascend the quaint steps to their hotel. A Spanish guitar player regales them with an impromptu concerto in front of the church. A well-intentioned local picks up Martin’s wallet which he had inadvertently dropped on the floor.

However, this is nothing but a charming façade concealing a very different reality: Martin and Kate’s room at their quaint little hotel in Altea has been double-booked and they are moved to its sister hotel, the Solana Apartments in Benidorm (2.1). This is certainly closer to the prevailing general image of Spain to be obtained upon watching *Benidorm*. Even though the Spaniards are not to be denied a certain flair and charm, their country is looked down on, sometimes patronisingly (‘Not a bad cup of tea

considering they're foreigners' — Madge, 2.3; 'I wonder if they do pile cream out here' — Madge, 2.3) and often disdainfully. Thus, Madge would ironically wait and see her (foreign-born) local GP rather than a Spanish doctor (1.5):

Madge: 'I've not been [to the toilet] since Tuesday [and it's Friday].

Janice: Don't you think you should see the doctor?

Madge: What, out here? You must be joking. They won't have any English doctors, not out here. I'll wait till I get home, see Dr Kundu.

Janice: Dr Kundu is from Pakistan.

Madge: Oh, yeah. But his wife is from Rotherham.

Not surprisingly, the image of the Spanish Health System is quite poor, featuring hospitals with crammed rooms, unsympathetic, careless staff (Special 2009); or surgeries in which doctors can tell whether somebody is pregnant 'just by looking at you' (Special 2009). The police force do not fare any better: they are naïve enough to believe the silly fibs that Geoff tells them (3.5), and to be outwitted by Mel at a rare critical moment (Special 2009). The same applies to the legal system and justice in Spain. When Mick is arrested after punching Mel in the face, Jacqueline quips: 'if Mel dies, they'll just lock him up in prison and throw away the key' (Special 2009).

Images of Spain and the Spanish are all perfectly summarised in the only significant regular Spanish character: Mateo. Just like another character that might have distantly served as a source of inspiration (Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*),ⁱⁱ Mateo is not played by a true Spanish actor (Jake Canuso). Although some aspects of the character may have been inspired by Manuel (whose utter stupidity Basil Fawlty largely attributed to his being from Barcelona), Mateo, in fulfilling the sexual needs of the British tourist, lives up to the stereotype of a Spanish waiter as perceived in British popular culture (Apter, 1982; Jaworski, Thurlow, Lawson & Ylanne-McEwan, 2003a; Hughes & Bellis, 2006) and seems to embody most if not all of the characteristics that Spaniards are endowed with in the show.

He certainly has the dark good looks that several women romanticise about, and may serve as a poolwatcher, waiter, security guard, receptionist, porter... but also a flamenco dancer (3.5) and even a matador (2.4). Above all, however, Mateo is a ruthless heart-throb who has made it his mission in life to seduce the attractive residents at the

Solana Apartments, both women and men (Troy falls for him, 1.4). But Mateo is not only a 'shifty sod' (1.5) that finds it impossible to remember his romantic conquests from previous years but he can also be easily bribed (2.3), and may well cheat in competitions (2.3) but he is ultimately an unreliable (3.5), superstitious man who resorts to prayer in the face of adversityⁱⁱⁱ (2.5) and is also equally easily outclevered by the British 'technicalities' ('Us Brits have been winning by them for centuries'; Donald, 3.1).

In this light, it can hardly be coincidental that the vast majority of the (mostly explicit but also implicit) occurrences of the word 'Spanish' or 'Spaniard' in the script collocate in contexts with clearly negative connotations.^{iv}

British tourism and social class

Even though *Benidorm* provides images of Spain and the Spanish, analysed above, the fact remains that most of the characters in the show are British. For Lockyer (2010), although the sending up of the diverse dynamics and intricacies of the British class system has been a central ingredient of British televisual comedy since the 1950s, there is a comparatively small number of detailed critical analyses of British class comedy (see Mills, 2005). In drawing on the work of Medhurst (2007), this study utilises a number of his discursive themes drawn around social class that are present in comedy in undertaking its analysis of the characters in *Benidorm*.

In particular, through drawing on Medhurst, the present study focuses upon (1) clashes between members of different classes who are presented as having little, if anything, in common; (2) a critique undermining of the social position of the middle class; and (3) how the experiences, lifestyles and behaviours of specific social classes are ridiculed for the viewer (2007, p.145). In particular, the working-class individual and working-class family unit in the setting of *Benidorm* are key concerns for this article. As Scott (1994, p. 938) reminds us, 'the individual is the basis for allocation to class situations, but the family, as a demographic unit, is central to social class formation'. It should also be noted that particular landscapes (home, the street, work place and, in this instance, tourist sites) are the geographical places where social class is performed and experienced within quotidian lives.

For Wagg (1998), the media have avoided representations of the working class, and where they have been depicted, this has often been based on stereotyping alone. As Jones (2011, p.127) outlines, ‘a YouGov poll at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 2006 revealed that most people working in television thought that Vicky Pollard^v was an accurate representation of Britain’s white working class’. The constructing and transmitting of such stereotypes reveals both the power of the cultural intermediaries. Those holding powerful positions in both old and new media, such as the new middle class, are the ones who are most successful in transmitting ideas concerning which lifestyles are deemed to be desirable and which ones are not (see Lawler, 2005). However, caution is required so as not to position the viewer as a passive consumer of stereotypical representations of social class: the viewer does not just passively consume media images (Skeggs et al. 2008). How social class is witnessed and reconfigured when watching television is dependent not only upon moral positions adopted when viewing shows, but also through the various forms of authority available to the viewer. In the case of *Benidorm*, it can be argued that some viewers will possess various forms of authority and cultural capitals to ‘be in on the jokes’ and stereotypes presented whereas, for others, *Benidorm* will present an accurate representation of the white working-class mass tourist at play — one that is to be either embraced or avoided at all costs (see Jones, 2011).

In consuming specific tourist sites and lifestyle experiences, new social capitals can be gathered, with their value dependent on whom else is present and how that experience is shared (see Mowforth & Munt, 1998). The struggle between different classes for greater value to be given to their cultural meanings and experiences is key to modern tourism. This struggle creates a growing spatial distinction between the middle-class and the working-class tourist, where the middle class seek out ‘unspoilt’ or long-haul destinations away from the mass package-holiday tourist (Curtin, 2010). As Mantecon and Huete (2008) found, middle-class British tourists still head to Spain, but they seek an ‘authentic Spain’ away from the mass tourist resorts. Such developments echo the move of nineteenth-century middle-class tourists in the UK away from British resorts as the working class began to discover the seaside (Swinglehurst, 1982; Barnes & Hoose, 1999).

In engaging with social class it is possible to theorise how tourism developed in different sites and in different ways, where specific places become associated with the

working class (Turner & Ash, 1975; Urry, 2000) whilst others become associated with the middle class (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003; Casey, 2009, Andrews, 2011). The perceived social class of tourist sites and those present within them has consequences for those who may make claims to belong, and those who do not. For example, in *Benidorm* Martin and Kate position themselves and are positioned by the other characters as not belonging. In the third series, as Martin's mother arrives to 'rescue' him from Benidorm, Janice Garvey asks Mick, 'Who is she? She doesn't belong here, she is far too posh' (3.5). Later in the same episode, Madge verbally abuses Martin's wife Kate for being 'that stuck up cow'; in response, Kate strongly rebukes her and her 'council chariot',^{vi} whilst affirming her 'disgust' for the 'dump' that is the Solanas.

In the opening episode of the second series, Martin and Kate are standing at the luggage carousel at Alicante airport. He is wearing a linen suit, whilst Kate has her pashmina casually around her neck. As they discuss the location of their holiday with another tourist (wearing cropped sports trousers and a football shirt), he is bemused that they are not going to Benidorm. He asks, 'Do you know you won't get an English breakfast there?', adding 'there is hardly any British up there, not like in Benidorm'. Both Kate and Martin, through their middle-class identity and knowledge, communicate that to their relief they 'know' this. As they arrive, Altea is (re)presented as the 'other' to Benidorm, tranquil, unspoilt, clean; the 'authentic Spain'. Their relationship with Benidorm can be theorised as 'anti-tourist', where social capital is acquired and maintained (Gustafson, 2002, p. 900).

For the new middle classes, competition for cultural capital in travel involves pursuing authenticity and exclusivity, a crucial axis of differentiation and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). As Lawler (2005) has shown, the middle class are key agents in deciding what experiences, consumption patterns and identities are worthwhile, and which others are positioned as *passé*, tacky or lacking. As the working class gain access to tourist sites and experiences once reserved for the middle-class tourist, the middle class utilise their cultural and economic capitals to seek out new destinations and new experiences that allow them a physical distance away from the working-class tourist. For Lockyer (2010, p.124), such class difference and inequality represent the fluid and dynamic characteristics of social class, where it is continually negotiated, renegotiated and reconfigured across varying social and physical landscapes. In doing so, the middle class create distinction from the working class who have become increasingly close in

spatial terms (see author, 2014). Such distinction is central in marking out working-class tourists, their tastes and bodies as the ‘other’ to middle-class tourism, taste and bodies. Past holidays and experiences consumed are used by middle-class tourists to present themselves as knowledgeable to other tourists (Curtin, 2010). Their narratives frame their class backgrounds, aspirations and cultural capitals — distancing themselves against the mass working-class tourist and the ‘inauthentic’ mass tourism they represent (Mordue, 2009). This middle-class traveller is positioned as *the* desirable tourist by tourist authorities and local councils alike; ‘When we talk about quality we mean acceptable level of... a level of tourists who have a certain spending power’ (Bloc-Els Verds, Spanish town councillor quoted in Mantecon & Huete, 2008, p. 203).

Reflecting the popularity of both the show and resort of Benidorm, the ITV1 (UK) breakfast show *Day Break* ran three days of live programmes from Benidorm in August 2011. In the background of the live camera shots were British tourists, their bodies and appearance making them appear like extras from the show. As these real tourists danced and chanted ‘England, England’ in the background of a camera shot, one of the show’s hosts back in London asked, ‘I wonder what the Spanish really think of us?’ However, through her comment and tone, she positioned herself against this group of tourists, whilst asking middle-class viewers what they and the Spanish think of *them*, the white working-class tourist and the embodied performances of their ‘unsophisticated’ classed identity (see Lockyer, 2010; Skeggs and Wood, 2012).

The research of Andrews (2005, 2006, 2010, 2011) upon working-class tourism in the Mallorcan resorts of Magaluf and Palma Nova has contributed significantly to understandings around working-class mass tourism. One of Andrews’ (2011, p. 3-4) immediate observations concerning both resorts is that they are predominantly ‘British’, white, heterosexual and working class, with neither making much reference to Spanish or Mallorcan culture. Andrews’ description of Magaluf provides imagery not dissimilar to that of Benidorm. The works of O’Reilly (2000) and Bowen and Schouten (2008) have found similar characteristics of resorts and retirement destinations in other areas of Spain. In their research, resorts popular with British tourists and ex-pats appealed to a mainly white, heterosexual, working-class tourist and resident, attracted by both the climate and the familiarity of the many British amenities on offer.

Participants in the work of Andrews understood Palma Nova as offering a 'better class of tourist'; where there was perceived to be less noise and anti-social behaviour. In making claims to better social, cultural and economic capitals, some of her working-class participants position themselves as the 'better other'^{vii} (Andrews, 2010). In *Benidorm*, distinction from other working-class tourists is utilised by The Oracle. On seeing the Garveys arrive (2.1), he comments, 'By 'eck, look at that lot, they're rough... this place is going to the dogs'. In the third series, when the Garveys get into a fight (3.4), Janey, in her attempts to re-take control of the pool area, demands, 'Take your episode of Jeremy Kyle elsewhere' (see Adib & Guerrier, 2001).^{viii} As Andrews shows, ways of 'doing holidays' are not based on a working/middle class binary alone. Working-class tourists draw upon past experiences, tastes and knowledge to access the 'better' resort and create distance from other working-class tourists.

People draw upon the describable features of places in constructing their identities, making claims to belong in certain places by virtue of the type of behaviour or identities other people exhibit (O'Reilly, 2000; Ryan, 2002; McCabe, 2005). Martin and Kate seek out holiday experiences that they understand to have a value that positions them apart from the other characters at the Solanas. They visit the 'Old Town' in Benidorm (1.2) in search for its authentic cuisine, culture and architecture. Interestingly, in the first three series Gavin and Troy (1.2), Donald and Jacqueline (3.3) and The Oracle (3.3) leave the confines of the hotel and head into the old town district too. However, their (exceptional) use of the old town is presented as an engagement with its large gay scene and the commercial entertainment attached. Later, in series four (4.5), Gavin desires to experience the 'real' Benidorm, so his holidaying friend (Kenneth) suggests the 'Benidorm Museum of Culture'. Upon arrival they learn it has been closed for a number of years:

Gavin (angrily): 'Well I would say I was surprised but of course that would be a filthy lie'.

Kenneth: 'I don't understand it, it is in the guide book!'

Gavin (grabbing Kenneth's guide book): '*Benidorm on a Budget*, 1999?'

Gavin's lack of surprise at the closure of a museum dedicated to Benidorm's 'culture' suggests that Benidorm has no culture worthy of a museum. At this point Kenneth suggests a nearby beach:

Kenneth: 'There is a little cove beach down the road'

Gavin (very angrily): 'Well I hope they haven't moved it since 1999!'

On arrival Gavin is overjoyed at finding an undeveloped 'authentic' Spanish cove without another holidaymaker in sight. Unbeknown to Gavin, Kenneth had known all along that the museum had closed down. His interests lie in the gradual arrival of increasing numbers of gay male nude sunbathers, and the sexual exploits they may promise. Other than Gavin, the working-class characters of *Benidorm* are not presented as seeking out Spanish culture, merely the delights of Benidorm's night-time economy or potential sexual exploits as presented on its beaches.

Seeking the authentic in Benidorm?

Much of the action in *Benidorm* takes place in two key areas — around the hotel swimming pool and at the hotel's bar and entertainment venue 'Neptune's'. The concern of the Garveys and other characters present is rarely the search for an 'authentic Spain' (Weller & Lea, 1998; Gustafson, 2002). Their focus is presented to be the sun, all-inclusive alcohol and food, along with the nightly (British) entertainment; as Huete argues, 'Benidorm is a leisure town par excellence' (2003, p. 3). The characters within the show are given little reason to leave the confines of the Solanas, the beach being presented as a threatening, over-consumed, crowded and uncontrolled space that cannot offer the controlled safety of the hotel (1.6).

Mass tourists are positioned as seeking out a series of pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1964; Turner & Ash, 1975; Smith 1978). These inauthentic performances and staged realities are commodified so that tourists can consume cultures in quick, short periods of time. MacCannell (1999), in utilising Goffman's (1972) dramaturgical model, theorises 'layers of authenticity' in the tourism experience. MacCannell suggests that levels of authenticity exist, ranging from a 'front region' — inauthentic social space such as 'Neptune's' — to the back 'authentic region' that tourists may never access. As Jaworski et al. have theorised (2003; see also Jaworski, Ylanne-McEwan, Thurlow & Lawson, 2003), tourists will often have limited contact with locals. Most contact occurs when locals take on the roles of 'helpers, servants, experts or part of the local scenery' (Jaworski et al, 2003:135). In their jobs serving tourists, locals may create the illusion of closeness and friendship.^{ix} For example, the barman Mateo is portrayed as only being polite, helpful or kind when he wants something that usually involves seeking money or

a sexual relationship with one of the tourists. His sexual desires represent other imagery of the hyper sexual Mediterranean man, similar to Costas, the bar owner in *Shirley Valentine* (see Hughes & Bellis, 2006; Casey, 2010).

In a further analysis of authenticity, it is worthwhile drawing upon Cohen's (1988) development of 'tourist modes'. In theorising *Benidorm*, Cohen's 'recreational mode' and the 'diversionary mode' are useful in understanding tourist motivations and experiences of the characters. Cohen's recreational mode positions tourism as just one form of entertainment open to the masses, akin to going to the cinema, or even watching television. Recreational tourists enjoy their trips because they restore physical and mental powers, giving tourists a sense of well-being, as for Gavin and Troy or Donald and Jacqueline, for example. These tourists accept 'make believe' or the pseudo events as described by Boorstin (1964) and embrace 'commercialisation, the inauthentic, the trivial, the buying of signs rather than reality' (O'Reilly, 2000, p. 18). Those tourists characterised by the diversionary mode undertake their holidays in an escape from the boredom and routine of their everyday lives. This type of tourist mode does not establish adherence to a meaningful centre — it only makes Weber's (1983) alienation endurable. It could be argued that the Garveys are representative of this form of doing tourism. Their yearly trips to Benidorm allow them to escape from the harsh economic realities of their lives back in Manchester, before returning to a reality which is seemingly unchanging.

As the characters in *Benidorm* suggest, their quest on holiday may have less to do with authenticity and more with Boorstin's 'pseudo-events' or Bakhtin's (1984) 'carnavalesque'. *Benidorm* represents an atmosphere of freedom reigning, where the everyday ordering of time, work and familial commitment may be suspended and the holidaymaker becomes organised in their own way (see Webb, 2005).

Discussion and concluding remarks

Benidorm invites viewers to ponder how classed identities are performed on holiday. Martin and Kate are represented as clearly concerned with distinction from mass working-class tourists. However, it is the middle-class tourists that are 'out of place and time' in *Benidorm*, where the Garveys and other working-class characters can claim belonging at the Solanas. In other words, Benidorm is presented as a resort where the cultural capital(s) of the British, white, working classes have worth and value (at least,

as perceived from within). Distinction is created against the other, where Martin and Kate (and their associated middle-class values) become ‘dangerously close’ to spoiling working-class holidays and the ‘carnavalesque’ atmosphere of Benidorm.

As some of the working-class characters in *Benidorm* show, working-class tourists draw from understandings concerning a ‘better class of tourist’ or ‘better resorts’ in differentiating themselves from other working-class tourists (Andrews, 2005). The varied working-class characters in the show and the different identity variables that help create an illusion of tridimensionality (Dancyger, 1991), along with references made to the varied lives they have left ‘back home’, remind us that ‘the working class’ are not one homogeneous group. The Garveys may represent the ‘problematic’ white working class (Jones, 2011), but they are just one example of how people ‘do class’ and its complex intersections with lived identities (see Taylor, Hines & Casey, 2011). As the characters perform their varied identities, it is their search for leisure and fun that are the common denominators to their stay in Benidorm. The characters are presented as not seeking access to an ‘authentic Spain’ (MacCannell, 1999). However, as Waller and Lea (1998) have pointed out, measuring what is ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ is fraught with problems.

The continued success of the show and, more importantly, the resort of Benidorm itself, reflects a worth for a much wider engagement with working-class tourism and its embodied experiences. Working-class tourism, as represented in *Benidorm*, may thus suggest that the shift should be made from discussing what ‘authentic’ Spain may be to inquiring into the different experiences and perceptions of Spain, including these resorts and the many experiences they offer.

On the other hand, the fact cannot be ignored that *Benidorm* is a sitcom and, as such, should offer pleasure in us laughing ‘at [its characters]’ (Mills, 2005, p. 41-42). Accordingly, *Benidorm* not only provides interesting insights into British classed experiences of Spain but may also be seen to invite reflection on, if not criticism of, such British classed experiences: ‘humour [...] indicates, or maybe just adumbrates, how [shared life-world] practices might be transformed or perfected’ (Critchley, 2002, p. 90). Thus, viewers may be invited to question Martin and Kate’s othered position in the show, as representative of a social class most characters do not feel they belong to; and even the othered position of Spain and the Spanish.

In this respect, evidence has been provided that this representation is often either patronising or degrading, very much in consonance with the underlying representation of the country found in the numerous articles on the experiences of real working-class British tourists in Spain that become the staple of UK tabloids in the summer months. Before jumping at conclusions, however, it is worth taking into account that this representation often results from the lines said, and opinions expressed, by the different characters. If *Benidorm* is perceived to be ironic about the subsample of the British population therein represented, it might be argued that this potential irony somehow taints their views on the host culture in the show. Indeed, none of these characters seems to know much about the world beyond their little suburban existence. Even Geoff 'The Oracle', a quiz champion, is beaten by the Garveys thanks to the valuable contribution of Michael (1.5), who is not even 10 years old. Crucially, however, this may well shed some new light as to how to interpret the resulting image of Spain and the Spanish. In particular, it may cast doubt on the validity of this image as a component of the British working-class imagiNation: humour 'can provide information about oneself that one would rather *not* have' (Critchley, 2002, p. 74-75).

Benidorm might thus be seen to distance itself from the views of its characters. Yet, this is not all there is to it. As suggested above, Spain and the Spanish, as re/presented in *Benidorm*, do not exclusively depend on the views that the British characters have of them. Regardless of their opinions, the image remains of a largely inefficient, quaintly retarded country inhabited by a superstitious, easy-to-fool population.

This is also in accordance with another aspect concerning representation in *Benidorm*. It has been noted that characterisation is absolutely essential in sitcom, typically successful sitcom characters being easily recognisable types with an illusion of tridimensionality. This tridimensionality is certainly a fact in *Benidorm*, since characters evolve and become far more likeable as the show progresses. Thus, the Garveys become firmly united as a family. Chantelle matures, taking her new status as a young mother more seriously. Noreen is not the innocent dupe she seems and subtly encourages her son Geoff to evolve as a person, now romantically involved with Chantelle. The Stewarts, in spite of their 'broad-minded' approach to life, never really mean any harm and are always ready to help fellow residents. Gavin and Troy are seen to move on to a new stage in their relationship, entering a civil partnership and even accepting Troy's

well-concealed fatherhood — all of which contributes to the visibility of alternative family units in early 21st century Western societies.

There is, however, one exception, and this is, quite unsurprisingly, Mateo. For this character, there seems to be no past and no future. His selfish, insensitive approach to life remains unchanged. Such characteristics may reflect recent representations of Spain in the British media as selfish (the closing of businesses for siesta), insensitive (the demolition and repossession of British expatriates' Spanish homes) and unchanged (an inability to adapt successfully to harsh economic times). After all, as Jacqueline would put it, 'I'm not being racist, but the Spanish can be a bunch of nutters, can't they?' (Special 2009).

Acknowledgements

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ⁱ Normality extends to the gay couple, Gavin and Troy. They continue the long history of British camp comedy in their bitchy remarks directed towards the heterosexual tourists (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). However, unlike earlier portrayals of gay men as rich and/or hypersexual (Casey, 2007), they are refreshingly real. Their acceptance by the other (heterosexual) tourists belies the diversity that Benidorm embraces. Should this reading be accepted, it could be argued that it is promiscuous Donald and Jacqueline who stand out, positioned as the 'opposites' of the homonormalised Gavin and Troy.

ⁱⁱ *Fawlty Towers* (BBC2, 1975-1979) was a British sitcom that remains a favourite among the British audience even today. Set in a family-run hotel in the English seaside resort of Torquay, one of its most memorable characters was Manuel, a useless Spanish waiter with poor organisational skills and a very poor command of the English language.

ⁱⁱⁱ This certainly mirrors the way the Spanish population is portrayed: Madge, all dressed in white, is mistaken for the Pope (3.6) and many fall on their knees and start praying fervently at the sight of her.

^{iv} Examples abound of the word 'Spanish' being used not to provide any necessary information but as mere epithets. Interestingly, the same usage has been identified by Mădroane (2009) and Wawrzyczek (2010) and for the words 'Romanian' and 'Polish', respectively, in the British tabloid press. Some significant examples illustrating this 'Othering' strategy include:

-Martin (commenting on the Solanas Apartments pay-per-view TV): 'One euro, 30 minutes. All-inclusive, the robbing Spanish bastards' (1.2).

-Troy (apologising to partner Gavin for his short affair with Mateo): 'Gavin, please, I was drunk and some dodgy Spanish waiter jumped me' (1.5).

-Geoff (about Mateo): 'Look, he's trying to bum me now. Get off me, you Spanish poof' (1.5)

-Madge (to Mateo): 'You dirty, twisting, Spanish bastard!' (2.3).

-Gavin's mother: 'I can't stand Spanish waiters' (2.7).

-Mick (to policemen) 'All right. Get your dirty Spanish hands off me' (Special 2009).

^v Vicky Pollard was one of the recurrent characters in *Little Britain* (BBC, 2003-2006). Played by Matt Lucas, abusive, foul-mouthed Vicky can be easily seen as a satirical representation of British urban chav subcultures.

^{vi} Madge, although not disabled, drives around Benidorm in a mobility scooter. Her reasons for undertaking this is that she '*shouldn't have to walk*' whilst on holiday. The association of mobility scooters with council housing reflects a wider belief that 'perfect bodies' represent the wellbeing associated with exclusive holidays, with disabled tourism seen as its inferior 'other' (Shaw and Coles, 2004). The imperfect or impoverished body has been positioned as representing less desirable forms of holiday undertaking (see Waller and Lea, 1998; Casey, 2010b).

^{vii} Social class is but one factor in tourism consumption (O'Connell and Williams, 2005), other identity variables such as age, gender (Andrews, 2011) and sexuality (Casey, 2009) intersect to influence an individual's ability to travel.

^{viii} Jones describes the *The Jeremy Kyle Show* as a place where 'week after week dysfunctional individuals from overwhelmingly working class backgrounds are served up as daytime entertainment fodder [...]: a human form of bear-baiting' (2011: 123).

^{ix} Casey (2009, 2010b) has problematised this simple worker/tourist spatial binary, showing that tourists will and do engage in long term friendships and sexual relationships with locals and other tourists alike.