

# #Cuéntalo [#TellIt]: Feminist voice(over) in Spanish Netflix series *Cable Girls*, *Money Heist*, and *Intimacy*

European Journal of Cultural Studies

1–17

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DOI: 10.1177/13675494251376106

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## Abstract

In light of a renewed emphasis on gender inequities and gendered mistreatment both within and beyond audiovisual production industries, this article argues that contemporary Spanish television and streaming is a vital site for the articulation of new modes of feminist engagement and expression. At the core of this articulation is the nexus of gender and voice. I analyse this nexus through a close contextualised reading of three Spanish case studies: *Cable Girls* (2017–2020), *Money Heist* (2017–2021), and *Intimacy* (2022). All three series feature female creatives behind the scenes as showrunners, creators, and writers, and all three have a female narrative voiceover, which invites varying degrees of feminist engagement, empathy, and solidarity. Emblematic of a wider paradigm of female and feminist voice(over) in contemporary Spanish streaming productions, these series exemplify the ways in which Spanish popular culture is a locus of intersecting ideas around feminisms and gender inequities. The international reach of these series, streamed via the globally dominant platform of Netflix, highlights their impact beyond the Spanish context, positing Spanish popular culture, and streaming content in particular, at the forefront of contemporary feminist engagement within mainstream cultures and as a key site within which frustrated articulations of industrial, and wider societal, injustices converge with new modes of feminist engagement and expression.

## Keywords

*Cable Girls*, feminism, feminist, *Intimacy*, *Money Heist*, Netflix, Spanish streaming, voice, voiceover

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## Introduction: the vocal turn

The voice constitutes a central concern of contemporary feminist politics. In 2017, the #MeToo movement encouraged women to speak up via social media about their experiences of sexual mistreatment, harassment, and abuse. Through a symbolic emphasis on female voices, the movement drew attention to the uneven distribution of power within and beyond audiovisual industries, as well as the extent to which marginalised groups are repeatedly subjected to inequalities, biases, and abuses.<sup>1</sup> One year later, Spanish journalist Cristina Fallarás created the hashtag #Cuéntalo (#TellIt), encouraging Spanish women to share their stories of sexual harassment, abuse, and rape in the wake of *La manada* (The Wolfpack) trial, whereby five men were found guilty not of rape or sexual aggression, but of sexual abuse, due to the supposed lack of clarity in terms of consent and to the alleged lack of violence in the attack.<sup>2</sup> This correlation of gender and voice reverberates within contemporary feminist theory, which hinges upon a turn to the vocal and/or the aural, with the voice a crucial component of such formulations. Feminist scholars underscore the extent to which silence is a patriarchal tool: Karpf (2011) asserts that silence is the idealised mode of speech for women; Sara Ahmed's conceptualisation of the feminist killjoy is predicated upon the need to reject the demand for silence and compliance at the core of female identity (2017); and both Boyce Kay (2020) and Phipps (2020) posit notions of voice and speaking up as forms of resistance against sexism and the patriarchy.

Amid this popular, political, and theoretical feminist vocal turn, audiovisual media such as cinema, television, and streaming are key sites for the engagement of feminist voice. While feminist scholars have analysed women's appearance and their visual objectification in detail within this context, less attention has been paid to how female voices sound or when and where they are allowed to be heard. That said, there have been some scholarly interventions that have signalled the importance of voice and sound, as well as their gendered dynamics, in audiovisual media. Silverman (1988), Lawrence (1991), Sjögren (2010 (2006)), and O'Meara (2022) analyse the ways in which gender norms and power dynamics dictate, characterise, and shape the ways in which women speak and are silenced, heard or ignored in contemporary screen media. However, these scholars engage primarily with Anglophone cinemas and media, meaning there is a significant gap pertaining to these issues within non-Anglophone cultural production.

With this in mind, I posit Spanish popular culture, specifically contemporary streaming, as a locus within which frustrated articulations of industrial, and wider societal, injustices converge with new modes of feminist engagement and expression. The proliferation of global SVOD (Streaming Video on Demand) services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have drastically altered the ways in which we consume film and television, as well as facilitating the international consumption and popularity of non-Anglophone content (*Money Heist*, 2017–2021; *Squid Games*, 2021–2025). Several of the most watched and binged Spanish-language streaming series boast female-led casts, deal with issues directly connected to feminism and gender politics, and feature prominent female showrunners and writers behind the scenes. This article focuses on three such series: *Cable Girls* (2017–2020), *Money Heist*, and *Intimacy* (2022). In what follows, I offer an overview of feminism, voice(over), and streaming in the Spanish context, before

analysing each of these series, all of which have enjoyed significant, if varying, success streaming on the world's leading platform Netflix, and all of which centre female voice through the use of narrative voiceover.<sup>3</sup> Although not the only female-led Spanish series to deploy this technique, I have selected these three for their transnational reach, and for their exemplification of diverse approaches and strategies in this context.<sup>4</sup> In *Cable Girls*, Lidia/Alba (Blanca Suárez) provides a framing narrative voiceover that overtly identifies the feminist impetus of the series, as well as functioning didactically for the intended international audience. In *Money Heist*, the voiceover of Tokyo (Úrsula Corberó) humanises the unlikeable protagonist and fosters spectatorial empathy in a feminist gesture that underscores how cultural mediations of gender are vocal and verbal, as much as they are visual and visible.<sup>5</sup> And in *Intimacy*, the posthumous voiceover of Ane (Véronica Echegui) acts as a conscience for the other female protagonists, a spectral reminder of the fatal consequences of not addressing issues of gender violence, and interpellates us as spectators, confronting us with our complicity within such structures. Despite serving varying purposes, these voiceovers invoke a sense of empathy between protagonist and spectator. The reverberations of female voices, in sonic and symbolic terms, resonate beyond the screen, constituting a central component of contemporary gender dynamics and feminist politics. This article thus intervenes in debates about gender and voice both within and beyond Spain, providing a methodology that dialogues, intersects with, and challenges Anglophone academic approaches to feminist screen media, and that can be usefully applied to other non-Anglophone productions to account for their gender politics.

### *Contexts: Spain, feminisms, women, voice(over)s*

The distinctiveness of Spanish feminisms in relation to their Anglophone counterparts necessitates a different scholarly lens. Rather than follow the linear trajectory often applied to Anglophone feminisms, 'Spanish feminist thinking has traversed a circular path that follows the vicissitudes of twentieth-century Spanish history' (Johnson, 2005: 244): the feminist gains of the Second Republic, the subsequent revoking of those gains and the return to a prohibitive patriarchal and misogynistic order under Francoism, before a second moment of feminist liberation in the wake of Franco's death in 1975. And while 'the concept of gender equality was a leading principle in the Constitution of 1978 [. . .], gender-based violence remained a problem' in democratic Spain (Hepworth, 2023: 212). In the contemporary context, feminism in Spain is 'experiencing a paradox' due to tensions between popular and public feminist mobilisations, evidenced by the 8M feminist strikes, and the reactionary rise of antigenderism, as promoted by far-right political parties such as Vox (Cabezas, 2022: 319).

In the Spanish audiovisual sphere, the foundation of CIMA (Association of Female Filmmakers and Audiovisual Media Professionals) in 2006 demonstrates that the awareness of gender biases, discrimination, and abuses within the industry predates more recent Anglophone movements such as #MeToo. Encompassing more than 1200 professional members, the organisation states its objective as being 'to encourage an egalitarian presence of female filmmakers and audiovisual professionals contributing to a balanced and realistic representation of women within the content that our medium

offers' (CIMA Official Website, n.d.).<sup>6</sup> In spite of the work conducted by CIMA, among other associations such as ODA (Observatory for Diversity in Audiovisual Media), there remains much to be done in terms of gender parity both on- and offscreen. In their 2024 report, ODA observed an increase in the number of female characters in Spanish audiovisual production, rising from 44% in previous years to 47.38%, with an increase too in non-binary characters (from 1 in 2023 to 6 in 2024) (Observatorio de la Diversidad de los medios Audiovisuales, 2024: 1). Behind the scenes, however, as Mercedes Herrero de la Fuente et al. (2022) note, data with regards to the presence of women within distinct professional roles in this sphere are 'not abundant or complete' (p. 5). These authors note that the areas with the lowest proportion of female representation are 'musical composition (11%), cinematography (15%), sound (19%), and direction (19%)', with 'executive production (32%), editing (2%), screenwriting (26%), and special effects (26%)' also male-dominated. They also observe a hierarchical gender spread whereby professions associated with direction and creativity are predominantly fulfilled by men, while those connected to organisation and aesthetics involve an increased number of women (Herrero de la Fuente et al., 2022: 9). Approved in 2022, the Ley Audiovisual [Audiovisual Law] was intended to achieve greater gender equality in the audiovisual sector, but this has been perceived as insufficient in terms of funding female-led projects or imposing fines on those not meeting equality quotas. While far from equitable, Spanish television and streaming constitute vital sites through which to explore intersections between gender and voice from a feminist perspective.

One of the ways in which gender and voice intersect in contemporary Spanish streaming is through the use of female voiceover. As O'Meara (2022) notes, 'since the 1990s women's voice-overs have appeared with increased frequency across various modes of English-language filmmaking, including documentaries' (p. 89). This tendency extends to television and streaming, with notable Anglophone examples including *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–2025). For Kathleen McHugh (2001), 'the popularity of this technique is particularly pronounced in the work of women filmmakers and, in some cases, derives from feminist experimental cinema' (p. 197). The audiovisual narrator is distinct to the literary narrator insofar as 'we can *hear* the voice of the narrator in audiovisual texts', and thus deduce information about both the state of mind and identity of the speaker (Stefanie Hoth, 2010: 83, my emphasis). The voiceover thus invokes a sense of proximity between speaker and spectator due to its acoustic quality and the fact that 'in every audio mix, the presence of a human voice instantly sets up a hierarchy of perception' and '*structures the sonic space that contains it*' (Chion, 1999: 5, original emphasis). The voiceover exemplifies this privileging of the human voice, such that the viewer experiences this aural aspect as though the narrator is whispering directly in one's ear, especially if listening, as I often do when watching material for my research, via headphones. This sonic proximity encourages an empathetic connection between character and audience, underscored by moments in which the voiceover breaks the fourth wall and directly addresses us as viewers. While not all female voiceovers are feminist, this article highlights moments of feminist potential that coalesce around the female voiceover in *Cable Girls*, *Money Heist*, and *Intimacy*.

## The didactic voiceover: feminist voices in *Cable Girls*

Period drama *Cable Girls* is an important case study within the panorama of female-led streaming series produced in Spain. Unlike *Locked Up* (2015–2019) or *Money Heist*, which were originally broadcast on national free-to-air channels in Spain, *Cable Girls* was the first Spanish-language original series produced specifically by and for Netflix. It marks a vital milestone in the streaming platform's creation of non-Anglophone content, a commitment similarly demonstrated by the construction of its first European hub on the outskirts of Madrid, opened in 2019 and expanded in 2022. As with its acquisition of locally produced content to stream via its website, Netflix leveraged already established national networks and infrastructures in its foray into non-Anglophone content production. *Cable Girls* was created by Bambú Producciones, a Spanish company founded in 2007 by Ramón Campos and Teresa Fernández Valdés. Bambú are creators and producers of

the first fictional Netflix series made in Spain, the first Netflix docuseries made in Spain, the first Apple TV series made in Spain, the first Movistar+ series, the second Starz series made in Spain . . . all of them internationally successful series as evidenced by the multitude of prizes they have won. (Bambú Producciones Official Website, n.d.)<sup>7</sup>

The company is known for series imbued with a 'taint of conservatism and nostalgia' (Loxham, 2023: 1712), such as *Velvet* (2014–2016) which is set in an eponymously-titled department store in 1950s Madrid (recreated through the use of CGI) and centred on 'the melodrama of infidelity and family secrets' as well as the ill-fated romance between Ana (Paula Echevarría) and Alberto (Miguel Angel Silvestre) (Loxham, 2023: 1714). Notwithstanding, Bambú's productions are significant for the study of female and feminist voices within and beyond Spain, given the prevalence of female-led casts and the focus on female-centred themes and issues.

Set in the late 1920s, stretching into the 1930s in its latter seasons, *Cable Girls* follows the now typical Bambú format of a period drama centred on a group of women forced to confront the challenges faced by, and limits placed on, women during this time period. Four women, from differing backgrounds, form the focus of the series: Lidia/Alba, Ángeles (Maggie Civantos), Carlota (Ana Fernández), and Marga (Nadia de Santiago). Spanning five seasons, the series follows these women as they navigate a pivotal moment in history: the establishment of telephone communications in Spain, but more importantly, the stirrings of female independence. Drawing on generic tropes of melodrama, telenovela, and period drama, the show emphasises the ways in which women in this period in Spain were systematically controlled by the men in their lives. In this regard, the series stands out as an example of cultural productions that do not look back with rose-tinted glasses upon a period often cited as progressive, and as one in which women in Spain, and indeed further afield, benefitted from various social, political, and legal freedoms.<sup>8</sup> *Cable Girls* thus actively addresses gender-related topics that resonate not only with the historical time period in which the show is set, but also with contemporary discussions relating to gender equity and feminism.

Against this backdrop, *Cable Girls* underscores the importance of female voice through its use of a female narrative voiceover belonging to protagonist Lidia/Alba. Most episodes feature a framing voiceover that introduces the main theme of that instalment in the opening sequence and then returns to reflect on the same idea in the closing scenes. The voiceover also punctuates most episodes, intervening at key points to offer further insights beyond the onscreen action. The significance of the voiceover cannot be understated, given that it opens the series, appearing in a brief scene-setting pre-credits sequence that outlines the parameters of the show. Lasting almost 2 minutes, it states that:

In 1928, us women were like adornments worn to parties. . . Objects without the power of opinions or decisions. It is true that life was not easy for anyone, but much less if you were a woman. If you were a woman in 1928, being free was something that seemed out of reach. Because for society, us women were only housewives, mothers, wives. We did not have the right to have dreams or ambitions. To carve out a future, many women had to move far away. And others had to confront the rules of a machista and retrograde society. At the end of the day, all of us women, rich or poor, wanted the same thing: to be free. And if to achieve this we had to break the law, we were prepared to do that without worrying about the consequences. Only those who fight for their dreams are able to achieve them. What we did not know was that destiny had many surprises in store for us.<sup>9</sup>

The images that accompany these words support the voiceover declarations: an elegant soirée attended by Alba and her friend, whose glamorous appearances confirm the idea of women as ‘adornments’ or ‘Objects without the power of opinions or decisions’; wife and mother Ángeles, tending to and clearing up after her daughter while her husband Mario (Sergio Mur) reads his newspaper calmly, before a cut reveals him refusing to let go of her and telling her to be quiet, affirming the idea that ‘us women were only housewives, mothers, wives’; a visibly upset Marga aboard a country bus, leaving her mother behind, demonstrating that ‘To carve out a future, many women had to move far away’; and a defiant Carlota standing up to her patriarchal father, evidencing the idea that ‘other women had to confront the rules of a machista and retrograde society’. While the series thus explicitly engages the limitations of women during this historical moment in Spain through the images of this opening sequence, it also, more importantly, utilises the voice to foreground this feminist impulse.

Critics have tended to view the voiceover in *Cable Girls* as unnecessarily explicit. Paul Julian Smith (2021) views it as a vital component of the series’ international ambitions, ‘a reassuring technique for the new viewer’ that ‘serves to “place” the US viewer and connect with the young contemporary female audience’ (p. 110). But Smith (2021) also designates it as ‘excessively explicit on feminism and women’s position in the period’ (p. 110). Likewise, Raquel Crisóstomo Gálvez (2018) describes the voiceover as ‘the spectators’ guide’, similar to Meredith’s voiceover in *Grey’s Anatomy* due to its confessional tone, ‘as if it were a page from her personal diary’ and contending ultimately that it is ‘quite unnecessary and excessive because of the descriptive and irrelevant tone’ (p. 64).<sup>10</sup> Despite its didacticism, the voiceover lies at the core of *Cable Girls*’ cross-cultural ambitions, establishing feminist interconnections across geographical, but

also historical, boundaries. Alba's assertions in voiceover call into question the gender bias of history and function as a form of *her* story, whereby history is retold from a feminist perspective and with a female voice. That is not to say that the series is predominantly concerned with an accurate retelling of this particular epoch in Spanish history, far from it.<sup>11</sup> Rather, I follow Loxham's (2023) view that the series enables a transnational dialogue through 'its focus on material and structural inequalities that are depicted as different in their historical iteration but the same in their generic manifestation' (p. 1714). I thus read *Cable Girls* as articulating a transhistorical feminist sensibility that draws parallels between the historical struggles that women such as the eponymous cable girls faced, and those facing women in the contemporary context in which the series is produced and viewed. *Cable Girls* emphasises vocal agency as Alba's voiceover narration underscores the strength and power one assumes in speaking up and telling one's own story. Although *Cable Girls* focuses on women's struggles 100 years ago, it thus draws parallels with contemporary debates in relation to women's rights, highlighting the work still to be undertaken in this arena.

### **The interpellative voiceover: feminist voices in *Money Heist*<sup>12</sup>**

While *Cable Girls* merits analysis as the first Spanish-language 'Netflix Original', the unprecedented success of *Money Heist* has rendered the series an important case study of contemporary streaming both within and beyond the Spanish context. The heist drama is one of the most consumed non-Anglophone series on Netflix; it has been nominated for, and won, a glut of awards including an Emmy for Best Drama (2018); and its iconic red jumpsuits and Salvador Dalí masks have become symbolic worldwide, worn in copycat crimes as well as being adopted for political causes such as feminism, democracy, and climate issues (*Money Heist: The Phenomenon*, 2020).<sup>13</sup> The plot of the series hinges upon two heists: the first involves a gang of robbers entering The Royal Mint in Madrid with the aim of printing their own bank notes, in a critique of the 2007–8 economic crash and the subsequent bailout by the European Central Bank (Parts 1–2); and the second centres on the rescuing of gang member Río/Aníbal Cortés (Miguel Herrán), alongside the thieving of gold from Spain's Central Bank (Parts 3–5). Produced by Vancouver Media, headed up by personal and professional partners Álex Pina and Esther Martínez Lobato, the show was first aired on free-to-view channel Antena 3 in Spain. Commencing with an audience of 4.5 million spectators that gradually declined over its first season, which had been split into two unequal Parts of 9 and 6 episodes respectively, *Money Heist* was initially deemed a flop. Picked up as part of its 'rescue strategy' (the acquisition of international distribution rights for 'half-finished or ailing projects that have been developed by national networks'), Netflix rearranged the 15 seventy-minute episodes into two seasons of 22 shorter episodes (40–50 minutes) to bring the programme in line with standard international episode lengths (Castro and Cascajosa Virino, 2020: 157–158). The success of the show on the platform led bosses to approach creators Pina and Martínez Lobato with a proposal to create further instalments, this time with a significantly greater budget that permitted 'more exterior and international shooting' (Smith, 2021: 103), and thus greater international appeal and reach.

In the context of gender and voice, *Money Heist* might not seem like an obvious choice. *Money Heist* features the mixed-gender team of Pina and Martínez Lobato, and focuses on a mixed gender cast which is male-dominated (Smith, 2021: 102). The genre and contemporary setting of the series stand out from other recent internationally-recognised Spanish series that have utilised the period drama format as a means of remediating recent history via a gendered lens (*Cable Girls*, *Velvet*). Perpetuating female archetypes, *Money Heist* centres and sexualises pretty, white, hegemonic, and normative female characters, with their demise typically linked to heteronormative and patriarchal care duties (Bonavitta and de Garay Hernández, 2019; Corbalán, 2024).<sup>14</sup> The series also focuses on heteronormative relationships and kinship structures. While trans character Julia Martínez (problematically played by cisgender actor Belén Cuesta) is a welcome addition to the cast in Parts 3 to 5, the series could be more inclusive since it features no lesbian individuals and steeps its queer male relationships in tragedy.<sup>15</sup>

Despite all this, *Money Heist* features a range of powerful, multi-faceted female characters that defy conventional understandings of femininity and rebel against patriarchal and misogynistic authorities: Tokyo/Silene Oliveira, Nairobi/Ágata Jiménez (Alba Flores), Lisbon/Raquel Murillo (Itziar Ituño), Stockholm/Mónica Gaztambide (Esther Acebo), and Alicia Sierra (Najwa Nimri). This idea has already been taken up in scholarship on the series, forming the focus of Anja Louis and Abigail Loxham's (2024) analysis of police negotiator Raquel who 'redefines feminine ability, power and control', and offers 'a more fluid version of embodied female subjectivity' (p. 147). Furthermore, the narrative explores dynamics of gender, feminism, and power, demonstrating the perpetuation of patriarchal injustices experienced by women. The heist crew, led by *The Professor*/Sergio Marquina (Álvaro Morte), constitutes an escape from systemic misogyny and patriarchal abuses, supported by the fact that negotiators Raquel and Alicia switch from the police to *The Professor*'s gang, having experienced gender-related discrimination and victimisation in the workplace. Furthermore, like *Cable Girls* and *Intimacy*, *Money Heist* makes use of a female narrative voiceover. Through an analysis of its fostering of spectatorial empathy, I understand Tokyo's voice(over) as feminist, emphasising how cultural mediations of gender are vocal and verbal, as much as they are visual and visible.

The character of Tokyo provides the voiceover narration of all five parts of *Money Heist*. The choice of Tokyo as narrator, rather than gang leader and heist mastermind *The Professor*, aligns with Smith's (2021: 99) argument that there is a preference for 'female protagonists and female audiences' at the centre of the recent boom of Spanish series beyond Spain and/or other Spanish-speaking countries. As a character, Tokyo is hardened and unlikeable. She often acts rashly and at times jeopardises the heist as a result, which for scholars Bonavitta and de Garay Hernández (2019: 215) renders her 'the classic *femme fatale*', with little to offer beyond her sex appeal.<sup>16</sup> However, Tokyo's status as voiceover narrator produces a split within her characterisation, complicating and nuancing her role in the series. At times, the purpose of Tokyo's narration is didactic, assisting comprehension, buttressing the narrative, and offering background information for the audience, for example on the origins of the foundational relationships between her and the rest of the gang.<sup>17</sup> But beyond this, Tokyo's voiceover highlights the multiple temporal narrative planes of the series. It speaks not only in flashback sequences, but, like June/

Offered in *The Handmaid's Tale*, from 'a different time and place than the visual text' (Harrison, 2020: 36), affording Tokyo a spatiotemporal excess that aurally amplifies her presence and significance within the series. This has a humanising effect, insofar as it splits the Tokyo we see onscreen from the Tokyo that narrates those events, fostering a heightened sense of empathy between protagonist and spectator.<sup>18</sup>

Split between past, present, and future iterations of the self, Tokyo as narrator speaks from a position of omniscience within a future timeline. Her existence on, and permeation of, the various temporal planes of the narrative resonate with the non-chronological organisation of the series, which repeatedly loops back to the past via analeptic sequences, but also projects forwards both vocally and aurally into the future through Tokyo's voiceover. In this way, *Money Heist* connects to Sjogren's (2006) reading of the female voice-off in classical Hollywood cinema as vortexical, characterised by 'digression rather than the linear model of progression often cited as the model of the classical cinema' (pp. 15–16). Tokyo's voiceover explodes the temporal and spatial limitations of the frame, occupying a future only aurally accessible to the audience, framing the narrative, and telling the story in her own voice(over). Through her honest, posthumous, and self-reflexive voiceover, Tokyo redeems herself and justifies her actions, which often appear rash and endanger the heist and the lives of her fellow crew, within the present timeline of the narrative. I read this as a feminist gesture insofar as it allows for a more sympathetic reading of Tokyo, due to the empathy it invokes in us as spectators. This relationship is heightened by moments in which Tokyo's voiceover appears to directly address us as viewers, breaking the fourth wall. In Part 1, Episode 6 (P1, E6), for example, Tokyo's voiceover states:

Have you ever thought that if you could go back in time, you perhaps would not make the same decisions? We all make bad decisions and some of them snowball. They become massive. Like the boulder in *Indiana Jones*, chasing you downhill only to crush you.

A comparable moment of direct address occurs in the final episode (P5, E10), when Tokyo's voiceover interjects 'Now what you're really wondering is "What happened to the real gold?"'. The use of the third person plural 'you' in the original Spanish (*ustedes*) in both of these instances is intriguing, implying that Tokyo's voiceover is addressing a group of people that she does not know. Her voiceover interpellates us within the narrative, underscoring the fact that the words pronounced by her voiceover are for our benefit. *Money Heist* thus directly fosters the sense of proximity between protagonist and viewer, in a gesture of feminist solidarity, through its interpellative voiceover.

## The provocative voiceover: feminist voices in *Intimacy*

As in *Money Heist*, *Intimacy* immediately interpellates its audience through a voiceover that encourages us to empathise with one of its female protagonists, who walks into the sea and dies by suicide in the opening sequence of the first episode. Over the course of the series, the posthumous narrative voiceover, which belongs to factory worker Ane, continues to directly address us as spectators and the other, living, protagonists of the series in a gesture that simultaneously invites empathy and engenders a sense of guilt and

responsibility. At the centre of the series are three very different female protagonists in terms of age and socio-economic background, whose privacy is violated through the circulation of explicit images. Produced by Basque company Txintxua Films and set in the Basque Country, *Intimacy* has a female-led cast, treats female-related concerns as a narrative focus, utilises a female narrative voiceover, and prominently features women at the level of production (Marian Fernández Pascal is the producer; Verónica Fernández and Laura Sarmiento are the series creators). In what follows, I analyse the female narrative voiceover in *Intimacy* as a part of a provocative depiction of gender violence onscreen that interpellates the audience, encouraging an empathetic relationship with the protagonist, as well as forcing us to confront our role and culpability in the perpetuation of systemic abuses, inequities, and injustices.

The female narrative voiceover of *Intimacy* is evocative due to its posthumous status, indexing Chion's (1999: 46–47) reading of the voiceover as proximate to death. Ane's story is revealed over the course of the series, both through the voiceover and through the non-linear narrative structure. Her suicide in the opening sequence is the result of harassment in the workplace, linked to the circulation of explicit images by and among her male colleagues. The series connects Ane's story with that of mayoral candidate Malen (Itziar Ituño) and her adolescent daughter Leire (Yune Nogueiras), both of whom experience similar violations. While a video of Malen having sex with a man who is not her husband is leaked to the press, jeopardising her family and her career, Leire must not only deal with the fallout of her mother's sex scandal, but also with threats from her ex-boyfriend regarding the circulation of explicit images. The narrative draws parallels between the women and their experiences, as well as positing Ane's tale as a warning of the grave consequences of not dealing with these crimes.

To return to the voiceover, Ane's posthumous narratorial interventions function as a form of conscience for the other female protagonists. When we first meet Malen, in the opening 5 minutes of the first episode, Ane's voiceover intervenes in a moment of (albeit unheard) direct address to the protagonist, underscored by the use of 'you':

Malen, they do not see you. They only see your triumph. You know what it has cost you to get here. Conquer others. Conquer yourself. On occasion you have thought about quitting but you care about your city. Whether they believe it or not. And you want, for once, that they do not win. Enjoy this, Malen. Enjoy the last hour before the rest of your life changes.

Ane is an omniscient narrator who speaks from beyond the grave. She knows how events will unfold, and her interjections foster tension for viewers by hinting at the troubles still to develop, a spectral reminder of the potentially devastating consequences of leaving these issues unresolved. Ane is an *acousmètre* and 'a voiceover calling for justice', akin to Mariela in *The Virgin of Juarez* (Thornton, 2020: 140). Following Michel Chion, Thornton (2020) explains how the *acousmètre* is a voice detached from a body and "invested with magical powers" that are "usually malevolent, occasionally tutelary" (p. 140). While the magic, malevolence, and mystery attached to Chion's *acousmètre* do not necessarily apply fully to Ane, her voiceover does bring a sense of foreboding. Moreover, her tutelary interventions operate as cautionary warnings to those dealing with similar issues, which ultimately led to Ane's death.

Besides the other female protagonists, Ane's voiceover also addresses us as spectators. The opening voiceover highlights the ways in which we are directly implicated in the events unfolding on screen, through the use of 'you' and 'we'.

Don't look at me like that. I didn't expect that this would be my end either. I was sitting there, like you are, thinking that my life was fine, but they betrayed me. Haven't you ever trusted someone too much? I have. You think you're safe, but you are not. All of us, deep down, are hiding something. And we tremble thinking about what might happen one day if someone found it out. You too.

This assertion highlights the sense of shame that Ane feels, not because her privacy was violated, but rather because her secret was revealed, resonating with Gisèle Pelicot's declaration that 'shame must change sides'. The opening sequence positions us acoustically with Ane as she walks deeper into the water, emphasised by the muffled sound we hear as she ducks her head under the water and begins swimming downwards. These aspects underscore how the series demands empathy and complicity from the viewer, creating proximity between narrator and spectator through the acoustical prioritisation of the voice on the soundtrack. Furthermore, Ane as narrator does not talk directly to any of the male characters, in a gesture that evokes feminist solidarity and emphasises the gendered element of gender-based and sexual violence. The interpellation of the spectator in this way confronts us with our culpability and complicity in relation to the perpetuation of systemic abuses, inequities, and injustices.

## Conclusions: voicing feminisms through feminist voice(over)s


Inspired by the recent emphasis on intersections between voice and feminism, this article has examined the ways in which female voiceovers can be read as feminist within three Spanish-language Netflix series. Emblematic of a wider paradigm of female and feminist voice(over) in contemporary Spanish streaming productions, these series exemplify the ways in which Spanish popular culture is an important locus of intersecting ideas around feminisms and gender inequities. The international reach of these series, streamed via the globally dominant platform of Netflix, highlights their impact beyond the Spanish context, positing Spanish popular culture, and streaming content in particular, at the forefront of contemporary feminist engagement within mainstream cultures. In *Cable Girls*, *Money Heist*, and *Intimacy*, female voices and voiceovers invite varying degrees of feminist engagement, empathy, and solidarity. In *Cable Girls*, the show adopts the didactic female voiceover as a strategy to engage international audiences, but also to articulate a feminist impulse that transcends its period setting to speak to contemporary issues and debates. In *Money Heist*, the use of an interpellative narrative voiceover facilitates a feminist reading of the series due to its humanisation of a flawed protagonist and its fostering of a sense of empathy and complicity in us as spectators. And the provocative posthumous narrative voiceover of *Intimacy* invites us not only to consider the devastating impact of crimes connected to revenge porn, gender violence, and privacy violation on those who experience them, but also our culpability and complicity in relation to the

perpetuation of systemic abuses, inequities, and injustices. Taken together, these three series underscore the value and importance of analysing non-Anglophone screen media and its contributions in the wider field of feminist media studies, as well as foregrounding the role of popular culture, and especially streaming content, as a crucial component of contemporary articulations of feminism and feminist engagement. That two of these female narrators ultimately have to die for their voices to be heard speaks volumes. Tokyo and Ane are feminist killjoys (Ahmed, 2017), insofar as they refuse to be silent/silenced and to comply with expectations, both in life and death. Through these female protagonist-narrators who reject the idea that a woman should be silent, and who continue to speak from beyond the grave, *Money Heist* and *Intimacy* epitomise how Spanish popular culture, and in particular TV and streaming, functions as a key site within which frustrated articulations of industrial, and wider societal, injustices converge with new modes of feminist engagement and expression.

### Acknowledgements

The author thanks the Carnegie Trust as the research upon which this article is based was funded by a Carnegie Research Incentive Grant. She also thanks the reviewers for their constructive comments on the piece, and Abigail Loxham for her incisive feedback on an initial draft of this article. Finally, she thanks Alba McVicar Reyes for her preparation of a comprehensive database on the three showrunners and series whose work forms the focus of this article.

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### Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author thanks the Carnegie Trust as the research upon which this article is based was funded by a Carnegie Research Incentive Grant.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

### Notes

1. While the #MeToo movement was vital in bringing to light issues of power imbalances and gender inequities at work in audiovisual production industries and in society more broadly, it also evidenced other privileges and systemic inequities, such as race and class, at work within these contexts. For more on this, see Phipps (2020) and Boyle (2019).
2. There is a website documenting and analysing the responses to #Cuéntalo in the first 14 days after it was created: <http://proyectocuentalo.org> (accessed 21 February 2025). For more on

the Wolfpack case and its fallout, see the documentary *You Are Not Alone: Fighting the Wolfpack* (2023).

3. Since Netflix launched its Engagement Reports in 2023, *Cable Girls* has garnered over 120 million viewing hours, *Money Heist* accounts for over 1146 million viewing hours, and *Intimacy* has enjoyed over 28 million viewing hours (What We Watched Reports, 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b). With regard to Netflix's status, according to the provider's website, at the time of writing the service has more than 300 million paid subscriptions worldwide (Netflix Investors Website, n.d.).
4. Other female-led Spanish series that utilise narrative voiceover include those centring trans-female protagonists (*Dafne and the Rest*, 2021; *Veneno*, 2020). Although related to the series and feminist impulses investigated here, this phenomenon merits, in my view, further and more nuanced analysis that takes into account the specificities of trans female subjectivities and trans feminisms. The 2025 series *The Lady's Companion* utilises a male narrative voiceover before playfully usurping it with the protagonist's own narration, which breaks the fourth wall, underscoring the continued interest in this technique.
5. For more on this, see Noble (2025).
6. This is my own translation. The original citation is: 'fomentar una presencia igualitaria de las cineastas y profesionales del audiovisual contribuyendo a una representación equilibrada y realista de la mujer dentro de los contenidos que ofrece nuestro medio' (CIMA Official Website, n.d.).
7. This is my own translation. The original Spanish is:
 

la primera ficción de Netflix en España, la primera docuserie de Netflix en España, la primera serie de Apple Tv en España, la primera serie de Movistar +, la segunda serie de Starz en España . . . todas ellas series de éxito internacional como avalan la multitud de premios recogidos. (Bambú Producciones Official Website, n.d.)
8. See, for example, the film *Belle Époque* (Dir. Fernando Trueba, 1992), which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1992, and which depicts the Second Republic as an idyllic period of liberal ideals and of personal and political freedoms. It is also worth noting here that Bambú's previous series *Velvet* was critiqued precisely for its apolitical depiction of its period 1950s setting. For more on how *Cable Girls* presents a 'complex vision of the 1920s', see Harkema (2018).
9. All translations of dialogue from the original Spanish are my own.
10. The original citations here are: 'la guía de los espectadores'; 'como si se tratara de la página de un diario personal'; 'bastante innecesario y sobredimensionado por el intenso tono descriptivo e irrelevante' (Crisóstomo Gálvez, 2018: 64)
11. The historical accuracy (or lack thereof) of *Cable Girls* is a topic dealt with by several scholars, who present differing views on this. Crisóstomo Gálvez (2018), who notes that while certain historical figures (for example, King Alfonso XIII) feature, the series does not deal with other important aspects, such as the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera which is especially relevant in relation to the 'escuchas telefónicas para evitar insurgenencias por parte del gobierno' ('government-sanctioned telephone eavesdropping to avoid uprisings') (pp. 61–62). Alternatively, for Harkema (2018), the series presents a 'nuanced engagement with the historical period in which it is set' (p. 222).
12. For more on the significance of voice and sound in *Money Heist*, see Noble (2022) and Noble (2025).
13. Overarching statistics regarding viewing figures for *Money Heist* are difficult to ascertain. Smith (2021: 96–97) notes that despite attempts to secure US audience figures for Spanish series from the Netflix press office, he received no information. Various press articles detail

the reception of new instalments of the series: as an example, Mónica Marie Zorrilla (2021) reports on the *Variety* website that in the week after the fifth and final instalment launched on Netflix on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021, the series amassed nearly 190 million total viewing hours, rising to Number 1 on Netflix's Global top 10 list within 2 days and boasting significantly more total viewing hours than the week's top English-language programme (*Lost in Space*).

14. Examples of the demise of female characters in *Money Heist* due to their fulfilment of patriarchal care roles include when Tokyo rescues her boyfriend and fellow heister Río, leading to the gang being captured; when Nairobi's guilt about her son, who was taken into care, brings about her death; and when single mother Raquel jeopardises the heist due to concerns for her ageing mother and young daughter.
15. I would like to thank my friend and colleague Miguel García for this observation and for encouraging me to think more critically about the feminist potential of the series, given its heteronormative impulse and lack of inclusivity.
16. The original Spanish citation is 'la clásica *femme fatale*' (Bonavitta and de Garay Hernández, 2019: 215).
17. Tokyo shares common ground with contemporary Anglophone voiceover narrators such as Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, Mary-Alice in *Desperate Housewives* and June/Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Despite their distinct genre origins and diverse functions within their respective series, these voiceover narrators divulge secrets and/or explore hidden aspects of their interpersonal relationships, just as Tokyo does. For more on Carrie and Mary-Alice as voiceover narrators and their role as secret keepers/spillers, see Hoth (2010) but also Akass and McCabe (2004, 2006), Bignell (2008) and Fritsch (2005). For more on June/Offred as voiceover narrator, see Harrison (2020).
18. Intriguingly, for Harrison (2020: 36), the spatiotemporal excess demarcated by June/Offred's voiceover narration in *The Handmaid's Tale* does precisely the opposite, insofar as it 'creates a sense of artificiality' that detracts from the humanising quality of the voiceover.

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