

# **LAS CHICAS DEL CABLE (2017–2020): AN ORAL HISTORY OF NETFLIX'S FIRST SPANISH ORIGINAL DRAMA**

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## **KEYWORDS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article analyses the production of Netflix's first original series in Spain, *Las chicas del cable* (2017-2020), through 6 interviews with professionals involved in its development, both from Netflix (Diego Ávalos) and the production company Bambú Producciones (executive producer Teresa

Fernández Valdés, co-creator Gema R. Neira, head writer María José Rustarazo, head director Carlos Sedes, and cinematographer Jacobo Martínez). The goal is to use to examine the localisation process of Netflix through its original productions, and the challenges (such as cultural misunderstandings) it posed for both the video-on-demand service and the local production companies with whom the service established close links during this period of global expansion. The conclusions point to a mutually beneficial partnership where Bambú Producciones learnt how to work with international video-on-demand services and became less dependent on the Spanish market, and Netflix benefited from a safer arrival to new territory with a company that had a strong track record.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Las chicas del cable* (2017-2020), released in English-speaking countries as *Cable Girls*, was the first original series produced by Netflix in Spain and, as such, an early example of the role original fiction has played in the globalization of the North American video-on-demand service. The main characters of *Las chicas del cable* are four young switchboard operators in the capital of Spain, Madrid, during the 1920s. Upon premiering in April 2017, *Las chicas del cable* was Netflix's second European original series, the fourth in Spanish if Latin American productions are considered. By July 2020, when the series ended after five seasons and 42 episodes, Netflix had already released more than 30 original series in Europe and a similar number in Spanish in Latin America.

The following pages analyse the production process of *Las chicas del cable* through six interviews with professionals involved with the series: Diego Ávalos (Vice President of Original Content for Spain and Portugal at Netflix), Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer and co-founder of Bambú Producciones), Gema R. Neira (co-creator of the series with Ramón Campos and development director of Bambú Producciones), María José Rustarazo (head writer), Carlos Sedes (main director of the first season) and Jacobo Martínez (main cinematographer of the first season).<sup>1</sup> The method chosen for this article is based on the notion that exclusive informants can provide the “backstage” knowledge needed to understand how a media product is created “within an organizational framework and under the influence of social forces such as technology, economics and cultural politics” (Brunn 2015: 134-5). The use of interview material has been on the rise in film and television research as result of the influence of disciplines such as historiography and the growth of interest in oral history (Cornea 2008). And, in the field of media production research, it is particularly useful for screenwriters (such as Neira and Rustarazo) because their work lends itself well to conversation rather than observation, and normally they are particularly articulate in the analysis of their role in the industry (Banks 2014: 546-7).

Extracts from the interviews are organized in different sections to trace the main challenges Netflix and Bambú faced during the production of the series. These interviews

1 The interviews were conducted using the Meet platform on June 4 (Diego Ávalos), June 26 (Jacobo Martínez), June 29 (Carlos Sedes), June 30 (María José Rustarazo), July 1 (Gema R. Neira) and July 2 (Teresa Fernández Valdés) of 2020. The author would like to thank Rut Rey (Netflix) and Irene Vecino (Bambú Producciones) for helping to facilitate and schedule the interviews.

offer the contrasting views of Netflix at the time of its emergence as a global video-on-demand service and Bambú Producciones, one of the many companies that accompanied it along the way.

## 2. LAS CHICAS DEL CABLE AND THE RISE OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING NETFLIX ORIGINALS

According to Jenner (2018), Netflix has operated as a transnational broadcaster willing to integrate into national media systems. During this period of integration, Netflix established partnerships with local operators for co-productions and built relationships with local creative communities. *Las chicas del cable* being chosen as Netflix's first original series is, for example, directly related to the success on its catalogue of the Spanish series *Velvet* (2014-16), also made by Bambú Producciones. The series incorporates the usual features of Bambú's dramas, such as the combination of romantic storylines and a big mystery, the centrality of a space (here, the telephone company headquarters), and the combination of rising stars and prestigious veteran actors in the cast (Cascajosa-Virino 2020). Netflix found in Bambú an ideal ally for this first endeavour of original fiction in Spain: the production firm had produced big successes for broadcast television and built up some internationalisation muscle in the previous years, developing links with the German producer-distributor Beta Film and French producer-distributor Studiocanal.

**Question:** *What prompted Netflix to produce original content in Spanish?*

**Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content):** *Club de cuervos* [the first Netflix Original in Mexico] was launched in 2015 and 3% [the first Netflix Original in Brazil] in 2016.<sup>2</sup> At the end of 2015, our service became available in Spain, and we already had the idea of producing there. The country has a great history of fiction, both in television and film, that attracted us. At the same time, Latin America had stopped buying Spanish content for distribution. Suddenly, Turkish series were growing. We started buying content such as *El barco* (2011-2013), *Gran Hotel* (2011-2013) and *Velvet*, among many others, and we saw a great appetite again in Latin America.

2 *Club de cuervos* (2015-2019) and 3% (2016-2020) were the first Netflix Originals in Mexico and Brazil, respectively.

*Club de cuervos* was a comedy that showed our hypothesis that, in Latin America, we could do not only content acquisition, but also change how fiction was made and find new stories [that are] impossible to find on traditional channels in Mexico. 3% worked better outside Brazil than in Brazil, which proved the other part of this strategy: you can find great stories and creators for a local market, but also for a global one, as we had a platform that by then was already becoming global.

**Question:** *What was the genesis of *Las chicas del cable*?*

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** The idea for *Las chicas del cable* came from [an] exhibition at the Fundación Telefónica about female switchboard operators. It caught our attention because it told us very well that, until then, women could only be housewives, teachers, nuns and servants. And suddenly, with the switchboard operators, a world opened for a type of worker that was very different from the others. They [switchboard operators] were also unmarried. They were trained, first at the capital, and then that spread to the rest of Spain. We took an article and saved it in the database, which is what we often do. With the call from Telefónica [whose Movistar+ division was starting an original drama production strategy], this concept came up again. We thought it would be perfect for them to start with a series about their own company. It was not the same concept as *Las chicas del cable*. It was about the Telefonica Building and the switchboard operators.<sup>3</sup> But Movistar+ said no. [Netflix] instantly said yes.

**Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer):** At that time, Netflix was looking for feature films. They were saying that they were betting on talented directors, but that they would make the films for a million euros. It was a more experimental thing. And after that first contact with a person in Madrid, we stayed on standby. We thought it was not for us. One Christmas [in 2015], we received an email from Eric Barmack.<sup>4</sup> He told us, 'Hi guys, I've heard things about you, and I know *Gran Hotel* and *Velvet* very well. I would be interested if you have any projects to send us. I love your dramas'. And we immediately replied that, of course, we would love to make a presentation, if he wanted to give us some directions or if we could just send concepts that were a bit developed.

3 The Telefónica Building, located on Gran Vía Avenue in Madrid, was, at the time of its construction in the late 1920s, the tallest skyscraper in Europe.

4 Executive Erik Barmack joined Netflix in 2011 and was Vice President and Head of International Originals between 2015 and 2019.

And he said, 'Yes, full freedom and as soon as possible'. We searched our hard drives, and we selected four projects, all of them riskier and more experimental. But then there was a minute of reflection before we sent it. We wondered, 'If this man says he really likes our dramas, maybe we should present something along those lines and not everything so risky and distanced from our current series'.

**Question:** *How was the relationship between Netflix and Bambú during the first development of *Las chicas del cable*?*

**Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content):** A marriage, like it is making a series, is a long-term relationship. And with Ramón and Teresa, there was a very quick symbiosis. After that email in December 2015, in January it was NATPE [the Miami-based international television market], and there, we met in person. It was really the beginning of a journey that has also become a friendship. We realised that we were not only bringing each other a story that was extremely interesting. We came and had a lot of meetings, but that is a very normal thing we did back then. We are a company that is a learning muscle, a living being where we are nourishing each other all the time. And with that nourishment, both of information and of relationships, we open our way of seeing the world and our way of seeing fiction. It was a very normal process of learning for us and of sharing information from our side, of how we wanted fiction to evolve when we went into making originals in certain countries. (...) *Las chicas del cable* was a brave story, with a very timeless struggle, but with contemporary topics and relevance. It fulfilled many things that we connected creatively. And Bambú is very attached to various talents (actors and actresses) that we found very interesting and saw a vision of a whole package. It was not a story in a logline: they [Bambú] had a broad vision of what they wanted to do, and that is where we really saw that symbiosis to move forward.

**Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer):** Within a month, we had signed the contract. It was the first time we negotiated a contract with North Americans. In fact, it was the first time that I brought in a lawyer with that profile. Until then, we had not needed it. We felt very responsible because, being the first [Spanish Netflix] series, I thought that what I fought for in this contract was going to remain a precedent within the Spanish industry. At the same time, I wanted to close the deal because it was Netflix, and we were the first. In the United States the industry is very strong. They are very aggressive in their negotiations, and we are not

used to that. That legal language, which is normal and very common for them, shocks you at the beginning. We decided to make a strong but quick negotiation. At a given moment, when two points got stuck, they told us that Netflix's lawyer and the person who was going to handle the production at a financial level were going to go to Spain. We had a meeting, and the final deal came out from that meeting.

### 3. THE CHALLENGES OF MAKING AN EARLY NETFLIX ORIGINAL

Netflix's expansion process, which was based on 'long-distance localisation' (Lobato 2019), was gradually accompanied by corporate decentralisation with the opening of more than 30 offices and production centres from Tokyo to Mexico (Roxborough 2019). *Las chicas del cable* is characteristic of this process: when the series was created by independent production company Bambú Producciones, Netflix's executives supervised it from the United States, but by the time the show ended, the company had already opened its first production hub in Madrid. *Las chicas del cable* was the first Netflix original in Spain and one of the first both in Spanish and in Europe, which made production a kind of "trial and error" experience for both companies, as they faced challenges such as communication problems and working in widely separated time zones.

**Question:** *What were the main changes that Netflix instructed Bambú to perform when developing Las chicas del cable?*

**Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content):** The guideline was 'we love what they [Bambú] have done, how can they evolve if we give them the tools and give them the freedom to do it?' (...) We were clear about several things in terms of length and creative freedom. We felt that we did not need 70 minutes per episode,<sup>5</sup> but also because of the nature of our service, no episode had to have an exact length. And we put a lot of emphasis on that from the beginning, but that they [Bambú Producciones] have the freedom to tell the story the way they need to tell it and the number of episodes they need to tell it. (...) We had conversations about the music. Music is part of the narrative. In many countries, and we saw

that in Mexico and Spain, music was not considered as part of the narrative. And we had a lot of debates about music, about what and how we should do it, how it can be used to push the narrative forward.

**Question:** *What were the main differences in making series for a Spanish broadcast channels and Netflix?*

**Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer):** Netflix has a lot of technical requirements. At that time, we were not used to working with video-on-demand services. The protocols of Antena 3 and other Spanish broadcast channels were far from those of Netflix. The choice of cameras was limited. You had to adapt. You must do 'dailies' [the processing of the footage shot], and you must do this on set. They control the whole process a lot. At first, I was overwhelmed by the Netflix world. You really are like under a big steamroller. It is different producing for Spain than producing for the world. But maybe it is different because you approach it from a different angle. When you see the dossier and all the technical characteristics that Netflix must fulfil, in the end it is not such a big deal, but at first, it is a lot of responsibility.

**Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer):** Time is money. It was important that the budget could be like that of other series or even a little higher, but we were saving 20 minutes of shooting. The series was going to be more ambitious, and it was going to have more resources. When we say that *Las chicas del cable* was at the standard of the production budget at the time, it is true, but with 20 minutes less. The tricky point is that we were going from seasons of 12 or 13 episodes to seasons of eight episodes. But by dividing certain expenses that are prorated over the entire season, such as set construction, you no longer divide by 13; you divide by 8. In order not to lose the target of giving the series more resources, we achieved two guaranteed seasons (eight episodes plus eight). This initial investment to start up the series was divided not by 12 or 13 episodes, but by 16, which again gave the series an advantage in terms of production.

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** We came from making series such as *Velvet* with 16 characters and very choral. And this series is somehow choral, even though it only has four lead characters. The most challenging thing was to balance the four stories so that they all fit in all the episodes. The main one was Lidia's (Blanca Suárez), but all of them had to be interesting because sometimes, if you do not give them space in the story, the characters are not intriguing. You must make

5 Since the 1990s, the standard length for Spanish broadcast dramas and comedies was 70 minutes. Movistar+, Netflix and other operators changed this standard to 50 minutes, which was later adopted by most of the broadcast channels.

[sure] the four of them were very different, with attractive conflicts, and that each one had a place in the series. Going from 70 minutes to 40 minutes was difficult. We were used to making the storylines in many beats. And here what we must do is narrate them better, with far fewer beats.

**Carlos Sedes (director):** It took us a while to get used to the length. It is like when you are making a feature film and suddenly you must make a short film. The length and the rhythm are different. And at the beginning, we were writing long scripts, but we were not aware of it. We had a lot of minutes, and we recorded much more than what remained afterwards. And on top of that, in series like ours, which tend to be very choral, it is more complicated. There are many characters and storylines. It took us a season to get to the real size of the series because it is not easy. So when you have a format like *Velvet* in your veins and suddenly you take it to 40 minutes, it is very tricky.

**Question:** *What were the main obstacles during the production process of the first seasons of Las chicas del cable?*

**Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content):** There were obstacles. The time difference was one of them. Bambú received notes from us when it was dawn in Spain, and we would reply when we were going to sleep. We were also a very small team, but we had a view of the whole world. The team of non-English originals when we did *Club de cuervos* and *3%* were just two people. Then we grew, and now it is a global team that is based in many parts of the world. But we had to learn how to work, and we saw it as a challenge. One was how can we make non-English content. From a distance, some things were not easy for our partners, and not easy for us. Because we were a small team, the process depended on who could supervise one series. Sometimes scripts had to be translated, notes translated for the other side, and it was a process, and not the most enjoyable one. But we knew that this was for the short term because our goal was to make the team bigger. I was the only Spanish-speaking member of the team, but I could not be on all the series.

**Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer):** Almost nobody could read in Spanish on Netflix's side. We also had a problem with the schedule. It is a big time-difference with Spain, nine hours.<sup>6</sup> It was almost the end of your day and the

<sup>6</sup> Even though the company is based in Los Gatos (California), the Netflix content development teams have their headquarters at Los Angeles.

start of theirs. The first year it was very common to have calls at eight or nine at night, long calls. And they must catch you wide awake because you are going to talk about characters, casting, and wardrobe proposals... There was a lot of tension in the first year. Netflix started to incorporate Spanish speakers, and then they came to Amsterdam. There, they began to have a team and to be a bit aware of what we were telling them about the time difference.

**Carlos Sedes (director):** At the beginning, it is true that it was very difficult for me to understand what a video-on-demand service is. I only had made broadcast series for regional and national channels. I remember, for example, the issue with music. Netflix decided to use modern music because they were trying to really bring a young audience to the series. I was shocked because we always tried to rely on the period, to try to make certain things realistic. The stylisation of the costumes is also something that is noticeable in the series.

**Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer):** When you talk to someone in another language, even if you have some knowledge of that language, it is complicated, the nuances... Even if they are technical issues, there is a very broad context. We were starting to work with the ACES postproduction system, [and] they did not want the LUTs [a conversion profile for colours] in a certain way...<sup>7</sup>

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** Netflix had a working system in which they wanted treatments and not a pilot.<sup>8</sup> And that frustrated me a lot because, for me to feel that a series exists, I need to give the characters a voice. When you give them a voice, you often find the rhythm. That was the initial process, which for me was absurd. There were four treatments without a pilot, and then we had to throw them away and start all over again when we wrote the pilot. We already knew that was going to happen, that the series would turn into something else. (...) Netflix's work methodology was also

<sup>7</sup> The Academy Color Encoding System (ACES) is an industry standard for managing colour throughout the life cycle of a motion picture or television production; ACES was developed under the auspices of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. LUTs is a conversion profile for colours that transforms input values (from the camera) to output values (final footage).

<sup>8</sup> A *treatment* is a detailed description of the actions and dialogues of a story. Normally, it is a previous step before writing the film screenplay. But in TV drama, it is more usual to commission the screenplay for the first episode or 'pilot' (instead of treatments) before the final greenlight.

being established, and they were modifying it with what we were telling them and doing it in the simplest possible way. We lost a lot of time with translations, and now we do not. It was another difficulty. You send something, [and then] you must wait five days for it to be translated, five days for it to be read, get notes back, and go back again and again with each version. It takes a lot longer. But we had no personal difficulties. Everything became much easier when they visited Spain. We sat down and talked to them, told them exactly what we wanted to do, and from then on, we got back to work, writing the pilot.

**María José Rustarazo (head writer):** When something did not work, we were used to clear directions and suggestions. But what we received from Netflix was characteristic of how they work: asking questions, questioning the character's motivations, making you reflect on the decisions you have made. There was a criticism between the lines that was hard for us to see. At the beginning we suggested that Lidia would be much more selfish, that she would be much crueller to the girls and, at first, trying to take advantage of them. There ended up being a fierce debate. Then we realised that it was a question of how to convey the information. (...) The second season was more complicated than the first. In the first, we were able to talk face to face with the people who made the decisions. When an intermediary person was created, their function was to mediate between the two parties. Sometimes a lot of things were lost. I think that there came a time when Netflix also concluded that this intermediate formula did not work. For the third season, the team was fully Spanish, and that improved things a lot because they knew the Spanish idiosyncrasy [and] had worked in Spain many times. And in terms of notes and communication, everything was much more direct and clearer for everyone.

#### 4. THE CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES OF TELLING GLOBAL STORIES

*Las chicas el cable* went into production in 2016 when Netflix began to place commissioning production outside the United States at the centre of its corporate discourse based on the promise that it was “a home for creative talent and ‘innovative’ storytelling with a ‘global audience’” (Crawford 2020: 86). But, even though Netflix's localisation process was burdened by challenges related to the differences between the company's production culture and that of the countries

where it began to produce original series, it also offered opportunities for creators who had often been constrained by the limitations of local operators. In the case of Spain, this was especially relevant due to the hegemony of broadcast channels in fiction production. With *Las chicas del cable*, the Bambú team intended to evolve in aesthetics and storytelling in relation to their previous works.

**Question:** *What were the main creative opportunities that making *Las chicas del cable* for Netflix provided?*

**Carlos Sedes (director):** It is true that, when they [Netflix] came and explained to us why the close shots or why certain things were done, you understood it. They kept track of how the series are watched and on what kind of devices, on mobile phones or tablets. They said that, for a mobile phone, a general shot was very abusive because it has very little readability. I was very struck at the beginning, like they were getting into a lot more things than the broadcasters, for the good. We would even have to discuss with them to [plan for] the costumes, the type of hairdressing, the sets... They went through everything. (...) We are always talking about evolving, and even though we are doing the same genre, we had the power to do it. I do not say reinventing the genre, but somehow changing the characters. It is not just an aesthetic question. It was a great evolution for Bambú. For example, the main character, Lidia, is much more incorrect than Ana (Paula Echevarría) in *Velvet*. Lidia, Carlos (Martíño Rivas) and Francisco (Yon González) are lonely people and have no need for anyone.

**Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer):** I also think that, in the wardrobe itself, there is a bit more colour. We played with stronger tones. The last seasons of *Velvet* and *Velvet Colección* (2017–19) are in other tones with much more colour. But in the beginning, the tone was more restrained, including in the colour grading. With *Las chicas del cable*, we wanted a more vintage feel. With the optics, we had more options to test. But with the cameras we did not. I like the Arri camera, and I have always worked with it. But here it was not possible because it did not support the 4K that Netflix demanded. The Red camera, apart from the fact that they [Red cameras] tend to return an error, at a visual level, it generates a more modern image. We tried the Sony F65, which was a camera that was discontinued in Spain, [so] there were almost none. It was brought to us from the United Kingdom. It was almost a prototype; it was uncomfortable to shoot with it. But it gave us a lot of options for the lenses, and we did a lot of tests. And we achieved a more organic image.

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** I think it made us do a job of trying to be very clear, for example, with political issues and having to explain them very well. In Spain, we know our history, but it is not the same abroad. We had to tell it in certain ways, but telling other kinds of stories I think was given to us by working for [a] video-on-demand service. I do not think we have told any of those stories thinking that the series was going to be watched from another country. They are things that we had not been able to do because we were not on pay TV – for example, the story of Óscar [the trans man played by Ana Polvorosa]. It is a story that we had not been able to tell in this way on any broadcast channel. We were not addressing the same audience. But they [Netflix] were also very brave in thinking that we are at a time when we must stress visibility, and that it was important for us. This included dealing with gender issues as well.

**María José Rustarazo (head writer):** [What] Netflix offered us was to make a story with much more risk, to present characters with more edges, darker. A character grows the more of a person they are, and all people have a dark side. And then also to tell the story of the period. It was an era that interested us to be able to tell things that had to do with women and to be a little more critical. Netflix allowed us to delve a little deeper into history and politics, and touch on small points and nuances that perhaps we could not deal with in a broadcast show. *Velvet* presents an imaginary post-Civil War, in which there is no dictatorship, and everything is happiness.

**Question:** *How did Las chicas del cable address feminist storytelling?*

**Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content):** We look for a diversity of stories, and we have everything in our offer. What I do believe, and we said it from the beginning, is that one of the goals we had when we created this group of non-English originals was to look for narratives that were not being seen or representation that was not being done. In a certain way, there is a gap that is not being fulfilled, a need or a hunger for female stories. Many series, when they say they are feminine, but you see how the female characters are written or how the narrative progresses, they really are not. So one of the things that we bet [on] from the beginning is to make that change as well.

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** I felt that the women around me still have the same problems. And the same conflicts. If I work, I am not a good mother. If they are always

going to put a man ahead of a woman, women cannot get into certain jobs. To a different extent, but they were somewhat the same. And so, we thought it was interesting to speak to young people from a different era. It seems like it gives you distance, but at the same time, you can make a reflection. It was also a time when the social movement was very strong, although not as strong as it was later, and it seemed perfect for a generation. (...) I think the main difference here with the rest of the projects we did before was precisely to say that history must be present; it must be the protagonist because it was the protagonist in the history of women. Women's rights have really changed, and it is also important to say that, in today's world, the rights we have can be lost.

**María José Rustarazo (head writer):** Netflix asked us for more sisterhood, for us to work in the female group. When *Velvet* was made, it was built entirely as a romantic comedy, with different love stories that worked independently. In *Las chicas del cable*, we worked on the female characters completely. We started to set them against each other, from the inside, from what their ambitions are, what motivates them, what they want. Love in a section. But they had to function independently of their partner. They [the four main characters] complement each other and [act] as if they were a whole. The person they fell in love with is not the one who complemented them. If Lidia were a very clever person, who had already lived a lot of life, very cynical and who did not believe in anything, we needed a character who was very innocent, who would make Lidia remember all that she had lost. And that was Marga (Nadia de Santiago). (...) We made the storyline of Ángeles y Mario about gender violence, which helped us to unite all the girls. We had no idea when we were writing that it was going to be so powerful, that it was going to be the total catalyst to unite these girls, to the point that, when we got to the second season, we said there is nothing more powerful. We are not going to find another season arc that is not these women helping and protecting each other. We had planned a lot of things to tie them together, but this was enough.

## 5. ENDING THE SERIES AND THE LEGACY OF THE FIRST SPANISH NETFLIX ORIGINAL

After five seasons, the final episodes of *Las chicas del cable* premiered on July 3, 2020, bringing the first Spanish Netflix original series to an end. *Las chicas del cable* was the start of a

partnership between Bambú and Netflix that would continue with the drama series *Alta Mar* (2019–2020) and *Jaguar* (2021), the documentary series *El caso Alcàsser* (2019), and the film *A pesar de todo* (2019). But both companies also travelled further the path that *Las chicas del cable* had started. On the one hand, Netflix opened its first European production hub in Spain in April 2019, and by July 2021 had premiered another 16 original series. On the other, Bambú became one of the reference production companies for the transnational video-on-demand platforms arriving in Spain, making series for Amazon Video (*Un asunto privado* [2022]), AppleTV+ (*Now and Then* [2022]) and Starz (*Nacho Vidal* [2023]).<sup>9</sup> The years of collaboration between the two companies was fruitful for both.

**Question:** *What led to the decision to end the series and place the final season during the Spanish Civil War?*

**Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer):** We decided that the time has come to end it so that the series did not suffer. We have been accompanied by the cast the entire time, and they also have other interests. Netflix somehow wants to be able to accompany them in these new interests. Either the actresses go to another series or they lose them. So, I think that it was a decision that has to do with giving new opportunities to the creative and artistic talent.

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** In the final part of the series, the main characters have faced many personal problems, but this was no longer a personal problem. The world is revolutionised, and life and death are more present than ever. The enemy is the political situation itself. The girls have already positioned themselves from minute one, in their ways of thinking, and they have also become self-conscious. This also happens a lot to me and to the women around me. Maybe if you had asked us when we were 20 years old if we were feminists, we would have said no. And now we all say yes. As a series goes on, the character becomes more and more aware of what they want, what they are looking for and the fight for freedom.

**María José Rustarazo (head writer):** For us as creators, it enriched us and, at the same time, made the characters grow: to abandon a bit of melodrama to focus the series on

what we were really interested in, which is to tell the story of the friendship of these women over the years. In other words, there came a moment when we felt that the telephone company phase was running out of steam. We realised that the girls had matured a bit and that we had to show that leap of maturity. And first we started with a little jump, going to the Second Republic [1931–1939]. And then we do it by going to the Civil War [1936–1939]. We could put the characters in a totally different place. And we could tell something that we want to tell, which is women in a historical moment in which they began to conquer many social and cultural territories. And then suddenly there is something that cuts it short, and everything goes backwards. And that is when the series has become a story of friends who love each other, who accept each other, who want to move forward, who want to continue growing. It is total conflict for them.

**Question:** *What is Netflix's assessment of *Las chicas del cable* and its success?*

**Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content):** If we are going to make an original from that country, in the language of that country, whether it is Spain or Germany, it has only one mission: that it succeeds in that country. The rest is an added value thanks to the global reach of our service. When we made *Las chicas del cable*, it was not made to work in Latin America. It was made to work in Spain. And that was our main market, and it still is to this day. There are few series that make it to 5–6 seasons. We have done several studies on the series to understand the audience a bit more. Normally, in the evolution of series, and this happens on broadcast television, after each season, the audience drops. This is a series that has held its own and has grown with each season. It has found new audiences – not only in Spain but also outside Spain. So, it is saying something that the audience has evolved and grown along with the narrative of series as well.

**Question:** *What have been the main lessons learnt from *Las chicas del cable* for Bambú Producciones?*

**Gema R. Neira (co-creator):** We learned one thing when Bambú started. We wanted to take about 15 steps at the same time, and we were wrong: media does not change if society does not change. And changes happen little by little. It was very important to make a popular series with very strong intellectual and social ideas because I think that can help a lot more to raise awareness among girls and women. And in grandmothers, too. But any series that focuses only on that eliminates a type of audience that would never get in

<sup>9</sup> Starz, rebranded as Lionsgate+, announced in November 2022 that was closing operations in Spain in early 2023, and *Nacho* was later released by local Atresplayer Premium.



there. And here, with the personal stories of the characters of the series, a lot of people who perhaps do not have those political ideas or who do not reflect on our rights, they have been able to think about it.

**Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer):** With the new projects, communication was much more fluid because there were many more people who spoke Spanish. You feel that you have not done so badly because we are still trusted, and series are still being made in Spain. You know the protocols, and then you realise that they do not pose too many problems. For example, the ACES system, I think we were the first in Spain to use it. I felt more secure; I knew what Netflix wanted, and later the protocols did not change that much. *Alta mar* was a further development of *Las chicas del cable* and for the same audience. Until *Jaguar*, we had not made a series for [Netflix] that was not an evolution of *Gran Hotel*.

**Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer):** I think what we have learned is to work for an international market. Because until now, what we did was to work comfortably in a local territory and export our content with the luck that it succeeded. With Netflix, what you learn is to start from scratch with that vocation. In Spain, we all know perfectly well which interlocutors were involved and, in general, the two sides of Spanish society in relation to the Civil War. And internationally, no, I am not going to give you a history lesson on the Spanish Civil War, but we will stick to what is important, which is the human conflicts involved in the fact that the same family did not remain on one side or the other. We have learned to analyse the content and to judge it in a way that is valid, to think more about this global content, without losing the essence of the local.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Recently, Spanish fiction has experienced a production boom due to the start of the strategy of the pay operator Movistar+ and global video-on-demand services, such as Netflix, HBO and others (Castro and Cascajosa 2020). With *Las chicas del cable*, Bambú proved that Spanish companies could adapt their production culture to the global marketplace, mixing established formulas with innovations in length, storytelling and topics. It was an example of a mutually beneficial partnership: Bambú learnt how to work with international video-on-demand services and became less dependent on the

Spanish market, and Netflix benefited from a safer arrival to new territory with a company that had a strong track record.

But the experience also had challenges, especially some due to distance and cultural misunderstandings that transcended language. Significantly, during the making of *Las chicas del cable*, the tallest hurdles were overcome in face-to-face meetings. Plus, the process became easier as more executives who spoke Spanish and had experience in the country's industry came on board. Netflix's expansion shows that 'localisation also occurs in the space between the macro-levels of regulation and infrastructure and the micro-levels of language, content, and audience taste' (Wayne and Castro 2020: 12). As the production history of *Las chicas del cable* proves, the Netflix localisation was essential to establish close relationships with local professionals, avoid communication problems and learn first-hand about the particularities of the local markets.

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*A pesar de todo* (2019)

#### TV Series

*3%* (2016-2020)

*Alta Mar* (2019–2020)

*Club de cuervos* (2015-2019)

*El barco* (2011-2013)

*El caso Alcàsser* (2019)

*Gran Hotel* (2011-2013)

*Jaguar* (2021)

*Las chicas del cable* (2017-2020)

*Velvet* (2014-2016)

*Velvet Colección* (2017-2019)