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The New Feminist Series: Cha(lle)nging the Representation of the Postfeminist Woman in Spanish Television (2015–2022)

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the renewed Spanish feminist movement is reshaping the portrayal of women in popular culture. The study delves into contemporary Spanish TV series spanning from 2015 to 2022. Close analysis of the series *La otra mirada* (2018–2019), *Señoras del (h)AMPA* (2019–2021) and *Paquita Salas* (2016–2021) demonstrates how they provide more authentic and progressive depictions of women and break away from the limitations of the postfeminist ideals cultivated in popular media since the 1990s.

This research employs the concept of 'postfeminist sensibility' as developed by Rosalind Gill (2007) to examine the presence of postfeminist themes in modern fiction, which give shape to models of femininity that uphold patriarchal values. Drawing on Gill's framework, Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters (2014) outline three archetypes of female representation within twenty-first-century popular culture: the girl, the housewife, and the career woman. These archetypes are constructed around limited ideologies of femininity rooted in patriarchal myths of beauty, maternal love, and romance. This thesis analyses how contemporary TV series challenge these female models and offer alternatives, creating more inclusive and empowering representations of women.

I demonstrate how each of the TV series examined in this thesis undertakes the deconstruction of one of the three postfeminist models along with the patriarchal myth it embodies. *La otra mirada* dismantles the girl model and interrogates the underlying beauty myth; *Señoras del (h)AMPA* explores the housewife model, specifically focusing on the idealised mother figure promulgated by the new momism discourse; finally, *Paquita Salas* presents alternative portrayals of female professionals that diverge significantly from the postfeminist career woman archetype and the myth of romantic love. Through the portrayal of female characters that are not confined to outdated gender norms, these series contribute to a broader conversation about gender equality and empowerment in contemporary Spanish television and society as a whole.

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Declaration

‘Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw’r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o’r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw’n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.’

Rwy’n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno’r gwaith gyda chytundeb fy Ngrichwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr)’

‘I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.’

I confirm that I am submitting the work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s)’

Introduction

In 2018, Spanish feminism gained global recognition as the marches for International Women's Day consolidated its position among Europe's most feminist countries. In the Spanish context, feminism has become mainstream, permeating all aspects of social life. This thesis examines how the increased visibility and impact of the Spanish feminist movement has influenced the portrayal of women in popular culture, particularly on television. Taking 2015 as the socio-cultural turning point when the new feminist landscape emerged and TV streaming platforms entered Spain, altering the television industry defying the traditional network system, my research focuses on contemporary Spanish TV series from 2015–2022. I analyse how the representations and cultural discourses in recent years are constructing new female subjectivities that differ from the postfeminist femininity cultivated in popular culture since the 1990s. By doing so, this thesis contributes to critical approaches on postfeminism, an under-explored concept in Hispanic media studies. It draws upon the work of Hispanic scholars in feminist studies and popular culture, such as Isabel Menéndez Menéndez (2008), Isis Giraldo (2016), Tatiana Hidalgo-Marí (2018), and Laura Martínez-Jiménez (2020), and aligns with the concept of postfeminism theorised by Susan Faludi (1992), Angela McRobbie (2009), and Rosalind Gill (2016) as a 'complex anti-feminism' that suggests feminism is no longer needed and that equality has been achieved. This conceptualisation emphasises the depoliticisation of feminism and its association with neoliberalism as defining features of postfeminism. As Milly Buonanno highlights, television has been in the vanguard of postfeminism 'since the 1980s, when post-feminist signals first began to surface' (2014: 20). However, investigation of Spanish television series as loci for postfeminist ideas has been largely overlooked. This thesis seeks to fill this gap by examining the shifting dynamics of gender representation in contemporary popular culture, employing postfeminism as a critical tool for analysis. In doing so, it contributes to a growing but still limited body of studies on Spanish TV fiction from a feminist perspective.

Gender studies analyses of television fiction in the Spanish context began in the early twenty-first century with works such as Elena Galán Fajardo's *La imagen social de la mujer en las series de ficción* (2007) and the project *Las mujeres en la ficción televisiva española de prime time* (2011), directed by José Javier Sánchez Aranda as part of the *I Informe del Observatorio Audiovisual de Identidades de la Universidad Internacional de La Rioja*. These critical approaches, along with subsequent works on fiction series from the 1990s and early-

2000s, showcased stereotypical representations of women during what has been referred to as the 'postfeminist era,' characterised by the invisibility of feminism in society. For three decades, postfeminism propagated the idea that gender equality had been achieved and feminism was no longer necessary. In Spain, the generation of women born after the eighties grew up taking feminist victories for granted, with the word 'feminism' erased from their vocabulary.

However, in 2014, when the Conservative Party in power attempted to reinstate abortion to the Penal Code, it sparked a reaction and consequent revitalisation of feminism. The mass mobilisation of women on that day signalled the beginning of an emerging feminism that can be traced back to the women's demands as part of the 15-M movement against austerity policies after the 2008 recession. The Internet played a crucial role in providing a platform to express feminist perspectives, share experiences of oppression, and create communicative channels among different women's groups. This led to a feminist landscape in which the postfeminist discourse was questioned, and its faux feminism unveiled. This period has been identified as the Fourth Wave of feminism. Thus, the sociocultural context in Spain changed dramatically for the first time since the discipline of Gender Studies had entered the country. As Martínez-Jiménez recognises, in contemporary times, feminism has become 'an ordinary matter *of/for the people*, affecting their needs, identities, and relationships. It is now more difficult to find women who openly define themselves as non-feminists' (2020: 999, italics in original) and is well-established in the entertainment and media industries, as well as socio-political spaces. Therefore, the thesis examines the new feminist period that starts in 2014/2015 to explore the extent to which the socio-political acceptance and articulation of feminist ideology at a national level have affected cultural production.

In the progressive and transformative project of feminism which aims to overcome the current patriarchal order, culture plays a decisive role in the sphere of symbolic production. Menéndez Menéndez asserts that 'in the twentieth-first century the cultural industries have become a new pulpit from which to suggest and propose the way in which one should be in the world, they are opinion makers and creators of identity' (2008: 21). Similarly, Buonanno (1999: 50) highlights the pre-eminent role that, with respect to cinema and literature, television and television series have assumed in constructing the collective imagination. She describes television as a 'super-narrator' (2008: 5) in contemporary society, contending that television series 'trabajan para preservar, construir y reconstruir un "sentido común" de la vida cotidiana, un sustrato de creencias y aceptaciones compartidas, incluso de respuestas a

los dilemas de la existencia' (Buonanno 1999: 64). Drawing upon Buonanno's emphasis on the importance of stories narrated by television and Paul Julian Smith's statement that, 'as dramatized societies, Spain and Mexico are thus at once reflected and refracted by the new series on the small screen' (2016: 3), this thesis looks at television series.

In Spain, television time dedicated to fictional series represents 41.5% of the programming time, followed by a significant margin by entertainment shows with a 16.1% (Lacalle, Gómez, Sánchez & Pujol 2019: 183). According to the study *El Observatorio de las series* published in 2019, television series are one of the first entertainment options in Spain with 86.2% of Spanish people claiming that they watch series, of which almost seven out of ten say they do it regularly, at least one hour a day. This sociological study provides data that confirms the impact of TV series in society since it observes that 70% of people who regularly watch series declare that TV series are essential in their lives, that one in two identifies themselves with some fictional character, that 40% have come to imitate them; and many of them state that at a certain point in their life a TV character has helped them or has become an aesthetic and behaviour reference (Barreiro, Dodd & Alvárez, 2019). This reinforces the idea that television, using Mar Chicharro-Merayo's words, is 'un artefacto ideológico, reflejo de dinámicas culturales, así como agente de socialización capaz de reproducir y legitimar modelos femeninos' (2013: 11).

Since the seventies, feminist critique has extensively studied popular culture as a relevant site where problematic models of women were constructed, hindering women's liberation. However, this thesis takes a positive approach to popular culture and recognises the potential of television as an innovative force. It acknowledges that representations transmitted through fiction can reinforce stereotypes, but also have the power to reflect social changes and challenge normative beliefs. As Buonanno puts it, 'the imagined alternatives work together with cultural and social change in the real world and so contribute to the redefining of shared conceptions of what is normal and what violates the norm' (2008: 75). Based on this premise, the thesis critically examines the forms of female representation in Spanish fiction, emphasises the importance of creating stories that narrate a changing and diverse reality challenging the conventions of the patriarchal system perpetuated by postfeminist discourses, and explores how the 'fourth wave' feminist period has given rise to new female representations on TV. By analysing these representations, the thesis sheds light on the potential of popular culture and television as vehicles for promoting gender equality and challenging societal norms.

The analysis of female characters in Spanish fiction becomes even more relevant in recent years as television series starring women have increased significantly due to the technological developments in the television industry. Since 2015, the landscape of television in Spain has undergone a significant transformation with the emergence of streaming services like Netflix, Movistar+, HBO, and Amazon Prime. The proliferation of streaming platforms and digital distribution channels has expanded the avenues through which content can reach audiences. This has led to an increase in the production of original programming, which in turn has provided more opportunities for diverse storytelling and representation, including the portrayal of complex female characters. The thesis examines the new ways of production, consumption, and distribution of the contemporary television industry as an important factor for the creation of feminist series.

Despite the increased popularity and visibility of Spanish feminism, it is crucial to recognise that anti-feminist and postfeminist ideas have not disappeared. Spanish feminism coexists with an extreme-right backlash represented by the nationalist political party VOX, which prioritises subverting feminist gains in its agenda. Marta Cabezas, in her article 'Silencing Feminism? Gender and the Rise of the Nationalist Far Right in Spain' (2022), describes how VOX has legitimised misogynistic discourse in society by employing a series of strategies against its proclaimed enemy: 'feminist supremacists' (328). The party has declared 'war on gender,' denying the existence of gender-based violence and calling for the repeal of the Gender Violence Law, claiming it is discriminatory against men (2022: 334). They also delegitimise gender violence victims by disseminating rape myths, such as false allegations made by women. As Cabezas points out, in Vox's internal communications manual, 'the party's leaders gave explicit instructions to manipulate discourse by using lies to deflect blame for all the ills of society onto feminism and "separatism"' (2022: 337). These strategies aim to undermine the credibility of gender violence victims and shift blame onto feminism, perpetuating harmful and misleading narratives that further marginalise those seeking justice and equality.

As VOX entered some regional governments in 2023, it took actions against gender equality initiatives and censored cultural events. Aware of the importance of culture in shaping ideologies, VOX has sought to control the departments of culture in the local and regional governments they influence. Within a month of being in power in different regions, the party censored a play about a Republican teacher, banned the performance of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, prohibited a female singer from showing her breast in a concert, withdrew the children's film *Lightyear* (2022) from a town's summer cinema offer because it shows a

kiss between two women, and cancelled several concerts. This exemplifies that the struggle for gender equality is far from over, with culture being the primary battleground. The TV series analysed in this thesis constitute only a small part of a much larger picture. For this reason, it is imperative that cultural products continue challenging and disrupting patriarchal norms, and promoting diverse, nuanced stories of female experiences to counter the anti-feminist backlash and move closer to a truly equal society.

In addition to confronting resulting misogynistic reactions, as previous feminist waves had to, the current feminist movement must now also address a new front: postfeminism. Within progressive discourses, many newly feminist ideas, such as those put forward by the new left-wing party *Sumar*, seemingly contradict the fundamental principles of feminist social justice. This party uses 'el mito de la libre elección' (de Miguel, 2015) to advocate for voluntary prostitution and altruistic surrogacy, practices that align with capitalism and run counter to the feminist agenda. Nonetheless, they defend them as expressions of women's freedom of choice. By rebranding prostitution as 'sex work,' this party contributes to obscuring the inherent sexual abuse of women and decriminalises the industry, thus transforming it into an acceptable trade. Furthermore, the absence of a prohibition of surrogacy in its political program highlights the party's lack of a strong position against a practice that, like prostitution, commodifies women's bodies. Without a public statement on this issue, some of their members advocate for altruistic surrogacy, while others, like the leader Yolanda Díaz, publicly oppose commercial surrogacy without expressing their position on altruistic surrogacy. Building on Gill's (2016) work about postfeminism and its multiple guises, Martínez-Jiménez emphasises the need to

> critically differentiate the various versions (and intentions) of feminism(s) that are currently circulating, feeding on each other and colliding with one another: for we must keep in mind that while feminism assuredly includes everyone, not everything should be welcome in feminism or even be able to – populist use of feminism and appeals to 'diversity' be called 'feminist'. (2020: 1002)

This underscores the complexity of the contemporary feminist landscape, where feminism must not only confront traditional forms of misogyny but also grapple with the co-optation and appropriation of feminist ideas by postfeminist ideologies that do not align with the core principles of gender equality. Mindful of the conflicting messages conveyed by these various feminisms, one of my thesis's primary objectives is to expose the anti-feminist discourses hidden within postfeminist postulates that claim to promote freedom, empowerment, and equality for women. Through critical analysis of cultural representations, this work aims to discern and differentiate postfeminist from feminist discourses, contributing to a better

understanding of the complexities within the feminist movement and its challenges in the contemporary context.

Postfeminism is a contested term that has been defined in different ways and has sparked debates among scholars. According to Gill, the notion of postfeminism has been understood as an epistemological shift (feminism influenced by poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonial theory), as a historical transformation (a new period after feminism), and as a backlash against feminism (2007: 249). However, 'there seems to be agreement among critics in linking postfeminism to a set of cultural features concerning femininity and feminism which are emblematic of the contemporary period' (Giraldo 2016: 165). When recognising the same characteristics as postfeminist, the difference of these formulations lies in the positive (Brooks, 1997; Lotz, 2001; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004) or negative sense (Faludi, 1992; Whelehan, 2000; Tasker & Negra, 2007; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009) when assessing them. Scholars are polarised in their views of this term. The optimistic perspective understands postfeminism as a feminism situated in the twenty-first-century context characterised by neoliberalism, consumer culture, individualism, postmodernism, and a decreased interest in politics and activism (Adraiens & Van Bauwel 2014: 179). Conversely, for theorists with a pessimistic perspective, the prefix 'post' in the word postfeminism means 'after' or even 'anti' feminism. This thesis aligns with the theories that negatively value this phenomenon. Building on McRobbie's arguments, I understand postfeminism as an assemblage of contradictory discourses that dismiss feminism and install a whole repertoire of new meanings taken from neoliberalism. This has as a consequence the reinstatement of gender inequality with the existence of new forms of gender regulation that maintain the patriarchal model of society (McRobbie 2009: 13). Postfeminist discourses are characterised by using terms like 'choice,' 'freedom,' and 'empowerment,' which legitimises the neoliberal project but does not address the correction of gender inequalities. Therefore, postfeminism does not challenge androcentrism, neoliberalism, or patriarchy.

While my research primarily scrutinises the postfeminist discourse for its undermining of feminism, I do agree with Amanda Lotz's assertion regarding the importance of emphasising the new contributions in favour of women present in postfeminist cultural productions. Lotz argues that although representations and discourses from the late 1990s may have limitations in advancing feminist goals, denying the gains they represent overlooks their potential significance (2001: 112). While acknowledging that postfeminist TV series may not constitute comprehensive feminist works, I agree with Lotz that they do possess some feminist characteristics that could have aided in the visibility of certain women's issues

at the time and audiences could still derive benefit from a feminist interpretation. Female-centred postfeminist dramas depict independent, professional, and empowered women who enjoy sexual freedom and female friendship. These characters serve as aspirational figures for female audiences, showcasing the possibilities of autonomy, success, and fulfilment in contemporary society. The legacy of postfeminism is evident in the case studies of this thesis, as these series present complex female characters, celebrate female agency and independence, featuring storylines that focus on women's empowerment by asserting their autonomy in various spheres, including career, relationships, motherhood, and sexuality. Additionally, they employ postfeminist visual aesthetics, such as stylish cinematography, fashion-forward costume design, and visually stunning set designs, to appeal to diverse audiences and convey complex themes. Therefore, in line with Lotz's suggestion, I do not completely dismiss postfeminist television series for falling short. However, I do critique the persistent presence of patriarchal structures in those texts labelled as postfeminist.

My research is based on the concept of 'postfeminist sensibility' introduced by Gill to analyse the postfeminist tropes present in contemporary fiction, which contribute to shaping models of femininity that perpetuate patriarchal values. Drawing on the works of Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters (2014), I examine three archetypes of female representation in twenty-first-century popular culture: the girl, the housewife, and the career woman. These archetypes are constructed around restrictive ideologies of femininity rooted in patriarchal myths of beauty, maternal love, and romance, reinforcing the trinomial of beauty-home-love that has traditionally upheld the sexual division and oppression of women.

This thesis investigates how these postfeminist models seemingly portray feminist-inflected notions of womanhood, yet they ultimately fail to break free from traditional models insofar as they do not challenge canonical narratives that confine women either to being or aspiring to becoming a mother and a wife. Series such as *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) and *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002), as epitomes of postfeminist narratives, may have a subversive quality or showcase feminist goals, for example, women's sexual freedom, economic independence, and access to the public space. However, the pathways for these women remain restricted to motherhood and family life. It follows that postfeminist series exhibit what has been described as 'glamorous neotraditionalism,' a term used by Martínez-Jiménez, Gálvez-Muñoz, and Solano-Caballero (2018: 406), to refer to the recovery and revitalisation of pre-feminist models of femininity by presenting them in a polished and attractive manner which masquerades as new feminist ideals. This thesis aims to explore the presence of female characters in Spanish contemporary TV series that challenge these postfeminist archetypes,

aligning with the ideals of feminism in the present time. By examining a selection of portrayals of woman, my research draws attention to alternative representations of femininity that break away from the limited and restrictive narratives of postfeminism, moving towards a more diverse and progressive understanding of women's roles and experiences in society.

This breaking of feminism into the mainstream, the wielding of a new legitimacy and visibility, and how this is represented in popular culture is worthy of critical analysis. Is the politicisation of feminism shifting postfeminist discourses to a more feminist approach? To what extent has feminist discourse entered into Spanish TV series? Has the postfeminist canon been challenged in the new female representations on TV series? Is postfeminism still present in those series that claim to be feminist? How have streaming platforms changed the ways in which gender is portrayed on TV? How are gendered subjectivities negotiated in different TV genres?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis examines three case studies of female-led Spanish TV series that were produced and aired between 2015 and 2022: *La otra mirada* (TVE, 2018–2019), *Señoras del (h)AMPA* (Telecinco, 2019–2021) and *Paquita Salas* (Flooxer, 2016/ Netflix, 2017–19). These series were selected for several reasons. Firstly, each series was originally designed for different television services and are representative of the diverse ways of production and consumption through public and private funding. In turn, this allows for exploring how feminist discourse can traverse audiovisual products with various financial backing. Secondly, each of the chosen series challenges one of the three postfeminist archetypes identified by Munford and Waters, providing alternative representations of girlhood, motherhood, and singleness. By debunking these archetypes, the series present new and modern portrayals of women's lives. Lastly, these series were selected because they exemplify different categories of feminist series. *La otra mirada* is part of a new wave of feminist historical series that reclaim women's stories, such as *Inés del alma mía* (Amazon Video, 2020), *Juana Inés* (Netflix, 2015), *El corazón del imperio* (Movistar+, 2021), and *Pioneras* (Movistar+, 2020). *Señoras del (h)AMPA* falls into the category of feminist series that reveal postfeminist models as outdated in line with other series like *Vida perfecta* (Movistar+, 2019–2021), *Sagrada Familia* (Movistar+, 2022–), *La reina del pueblo* (Flooxer, 2021), and *Supernormal* (Movistar+, 2022–). On the other hand, Paquita Salas represents a new paradigm of feminist series that construct complex, multi-dimensional heroines without centring the narrative on feminist history or postfeminist archetypes. They are series such as *Hierro* (Movistar+, 2019–2022), *La unidad* (Movistar+, 2020–2023), *Veneno* (Atresplayer Premium, 2020), and *#Luimelia* (Atresplayer Premium, 2020–2021).

The series chosen for analysis were not based on audience ratings, as obtaining this information in the diversified television landscape is complex and practically impossible. Instead, the selection was deemed appropriate to illustrate the main patterns in the construction of greater diversity in the representation of women in contemporary TV series. Critical analysis of these case studies enables the identification of the presence of feminist discourse in Spanish TV series and its potential to challenge and subvert postfeminist narratives. By examining how different series portray women and negotiate gendered subjectivities, my research illustrates the evolving landscape of gender representations in popular culture.

The selected case studies demonstrate how the feminist discourse has made its way into Spanish TV series in recent years, reflecting broader social movements and changing attitudes towards gender equality. There is a noticeable shift trend towards more nuanced and critical representations of gender and feminism that challenge the postfeminist canon and offer alternative perspectives on women's empowerment and liberation. These series address a wide range of gender-related topics, including sexism, misogyny, gender-based violence, and reproductive rights and reflect the experiences of diverse groups of women, including racialised women, LGBTQIA+ women, women with disabilities, and others who have been historically marginalised.

The production of TV series with strong female leads and more complex female characters has been facilitated by streaming platforms. They have played a significant role in reshaping the portrayal of gender in Spanish TV series by fostering greater diversity, creativity, and openness in storytelling, as well as providing opportunities for more providing opportunities for a wider range of voices and perspectives. Notably, the three case studies discussed here were written and directed by teams comprising women, trans women, or gay men, diverging from the traditional all-male creative teams. This departure challenges and subverts the male gaze, which has historically objectified and sexualised female characters. With more women involved in the creative process, streaming platforms have become fertile ground for these female-centric narratives to thrive, allowing for deeper explorations of topics such as friendship, motherhood, career aspirations, and sexuality from a female perspective.

The emergence of new voices in television creation are negotiating gendered subjectivities in diverse ways across various TV genres, challenging traditional narratives and offering fresh perspectives in television storytelling. The case studies analysed showcase new takes on different tv genres such as period drama, crime fiction, dark humour, and parody. *La*

otra mirada proposes a new perspective of the period drama, the female genre par excellence. The series departs from the romanticised nostalgia commonly found in this genre, instead reframing the politics of nostalgia as a type of activism by reclaiming overlooked women's stories and utilising its narrative to critique the present, rather than romanticising the past. In *Señoras del (h)AMPA*, the heroines of the series defy traditional gender roles for women within the gangster genre. Portraying these women as criminals and wrongdoers disrupts entrenched gender hierarchies in these traditionally male-dominated genre narratives. Rather than confining female characters to passive roles or mere *femme fatales*, the series introduces the figure of the mother engaged in various aspects of criminal activities, ranging from leadership roles to street-level operations. Additionally, this series is a dark comedy, a less common genre in Spanish TV fiction, offering unique perspectives and storytelling approaches that explore the complexities of female experiences through a comedic lens. *Paquita Salas* also diverges from the conventional Spanish comedy by presenting a parody of the female celebrity entrepreneur. The series uses humour and satire to highlight the ridiculousness of societal expectations placed on professional women, while celebrating the strength and resilience of its female protagonists.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the theoretical framework which informs my research and the historical, cultural, and sociological context that has contributed to the emergence of new female representations on Spanish TV. The chapter begins with an examination of the resurgence of the feminist movement in Spain, tracing its evolution through the feminist waves paradigm. This section delves into the historical context and how feminist ideas gained renewed visibility in the country. The second section of this chapter explores the impact of online TV on changing female portrayals on screen by focusing on the transformation of television production, distribution, and consumption in the digital era and its implications for gender representation. In the third section, a review of literature related to postfeminism and feminist critique in Spanish television studies is presented. The final section of the chapter is dedicated to presenting the methodology applied in the investigation. It creates a framework based on Gill's notion of 'postfeminist sensibility', emphasising the importance of using postfeminism as a valuable tool for analysing gender dynamics in neoliberal societies. Gill's theory provides a vocabulary and conceptual framework for discussing issues such as the objectification of women, the representation of diverse femininities, and the impact of neoliberalism on gender identities. This enables nuanced analyses that take into account the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in postfeminism, encompassing both progress and backlash. By

understanding postfeminism as a theoretical framework that explores the ways in which feminist goals have been co-opted or diluted within neoliberal ideologies, I analyse the complexities of gender dynamics in contemporary societies as portrayed in television series and explore possibilities for resistance and transformation. The section outlines the research approach, including textual analysis and its relation to discursive, social, and historical contexts.

Chapter 2 analyses the representation of girlhood in the historical narrative of *La otra mirada.* The primary focus is to explore the various ways in which the series challenges the 'girl power' discourses that have influenced discussions on gender and empowerment since the 1990s. By critically examining the connection between 'girl power' and the concept of 'the beauty myth,' coined by Naomi Wolf in 1990, the chapter aims to reveal the complexities and contradictions within gender discourses in popular culture. By recovering feminist terminology that had been depoliticised in recent decades, the series engages with the driving forces of contemporary feminism and develop in its narrative current women's oppressions. The analysis in this chapter also emphasises the significance of making the history of feminism visible within the context of the series. By doing so, the series contributes to the creation of a feminist culture in society, acknowledging the struggles and achievements of women in the past and their impact on shaping contemporary feminist discussions. This series delves into the politics of memory, constructing genealogies, challenging established canons, questioning traditions, reclaiming voices, and sparking debates. As a cultural memory work, the series fosters solidarity and identification among women, enabling them to forge a collective memory of the feminist movement. This collective memory has the potential to reshape their understanding of the present and inform their actions moving forward. *La otra mirada* makes clear that there is a before and after in the social context that reflects the transformation in women's role in society. Additionally, it leaves no doubt that these changes have not been the result of the inevitable course of history, but rather the struggle of women, both past and present (Llona 2009: 40).

In Chapter 3, the analysis of *Señoras del (h)AMPA* focuses on the maternal discourses originating from postfeminism and contrasts them with lived experiences of contemporary motherhood. Drawing on the 'new momism' ideology, as theorised by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels (2005), this chapter aims to expose the unrealistic expectations surrounding modern motherhood that are present in cultural productions. 'New momism' establishes a hierarchy of motherhood by distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' mothers. I investigate how this division is recognised and deconstructed in the series, demonstrating that

these stereotypes do not truly exist in reality. *Señoras del (h)AMPA* exposes that the portrayal of the 'good mother' is a fictional construct, while the figure of the 'bad mother' can serve as a source of empowerment for women rather than being demonised. By dismantling this binary framework, the narrative promotes alternative maternal experiences that are more aligned with women's actual experiences of motherhood. I utilise Andrea O'Reilly's theory of feminist mothering to analyse how the protagonists of the series challenge the notion of 'the perfect mother' and transition towards a new approach to motherhood. The series also confronts the postfeminist and feminist paradigms in the new Spanish social reality to highlight the outdated discourses of postfeminism. By proposing an inversion to the 'hauntology' of feminism described by Munford and Waters (2014), in which the ghost of feminism haunts postfeminist narratives, the series positions the postfeminist woman as a spectre of the past, transformed into a ghost that has no place in a feminist era.

Finally, Chapter 4 engages with representations of professional women that go beyond the confines of the romance genre, which is often prevalent in postfeminist narratives. The chapter focuses on the series *Paquita Salas* as an example of new feminist series that present innovative narratives for professional women, prioritising career aspirations and personal growth over romantic relationships, thereby providing a more varied and inclusive representation of women in television. The series departs from the postfeminist model of the career woman that is portrayed as a single, modern, professional woman in her thirties residing in urban areas who, despite her career success, she is dissatisfied with her single status and longs to find a man to settle down with. Consequently, while these characters excel in their professional lives, the narratives predominantly highlight their chaotic personal lives. Therefore, the central theme revolving around the career woman is romantic love and the quest for the ideal partner, which often reinforces and reproduces patriarchal notions of heterosexual coupledom. The protagonists of *Paquita Salas* offer new portrayals and storylines for career women, redefining the notions of success, singlehood, and the 'happy ending' depicted in postfeminist narratives. The chapter also analyses the feminist issues tackled in the series, exploring how it addresses themes such as workplace equality, gender dynamics in the entertainment industry, hate speech against women, female sexuality, and the challenges faced by women in pursuing their career aspirations due to the existence of the glass ceiling and 'the punishment gap'. Through this examination, the chapter highlights the series' contribution to advancing feminist discourse in television.

Through each case study, the relevance of cultural context and trends at the time of the series' production is acknowledged in order to situate them as products of their time. By

addressing the strategies that they use to forward a feminist agenda, my research explores the representations of women and gender dynamics in contemporary Spanish TV series and unveils the transition towards feminist portrayals by challenging long-standing postfeminist themes.

Chapter 1. Towards New Paradigms of Female Representation on TV

This chapter examines the social and cultural factors that since 2014/2015 have created the necessary conditions for a change of paradigm in the representations of women in television fictional series in Spain. I consider this date as a turning point because during this period, feminism began to gain traction in public discourse, coinciding with the introduction of streaming platforms in the country, which subsequently affected the television industry. The chapter identifies the resurgence of the feminist movement and the technological developments in the television industry as the main reasons for the new depictions of women in fiction. The significant increase in television series and their great popularity in the entertainment sector have prompted the interest of Spanish scholarship, which had traditionally paid insufficient attention to television productions as legitimate objects of critique. Paul Julian Smith noted in 2016 that television drama was neglected by Spanish scholars who have 'not yet recognized that television has displaced cinema as the creative medium that shapes the national narrative' (2016: 3). In recent years, while Spanish scholarship on television fiction has grown, TV studies from a feminist perspective are still limited and barely use postfeminism as a critical tool when examining female representations on screen. I emphasise the importance of utilising postfeminism as a term of critical analysis in the Spanish contemporary media culture. Giraldo states that'[e]l posfeminismo provee un marco discursivo rígido para la subjetividad femenina, donde quienes no caben son empujadas fuera de los propios límites de la subjetividad' (2020: 22). By employing this discursive framework, I investigate those female images on screen that fall outside of it, considering them as representative of new feminist subjectivities in Spanish fiction. My research contributes to feminist television studies by analysing contemporary Spanish TV series that question, dissect, and resist sexism derived from postfeminist models of women. These series offer feminist versions that propose new articulations of gender, femininity, and power.

The first section explores the history of Spanish feminism and its relationship with the global trends in the women's movement. This aims to demonstrate how what was historically a marginal movement has transformed into an important mobiliser in contemporary Spanish society, with a presence in all public spheres from politics to culture. This section investigates the differences that this feminism always had in comparison to the European and American currents, and how this new Spanish feminism of the twentieth-first century has broken the

historical tendency to be a minority movement and latecomer to global trends. It traces the evolution of Spanish feminism until its depoliticisation in the 1990s, which coincides with the emergence of postfeminism and neoliberal politics. It examines the recent resurgence of feminism as a political movement that inspires large social mobilisations and identifies the ways in which the comeback of feminist discourse has filtered into popular culture. The second section studies the new ways of production, distribution, and consumption of television in the digital era to understand its relevance in the transformation of female portrayals on TV. The rise of streaming television has led to an increase in TV fiction creation in Spain, fostering the emergence of contemporary series that question hegemonic discourses and prompt a reflection on feminist concerns. The third section reviews the existing literature produced on Spanish television studies, its contribution to the critique of contemporary female-centred series, and how feminist criticism has approached the processes of construction and consumption of female representations on TV. Lastly, in the fourth section, I present the theoretical framework of this thesis that follows Gill's theory of 'postfeminist sensibility' (2007), which elaborates a critical approach to the concept of postfeminism and emphasises its analytic value. Gill affirms that 'postfeminism is a critical analytical term that refers to empirical regularities or patterns in contemporary cultural life' (2016: 612), which includes notions of individualism, choice, and self-improvement, the emphasis on discipline, self-surveillance, and sexual subjectification, and the disappearance of a critical vocabulary for structural inequalities. She argues that postfeminism is a response to feminism intimately related to neoliberalism, making it complicit with the patriarchal system. Gill's framework provides me with a critical lens through which to examine media representations of gender beyond simple stereotypes. Her rich and nuance approach acknowledges the complexity of contemporary media culture, since it recognises that media texts often contain contradictory messages about gender and femininity, reflecting the tensions and ambiguities present in society. Her thesis helps my analysis to uncover and interrogate the ways in which media texts negotiate and sometimes subvert or reinforce gender norms and power dynamics.

Building upon Gill's work, Munford and Waters' study on the postfeminist mystique in the new millennium analyses postfeminism and its manifestations in popular culture focusing on films and television series. They identify three models of femininity that emerge in the postfeminist landscape and function as a means to restore the patriarchal social order: the girl, the career woman, and the housewife. Munford and Waters' work is integral to my research as the authors utilise the set of postfeminist themes and tropes circulating in the media, as described by Gill's theory, to construct three distinct models of women that are

recurrently depicted in contemporary fictional narratives worldwide. This framework serves as the foundation for analysing new female representations in Spanish television series. I investigate whether these three postfeminist models, identified by Munford and Waters as enacting patriarchal myths that oppress women, are being challenged in the selected case studies.

Focusing on the Spanish television series broadcast from 2015 onwards, I examine these three female models and their embodiment of 'la mitología patriarcal que se nutre no solo del mito de la belleza, sino también del concepto de amor romántico y del amor maternal para encorsetar a las mujeres' (Bettaglio 2018: 78). I demonstrate how the three postfeminist models theorised in the Anglocentric context are present in Spanish TV fiction, therefore setting the theoretical foundations for my analysis of the series *La otra mirada* (2018–2019), *Señoras del (h)AMPA* (2019–2021) and *Paquita Salas* (2016–2021), to show how the new Spanish series are dismantling those models to promote alternative female representations to postfeminism. This resistance to dominant postfeminist discourses reflects a broader societal reckoning with gender norms and power dynamics, offering insights into the evolving cultural landscape of Spain and its engagement with broader global conversations around gender, identity, and representation. In an era of feminist resurgence, Spanish television is adopting patterns inspired by American fiction, which has redefined the female image portrayed on television in the last decade. These new series reflect a desire for more diverse and inclusive representations in media, politics, and everyday life, as well as a recognition of the importance of challenging traditional power structures that perpetuate inequalities based on gender.

1.1. The Resurgence of the Spanish Feminist Movement

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, a notable resurgence of feminist campaigns and mobilisations has taken place in various countries across Europe, Latin America, North America, and Asia, leading to the return of an activist feminist movement that has reinforced its internationalist spirit. Feminist theorists, such as Rosa Cobo (2019), Alicia Miyares (2018), Nuria Varela (2019) and Susan Watkins (2018) define this new upsurge of feminism as 'the fourth wave,' characterised by its focus on denouncing all forms of violence against women, globalised protests, and the use of social media as a mobilising platform. Cobo points out that 'el cuerpo vindicativo de la cuarta ola feminista es, sin duda, la violencia sexual', and its denunciation 'ha tomado tal fuerza que está ampliando el marco de la definición de violencia, incluso de aquellas que han estado más naturalizadas' (2019: 138).

Philosopher Alicia Miyares also emphasises that sexual violence is the main distinguishing element of this wave from the previous one, as they share the same political agenda. Miyares states that:

> [e]sta cuarta ola del feminismo no se configura solo en torno a la vindicación de los derechos de las mujeres y su efectividad real y no formal, sino que además, y de ahí su novedad, parece haber tomado conciencia de las sutiles formas de violencia, acoso y explotación que sufren las mujeres y no así los varones (2018: unpaginated).

Violence against women is a global problem, and the fight against it has taken on a global character as well. The fourth wave begins to take shape in the international context during the 2010s, marked by great demonstrations and online denunciations in various countries (Cochrane, 2013; Varela, 2019). Movements such as #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo have had reverberations in Spanish society, sparking conversations about gender-based violence, workplace harassment, and gender inequality. In Spain, a pivotal moment for this revitalised activist feminist movement occurred on International Women's Day, March 8, 2018, with the first global feminist strike, involving more than 170 countries (Varela 2002: 100). Spain's mobilisation achieved international resonance due to the six million women who participated in the twenty-four-hour strike and the hundreds of thousands who protested in the streets, putting Spain at the forefront of international feminism (Gutiérrez-Rubí 2019: 24). This is an unprecedented event since the Spanish feminist movement 'while not negligible, has been historically weak, its activities involving only a minority of women' (Valiente 2005: 182). Even during its most visible moments in the 1970s and 1980s, Spanish feminism was described as 'una minoría activa' (Larumbe Gorraitz 2005: 13) because it never had massive support from the majority of Spanish women. However, the struggle for women's rights in Spain can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, where feminist consciousness began to emerge through the efforts of women such as Emilia Pardo Bazán and Concepción Arenal, who challenged societal roles and norms through various platforms (Franco Rubio 2004: 456). And by the early twentieth century, women in Spain started organising collectively and demanding political changes to transform their reality.

1.1.1 – From Feminist Activism to its Depoliticisation

The first Spanish women's associations date back to 1912 and their main goal focused on advocating for improved working conditions. In 1918, the National Association of Spanish Women (ANME) was established with a broader set of objectives, including advocating for reforms in the Civil Code to ensure equality between spouses before the law, granting full

legal capacity for women, opposing legalised prostitution, condemning violence against women, promoting higher education for girls, advocating for women's participation in liberal professions and public service positions, and fighting for women's right to vote (Franco Rubio 2004: 477). Notable feminists such as Clara Campoamor, Elisa Soriano, María de Maeztu, and Victoria Kent were among the influential members of this organisation (Morcillo Gómez 2012: 62). However, this early feminist movement in Spain differed from the suffrage movements in America and Britain, primarily due to the absence of a collective feminist consciousness and widespread militant activism among Spanish women. The majority of Spanish women did not actively support the feminist cause. María de los Ángeles Pérez Acosta attributes this passivity and reluctance to embrace feminist ideals to the social structure of the country during the early twentieth century. Spain's predominant reliance on agriculture, limited involvement of the emerging middle class in society, strong ideological influence of the Catholic Church, and delayed industrialisation contributed to women's preservation of their traditional roles in society (2002: 5).

With the establishment of the Second Republic in Spain (1931–1939), women were granted full citizenship rights, including the right to vote. The Republican Constitution of 1931 introduced progressive legislation related to family and education, which aimed to transform the status of women in society. However, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the subsequent Franco dictatorial regime (1939–1975) resulted in the abolishment of the equality measures implemented during the Republic.

The Franco dictatorship imposed a rigid patriarchal system that marked the subalternity of women through a new legal order that upheld a hierarchy of male privilege (Nash 2012: 45). During the Francoist regime, women were stripped of their social and political agency and relegated to subservient roles. Despite the repressive environment, women still participated in clandestine opposition activities, and there was a resurgence of feminism in the later years of Francoism (Nash 2012: 47). In the 1960s, women began to form associations with a feminist consciousness, influenced by the events of May 68 and the feminist movements in Europe and America. However, the Spanish feminist movement had unique characteristics compared to its international counterparts. In Spain, the arrival of American second-wave feminism coincided with a strong political struggle for democracy, which was linked to the resistance groups fighting against the Franco regime. Many of the early pioneers of the feminist movement in Spain during the Franco period were associated with the Communist or Socialist Party (Larumbe Goraitz 2005: 11).

The resurgence of Spanish feminism was a response to the dictatorship's lack of political liberties and the misogynistic discrimination of the Franco regime, as 'feminism questioned the sexist bases of Franco's political, social, and cultural structures and linked the liberation of women with the consolidation of the country's process of political democratisation' (Nash 2012: 48-49). After Franco's death in 1975, the Spanish feminist movement began taking to the streets and engaging in activities aimed at ending gender inequality across all social aspects while working to consolidate a democracy that would enable significant changes in women's lives (Pérez Acosta 2002: 8). The movement was formed by a new generation of young women who opposed the social constraints imposed on them. There was an urgency to destroy the model of femininity that had been enforced by the dictatorship (Larumbe Gorraitz 2005: 11).

During the Transition, diverse feminist associations worked as a coordinated movement to campaign for gender equality. They organised various activities, including debates, conferences, demonstrations, and publications in feminist magazines, to challenge the patriarchal order and advocate for women's rights (Nash 2012: 49). They fought for the decriminalisation of adultery, sexual freedom, divorce, right to contraceptives and abortion, equality at work, and the elimination of discriminatory practices. Feminists argued that democracy should be founded on the principles and practice of gender equality and an egalitarian political culture (Nash 2012: 50). Although the Spanish feminist movement was not a massive mobilising force during the early stages of the Transition, it comprised around ninety women's organisations operating in different parts of the country (Threlfall 1985: 48). The movement occasionally showed some signs of strength, such as the national feminist conferences regularly attended by between three and five thousand women (Valiente 2005: 182). However, it was still a minority movement. As Larumbe Gorraitz asserts, during a period when the majority of the population, including women, accepted their existing reality, an active minority firmly opposed that majority and succeeded in exerting their influence, and although they did not achieve all their objectives, they did generate substantial changes (2005: 13). Without the feminist movement during the Transition years (1975–1982), the history of Spanish democratisation would have been a different one, and surely the resulting Spanish democracy would be more traditional, as many feminist demands were not initially on the agendas of the political elites (Verdugo Martí 2010: 277).

Similar to other social movements of the Transition, the political and social change to democracy brought about a process of disintegration of Spanish feminism as an important social force (Nash 2012: 50). From the early 1980s onwards, the movement experienced a

crisis characterised by organisational fragmentation, a decline in collective action, and increasing institutionalisation of feminism (Larumbe Goraitz 2005: 12). In 1983, the creation of the *Instituto de la Mujer* marked the emergence of what was known as 'state feminism'. Its primary objective was to develop the principle of non-discrimination as stated in the 1978 Constitution. However, since its foundation, the Institute received strong criticism from the most radical sectors within the movement who saw it as a form of institutionalisation that compromised the autonomy of independent feminism (Folguera 2012: 110). Celia Valiente's studies (1995, 2005, 2006) on the influence and impact of the Women's Institute in its initial two decades suggested that while the institution played a crucial role in involving other state entities in promoting gender equality policies, supporting feminist associations, and advancing women's studies, did not favour 'the mobilisation of the feminist movement (or of public opinion) as a way of advancing demands that go beyond [the government's] gender equality commitments' (Valiente 1995: 236). Valiente observed that the important achievements of the Institute were often a result of collaboration with feminist activism (2006: 132). These findings align with the views of radical feminists who believed that the institutionalisation of feminism would restrict the movement's power as it would always be tied to the policies of the ruling government. The fear was that institutionalisation could dilute feminist objectives and hinder its ability to push for more transformative changes in society.

The emergence of state feminism led to the dispersal of feminist groups and associations, ultimately contributing to the dissolution of the feminist movement as a coordinated and organised force. By 1987, the *Instituto de la Mujer*'s catalogue listed six hundred organisations, of which only sixty were classified as feminists (Larumbe Goraitz, 2005; Folguera, 2012). Another branch of the feminist movement also appeared in the 1980s: academic feminism. This type of feminism emphasised the need to incorporate the gender variable into research and integrate feminist criticism within academia (Pérez Acosta 2002: 11). While the creation of the Women's Institute and the growth of academic feminism were successes for the feminist movement, they also provoked some unintended consequences leading to its dissolution. Barbara Epstein's analysis of the decline of the women's movement in the United States in her article 'What Happened to the Women's Movement?' (2001) can be relevant to the Spanish context. Epstein points out as one of these causes the unforeseen consequences of the victories of feminism, because 'the mass diffusion of feminist consciousness, the bureaucratization of leading women's organizations, and the high visibility of academic feminism' made feminism 'become more an idea than a

movement' (2001: unpaginated). Similarly, in Spain, the proliferation of women's associations, the institutionalisation of feminism through the Women's Institute, and the rise of academic feminism might have created an impression that feminist objectives had been achieved and that feminism was now everywhere, so 'feminism ha[d] simultaneously become institutionalized and marginalized' (Epstein 2001: unpaginated).

Furthermore, Epstein also observes a demobilisation of collective action that started in the 1980s and was intensified in the 1990s. It then started 'a period when radicalism had been made to seem irrelevant' (Epstein 2001: unpaginated). Focusing on the American context, Epstein states that the revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s evaporated with the end of the Vietnam War, which had triggered a protest movement, not only against the war but also against racism and sexism. By the 1980s 'radical feminism as an activist movement became marginal to politics' (Epstein 2001: unpaginated). Simultaneously, although living in a very different social context, the Spanish feminist movement also suffered a loss of collective action in the 1980s. In its case, the end of the Transition, marked by intense political activity in the quest to establish a new society and the arrival of democracy that needed time to put into practice the new Constitution, led to a reduction of the movement's radicalism.

By the beginning of the twentieth-first century in Spain, as it happened in the US and UK, there was no longer an organised feminist movement but many independent organisations. Pilar Folguera in her article 'Integrando el género en la agenda política. Feminismo, Transición y Democracia' (2012) highlights that the feminism of young women in the new millennium differed from that of previous generations. For many young women, feminism was not linked to a particular group or ideology. Instead, they saw feminism as a fluid concept expressed by every woman in various aspects of their lives. While women's behaviours aligned with feminist principles, they did not necessarily identify themselves as feminists (Folguera 2012: 118-120). This trend reflected a desire for individualisation and personal autonomy, which resonates with the postfeminist discourse that emerged in the Anglo-American context with the rise of neoliberalism. Postfeminism promulgated that inequalities could be solved individually; hence the collective struggle lost its meaning (Scharff 2012: 10). In line with this new ideology, the Spanish feminist movement was dismantled as an active social movement. In the 1990s and 2000s Spain had entered a postfeminist era. Postfeminism, as described by McRobbie (2009), emerged in the 1980s and continued into the present. It marks a shift towards the depoliticisation of feminism and its transformation into a personal lifestyle rather than a social and political movement.

Two influential works describe the socio-cultural context and the historical shift in which postfeminism emerges, Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1992) and McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009). Faludi's book focuses on the patriarchal backlash to the women's movement that took place in the US in the 1980s during the Reagan era. She reveals how politics and culture organised to disavow the critical force of the movement. Faludi claims that 'the backlash is at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively "progressive" and proudly backward' (1992: 12), which makes it hard to expose anti-feminist sentiments when they are dressed up in feminist clothes (1992: 95). She documents the creation of myths blaming the feminist movement as the source of women's unhappiness. The women were told repeatedly that '[y]ou may be free and equal now, […] but you have never been more miserable' (Faludi 1992: 1). The media and popular culture (women's magazines, film and television programmes, and the beauty and fashion industry) were the primary disseminators of myths that suggested that there was a 'man shortage', so single women at the age of thirty had a very little chance to get married, that there was an 'epidemic of infertility' that struck professional women who postponed childbearing, that the new divorce laws were impoverishing women, and that feminism was to blame for illnesses such as 'burn out' and 'great emotional depression' (1992: 21). These false ideas became 'popular idioms and new forms of common sense' (McRobbie 2009: 33), and they are the basis on which many of the postfeminist discourses are articulated.

Building on Faludi's work, McRobbie analyses the two decades that follow the election of the New Labour Party in 1997 in the UK. She examines how feminism was incorporated into political and institutional life, but transformed into a more individualistic discourse, creating fertile ground for the emergence of postfeminist features in media, popular culture, and state agencies (2009: 1). While Faludi looked at the immediate patriarchal reaction to the feminist movement of the 1960s, McRobbie explores the more complex backlash that emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in which feminism has been taken into account and at the same time it has been reviled. She does not suggest that during that time all traces of feminist activity had vanished, but there was an acceptance of certain feminist ideals and the recurrent notion that feminism was no longer needed, which discouraged new forms of feminist activity from taking shape. The new discourse 'comprises neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice' (McRobbie 2009: 12). It is a sophisticated disarticulation of feminism in which feminism has not been rejected but incorporated into the

neoliberal discourse using feminist vocabulary such as 'choice' or 'empowerment' with the goal of substituting feminism and re-establishing traditional ideas about women in order to minimise the possibility of a new women's movement (McRobbie 2009: 24). Postfeminism, McRobbie argues, is characterised by the implementation of a neoliberal model of society that emphasises the self-governance of the individual. She states that postfeminism promotes the assumption that equality has been achieved while gender inequalities are masked by a discourse of individualism and freedom of choice. As an update of Carol Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988), McRobbie describes 'the new sexual contract' available for young women in postfeminist times. With this new deal, young women are offered positions of visibility in spheres of employment, education, consumer culture, and civil society, as long as they successfully choose to embody acceptable femininities, which require an active rejection of feminism as a collective political movement to become a personal lifestyle (McRobbie 2009: 55). Hence, McRobbie employs in the description of postfeminism the notion of 'double entanglement' which includes anti-feminist sentiment while incorporating feminist terminology producing more sophisticated forms of domination and replacing the male approval with 'a new horizon of self-imposed feminine cultural norms' (2009: 63).

Although postfeminism has been mostly developed and theorised in the Anglo-American context, it 'is a transnational circulating culture which is taken up by women in a range of locations' (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson 2017: 216). Feminist cultural scholars across borders have identified postfeminist representations of female subjectivity in Colombia (Giraldo, 2015), China (Kam, 2020), Italy (Fegitz, 2018), Nigeria (Dosekun 2015), and Singapore (Lazar, 2006). These theorists argue that postfeminism has successfully been projected on a global scale but reshaped and integrated into local cultures in different ways. By exploring the different forms (racial, decolonial, transnational) in which the postfeminist discourse is articulated outside the Anglo-American and Western context, these theorists demonstrate in their analyses that postfeminism, as defined by Giraldo, is 'un régimen de subjetividad femenina de proyección global, intrínsecamente conectado con el capitalismo y con el *ethos* neoliberal' (2020: 17, italics in original).

In the Spanish context, the book *La mujer en la España actual. ¿Evolución o involución?* (2004), edited by Jacqueline Cruz and Barbara Zecchi, analyses the situation of Spanish women in the two decades that precede the Transition and comes to the same conclusion as McRobbie, feminism had virtually ceased to exist as a political discourse and practice in the 1990s. There had been a regression in the cultural and political spheres and slow advances in the social terrain for Spanish women (Cruz & Zecchi 2004: 8). The central

idea of *La mujer en la España actual* is the existence in Spain of a 'patriarcado de consentimiento,'concept used by feminist philosophers such as Alicia Puleo, Ana de Miguel and Miyares, which opposes the 'patriarcado de coerción' prevalent during the Franco regime. In a 'patriarcado de consentimiento,' following Foucault's idea of de-centred power that is not repressive but persuasive, women eagerly comply with the patriarchal mandate encouraging sexual roles through attractive images of contemporary normative femininity (compulsory youth, strict beauty standards, 'superwoman' balancing work and household duties, etc.) and powerful myths largely conveyed by the media (Puleo 2005: 25). De Miguel (2015) highlights neoliberalism as the great ally of the 'patriarcado de consentimiento' experienced by women in Spain, as it develops patriarchal discourses that, consolidated through the economic ideology of neoliberalism, are presented as liberation. Hence, in the Spanish context, while the term 'postfeminism' may not be frequently used, the 'patriarcado de consentimiento' serves as its equivalent.

The different contributors to the volume examine the situation of feminism and women in diverse spheres of society and culture before the crisis of 2008, demonstrating that during those years there was an evident setback in the situation of women. Cruz and Zecchi's book observes a shifting pattern from the 1980s to the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century from feminism to the articulation of female experience within a postfeminist culture. During the postfeminist era in Spain, the feminist movement diminished greatly and became almost invisible, but not completely extinct as evidenced by its participation in the 1995 *Fourth World Conference on Women* in Beijing, which 'marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality' (Women UN, 1995). The 'espejismo de la igualdad' (Valcárcel, 2011) experienced in the 2000s had rendered the feminist movement unnecessary and it was relegated to theoretical production and to very marginal social actions. For instance, the 8M demonstration in Madrid in 2000 brought together only 1,000 women, and it did not reach more than 10,000 until 2017. This would change drastically with the recent revitalisation of the movement that on the 8M of 2019 reunited 375,000 women in Madrid (Europa Press, 2020). The new upsurge is marked by the fourth wave of feminism when women realised that gender equality was not real and that the women's rights achieved by previous feminist waves may not be permanent. Women began to take action and opposed the depoliticisation and individualism promoted by postfeminism in the previous decades.

1.1.2 – The Fourth Wave of Feminism

In Spanish feminist studies (Amorós, 1997; Johnson, 2003; Valcárcel, 2021), the history of feminism is divided in three waves: 'feminismo ilustrado, feminismo sufragista y feminismo contemporáneo' (Valcárcel, 2021). The division of the three waves is different in the Anglo-American context. The first wave is situated from the 19th century to the 20th c., and it corresponds to the suffrage movement. The second wave took place in the 1960s and 1970s advocating for equality and sexual liberation. The third wave appeared in the 1990s as intersectional and sex-positive feminism (often labelled as postfeminism). In the analyses of the case studies, I would refer to these waves of feminism as I am drawing on Anglo-American postfeminist theory. However, in order to comprehend the fourth wave of Spanish feminism is necessary to employ the history of feminism in the European context. According to Amelia Valcárcel (2019), each wave of feminism emerges during a 'crisis civilizatoria', characterised by profound changes in political and economic systems worldwide. The first wave of feminism appeared during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, coinciding with the dismantling of the Ancient Regime. The second wave arose in the nineteenth century alongside the Industrial Revolution and its new model of society, when democracy was becoming established for the first time as a political system. The third wave is linked to the social revolution that followed the Second World War, leading to the creation of the welfare state. While Valcárcel (2021) argues that the third wave of feminism is still ongoing due to the persistence of its political agenda, other theorists, such as Miyares, suggest signs of a new wave.

Miyares posits that a new 'crisis civilizatoria' and backlash indicate the beginning of a new wave of feminism (2018: unpaginated). In the early twenty-first century, the world experienced crucial changes in its ways of life, particularly due to the 2008 Great Recession and the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant economic ideology. The economic crisis led to cuts in social welfare policies, primarily affecting women who were the main recipients of such benefits. These policies included reductions in financial aid for dependent or disabled individuals, decreased unemployment benefits, elimination of subsidies for nursery schools, and the dismantling of gender equality policies, such as the Ministry of Equality (Vicent et al. 2013: 8). The impact of these measures, coupled with the rise in female unemployment, exposed the fragility of women's rights and their situation of inequity in society, shattering *el espejismo de igualdad* that Valcárcel had described (2011: unpaginated). Miyares points out that this awareness of inequality became the spark that ignited the fourth wave of feminism in Spain (2018: unpaginated).

Every wave of feminism brings with it a patriarchal backlash. In her historical analysis, Faludi demonstrated how the antifeminist backlash is a 'perpetual viral condition in our culture' that emerges every time the feminist movement makes important advances (1992: 10). In Spain, the reactionary movement was materialised in the rise of the nationalist far-right party VOX in 2018, which has made anti-feminism its political flag. Varela describes this backlash as

> más violenta y reactiva que en épocas anteriores y, además, trae consigo una corriente negacionista que no solo pretende ningunear la teoría feminista, también cuestionar nuestro propio relato vital, castigar a quienes denuncian, insultar a quienes piensan colectivamente, criminalizar a quienes luchan por erradicar la violencia de género; en definitiva, volver a acallar nuestras voces (2019: 6)

With respect to the political agenda, Miyares explains that the fourth wave continues the project of the third wave: parity in all social spheres (2018: unpaginated). However, if the previous wave achieved formal equality, the objective of the fourth wave is to advance towards real equality. This new wave is characterised by its power of mass mobilisation and its focus on sexual violence. In recent years, the feminist movement in Spain has become a mass-supported movement and has regained its power as a force for social change. As a consequence of its activism, 'gender justice has penetrated Spanish common sense in a way the broad/formal development of equality during the last fifteen years was unable to achieve' (Martínez-Jiménez 2020: 999).

The activism of the Spanish feminist movement started to rebuild in the 2011 Occupy encampments at Puerta del Sol (Claveria, 2018; Cruells, 2015; Galdón Corbella, 2016). For several months, the 15M movement occupied Madrid central square, Puerta del Sol, in 2011, to protest against government cuts and unemployment caused by the great economic recession of 2008 (Claveria 2018: 23). This protest expanded to the rest of Spain, with camps being set up in most of the main cities' squares, where assemblies were formed by adopting a non-hierarchical organisational structure to discuss a political agenda for fundamental rights for every citizen. In these camps, feminist committees and work groups such as *Comisión de Feminismos Sol* (Madrid), *Setas Feminista* (Sevilla), *Feministes Indignades* (Barcelona), and *Feministas Bastardas* (Zaragoza), among others, emerged. They were created as a response to the initial rejection that feminist proposals encountered from some of the people gathering in the assemblies (Gámez Fuentes 2015: 1). From that moment on, women created self-managed feminist spaces that made visible political issues that affected women and had previously been ignored (Claveria 2018: 24).

Gámez Fuentes affirms that 'the work of the feminist groups in the 15M was nourished by the activist legacy of the Spanish feminist movement during the first years of democracy, but also by an infrastructure that came into being in Spain in the nineties: cyberfeminism' (2015: 5). For the renewed feminist movement, new media technologies have become a fundamental tool for the spreading and popularisation of feminism, especially among younger generations. Social networks are a feminised space since almost 42% of women are daily users of social networks, compared to 31% of men (Gutiérrez-Rubí, 2019: 80). Through digital media and social networks (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.), feminism finds a place to share information without gatekeepers, which facilitates the diffusion of feminist documents and materials that otherwise would not have been published or would have been difficult to find (Claveria, 2018; Amaro Quintas, 2012). The virtual world represents a new space of public opinion to which women had never had access due to the patriarchal control of the media (Varela 2020: 106). Lucrecia Burges Cruz in her article 'La emergencia del sujeto feminista' (2019) has compiled some of the many actions that, combining the digital and real spheres, have been a milestone in terms of feminist consciousness-raising and mobilisation (2019: 190). In the Spanish case, I highlight three key events for Spanish feminism that have signified the consolidation of the movement: *El tren de la libertad* (2014), the 7N March (2015), and the 8M Strike (2018).

El tren de la libertad in 2014 was the first time in decades that women protested in a massive march. Thousands of people from all corners of the country marched to Madrid to demonstrate against the restrictions on access to abortion that the conservative-led Spanish government (*Partido Popular*) was proposing in a new law presented to Congress in December 2013. The resignation of the minister who carried out this law proposal, Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, and the withdrawal of the law as a result of the protests, strengthened the movement since women saw that the mobilisations and their actions had a real impact (Claveria 2018: 24). According to feminist theorists such as Celia Amorós, Cobo, Miyares, and Varela, *El tren de la libertad* marks the beginning of the fourth wave in Spanish feminism.

The following year, on 7 November 2015, another march was organised, *La Marcha Estatal Contra las Violencias Machistas.* Tens of thousands of people from all over Spain gathered in the streets of Madrid again to show their outrage at the constant murders of women by their partners or ex-partners. The objective was to urge for a State Pact that included the political commitments and the necessary budget items to fight against 'sexist terrorism' (Núñez Puente & Fernández Romero 2017: 274). A year later, on 15 November

2016, their Manifesto was the basis of a report prepared by a committee created in the Parliament with concrete proposals to advance in the eradication of the different forms of violence against women. In 2017, the Parliament approved a State Pact with 214 measures and a budget of one thousand million euros to stop gender-based violence (Secretaría de Igualdad, 2019).

The 8M Strike in 2018 was a vindication day with demonstrations, rallies, and labour strikes without precedent in the whole planet. In Spain, unlike the rest of the countries, the feminist movement organised a full 24-hour women's strike. This was not a classic labour strike, but 'a fourfold one: women were summoned to stop working, to stop attending classes, to cease to undertake care work and to avoid consuming' (Campillo 2019: 252). The massive support for the strike, which was joined by millions of women, meant the crystallisation of the fourth wave of the Spanish feminist movement (Burges Cruz 2019: 199). This unexpected and unforeseen success that surprised both national and international media and public opinion was the result of a long preparation period within a protest cycle led by feminism (Campillo 2019: 253). Social networks and digital websites had a crucial role in creating contact channels among the different feminist groups and in mobilising women who do not belong to feminist associations, therefore creating a collective identity.

In the years prior to the 8M Strike, women had participated in a series of feminist protests in the streets and online. In the streets, there were constant demonstrations during 2016 and 2017 that were sparked by cases of sexual assault, domestic violence, and controversial court rulings on gender-based violence cases. Especially noteworthy were the demonstrations that followed the ruling of the *La Manada* case. In this instance, the justice system determined that the gang-rape of a teenager had been classified only as abuse and not as assault, resulting in a very lenient sentence for the accused. This decision prompted protests both in Spain and abroad, mainly led by Spanish women living outside the country, thus making the case internationally known. In the digital space, women had joined in viral phenomena related to the defence of women's rights and the fight against gender-based violence with online campaigns such as #NoSomosVasijas, #Cuéntalo, #MeToo, #Time'sUp, #JuanaEstaenmiCasa, #yosítecreo, etc. (Campillo, 2019; Burges Cruz, 2019; Gutiérrez-Rubí, 2019). This type of protest increased during the pandemic years due to the lockdown restrictions. Women kept claiming equality on the web, criticising gender injustices via social networks, debating in video conferences, and streaming lectures and workshops. Thus, the Internet becomes an important social tool that enables the feminist movement to build and spread more widely and strongly (Burges Cruz 2019: 186). The last 8M demonstration in

2023, almost a decade since *El tren de la libertad,* confirms the irreversible shift in a society that has become aware that gender equality is an unfinished process; hence the feminist fight continues to be needed.

As seen in the different mobilisations, social networks have played an essential role in the dissemination of the feminist discourse, although they have not been the only medium. The study 'La comunicación del movimiento feminista en el Estado Español,' published in 2019, states how the propagation of feminist ideas has also been possible due to the proliferation of feminist magazines, and feminist literature in recent years. In addition to these genres, the study highlights the importance of feminist fiction in the audiovisual field, as the use of references from popular culture has served to broaden the scope of discourse and collective identification, especially among young women. They use references that, in some cases, perhaps initially would not have been considered particularly feminist such as the case of the vindication of female characters from *Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter,* or the *Hunger Games*, and in other cases, they use new series with a feminist discourse such as *Orange Is the New Black* and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Gutiérrez-Rubí 2019: 84). The introduction of feminist ideas into popular culture is a symptom of the change in public receptivity (Gutiérrez-Rubí 2019: 84), and it has led to an increase in television series with feminist discourse. In this case, new technologies have also played an important role because they have transformed the television industry affecting its ways of production and consumption, and thereby favouring the creation of feminist series.

1.2. The New Television in the Post-Network Era

The Spanish TV industry has undergone significant changes in recent years due to the introduction of video-on-demand services, which have transformed the creation, production, and distribution of audiovisual content. In 2015, Netflix entered Spain, and Telefónica launched Movistar+ as its video-on-demand service. A year later, HBO and Amazon Prime Video also started their streaming services in Spain, and, in 2019, the two largest television broadcasters, Atresmedia and Mediaset, launched their own video-on-demand platforms, Atresplayer Premium, and Mitele Plus, respectively (Lacalle, Gómez & Sánchez 2020: 166).

According to the annual surveys (2019–2022) by Obitel (*Observatorio Iberoamericano de la Ficción Televisiva*), the increase in television platforms has notably boosted television series production in Spain, resulting in a wider and more diverse output that allows for more original content from a formal, aesthetic, and discursive point of view. These new streaming services have also encouraged the emergence of stories about women

and people from minority groups, which were rare on mainstream TV. Contemporary television has entered a 'post-network era,' a term coined by media scholar Amanda Lotz to describe the reduced power of television networks as 'controllers of distribution and schedulers of programs' since the advent of streaming platforms (2014: 275). With 'non-linear' (independent of a schedule) contents available, viewers deliberately select the shows they want to watch and when they want to watch them, disrupting 'many of the dominant practices that have shaped the production of television since the broadcast era' (Johnson 2019: 84). 'Online TV' (Jonhson, 2019), or 'internet-distributed television' (Lotz, 2017), is unburdened by the limitations of standards and practices of advertising-funded services that can shape the content that they produce. This 'enable[s] them to create more risky content that might otherwise upset advertisers or audience' (Johnson 2019: 85).

In the Spanish case, the country may not have truly reached the post-network era, since the Obitel reports from recent years (2020–2022) show that around 70% of Spanish audience still used conventional TV as the only way to access TV contents. However, they point out that traditional linear television consumption is decreasing every year, and there is a constant increase in the use of streaming services, especially for consuming fictional series, which have become the most popular genre among the Spanish audience (Barreiro, Dodd & Álvarez 2019: unpaginated). The need for streaming services to aggregate a significant amount and variety of content and their focus on contents that appeal to specific niche groups of consumers rather than on ratings have had an impact on storytelling (Johnson 2019: 95). The new patterns of production and consumption of television series proposed by online TV services have fomented the creation of female-led series, the increasing participation of women in creative teams, and the introduction of series that, a priori, were not suitable for a mass audience on mainstream television, due to the cooperation of streaming services with broadcast channels. These factors have contributed to a notable growth of feminist series in Spanish fiction.

The diversification of the television offer has facilitated the production of a greater variety of narratives compared to the network era of generalist television when the competition for audience ratings and the need for family-friendly series limited the creation of 'more audacious and cutting-edge series' (Buonanno 2008: 62). The new streaming platforms offer increasingly extensive catalogues, which has led to opportunities for more specific or minority content (Cascajosa-Virino 2018a: 60). This has enabled more diverse television storytelling with narratives about women and non-normative sexual identities, which were traditionally considered as a niche market and hardly ever made prime time on

television (Malici 2014: 194). These series were often relegated to the margins of the TV schedule, limiting their visibility and, consequently, their continuity in television programming. There are notable examples of this course of action in the programming of TV series featuring female and LGBTQIA+ characters, such as the American series *Murphy Brown,* which aired in Spain in 1990, and *Ellen*, in 1995. They were scheduled on the second channel of the public television network, La 2, which is a cultural channel 'characterised by being the television of minorities' (Fernández-Gómez 2013: 723), therefore not a choice for audiences in search for entertainment series. This tendency in television scheduling is a recurrent practice also at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2005, the popular American series *Sex and the City* was broadcast on a popular generalist channel, Antena3, but at 2 a.m., a time that is considered by television programming as a 'graveyard slot' (between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.), when there are fewest viewers and therefore the content is considered less important (Henderson & Henderson 2019: 378). These three American series enjoyed great popularity in the USA due to their cultural importance as trailblazers of showing in primetime TV, single motherhood (*Murphy Brown*), a lesbian protagonist (*Ellen*), and female sexuality (*Sex and the City*), but in Spain, they did not have much visibility as a result of their scheduling (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014; Benoit, 1996; Cragin, 2006). The inability to control the time slot of a series was one of the frustrations of studios and creators producing television series for linear, schedule-defined television because both the time when a show was scheduled, and the network promotion could be determinants of success regardless of its content (Lotz 2017: unpaginated).

The unfavourable effect of programming is not limited to imported shows. The Spanish TV series *Mujeres* (2006) was commissioned by the public television service to broadcast on the first channel of the network, but once filmed, it was considered too risky and was on the verge of never being released. After more than a year of its production, it finally premiered on La 2, the aforementioned minority channel, in prime time, in 2006 (Menéndez Menéndez 2014: 73). Although it was aired on the second channel, it was a success. However, it did not renew for another season because by that time many of the actors had already moved onto other projects (Zurian 2017: 251). As a result of this scheduling, one of the few Spanish series with a feminist perspective shown on TV in those years, 'una *rara avis* en la producción nacional' as Menéndez Menéndez (2014: 77) described it, suffered from the lack of promotion and visibility, hindering its potential to reach a broader audience.

However, in the post-network era, these circumstances have changed and, as Claudia Bucciferro states, the television landscape that presents 'an imbalance that supports societal

biases regarding gender, perpetuating stereotypes' is being challenged due to digital innovations, 'which are changing old patterns regarding the production, distribution, and consumption of film and television content' (2019: 1053). As demonstrated in the earlier examples, broadcast television relies on gatekeeping practices that regulate the production and scheduling of television programmes. These practices often cater to specific demographic groups based on gender and age, with prime time reserved for content that conforms to traditional gender roles and targets a broad audience, particularly the male audience, which historically held control over the television in the family (Bucciferro 2019: 1055). Linear networks and channels determine 'when to continue or cancel series as part of the business of constructing a schedule and managing its inherent capacity constraints' (Lotz 2017: unpaginated). However, online TV platforms are free from such constraints and no longer have to prioritise creative decisions based on a fixed schedule (Lotz 2017: unpaginated). Instead, streaming services are able to offer content in a non-linear format, catering to niche audiences rather than aiming for universal appeal. This approach opens up opportunities to explore visual narratives that were previously rare in mainstream television. Viewers who subscribe to video-on-demand services expect content that goes beyond traditional norms, and online TV fulfils this demand (Lotz 2014: 86). For instance, Netflix aims to produce original series that are 'not already on television or would be difficult to put on television' (Landau 2006: 15). As a result, online TV platforms have become spaces for experimental content, pushing the boundaries of storytelling and promoting diversity in narratives (Johnson 2019: 89). The focus on attracting subscribers leads to the creation of content that deviates from the traditional aim of appealing to advertisers and achieving mass viewership (Lotz 2017: unpaginated).

The characteristics of narrowcasting, present in online TV platforms, have led to an increase in female-led series that break free from the constraints of traditional broadcasting. Non-linear programming allows for the emergence of a female independent viewer who can freely choose what, when, and where to watch without needing to negotiate this viewing practice with others (Bucciferro 2019: 1055). In the pursuit of niche markets, 'smaller, specific audiences gain value, which makes demographic groups such as women […] increasingly important' (Lotz 2006: 26). Female audience is the first important niche group in the narrowcast environment because, although 'considered a "minority" group due to the history of male domination that forced secondary economic, social, and political status upon them', they represent over fifty percent of the population (Lotz 2006: 28). Consequently, online television has given rise to narratives that resonate with this group.

The new television of the post-network era has an impact on television content and specifically on the proliferation of female-led series with a feminist perspective such as *Mentiras, #Luimelia,* and *Veneno* (Atresplayer Premium, 2020), *Hache* (Netflix, 2019), *Hierro* (2019), *La unidad* (2020) and *Antidisturbios* (2020) by Movistar+, and *La Templanza* and *Inés del alma mía* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020). Moreover, streaming services, characterised by producing novel and risky content, offer more opportunities to women as writers, directors, executive producers, and other jobs behind the cameras (Cascajosa-Virino, 2017; López Rodríguez & Raya Bravo, 2019). The increase of women in the creative teams leads to a deeper exploration of feminist issues and the female experience in the television fiction series (Visa Barbosa 2019: 286). Netflix, for example, has contributed to a disruption of traditional boundaries, 'giving the opportunity to women and people from minoritized groups to develop their own creations' (Bucciferro 2019: 1054). However, it is essential to exercise caution. Firstly, because this streaming service also offers plenty of content that reproduces gender stereotypes and, secondly, because the Netflix algorithm leads to viewing suggestions that match previous choices, which can cause viewers to ignore other kinds of content completely, and never be exposed to diverse narratives that might challenge their worldview (Bucciferro 2019: 1054). The algorithm creates 'filter bubbles so that people with different tastes have very different experiences of the content available' (Lotz 2017: unpaginated). Bucciferro highlights that Netflix does not care about supporting social change, rather than seeking to appeal to a variety of tastes and reaching a larger audience, but the actions of this company are helping to create feminist series that represent 'bold and independent women, and some are made by women for women, offering narratives that shake old stereotypes' (2019: 1054).

Streaming services have not only contributed to the production of more feminist series but have also played a relevant role in the preservation and continuation of such shows through alliances with traditional broadcast channels. Rather than creating competition, the emergence of streaming platforms has led to a synergy between traditional and online TV, co-producing series, and buying the distribution rights of the series. These alliances have extended the life of shows, particularly feminist shows. Streaming services have engaged in a 'rescue strategy' by picking up series that have been cancelled on other channels, thus extending the life of these shows, and providing them with a protected environment free from the pressure of traditional broadcast ratings (Castro & Cascajosa 2020: 158).

Several examples illustrate this phenomenon. *Paquita Salas* (2016–2019) started as a web series on the digital platform Flooxer (Atresmedia) in 2016 and gained popularity

quickly. After a less successful test run on the broadcast channel Neox, Netflix bought the series and produced two more seasons, leading to its immense success both nationally and internationally. Similarly, *Vis a Vis* (2015–2019), a series with a dedicated fan community, faced challenges in its reception during the second season on Antena3, leading the network not to renew it. However, FOX España, which is also part of the catalogue of Movistar+ and Orange TV, picked up the series for two more seasons in 2018 and even created a spin-off, *Vis a Vis: El Oasis* (2020), significantly prolonging the show's life. *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (2015–2020) a critically acclaimed series featuring feminist discourse and important female characters, was also cancelled after its second season due to low ratings. However, thanks to a co-production between Netflix and TVE, the series received a third season, ensuring its continuation. These examples demonstrate that the intervention of streaming services in the production and continuation of series with feminist ideals has been essential in extending their showing time and ensuring their impact on audiences. Streaming platforms have become a crucial factor in promoting feminist series that might not have survived solely through traditional broadcast channels.

Online TV has revolutionised content distribution by allowing series to be distributed in multiple markets simultaneously, so that if in some of the exhibition windows, the production is not successful, it is possible to offset the production costs with the remaining markets (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2018: 18). For instance, the low acceptance of *Las chicas del cable* in the Spanish market has been compensated by the success experienced in Latin America. This has benefited many series that in the traditional broadcasting system would have never been renewed for a second season, or even produced due to their perceived lack of appeal to a mass audience, such as the female-led series *Señoras del (h)AMPA.* This series, thanks to the partnership between Telecinco and Amazon Prime Video, was automatically renewed for a second season before the broadcast of the first one. However, in the traditional programming system, the decision of the renewal would have waited until the ratings of the first season had been assessed. In that case, it would have not passed the test. Although the series premiered with extraordinary ratings, almost three million viewers, the constant changes in its schedule made by Telecinco to prioritise its reality programmes impacted on audience behaviour and viewers decided to stop watching the series or watch it on Amazon Prime Video, where it was also available (Mucientes 2019: unpaginated). The second season was first available on Amazon Prime Video for streaming, as it has happened with other series produced by Telecinco, which reduces the pressure of obtaining important ratings on

the broadcast channel. Therefore, the digital distribution model mitigates the risk of series failure, encouraging a more diverse and greater volume of audiovisual content production.

The content cross-platform rights are also homogenising the audiovisual content shown in online and traditional TV, both technically and narratively. Consequently, 'the notion that broadcast television mode and content are somehow less innovative, interesting, or compelling than those of their narrowcast cable and streaming counterparts' (Nygaard & Lagerwey 2017: 111) is changing due to the partnership with digital platforms that help to reduce any potential losses of broadcast networks in case of betting for more risky content. In the past, 'broadcast representations were unlikely to shock or challenge audience expectations of gender roles' (Lotz 2014: 9). However, contemporary series, in streaming platforms as well as generalist channels, have broken away from these conventional norms. This shift is evident in the three series analysed in the thesis, which showcase examples of storytelling that challenge and subvert traditional gender norms in online and traditional TV. In addition to these relationships with streaming services, broadcast channels offer digital platforms such as Playz, from RTVE, and Flooxer, from Atresmedia, that show short-term fictions aimed at young audiences who have abandoned linear programming (Lacalle, Gómez & Sánchez 2020: 168). These digital platforms provide opportunities for experimentation with narrative techniques and introduce new and cutting-edged topics that differ from traditional television. Jesús Segarra-Saavedra's analysis of Spanish web series exhibited in 2017 confirms this trend. He concludes that these series tend to present more equality between genders and showcase sexual diversity, reflecting a move towards more inclusive and progressive storytelling (2018: 207).

Overall, the digitisation and distribution of streaming content have played an essential role in the proliferation of television series that centre on the female experience, with some of them adopting a feminist perspective. This shift in the television landscape has led to the emergence of new fictional narratives that challenge and disrupt the traditional androcentric biases present in media discourses (Menéndez Menéndez 2008: 63). Thus, the focus of this thesis is to explore the progressive and empowering potential of Spanish television series that have embraced feminist elements. It seeks to examine works of fiction that introduce fresh and innovative female representations, effectively challenging the traditional and stereotypical depictions of women on TV. Recent narratives with female protagonists are taking notable steps 'towards a more nuanced representation of women in Spanish television series' (Ruiz Muñoz & Pérez-Rufí 2020: 824) presenting new discourses on maternity (Hidalgo-Marí & Palomares Sánchez, 2020), more complex images of the family (Lacalle &

Gómez, 2016), or different portraits of women including diversity in age, class, and race (Menéndez Menéndez, 2014; Barroso Quintana, 2020).

1.3. Feminist Studies on Spanish Television

In parallel with the expansion of television series, academic interest in this phenomenon has increased in the field of Spanish television studies. This trend, as Manuel Palacio (2007) notes, reverses the traditional lack of attention in Spanish scholarship toward cultural studies. Palacio points out two main reasons for this disinterest. The first one would be the lack of university legitimacy that the study of popular culture incites in Spain, a country where there is no tradition of television studies; and the second cause would be the marginal position that gender studies or studies of identity and minorities take as research or teaching topics in the country (2007: 70). In the same line, Smith recognises that television studies have been disregarded in Spain but acknowledges that, in the last decade, there has been an increase in the publication of studies on Spanish television and that Spanish scholars 'are finally shaking off the heritage of the *telebasura (trash TV)* debate and taking their TV seriously' (2016: 306). Smith has contributed immensely to the literature on Spanish TV studies and has opened new research channels that had not been explored before in Spanish scholarship such as transmedia studies and transnational narratives. His latest books about Spanish television, *Dramatized societies: quality television in Spain and Mexico* (2016), *Television drama in Spain and Latin America: genre and format translation* (2018), and *Reimagining History in Contemporary Spanish Media: Theater, Cinema, Television, Streaming* (2021) provide relevant analyses of recent Spanish television series and the application of new theories on production, reception, and transmedia in the contemporary internet era, yet the focus on gender analysis is scarce.

While television studies have found little resonance in Spanish scholarship, the interest in critiquing popular culture from a feminist perspective is even more marginal. Menéndez Menéndez acknowledged in 2016, at a conference of the 13th edition of Escuela Feminista Rosario de Acuña, how the researchers of media studies still suffer a lack of legitimacy in the Spanish academia, which is aggravated if the analysis is feminist. However, in recent years, there has been significant production of studies that analyse gender in Spanish series. Most of these (Arranz Lozano, 2020; De Caso Bausela, González de Garay & Marcos Ramos, 2020; González de Garay, 2019; González de Garay & Marcos Ramos, 2021; Hidalgo-Marí, 2015; Lacalle, 2016; Maroto González & Rodríguez Martelo, 2022) have followed in their analyses a 'sex roles approach', which is described by Buonnano as a

methodology of content analysis 'with the main objective of discerning and criticising the sexual stereotypes conveyed by television' (2014: 9). This research compares male and female characters by quantifying the number of characters of each sex that appear in a series, their discourses on various topics, or their presence in a public or private space. These studies have contributed to exposing the unbalanced portrayals of genders in Spanish fiction series, revealing the presence of deeply ingrained clichés and gender stereotypes, and confirming the preservation of the patriarchal order in TV representations. The most recent works employing quantitative methodology indicate a slight evolution in how gender is portrayed in the new fictional content of television, although gender stereotypes are still persistent.

Other studies (Bandré, 2019; Bonavitta & de Garay Hernández, 2019; Cuenca Orellana & Martínez Pérez, 2020; Coronado Ruiz & Galán Fajardo, 2015; Lacalle & Castro, 2017; Mastandrea & Martínez, 2019; Santaella Rodríguez, de Pinedo Extremera, & Martínez-Heredia, 2022) offer close reading analyses of the fictional texts in order to explore how television narratives address female issues and concerns. Qualitative research in this area has investigated topics such as female sexuality, the role of older women in the stories, representations of feminist women in historical fictions, depictions of abortion and gender-based violence, and the emergence of new female portrayals that challenge gender stereotypes. Some others (Castilla Barbadillo, 2022; Gavilan, Martínez-Navarro & Ayestarán, 2019; López Rodríguez & Raya Bravo, 2019; Ruiz Muñoz & Pérez-Rubí, 2020) have taken alternative approaches to analyse television series away from the textual analysis. They shed light on different structures of meaning, conducting research on audience reception, exploring how female viewers decode fictional depictions of women, investigating the influence of female showrunners on series, and examining the production and distribution of female ensemble cast series in Spain.

However, very few analyses (Chicharro-Merayo, 2018; Crisóstomo Gálvez, 2018; Hidalgo-Marí, 2019; Hidalgo-Marí & Palomares-Sánchez, 2019; Loxham, 2021; Menéndez Menéndez, 2014, 2017) have considered the notion of postfeminism when examining female representations on television. The thesis aims to contribute to an under-researched aspect of Spanish feminist studies in which postfeminism is the object of study. This investigation explores contemporary Spanish fiction series through the lens of the feminist critique that considers postfeminism as its '*critical object*: the phenomenon which analysts must inquire into and interrogate' (Gill 2007: 254). Researchers such as Giraldo, Martínez-Jiménez, and Menéndez Menéndez have offered relevant works on postfeminism in Hispanic feminist media studies. Giraldo points out the need to integrate the concept 'postfeminism' into the

repertoire of critical analysis of the Hispanic media culture because the area of study is not properly established despite the fact that the phenomenon has been operating in the region for more than a decade (2020: 3). She develops the theory of 'coloniality of gender' to understand how the postfeminist regime having a local origin as 'a product of hegemonic Western concerns, […] has successfully been projected on a global scale' (2016: 165). Giraldo identifies hypersexualisation and agency in relation to it as the most important aspects in conceptualising postfeminism as a regime of regulation that puts coloniality in action (2020: 16). That is, the notion developed in Western society that postfeminist subjects are agents of their own sexual objectification as a sign of progress in the turn of the century becomes a model to which all cultures should aspire. In analysing Spanish media, Martínez-Jiménez proposes a reconceptualisation of the term as 'neoliberal postfeminism' to make it inseparable from the neoliberal project at a time when feminism is exposing its cracks and losing legitimacy. She claims that it must be understood 'as a new (populist) narrative in the Spanish context' (2020: 1000), which aims 'at depoliticising the personal' so it de-problematises women's choices even though they reproduce gender inequalities (2020: 1001). Martínez-Jiménez points out the potential of postfeminist discourses to deactivate feminist counter-hegemony and deems imperative that feminist studies focus on how postfeminism appropriates and perversely integrates values of equality, justice, diversity, and freedom in a new suggestive and sexy narrative that does not disturb the neoliberal capitalism, a strategy that she calls '*hipsterización* del feminismo' (2021: 378). In this sense, Menéndez Menéndez in her works on contemporary media in Spain (2017) also uses terms such as *hipster sexism* and *neomachismo* to describe supposedly liberating narratives although their female representations consist in the celebration of normative femininity. She defines postfeminism as a new feminine mystique that, disguised as sexual freedom, continues to be a neoliberal instrument for the consolidation of patriarchy (2017b: 85).

Spanish television studies on postfeminism confirm how Spanish TV series reproduce the postfeminist canon exhibited in female-led American series. They represent 'empowered' women, who have jobs, money, sexual freedom, and independence but who keep on replicating the most traditional roles of femininity subordinated to their male partners. Through the analysis of female representations in contemporary Spanish TV series that have claimed to celebrate feminist discourses, these authors expose the resilience and adaptability of postfeminism, which may have changed thematically but still maintains the patriarchal social order intact. Chicharro-Merayo in her article 'Spanish History and Female Characters. Representations of Women in Spanish Historical Fiction' (2018) analyses the postfeminist

depictions of female characters in the period dramas *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (2005–2012), *La Señora* (2008–2010) and *14 de abril, La República* (2011–2019). The article emphasises the postfeminist dimension of the main female characters of those productions, who are represented as empowered women with a presence in the public space and as an active part of the political changes of the moment, but their fundamental components are the emotional, romantic, and maternal dimensions. Chicharro-Merayo also argues that 'these characters reach increasingly powerful positions mainly achieved through the use of their female qualities', their key to success is their embodiment of traditional femininity (sensitivity, empathy, strength, etc.), which differentiates them from the male characters (2018: 92). Similarly, Abigail Loxham explores the transnational legibility of postfeminism in the Spanish dramas *Vis a vis* (2015–2019), *Cable Girls* (Netflix 2017–2020) and *Velvet* (2014–2016). She observes the performativity of postfeminist tropes in the female characters of those Spanish series. The last two series are period dramas that, as Loxham states, although they are historically distant from the postfeminist era, their narrative presents recognisable postfeminist elements such as 'female friendship, women in the workplace and a sexual autonomy' (2021: 9). In *Vis a vis*, the main character, Macarena, embodies the postfeminist white, middle class, successful career woman. However, Loxham points out that the series subverts this subjectivity once the character is in prison, removed from the neoliberal society, leading to new representations of female subjectivity. This analysis confirms that Spanish TV series engage with postfeminist tropes while also incorporating discourses that challenge and subvert them.

Similarly, other works on postfeminism not only uncover the postfeminist discourses in Spanish fictions but also recognise the new productions that are breaking this canon taking a feminist perspective. They analyse if the shift to a greater and diversified representation of women beyond postfeminist images observed in foreign series is also taking place in Spanish fiction. Hidalgo-Marí's 'De la maternidad al empoderamiento: una panorámica sobre la representación de la mujer en la ficción española' (2017) and Menéndez Menéndez's '(Re)elaboration and (Re)signification of US TV Drama in Spanish Serial Fiction: The Case of *Mujeres*' (2010) draw a comparison between the American and Spanish series to trace the changes in televisual female representations that transcend national borders. Hidalgo-Marí states that, as in previous decades, international fiction and, specifically, American fiction, serves as a catalyst for new trends and audiovisual patterns that influence Spanish fiction (2017: 309). Menéndez Menéndez confirms how since the 1990s, most of the Spanish fictional series have incorporated American formulas for plots and characters, sometimes

even making ‘attempts at adapting successful US series that reflect the female experience’, such as *Ellas y el sexo débil* (Antena3, 2006) and *Las Chicas de Oro* (TVE, 2010) (2010: 149-154). American fiction, in the last decade, has opted for series in which women are the main characters, such as *Scandal* (ABC, 2012–2018), *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013–2019), *The Good Wife* (CBS, 2009–2016) or *Grace & Frankie* (Netflix, 2015–2019).

These series have broken the prototypical barriers in female representation and have incorporated new models of women that are much stronger and more independent, whose action is not only subordinated to the romantic plot, producing a new plurality and multiplicity in the stories being told about women’s lives (Hidalgo-Marí 2017: 309). Spanish fiction has been absorbing this trend of reflecting a more equal reality and incorporating new representations of women that challenge the female image that has traditionally been shown on television. Hidalgo-Marí’s research reveals that Spanish fiction is evolving in terms of female representation, constantly introducing newer patterns, inherited from American fiction, that empower and redefine the female image shown on television. Women are depicted as more than just mothers or romantic partners, as they become detached from their maternal-family role, and gain importance in professional contexts, leaving aside the male hegemony to which they were relegated (2017: 310).

Despite some television series incorporating feminist demands and advocating for a narrative renewal, ‘the majority of the fictional products present a discourse that consolidates dichotomies and traditional hierarchies between the sexes’ perpetuating gender stereotypes (Menéndez Menéndez 2010: 154). As mentioned previously, recent studies (Arranz Lozano, 2020; Bonavitta, 2019; González de Garay, Marcos-Ramos & Portillo-Delgado, 2019; Mastandrea & Martínez, 2019) affirm that a great number of contemporary Spanish television series continue to depict traditional gender roles by portraying female characters who conform to conventional notions of femininity and embody classic tropes like the *femme fatale*, the submissive woman, and the companion of the male hero. The plots for female characters often revolve around emotional objectives, seeking romantic love, taking care of their children, or supporting their male partners, while their professional roles and aspirations are given less prominence in the storylines. In terms of professional representation, women in these series are typically shown in less qualified or lower-level occupations compared to their male counterparts. Even when women occupy positions of power at the top of the work pyramid, they are often portrayed with masculine attributes, linking leadership and authority to traditionally masculine traits. The findings of studies by Arranz-Lozano (2020) and

González de Garay, Marcos-Ramos, and Portillo-Delgado (2019) also reveal the persistence of the Western beauty canon in Spanish television series. Female characters are often portrayed according to a narrow beauty standard that demands youth, sexiness, and a slender body, perpetuating unrealistic and restrictive beauty ideals. Although there might be a reduction in explicit images of female bodies as sexual objects, certain forms of objectification of women still exist in contemporary series.

The reproduction of the traditional gender hierarchy in new television series is imbued by a postfeminist approach that instrumentalises feminist rhetoric to maintain gender inequalities. Some series might be advertised or perceived by the audience as feminist or progressive, but they often present confusing and ambiguous messages, ultimately failing to challenge the deep-rooted gender hierarchy. Thus, in her article 'Entre el neomachismo y el retrosexismo: antifeminismo contemporáneo en las industrias culturales' (2017), Menéndez Menéndez urges feminist critique to centre its analysis on the disarticulation of postfeminist discourses, and she highlights that academic texts still lack the theoretical impulse to unveil and conceptualise these notions, which challenge the emancipatory ethics of feminism and also women's freedom (2017a: 2). Esther Marín Ramos also draws attention to the necessity that,

> desde la crítica feminista, continuemos ahondando cada vez más y visibilizando la persistencia de algunas ideas que por su presencia sutil y casi inconsciente en las narraciones de mayor repercusión social, calan en el imaginario colectivo y contribuyen a mantener el sexismo (y el sistema que lo propaga) en nuestra sociedad. (2019: 45)

The 'stereotype analysis' that is so common in Spanish feminist criticism may not capture the complex image of postfeminism and recognise the contradictions in the female representations that are identified as feminist. Consequently, Menéndez Menéndez elaborates an epistemological framework based on Gill's work, identifying a series of questions that must be asked to overcome the ambiguous postfeminist paradigm: questions about the plot, the endings, the values linked to female characters, the construction of the discourse, or the very concept of authorship (2017: 24). The author affirms that feminist critics must,

> leer en el texto cuál es el grado de autodeterminación femenina y cómo se aplica la identidad de género a cuestiones clásicas del sistema sexo/género, como la heteronormatividad, el matrimonio o la sexualización del cuerpo de las mujeres, preguntándonos por la noción de placer visual y la posibilidad (o no) de subvertir la mirada masculina. (2017: 24)

By applying these questions, feminist critics engage in a more nuanced examination of postfeminist discourses and their impact on gender representations, delving into the complexities of how these representations challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms and

hierarchies. Menéndez Menéndez not only highlights the need to reveal sexism in supposedly feminist narratives but also underscores the importance of searching for the existence of authentic subversive or novel female representations based on other variables such as 'la edad o el placer sexual; la amistad, solidaridad y también el amor entre mujeres, el uso subversivo del humor, el cuestionamiento de la maternidad/paternidad convencional, la discusión del amor romántico...' (2017: 24). Building on these guidelines for an effective feminist analysis against the ambiguity of postfeminist discourses, I employ these questions in my research with the goal of revealing new female representations that incorporate feminist perspectives and subvert the postfeminist canon. The following section outlines the theoretical framework that I apply to develop a critique of postfeminism, and how it is implemented as a critical term in the examination of the case studies in this thesis to analyse the new constructions of femininity in contemporary televisual representations.

1.4. Postfeminism as an Object of Study

In the historical context discussed in this chapter, postfeminism has been described as a regressive political stance in relation to feminism, according to Faludi and McRobbie. However, Gill presents a more nuanced view of postfeminism, considering it not just as a response to feminism but as a new discursive phenomenon closely linked to neoliberalism. She reformulates postfeminism as a *sensibility* that entangles feminist and anti-feminist ideas and emphasises the need to be the critical object of feminist analysts. In her book *Gender and the Media* (2007), Gill proposed the definition of a 'postfeminist sensibility' that can be used as a concept to analyse contemporary cultural texts. She recognises 'a number of recurring and relatively stable themes, tropes, and constructions that characterize gender representations in the media in the early twenty-first century' (2007: 255). Those themes offer the criteria that can be used to identify something as postfeminist. Gill's notion of postfeminism as a patterned phenomenon offers a useful analytic tool for the critical study of the new representations of femininity in contemporary Spanish TV series. Although the current cultural landscape is different from the one in which Gill formulated that concept in 2007, she has revisited this notion to examine its relevance a decade later in 'The affective, cultural and psychic life of postfeminism: 10 years on' (2017), and she has concluded that despite the coexistence of postfeminism with a revitalised feminism, most of the elements of the *sensibility* 'remain present in force, often in intensified form' (Gill 2017: 620). This denotes the continued vitality of postfeminism as a critical concept, since part of the success of the postfeminist sensibility is its flexibility, 'its ability to change and mutate in relation to

new ideas' (Gill 2017: 611). Gill outlines a number of elements that constitutes the postfeminist sensibility, which also marks its contradictory nature comprising feminist and anti-feminist discourses with notions of individualism and choice standing next to ideas of surveillance and discipline and punishing 'wrong' choices.

The first aspect that Gill points out is that femininity is defined as a bodily property, which presents the possession of a 'sexy body' as women's key source of identity, a defining feature of womanhood that creates an obsessional preoccupation with the body in the media. The body is also presented as women's source of power, an idea theorised by Catherine Hakim as 'erotic capital', defined as a major asset for women to gain economic and social benefits (2010: 499). The second aspect, closely related to the previous one, is the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring, and self-discipline, which are required to have a body that conforms to the norms of attractiveness. Therefore, the body becomes a personal project. However, this surveillance is not only on the body, but also on the self. Women are in need of constant vigilance, evaluating and improving themselves as lovers, daughters, or mothers. Such surveillance has intensified in the last years due to the effects of social media in creating the 'girlfriend gaze', 'a modality of looking in which girls and women police each other's appearance and behaviour' (Gill 2017: 617).

Thirdly, Gill refers to the sexualisation of culture. Her use of 'sexualisation' refers both to the widespread proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms, as well as the increasingly frequent eroticisation of women and girls (and to a lesser degree, of men) in public spaces. The fourth feature is the women's displacement from sex object to desiring sexual subject: rather than objectified, women are represented as subjects with sexual desires who freely choose to present themselves as objects. Gill describes it as 'a deeper form of exploitation than objectification' in which the objectifying male gaze is internalised to create a new disciplinary regime (2007: 258). The fifth aspect is the focus on individualism, choice, and empowerment which is central to postfeminism. It presents women as 'autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever' (Gill 2007: 260). They are women who choose freely to enact traditional femininity that was understood to please men as a way to please oneself. These ideas are connected to the neoliberal ethos and aim to depoliticise people's actions. The individualistic discourse transforms women's experiences of gender inequity as personal issues that must be solved individually, deactivating then the collective action. Sixth, there is a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference constructing femininity and masculinity as opposites. With these discourses, the difference is constructed as 'sexy', re-eroticising power relations

between men and women, and the existing inequalities are naturalised, hence represented as inevitable (Gill 2007: 266). The seventh element is described by Gill as the 'makeover paradigm', which first makes women believe they are flawed in some way so that they are offered possibilities of reinvention and transformation following lifestyle experts and practicing appropriate consumption habits. Recently, this paradigm extended beyond the surface of the body to an incitement to 'makeover' one's interior life, developing a new, 'upgraded' postfeminist subjectivity (Gill 2017: 617). Eighth, irony operates in postfeminist culture as a strategy that allows expressing sexist, homophobic, or racist comments in an ironised form while insisting this was not actually meant. Irony functions in various ways such as using retro-imagery and nostalgia to construct contemporary sexism but locating it in a previous era to avoid criticism or using the 'extremeness of the sexism' claiming that people identify this as knowingly ridiculous, something that is just 'harmless fun' (Gill 2007: 267). The use of irony also makes criticism much more difficult since any critique would be dismissed as lacking an understanding of the irony or being humourless.

In her 2017 reviewed work, Gill added to these eight tropes the relation between postfeminism and the 'inspiration industry'. She states that a focus on 'positive mental attitude' is increasingly central to postfeminist culture inciting women to work on their character and psychic dispositions and being solely responsible for creating their own happiness. It mandates that women remain positive and upbeat in the face of continuing inequalities, pathologising affective responses such as vulnerability and anger. Gill notes how this is 'simultaneously affective, aesthetic, and political' (2017: 619-620). Women do not have the right to feel angry because this is psychologically and aesthetically unappealing, while politically dangerous. All these features exert a powerful regulatory force on women in contemporary life generating models of behaviour that constrain their lives (Gill 2017: 610).

The reproduction of the elements of the *sensibility* in female representations have generated the three models of femininity available for the postfeminist woman in popular culture, which have been described by Munford and Waters in their book *Feminism & Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* (2014). The term 'postfeminist mystique' used in the title makes an explicit reference to the ground-breaking book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan, since the intention of the authors is to carry out a revaluation of the situation of female representation in popular culture fifty years after its publication. Friedan's book is usually credited to have set in motion second-wave feminism when she argued that the re-mystification of femininity in the 1950s had stopped the independent woman that had emerged after the suffrage movement. Friedan critiqued the

media's role in creating a domestic femininity glorifying the figure of the housewife, which had provoked what she called 'the problem that has no name' in reference to the general dissatisfaction experienced by women at the time (Munford & Waters 2014: 81). Munford and Waters examine whether that mystique has changed over time and reach the conclusion that if Friedan stated in her book that the feminine mystique suggested that women's destiny lay in the fulfilment of their femininity, the postfeminist mystique 'is ultimately focused on the same goal' (2014: xiii).

By providing an in-depth analysis of contemporary films and television series in the American context, Munford and Waters explore three recurring models of femininity presented in popular culture, namely: the career woman, the housewife, and the girl. These models reproduce the traditional myths of femininity, reinforcing the gender hierarchy in contemporary society. The patriarchal mythology of romantic love, maternal love, and the beauty myth become defining features of the models of the postfeminist woman. The career woman recognises romantic love as her only source of happiness because, despite her professional success, she is consistently portrayed as an unhappy individual constantly seeking the missing element in her life—a romantic partner. Although investing in a professional career remains important, her ultimate goal would be to find a husband (Munford & Waters 2014: 44). The housewife locates in maternal love her life project and her essential role as a woman (Munford & Waters 2014: 77-78). And the girl bases her empowerment to achieve success in life on the beauty myth (Munford & Waters 2014: 111). Alongside these models, postfeminism also presents negative archetypes to show women the consequences of not following the proposed patterns of behaviour. The antithesis to the career woman takes form on the miserable, cruel, unfeminine boss who has sacrificed her personal life to achieve the top of her profession. The bad mother is a result of the housewife who defies the societal expectations to be a perfect mother. The model of the girl who is shaped by 'girl power' discourses and her hypersexualisation is a reaction to the victimised woman that embodies the fallacious image of the feminist as whining and puritan. These are cautionary tales that advise women that their happiness, success, and fulfilment in life reside in their engagement with the norms of traditional femininity. The postfeminist heroines and their negative counterparts promote the postfeminist lessons that define 'good' women by their personal relationships and their adherence to beauty culture, while 'bad' women are identified by their resistance to familial and romantic intimacy and the beauty myth.

Munford & Waters describe the career woman portrayed in series such as *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002)*, Sex and the City* (1998–2004)*,* and the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), who

represents the single, urban, working girl that has become the poster girl of postfeminism. Through postfeminist themes of autonomy, choice, sexual subjectification, and individualistic empowerment, the professional woman signifies the 'liberated woman' who is financially independent, sexually free, and career-oriented, but whose 'choice' legitimises retrograde femininities and the women's decision to return to traditional domestic roles (Munford & Waters 2014: 48). Therefore, narratives of the career woman repackage feminist discourses into feminine ones. In the aforementioned series, the economic, social, and sexual autonomy of their main characters contrasts with Ally's intense anxiety regarding love and maternity, and the search for Mr. Right by the protagonists of *Sex and the City*. Both series reassert traditional tropes of maternity and coupling, despite the characters' empowerment in other aspects of their lives. Consequently, the single girl's ultimate pursuit in these stories 'remains underwritten by a heterosexual quest narrative and an adherence to the disciplinary practices of traditional femininity' (Munford & Waters 2014: 44). Postfeminism reinvents the female subject of the narrative as an empowered woman but maintains the traditional romance plot foregrounding, the importance of love through a heterosexual romance.

This model was transferred to Spanish television series at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s when *series profesionales* such as *Periodistas* (1998–2002), *El comisario* (1999–2009), and *Hospital Central* (2000–2012) began to proliferate, reflecting the Spanish social reality of the time. These series featured women who left the domestic sphere to enter the workplace as journalists, policewomen, or doctors. However, as Elena Galán Fajardo (2007) concludes in her analysis of *El comisario* and *Hospital Central*, the female characters in these narratives follow the model of the career woman, because despite being portrayed as strong, independent women, their main concerns revolve around the search for a romantic partner or a family, assuming a more sentimental role than professional in the plotline. Galán Fajardo also highlights the importance of the body and the beauty of the female characters in these series (2007: 124), which emphasises the obsessional preoccupation with the female body to define women's identity that was observed by Gill in her postfeminist sensibility. Contemporary Spanish series such as *La casa de papel* (2017–2021), or *Las chicas del cable* (2017–2020) continue reproducing this model, albeit in a more complex form. These series feature young, beautiful, and highly active postfeminist heroines who value their autonomy and freedom to make individual choices, but who still 'seem compelled to make choices that are located in normative notions of femininity' (Gill 2007: 269). In these fictions, women are represented as competent professionals, although their personal life acquires more importance in their storylines, and their professional development

is often relegated to the background (Hidalgo-Marí 2017: 306). For instance, in *La casa de papel,* the character of Raquel Murillo, the police inspector, is depicted as an intelligent, independent woman who managed to escape a situation of gender-based violence by divorcing her abusive husband. She emerges as a leader, heading a police group tasked with handling the heist on the Royal Mint of Spain, symbolising an empowered woman. However, she is portrayed as miserable in her personal life, having to witness the happiness of her ex-husband with her own sister. The narrative further complicates her empowerment as she becomes seduced by 'the Professor', the leader of the robbers, leading to the initiation of a romantic relationship between them. This ultimately results in her aiding him to escape, which entails the destruction of her successful career. In the final scenes, viewers witness a happy woman meeting her criminal lover in a romantic setting after having left behind her career, her house, and her city to embark on a life as fugitives. This ending underscores the significance of romance in the narrative of the career woman, shaping the actions of the female character.

As the counterpart of the career woman whose storyline leads to love or motherhood, postfeminist narratives often incorporate the figure of the female professional in power positions whose success always comes at the cost of a poor or non-existent personal life. They are normally described as a self-absorbed professional married to the job. These successful professionals are depicted as unhappy and 'empty' women, or as masculinised women, who are aggressive and competitive. A well-known example is Meryl Streep's portrayal of Miranda Priestly in the film *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), who becomes the epitome of the monstrous female boss and career-obsessed woman who ends up alone, serving as a cautionary tale for career women who do not prioritise family.

María Folguera in her article 'Una chica con carácter: jefas en las series españolas de las últimas décadas' (2015) affirms that since the 1990s the Spanish series whose storylines take place in workplace settings introduce the figure of the female boss who is continually described by the rest of the characters as 'cold', 'with a temper', 'tough', 'strict' or 'unfriendly', and is depicted as a failure in her love life. As an example of the most extreme configuration of this model, Folguera mentions how the character of Laura in *Periodistas* embodies the stereotype of the resentful spinster living with her mother. This negative depiction of the powerful woman is interpreted as retribution for abandoning the traditional stereotypes of housewife, mother, and wife (Lacalle & Gómez 2016: 65). The women's dilemma about balancing their professional and personal life is typically resolved in most narratives through what Diane Negra (2009:15) calls 'retreatism', whereby women retreat

from their public lives to find fulfilment in marriage, home, and family. These narratives often give 'happy endings' to career women by having them find husbands and settle down.

The second model of femininity explored by Munford and Waters is the housewife, and how 'the postfeminist mystique frees domestic femininity from its image of entrapment and drudgery, positioning it as just another available choice for women', and a desirable one too (2014: 44). The authors state that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the housewife gained renewed visibility in cultural texts reviving an outdated model of femininity that glamourised domestication through narratives of the privileged 'housewife' and her life. Popular culture celebrates cooking, crafting, cleaning, or childcare and rebrands homemaking as an 'art' or a 'science,' and presenting it as a professional exercise that adds value to the domestic practice (Munford & Waters 2014: 78). Examples of this trend can be seen in cooking TV shows like Rachael Ray's *30 Minute Meals* (2001–2012) and *Nigella Bites* (2000–), as well as programmes on organising a house like Netflix's TV series *Get Organized with Home Edit* (2020). Additionally, there is a plethora of homemaking books, such as Nigella Lawson's *How to be A Domestic Goddess* (2000), and Kirstie Allsop's *Kirstie's Homemade Home* (2010). The portrayal of this practice is often glamourised with images of privileged, white, middle-class, suburban women who conform to cultural aesthetic ideals. For instance, television cook Nigella Lawson is presented as 'a successful, good-looking businesswoman who also have time to pick up the kids and do the cooking in her household' (Leer 2017: 20). Similarly, the protagonists of the reality TV franchise *Real Housewives of...* (2006–), 'with [their] hyper-groomed appearance and rigorous fitness schedule, [have] been instrumental in repositioning the housewife as a desiring and desirable being' (Munford & Waters 2014: 93).

Postfeminist culture, as argued by Munford and Waters, revisits the notion of the 'happy housewife heroine' that Friedan criticised in her feminine mystique. In this contemporary version, the postfeminist model of the housewife incorporates themes of sexual difference, individualism, choice, self-surveillance, and irony, as outlined by Gill. The postfeminist mystique represents this heroine as cognizant of feminism, and therefore this traditional femininity is either playfully or ironically represented, implying that women who embody this role are aware of its social significance (Munford & Waters 2014: 81). Alternatively, the housewife may be presented as someone who has made a personal decision, co-opting the feminist language of choice and empowerment. In popular culture, the housewife model is celebrated through the re-enchantment of old-style domestic femininity. It prominently features the celebration of motherhood, which aligns with the postfeminist

discourse termed ‘new momism,’ as conceptualised by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels in their book *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* (2005). Douglas and Michaels base this discourse on what the sociologist Sharon Hays labelled the ideology of ‘intensive mothering’, whereby women are conceived as primary caretakers of children, so they have to devote abundant amounts of time, energy, and money to their children (Hays 1996: 8). ‘New momism’ lays on the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, redefining women, first and foremost, in their role as mothers, and their devotion to motherhood is judged by a series of norms that are impossible to meet (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 4). This concept of ‘new momism’ intersects with the theory of ‘the perfect’ as explored by McRobbie in her ‘Notes on the Perfect. Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times’ (2015). McRobbie argues that the notion of ‘the perfect’ is closely tied to the restoration of traditional femininity, where ‘female competition is inscribed within specific horizons of value relating to husbands, work partners and boyfriends, family and home, motherhood and maternity’ (2015: 7).

Due to the standards of perfection set for success in motherhood, women who also pursue careers need to prove that they ‘can do it all’ (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 22), which is at the core of the image of the ‘superwoman’ or ‘supermom’. The media has long portrayed stories of superwomen who seemingly ‘have it all’ - juggling a successful career, a harmonious home, maintaining an attractive physique, and nurturing their families. This portrayal of women who effortlessly manage all aspects of life has been prevalent since the 1980s, with examples like Helen Gurley Brown’s book *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money... Even if You’re Starting with Nothing* (1982) and stories of celebrities that suggest that ‘if Reese Witherspoon can marry young and become an A-list actress while raising a three-years-old and expecting another child, then you can “do it all” too’ (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 26). Therefore, a woman is expected to excel in her role as a professional, a wife, and a mother, all while adhering to contemporary standards of beauty and style. The achievement of perfection in these areas is portrayed as individual accomplishments, implying that a woman’s success or failure depends solely on her skills and abilities, throwing overboard all ideas of gender justice and collective solidarity in favour of ‘excellence’ (McRobbie 2015: 16). The media has played a significant role in constructing this new ideal of motherhood, particularly targeting middle- and upper-class white women, although the high expectations of motherhood impact all women to some extent (Gibson 2019: 2). Douglas and Michaels illustrate how the cultural landscape is saturated with representations of intensive mothering that present the figure of the mother as selfless, serene,

slim, and, above all else, satisfied by her maternal role. Parenting manuals, advertising, TV shows, films, and the proliferation of stories of celebrity moms have raised 'the bar, year by year, of the standards of good motherhood while singling out and condemning those [women] were supposed to see as dreadful mothers' (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 14). This imagery of the 'good' and 'bad' mother has evolved into a 'common sense' that women share about motherhood.

Spanish TV fiction tends to represent this dichotomy through the figure of the 'Mediterranean mother,' who is portrayed as willing to sacrifice herself for the love of her children or the harmony of the family (Lacalle & Sánchez 2015: 235) and the 'entrepreneur mother', who is often depicted with negative traits such as authoritarianism, lack of scruples, or aggressiveness in business, which poses a threat to family stability (Lacalle & Sánchez 2015: 235). However, some contemporary TV series with mothers as protagonists represent the new momism with characters that embody the 'do-it-all mum' or the good mother myth, exemplified in *Los misterios de Laura* (2009–2014) and *Madres. Amor y vida* (2020–) respectively. *Los misterios de Laura* portrays a protagonist that epitomises the professional woman that can have both a family and a career. Drawing on Anja Louis' article (2020) about this series, I argue that Laura represents the superwoman who lives on the edge, combining her work and her family obligations. Although she is portrayed as a somewhat disorganised mother, often seeking help from her mother or neighbour to take care of her sons while she is solving a murder, she ultimately succeeds in both spheres as a constant reminder of how it is possible to 'do it all'. *Madres. Amor y vida* constructs its narrative around the new momism discourse, representing motherhood in moral terms and juxtaposing the 'good' mother with the 'bad' mother. The series follows a group of women who make immense sacrifices, leaving their jobs, homes, and partners to care for their children in the hospital, conforming to the notion of intensive mothering. These good mothers are contrasted with other mothers in the series who do not comply with the idealised standards of perfect mothering. The series presents a simplified, black-and-white view of these mothers, overlooking the complexities of parenting and enforcing the singular 'correct' path to motherhood. These contemporary series perpetuate the postfeminist model of the housewife, which proposes an idealised image of the mother and homemaker based on ideas of natural sexual difference that construct femininity and masculinity like opposites, returning, then, to traditional gender roles. Therefore, '[d]espite the changes that feminism has made to women's working lives, they continue to be represented as custodians of the home and judged in accordance with the effectiveness in this role' (Munford & Waters 2014: 103).

Girlhood, represented by the concept of 'girl power', is the third and last model of femininity identified by Munford and Waters. The authors expose how during the 1990s the idea of girl power became prominent in popular culture, manifested through images of empowered girls and young women in various media forms, including music, films, and TV shows (Munford & Waters 2014: 109). Girl power marks a generational shift in popular culture to individualistic postfeminist stances abandoning feminist collective perspectives. In the girl power discourse, the term 'girl' symbolises the rebellious daughter of feminism that challenges the critiques of traditional femininities that were present in the second wave of feminism (Munford & Waters 2014: 110). Instead of rejecting conventional beauty, fashion, and feminine sexuality, girl power celebrates and reclaims them as sources of empowerment. Girls and young women are hypersexualised in their media representations, and style and fashion are introduced as mobilisers of sexual agency and confidence, rather than entrapments of traditional femininity.[1] The concept of 'power' derives from the theory of 'power feminism' coined by Naomi Wolf in her book *Fire with Fire: New Female Power and How It Will Change the Twenty-First Century* (1993). Wolf contrasts this form of feminism with what she terms 'victim feminism,' associated with second-wave feminism, which she criticises for perpetuating a sense of powerlessness and shared vulnerability among women (1993: 136). In contrast, power feminism encourages women to embrace individual agency and strive for success on par with men. According to Wolf, women, to achieve success, need to imitate men and practice the power they have in an individualistic form, opposed to collective actions, which undercuts the possibility of feminist activism (1993: 135).

Wolf's theory of power feminism contradicts her own work published three years earlier *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (1990). This can be recognised as an example of victim feminism in which Wolf criticises the tyranny of the standards of feminine beauty that oppress women and how 'beauty' becomes a device of social control that undermines women's political advancement. However, in *Fire with Fire*, the author embraces those beauty standards as sources of female empowerment. Similarly, other theorists of 'anti-victim feminism,' such as Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe, Rene

[1] The term 'girl' encompasses an idea rather than an age range in postfeminist theory. Girlhood is envisioned as being applicable to everyone, allowing adult women to inhabit this space by adopting girlish and youthful attitudes in their behaviour. This focus on girlhood is also evident in television series through the frequent use of the term 'girl' for shows featuring adult women, such as *Good Girls* (2018–2021), depicting suburban mothers, *New Girl* (2011–2018), featuring a woman in her early thirties, or the Spanish series *Las chicas del cable* (2017–2020), which follows women in their late twenties. As Tasker and Negra (2007) noted, besides consistently referring to women as girls, there is also a tendency to treat them as such, implying infantilisation and belittlement.

Denfeld, and Natasha Walters 'share the conviction that women are no longer oppressed as a group, and that their progress as individuals is now impeded by the women's movement' (Cole 1999: 72). Those theorists created an ad hoc image of second-wave feminism as a boring, dogmatic, anti-sex, and anti-men movement, to build their own feminism as opposed to the values of second wave, so they suggest a feminism with total autonomy from the past. Anti-victim feminist theorists advocate for a new feminism characterised by individual agency, power through sex, and a re-appraisal of traditional femininity.

In the model of the girl, postfeminist themes of individualism, choice, self-monitoring, sexualisation of culture, sexual subjectivity, and the emphasis on the female body as a defining identity are evident. The girl of the collective imagination, as described by Susan Hopkins, is depicted as a heroic over-achiever—active, ambitious, sexy, and strong (Munford & Waters 2014: 109). This reintroduces the concept of the perfect as a central motif for contemporary femininity. These 'can-do girls' are constantly striving to improve and achieve perfection, with the belief that they can have it all in the future. In this definition of the girl, young women are expected to attain physical and intellectual perfection by adhering to practices of traditional femininity (Munford & Waters 2014: 109-110). McRobbie argues that the pursuit of perfection is a disguise for male dominance, taking the form of feminine self-regulation (2015: 3). For example, when young women invest in their bodies to meet beauty standards as a personal choice, they often fulfil men's visual pleasure because patriarchal beauty standards are closely linked to the empowerment of women (Martínez-Jiménez, Gálvez-Muñoz & Solano-Caballero 2018: 410). The beauty myth permeates all three postfeminist female models, but it becomes a defining characteristic of the girl. Her empowerment appears to be directly linked to her feminine identity, expressed through compliance with the beauty myth. Hakim's concept of erotic capital is also relevant in understanding the girl model. According to Hakim (2010), beauty is crucial for women to succeed in contemporary society, and it is considered a valuable asset that is accessible to everyone through cosmetic and surgical techniques, fashion, diets, and sports. Hakim legitimises the monetary exchange for sexual favours either at work or in a marriage. As Menéndez Menéndez points out, Hakim is inverting the value that until now had been given to some practices, considered discriminatory, to define them in these new times as instruments of emancipation and power, especially for women (2015: 49).

Postfeminist girlhood narratives combine female independence and individualism with a confident display of femininity/sexuality (Genz 2009: 77). Films such as *The Princess Diaries* (2001) and *Legally Blonde* (2001), and television series like *Gossip Girl* (2007–2012)

and *Pretty Little Liars* (2010–2017) showcase independent young women expressing traditional femininity through exaggerated girlie attitude. Superhuman heroines in television series and films, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Charmed* (1998–2006), and *Wonder Woman* (2017) embody extraordinary girls with great physical, mental and/or social power always accompanied by a hypersexualisation of the heroine.

In Spanish television series, girl power that combines empowerment rhetoric with traditionalist identity models is depicted in dramas like the popular *Élite* (Netflix, 2018–) and *La casa de papel* (2017–2021). In both series, young female characters 'adopt a sexualised stance as an expression of positive female autonomy rather than objectification' (Genz & Brabon 2009: 102). In *Élite,* female characters are portrayed as empowered young women who express a feminism associated with 'sexually aggressive behaviour, glamorous styling and provocative posturing' (Genz & Brabon 2009: 98). Despite the changes in characters throughout the series, they consistently embrace traditional femininity through beauty culture and fashion, while also asserting their agency and independence as desiring sexual subjects. In *La casa de papel*, the character Tokyo is constructed as a stylish action heroine. As a robber and a killer, she embodies stereotypically masculine traits like aggressiveness, strength, assertiveness, and violence. However, like many strong female characters in action narratives, her body is oversexualised. She appears in revealing clothing or partially naked on many occasions without a real justification for it, and the camera frequently moves closely, tightly framing Tokyo's body. Her body and sexuality are presented as spectacle for male pleasure. Tokyo clearly stated the girl power heroine. Despite her tough and financially independent nature, Tokyo's character also adopts normatively feminine behaviour through fashion, girly acts, and heterosexual relationships. As Bonavitta and de Garay Fernández state, 'Tokio ofrece poco más que una versión *millennial* de la chica sexy de cualquier serie de acción' (2019: 215, italics in original). Both series present narratives of girlhood that emphasise desire, sexual agency, and self-determination as representations of female power. Femininity is directly related to the body and its construction as a seduction artifact, with the female characters placing their physical appearance at the centre of their actions.

Through the models of the career woman, the housewife, and the girl, postfeminism 're-centres both heterosexuality and whiteness, as well as fetishizes a young, able-bodied, "fit" (understood as both healthy and in a more contemporary sense as "attractive") female body' (Gill 2007: 161). Although postfeminist narratives introduce themes important to women, they tend to maintain the gender hierarchy intact, with female characters privileging identity and lifestyle over politics, thereby posing little challenge to the existing gender

power relations in society. However, Munford and Waters already suggested in the conclusion of the postfeminist mystique that 'feminism [in the 2010s] [wa]s becoming politicised again and that could lead to losing the celebratory mode in popular culture' potentially leading to a more critical portrayal of women's reality and identifying gender inequalities while offering new alternatives to the patriarchal social order (2014: 170).

In light of this, the thesis explores alternative depictions of women that challenge the patriarchal system in the context of the politicisation of feminism in Spain. The analysis focuses on television series that deconstruct the three postfeminist models of femininity and create new female representations with a feminist perspective that proposes varied and diverse portrayals of women without the constraints of the postfeminist canon. As Asunción Bernárdez Rodal notes in *Mujeres en Medio(s)* (2015), while the postfeminist canon has been a hegemonic discourse during the past decades, there is now an emergence of new dynamics of female representation that do not prescribe any set of norms, because '[s]olo huyendo del esencialismo de la mujer para hablar de "las mujeres" podemos ofrecer una imagen más real y positiva en nuestra sociedad' (2015: 87). Consequently, this thesis does not identify a new model of 'being a woman'; instead, it shows the constraints of postfeminist models and seeks to recognise depictions of multifaceted and complex female characters that break away from simple tropes, such as the good girl, the perfect mother, the *femme fatale*, the damsel in distress, or the evil boss. In this thesis, each of the analysed series focuses, among other characteristics that expose feminist ideals, on deconstructing one of the three postfeminist models and the patriarchal myth associated with them. *La otra mirada* challenges the model of the girl and questions the beauty myth upon which is constructed. *Señoras del (h)AMPA* deconstructs the model of the housewife, particularly the trope of the 'good mother' promoted by the new momism discourse. *Paquita Salas* presents different representations of female professionals that deviate from the postfeminist career woman and the myth of romantic love.

These three case studies belong to the female ensemble series genre, which has experienced significant growth in recent years. According to María José Ruiz Muñoz and José Patricio Pérez-Rufí's article 'Hermanas, amigas y compañeras en serie. La ficción coral femenina española de las televisiones generalistas y plataformas VOD (1990- 2019)' (2020), there has been a notable increase in female ensemble series exhibited on television and streaming platforms from the end of 2014 to 2019 (2020: 822). While not all female ensemble series exhibit a feminist perspective, the authors note that the evolution of Spanish female ensemble series since the 2014-2015 season has mirrored global social, political, and

cultural changes. These series have gradually shifted away from portraying women primarily in traditional roles such as mothers and caregivers to presenting more diverse and multifaceted female characters with complex relationships (2020: 823). In this thesis, I argue that *La otra mirada, Señoras del (h)AMPA,* and *Paquita Salas* exemplify the new wave of series that challenge conventional female representations and actively engage with feminist ideas and issues prevalent in Spanish society.

Chapter 2. *La otra mirada*: Rethinking Girl Power

La otra mirada (LOM) is a period drama produced by RTVE and Boomerang TV, aired between 2018 and 2019 on primetime Spanish public television, TVE1. Set in 1920s Seville, the series narrates during two seasons the story of a group of teenagers in a female boarding school, *Academia de Señoritas*. It recreates the historical *Residencia de Señoritas* in Madrid, founded by María de Maeztu in 1915 as an innovative learning space for women, 'ejemplar para la emancipación de la mujer española en el primer tercio del siglo XX' (Codina-Canet & San Segundo 2015: 494).[2] Through the stories of the students and teachers at this boarding school, the series portrays a milestone in Spanish feminism: the profound overhaul of the educational system for women in this period. Women's access to education led to significant changes regarding their active participation in society, as it empowered them to think critically and become more aware 'of their own potential and, at the same time, their disadvantaged position when compared to men' (Puche Gutiérrez 2012: 129).

LOM is a feminist series that delves into feminism and reflects the oppressions that women faced in the second decade of the twentieth century. The female characters, as highlighted in the series description on the RTVE website, 'afrontan problemas y retos muy actuales' (RTVE 2018: unpaginated), therefore establishing a dialogue with the current situation of women and their feminist demands. Nerea Cuenca Orellana and Natalia Martínez Pérez, in their article 'Reescribiendo la feminidad en las series españolas: las nuevas heroínas en *La otra mirada'* (2020), state that the series portrays teenage years as the stage of life in which young individuals should be open to advice and guidance from those who have experienced that phase before. It presents female solidarity as a response to social conflicts and introduces the notion that diverse models of womanhood exist, far from idealised and unrealistic portrayals. Consequently, the series brings forward feminist concepts such as the intergenerational alliance of women, sorority, and the heterogeneity of women. These ideas counteract the image of the postfeminist heroine propagated by girl power discourses.

This chapter examines how LOM dismantles the postfeminist model of the girl that is structured through the generational conflict between young women and second-wave feminists and addresses the 'dis(re)memberment of feminist history' (Munford & Waters 2014: 28) that had taken hold of Spanish society in the course of the 1980s and 1990s. In the

[2] María de Maeztu y Whitney (1881–1948) was a Spanish educator, feminist, founder of the *Residencia de Señoritas* and the Lyceum Club in Madrid. She was a defender of women's suffrage and participated very actively in some of the most important initiatives promoted by and for women in the interwar period.

first section, I provide a concise contextualisation of the television series to situate it within its cultural milieu as it is a product of its time, emblematic of the evolution of modern entertainment and the cultural currents that drive it. This helps illustrate that the series is not an isolated case but an exemplar of broader trends. I situate LOM within the tendency of public television to create series with educational value. In the second section, I examine the significance of LOM in tracing the roots of feminist theory and the history of the women's movement to rediscover a feminist genealogy that offers young women the possibility to establish a common thread with the past, enabling them to interpret the present and guide them in the future. In contrast to the independence and individuality propagated by the postfeminist girl model, feminist memory fosters a sense of collective subjectivity. Drawing from feminist works on memory (Harding, 1996; Hirsch and Smith, 2002; Llona 2009) and historiography (Nash, 1994; Morant Deusa et al., 2013), I analyse LOM as a crucial cultural memory work that consolidates feminism as a group identity and functions as a counter-history that restores overlooked stories of the feminist movement. I argue that the series is a narrative that 'depatriarchalizes the memory' (Sosa, 2020), establishing strategies against the oblivion and the erasure of women in history. By referencing notable historical figures in feminism, both domestic (María de Maeztu, Elena Maseras, Carmen de Burgos) and international (Emma Goleman, Alice Guy, Mary Wollstonecraft), the series actively contributes to constructing a feminist lineage. Additionally, LOM sheds light on the socio-political environment for women in 1920s Spain through the characters' experiences. These characters navigate the biases and stereotypes of that era while grappling with patriarchal laws that perpetuated gender pay disparities, enforced paternal authority, criminalised adultery in women, and penalised abortion.

The third section explores the feminist representation of girlhood within the series, offering an alternative perspective to the postfeminist model of the girl. I argue that the young female characters of LOM stand in opposition to the girlhood image propagated by the discourses of girl power, which introduce neoliberal tenets of entrepreneurship and competitive individualism along with a celebration of stereotypical femininity that includes 'normative beauty, domesticity, sexual objectification, heteronormativity, and consumptive excess' (Zaslow 2009: 38). These attributes ultimately reinforce the patriarchal order, maintaining the sexual divide and the oppression of women. The girl power heroine has been the dominant representation of girlhood in contemporary film and television texts. As observed by Loxham (2021) and Chicharro-Merayo (2011), postfeminist tropes have been also introduced in period dramas despite their historical distance from the emergence of

postfeminism. Numerous historical stories, featuring young female protagonists, construct a portrayal of girlhood by blending elements of the chosen historical setting with contemporary notions of female autonomy, resilience, and empowerment. Recent productions like *Enola Holmes* (Netflix, 2020), *Inés del alma mía* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020), and *Un asunto privado* (Amazon Prime Video, 2022) present narratives that spotlight girl empowerment within constraining societies.

Similarly, LOM deploys a tale of female empowerment within the framework of a period drama. However, the series shifts to a revised narrative that legitimises feminist forms of power to subvert patriarchal limitations and reframes girl power by emphasising collectivity over individuality and agency over traditional femininity as a means to empowerment. LOM's narrative proposes many other possibilities for 'being a girl' through new ways of female empowerment. Building upon Emilie Zaslow's research into narratives of femininity and feminism within girl power, I analyse the return to political and activist feminism in LOM that recovers the collective struggle for social transformation. I also examine how the traditional femininity celebrated in postfeminist accounts of girlhood perpetuates the beauty myth. Drawing on Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990), I contend that the series unveils the essence of this myth by exposing the underlying anxieties stemming from feeling insufficiently beautiful and its pervasiveness in other domains such as culture, sex, and violence.

2.1. In context: *La otra mirada* as an Educational Series

LOM is a televisual product framed in a conception of public service television, projecting collective principles that are consistent with the current political context. Accordingly, the series manifests feminist ideals that intersect with the upsurge of feminism at the time of its production. Inserted in a very popular genre in Spain such as period drama, LOM's pedagogical value makes it different from the female-centric trend of television series that delves into the past with nostalgia such as *Gran Hotel* (2011–2013), *Velvet* (2014–2016), and *Alta Mar* (2019–2020), 'which present affluent worlds in which women have limited power, but fabulous clothes' (Munford & Waters 2014: 29). These series tend to show the contrast between current freedom and past oppression as if all those limitations suffered by women in the past had been overcome. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith state that 'nostalgic narratives are often dismissed as inherently conservative, if not reactionary and escapist, yearning for an idealized past that disables political action in the present on behalf of social change' (2002: 9). However, LOM demonstrates that nostalgia can work as a form of

activism in feminist narratives that resituate the politics of nostalgia by recuperating overlooked female stories.

Broadcast in 2018, 'el año del tsunami feminista' (Varela, 2020), LOM establishes a connection between the 1920s and contemporary society and politics, articulating discourses in favour of a feminist identity that is resurging after having been side-lined for nearly two decades. The series participates in the construction of the contemporary feminist political project using the cultural sphere as the loci from which to create a narrative of resistance against patriarchal oppressions that are taking place in the socio-political context of its reception. During the press conference to present the series, one of the actors, Begoña Vargas, conveys the connection of this fiction with the social reality of 2018. She asserts that the series 'es necesaria en este momento por todo lo que está pasando en la calle, que las mujeres este año están saliendo a reivindicar sus derechos, manifestándose. Este año más que nunca necesitamos todas el apoyo hasta de la televisión' (Marcos 2018: unpaginated). Alicia Gómez Montano, RTVE's first Equality Director in 2018, explained about LOM that,

> Me parece muy importante abordar los orígenes de las luchas por la igualdad, porque somos el resultado de lo que hicieron aquellas mujeres [...] A todos nos importa la audiencia, pero hay que mantener en antena los productos buenos, productos de servicio público que contribuyen a informar y a educar a la ciudadanía. (Muñoz 2019: unpaginated)

Gómez Montano highlights the significance of productions that entail an exercise of pedagogy and contribute to historical memory. Its educational objective is also admitted by the writing staff of the series: '[q]ueríamos lanzar un mensaje claro y contundente. Es necesario cuando hablamos de temas como la desigualdad y la libertad de las mujeres' (Rus 2019: unpaginated). The series began with a mixed-gender script team led by Jaime Vaca, the creator of the fiction alongside Josep Cister. However, when Alba Lucío took over leadership in the writers' room for the second season, she opted to surround herself exclusively with women (Cortés 2019a: unpaginated). However, it is worth noting that, despite the scripts being written by women, the directors of the series remained predominantly men.

As articulated by Chicharro-Merayo, television series, beyond serving as outlets for escapism and entertainment, also wield socialising and educational impacts on their audience, providing viewers with interpretations and explanations about the social structure in the past and the present (2011: 181). In line with this idea, RTVE's website features an article discussing why LOM should be showcased and dissected within educational institutions. The very setting of the story within a school underscores its didactic dimension, sometimes even at the expense of creating a finer product aesthetically and cinematically. Each episode

revolves around a feminist topic, ranging from sexual education to motherhood or the beauty canon. This thematic focus is unveiled in dual stages: within the confines of the classroom and beyond. The personal predicaments of one or more characters serve as a conduit to explore these subjects within the educational environment. For instance, if a character grapples with the anxieties of pleasing her boyfriend sexually, the classroom discussions could revolve around sexual education from a feminist perspective. The audience becomes witnesses to teachers imparting feminist knowledge to young women. Simultaneously, the spectators are also positioned as learners of these lessons, as the camera's perspective capturing the teacher's explanations from the rear of the classroom aligns the audience with the students' viewpoint. Education is portrayed as the cornerstone for understanding women's oppressions and the alternatives to change their situation. Thus, in each episode, the series illustrates the transformative potential of feminism in reshaping the lives of women.

The informative and educational role of the series is reinforced by the programme broadcast after the series during its airtime in TVE1. Following every episode, Isabel Gemio hosted the chat show *Retratos con alma*, described in a press note from TVE as a programme that

> abordará cada semana los distintos temas que se hayan tocado en la serie de La 1 y, a través de testimonios de destacadas personalidades y de mujeres pioneras en distintos ámbitos, realizará un paralelismo entre esas historias en la ficción y las historias reales de mujeres contemporáneas que sufren las mismas dificultades. (Europa Press 2018: unpaginated)

The show comments on issues of work, politics, education, motherhood, and systemic violence that are as relevant for women today as they were during the period represented in the series. *Retratos* supplements the themes explored in LOM by incorporating archival footage of the historical figures referenced in the series and of the society during that era. The use of archive materials in the programme reinforces the story told in the series by making discernible to the audience the historical truth within the fictional account. This also introduces pertinent historical facts, such as the prevailing laws of the time, which enhance comprehension of certain situations encountered by the female characters. The programme further facilitates a comparative lens with the present, allowing the audience to evaluate both the progress women have achieved since then and the challenges they continue to face today. Furthermore, by portraying the contemporary state of feminism, *Retratos* accentuates the ongoing efforts required to attain gender equality. This is accomplished through the presentation of data and statistics, revealing the underrepresentation of women in numerous traditionally male-dominated professions and academic fields, the significant proportion of

women relinquishing their careers to prioritise family, the inadequate recognition of female artists, and their limited involvement in cultural domains. Therefore, the series and the programme collaborate in validating feminist thought and dismantling the discredited image that had been associated with the movement since the 1990s. Feminism regains its relevance as a legitimate ideology in the present era, poised to confront contemporary challenges and enhance the lives of women.

In terms of audience reception, the feminist message of LOM is obvious to viewers and critics. The audience, via social networks like Twitter (#LaOtraMirada), recognises the pedagogical capacity of the series and stresses the need for a production like LOM in public television, one that advocates for fundamental values for society such as gender equality and solidarity. Some viewers tweet about the series expressing these views:

> Los valores que promueve son los que se necesitan hoy en dia. Pondria [sic] esta serie como obligatoria en todos los colegios de españa [sic]
> Clara @claraobrero98 (8 jul. 2019)
>
> Esta serie es visibilidad, concienciación, amor y ARTE. Necesito más temporadas, la sociedad lo necesita.
> Estefanía RL @Estefania_rl98 (8 jul. 2019)
>
> Series que dan lecciones de vida
> Izaskun Marina @IzasM8 (8 jul. 2019)
>
> Gracias a esta serie soy aún más consciente de la lucha incansable de las mujeres, gracias a ustedes compañeras hoy podemos ser más libres
> abril @soyexagera (8 jul. 2019)
>
> Gran serie. Una segunda temporada genial, con cantidad de cosas que aprender. Ojalá tenga continuidad.
> Toni / aiumora @aiumora (15 jul. 2019)

As the tweets above illustrate, the educational aim of the series and its feminist approach are readily apparent to the audience. Critics also praised the series for is feminist teachings. Popular feminist publications like *Pikara* and *Tribuna Feminista,* along with other print media dedicated to television fiction, underscore the series' commendable role in addressing contemporary feminist concerns with such transparency. In recognition of its achievements, the series was bestowed with the accolade of Best Drama in the Spanish TV festival MiM Series Awards in 2018. The prominent global drama streaming brand *Walter Presents* secured the rights for its broadcast in the US and Canada, where it is accessible on Apple TV+, Prime Video, and PBS Video under the title *A Different View.* Nonetheless, despite these accomplishments, LOM did not achieve spectacular ratings on Spanish TV. This could be attributed to a combination of factors, including the somewhat tarnished image of TVE

during that period, evolving television consumption habits (viewers also had the option to watch the series on the TVE streaming platform without adhering to traditional viewing schedules), and network strategy. The latter entailed minimal promotion of the series and its scheduling to compete against two other popular shows, *Factor X* (Telecinco) and *Fariña* (Antena 3). The scriptwriters of the series regret that the streaming viewership wasn't factored into decisions about its renewal. Despite audience and critical calls for a third season, the series concluded after its second season, which had seen the episode count reduced from thirteen in the initial season to eight. Nevertheless, LOM has elicited substantial critical interest, regardless of its relatively brief run.

The series has emerged as a significant subject of examination within recent academic discourse on feminism. Examples include the aforementioned article by Cuenca Orellana and Martínez Pérez on the changes of female representation in Spanish television series, the study conducted by Aurora Forteza-Martínez and Manuel Antonio Conde's 'La educación y las mujeres en las series educativas: *La otra mirada* como estudio de caso' (2021), exploring the pedagogical dimensions of feminism in the series, and Deborah Barroso Quintana's master thesis, 'Las series como elemento transmisor de reivindicaciones sociales actuales. Análisis de *Los gozos y las sombras* y *La otra mirada*' (2020), which analyses the societal influence of television series and the feminist discourses inherent in LOM. Building upon these works, I investigate how the series deconstructs the postfeminist model of the girl that is based on girl power discourses and introduces novel portrayals of female empowerment shaped by a political feminism that has reclaimed its historical legacy.

2.2. Memories of Feminism, Creating a Matrilineal Heritage

History has often been recounted through an androcentric lens, yet the series, as implied by its title, offers '*La otra mirada*', presenting the perspective that has been marginalised within the official narrative. This series not only unfolds a significant epoch of Spanish feminist history but also embodies feminist knowledge (memory) through interweaving references to pivotal feminist figures into its storyline. Claiming a feminist genealogy became a fundamental part of activism in the second wave. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminist scholars initiated a task of recovery, revision, and visibility of women in history. Collective memory, defined as 'the sum of understandings of the past that circulate in any given society' (Labanyi 2008: 121) has hitherto overlooked the contributions that women have made to humanity. Consequently, feminist art and scholarship have endeavoured to reintegrate into the

dominant historical account the narratives that have been neglected or erased (Hirsch & Smith 2002: 11).

Spanish feminist philosophers such as Amorós and Valcárcel have emphasised the imperative of cultivating a feminist genealogy for women to construct their identities. Amorós advocates for women to 'denunciar el matricidio y reconstituir nuestra tradición con sus señas de identidad' (2009: 27), while Valcárcel asserts that 'para afrontar el futuro conviene tener en las manos el pasado valioso, y nuestro sexo ha sido condenado durante larguísimas edades a no tener autoconciencia, a no saberse sujeto, lo que ha implicado desmemoria' (2021: 177). Both authors challenge notions that are essential pillars of the girl power discourse: 'matricidio' and 'desmemoria'. Girl power is rooted in the mother-daughter trope that accentuates intergenerational conflict and dismisses the prior generation, leading to a form of 'political matricide' (Howie 2010: 3). The breaking away from the previous generation has 'desmemoria' as a consequence, that is, the oblivion of feminist theory, fostering a dehistoricised discourse that makes an emancipatory critique difficult. Amorós and Valcárcel acknowledge that the construction of a feminist lineage is part of the process of politicisation and essential for a future project. As Amorós (1997) observes, all forms of power are linked to genealogy, hence reconstructing the feminist theory tradition empowers women and validates the feminist movement. Rebuilding a feminist genealogy helps young women recognise themselves as members of a historically disadvantaged group with a shared objective. It fosters solidarity and offers role models to aspire to while transmitting female experiences. This is what María Noel Sosa González refers as 'despatriarcalizar la memoria' (2020: 22), which implies understanding the forms of production of forgetfulness that deny the experience of women and retraces the gap between generations of women: 'Se trata de erosionar las genealogías patriarcales, habilitar un retejido de memoria que recupere a las mujeres y sus horizontes políticos, que permita inscribirse en linajes feministas' (Sosa, Menéndez, & Castro 2021: 27). I argue that LOM contributes to the process of depatriarchalisation of memory by unearthing the active roles of women in 1920s Spain. The series recuperates women's history on two levels. On the surface, the narrative of the girls' boarding school and the lives of its female characters recover the memory of Spanish women and their struggles in the early 1920s. Within this narrative, the classroom sessions on feminism, led by the teachers, shed light on significant events and figures from both national and international feminist history.

The series depicts a fictionalised *Academia de Señoritas* in Seville, wherein both teachers and students try to fight for women's rights and break with traditions that limit their

lives. The main characters in this ensemble cast series are four teachers and five students, each of whom contributes to the narrative's feminist themes. Teresa Blanco Sánchez (Patricia López Arnaiz) is an independent, single woman in her thirties and the new teacher of Art and Literature. She emerges as a catalyst for change in the school, prompting students and teachers alike to reassess their lives from a fresh perspective. Teresa embodies a progressive outlook on women's roles in society, influenced by the feminist ideas that she encountered during her global travels. Her smoking and preference for trousers and boots symbolise the 'modern woman' archetype of the 1920s, akin to the French *garçonne* or the American *flapper*.

Manuela Martín (Macarena García) assumes the role of the new director of the *Academia,* succeeding her mother who founded the institution. Although under thirty, Manuela is already married and faces societal pressure to have children. Yet, her aspirations and plans differ from the norm. She seeks to reshape the school's direction and finds an ally in Teresa. Besides her administrative role, Manuela also teaches history. Ángela López Castaño (Cecilia Freire) teaches 'Cultura General y Hogar'. She is married with five children, and has very strong traditional beliefs, but her life takes an unexpected turn when she falls in love with another woman. Luisa Fernández Mayoral (Ana Wagener), a fifty-year-old widow and co-founder of the school, adheres strictly to the prevailing moral and social norms. She is a science teacher. She initially resists any alteration in the school's teaching methods, which pits her against Teresa. Over time she changes and frees herself from the rules that constrained her life.

Among the students, Roberta Luna (Begoña Vargas) stands as a leader within her group. She displays a strong interest in fashion and a desire to learn French for potential studies in Paris. Although self-assured, she experiences a traumatic event: rape by her boyfriend, Rafita Peralta, and the subsequent trial that triggers a hostile societal reaction. Flavia Cardesa (Carla Campra) is a responsible student aspiring to become a lawyer. She is in love with Tomás Peralta, but her family arranges a different marriage for her. Meanwhile, Margarita Ortega-Sánchez Camaño y López de Carrizosa (Lucía Díez) is the smartest girl in class, eager to always be right. She is a classist whose greatest ambition is to get an aristocratic husband. However, her life takes a new direction when she falls in love with the school's gardener, who grapples with mental health challenges. María Jesús Junio Crespo (April Montilla) embodies timidity and insecurity, with her primary wish being to secure a boyfriend, regardless of the circumstances. Macarena Panduro Alén (Paula de la Nieta), raised solely by her mother, is a cheerful and carefree individual who is constantly told that

she fails to conform to traditional femininity. Her mother's affair with Ángela, one of her teachers, adds complexity to her character.

Beyond these women, three male characters play important roles in the narrative. Ramón (Juanlu González), in charge of school maintenance, is a noble and kind person whose association with Teresa prompts him to defy gender stereotypes. Tomás Peralta García de Blas (Álvaro Mel), a member of Seville's influential family, finds himself estranged after testifying against his brother in a rape trial. He takes on a job at the school to assist Ramón. He is in love with Flavia, with whom he tries to build a life together. Don Rafael Peralta (Javier Mora) – father of Tomás, Rafita, and a third son – is the owner of an important factory and other businesses, and consequently, he exerts great power in the city. He emerges as an antagonist against the women of the school after Roberta accuses his son Rafita of rape. In the second season, his sole objective becomes shutting down the school. Rafael epitomises patriarchal power unwilling to relinquish its privileges, clashing with the feminist ideals championed within the *Academia.*

The story's backdrop within the *Academia de Señoritas* serves to recover the forgotten story of the *Residencia de Señoritas* as a testament to the great achievement of the first Spanish feminism: the reform of the educational system to incorporate women. Official history has consistently highlighted the accomplishments of the *Residencia de Estudiantes,* the men's school, as the main centre for scientific and educational modernisation in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many students of the institution became important figures of Spanish culture such as Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, and Federico García Lorca. However, the female school has historically been overlooked, with its educators (María de Maeztu, María Zambrano, Maruja Mallo) and students (María Moliner, Elena Fortún, Josefina Carabias, Victoria Kent) – pioneering women of their time's intellectual sphere – relegated to obscurity within historical narratives of that era. Regrettably, these remarkable individuals remain absent from contemporary formal education.

The series reclaims the significant undertakings of the *Residencia de Señoritas*. It depicts its feminist agenda designed to improve the lives of Spanish women through conferences and seminars, and its interest in providing women with the education needed for them to participate in the labour market, though this education is always intertwined with the inevitable roles of wives and mothers. By mirroring the *Residencia*, the school in LOM presents the duality of the existing educational models for women, the links with other female international institutions, and the cultural and social activity organised in the residence to undergo academic learning. As elucidated by Raquel Vázquez Ramil, 'la Residencia se

constituyó como institución residencial, centro académico, aula de cultura y sede de la rama internacionalista del movimiento feminista' (2012: 320), hence feminist activism was always linked to the institution. Feminist education is conveyed in LOM through the teachings of Teresa in her art classes and Manuela in her history lessons. Despite this, the series also points out the endurance of traditional feminine education tailored to train women for traditional roles. Ángela, in her subject 'Cultura General y Hogar', imparts teachings that prepare young women 'para lo que se espera de ellas, mujeres de bien, educadas y correctas' (E1S1). These lessons are frequently challenged by Teresa and her ideas of the new woman. The episode 'Retratos en tono pastel' (E3S1), where the group is preparing 'El baile de otoño' celebration, illustrates the contradictions between the feminist and feminine messages voiced in the school. On the one hand, Ángela's lesson on 'Buenos Modales' outlines the protocols to be observed during the event, underlining traditional etiquette. She explains that,

> La imagen lo es todo, hay que demostrar que es un día especial luciendo una gran sonrisa. Una cara larga sería una falta de respeto hacia los invitados. Debemos dar conversación a nuestras parejas y asegurarnos de que pasen una buena noche. La actitud que tengamos hacia ellos hablará de nosotras mismas. Una mancha en el vestido es intolerable. Hay que abrillantar bien los zapatos. La pulcritud demostrará que nos hemos ocupado de nuestras tareas antes de acudir al baile.

Ángela's lecture explicitly underscores the entrenched adherence to the moral and societal norms of the time, which the school struggled to transcend. As pointed out by Álvaro Ribagorda, the female residence 'fue una institución excesivamente disciplinada y algo puritana, especialmente si se la compara con la libertad reinante en la Residencia de Estudiantes' (2015: 174). Despite the feminist discourse within the school, it refrained from directly challenging the domestic sphere. The protocol for the dance expresses specifically the traditional feminine concept of the 'Angel in the House,' portraying women as selfless beings solely devoted to tending to the physical and emotional needs of men. Ángela's discourse portrays the dance not as a source of enjoyment for the girls, but as a task to ensure the comfort and pleasure of their male partners, the guests. In stark contrast, Teresa, representing the new woman, scrutinises the stereotype of the 'Angel in the House' that prescribed women's conduct, appearance, and emotions:

> Sonreír eternamente, guardar las formas, ser la más guapa, la más feliz es una mentira y un peso demasiado grande. Siempre nos han dicho cómo tenemos que sentirnos, cómo tenemos que comportarnos pero lo peor de todo es que lo hemos aceptado.

The opposing ideas are crystallised in the sequence that alternates close-up shots of Teresa and Ángela in their respective lessons urging students to act in contradictory ways:

> Teresa: Llorad

Ángela: Sonreíd
Teresa: Enfadaos
Ángela: Sed felices
Teresa: Sentíos tristes

In their appeals, Teresa urges girls to openly express their emotions, even if they are negative, whereas Ángela insists on their compliance to the prescribed model of decorum and propriety, in which women are expected to present a pleasing image to society (men).

In its portrayal of the *Residencia*, LOM also highlights the international alliances that the Spanish school formed with other institutions. Thanks to the connections of the residence, Roberta manages to pursue fashion studies in Paris. Furthermore, the series captures the cultural initiatives undertaken by the school to defend women's rights and foster their engagement in scientific, artistic, and literary activities (Gordo 2007: 246). This aspect is introduced from the very first episode through depictions of theatrical performances, carnival festivities, athletic competitions, and visits by notable intellectuals and artistic figures participating in conferences and courses.

In the first episode, students are tasked with preparing a play to mark the start of the course. This cultural endeavour serves as the first indicator of change within the school, as students, inspired by Teresa, opt for a different play. Traditionally, Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla* (1616) was staged, but they instead chose *A Doll's House* (1879) by Henrik Ibsen, a story in which aspects such as the role of traditional women, religion, or marriage are questioned. Ibsen's play is considered one of the early significant feminist plays, even if its creation might not have been originally intended as such. It breaks with the infantilisation of women, which is relevant in their process of emancipation and liberation. The series showcases certain segments of the play, particularly the conclusion in which the main character, Nora, confronts her husband before leaving him and her children in pursuit of independence:

Torvald: Antes de nada, eres esposa y madre.
Nora: Ya no creo en eso. Nuestra casa solo era un salón de recreo. Yo fui una muñeca grande en tu casa, como también fui en casa de papá.
Torvald: ¿No son tus deberes para con tus hijos y con tu marido? ¿No comprendes cuál es tu puesto en el hogar? ¿No tienes un guía infalible para estas cuestiones?
[…]
Torvald: ¿Entonces no has sido feliz?
Nora: No, estaba alegre y nada más.
[…]
Nora: Toma aquí tienes mi anillo. Devuélveme el mío. Adiós. (E1S1)

While the students enact these scenes on stage, the camera focuses on close-ups of the teachers' faces. Manuela, Ángela, and Luisa seem moved by the play. Luisa looks downward

with a sombre expression during Torvald's inquiry about a woman's duties toward her husband and children; a tear rolls down Ángela's cheek as Nora confesses that she has not been happy; and Manuela's eyes glisten as she watches the scene where Nora asks for her ring back. This foreshadows the themes that these characters will grapple with throughout the series: women's independence from men (father, husband, son), the discontent of being solely a mother and wife, and the desire for divorce. The shift from the play of Don Juan to *A Doll's House* symbolises the transition from the traditional female model of the 'Angel in the House' to the emerging modern woman of the early twentieth century. In 1910, in Spain, following the global trend of economic and social modernisation, a new image of an educated and professional woman began to emerge, gradually finding its place in the collective imaginary. The series captures this evolution into the new female model.

As for the conferences that consolidated the institution as an avant-garde centre in which many intellectuals of the time participated, LOM fictionalises a visit from the founder of the Residence in Madrid, María de Maeztu. She appears inspecting the school that carries on her work in the city capital and delivering a lecture on individualism. The character of Maeztu expresses that,

> Solo los sujetos que se desarrollan individualmente pueden contribuir a la sociedad y al bien común. Esto que en la filosofía está muy bien, en la práctica estamos aún muy lejos de conseguirlo. ¿Por qué creéis que es así? Las personas, las mujeres en concreto, estamos muy lejos de ser independientes. Son otros los que marcan nuestros caminos: nuestros padres, nuestros maridos, nuestros hermanos, nuestro entorno en general. Creo que es imprescindible que las mujeres antepongamos nuestro desarrollo y crecimiento personal, nuestra felicidad, nuestra formación y nuestros derechos a cualquier otra cosa, porque solo así, hombres y mujeres podremos hablarnos de igual a igual. (E4S1)

Through her speech, the series recovers Maeztu's legacy and her advocacy for women's personal development to achieve gender equality. She insisted on the importance of women's individuality, enabling them to be self-reliant and nurture their personal growth to 'colaborar, como persona, en la obra total de la cultura humana' (Maeztu, as quoted in Gordo 2007: 236). Her conception of individualism stands in contrast to the neoliberal notion propagated in the girl power discourse. Maeztu speaks of individualism as a person's unique characteristics, in other words, individual identity. She encourages women to break free from the confines of the family-patriarchal structure that restricted them, enabling them to tap into their talents and potential. Once personal fulfilment is attained, women can actively contribute to societal progress, thereby integrating the individual within the community. Conversely, neoliberalism defends individualism as the liberty of individuals to exercise their agency without collective oversight. Girl power discourses emphasise individual choices without adequately

considering their impact on the broader group, young women are invited to exert their individual rights outside of a collective project.

Through those detailed accounts of the activities within the girls' school, LOM raises awareness of the historical significance of the *Residencia de Señoritas*. Thus, I posit that the series can be viewed as a 'lugar de la memoria', as formulated by Miren Llona. Building on Pierre Nora's concept of 'sites of memory', Llona explains that these places are more than just repositories of historical events; they encompass the collective memory and cultural identity of a society,

> Los *lugares de la memoria*, concebidos como espacios de recreación de experiencias, pueden ser capaces de generar emociones y sentimientos de empatía en el presente hacia los protagonistas del pasado y sus vivencias. Este proceso constituye una manera de establecer lazos de solidaridad y de identificación, que incorporados a nuestra subjetividad pueden modificar la manera que tenemos de entender el mundo y de manejarnos en él. (2009: 38)

Llona indicates the importance of preserving and safeguarding the collective memory of the feminist movement by establishing sites of memory. These sites can manifest as physical entities like monuments, buildings, and squares, or they can exist in immaterial forms such as rituals, commemorations, and celebrations. In this context, the series serves as an immaterial site of memory, fostering a shared experience of commemoration linked to a pivotal moment in women's emancipation. The recognition accorded to the *Residencia de Señoritas* as a significant facet of feminist history within the series nurtures a sense of identification among women, engendering a collective feminist memory.

Sites of memory serve to accentuate what society deems valuable, and historically, these have predominantly revolved around men's narratives, celebrating male figures and events, thus highlighting the dynamics of gender and power. The pervasive patriarchal influence has systematically negated opportunities to honour noteworthy female figures in public spaces, exemplified by contemporary incidents of effacing feminist murals, or the dearth of monuments and streets dedicated to women in Spain. The series illustrates this power dynamic in the episode 'Mujeres olvidadas' (E4S2), where the students, upon realising the absence of female role models in Spanish society, propose changing the name of the street where the school is situated to honour Carmen de Burgos.[3] In this episode, both teachers and students are deceived by Don Rafael Peralta who, in collusion with the mayor, takes any opportunity to act against the school. The school organises a public event to unveil the

[3] Carmen de Burgos (1867–1932) was a prolific writer and journalist. She belongs to the Generation of '98 and she was the first female war correspondent and the first woman to run a newspaper in Spain. However, she was silenced by the official history during the Franco regime.

plaque, only to discover that it bears the name Juan Valera, not Carmen de Burgos. Through this manipulation, Don Rafael Peralta flaunts his power over the city and reminds the women in the school of their subordinate place in society. The mayor's speech during this event explicitly demonstrates the prevailing perspective on women's education during that period. He states that 'esta placa homenajea al escritor, diplomático y académico Juan Varela [sic], andaluz ilustre y firme defensor de la educación de las mujeres para conseguir tres pilares esenciales: recato, honestidad y decencia'.

The choice of Valera's name for the plaque holds a symbolic significance that underscores the historical role of male power in suppressing women's narratives. His staunch opposition to the feminist movement is a testament to the gendered power dynamics of that time. As María Remedios Sánchez García documents, towards the end of the nineteenth century, just as the feminist movement was emerging, Valera vehemently attacked it through a series of articles, labelling it as 'ridículo' and 'risible' (2007: unpaginated). He stated that 'debe educarse a la mujer de suerte que pueda ser en lo futuro excelente madre de familia, hacendosa, económica y hábil en la costura y otras labores de manos y en el gobierno de la casa', advocating, therefore, for an intelligent albeit submissive woman (Sánchez García 2007: unpaginated). Valera was fiercely against the admission of Emilia Pardo Bazán as a member of RAE (Royal Spanish Academy), and he excluded Rosalía de Castro from his anthology of nineteenth-century Spanish poetry, thereby contributing to their marginalisation in Spanish cultural discourse. The fact that the street does not receive the name of Carmen de Burgos in the series exemplifies the invisibility suffered by many female artists in history. In this context, the episode concludes with the students' response to this injustice. Recognising that institutional avenues are insufficient; they take matters into their own hands. By creating and affixing their own plaque on the street, they aim to rectify the oversight. Alongside the official Valera plaque, they display another one inscribed with the words 'calle de las mujeres olvidadas,' commemorating the influential women throughout history whose contributions have been disregarded and forgotten by patriarchal institutions. Furthermore, the students' reaction underlines the reality that civil disobedience and actions conducted outside established institutions and norms are sometimes the only pathways available to women for effecting change in their circumstances. It showcases how women can challenge and reshape societal narratives through direct action when traditional channels fail to acknowledge their voices and experiences.

The series also brings attention to other 'forgotten women': the everyday women whose struggles have been marginalised in historical narratives. The individual experiences

of the characters in LOM function as a form of counter-memory to the prevailing official history, as they illuminate the social and political realities faced by Spanish women at the start of the twentieth century, which might diverge from the social reality described in most historical accounts. Common historical narratives tend to emphasise periods in which men faced restricted rights, with their subsequent achievements being well-documented in historical texts. On the other hand, women's lack of rights and their efforts to secure them are frequently overlooked. While the first few decades of the twentieth century in Spain are often characterised as an era marked by the consolidation of crucial rights for people due to reforms established by Liberal governments and enshrined in the 1876 Constitution, the reality for women differed significantly. The constitution guaranteed essential freedoms such as choosing a profession or trade, academic freedom, press freedom, rights of assembly and association, the right to form labour unions, and, since 1890, the (male) universal suffrage (Varela Suanzes-Carpegna 2007: 474-477). However, it is important to note that these rights were largely inaccessible to women due to their subordination to male figures, typically fathers or husbands, because women were treated by the Civil Code as a minor. The series effectively portrays the restricted liberties experienced by women during the 1920s, owing to laws that acknowledged gender inequalities. It illustrates how the feminist movement of that time sought to address and challenge these inequities by advocating for the elimination of discriminatory legal provisions.

The first feminist organisations in Spain fought for the legal equality of both spouses and the full legal capacity of women since the Civil Code established the subordination of the wife to her husband. Within the series, the three married characters – Manuela, Flavia, and Ángela – exemplify this dynamic of submission within marriage. Their experiences mirror the broader societal context of women's legal and social status during that time. Flavia's story reflects the constrained agency of married women. Pressured by her family, she enters into a marriage with a man that she does not love. Despite her aspirations to become a lawyer, her ability to continue her studies depends entirely on her husband's approval, as article 57 of the Civil Code mandated that 'el marido debe proteger a la mujer, y ésta obedecer al marido (Imaz Zubiaur 2008: 71). Disobeying the husband carried the threat of punishment by the competent authority. Thus, when Flavia resists leaving the school, her husband involves the police to enforce her return home. In Ángela's case, her admission of an affair with another woman results in her husband denying her access to their children. This illustrates the fact that parental authority was exclusively vested in the husband, highlighting the legal and social inequality that women faced. Although she eventually reunites with her husband in

order to be with her children, this decision comes at the cost of her personal desires and agency. Manuela's situation brings to light the necessity for divorce legalisation, a key demand of the early Spanish feminist movement. Unhappy in her marriage, she and her husband live apart at one point, but societal expectations force them to maintain the appearance of a couple. Despite their separation, her financial autonomy remains limited due to provisions within the Civil Code. Articles 59 and 60 stipulated that the husband is the administrator of conjugal assets and the legal representative of his wife (Imaz Zubiaur 2008: 71). Consequently, when Manuela requires financial support to sustain the school, she must seek her husband's assistance, as obtaining a bank loan in her own name is not possible without his approval. The series also addresses the issue of Manuela's residence after the separation from her husband, explaining that she remains in the family house due to her father's ownership of the property. Otherwise, she would have to leave the house as the husband is the owner of the marriage capital.

Other regulations that restrained women's emancipation were the illegality of contraceptives and abortion. Both practices were unlawful, but women needed to make use of them to have some control over their lives, so their prohibition caused women to risk their health in unsafe procedures. Again, Manuela and Flavia show these practices through their stories. In her attempt to not have children in a broken marriage, Manuela uses a dangerous liquid as a contraceptive that makes her very sick. Flavia, when she finds out that she is pregnant, understands that her only option in order to continue her studies is abortion. Her husband had already manifested that she would keep studying until she had a baby and then just become a housewife. In her desperation for remaining in school, Flavia goes to a clandestine clinic to get an abortion. This presents the lengths to which women were forced to go due to unjust laws. The series also exposes gender inequality in legislation through the episode in which Ángela's husband is proposed employment at the school. Prior to this, the school had exclusively female teachers. The revelation that Ángela's husband would receive a significantly higher salary than any of the female teachers prompts Luisa to question this disparity. Manuela's response, 'así lo establece la ley' (E5S1), exposes the discriminatory policies perpetuated by legal systems. By presenting these situations, the series brings to light the oppression of women in the 1920s, which contrasts with the freedoms achieved by men in that period. Moreover, LOM unveils the existence of a feminist movement that is often omitted from history textbooks within the Spanish educational system. This omission reinforces the need for alternative narratives that recognise the historical contributions and struggles of women in shaping societal change.

As previously mentioned, the primary narrative of the series delves into the history of Spanish women during the 1920s, while the lessons within the school serve to reclaim both national and international feminist history. The series uses mainly art as means of redressing the official 'forgetting' of women in history, so Teresa's lessons are particularly instrumental in educating the students (and the audience) about the lives of important female figures. In one of her first lessons, Teresa introduces Berthe Morisot as the first Impressionist female painter and states that 'gracias a ella otras pintoras entraron en este movimiento pictórico' (E2S1). In the episode 'Mujeres olvidadas' (E4S2), the students are required to create a magazine wherein they must write about female role models. Roberta, with an interest in fashion, explores the lives of María and Carolina Montagne, influential Catalan haute-couture designers. Caroline was a teacher and friend of Jeanne Lanvin, founder of Lanvin House, one of the oldest Parisian fashion houses still in operation. This episode reinforces the importance of acknowledging women's contributions to various fields.

In 'Alma mater' (E13S1), literature takes centre stage. Teresa suggests Helen Keller's and Mary Wollstonecraft's works as summer readings for the students. [4 & 5] Teresa claims that 'Keller nos anima a que superemos las adversidades y Wollstonecraft a que nos apoyemos juntas para conseguirlo'. By connecting past experiences of women with the present lives of the students, Teresa offers them role models whose journeys can inspire and guide them. In the episode 'Vuestra historia' (E3S2), Alice Guy appears as a referent for these girls who have the assignment of making a film.[6] Teresa educates the girls about Guy to dispel the notion that cinema is a male-dominated domain. She tells students that, 'cuando decís que el cine es cosa de hombres, no solo estáis mintiendo, sino que además os estáis negando la posibilidad de dar vuestro propio punto de vista'. This episode demonstrates how knowledge of women's history contributes to dismantling gender-based assumptions surrounding professions traditionally deemed masculine. Reevaluating history from a feminist lens disarms patriarchal myths that sustain the incapacity of women to be included in certain fields naturalised as masculine.

[4] Helen Keller (1880–1968) was the first deafblind person who got a university degree and became a world-famous author. She advocated for people with disabilities and women's right to vote.
[5] Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) was an English philosopher and writer, who fought for women's equality. She is regarded as one of the founders of feminist philosophy due to her book *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).
[6] Alice Guy (1873–1968), a contemporary of the Lumière's brothers, was the first person to use cinema to tell stories, and a trailblazer when it came to creating special effects. Her pioneering book *Woman's place in photoplay production* in 1913 denounced the exclusion of women in the world of cinema (Aguilar Carrasco, 2019).

In addition to the art lessons, Manuela's history classes are filled with teachings about key feminist historical events. Her inaugural lesson in the episode 'Un voto de confianza' (E2S1) focuses on suffrage, a critical topic considering Spanish women lacked the right to vote at that time. Manuela cites examples of countries like Australia and Finland, where women could already vote at the start of the twentieth century. She also mentions the United States, where figures such as Elizabeth Stanton and Lucrecia Mott alongside other women 'acaban de conseguir que se apruebe el voto femenino'. Manuela educates girls on the importance of voting so they can have representatives that fight for their rights. In 'Miedo al otro' (E1S2), Manuela recounts the story of Elena Maseras, who in 1872 became the first Spanish woman to receive a university education. Manuela explains the challenges that Maseras faced, including her exclusion by fellow students and professors upon entering the university.[7] In the final episode, 'Desde dentro' (E8S2), Manuela teaches the students about diverse feminist organisations. She mentions the ANME (National Association of Spanish Women), founded in 1918, which became one of the major associations in Spain that promoted women's rights. Manuela also makes reference to the suffrage movement in the United Kingdom (1903) and the Seneca Falls Convention (1848) in the United States. The latter event marked the first women's rights convention, advocating for women's civil, social, political, and religious rights. Manuela prompts the students to discern the connections between the ANME, suffragists, and Seneca Falls, underlining that feminism is a collaborative endeavour. She affirms that 'el objetivo de esta clase no es solo que sepáis que en todo el mundo hay mujeres alzando la voz por conseguir la igualdad, sino que entendáis que a pesar de nuestras diferencias, este es un movimiento colectivo'. Manuela, therefore, depicts feminism as a global movement in which women across the world unite to pursue shared objectives. Through these teachings, the series illuminates the significant role of women in history, reiterating that even when silenced, women have profoundly influenced human history. The teachers in LOM actively present the profiles of these remarkable women and the actions that they undertook, ensuring that students and viewers alike recognise the indelible impact of women's contributions.

Framed within the narrative of the first female school for higher education in Spain, the series recuperates feminist memories through various strategies: referencing biographies of relevant feminist figures, recollecting feminist events, and portraying the socio-political

[7] Her experience is echoed by the character of Amelia Folch in the also TVE series *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (2015–2020).

landscape of Spanish women during the 1920s. The series not only reveals the feminist history that was previously obscured and actively negated but also reshapes it into a memory that resonates with women today. As Valcárcel explains, this process is crucial for the formation of 'una voluntad común bien articulada que sabe de sí, de su memoria y de los fines que persigue' (2001: 32). Accordingly, the series contributes to uncovering the wisdom and knowledge of women from previous generations so young women can identify with a fight that must be continued. The revival of feminist principles within the series encourages a rethinking of the girl power paradigm. This reevaluation challenges the tenets of strong individualism and the endorsement of conventional femininity, both of which serve as foundational components in shaping the girl power heroine.

2.3. Re-writing Female Empowerment

LOM signifies a return to the feminist values that had been replaced by the neoliberal notions of individualism, choice, and personal agency in the portrayal of girl power heroines. The series lays bare the illusory nature of the girl power discourse, which, as observed by Imelda Whelehan, 'seems nothing more than an empty endorsement of a social meritocracy' (2005: 163). The girl power narrative unfolds as a theory of self-fulfilment that does not challenge or dismantle the systematic discrimination of women, so it is not a threat to the status quo.

Girl power, following the dichotomy of 'victim/power feminism,' establishes the conception that there is an old feminism, which is antisex, antifreedom, elitist, dictatorial, and obsolete, and a new feminism (power feminism), which is empowering, 'unapologetically sexual,' 'pleasure-loving,' and 'self-assertive' (Wolf 1993: 149). Girl power brings a new rhetoric linked to the neoliberal ethos in which 'choice' and 'freedom' become effective terms that disarticulate any criticism made by the so-called old feminism. However, as Valcárcel states, this new rhetoric can be described as 'trucos lingüísticos puestos al servicio de prácticas patriarcales inmemoriales' (2016: unpaginated). LOM brings the 'old feminism' ideals to twentieth-first-century audiences to deconstruct the distorted image of feminists disseminated by postfeminist discourses and to demonstrate that feminism is as imperative for women today as it was for previous generations. The series represents patriarchal practices that were frequent a century ago and that still exist in present times. For instance, the blaming of victims of sexual violence, the pay gap between sexes, the lack of female referents in public spaces, or the difficulties of getting abortions.

I argue that LOM recuperates a feminist past to show that the values that power feminism rendered outdated are still valid in contemporary times. Central themes to second-

wave feminism had been rejected by girl power discourses in what Emilie Zaslow terms as the 'moving from sisterhood to girl power' (2017: 47). However, the series inverts that movement by going back to female solidarity. I argue that LOM dismantles the girl power model by recovering three core feminist ideals from second-wave feminism that had been marginalised or misconstrued by power feminism: 'my body, my choice', 'sisterhood is powerful', and 'the personal is political' (Zaslow, 2018). Through the recovery of those feminist themes, the series critiques the practices and values that girl power has taken as expressions of empowerment.

Despite being historically situated in the 1920s, LOM's narrative foregrounds feminist dialogues that characteristically align with second-wave feminism, addressing issues such as the criticism of the beauty industry, pornography, and the exploration of female sexuality—anachronistically echoing the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. While acknowledging that certain Spanish radical feminists of the 1920s, like Carmen Eva Nelken (*Magda Donato*) and Federica Montseny already discussed these concerns in their writings, the way they are presented in the series bears more resemblance to the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. The first feminist motto that I examine is 'my body, my choice', which underwent a transformation in the 1990s, losing its political connotation and evolving into a declaration of young women's liberty to embrace a sexy and traditionally feminine image through fashion, style, and girlish behaviour—essentially aligning with the beauty myth.

2.3.1 – Resisting the Beauty Myth

In the 1960s, the feminist movement coined the phrase 'my body, my choice' to demand women's right to exercise final decisions over their bodies, and sexual and reproductive health. This slogan aimed to address crucial issues such as sexual violence, abortion, lack of contraception, and forced pregnancy. However, in the 1990s, girl power theorists made the revaluation of femininity central to their concerns, claiming the beauty/female sexuality as a site of power. Consequently, the original political meaning of 'my body, my choice' was supplanted by the idea that '[t]hese were their bodies, and it was their choice to adorn them and sexualize them as they wished' (Zaslow 2018: 55). Power feminism takes the myth of freedom of choice to discourses on body and sexuality. Its theorists disseminate the message that 'sexuality is power' (Paglia, 1990; Denfeld, 1993), and that empowerment depends on sexual attractiveness and self-confidence, hence in the era of girl power, the choice of following beauty practices becomes compulsory if young women want to achieve success. As Gill states, there is a lack of choice when it is exclusively 'in this disciplined body, […],

that one finds the "promise of power"' (2003: 104). Here, I draw upon Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) to examine beauty practices as a mechanism to control women rather than a source of empowerment. In LOM, the experiences of the young female characters unravel the façade of girl power's discourse on beauty. Instead of being manifestations of personal choice and agency, beauty practices are exposed as mechanisms of surveillance and restriction. The series scrutinises three vital themes that Wolf (1991) identifies as components of the beauty myth: the unattainable image that the beauty canon imposes on women, the necessity for women to compete against each other, and the internalised objectification of their bodies and sexuality.

In the episode titled 'Ser mujer' (E12S1), beauty is a focal point, and its canon is examined through various lenses ranging from the homogenising image that the beauty industry provides to the negative consequences on the self-esteem of the girls. The episode probes the artificiality propagated by the beauty standards and the constraints tethered to them. It starts with scenes of several students preparing for their day, engaging in their beauty routines while glancing at mirrors. Subsequent shots portray the girls descending a staircase in unison, exhibiting striking similarities: curly hair, red lipstick, and flowers adorning their tresses. They carry a magazine featuring an image of a woman whose appearance they are emulating, juxtaposed with an advertisement proclaiming, 'A los hombres les encantan las mujeres femeninas y jóvenes, por eso el lápiz de labios *Femme de l'aube* les resulta irresistible'. This raises concern among the teachers, who discern that the girls are shaping their notions of womanhood based on external standards defined by the male gaze. Hence, they decide to steer their lessons towards exploring the multifaceted nature of 'being a woman,' aiming to disentangle the notion of female identity from its preoccupation with beauty. The episode, through a sequence of scenes with close-ups of the different women who are in the school and Ángela's voice-over, culminates with the realisation that 'es muy difícil explicar lo que es ser mujer porque serlo significa muchas cosas, tantas como mujeres hay en el mundo, y tantas como vueltas da la vida'. Through her experiences with various students and in her own personal history throughout the episode, Ángela, whose teachings centred around a set of instructions for students to adhere to in order to become respectful women, acknowledges the impossibility of defining what it truly means to 'be a woman'. This is a declaration of the heterogeneity of women, opposing the archetype of the girl that venerates youthfulness and attractiveness as the epitome of womanhood, thereby excluding those who do not conform to this standard.

In the art class, Teresa describes the evolution of beauty standards across different historical periods. She presents the Venus of Willendorf, characterised by her ample hips and breasts as in the Palaeolithic era beauty was linked to fertility. Moving forward, she discusses Sandro Boticelli's masterpiece 'The Birth of Venus' (c. 1484–1486), portraying a woman with petite hands and feet, rosy cheeks, fair skin, and flowing blonde hair, embodying the Renaissance ideal of beauty. And the last artwork, 'La Toillette' (1879) by Eva Gonzalès, depicts the use of corsets in the nineteenth century to cinch the waist and emphasise women's sensuality. Teresa states that 'el canon cambia, pero la presión que ejerce sobre las mujeres sigue ahí'. This sparks a question from one of the students: '¿entonces, está mal pintarse los labios?'. This question closely echoes a query voiced by Wolf's in *The Beauty Myth*: 'does all this mean we can't wear lipstick without feeling guilty?' (1991: 28). Teresa's reply aligns with Wolf's perspective, suggesting that the issue is not merely about using lipstick, but rather about critically considering the power dynamics at play in such situations. Wolf encourages to ask 'Who is this serving? Who says? Who profits?' (1991: 280). Teresa invites students to reflect on who defines femininity. The girl power heroine celebrates normative femininity without considering the fact that '[t]hey share the same set of visual signifiers as mediated girls and women whose appearances are crafted to appeal to a male gaze' (Hains 2009: 104). Teresa explains it in her lecture,

> Una revista de este año. A los hombres les gustan las manos suaves, la fragancia que adoran los hombres, […] Nos dicen cómo tenemos que pintarnos, cómo tenemos que peinarnos, incluso a qué tenemos que oler. […] ¿Cuán condicionada está tu mirada? ¿Lo haces porque quieres o porque crees que tienes que hacerlo?

The series makes evident that the male gaze is not referring to the view imposed by individual men but is conceived as an economic and cultural structure. As Wolf declares, 'real agents enforcing the myth today are not men as individual lovers or husbands, but institutions, that depend on male dominance' (1991: 288). This concept is effectively demonstrated in a scene where some girls question Tomás about his vision of an ideal woman. His response does not involve mentioning the specific lipstick that they are wearing as dictated by the magazine's beauty standards. Instead, he describes the unique qualities of Flavia ('guapa, dulce, divertida, espontánea'), without generalising about a certain type of woman. Tomás's words revolve around a real and distinctive woman, someone he has a genuine affection for, rather than conforming to an abstract ideal. The constructed ideal, as seen in magazines, stems from the beauty industry, which manufactures desires to perpetuate

women's consumption patterns. Beauty culture offers oppressive beauty norms that could never be satisfied, lowering women's self-esteem.

Girl power heroines present perfect bodies as natural and effortless because the processes to achieve that perfection are not made visible. Yet, to dismantle the beauty myth, it is crucial to unveil the sacrifices women endure to conform to prevailing standards of female beauty. In LOM, the damages that the myth causes are shown through the character of María Jesús, a young woman who is obsessed with finding a boyfriend and is always worried about fitting into the beauty mould which leads to constant lack of self-worth and anxiety. Throughout various episodes, the series portrays her struggles in socialising with boys due to her self-perceived lack of attractiveness. She spends significant amounts of money on clothing, shoes, and make-up to replicate beauty ideals, yet she suffers from depression and low self-esteem because she does not fit the canon. In her experiences, María Jesús encapsulates 'the anxieties that revolve around positioning the body as an instrument of power, and the social, psychological, and economic requirements of this revised body narrative', as discussed by Zaslow in relation to narratives of sexual agency in girl power media culture (2011: 62). Her story shows the immense toll that societal beauty norms can take on a person's mental and emotional well-being.

María Jesús' dissatisfaction with her body is evident as early as episode four in season one, titled 'Derecho a la intimidad'. In this episode, she begins seeking a boyfriend through a magazine's contact section, stating that it prevents potential partners from actually seeing her ('así por lo menos no me ve'), as she believes they would immediately flee upon observing her looks ('cuando me vea sale corriendo, me llaman avestruz sin culo'). Furthermore, she confesses: 'quiero aprender a ser una buena amante y hacer cosas que le gusten para que se olvide de lo fea que soy', all in an attempt to compensate for what she perceives as her physical unattractiveness. These insecurities persist in subsequent episodes, such as episode six, 'Una segunda oportunidad,' where María Jesús meets the boy that she connected with through the magazine. As she prepares for the meeting, her discomfort with her body is palpable. She questions her choice of clothing, particularly her height, suggesting she feels overly tall. Despite reassurances from her friend, her dissatisfaction remains evident when she gazes at her reflection.

The peak of María Jesús' internal struggles comes in the episode 'Ser mujer' (E12S1) when she experiences a breakdown. Her discontentment with her appearance continues to manifest in various scenes. At the beginning of the episode when the girls are getting ready for class, she is the first student who is shown looking at the mirror while she exclaims with

an afflicted voice '¡Qué cara!'. Then, her attempt to curl her hair according to trends is unsuccessful. This upsets her even more. In another scene, she creates a collage of women's body parts from magazine clippings, attempting to assemble what she perceives as the 'perfect' woman. As Macarena aptly notes, the resulting image resembles Frankenstein's creation. This collage-making process reflects the fragmentation of women's bodies perpetuated by the beauty industry and media portrayals, in which 'se elimina la idea de individuo para construir un conjunto de fragmentos deshumanizados' (Menéndez Menéndez 2017: 87). This objectification is internalised by women who scrutinise every part of their bodies in search of a perfection that is not real.

The episode continues to explore these themes as all the girls gather in a room for a collective beauty ritual before bedtime. This scene depicts various beauty practices that may resonate with female viewers, such as sharing beauty tips and discussing perceived imperfections. Flavia, for instance, questions her nose's appearance and suggests making it slightly more upturned: '¿A vosotras os gusta mi nariz? ¿No os gustaría como un poquito más respingona?'. Cosmetic surgery is also mentioned when Margarita talks about how doctors in the United States can change people's faces according to their desires. María Jesús, who has been silently observing her friends' beauty routines, initially responds positively to the idea of 'ponerte la cara que quieras'. However, the scene takes a sombre turn as María Jesús' expression shifts from mild interest to unease and sadness. This occurs when Margarita asserts that a girl who is not naturally attractive will never be so, regardless of medical advancements.

All these expressions of anguish shown throughout the episode end up materialising in a nervous breakdown with María Jesús locked in her room and crying on the floor, demonstrating 'la carga de destructividad de la autoestima de la mujer que va asociada al modelo [de belleza] patriarcal' (Fernández Rodríguez 1998: 351). Hence LOM challenges girl power theorists' defence of the practices that seek normative femininity, which are conceptualised as emancipatory. The series reveals them as the sources of frustration and anxiety in women who compare themselves with unreal models. In the beauty myth, Wolf asserts that '[w]hat is good about "beauty" – the promise of confidence, sexuality, and the self-regard of a healthy individuality – are actually qualities that have nothing to do with "beauty" specifically' (1991: 285). María Jesús' journey illustrates this, as she finds self-assurance, happiness, and positivity not through conforming to traditional beauty standards but through her achievements in archery. In the second season, the introduction of sports provides María Jesús with an avenue to build her self-identity and individuality. Through her

accomplishments in archery, she experiences genuine confidence and fulfilment, dismantling the notion that complying with narrow beauty ideals is necessary for personal growth and empowerment.

Wolf argues that competition is also part of the myth, so 'women will be divided from one another' (1991: 14). As women grow more powerful with time, the links between generations of women must be broken. The myth considers ageing 'unbeautiful,' which creates a fear between young and older women (Wolf 1991: 14). Girl power narratives represent this fracture identifying older women as the villains in their stories. They are depicted as jealous, mean women who want to control or annihilate the young heroines. They embody the terrible boss, the controlling mother, or the mean mother-in-law. However, LOM demystifies this competition making visible the friendship and solidarity between women of different generations. The students recognise the need for their teachers' knowledge and help, and the teachers accept their mentoring role so that they break the rivalry that sustains the beauty myth. The students see the beauty in their older teachers and vice versa, exchanging complimentary remarks. Furthermore, they not only defy the divide between generations but also among peers. Wolf states that the myth has taught women that their sisters have a secret weapon to be used against them: beauty. This provokes a beauty competition in which one woman's value fluctuates through the presence of another (1991: 284). The female characters in LOM enact the 'noncompetitive idea of beauty' elaborated by Wolf, whereby women compliment each other and show their admiration without identifying other women's beauty as a threat. There are frequent scenes in which students flatter their classmates when they are getting ready for a party or going for a walk. They help each other to look their best without showing the envy that girl power presents as inherent to women.

As demonstrated in the analysis of the beauty canon, girls have internalised the objectification of their bodies exercising surveillance and control over themselves to conform to prescriptive feminine attractiveness. This process of subjectification, defined by Gill as the internalisation of the objectifying male gaze by women, reaches their intimate practices, since the beauty myth is also found in women's sexuality. Wolf states that what girls 'learn is not the desire for the other, but the desire to be desired' (1991: 157). Girl power makes it imperative for women to construct themselves as empowered 'sexual entrepreneurs' (Harvey & Gill 2011: 52). Their practices of empowerment coincide with discourses from heterosexual imagery and pornography that reproduce masculine meanings of sexual pleasure, which results in women enacting patriarchal discourses in their relationships and

sexual lives. LOM highlights the lack of sexual narratives from a female point of view and the need for a positive definition of female sexuality to liberate women.

In the episode 'Derecho a la intimidad' (E4S1), the fact that girls are found reading an erotic fanzine is an excuse to tackle the topic of female sexuality. Teresa shows some pornographic material to the other teachers, so they raise awareness that everything, including the fanzine that the girls are reading, is narrated to satisfy men while women are shown as objects for that purpose. Teresa exposes that, as the girls' instructors, they cannot omit the topic, but teach the students from their own experiences as women. Girls learn how to look sexual from cultural products that reproduce the male erotic fantasy that positions women as mere objects of pleasure, but they do not encounter representations of female sexual pleasure. Therefore, passing their own experiences on the girls and talking about their sexuality freely, the teachers break away from discourses of sexual subjectification. Teresa's lesson becomes a moment of self-knowledge for the girls by reproducing a memorable act of second-wave feminism in which women were encouraged to use hand mirrors and look at their vulva. This practice echoes the self-examination proposed in the best-selling book *Our bodies, Ourselves* (1970) written by the feminist group Boston Women's Health Course Collective. This revolutionary book about women's health and sexuality invited women to investigate their bodies: 'We emphasize that you take a mirror and examine yourself' (1971, as quoted in Wells 2008: 701). Teresa invites the students to go one by one into her room, where she has placed a mirror on the floor so they can see their vulva for the first time. She also encourages students to know themselves and discover what gives them pleasure. The rest of the lesson consists of a conversation between students and teachers in which students ask questions about sex and teachers try to answer from their experiences and knowledge, imitating the Boston Collective group who educated women through discussion groups and workshops. Teresa ends the lesson with an explicit reference to the slogan 'my body, my choice' reminding the girls that 'vuestro cuerpo, es solo vuestro y nadie más decide sobre él'.

LOM reclaims the slogan with its original political meaning, dismantling not only the beautification process as a locus of power but also shedding light on bodily issues that postfeminist girlhood narratives either avoid or portray from a conservative standpoint, such as abortion or sexual violence. Through Roberta's story, the series shows the suffering of the rape survivor who attempts to continue with her life as before, the challenges of recounting her traumatic experience, the victim-blaming she encounters from segments of society, and the persisting patriarchal judicial system that often fails to deliver justice for women.

Roberta is invited by her boyfriend Rafita to a party in her countryside residence. After becoming intoxicated, she requests him to drive her back to the school, but he declines. Opting to walk alone to the school, Rafita follows her and perpetrates the rape. Subsequent to the assault, Roberta endeavours to suppress the experience and maintain her routine, yet her anguish remains constant, entailing shame, guilt, and fear. When she eventually discloses her ordeal and takes legal action, some peers censure her for attending the party unaccompanied, and external critics label her as slut. The legal proceedings show the justice system's inadequacy in handling gender-based violence cases. Despite the judge ruling in her favour, Rafita receives a disproportionately lenient financial penalty. Given his affluent background, this penalty holds no real consequences. Through this narrative, the series reclaims the term 'victim,' which power feminism had vilified. Teresa assists Roberta in comprehending that she is a victim of sexual assault, as Roberta grapples with guilt for attending the party and consuming alcohol. Roberta's rationale echoes girl power discourses that consistently present women as always in control of their bodies, sexuality, and choices regarding sex and relationships. This contributes to the 'patriarchal effect [that] women hold themselves responsible for sexual assault/abuse often after-the-fact' (Rome & Lambert 2020: 517). In contrast to this notion, LOM illustrates that women often lack control over their bodies.

In order to convey to Roberta that she is not isolated in her victimhood, some classmates and teachers share their own encounters with sexual harassment. Margarita reveals that a temporary school worker touched her inappropriately while they engaged in a friendly conversation. Luisa recounts a scenario where a man attempted to kiss her while she was pregnant; upon her refusal, he threatened to malign her reputation. And Ángela tells how her cousin 'ha tenido siempre la mano muy larga' and one time, when she was playing with her sister, he touched her sister's bosom, and she could not react. The series further illustrates instances of public sexual harassment across multiple episodes. Street harassment is depicted when the group of girls embarks on a river walk and also when the teachers visit a bar, indicating that any woman, regardless of age or position, can become a target of such violence. Roberta's storyline, along with the testimonies and scenes depicting gender-based violence from other characters, establishes a continuing conversation with the contemporary audience, representing past realities of the series as reflections of present-day issues. Roberta's rape and subsequent trial evokes *La Manada* case, which was stirring numerous demonstrations and feminist analyses at the same time that the series was being broadcast. The women's testimonies to help Roberta after the bitter victory in the trial parallel the project #Cuéntalo, promoted by journalists Cristina Fallarás and Virginia P. Alonso. The

hashtag emerged in Spain after the sentencing for sexual abuse by *La Manada,* inviting women to share on Twitter the stories of the sexual aggressions that they had suffered. The result of the project is 160,000 original tweets: 40,000 of them recounted personal assaults, and 11,000 were from someone who could not do it – cases of murders, grandmothers, mothers, or anonymity (Remacha 2018: unpaginated). Consequently, the series fictionalises one of the most important issues of contemporary feminism: sexual violence. This theme is also present in the following two case studies as a constant in women's lives. In *Señoras del (h)AMPA*, the character of Virginia suffers sexual harassment in her workplace and in *Paquita Salas*, Belinda is the victim of online aggression.

As previously discussed, the series shines a light on the potential dangers of illegal abortions through Flavia's storyline. LOM, in alignment with feminist principles, refrains from condemning the act of abortion when Flavia opts for the procedure. It portrays various cases of women making the choice to undergo abortions without casting judgment. Within the setting where the abortion occurs, Flavia shares the waiting room with two other women: a prostitute and a married mother of two who cannot afford another child. Abortion is presented as a right that women sought during the early twentieth century, insisting on the necessity for safe procedures. Contrary to the moral quandary that often underpins postfeminist narratives addressing abortion, LOM does not engage in such debates. The series prioritises highlighting the procedure itself and the well-being of the woman. Flavia's storyline, like Roberta's, addresses a contemporary issue that has been crucial for the feminist movement from the past to the present. Contemporary feminist organisations continue to denounce the systematic violation of the right to legal abortion in Spain. This is because regional governments fail to provide information on how to access this right, many doctors in public hospitals refuse to perform this procedure as conscientious objectors, and there are numerous provinces where it is not practiced, especially in recent years with the rise of new far-right governments (Kohan 2021: unpaginated). Therefore, in contemporary Spain, clandestine abortions like Flavia's still occur. Therefore, in contemporary Spain there are still clandestine abortions like Flavia's. The series evidences the feminist fight for women's control over their own bodies challenging the girl power narratives that 'depoliticise women's sexuality extolling virtues of individual self-expression through consumerism' (Nguyen 2013: 165) and omit the representation of situations that women endure such as sexual violence, sexual harassment, and abortion. LOM therefore presents numerous situations in which the female characters resist the beauty myth, rekindling the politicised essence of the 'my body, my choice' discourse.

2.3.2 – The Return to Sisterhood and Collective Fight

The second-wave feminist mottos 'sisterhood is powerful' and 'the personal is political' were effectively discarded by the girl power discourses. This abandonment occurred as collective action and the pursuit of social change were replaced by the ideals of individualism and personal autonomy. Consequently, the feminist movement became depoliticised and was rendered meaningless. Wolf, who initially had stressed the importance of a movement driven by peers and characterised by intergenerational collaboration in her work *The Beauty Myth* (1990), later expressed reservations about 'sisterhood' in her subsequent book *Fire with Fire* (1993). In this later work, Wolf critiques the concept of sisterhood as a sterile bond that fails to empower women, viewing it as a connection based on a shared identity of victimhood and powerlessness. She states that power feminism 'calls for alliances based on economic self-interest and economic giving back rather than on a sentimental and workable fantasy of cosmic sisterhood' (Wolf 1993: 58). This shift towards power feminism and economic self-interest contributes to a detachment of the personal from the political sphere. As highlighted by scholars like Zaslow, 'in girl power feminism, a feminist makes choices in her own interest, without thinking about the political implications of those choices or about the social structures within which those choices are made' (2018: 58). This separation of personal choices from political awareness and activism marks a significant departure from the principles of second-wave feminism.

The emphasis on individualism appears in televisual depictions of strong women and girl power heroines who do not need the support of a community to succeed. Girl power narratives present a unique heroine, a super-powerful girl, who only needs her physical and intellectual skills to achieve her objectives or win her fights. Girl action figures such as Buffy, Lara Croft, Veronica Mars, and Wonder Woman become the epitome of girl power heroines. They represent the autonomous, independent female protagonists who fight evil or solve crimes on their own, with the only help of their own competence and abilities. However, LOM breaks away from this concept of a solitary heroine capable of handling everything independently. Instead, the series weaves together the stories of multiple heroines who rely on female solidarity to overcome their struggles. Each episode delves into the experiences of different characters, often featuring both students and teachers. The main plotlines focus on these women's challenges and how, with the support of their community, they work together to find solutions. Thus, the individualism celebrated by girl power narratives transforms into a sense of interdependence within the framework of feminism depicted in the series.

LOM presents the feminist political solidarity among women as essential to dismantling patriarchal oppression. This theme of unity is epitomised in the final episode titled 'Tengo un sueño' (E6S2), where the power of women joining forces against patriarchal norms is highlighted. In the 1920s setting of the series, marriage was often an oppressive institution, with women subject to their husbands' authority. Hence, as a married woman, Flavia needs help to be free of that situation. After her abortion, her husband demands that she abandon her education and become a housewife. In a moment of courage, Flavia confronts her husband and admits her lack of affection for him. She reveals that the abortion was not a natural miscarriage, but a choice that she made to avoid having his child. This confession infuriates her husband, leading to his report to the police. Facing imminent arrest, Flavia's classmates and teachers rally around her, helping her evade the authorities. Thanks to their collective efforts, she manages to escape the country with Tomás so they can start a life together where she can continue her studies.

In the same episode, a powerful demonstration of unity takes place as working-class women join forces with the upper-class teachers at the school to prevent its closure. The catalyst for this collective action is Don Rafael Peralta, who has carried out a plan whereby he can own the school and shut it down in revenge for his son's rape accusation. Tricked by the administrator of the school, Manuela signs a document that transfers the property of the school to Peralta. He intends to demolish the school and build a hotel, but the teachers and students come together to save the institution. Confronting eviction, the students, led by Manuela and Teresa, barricade themselves within the school to stall the takeover. Meanwhile, Tomás takes matters into his own hands, secretly obtaining incriminating documents from his father's desk that expose his illegal activities. Simultaneously, Luisa reaches out to the working-class women employed in Peralta's factory, seeking their assistance in the efforts to block the police from entering the school premises.

The scene of both social classes fighting together represents the political-based sisterhood that feminists proclaim to combat patriarchy. This idea is explicit in the episode through the dialogue between Luisa and the spokesperson of the factory workers. When Luisa asks for their help, the worker expresses that 'esa no es nuestra lucha, nuestra lucha es levantarnos a las cuatro de la mañana y […] trabajar doce horas por una miseria'. Luisa responds to that:

> cada una tiene lo suyo y eso es innegable, pero mientras las leyes no nos amparen y los políticos sigan sin escucharnos, ninguna de nosotras conseguiremos nada. Solo podremos cambiar las cosas si nos unimos y atajamos el problema de raíz. […] solo cambiaremos las cosas si tenemos acceso a todo tipo de puestos y oportunidades, solo cambiaremos las cosas si

> algún día podemos llegar a legislar y a gobernar, y el primer paso para eso es la educación, por eso os necesitamos. (E8S2)

Luisa's speech highlights the critical role of education for girls in accessing positions of power and effecting change in the pervasive inequality that women endure. Despite the prevailing circumstances that limited higher education to the privileged bourgeois class during that era, Luisa conveys the notion that shared oppressions bind them together, transcending their differences. She asserts that only through collective effort can they bring about the transformative social change required to challenge the existing gender disparities. In this manner, LOM resuscitates the concept of sisterhood as a potent political strategy aimed at dismantling patriarchal injustices. The collective actions conducted in the episode in which students, teachers, and workers fight together against Rafael Peralta result in victory. Peralta is forced to negotiate with the school because the mayor halts the project of the hotel, spurred by the irregularities exposed in the documents acquired by Tomás. Unable to proceed with his plans, he concedes to keeping the school operational, albeit under the condition that Manuela resigns from her post as director. In her final address to the students, Manuela reflects on the power of their collective unity, which has secured the school's continuity and granted new generations of girls the invaluable opportunity for education.

Paired with the belief that sisterhood is powerful, 'the personal is political' motto allowed women to understand that,

> the oppression they personally experienced in the home, in relationships, and in the workplace was part of a structural patriarchy that organized women's lives, and it challenged women (and men) to reflect upon the political implications of their personal choices. (Zaslow 2011: 27)

Girl power reverses this idea taking everything, including the political, as a personal and individual choice. Power feminism 'does not require an investment in social change' because the activist stance becomes an individual act (Zaslow 2011: 6). Feminism becomes a lifestyle, an identity marker, rather than a political movement. Girl power storylines in contemporary media culture focus on the successes of individual characters, who enact their unique power to achieve success or who solve their problems by changing their lifestyles, which has been called 'the makeover paradigm' (Gill, 2017; Gwynne, 2013; McRobbie, 2008). The makeover trope appears in a multitude of postfeminist films in which a socially awkward or unnoticed young woman acts out the ugly-duckling-to-swan-narrative. The protagonist experiences a process of self-transformation as necessary to achieve her goals, which are mostly getting

noticed in her job to get a promotion or getting the attention of her love interest.[8] In those narratives, the structural inequity is made invisible and there is no revaluation of relations of power since the success of women depends upon their individual responsibility in making adequate choices. In girl power, young women are asked to self-improve on a path to perfection in order to be empowered and autonomous, without considering can be victims of an unjust system.

By contrast, LOM returns to the activist notion of the personal is political. The women in the series understand that most of the issues in their individual lives are part of a system of gender, and they also comprehend that 'to make social change women must make individual change' (Zaslow 2011: 89). In their classes, students come to realise that the personal struggles that they face are often rooted in broader social inequalities. Through the lens of feminist theory and historical context, they begin to comprehend that many of the challenges that they encounter are not merely the result of individual choices but are intricately linked to external societal factors.

For instance, María Jesús's dissatisfaction with her body is illuminated as a consequence of a pervasive sexist culture that perpetuates unrealistic ideals of women's appearances. Similarly, Flavia and Manuela's reluctance to embrace motherhood is not solely a matter of personal preference, but rather a response to the restrictive norms surrounding women's roles at the time. The deeply ingrained problem of sexual harassment faced by the women in the school is revealed as a systematic issue arising from the objectification of women's bodies. In the case of Macarena, her uneasiness for not acting feminine enough and being called 'machorra' is based on the gender stereotypes that stigmatise women who act masculine. She has earned the title of 'tomboy' in the school because as she tells her mother, 'no me gusta maquillarme, no me gusta echarme perfume, y cada vez me fijo menos en los chicos, la verdad' (E12S1), which makes her worried that she is different from the rest of the girls.

Macarena's struggle with not conforming to traditional femininity is also explored in a classroom setting. Manuela introduces the concepts of femininity and masculinity, illustrating how these notions are often defined in opposition to each other. She invites students to share instances where their behaviours deviate from these stereotypes, aiming to debunk rigid gender roles. This activity includes inviting male figures, such as Ramón and Tomás, to

[8] The most popular TV series of the makeover narrative is the Colombian series *Yo Soy Betty La Fea* (1999), which has had over thirty versions worldwide. The last version is the American *Betty in NY* (2019), twenty years after the original one.

participate, underlining the collaborative nature of dismantling these stereotypes. Manuela starts the activity by revealing that, in that moment of her life, her job at school is more important than being a mother. In a poignant moment, Macarena bravely acknowledges that 'a mí me gusta jugar al balón con los chicos de mi barrio y no soporto las muñecas' (E12S1). This admission initiates a chain of revelations from others in the room (Tomás confesses that he is afraid of chickens and Ramón, that he loves reading romance novels and sometimes cries while reading them), highlighting the arbitrary nature of gender-based expectations. Manuela's facilitation of this exercise shows the disparity between societal norms and individual realities, encouraging students to challenge these limitations and embrace personal authenticity.

In addition to recognising that many personal issues may be rooted in the systemic discrimination of women, personal actions can serve as political statements and have social implications. Zaslow states that '[t]he way a woman engaged in her activities can be seen as reifying her femininity, acting in resistance, or negotiating feminine oppression' (2018: 51). Teresa's rejection of the aesthetic femininity of the time is an understanding of the personal is political. She breaks the rigid dress code by wearing masculine attire – trousers, collared white shirts, and ties – as an act of disavowing the existing normative femininity and as an expression of her right to enjoy masculine prerogatives. Her style articulates a discourse of freedom and change that has been studied profusely by intellectuals of that period and contemporary historians. The modern woman of the 1920s embodied in Teresa represented a new global female model. With her style as a subversive tool to offer alternative versions of femininity, the new model caused changes in women's place in society because the modern woman makes herself visible in public spaces to participate in politics, sports, and entertainment such as dancing and drinking. In Spain, this fashion icon, according to Jordi Luengo (2008, quoted in Pattison 2017: 264-265), 'contribuyó a despertar la conciencia de sí mismas en las mujeres atentas a su mensaje, estimulando su integración y participación en la sociedad, y abogando por su independencia como ser humano libre para establecer las pautas que definiesen su feminidad'. Therefore, Teresa's fashion choice becomes a political act. Roberta and Margarita also carry out personal actions that affect the community and may lead to social changes.

In Roberta's rape case, Teresa highlights the importance of Roberta overcoming her fears and telling her story, making it public in court. Her action could help other women to report their abuses and produce a change in the system. Meanwhile, Margarita's determination to become a scientist and study psychiatry to find a treatment for schizophrenia

may also have an impact on society at large and on women in particular. She could become a female referent in science for the next generations of women who want to venture into this male field of study. Margarita, who has started a relationship with Elías, Ramón's nephew and the new gardener of the school, finds out that his mental health problem is schizophrenia. This illness was not yet deeply studied, and she decides to become a scientist and find a cure. Luisa, who once tried to be part of the scientific circle, warns Margarita of the difficulties for women to get into science at the time. However, her strong conviction in her potential would change Luisa's negative attitude towards the field and pushes her to resume patenting an invention that she had abandoned.

The reactivation of the personal is political in the series make these women articulate their struggles in a collective 'we'. On that account, in order to solve their problems, collective deliberation, evaluation, and action are needed. Consequently, the series recovers a feminist activism that challenges the individualistic and private conception of feminism that girl power discourses disseminate. By accentuating collective efforts, the series presents a model of feminist engagement that is grounded in a sense of solidarity, shared purpose, and the pursuit of broader societal transformation.

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at the ways in which the feminist narrative of LOM debunks girl power discourses, which are the base of the postfeminist model of the girl. The preoccupation with the body, sexual empowerment, individualism, and the generational conflict are central to the construction of the girl power subject. The 'girl' believes in the neoliberal discourse that her social progress depends upon her own individual actions; she does not consider herself part of an oppressed group. Girl power theory proposed that young women reject the feminism of the previous generation, of which it had made a caricature by distorting the aims of the movement. As opposed to these narratives, LOM proposes that the recuperation of feminist history is decisive in the process of developing the women's movement and its capacity for collective response. By learning the history of feminism, young women come to understand that they are part of a unified struggle and that they still need to fight for the power that girl power discourses are encouraging them to perform. In LOM, feminism is discussed, explained, and theorised without reserve, resonating with issues of contemporary times.

LOM has revealed that under the illusion of freedom and emancipation, girl power rhetoric imposes on young women the oppressive model of traditional femininity. By

analysing the effects of the beauty myth on girls, the series discovers the truths (anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, female submission) behind the celebration of femininity promulgated by that model. The series manifests that women must celebrate their uniqueness, bodies, and personality. It explores various relations that empower women, describing them as a heterogeneous group. María Jesús seeks their personal realisation through sports, and Margarita, through science. Roberta pursues personal fulfilment in fashion and travel, and Flavia wants to be with the person that she loves without external pressures. In doing so, LOM dismantles the direct link between beauty and success imposed by the model of the girl.

As Rebecca Feasey states, in much the same way as women are said to struggle to live up to the unrealistic beauty myth that saturates the contemporary media environment, the mask of perfect motherhood also offers a flawless yet unrealisable ideal for contemporary mothers (2016: 214). Following the work of demystification of the ideal beauty, the next chapter challenges the patriarchal myth of maternal love that bases women's identity on their condition as mothers, examining the postfeminist model of the housewife that primarily includes a celebration of motherhood by redefining women, first and foremost, in their maternal role.

Chapter 3. *Señoras del (h)AMPA:* Killing the Postfeminist Woman

Señoras del (h)AMPA (referred to as *Señoras* from herein) is a dark comedy series created by Abril Zamora and Carlos del Hoyo that tells the story of four mothers who know each other from the AMPA (Parent-Teacher Association) of the Gloria Fuertes School: Mayte (Toni Acosta), Lourdes (Malena Alterio), Virginia (Nuria Herrero), and Amparo (Mamen García), a grandmother who takes cares of her daughter's son. The story starts when, due to an accident with a food processor, these women get involved in the murder of another mother of the AMPA, Elvira (Marta Belenguer). This is an event that radically changes their lives. Unable to confess the crime, they end up involuntarily generating a spiral of unfortunate events that lead them to other criminal actions and to confront a mafia gang. Beyond the extraordinary situations recounted in the story, the narration is of relevance to this thesis for portraying experiences of motherhood that diverge from the 'good mother' myth.

This chapter shows how *Señoras* subverts postfeminist discourses of motherhood and womanhood and proposes feminist practices that overturn the patriarchal order. In the first section, as I have done in the previous chapter, I contextualise the TV series to explore its contribution to a broader cultural conversation about motherhood. LOM aligns with the trend of 'bad moms' narratives that aim to defy the image of the 'perfect mother' that has been gaining traction in recent years. In the second section, I argue that the series exposes the discourse of unrealistic motherhood disseminated by postfeminism since the late 1980s. I examine the model of the housewife/mother endorsed by the new momism ideology (Douglas & Michaels, 2005) and the 'have-it-all' discourse that constructs women as supermoms that can successfully manage a house, bring up their children, and also have full-time jobs. New momism reshapes conservative models of motherhood into glamorous, aspirational, and sexy images based on the notions that womanhood is fulfilled by becoming a mother, and that mothering is natural to women because they have an innate and superior ability to care for children. Therefore, new momism is an embellished or modernised version of traditional patriarchal motherhood. These discourses create a hierarchy of motherhood through differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' mothers. Here, I explore how this dichotomy is identified and disarticulated in *Señoras*, which shows that these stereotypes are non-existent absolutes revealing that the 'good mother' trope is a fictional creation, and the 'bad mother' can be a figure of empowerment for women, instead of a demonised one. By dismantling this binary construction, I establish that the series debunks the myth of the perfect mother

uncovering the artificiality of idealised motherhood through the story of Elvira, a woman who projects the image of a supermom, but whose reality is completely different. I state that the series exposes the 'new momist' model that 'can only be imagined or lived on a fictional level' (Stone 2016: 1023) and therefore evidences the gap between maternal myths and real women's experiences.

The third section demonstrates how the intensive mothering demanded by the new momism ideology is not exercised by the mothers in *Señoras*. The series represents motherhood closer to what real women may experience and proposes alternative ways of mothering that can be empowering for them. This section focuses upon the formulation of a counter-discourse of mothering that challenges the oppressive practices of normative motherhood. I draw on Andrea O'Reilly's theory of feminist mothering, whereby mothers exert the agency and autonomy denied to them in patriarchal motherhood (2014: 189), to examine the protagonists' journey to a new means of mothering. Throughout the series, the protagonists develop a critical attitude towards their maternal practices and start gaining control of their motherhood, and, as a result, their lives. Using Adrienne Rich's (1977) distinction between 'motherhood' as a patriarchal institution and 'mothering' as the women's maternal experience, I argue that *Señoras* proposes mothering against motherhood to make possible an empowered maternity by enacting feminist practices that replace the hegemonic discourse of new momism.

In the fourth and last section, I examine the paradigm shift that the series proposes by presenting postfeminism as a recent past. *Señoras* proclaims the reality of feminism with a re-emergence of feminist ideas in its narrative and the turn to a ghostlike postfeminism, whose ideas have been relegated to the past in the character of Elvira who, after her death, appears as a spectral figure in the story. I read the character of Elvira as the 'ghost of postfeminism' inverting the metaphor of the ghost of feminism often used in feminist critique. To this end, I employ Munford and Waters' work (2014) on the 'hauntology' of feminism, Avery Gordon's (2008) ghostly text analyses, and Jerzy Kociatkiewicz, Monika Kostera, and Anna Zueva's (2021) analysis of the exorcising of the ghost of capitalism. Building on these works, I posit that the exorcism of Elvira's spectre and its eventual disappearance as suggestive of the vanishing of the system that she embodies. I contend that postfeminism in *Señoras* is a haunting presence that makes visible the oppressive practices of contemporary motherhood, as well as the underlying deceit inherent in the discourse of new momism. Therefore, I suggest that the ghostly status of postfeminism in the series renders it an old ideology which needs exorcising in order to establish the feminist woman as the new reality.

3.1. In context: *Señoras del (h)AMPA* as a feminist text on the 'bad mother'

By exploring the authorship of the series, its reception, and its representation of imperfect mothers, I situate *Señoras* in its cultural context demonstrating how the show is in line with contemporary feminist audiovisual texts that propose a new depiction of the figure of the bad mother. It switches from the negative and stigmatised image of neglectful mothers that fail their children to new maternal characters that perform 'bad mothering' as a transgressive means to resist and redefine normative motherhood. Like the writing/production staff of *La otra mirada*, who acknowledge feminism as an influential force, Zamora and del Hoyo recognise that they wanted to do 'una serie protagonizada por mujeres y, por supuesto, como somos feministas, pues iba a tener tintes feministas' (Morales 2020: unpaginated). They identify as feminists publicly and regularly engage in activist work, especially in relation to LGBTQIA+ rights. As part of this community, del Hoyo (a gay man) and Zamora (a trans woman) work for the inclusion and visibility of this community in Spanish fiction, and of other groups who have rarely been represented on television products such as people with disabilities, or who have usually been portrayed stereotypically such as women. Thus, in their series they propose more diverse female characters regarding age, class, sexuality, beauty, and ethnicity. For instance, *Señoras* presents a conference hostess with achondroplasia, a Muslim mother, lesbian couples, a young woman with Down syndrome, women at risk of social exclusion due to their socioeconomic position, and women who do not represent mainstream beauty standards. The directors try to 'crear una historia evitando estereotipos y dando derecho a réplica a mujeres que habitualmente no la tienen' (Morales 2020: unpaginated). Zamora, whose last work as an actor was playing the transsexual inmate Luna in *Vis a vis* (2018-1019), has mentioned how series with all-female casts such as *Señoras* and *Vis a vis* are still seen in the Spanish audiovisual context as an anomaly (Morales 2020: unpaginated).

As relevant as knowing the authors' intentions in constructing a feminist text, the reception by both the audience and the critics also offers valuable insights into whether the dominant (feminist) stance it presents has reached the viewers. Premiering in June 2019 on both broadcast television (Telecinco) and Amazon Prime Video simultaneously, *Señoras* became a hit immediately receiving public and critical acclaim. The audience and the critics praised the portrayal of empowered women, their sorority, the diversity and inclusion of the women represented, and also the newness of its comedy style. With its first episode, the show obtained almost three million viewers, a 20.9% audience share, which made it the best debut of a fiction series in Telecinco in four years (Lacalle, Gómez & Sánchez 2020: 174).

However, due to an inconsistent television strategy by the network that prioritised its reality shows, the audience dropped, reaching an average of 1,340,000 viewers (11,0% share) by the end of the first season (Lacalle, Gómez & Sánchez 2020: 174). This drop led to the cancellation of the series after the second season, which originated the creation of the campaign on Twitter *#SaveTheHampa* that asked for the renewal of a third and last season. This confirms the significant fan community created around the series. Despite its irregular trajectory in public broadcast and the impossibility of knowing the ratings on the streaming platform, there is evidence of the success of the series. It has been rated 7.3/10 on IMDb and has received numerous favourable reviews in the media. At the Cannes Festival MIPTV 2019, one of the most important international television markets, *Señoras* received the award for best TV series. Owing to this recognition, the series was renewed for a second season before its debut on television. In 2021, the American broadcast network NBC bought the rights to create a remake and commissioned a pilot episode of *Dangerous Moms* written by showrunner Janine Sherman Barrois (*ER, Criminal Minds, Claws*). The acknowledgments that the series has received demonstrate the interest of television producers for fictions that pose new narratives depicting 'rebellious mothers' that do not adhere to normative motherhood.

The trope of the 'bad mother' as a transgressive discourse in popular culture has emerged in the last decade as a response to the good mother myth that was established in the mass media in the 1980s through the model of intensive mothering as the correct way to be a mother, as analysed by Hays (1996). Since the 2010s in Spain, there has been a noticeable increase in popular texts such as digital platforms, books, blogs, podcasts, films, and series that introduce maternal counter-narratives, creating new discourses of motherhood. Although these are still a few voices in comparison to the 'glamorous maternal images that reflect the resurfacing of pro-natalist discourses' in popular culture (Bettaglio 2015: 231), it is evident that in Spain there is an increasing visibility given to narratives that challenge, resist and dismantle the monolithic definition of good motherhood.

In popular culture, the figure of the good mother usually appears side-by-side with its counterpart, the bad mother, often to illustrate the consequences of not following the established model of femininity. The bad mother trope has normally appeared in public discourses through fictional and non-fictional representations of motherhood to stigmatise women who do not conform to societal expectations. Recently, Spanish television has participated in the dismantling of the discourse of the bad mother through the story of celebrity Rocío Carrasco, which has had a significant social impact. Her biographical series

Rocío, contar la verdad para seguir viva (Telecinco, 2021) has opened a re-evaluation of the label of bad mother in public forums. For two decades, Carrasco had been portrayed as a bad mother across numerous magazines and television shows. However, the revelation about her life as a victim of gender-violence has sparked a critical conversation on motherhood. Each episode of the series has ignited conversations on social media platforms and television networks, consistently trending and attracting a large viewership. The series' first episode, for instance, achieved a remarkable 33.3% audience share and nearly four million viewers (Jiménez 2021: unpaginated).

Rocío's story has brought to light the profound harm and violence that can result from branding a woman as a bad mother. This label has been historically feared and rejected as a shameful oxymoron. In response to this, women have started to embrace and use the term in public discourse (Martínez Guillem & Barnes 2018: 288), attempting to strip it of its negative associations and infuse it with a defiant significance that challenges the prevailing myth of the good mother. A notable example of this reappropriation is the digital platform *El Club de Malasmadres*. This 'club' started in 2014 with the Twitter account @malasmadres, and it has since expanded to include books, podcasts, various social networks, and even clothing and accessories featuring phrases like 'malamadres' or 'soy malamadre'. The primary objective of this initiative is to demystify traditional notions of motherhood and undo the unrealistic expectations of being a perfect mother, all while advocating for a new, more realistic social model. The creators of this platform declare to be the voice of a misled generation of women that have been raised and educated in the nineties with the concept of the superwoman,

> caught up between contradictory discourses that encourage [them] to have it all, including successful careers, while at the same time fostering the 'new momism' that says that a woman is not completely fulfilled if she has no kids and needs to devote her entire life to her children (Martínez Guillem & Barnes 2018: 288).

Therefore, with their motto 'No soy superwoman ni quiero serlo', their members, more than a million mothers, have the balance of family and work life as a common struggle. They fight for political and social changes to eliminate the conception that parenting is the main responsibility of the woman, promoting co-parenting in which fathers and mothers share equal responsibilities.

New literature that confronts normative motherhood has also emerged recently. These publications keep redefining the figure of the bad mother as a 'rebel', 'disobedient', or 'rebellious' mother that challenges the regulatory practices of the new momism and defends that a 'bad' or 'good enough' mothering can be empowering. Nonfiction books such as *Guía*

para madres rebeldes (Marga Durá and Agustina Guerrero, 2018), *Mamá desobediente* (Esther Vivas, 2019), *La mejor madre del mundo* (Nuria Labari, 2019), and *La carga mental femenina* (Samanta Villar, 2000) talk about the real experiences of motherhood and the problem of work and family conciliation, the resistance to maternal perfection, and the ambivalence that this experience generates in contemporary feminine identity. These narratives '[a]bren un espacio de resistencia a la construcción cultural de un modelo identitario basado en la ecuación feminidad = maternidad' (Bettaglio 2018: 71). Also, graphic novels such as *La Volátil. Mamma mía* (Agustina Guerrero, 2015), *La madre que nos parió* (Cristina Quiles, 2015), *39 semanas y mis experiencias como madre novata* (Esther Gili, 2016), and *La mala leche* (Henar Álvarez and Ana Müshell, 2020) contribute to breaking away from archaic ideas associated with motherhood and articulate resistance to the mystification and glamorisation of the maternal role. As the examples show, popular culture is presenting stories of women that embrace mistakes, weaknesses, and anxieties 'opening up the space of mothering beyond dominant cultural ideals of devotion, fulfilment, and perfection' (Martínez Guillem & Barnes 2018: 286). Embedded within this cultural trend, *Señoras* consolidates a disruptive discourse that questions the traditional role of the woman-mother and reclaims the figure of the 'bad mom'. The series depicts how the protagonists recognise that they cannot attain the good mother ideal and instead develop new maternal practices that align with their individual circumstances.

3.2. Unmasking the New Momism

The different characterisations of contemporary mothering portrayed in *Señoras* contribute to the identification of the figures of 'good' and 'bad' mothers. The series deconstructs the discourses of the good mother and sheds light on 'the mask of motherhood' (Maushart, 1999) worn by the idealised supermom. Furthermore, the exploration of the bad mother figure in *Señoras* exposes the impacts of this negative label on women and its transformation into a transgressive notion challenging the rigid norms of parenting. The narrative demonstrates how the fear of not meeting the standards of a good mother oppresses, controls, and generates anxiety in those women categorised as bad mothers. It also proposes a repositioning of this trope as a 'good enough' mother, a term coined by Feasey to describe 'women unable or unwilling to conform to the ideology of intensive mothering' (2017: 7). Consequently, *Señoras* strives to demystify the idyllic motherhood that has dominated cultural discourse in recent decades, debunking the postfeminist 'have-it-all' rhetoric as a 'perverse, frustrating and commodified fiction' that contributes to constructing the supermom ideal (Martínez-

Jiménez & Gálvez-Muñoz 2019: 757). As an alternative to the postfeminist portrayal of the 'good mother' as a patriarchal construct pigeonholing women into motherhood and punishing those who do not conform with this ideal, the series presents a feminist paradigm that celebrates the diversity of mothers and mothering experiences, countering the limitations imposed by new momism.

New momism is based on the ideology of intensive mothering, a gendered model that advises women to use 'child-rearing methods that are child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive' (Hays 1996: 122). It is a combination of selflessness and professionalism in which self-sacrificing mothers should be experts in multiple disciplines in a constant race to be the best under the surveillance of other mothers. The new momism discourse produces a 'highly romanticized and yet demanding view of motherhood in which the standards for success are impossible to meet' (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 4). This exigent form of motherhood forces women to demonstrate that they can do it all if they want to have a career, or to do anything else besides staying home with their kids all day. In the professional sphere, there is no place for work and family conciliation, thereby propelling women into a role of superwoman who must adeptly juggle her responsibilities both within and outside the household. Therefore, a woman can have it all if she excels in every field. This entails not only being a proficient professional but, more crucially, sustaining a thriving marriage and fulfilling the role of a nurturing mother, all while adhering to contemporary standards of style and attractiveness.

In my analysis, I focus on the first season of *Señoras* because the creators conceived its thirteen episodes as one closed story in case it would not be renewed, as Del Hoyo states, 'apostamos todo a la primera porque jamás pensamos que fuera a haber una segunda' (García Higueras 2018: unpaginated). Although there is a second season that keeps showing different aspects of the experience of motherhood from a feminist perspective, I consider that the creators' intention to unmask the new momism discourse in order to free women from this constraining practice of motherhood is fully accomplished in the first season. The scriptwriters and directors have made this explicit through the series' presentation, stating their aim to delve into 'lo que se esconde detrás del disfraz de la maternidad' and to portray a more authentic depiction of both motherhood and womanhood (García Higueras 2018: unpaginated). Accordingly, the first season describes the reality of a group of women who grapple with the immense pressure to meet the high expectations of being a good mother. However, as the story unfolds, these characters undergo a transformation towards a more feminist approach to motherhood.

Señoras narrates the adventures of four mothers who find themselves overwhelmed after accidentally causing the death of another woman. However, at its core, the series primarily revolves around the lives of these exhausted mothers who do not comply with the idealised models of motherhood. The protagonists, all of whom come from low-income backgrounds, 'face structural barriers that make it difficult to demonstrate to the outside world that they are good mothers' (Elliot, Powers & Brenton 2015: 366). Mayte, a forty-seven-year-old divorcee, is the mother of two children: Arancha, a rebellious teenager, and Goyo, her peculiar youngest son. Her ex-husband, Gregorio, runs a bar with his girlfriend Manoli. Mayte's life is a constant juggling act between familial responsibilities—such as housework, attending to her children's needs, participating in school activities through the AMPA, and resolving conflicts with Gregorio—and her precarious job selling food processors door-to-door. Financial constraints and a chaotic life leave her with minimal leisure time or moments for herself. Lourdes, also in her late forties, is married to Vicente, a police officer. She is the adoptive mother of Mari Carmen, an Asian girl, and works as a registrar in Vicente's police department. Her married life is marked by monotony, as she frequently attempts—unsuccessfully—to revive the passion in her marriage. She takes on the bulk of household responsibilities without much assistance from her husband.

Amparo, a woman in her seventies, is raising her grandson single-handedly, as her daughter Paloma is supposedly pursuing an acting career (though she is actually engaged in prostitution), and her husband remains in a coma at a care facility.[9] Amparo works as a janitor in the building where she and Lourdes reside—a building that the owners intend to sell, putting both Amparo and Lourdes at risk of eviction. Virginia is a young woman who is pregnant with her second child. Although in her eighth month of pregnancy, she continues to work at a supermarket as a cashier and stock clerk. Her partner, Carlos, also holds an unstable job, necessitating the extra income. Financial concerns dominate her thoughts, especially after Carlos loses his job. Since the crime, Virginia is away from home for long periods. This causes a crisis in the couple. Carlos and she will gradually distance themselves until he is unfaithful to her. Given their circumstances, Mayte, Lourdes, Amparo, and Virginia exhibit a range of mothering practices that align more closely with women's lived experiences than with the idealised notions of perfect motherhood. In this way, they emerge as representations of feminist figures within the narrative.

[9] The husband in coma is representative of the previous patriarchal generation—still present but not listening—and the absent father/husband figure of the housewife in previous generations.

By contrast, the characters of Elvira and Begoña embody postfeminist archetypes. Elvira epitomises the perfect mother as described by new momism. She belongs to the upper class, is married with two children, and expertly balances her family life with her job. She personifies the image of a successful superwoman. She is positioned as an antagonist to the aforementioned group of women. Elvira is the building owner seeking to evict Lourdes and Amparo. She happens to be Mayte's co-worker, with whom she competes for their job due to company downsizing. Additionally, Elvira serves as the president of the AMPA, opposing Virginia's proposal for free school meals for underprivileged children. Meanwhile, Begoña is the stereotype of the ambitious professional woman who sacrifices her personal life for a successful career. As a neglectful mother, she shares a strained relationship with her daughter who holds resentment towards her. Begoña holds an authoritative position as the boss of Elvira and Mayte, cultivating a toxic rivalry between them. This rivalry not only bolsters Elvira's ego but also fosters insecurity within Mayte.

Both of these postfeminist models, Elvira and Begoña, meet their demise within the series. Elvira's death occurs in the first episode when she visits Amparo's house while Mayte is conducting a demonstration of the food processor. An electrical malfunction causes one of the blades to dislodge from the device and strike Elvira's throat. Despite surviving the initial injury, her life is jeopardised as a discussion among the women delays the call to emergency services, ultimately leading to her death without their intervention. Following her death, Elvira manifests as a ghost, haunting the main characters. Begoña's death occurs towards the end of the series due to terminal cancer. She briefly becomes a ghost in the final episode of the first season and in the first episode of the second one, during which she communicates with Mayte.

The series joins the cluster of contemporary TV series that place maternal figures at the forefront of their narratives. The British TV series *Motherland* (BBC2 2016–, Netflix 2020–), the Australian *The Letdown* (ABC 2016–, Netflix 2018–), and the Canadian *Workin' Moms* (CBC 2017–, Netflix 2019–) serve as examples of the new strand of television comedy series that focus on mothers' day-to-day struggles. These shows aim to 'demystify motherhood by revealing the highs and lows of this complex cultural construction' (Bettaglio 2018: 69). The protagonists of these series challenge maternal myths and shed light on taboos, such as maternal ambivalence. They find humour in their unsuccessful attempts to be perfect mothers and show how overwhelmed they become while navigating the experience of mothering. These narratives emphasise how the ideology of new momism places undue pressure on women to conform to unattainable ideals. However, *Señoras* presents a crucial

distinction from these series by transcending the mere exposure of motherhood myths. Instead, it questions the established social order and strives to restructure social relations, as well as redefine mothering beyond patriarchal models. The protagonists of *Señoras* question the expectations of intensive mothering and learn how to implement more feminist maternal practices that liberate them from the unachievable standards of motherhood.

In the English-speaking series, although mothers gain great visibility and they highlight the problems of attempting to be a perfect mother, they do not destabilise power relations, nor do they question the role of their partners (usually men) in the unequal distribution of home and childcare tasks. Applying Marina Bettaglio's findings in her analysis of mothers in comics and graphic novels, these comedy series appear to offer solace to female viewers who, through laughter at their insecurities, manage to overcome the guilt that often accompanies motherhood in today's postfeminist context, but they do not alter the established order (2018: 77). Within these comedies, laughter functions as a 'dispositivo terapéutico que permite sobrellevar la angustia causada por una situación contradictoria, paliando la insatisfacción, las tensiones, las incongruencias, sin atajar las causas profundas de su malestar, ni cuestionar el orden social existente' (Bettaglio 2018: 77). In contrast to these series, in *Señoras,* humour does not revolve around the absurd situations in which messy mothers may find themselves in order to comply with the new momism standards. Its humour arises when ordinary women confront extraordinary circumstances, such as concealing a corpse, robbing a bingo hall, or kidnapping a police officer. Their struggles in the realm of motherhood are not employed for comedic purposes; rather, they are typically depicted to unveil the stress, oppression, and exhaustion that women endure as they strive to embody 'the normative/idealized "good" mother' (O'Reilly 2014: 3). The main action of *Señoras* does not centre on the day-to-day lives of working mothers, but rather on their exploits as criminals and how they manage to harmonise these activities with their maternal obligations. This humorous approach elucidates the challenge of reconciling work and family that women often confront, spotlighting the difficulties that arise from simultaneously assuming the roles of a criminal and a mother. This situation contrasts with conventional (male) crime series, where the problems of work-family balance are seldom addressed. Male gangster protagonists are usually portrayed as family men, yet their familial responsibilities are commonly managed by their wives while they engage in criminal pursuits.

The series challenges dominant, limiting narratives about motherhood that portray the good mother as 'white, heterosexual, married, middle to upper class, able-bodied, suburban, thirty something, apolitical, in a nuclear family with one to two young children to whom she

is biologically related and ideally is a full time, stay-at-home mother' (O'Reilly 2014: 2). However, a good mother can also work outside the house if she becomes a supermom that can do it all and has the energy and the resources to make everyone, even herself, happy (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 79). New momism expects working mothers to adhere to the postfeminist responsibility of 'having it all': the home, the family, the body, and the career. Hence, a fulfilled woman is one that succeeds in the family sphere, with an ideal husband and wonderful children, and also has a rewarding job and a perfect body. This discourse does not only regulate motherhood and its practices but all the aspects of women's lives, promoting a narrow, homogenised image of womanhood in line with the postfeminist tendencies of individualism, self-surveillance, and the preoccupation with the body. '[C]ontemporary motherhood includes an unprecedented imperative to beauty and fitness' (Bettaglio 2015: 233) promoted by a popular culture that constantly exhibits attractive images of new mothers as radiant, skinny, fashionable, and fulfilled in their successful careers. However, in *Señoras*, as actor Nuria Herrero stated during the promotion of the series, 'no idealizamos a la mujer, solo la retratamos' (Cortés 2019b: unpaginated).

The title of the series itself is a statement of intent that breaks with certain attributes associated with the superwoman ideal. The word 'señoras' means ladies, mature women, standing in contrast to the 'girlification' of adult women and the youthfulness promulgated by postfeminism as a central characteristic of the sexiness of a woman. These women are not 'sexy ladies', they are ordinary women, with non-canonical bodies, dressed in cheap, occasionally unflattering clothes, often seen wearing the same outfits repeatedly. Far from the youthful, elegant, and sexy image of the postfeminist mothers in *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012), *Big Little Lies* (2017–2019), and *Las chicas del cable* (2017–2020), *Señoras* steers clear of glamour and sophistication. The title not only accentuates the age and perceived lack of attractiveness of these mature women, but also underscores their socioeconomic status. The 'h' added to AMPA in between brackets creates the Spanish word 'hampa' (meaning criminal underworld), which denotes that these women are criminals, but from a lower class. This play on words exhibits an explicit opposition to the successful, upper-middle-class career woman of postfeminism. The women of the series experience money troubles and must fight every day to make ends meet while they work in not very qualified jobs such as door-to-door commercial and supermarket worker. From its title onwards, the series cultivates a portrayal of women that deviate significantly from the postfeminist supermom ideal.

The opening of the first episode of season one (E1S1) establishes a number of key themes of new momism: the notion that the mother is fully satisfied and completed in motherhood, the emphasis upon surveillance of fellow moms and self-surveillance through guilt, the idea of motherhood as an individual achievement, the focus on beauty and fitness, the glorification of domesticity, and an emphasis upon consumerism. I identify these themes in the introduction of two of the main characters of the series, Elvira and Mayte, as they represent two opposite images of motherhood. Elvira personifies the supermom who has accomplished the 'have it all' fantasy, a woman who can simultaneously work full-time while still being a perfect mother at home, whereas Mayte illustrates the lived experience of lower-class, working mothers who struggle to combine their work and family obligations. She is an example of those mothers that have internalised permanent feelings of failure when faced with images of perfect mothers in the media. The series starts with Elvira as the voice-over that narrates her perfect life using images of Mayte's life as the counterpoint to that story of perfection. While Elvira's voice tells her story, the series intercuts between scenes of Elvira's and Mayte's daily activities, which draws a comparison between these two maternal figures. Although this seems to propose a juxtaposition of the figures of the good and the bad mother, I read it as an exposition of the gap between the maternal myth and the reality of motherhood. Elvira's routine is only a fictionalised account that she constructs of her life and makes public in her blog, but that has little to do with her real life as it will be disclosed throughout the season. However, viewers see Mayte's life without any filters.

Elvira starts the narration/writing of her blog marking her identity as a mother, 'como *working mom,* mi día empieza siempre con una larga pero gratificante jornada de trabajo'. She does not use the word 'woman', nor her profession, class, race, or any other identifier, which shows how new momism ideology affects the way women view their identity. Mother is the primary identity for most of these women. Her use of the term 'mom' also evidences her new momism discourse. 'Mom,' previously used only by children, is a central term of this ideology. It is used to keep women in their places, defining them by their relationships with kids, rather than with other adults (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 20). After this initial statement which also emphasises the fulfilment that she finds in her job, she proceeds to expose the glorification of domesticity. She describes her home as 'mi refugio, mi remanso de paz, a mí me gusta llamarlo mi santuario'. The description is accompanied by images of her uncluttered, immaculate, elegant house while she is doing some crafts for decorating it, because as 'a true domestic goddess, you can't buy all these things, you have to make them yourself' (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 226). Contrary to this, viewers are confronted with

scenes of an overwhelmed and stressed Mayte that goes rushing from her work, after a frustrating day without any sales, to an untidy, overfull house. She represents, therefore, the bad mother because in the new momism discourse 'overburdening, stress, and anxiety are interpreted in terms of personal failure or poor decision-making' (Tichy & Krüger-Kirn 2019: 9). The new momism ideology is sustained in the idea that if a woman gets organised, she will succeed, because it is not a matter of a lack of time, but of organising time effectively.

Elvira's maternal experience is illustrated with a classic representation of the good mother who is frequently presented 'rodeada del amor de sus hijas […] en medio de un orden minimalista y con el maquillaje perfecto' (Imbaquingo & Dávila 2020: 131). She continues her blog stating that 'por la noche aprovecho para pasar tiempo con mis hijas y es que si algo me hace sentir completa eso es mi papel como madre'. This last sentence appears to be a literal reflection of the definition of new momism, which asserts that 'no woman is fulfilled unless she has kids' (Douglas & Michaels 2005: 204). From this idyllic scene, viewers transition to Mayte's house, where she grapples with a sick child and a challenging teenager who hurls hurtful words at her: 'que te follen, me estás jodiendo la vida.' Mayte does not look happy at that moment. The scene contrasts again with the figure of the good mother that has always been 'basically content, and children are, essentially, wonderful repositories of nothing but joy for those who bear and look after them' (Oakley, as quoted in Smyth 2020: unpaginated). Elvira's narrative continues with the phrase, 'esta tarea no podría concebirla sin la ayuda de mi compañero de vida, el padre de mis criaturas, él es mi mayor pilar'. This remark reinforces the idea that motherhood is constructed as an individual practice with the mother as primarily caretaker, while her partner is only there to help. However, the partner's presence is crucial to validate the nuclear family construct that is upheld by new momism. Once more, Mayte diverges from this ideal. In a juxtaposed scene to Elvira being affectionately kissed by her husband, Mayte is seen arguing on the phone with her ex-husband.

At this point of the narration, Elvira has highlighted her professional position, her home, and her family with a husband and children. Subsequently, she initiates a discourse about the body, aligning perfectly with the rhetoric of 'having-it-all'. She states, 'eso sí, mi papel de madre no está reñido con el de mujer, por eso me gusta cuidarme y seguir sintiéndome atractiva, deseada'. In accordance with postfeminism, the bodies of mothers are expected to be meticulously maintained, a concept encapsulated by Gill's idea that 'femininity is a bodily propriety' (2007: 255). By expressing her wish to be desired, Elvira exemplifies the postfeminist transition from sex object to sexual subject. Elvira does not

express her desire for someone; rather, she articulates her willingness to shape her body into the desired object of another. In this dynamic, both Elvira and Mayte are depicted as taking care of themselves. However, Mayte's efforts are subtle, meant to remain inconspicuous to others. Viewers observe her quickly touching up her roots at the end of the day. The following day, when Mayte and Elvira meet at work, their boss, Begoña, will comment on Elvira's new hairstyle and colour while Mayte will not receive any compliments.

The surveillance of the female body is further encouraged toward the end of the post, where Elvira bids farewell to her readers with 'besitos de stevia'. The youthfulness and beauty that postfeminist women must perform are maintained through an increased interest in dieting, health, and, even, plastic surgery. The reference to *stevia*, a sugar substitute, underscores the significance of dieting. In a later scene of the first episode, Elvira continues to display this fixation on health and diet. She brings a gift of eggplants, pointing out that they are from her own organic vegetable garden. She even mentions that she has stopped drinking water because she read somewhere that it is detrimental to health, emphasising the extreme and sometimes ludicrous measures that some women resort to in pursuit of the 'perfect' body, following advice from so-called beauty experts. When Mayte crafts a blog post while pretending to be Elvira, she signs off with 'besitos de azúcar', directly confronting Elvira's postfeminist lifestyle.

Elvira concludes her narrative encouraging other mothers to strive to be like her, 'hasta aquí mi post de hoy, espero que haya sido inspirador para vosotras, las súper mamás que me leéis'. Elvira's blog serves as a reflection of the 'mommy blogs' that contribute to the creation of the maternal perfection trope, perpetuating myths surrounding motherhood. However, these blogs are often more about representation than reality, with their primary objective being the performance of the good mother role and the surveillance of other women's actions. This practice is emblematic of new momism, fostering competition among women. Elvira's closing lines are delivered while viewers observe Mayte reading the blog on her broken phone, her expression conveying fatigue and weariness. Absorbing Elvira's portrayal of a perfect life evokes feelings of inadequacy and distress in other women like Mayte. Within the framework of the neoliberal principle of individualism, which places the entirety of responsibility on the individual, women who are unable to attain the supermom ideal tend to not question the idealised image of the good mother, but themselves, internalising feelings of incompetence. Consequently, in various instances throughout the ensuing episodes, Mayte will verbalise her perplexity at how other mothers seem to manage everything, simultaneously experiencing a sense of failure. In the second episode, after

having a meeting in the school with another father who accuses her son of being a bully, Mayte confides in Gregorio, shedding tears as she expresses,

> ese hombre tiene razón, yo soy una madre horrible, lo soy, yo intento hacerlo todo bien, […] pero es que es mucho y a veces siento que no llego y es como que me ahogo, […] todas las madres que conozco lo hacen y no se quejan, es así como funcionan las cosas, todas las madres pueden con todo menos yo. (E2S1)

The idea of the bad mother is expressed again in the fourth episode when Mayte and her boss Begoña attend a weekend work convention. Despite being away, Mayte's children continue to call her incessantly, and when Begoña suggests that she turn off her phone, Mayte responds with, 'me siento mala madre si no cojo el teléfono a los niños' (E4S1). Mayte is the character that, as the antagonist to the supermom Elvira, struggles most intensely with the notion of being a bad mother.

The interweaving of scenes from Elvira and Mayte's lives depicts the dichotomy between good and bad mothers which has been traditionally represented in postfeminist narratives to establish the prescribed path of motherhood and illustrate the consequences of not adhering to it. Nevertheless, in the series, identifying the stereotypes of good and bad mothers serves as only the starting point for deconstructing the discourses that uphold these models. The series exposes the hollowness of the good mother myth, unveiling the falsehoods within Elvira's narrative. Additionally, through the character development of Mayte, it disarticulates the image of the bad mother as a neglectful parent. *Señoras* unveils the pressures and anxieties that real women experience to strive to attain ideals of perfection, rejects motherhood hierarchies, and proposes a feminist mothering to banish the oppressive practices of patriarchal motherhood. Mayte emerges as a symbol of transition, moving from the anxiety of conforming to the ideal of a good mother to realising new possibilities in motherhood that can be both empowering and liberating. Whereas Elvira evolves into a representation of an outdated model of motherhood that cannot endure within the context of a feminist paradigm.

After the presentation of these two conflicting images of motherhood, viewers are introduced to the revelation that Elvira is wheelchair-bound. The absence of any indication of her disability during her initial introduction is part of the illusion she is projecting, aligned with the core tenets of new momism, one of which is projecting the image of an able-bodied woman. I propose that Elvira's wheelchair is doubly coded. It is a sign of inclusion of disabilities when portraying female characters in contemporary feminist narratives, while also functioning as a metaphor for the immobility inherent in this feminine archetype,

representing how the postfeminist good mother trope is placed in a constrained and immobile situation. After she is killed in the first episode, she will appear as a ghost without the wheelchair, recovering her mobility. It is at that moment that she begins to transform into a new woman.

Towards the end of the first episode, in an attempt to conceal Elvira's death, Mayte composes a final blog post under Elvira's name, creating the illusion that she has deliberately disappeared. Here, she unveils the challenges encountered by working mothers and women in general as they strive to align with ideals of perfection:

> A veces miro al espejo y este me devuelve una imagen desfigurada de mí. ¿Quién soy? ¿Queda algo de mí bajo esa mujer de mirada perdida? ¿Qué se esconde tras el disfraz de la maternidad? Quién sabe. Nos desvivimos por ser la mejor madre, la mejor compañera, la mejor esposa. La mejor, en todos los sentidos. Y equivocarse parece un lujo que no nos podemos permitir. Siento deciros que esta es mi despedida. [...] Me voy lejos, a un lugar donde nunca nadie podrá encontrarme. Ahora comienza mi nueva andanza. (E1S1)

At this juncture, the viewer witnesses the ghost of Elvira rise from her wheelchair and abandon it to commence her 'nueva andanza', a journey that will prompt her to scrutinise her postfeminist lifestyle. This marks the beginning of the story. Throughout the remaining span of the season, her veneer of perfection is systematically dismantled. Her professional success was an illusion – she had not managed to sell a single food processor but instead hoarded them in a storage unit without her family's knowledge. Her marital harmony was equally false. Her husband's animosity towards her was so intense that he went to the extent of hiring a hitman to eliminate her. On her part, Elvira was engaged in an affair with the PE teacher. Her relationship with her daughters was also distant, exemplified by her decision to send one of them to boarding school in order to evade her responsibilities. Even her friendships were inauthentic. Anabel, her only friend, was also deceived by Elvira's appearance of being the perfect 'working mom,' remaining unaware of the reality of her life. The web of lies, silence, and inauthenticity in Elvira's narrative forms the 'mask of motherhood' that, as Maushart describes, is 'an assembly of fronts – mostly brave, serene and all-knowing – that we use to disguise the chaos and complexity of our lived experience' (1999: 2). However, the series lifts this mask exposing what is behind that façade and showing authentic experiences of motherhood through the lives of the other mothers in the narrative. Mayte illustrates how emotions like anxiety, rage, and anguish are also integral to the maternal journey; Lourdes reveals the impact of motherhood on her marriage and sexual life; Virginia exposes the financial strains of raising children and the challenges of meeting all expenses; and Amparo demonstrates that motherhood persists even as children become independent adults, as one

might find themselves responsible for grandchildren, commencing the cycle anew. These four protagonists disclose experiences that are omitted from new momism discourses, thus bringing to light a reality that deviates significantly from the romanticised myths surrounding motherhood.

3.3. 'Mother Outlaws' and Their Feminist Practices

Having analysed how *Señoras* exposes the inherent fallacy of the supermom ideal, this section focuses on how the protagonists find solutions to overcome the constraints of normative motherhood. They present distinct (feminist) maternal approaches that challenge and reshape various facets of new momism, which otherwise renders motherhood oppressive and constraining for women. While the perfect motherhood of Elvira is being unmasked, the series brings to the forefront 'the chaos and complexity of [women's] lived experience' (Maushart 1999: 2) through the stories of the four central characters. *Señoras* does not pretend to promote another grand narrative about motherhood, but to depict alternative ways of mothering that liberate women from motherhood myths through the deconstruction of the dominant discourse. Building upon the work of Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), O'Reilly formulates a theory of feminist mothering that 'is constructed as a negation of patriarchal motherhood' (2008: 187). O'Reilly stresses the important contribution of Rich to the feminist critique when she developed a distinction between motherhood, as an institution, and mothering, as a practice. Motherhood describes 'the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women' (O'Reilly 2008: 184), while mothering is 'women's experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred and potentially empowering to women' (O'Reilly 2008: 184). Thus, for mothering to emerge as a site of empowerment, Rich suggests that women must become 'outlaws from the institution of motherhood' (as quoted in O'Reilly 2004: 169), that is, women must break the rules set by patriarchal motherhood and pursue mothering practices that have been marginalised by the official meaning and associated with bad mothering.

Using Rich's terminology, I posit that the protagonists of *Señoras* fall within the category of 'mother outlaws' since they transgress both the literal and figurative boundaries of law and normative motherhood standards. Their journey into the criminal world, breaking established societal norms, prompts them to also challenge and question the maternal norms that are perceived as the 'correct' path to motherhood. Mayte, Lourdes, Virginia, and Amparo are initially introduced in the series with a singular dimension of their identity: they are mothers. Motherhood serves as the sole common thread uniting them, as they are merely

acquaintances due to their involvement in the same parent-teacher association. However, as they become entangled in criminal activities, they unearth an identity that transcends motherhood. Circumstances force them to question the prescriptive guidelines of patriarchal motherhood. Their new reality disrupts their routines, previously focused on attaining the archetype of the good mother, a pursuit that made them struggle to achieve a work-life balance. Thus, as their routines shatter, their priorities shift, compelling them to reshape their mothering approaches. They start resisting to follow the script of good mothering as they cannot be the ever-present and available mothers because their involvement with a mafia gang keeps them busy. They cannot be the sole caretaker, so they engage others in their maternal responsibilities, especially their children's fathers, but also their mother-in-law or the father's partner. They also start meeting their own needs before those of their children because they have to prioritise their own existence, that is, not being killed by the mafia or caught by the police. Therefore, the new circumstances of these women make them look for alternative modes of mothering, thereby contributing to the formation of a counter-narrative to new momism. Following their transformation into outlaws in the truest sense, they evolve into 'mother outlaws', women who 'raise their children in opposition to the normative motherhood ideal of the always present and self-sacrificing mother' (O'Reilly 2004: 17).

Drawing on O'Reilly's definition of feminist mothering as 'a practice that seeks to grant mothers agency, authority, authenticity, autonomy, and advocacy/activism' (2014: 189), I examine the process of empowerment of the protagonists embracing these capacities of feminist practice. Maternal agency is concerned with 'mothering practices that facilitate women's authority and power' (O'Brien-Hallstein, as quoted in O'Reilly 2014: 189). The mothers in *Señoras* are presented in the first episodes as being influenced by the dominant discourse of new momism, which represses the mother's own selfhood as they feel the responsibility to follow the mandates of normative motherhood. In their attempts to align with the prescriptions of the good mother narrative, they exercise limited power in their maternal roles. This dynamic results in what Rich describes as 'powerless responsibility' (2020: 56) wherein they lack agency over their own mothering experiences. As a result, they grapple with feelings of guilt, fatigue, stress, and anxiety. Mayte, burdened by the constant comparison to the superwoman ideal propagated by Elvira's mommy blog, perceives herself as inadequate and incapable of reaching these standards. Lourdes bears the weight of mental strain as the sole manager of the household and family, consistently organising, planning, and assigning tasks to her husband. Meanwhile, Virginia navigates the constraints of the neoliberal work system, which hinders her from fully enjoying motherhood, even during an

advanced stage of pregnancy, as she remains tied to her professional obligations. As Jacob Perreault-Laird states in his thesis on motherhood and precarious labour market, 'being a good or productive worker in the current financialized, neoliberal labour economy requires women to be genderless. The worker identity is paramount to surviving in precarious work conditions. As such, having children and taking time away from the work force can be read at being unproductive' (2018: 62). Thus, the threat of losing her job if she is absent for an extended period leaves little room for maternity leave. As a consequence, she works until the day she gives birth performing activities in the supermarket that could jeopardise her health and that of the baby. She returns to work just days after giving birth, which do not allow her to fully recover from the medical procedure or enjoy time with her newborn.

Nevertheless, as the series progresses, these mothers transform into 'agents in their own lives rather than passive victims of discourses' (Horwitz 2004: 45). Mayte starts taking her own decisions in mothering while abandoning Elvira as her role model. She challenges aspects of the institutionalised motherhood: she does not see herself as the only possible caregiver and relinquishes her children's care to Gregorio and Manoli, she accepts that she needs other experiences apart from motherhood to feel fulfilled such as friendship, relationships, and activism, and she redefines what she believed could be damaging to her children such as not being available for them twenty-four hours. Mayte rediscovers enjoyment during her company's weekend convention trip with Begoña, who urges her to reclaim her agency with the words, 'coge las riendas de tu vida, decide tú por ti misma' (E4S1). Initially hesitant, Mayte eventually embraces the moment, revelling in dancing, drinking, and even a one-night stand. She later engages in a brief romance with the PE teacher as a means to foster adult relationships unrelated to their parental roles. Moreover, she recognises the necessity of delegating parental responsibilities when she feels incapable of fulfilling them. When overwhelmed by fear and stress due to her association with the mafia gang, Mayte makes the challenging decision to temporarily entrust her children's care to Gregorio, aiming to regain her strength and free herself from the grips of the criminal organisation.

Lourdes' agency becomes evident as she challenges the gendered hierarchy within her household, reshaping her perspective on gender norms to foster an egalitarian partnership that encompasses shared responsibilities in housework and childcare. The family model propagated by new momism often absolves fathers of equal domestic duties, reinforcing the notion that care work primarily falls under women's purview. Bonnie J. Dow has argued that 'to achieve equality in the private sphere would require further adjustment from men, an issue

mysteriously absent in postfeminist rhetoric' (1996: 94). However, the series does not avoid the issue. Initially, Lourdes and Vicente conform to traditional gender roles within their home. Lourdes attends to daily chores, while Vicente only sporadically assists by performing tasks as requested by his wife, such as picking up their daughter from dance lessons or purchasing groceries before returning home from work. These scenes, in which she is clearing the table or rushing to take the trash out while Vicente keeps watching TV, underscore Lourdes' compliance with gender stereotypes, while their pedantic preteen daughter constantly criticises her mother's adherence to these norms, deeming it a negative example. Nonetheless, the new circumstances keep Lourdes busy and absent from the house, which requires an adjustment from Vicente. Subsequently, the series portrays Vicente engaging in activities traditionally associated with women's roles – ironing, cleaning, and tending to their daughter. Certain sequences juxtapose shots of Lourdes fighting in a boxing ring with scenes of Vicente doing laundry and folding clothes. This transformation in Vicente's domestic responsibilities culminates in a family scene where he, wearing an apron, presents a meal that he has cooked to Lourdes, their daughter, and his mother, who are seated at the table. This scene symbolises the shift in gender stereotypes within the new family structure advocated by feminist mothering, which promotes the equal distribution of responsibilities for care and housework and sets an example of co-parenting to new generations.

In Virginia's case, she overcomes her miserable working conditions to better reconcile work with family life. Within her workplace, Virginia faces immense pressure due to an overbearing employer and a hostile environment marked by sexual harassment. Ramón, her boss, continually monitors her actions and assigns tasks unsuitable for her pregnancy. The early episodes feature commentary from other women about Virginia's unfavourable work circumstances. Lourdes even intercedes on her behalf, challenging Ramón with the plea, 'Ramón, por favor, que tenéis a la criatura trabajando con semejante bombo, dadle de baja, ya, coño' (E2S1). The situation gets worse as Ramón's harassment intensifies. He resorts to blackmail, coercing Virginia to dine at his house under the threat of job loss. When Virginia resists his advances, he retaliates by intruding upon her hospital room shortly after giving birth, insisting she return to work immediately, thus denying her the opportunity to fully enjoy her maternity leave. Virginia confides in Carlos, who responds by facing Ramón at the supermarket and delivering a physical blow. Nevertheless, due to Carlos's unemployment, Virginia must resume her job, as she is the sole breadwinner.

Returning to work, Virginia discovers that other women have endured similar harassment from Ramón. Bolstered by this shared experience, she confronts him directly. A physical altercation ensues between them, culminating in another woman, Juani, who fears for Virginia's safety, shooting Ramón. With Juani's assistance, Virginia disposes of Ramón's body. Consequently, Virginia is promoted to assume Ramón's managerial role at the supermarket. This advancement not only improves her working conditions but also benefits her colleagues, particularly the women who have endured harassment. Virginia's newfound position grants her a flexible schedule, enabling her to tend to her children's needs. Mayte, Lourdes, and Virginia's plotlines showcase how they exercise agency and construct their mothering beliefs and practices away from the dominant discourse, which makes it possible to navigate motherhood with a sense of empowerment, unburdened by feelings of depression, inadequacy, or failure.

Amparo, the grandmother of the group, does not undergo the same transformation as the other mothers, shifting from a postfeminist mothering style to a feminist one. She was a mother before new momism became the dominant discourse in society, so she practices a child-rearing that is not all-consuming, expert-driven, or financially expensive as that of intensive mothering. Amparo represents the cohort of mothers from a previous generation when constant monitoring was unnecessary, allowing children to play freely, watch TV without strict supervision, and addressing them without meticulously adhering to the latest parenting advice dictated by experts. She sheds light on how contemporary mothers are subjected to a more demanding model of motherhood than before when women's roles were largely confined to domesticity. In her case, Amparo gains agency as a woman who had been removed from the public space due to her age. At 72 years old, she devotes her days to caring for her grandson, visiting her husband in a care home, and cleaning the building where she lives. However, the unconventional situation arising from their criminal activities disrupts her solitary domestic routine, propelling her into group dynamics where she makes decisions and engages in activities that extend beyond her roles as a mother, grandmother, and wife. She is the only character that seems to find solace and enthusiasm in these new circumstances, as she feels that she is not alone anymore and is embarking on adventures that she excitedly recounts to her husband, who is in a coma. Each episode's opening recap features Amparo summarising recent events for her husband, often expressing her exhilaration about her experiences. At times, she even admits, 'creo que me estoy como aficionando, que me gusta mucho esto de ser una delincuente, no sé, a veces pienso que podría ser una ¿cómo se dice?... matahari' (E7S1).

Asserting their agency, these women gain the authority and autonomy emphasised in O'Reilly's concept of feminist mothering. These attributes, described as 'confidence and conviction in oneself' (O'Reilly 2014: 189), bestow upon these mothers the resoluteness to wield power within their households and shape their mothering practices independently. They evolve into self-reliant thinkers who cease comparing their actions to the idealised image of the good mother. The protagonists reclaim the authority they had relinquished to external sources such as parenting magazines, child-rearing experts, celebrity moms, and other cultural portrayals embedded within new momism discourses. They cultivate confidence in their own values and perceptions of what their children need. In the first episodes, as these women frantically juggle their daily tasks—ranging from shopping and cleaning to working, cooking, and attending AMPA meetings—a prevailing sense emerges that life is managing them instead of the other way around. However, by the series' conclusion, they have gained mastery over their lives on their own terms. In the final scene of the first season, the four protagonists finish their visit to assist a woman and continue walking down the street. When Lourdes glances at her watch and remarks 'otra vez que no llegamos al AMPA'. To the viewers' surprise, these women keep walking calmly, devoid of the urgency or distress that they previously displayed while rushing to AMPA meetings throughout the season. The change in their attitude demonstrates that they have substituted the demanding tenets of patriarchal motherhood for an empowering mothering that enables them to lead a life outside of this role.

Similarly, authenticity is explained in O'Reilly's feminist model following Elizabeth Butterfield's definition as a term that 'denotes being true to oneself, as in making decisions that are consistent with one's own beliefs and values' (790, as quoted in O'Reilly 2014: 189). To attain authenticity, these women shatter the silence surrounding the negative facets of their maternal experiences. Mayte embodies maternal ambivalence by openly acknowledging her conflicting and infuriating feelings toward motherhood. She admits, 'a mí, mi hija ni siquiera me cae bien' (E4S1), and she despises her son's behaviour when she finds out that he is a bully in school. She exposes the love-hate relationship of being a mother. Virginia displays the social isolation that produces motherhood. Confined to her home, her job, and her prenatal classes, she has no time to make friends. Her only social network is the AMPA. She reveals that the silver lining stemming from their involvement in criminal activities is the newfound camaraderie among the group. Amparo paints a picture of the relentless routine inherent in parenting, where no matter how much effort mothers invest, it never seems sufficient. Even as Amparo single-handedly cares for her grandson, her daughter still finds

fault and criticism during her visits. Lourdes illustrates how parenthood can place a strain on a marriage, amplifying pre-existing issues between partners and diminishing intimacy due to exhaustion and sleep deprivation. Collectively, these women articulate the hardships and challenges of motherhood, dispelling the notion of it being an easy or flawless journey.

Another example of authenticity is the blog that Mayte initiates towards the end of the series, where she speaks truthfully about her experience as a mother and a woman. This blog stands in stark contrast to Elvira's, which, as previously discussed, conceals, and distorts her maternal reality, presenting an idealised façade and suppressing the struggles inherent in motherhood. Elvira's blog epitomises the inauthenticity linked to the postfeminist model of the good mother, which pressures women to follow external regulations in their childrearing that they may not genuinely choose but perform solely to avoid being judged as bad mothers. In her blog, Mayte defends the value of authenticity, proclaiming, 'ahora sabemos exactamente lo que queremos' (E13S1), and she highlights that the root of women's oppression lies in the pursuit of an unattainable perfection that society has imposed upon them,

> me he dado cuenta de que me he pasado la vida tratando de ser como esas mujeres perfectas que nos venden en la tele, pero si algo he aprendido a mis cuarenta y bastantes es que no existen las mujeres perfectas, como tampoco existe la familia perfecta ni la vida perfecta. (E13S1)

Mayte confirms that the superwoman ideal does not exist, and advocates for 'otro tipo de mujeres, las de verdad' who are characterised by their diversity and individuality rejecting the myth of the maternal instinct as 'estereotipo unificador de las mujeres' (Saletti Cuesta 2008: 173). By the end of the season, the protagonists have come to the conclusion that in order to be happy they have to move away from that idealised image of motherhood. This newfound perspective grants them the freedom to act in accordance with their genuine desires, unburdened by the fear of being labelled as bad mothers. I consider Mayte's blog not only an example of authenticity but also illustrative of the fifth and last term that O'Reilly lists in her feminist model of mothering: maternal activism. O'Reilly 'recognizes the potential political/social dimension of motherwork whether such is expressed in anti-sexist childrearing or maternal activism' (2014: 189). Mayte's blog is a political statement, as it represents a subversive discourse that confronts the normative perspective of motherhood prevalent in many 'mummy blogs,' particularly those of celebrities. These celebrity blogs often project glamorous maternal images that contribute to the myth of motherhood as a source of unconditional happiness for women. In addition to the blog, the most overt example

of the protagonists' activism is the foundation of the *Asociación de Mujeres Begoña Cepeda.* Following Begoña's passing, she bequeaths her inheritance to Mayte. Mayte and her friends employ these funds to establish an association that fosters a network of support among women and offers assistance in instances where administrative institutions fall short.

The new practices performed by the mothers in *Señoras* from a position of agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism have made motherhood better for them, shifting the focus from children –as new momism insisted– to mothers, who express their selfhood in various ways, not only 'look[ing] to motherhood to define and realize their identity' (O'Reilly 2014: 191). The series breaks ideological assumptions that sustain new momism and that cause mothering to be oppressive for women. O'Reilly has termed them as 'the essentialisation, naturalisation, privatisation, individualisation, normalisation, idealisation, bioligicalisation, intensification, expertisation, and depoliticalisation of motherhood' (2014: 4). *Señoras* presents a diverse range of maternal perspectives and practices that challenge those mandates. For instance, Lourdes, as an adoptive mother, and Manoli, as a stepmother, resist bioligicalisation, which places the birth mother as the 'real' mother. Normalisation is also contested in the series, proposing other families that do not adhere to the specific model of the heterosexual nuclear family such as divorced couples, single mothers, homosexual couples, extended family, and stepfamily. The protagonists' families and those of other parents of the AMPA are examples of heterogenous family structures. Expertise is questioned by Amparo as she raises her grandson the same way she raised her daughter before. She relies on traditional beliefs instead of prescriptive norms written by childrearing experts. Other ideological imperatives such as the intensification of motherhood, which encourages women to invest most of their time and energy in their children, and idealisation are clearly disarticulated through the uncovering of Elvira's real life and through the actions of the protagonists that learn that they should invest time in themselves and meet their own needs before their children's.

Among all these ideological imperatives of normative motherhood, I focus on essentialism and naturalisation, according to which maternity is essential to female identity and natural to women, and therefore the foundation on which the rest of oppressive notions of motherhood are built. The ideas of essentialism and naturalisation are refuted in the series by showing how the practice is shared with the protagonists' male partners. In some situations when the mothers are fighting other criminals, the fathers are responsible for their children's care, which also challenges individualisation that has placed mothering as the job of only one person, the mother. During the story, motherhood is represented as a collective activity, a

communal practice that involves mothers, fathers, grandparents, older siblings, neighbours, and friends. The final scenes of season one illustrate this with shots of the four protagonists' families. Mayte is depicted having a dinner at Gregorio's bar, accompanied by him, Manoli, and her two children. When her daughter, Arancha, uses strong language at the table, it is Manoli who takes on the role of reprimanding her. Lourdes is shown sharing a meal at home with her mother-in-law, her daughter, and her husband Vicente, who is taking charge of the cooking for the evening. Virginia is captured in a scene where she is feeding her baby from a bottle, while Carlos engages in playtime with their older child. Amparo's domestic scene portrays her at home with her daughter, her grandson, and a man that she met at the care home during her visits to her husband. While assisting her daughter in preparing for a casting audition, Amparo's friend takes the opportunity to teach her grandson some card tricks. These visual depictions underscore the involvement of other individuals in parental responsibilities, highlighting that caregiving tasks are not solely the domain of the mother.

Proposing a form of collective maternity defies the biological difference of the sexes that reserves the function of mothering for women as their primary role in society due to their ability to give birth. As O'Reilly suggests, the disruption of gender essentialism is the most effective step to destabilise contemporary patriarchal motherhood. She argues that the essentialisation of motherhood 'occurs both as a result of and in response to the other themes' (2010: 367). As opposed to the confined female identity dictated by patriarchal norms, *Señoras* disrupts essentialisation and repositions motherhood in relation to a diverse array of desires. The titles of each episode serve to emphasise the multifaceted nature of women's agency beyond their prescribed 'natural role' as mothers. These titles, such as 'Señoras que matan', 'Señoras empoderadas', 'Señoras sin blanca', 'Señoras que mienten', 'Señoras a la fuga', 'Señoras que roban', 'Señoras violentas', and more, depict women taking actions and embodying characteristics far removed from normative maternal attitudes. These titles represent women who act completely outside their identity as mothers who, according to the patriarchal norms of motherhood, must dedicate their time to helping their children, cooking for them, playing with them, taking them to school, buying what they need, and being patient, calm, sacrificial, and happy. In the last episode, functioning as an epilogue, Mayte writes on her personal blog as a woman addressing other women. This shift contrasts sharply with Elvira's mommy blog, where she defined herself primarily as a mother addressing fellow mothers. Mayte's self-representation does not revolve around motherhood as her core identity. Instead, she positions herself primarily as a woman, with motherhood being just one aspect of her womanhood rather than the defining factor.

The protagonists of *Señoras* fight, negotiate, and disrupt gender essentialism in order to develop their individualities. They propose the abolition of traditional gender roles and the restructuring of society through a politics of feminist mothering, which empowers women and liberates them from traditional maternal rules that shape and direct women's aspirations, desires, and behaviours. The series suggests that the traditional motherhood recuperated by new momism is inapplicable to present times, even though its influence continues to impact women's lives. Elvira symbolises the outdated postfeminist superwoman archetype that modern women must challenge and abandon in order to reclaim the agency that has been taken from them 'in the name of the institution of motherhood' (Rich 1977: 275). Moreover, the appearance of Elvira as a ghost serves as a metaphor for the obsolescence of postfeminism as an ideological framework. It signifies that the era of postfeminism, along with its emphasis on the supermom ideal, belongs to the past and is no longer relevant in the contemporary context.

3.4. The Ghost of Postfeminism

As Strehlau notes, postfeminism is frequently analysed and conceptualised as 'a time or sensibility haunted by the ghost of feminism that it wants to (purports to) relegate to the past' (2017: 39). However, *Señoras* reverses this and presents postfeminism – embodied in Elvira – as the ghost that haunts the feminist narrative. The imagery of a ghost feminism that haunts popular culture in the postfeminist context is recurring in feminist critique. Victoria Hesford examines 'the figure of the feminist-as-lesbian as a ghost of the recent feminist past' (2005: 3), Campion Decent (2016) traces historic feminist ghosts in contemporary artworks, and Daniela Agostinho (2016: 1) advocates for a 'ghosting and ghostbusting feminism'. McRobbie also turns to this metaphor in her analyses of postfeminist culture. She declares that postfeminism presents 'a hideous spectre of what feminism once was' (2009: 2) and in its narratives 'a spectre of feminism is invoked so it might be undone' (2004: 259). McRobbie acknowledges that postfeminist discourses claim that in neoliberal times feminism is rendered obsolete, unnecessary, and deceased, but she notes that 'in endless conjuring up a demon that must be extinguished (in this case feminism) that demon demonstrates something of its lingering afterlife and its ghostly power' (2011: 183). Accordingly, following the notion that postfeminist narratives have turned feminism into a ghost of the past that refuses to be laid to rest, Munford and Waters build their work on a hauntology of feminism 'as an antidote to the forgetful and partial impressions of feminism that emerge from postfeminist discourses of gender' (2014: x). The authors investigate the implied 'afterlife' of feminism and establish

the resilience of its legacy. They consider that the ghost of feminism is a revenant that keeps going back and, at other times, can reawaken and revivify feminism (Munford & Waters 2014: 170). I propose that the three main characteristics of the ghost of feminism described by Munford and Waters suffer an alteration in the figure of Elvira as representative of the postfeminist spectrality in *Señoras*. The ghost in postfeminist narratives exposes feminism as 'pastness' (Tasker & Negra, 2007), it is described as a haunting presence that affects the living present, and it maintains that the ghost cannot be exorcised because it is 'potentially a spirit of the future-to-come' (Derrida, as quoted in Munford & Waters 2014: 11). In a re-writing of that ghost, Elvira's spectre, and to a lesser extent Begoña's, represent postfeminism as past in a feminist narrative. Elvira is described as a haunted-haunting presence because she is also affected by the actions of the living, and as such, she can be exorcised, so she will disappear without an option to return, eliminating any future possibility.

Postfeminism, since the term entered the media lexicon in the 1990s, has speculated 'readily and obsessively on the death of feminism' (Munford & Waters 2014: 169). The idea of its demise had altered the image of the women's movement in the collective imagination because although it was not dead, it was 'less visible than before […] unrecognisable to some' (Walby, as quoted in Munford & Waters 2014: 18). However, in the second decade of the millennium, feminism has 'reentered the sphere of public awareness, both in political discourse and popular culture' (Agostinho 2016: 1) and the popular imaginary recognises that feminism is alive. In this context, there is a paradigm shift proposing feminism as hegemonic and postfeminism as a dying model. This process is represented in the series as postfeminism evolving or being integrated into broader feminist discourse. Following this chronology, in the series, Elvira's postfeminist discourse dominates the first episode as the established order that the rest of the women must follow to achieve the perfect life that she displays. However, since her death, the four protagonists base their actions on feminist ideals of sorority, collectivism, activism, and female agency, which bring about a change in the established order by debunking postfeminism and recognising feminism as the social contemporary order. The manifestation of Elvira as a ghost implies the historicization of postfeminism, relegating her postfeminist conceptions to a past in which women were constrained by the notion of perfection. The present time described in the series is full of imperfect women who have left behind the aspiration of being a perfect mother.

I argue that, alongside Elvira, the character of Begoña is also a spectral figure because although she is not dead for most of the series, she can be considered not fully alive since she has terminal cancer, and she is living through the last stage of it. Eventually, she does pass

away at the end of the first season. Her death represents the vanishing of another model that was created in postfeminist narratives to describe the consequences of women who do not follow the ideals of traditional femininity, which prioritise romantic and maternal love over other life projects. Elvira and Begoña exemplify the two extremes in motherhood portrayals: the perfect and the bad mother, respectively. Begoña confides in Mayte about the personal toll her high-powered corporate position has exacted on her life. She reveals that 'es el fruto de mucho sacrificio […] me ha costado dos matrimonios y la relación con mi hija' (E4S1). Despite her dedication to the company, her aspirations of being recognised as the top employee go unmet, and she later faces termination. Her terminal illness, dismissal, and replacement by a younger woman all contribute to her portrayal as an obsolete and fading female archetype. After her death, Begoña also appears briefly as a ghost in the first episode of season two. During this scene, Mayte visits her grave, and Begoña materialises to confirm the paradigm shifts presented in the first season. Following a brief conversation, Begoña urges Mayte not to continue visiting her and asserts, 'nuestro tiempo pasó, ahora es el tuyo' (E1S2), which consolidates the idea that the postfeminist woman, any model presented by this ideology, is the past because the present is for feminist women like Mayte.

According to Gordon in her *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008),

> haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition (8).

As Gordon points out, the ghostly presence of Elvira serves an affective purpose in the present, propelling Mayte and her friend Anabel towards transformative insights by revealing hidden elements previously overlooked. However, it is the current context that notably influences Elvira, effectively reversing the haunting dynamic. Elvira's spectral manifestation undergoes a transformation through her interactions with Mayte and Anabel. These women's actions and emotional responses to Elvira's haunting make her understand aspects of her life that she failed to see before, which leads her to regret her postfeminist past.

Anabel is introduced as Elvira's closest friend in the series. In her first appearance, she is depicted waiting for Elvira at her workplace, ready to take her to a school AMPA meeting. During this meeting, she consistently aligns herself with Elvira's perspective in discussions with other mothers. When Elvira goes missing, Anabel is the lone sceptic, refusing to believe that her friend's absence was voluntary. Anabel suspects foul play,

believing Elvira might have been abducted or killed. She is resolute in her conviction that Elvira would never leave without telling her. The phrase 'besos de azúcar' in her last post and the fact that she did not take her clothes only confirm Anabel's suspicions of a crime. At this juncture, Elvira's ghost materialises before Anabel, encouraging her to uncover the truth and seek justice: 'descubre quién está detrás de todo esto, haz justicia, Anabel' (E2S1). Anabel eagerly welcomes each subsequent appearance of Elvira's ghost, which guides her in her quest to unravel the mystery behind the murder. However, upon unearthing Elvira's hidden secrets, Anabel's attitude shifts. She becomes reluctant to heed the guidance of the ghost, as the revelations paint a far less flattering picture of her friend than she had perceived. Anabel learns the unsettling truth about Elvira's actions, revealing how her ambition led her to amass a large number of food processors to outdo Mayte in a competition, which ultimately resulted in financial ruin for her family. As a consequence, her family loses their house, her husband commits suicide, and her daughters are sent to some form of orphanage. An additional shock is discovering Elvira's secret affair with the PE teacher, a revelation that deeply affects Anabel because the series suggests that she felt something more than a friendship for Elvira. Through her haunting of Anabel, the ghost of Elvira embarks on a journey of introspection, re-evaluating her past actions from Anabel's perspective. The admiration Anabel once held for her friend gradually erodes with every lie that she uncovers, to the point of rejecting her ghost and admitting that she does not care what really happened anymore, which causes a great impact on Elvira. The revelations of Elvira's secrets make Anabel stop looking onto her disappearance and start living a freer life without her presence and approval.

A similar liberation is shown in Mayte's life when she gets rid of Elvira's ghost. I argue that in Mayte's case, Elvira's spectre turns into the phantom described by Virginia Woolf in her famous essay 'Professions for Women' (1931). Woolf writes in her essay that she needs to battle a woman phantom that is tormenting her, which she calls the Angel in the House. She is charming, unselfish, sympathetic, excelled in the difficult arts of family life, sacrificial, and selfless. Woolf had to kill the phantom to get rid of falsehood and be herself. Similarly, Mayte is tormented by Elvira's ghost and her idea of the perfect mother who represents the Angel in the House recovered by new momism ideology. In a new embellished package as the contemporary supermom, a professional and progressive woman performs all the characteristics of the Victorian model, but as her individual and autonomous 'choice' rather than being forced to. As the new Angel in the House, Elvira is the presence that points out the inability of Mayte to be a good mother and keeps disempowering her. However, Mayte starts gaining the battle against the phantom as soon as she is able to

perceive the delusion of perfect motherhood and she redefines her mothering away from patriarchal models. During the series, despite the nagging apparitions of Elvira, Mayte discovers that there are many ways to approach motherhood, as there are women and families, and that she should not try to follow the proposed myth of the perfect mother and find her 'own maternal style in the midst of conflicting messages' (Betagglio 2015: 234). In hauntology theory, the ghost passes on their narratives to link past and present, but here, these women break with the past that the ghost represents. Anabel and Mayte distance themselves from the women that they were when Elvira had an influence on them. Hence, the haunted people change, yet it is the haunting presence who undergoes the greatest evolution. Elvira goes through a transformative process that makes her reflect on her behaviour and comes to the realisation that her postfeminist lifestyle was a mistake that has not brought happiness to her or her family. Thus, Elvira becomes a ghost haunted by her past. In the same way, Begoña also starts a change in her last days of life due to her involvement with Mayte and her friends.

The relationship between Begoña and Mayte begins after Elvira's death, leading to a close friendship where they share confidences and embark on adventures together. Begoña, who always preferred Elvira as she was apparently a great vendor, starts getting to know Mayte and understanding her difficult situation. She eventually reveals to Mayte that she is terminally ill, which prompts Mayte to confess her criminal activities. Subsequently, Begoña becomes entangled in Mayte's schemes, including the abduction of a police officer and a bingo heist. Begoña's proximity to Mayte and her friends triggers a transformation in her character—from an individualistic, competitive, and serious boss to a more generous and light-hearted woman who embraces solidarity to the extreme. This is evident when she falsely confesses to a crime that she did not commit in order to protect her friends. When Amparo is in prison accused of Elvira's murder, and the investigators are very close to discovering that Mayte, Lourdes, and Virginia are also guilty, Begoña makes a video from her hospital bed in which she admits having killed Elvira. Knowing that she is dying soon, she decides to save them and makes herself responsible for all the criminal acts perpetrated by them. Having shared some of their experiences and learned about Elvira's death from Mayte, Begoña constructs a narrative that aligns with the evidence held by the police. Consequently, the four women are exonerated from suspicion. Elvira acknowledges Begoña's change when she appears at the hospital during Begoña's final moments. Curious about the pain of death, Begoña queries Elvira, who responds, 'esto solo es un paso más, piensa en todos los que has dado durante este tiempo, cuando te conocí no eras más que una pija arrogante y ahora, mírate, eres toda una señora del hampa' (E12S1). Thus, after recognising the transformation

that Elvira and Begoña have undergone in the story, both postfeminist characters come to an end in the series.

The last and most important feature of the ghost of feminism is that it represents the future, it is described as 'an emissary of pasts and possible futures that the present cannot exorcize' (Munford & Waters 2014: 19). It states that 'feminism refuses to leave because its business remains unfinished' (Munford & Waters 2014: 171). Contrary to that, *Señoras* does present a process of exorcism of the ghost of postfeminism that eliminates the future return. In their article on the ghost of capitalism, Kociatkiewicz, Kostera, and Zueva claim that 'the only way to begin the exorcism is to face the ghost,' the tormented need to see, listen, and engage with the spectre to disrupt its endless return (2021: 2). The authors draw attention to questions of invisibility, voice, and recognition as means of exorcising the ghost. The first step is to make visible the invisible, 'the ghost needs to be exposed, the secret brought to light' (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera & Zueva 2021: 7). As explained before, Anabel reveals the lie beneath Elvira's perfect life and Mayte's friendship with Begoña exposes her vulnerability undermining the stereotype of the tough boss. The acknowledging of the truth makes visible the myths of postfeminism, so aware of its real nature and what it hides, gives the opportunity to act on it. Once the ghost is made visible, the exorcising practice needs the haunted subject to listen to what the spectre must say and engage with it to discover the unfinished business that do not allow the ghost to move on. In her son's communion, Mayte listens to Elvira's crying. It is the first time that Elvira does not appear in front of her. She is hiding under a table and Mayte goes searching for her guided by the sound of a weep. Under the table, both women have their final conversation in which Elvira finally shows her true self and admits to Mayte having done everything wrong and asks her 'por favor, ocúpate de mis hijas que no cometan los mismos errores que yo' (E8S1). Elvira realises that has nothing to do in the new reality, so the exorcism is complete, and she just disappears from Mayte's life. She only appears one more time to help and comfort Anabel in the hospital after she has been attacked by the mafia and has lost an eye. Elvira is finally honest with her, she tells her that she is 'una superviviente, estoy orgullosa de ti, Anabel, eres una guerrera, siempre lo fuiste, nunca supe verlo. Te dejé de lado, te oculté cosas, no fui sincera contigo', and says goodbye as she disappears from her life too, 'adiós Anabel, sé fuerte' (E8S1). Elvira's desire to see the protagonists in prison and seek justice vanishes, and she even applauds Begoña's gesture to take the blame for her murder. She acknowledges that 'lo que has hecho es muy bonito, ella todavía no lo sabe pero cuando se entere te lo va a agradecer toda la vida'. Elvira and Begoña disappear because they do not have any unfinished business anymore. Elvira is at peace with

her death, forgives Mayte, and has apologised to Anabel, whereas Begoña has redeemed herself in her last days.

Their exorcism suspends the future possibilities that a ghost always represents. Inheritance, as a continuation for the next generations, is what maintains the ghost's afterlife and what is rectified in the narration of *Señoras.* On one hand, Elvira realises that she cannot pass on any legacy to her daughters as she rejects her postfeminist bequest breaking with the possible future and continuance of this feminine model when she asks Mayte to take care of her daughters, so they do not make the same mistakes as her. On the other hand, the legacy of Begoña is a feminist one with her confession to save the four protagonists, her money that will be used to create a women's association, and her phrase about female solidarity, 'en el infierno hay un lugar para las mujeres que no ayudan a otras mujeres' (E12S1), which Mayte will repeat on several occasions when after her passing. The series proposes the disappearance of postfeminism as a process of exorcism in which 'we should acknowledge the ghost, engage with the torment of the haunting, and not deny its existence' (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera & Zueva 2021: 6); in the case of postfeminism this is to acknowledge its patriarchal myths, and engage with its oppressive discourses to challenge and disrupt them.

3.4. Conclusion

Señoras del (h)AMPA gives space to new narratives of rebellious mothering that challenge the canon of the perfect mother and the postfeminist woman that can 'have it all'. With a clear feminist agenda, the series contributes to the creation of alternative representations of female characters on television. The narrative breaks away from the hierarchy of motherhood that creates good and bad mothers to accept mothering practices that are considered unnatural by new momism discourses and promotes feminist maternal techniques that do not prescribe a unique model of action. Consequently, through the figure of Elvira, who represents postfeminist discourses of the good mother and the have-it-all woman, there is a debunking of the postfeminist paradigm, which is replaced by a feminist model to subdue the constraints of patriarchal motherhood. The ghost of Elvira signifies the disappearance of postfeminist ideology, that is, the awareness of its redundancy in contemporary feminist times.

The deconstruction of the postfeminist model of motherhood in *Señoras* primarily occurs through class, as it will be seen in the next chapter with the career woman in *Paquita Salas*. The protagonists of both series belonging to a lower socioeconomic class, which leads to frequent financial struggles, serves as the catalyst for dismantling the postfeminist ideals

surrounding motherhood and the romantic aspirations of career women. In *Señoras,* the protagonists' struggle transcends the postfeminist dilemma of achieving work-life balance because, set against a backdrop of financial hardship, their socioeconomic status makes it impossible to adhere to standards of acceptable mothering. Throughout history, low-income mothers have been consistently portrayed in social policy and discourse as negligent mothers. They were often depicted as absent from their children's lives, unable to maintain a clean and organised household, typically preparing quick meals, and lacking the means to provide for their children's needs. However, *Señoras* elevates them as protagonists, drawing attention to how women, so different from the postfeminist upper-class mother, negotiate ideal images of motherhood. I state that, in line with Feasy's argument in her analysis of the sitcom *Mom* (2013–), the series about working class mothers can open up a dialogue 'about appropriate maternal practices and acceptable family dynamics in a pronatalist period dominated by the ideology of intensive mothering' (2017: 24).

The series dismantles the notion of uncomplicated motherhood characterised solely by happiness and presents motherhood as a complex personal experience involving conflict, pain, ambivalence, and even regret in some instances. It confronts the patriarchal myth of maternal love and the homogenising portrayal of the sacrificial mother, presenting multifaceted and humanised maternal characters. *Señoras* celebrates the diversity of mothers operating outside normative motherhood, defying postfeminist discourses of individualism, consumerism, and sexuality, and adhering to feminist aspects of intersectionality, sorority, and class-consciousness. The women in the series are depicted as good enough mothers, encompassing various maternal identities and family structures. This approach proposes a feminist mothering that denaturalises and de-essentialises motherhood in order to create a gender-neutral approach to care work.

Amid the coexistence of postfeminism and feminism in contemporary times, *Señoras* advocates for relegating postfeminism to the past, encouraging the full embrace of feminist ideals. In a step forward to Munford and Waters' hauntology, in which the emergence of the ghost of feminism becomes a powerful device to recuperate feminism, *Señoras* revivifies feminism as the only way to achieve social equality between sexes, which would allow women to carry out their life aspirations without the obstacles imposed by patriarchal motherhood. Building on this evolving feminist paradigm, the subsequent chapter examines the series *Paquita Salas,* which challenges the patriarchal narrative of romantic love that has traditionally served as the only possible happy ending for postfeminist heroines. The

protagonists of *Paquita Salas* embrace singlehood without making it the central focus of their narratives, thereby subverting the traditional postfeminist portrayal of the career woman.

Chapter 4. *Paquita Salas*: The New Feminist Paradigm

Paquita Salas (PS) is a comedy series created in 2016 by Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo, known in Spain as *'los Javis'*. The series, filmed in a mockumentary style, focuses on the day-to-day life of Paquita Salas, a fifty-six-year-old acting agent who had great success in the past, but is now struggling to adapt to the new ways of showbiz. Over the course of three seasons, Paquita (Brays Efe) and her friends, Magüi (Belén Cuesta), Noemí (Yolanda Ramos), Belén (Anna Castillo), Lidia San José (herself), and Belinda Washington (herself) go through various career crises. They are a group of women fighting for their professional aspirations and, even in the face of failure, they manage to adapt to the new circumstances and reorganise their goals. Portrayed from a feminist perspective, these professional women disrupt the postfeminist canon of 'the single girl in the city' (Kim, 2001), which has been described by Munford and Waters in the model of the career woman.

This chapter is concerned with the exploration of the new paradigm of professional women that reflects a moment in which feminism has been revitalised and popularised in television. It is characterised by the dismantling of the career woman archetype that is built upon postfeminist tenets of empowerment, independence, consumerism, and choice in order to articulate traditional narratives of romance. The career woman is a single, modern, thirtysomething female professional who lives in urban settings, but who is unhappy about being single and desperately desires to settle down with Mr. Right. Although she is presented in her professional environment, her narrative is based on a love plot reproducing the patriarchal myth of romantic love. The postfeminist romantic story requires, therefore, that the female character is professionally successful and unhappily single, two aspects that are defied in PS's narrative.

In the first section, similar to the preceding chapters, I situate the series within its cultural context, showcasing its alignment with a trend of internet series that have transitioned to mainstream platforms. This journey is often observed in series centred on or created by women. In the case of PS, it is not created by women, but it centres on women's stories, with a predominantly female cast. In the second section, I examine how PS dismantles the sexist trope of the single professional as an incomplete, unhappy woman. Drawing on Gill's postfeminist sensibility and on the myth of romantic love, I analyse the postfeminist model as a liberated woman who 'is sabotaged by her constant search for the missing element in her life: a man and heterosexual partnership' (Genz 2010: 107), and who needs to negotiate the complicated dilemma of 'having it all' (career versus love and family).

By contrast, Paquita and the women around her break with the image of women absorbed in romance, as they interrogate and destabilise notions of heterosexual partnership, normative femininity, and the free choice that postfeminism celebrates. I argue that Paquita and her friends embody feminist versions of the career woman that are more in tune with the lived experiences of contemporary women. The series negates the ideal of the successful professional woman through the representation of flawed, failing characters and rejects the romantic plot with its conventional 'happily ever after' ending. Negra's theory of retreatism notes how marriage and settling down is the ultimate goal in the postfeminist narrative (2009: 88). Achieving this happy ending involves women abandoning or downshifting their careers, which suggests that women cannot 'have it all'. Therefore, in these postfeminist narratives of the career woman, emotional fulfilment is directed exclusively to having a married life, implying that women's happiness is only attainable through finding a partner. However, PS explores alternatives to this and offers a range of different emotionally satisfying endings for its female characters that do not reiterate a willingness to return to traditional female roles.

By discarding singleness as a problem for women, the series focuses on gender inequity as women's main concern. Section three analyses how the plots of the female characters in PS draw attention to the persisting gender barriers in current Spanish society, which undermine women's equality in the public sphere. The series underscores contemporary feminist debates such as the beauty canon on television, transsexuality, female sexuality, cyber misogyny, and the glass ceiling. With a specific focus on the film and television industry, PS highlights gender inequalities such as the lack of roles for certain feminine profiles like mature women and women who do not comply with contemporary beauty standards, the difficulty for female filmmakers in securing funding for their projects due to the assumption that women's stories are niche, the misrepresentation of trans women, and the absence of female sexual pleasure in fictional narratives. It also makes visible other inequalities that affect all women but that are more accentuated in public figures —such as actresses in this context. These include the prevalence of violence and hate speech against women on social media platforms, workplace sexism, and the significant gender imbalance in leadership positions.

My analysis of PS as a feminist series departs from the numerous studies conducted thus far. While most works on PS to date focus on the innovative techniques of the series, examining its utilisation of Spanish pop culture (Cabrera Peralt, 2020; Doñate-Ventura, 2020), the subtitling and translation of Spanish humour and culture (Ogea, 2019; Cruz, 2020; Bernabéu & Timofeev, 2022), and the transmedia storytelling characteristic of the

productions of the Javis (Vázquez González, 2020; Raya Bravo & Rubio-Hernández, 2020), in terms of gender, PS has been interpreted through a queer lens, focusing on the portrayal of homosexual aesthetics (Calvo, 2018) and the representation of subaltern identities such as transgender and bisexual individuals (Venturini, 2023). However, my analysis centres on its feminist perspective bringing together queer and feminist theories on success and failure. Drawing on J. Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), my examination of PS showcases characters seeking alternatives to conventional understandings of success. The female characters in PS dismantle the traditional understanding of success as outlined by Halberstam and embrace the concept of failure proposed by the author. Halberstam argues that 'success in heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation' (2011: 2) and asserts that failing may offer 'more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (2011: 2-3). Halberstam asserts that failure can provide an avenue to break free from the constraining norms that regulate behaviour, and further suggests that 'failing is something, that queers do and have always done exceptionally well' (2011: 3). As queer individuals who have embraced failure in their life, the Javis construct PS around the theme of failure. In the series, they incorporate their own experiences of failing as actors but through the portrayal of female characters, thus providing a platform for a feminist perspective. This align with the idea that for women, as for queers, 'failure has often been a better bet than success. Where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal standards' (Halberstam 2011: 4).

As a feminist series created prior to the emergence of #MeToo, its production and distribution followed a recurring pattern observed in successful feminist creations at the time. These works often began as low-budget projects on marginal platforms, gradually amassing significant online audiences, and eventually transitioning into mainstream products. While contemporary Spanish feminist cultural production continues to grapple for recognition from major corporations, the feminist surge in Spain in 2018 and the global MeToo movement of 2017 have notably elevated its visibility. PS, conceived just before these events, exhibits certain aspects of the series—such as its protagonist, filming style, and length— defied conventions of its time. This departure from norms was a result of the artistic freedom accorded to the directors, a consequence of the series' original focus on the internet medium.

4.1. In context: From the Margins to Mainstream, The Pathway of Feminist Productions

In any artistic field, from painting, theatre, music, and magazines to the television and film industry, feminist artists often resort to methods like self-production and crowdfunding to realise their creations before attaining recognition and visibility through mainstream channels. Within the audiovisual sector, the barriers faced by marginalised groups in accessing commercial avenues make the online space an evident choice for emerging artists and narratives that lack exposure on traditional television platforms. PS, which narrates the story of a failing mature woman, would have encountered challenges in finding acceptance by a major network, as acknowledged by Javier Calvo in an interview (Tocino 2017: unpaginated). As a result, PS follows the established trajectory of many popular feminist productions, moving from a state of precariousness to eventual success.

The storylines and character portrayals in PS are infused with feminist ideology, and the creators, the Javis, have openly expressed their strong feminist convictions:

> J.A.: Nosotros queremos que sea una serie feminista, y ojalá lo hayamos conseguido. […] J.C.: Es una serie sobre mujeres que no necesitan ningún hombre, que se mueven ellas solas, que trabajan, que sufren, que lloran, que ríen, que follan, que luchan… sí, 'Paquita' es una serie feminista y llena de discursos políticos, como el que hace Mariona cuando se desnuda en mitad de un teatro. […] Es una serie sobre mujeres que descubren su sitio. (Tocino 2017: unpaginated)

As discussed in Chapter 1, television remains marked by a lack of representation for series focused on women, racialised minorities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Such content is often deemed too niche or financially unviable within the traditional broadcast framework. Consequently, web series have emerged as a medium that offers a platform for these overlooked groups within the confines of conventional programming. In her exploration of women in web series, Iera Díaz provides illustrative examples that highlight how the Internet serves as a tool to shed light on issues that often remain invisible on television. These topics find access to the small screen only after they have demonstrated their success through online platforms (2018: 249). A striking example of this phenomenon is PS, which originated from a fifteen-second skit on Instagram and evolved into a series of five twenty-minute episodes produced for Flooxer, a web platform owned by Atresmedia. The series was filmed in a mere nine days and released twenty-two weeks after the agreement with Flooxer was established. Its impact was almost immediate, generating considerable media buzz across social networks. In an unexpected turn, due to the series' remarkable success, Netflix acquired it in 2017 and subsequently released two additional seasons in 2018 and 2019.

Hence, PS aligns with the growing trend of web series transitioning to television and mainstream streaming services, as seen with examples like *Broad City* (2014–2019) and *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* (2011). *Broad City* is an American TV series that started on YouTube and, following its success online, was picked up by the cable channel Comedy Central, and then acquired by Netflix. The writers, creators, and actors of the series are two young women, Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer. The series advocates for the women's movement, the LGBTQIA+ community, and anti-racism. Similarly, *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*, a series that challenges prevailing stereotypes of Black women in media, television, and film, was initially created for YouTube. Upon achieving significant popularity, it was adapted by HBO under the title *Insecure* (2016–2021). Issa Rae, the creator of the series, articulates in an interview how the Internet serves as an alternative storytelling platform with the potential to empower minority voices:

> I think we, as black women, need to just create the media ourselves. […] Right now, pitching your idea to a network exec or an industry liaison just isn't working, […] I think the web is the best way to go right now, and I've seen a lot of GREAT shows come off of the Internet. (Noelliste, 2011)

Stefania Marghitu notes that 'Jacobson and Glazer, and Rae first gained subcultural success with their webseries through an established fanbase that connected to their cultural specificity and relatable content, which showed crossover potential' (2019: 2). Similarly, the Javis were able to secure contracts with major companies after amassing substantial audiences. Calvo underscores that the triumph of their projects showcasing diversity 'ayuda a que luego los grandes jefes se atrevan a hacer cosas distintas' (Tocino 2017: unpaginated). Despite the noted increase in series that challenge stereotypes and provide a platform for underrepresented groups, significant invisibility of these demographics persists, as highlighted by organisations like CIMA (Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas y de Medios Audiovisuales) and Clásicas y Modernas (Asociación para la igualdad de género en la cultura). Acknowledging this reality, the Javis launched their own production company, *Suma Content*, in 2021, with the explicit aim of 'creat[ing] opportunities for those who have, historically, been shut out of mainstream production' (Lang 2021: unpaginated). Calvo stated their intention: 'we want women creators to tell women's stories, mainstream LGBTQIA+ stories told by people from that community. There is often a sense of change in the industry in Spain, but the wheel isn't moving fast enough' (Lang 2021: unpaginated). One of their initial projects under this banner was *Cardo* (2021–), a series created by Ana Costafreda and

Ana Rujas, which follows the journey of a young woman on the cusp of turning thirty and navigating a life crisis. Notably, *Cardo* emerged as a major television hit in 2021.

Committed to showcasing diversity from a feminist standpoint, the Javis present within PS content that boldly critiques patriarchy while also granting visibility to mature women through its main character. It is important to highlight that the role of Paquita is portrayed by the male actor Brays Efe, but as he has declared repeatedly: '[n]o hubo premeditación de jugar con el género en Paquita Salas' (Gomar 2017: unpaginated). Smith also mentions this aspect in his article about the Javis, highlighting that 'what is truly striking in Paquita Salas is that the mature female protagonist is played by a much younger man (Brays Efe) but without the slightest trace of camp' (2018: 42). The directors have also addressed this aspect when questioned about their intention to provide visibility to mature women in their series:

> J.A.: A mí me da mucho pudor hablar de la visibilidad de las mujeres mayores cuando hemos puesto a hacer de Paquita a un chico. Habrá gente que diga "mira estos, que van de que dan visibilidad, y el papel no se lo han dado a una señora mayor sino a un chico".
> J.C.: No tiene nada que ver. Es que ninguna actriz de 50 años hubiera hecho 'Paquita' cuando era un proyecto de Flooxer sin dinero. […] Al final, interprete el personaje quien lo interprete, que eso es una decisión artística, lo importante es que una mujer se sienta representada. (Tocino 2017: unpaginated)

As mentioned in the extract, a significant part of this decision was the precarious situation of filming it. It was a project among friends. Efe conceived the character of the talent agent during a dinner with the directors, aiming to craft a sketch for posting on Instagram. The series' narrative unfolded organically from Efe's portrayal of the character, who began as a man with distinctive glasses as shown in the initial sketch, eventually evolving into a woman during the scripting process. The series operates under the assumption that Paquita is perceived by audiences as a woman. It presents an example of cross-gender acting wherein Efe is not acting as a man pretending to be a woman; rather, his character is an authentic woman who happened to be played by a man. This creative choice resonates with other instances in contemporary cinema, such as Cate Blanchett's portrayal of Bob Dylan in *I'm Not Here* (2017) due to a casting decision for her silhouette.

Although portrayed by a male actor, Paquita and her friends authentically embody aspects of contemporary womanhood, sidestepping the replication of idealised postfeminist paradigms. The directors distinctly convey that the narrative does not centre on conventional notions of femininity:

> J.A.: Es una historia de una mujer sin ser una historia de amor, ni divorcios, ni familia, ni madre. Es sobre su trabajo, es una historia profesional de una mujer.

> J.C.: Unas mujeres: Magüi, Mariona, Lidia…
> J.A.: Exacto, es de un grupo de tías fuertes, luchadoras y que no se van a doblegar a su físico, a que les impongan cómo pensar, etc. (Tocino 2017: unpaginated).

Within the series, they introduce alternative representations to the postfeminist archetype of the career woman, dismantling stereotypes concerning romantic love, beauty norms, and singleness.

4.2. The New Career Woman: Singleness Is Not the Problem

Television has been decisive in constructing and disseminating the different versions of the new woman, who, in the 1960s, started participating in the professional sphere. Bonnie J. Dow (1996) mapped evident changes in the portrayals of working women in series in a span of thirty years. In the 1970s, they represented professional female characters choosing a career instead of a man. For those characters, 'work was not just a prelude to marriage' (Dow 1996: 24). This disrupted the period's conventional television representations of femininity because the female protagonists no longer were the good wife prototype or the single adult woman who was hunting for a man (Dow 1996: 34). Instead, these new women were single by choice. Their stories narrated the fight for their independence and their right to access a profession. By contrast, in the 1980s, working women's fictions illustrated the incompatibility of professional success and femininity. The shows presented very successful professional women, but they were always 'desexualized, masculinized, and undermined as a feminine woman at every level—in dress, manner, personality, and so forth' (Dubrofsky 2002: 271). Their competence seemed inversely proportional to their femininity. However, in mid-1990s TV, professional women recovered their femininity, especially in their desire for love, family, and children. The representation of women who were fighting for their independence and the realisation of their profession was replaced by 'the depiction of independent women who are shown as unhappy because of this independence (like *Ally McBeal*)' (Kim 2001: 320). This marked a shift to postfeminist discourses that celebrated traditional femininity. These series served as cautionary tales, portraying the female professional as a woman whose success came at the cost of her personal and domestic life, rendering her miserable and unhappy. This novel representation of the professional woman initially surfaced in literature with Helen Fielding's book *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), subsequently serving as a prototype for a majority of works portraying working women.

Fielding's novel marked the beginning of a new genre in woman's fiction known as 'chick lit' that shaped popular culture at the turn of the millennium. This genre occupies a

significant space within postfeminist discourse, exploring the complexities of contemporary womanhood within the framework of postfeminist ideals, such as female empowerment, individuality, consumerism, and heteronormativity. Heroines of chick-lit are 'presented as financially independent, working outside the home, and sexually assertive' (Gill & Herdieckerhoff 2006: 498), reflecting the postfeminist notion of female empowerment. Many chick-lit narratives are situated within a context of consumer culture, with characters frequently engaging in shopping, dining out, and other leisure activities, emphasising lifestyle choices and consumption. However, the pursuit of love is the central theme of these narratives which reinforces conventional notions of romance and heteronormativity. These independent professional female characters exhibit the fear of remaining single and childless into their thirties, a sentiment that reflects what Faludi identified as a backlash against the feminist advances made in the 1970s. As discussed in Chapter 1, Faludi demonstrated how media narratives during the 1980s propagated inauthentic stories that eventually became common sense for society such as the 'infertility epidemic', the 'man-shortage', and the likelihood that a woman over thirty had more chances of being killed by a terrorist than getting married (1992: 1-2).

Shaped by these anxieties, the portrayal of singleness becomes the central concern of the main female character in chick lit. It emerges as a 'problem' particularly for professional women who may have neglected their personal life when entering the job market. Following this model, in television series about working women, the love relationships acquire the greatest importance in the configuration of the female character, which positions her exclusively in the romance genre reinforcing patriarchal notions of heterosexual coupledom. Romantic love presents heterosexual relationships as the sole partnership possible, as it involves the union of two supposedly distinct and complementary essences—male and female. This notion intertwines 'la consecución del amor (completitud del ser) con la de la felicidad, haciendo del amor y la búsqueda de la otra mitad una meta vital' (Pascual Fernández 2016: 66). In enacting the myth of romantic love, postfeminist narratives operate as contemporary fairy tales in which the female protagonist embarks on a quest to find her Prince Charming. This idealised ending, often characterised as 'happily ever after' serves to 'un-single' the supposedly problematic single subject.

Romantic success and the prospect of a family become the only plausible happy ending for professional women in postfeminist narratives. As a result, television series often conclude their main storylines by proposing domestic and romantic contentment for women, while men frequently achieve career-related success. The postfeminist career woman suffers

from a state of incompleteness because she is unmarried without children, but this is resolved when she rejects the professional sphere, which implies a restoration of the gendered public (male) and private (female) spaces. Negra has coined the term 'retreatism' to encapsulate this narrative tendency that relocates the female protagonist within the domestic realm. In her analysis of a wide range of films and television series, Negra identifies a recurrent pattern, the retreatist theme, which invariably concludes stories by re-establishing the patriarchal status quo. In these postfeminist narratives, the career woman undergoes a 'retreatist epiphany,' wherein she realises that her professional pursuits fail to bring fulfilment to her life, and that her happiness depends on securing a (heterosexual) partner and a family. To fulfil this feminine desire, she is often compelled to downshift her career or abandon it entirely. Negra contends that these '"adjustment ambition" narratives work to discredit the meaning and value of work in the heroine's life or at least to insist that it be made secondary to romance' (2009: 88). As Alyssa Franke and Danny Nicol point out, home-oriented life for a man or a woman is not problematic if they freely desire it, 'what makes that situation regressive is the exertion and denial of social and economic pressure that shoehorns women into that role, pressure from which men are disproportionally free' (2018: 202). This disparity becomes particularly apparent in television series where the option of domestic life is seldom presented as a male character's preferred conclusion, in stark contrast to the frequent presentation of female characters' happy endings that 'lean into regressive narratives about femininity and how women find fulfilment in their lives' as a mother or wife (Franke & Nicol 2018: 208). In postfeminist narratives of the career woman, the constant focus on the impossibility of having a successful career and a satisfying personal life leads audiences to assume that women are incapable of 'having it all,' while potentially disregarding the social and economic changes that could address this issue. The retreatist narrative structure perpetuates the notion that women's personal choices are the sole avenue to reconcile the work-life dilemma.

PS emerges as a novel paradigm shift in the portrayal of working women within TV series, presenting alternative renditions of female professionals that diverge from the postfeminist archetype of the unhappy single career woman. This series also eschews the notion of heterosexual romance as the only narrative trajectory for female characters. Paquita and her friends constitute the 'new career woman' in light of the feminist turn in female representations on television. The series showcases the change from the postfeminist model based on a feminine concern with love and romance to a feminist subject that centres the narration on her professional dimension without excluding her personal life. In portraying

single women, PS certainly encompasses elements of sex and romance, yet these romantic pursuits do not define the characters' overall narrative. The female protagonists do not necessarily struggle for independence or seek to assert themselves within male-dominated realms. Instead, they navigate the contingencies of finding a fulfilling life project that could make them happy. Their storylines revolve around the challenges they encounter in their careers, such as persistent workplace sexism, uncertainties about their chosen professions, and occasional professional setbacks. Their personal lives are not the central focus because they are portrayed as women who are emotionally satisfied in their friendships, familial ties, and/or sexual relationships. While emotional problems within their relationships may arise, these conflicts do not dominate their plotlines. The portrayal of this new career woman disrupts two foundational assumptions embedded within the postfeminist model: her success in the workplace and the romantic love as the central storyline.

4.2.1 – Success Is Not Easy

As Rachel Dubrofsky states in her analysis of *Ally McBeal* as a postfeminist icon, in postfeminist narratives, the heroine's 'professional success is a given' (2002: 273). The women in these narratives are remarkably competent and accomplished in their professions, adhering to the 'top girl' ideal and the concept of perfection as defined by McRobbie. This portrayal is evident in series such as *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City,* where postfeminist professional women embody an image of success that appears effortlessly achieved. In both series, the main characters are highly educated women with impressive careers. Ally and her colleagues excel as lawyers, demonstrating intelligence and effectiveness in the courtroom. They earn admiration and respect from their male counterparts. Likewise, the protagonists of *Sex and the City*—Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda—occupy prominent roles in their respective fields: journalism, PR management, art gallery management, and law. Throughout the series, all of them are seen ascending in their careers in a seemingly effortless way. As Ouellette notes, their status in the workplace 'is indeed so secure that disappointments and problems focus almost entirely on their personal lives' (2002: 321). Thus, while these series present successful working women, their narratives predominantly centre around personal rather than professional matters. Conversely, PS redirects the narrative spotlight towards the workplace and the challenges of achieving success. Unlike the depicted top-tier professionals in other series, the protagonists of PS do their best in their jobs, but they are not necessarily at the pinnacle of their fields. Instead, they grapple with the reality of

seeking meaningful career paths and confront situations of disillusionment, frustration, and even failure in their pursuit of professional accomplishments.

The series delves into the challenges faced by Paquita as she strives to maintain her struggling agency afloat after her most renowned client, Macarena García, leaves. Her efforts to secure new clients and retain existing ones are fraught with difficulty. While Paquita enjoyed her heyday in the 1990s, she now finds herself adrift in the contemporary entertainment landscape. Her pursuit of excellence appears anchored in a bygone market model, leading her endeavours to fall short of desired outcomes. Unlike postfeminist professionals, who are admired in their fields, Paquita is not respected in her sector due to her agency's lack of success and is perceived in many situations as a loser who people do not take into consideration. She often becomes the subject of disregard, with recurrent scenes portraying encounters where individuals from the entertainment industry—actors, directors, and managers, whom she claims to know—either do not remember her or are not familiar with her.

The series frequently showcases her experiences of humiliation at the hands of other professionals. For instance, in the episode 'La actriz 360' (E2S1), Paquita discovers that her former assistant, Fernando Canelón, who has risen to become a significant talent agent, now represents Macarena. In a heated exchange during a theatre event, he publicly criticises Paquita for her perceived inadequacies as an agent, exclaiming, '[p]or favor, Paquita, que yo no tengo la culpa de que me vayan bien las cosas. Macarena vino a verme para que la representara porque tú te estás quedando antigua y eres muy pesada'. On another occasion, during her attendance at a meeting of ARAE, the Spanish Association of Acting Agents, she is met with a chorus of exasperated glances and uncomfortable silence from her fellow agents. Her professional shortcomings are further emphasised when she is excluded from a celebration and a photo shoot meant to feature Spanish talent agents for a prestigious film magazine, a fact that illustrates her professional failure. She is not even recognised as an agent by her colleagues:

> President of ARAE: Esta foto es una foto para representantes.
> Paquita: Pero es que yo soy representante.
> President of ARAE: No, no lo eres. Una representante que no trabaja no es una representante, Paquita. Lo siento. (E2S3)

Throughout the series, Paquita emerges as a person who is trying to find her place in a profession where she does not excel. This theme extends to her circle of friends, who are similarly far from perfect. In her quest to keep her agency relevant in the entertainment

industry, Paquita enlists the help of a group of women who are all navigating their own career difficulties.

One such friend is Magüi Moreno, a Marketing graduate, who serves as Paquita's devoted assistant and closest confidante. She admires Paquita and, although sometimes she totally disagrees with her decisions, she supports her unconditionally. While she invests substantial effort and goodwill into her work, she is prone to making constant mistakes. Notably, the plot of the first episode hinges on one of these errors—her unawareness of a spam folder where certain emails are diverted, highlighting her lack of expertise. Throughout the series, Magüi's confusion regarding her tasks in various jobs becomes apparent. She continues to work with Paquita until the agency's closure, subsequently securing a position at a fashion company. The fashion sector is unknown to her, and she does not get used to the fast pace and stress brought about by her new position, which leads to frequent errors in her performance. An illustrative instance occurs in the episode 'B-Fashion' (E2S3), where viewers witness Magüi in her new job for the first time. Her storyline revolves around an error she makes—sending a famous actress the wrong party dress. Her attempts to rectify the situation result in a series of misunderstandings, ultimately culminating in Magüi tearfully pleading for the dress's return, fearing for her job. At the end of the episode, she realises that she is not happy in this job, yearning for her previous role in acting management. Her current position proves challenging due to a competitive and hostile environment, coupled with an unsupportive boss. Nevertheless, Magüi persists, acknowledging that while her current job is not fulfilling, it remains her only option at present. This scenario stands in marked contrast to the description of the postfeminist career woman who typically derives satisfaction from her profession.

Lidia San José, Paquita's oldest client, is portrayed as a tireless actress who embarked on her career at the age of five. She does not cease to fight for continuing in the business even though she is very unlucky. She is represented as a forgotten figure in the industry because after having participated in some popular television series in the nineties, few people remember her. She only gets small roles in television series, but she keeps working, hoping to find a better job. The extent of her lack of success becomes evident in her initial appearance in the series. Paquita introduces her as an actress with an extensive career, retracing her roles from her childhood and teenage years. However, as they delve into Lidia's adult career, both characters struggle to recall significant works beyond her early years:

> Paquita: y… ¿y qué más?, una película en China, pero nunca… Me dio mucha pena. Hacían kun-fu, ¿no?

(Silencio)
Paquita: Bueno, y teatro.
Lidia: Sí, teatro y microteatro.
(Silencio)
Paquita: Ah, los diez 'pasapalabras'[10]
Lidia: Sí, los 'pasapalabras'. Treinta. (E1S1)

This dialogue makes evident the scarcity of roles that Lidia has done in films and television. Her career path has compelled her to take on jobs in theatre and even a game show, underscoring the challenging reality faced by many individuals in the acting profession. A study by Queen Mary University reveals the striking statistic that 'unemployment rates hover at around ninety percent' (Williams, Lacasa & Latora, 2019). This dire situation is emphasised by Paquita during a disagreement with a trans actress, where she draws attention to Lidia's two-decade struggle in the industry: '¿Quién tiene más difícil conseguir un papel como actriz, una actriz transexual o Lidia San José? Porque llevo 20 años a su lado y no ha sido un camino de rosas' (E2S3).

Throughout the series, Lidia serves as a poignant representation of the difficulties many actors confront. She often finds herself awaiting roles that never materialise, receiving minimal auditions, and acting as a backup for high-profile events when top actors are unavailable. She sees how new actresses in the agency get jobs faster than her because they are younger. Even, her attempt to invest in her career by creating a short film with herself as the lead ends in disappointment. One particularly revealing episode, titled 'El secreto' (E3S2) highlights Lidia's disillusionment with her unstable acting career. In it, she is attending a film premiere, but is denied access to the photocall due to the presence of numerous other celebrities. In an effort to maintain appearances and fulfil her obligations with the designer who has lent her the gown, she arranges for a staged photograph to be taken after everyone has left. The sequence of the premiere ends with Lidia in an elegant red gown eating some lentils heated in the microwave while posting her photo at the event. This captures the façade of success that many within the entertainment industry must maintain, even when reality paints a different picture. In the same episode, Lidia's struggles come into sharp focus when she finally lands a television role in a highly rated series. While the opportunity appears promising, her anxieties and insecurities surface, hampering her performance during the shoot. Her difficulty delivering lines and prolonged shooting time result in her not being called back to the series, underlining the fragility of her position in the industry. Lidia's

[10] *Pasapalabra* is the adapted version of the British format *The Alphabet Game*.

character serves as an in-depth portrayal of the challenges faced by the majority of individuals striving to establish themselves in the acting profession.

Belinda Washington's story shares similarities with Lidia's in terms of experiencing a decline in popularity after achieving fame in the 1990s. Just like Lidia, Belinda was once a renowned actress and TV presenter during that era. However, her professional career has not been very fruitful in recent years, and she finds it difficult to find work as an actress. Belinda illustrates how women's chances to succeed in acting fall precipitously as they age. She is a divorced woman with a child, so, while waiting for the call to come back to acting, she tries to find other artistic ways to get paid jobs. She forms a band where she is the lead singer and performs in smaller venues. Belinda's status as a client takes a backseat until the third season when Paquita establishes a new agency with Lidia and Belinda as her sole clients. Prior to this, new and potentially more successful clients took precedence in Paquita's efforts.

Mariona Terés is the new actress with whom Paquita wants to revitalise the agency. Following the departure of Macarena, Paquita and Magüi attend a drama student play to scout for fresh talents. Despite their initial interest in the play's protagonist, they ultimately sign Mariona, who played a minor role as the maid. Mariona lacks various skills necessary for a successful acting career. Additionally, Paquita voices concerns about her lack of photogenic qualities, people's refusal to cast her because she does not conform to beauty standards, and her absence of English language skills. Despite all this, Mariona secures immediate success after Paquita arranges an audition for a film. While she achieves recognition and triumph, her narrative diverges from the archetype of an over-achieving and highly skilled professional often seen in postfeminist narratives. Once Mariona attains significance in the industry, she departs from Paquita's agency. Hence, this success is not shared with Paquita, who interprets it as another personal setback.

Belén de Lucas becomes the new addition after Mariona leaves the agency. She initially worked as a waitress but harboured dreams of becoming an actress. Belén's connection to Paquita comes through her cousin Álex, who serves as a courier and general assistant in the agency, as well as Magüi's boyfriend. Álex insists that Paquita review Belén's *videobook* when the agency is in dire need of new talent. As Belén starts auditioning for roles, an unfortunate turn of events leads to the agency's closure. In the midst of this, Belén questions her true passion for acting and contemplates pursuing a career as a scriptwriter and director. Her aspirations to study at the RESAD (Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático) are met with disappointment as her work falls short of the school's standards. The episode titled 'B-Fashion' (E2S3) critiques institutions like RESAD that impose their system as the

only way to be successful and asserts that, in reality, there are many pathways to success. Belén's experience serves as an example to this notion. Despite her setback, Belén is not discouraged to keep writing, which culminates in her creation of a popular film that offers opportunities for her friends as well.

Noemí Argüelles is one of the more enigmatic characters in the series. She embodies a hustler mentality, dabbling in various business ventures, some of which may be illicit. Introduced initially as a vendor of Divacel, a dubious miracle product, Noemí is eventually revealed to be operating a pyramid scheme. Later, she takes on the role of a hairdresser, using Paquita's agency as a makeshift co-working space. Her lack of formal qualifications becomes evident when a client enquires about her credentials as an aesthetician. Her response humorously dismisses any formal training, highlighting her self-made approach:

> Client: ¿Pero tú eres *esteticién*?
> Noemí: A ver, *esteticién*… Soy *esteticién* un poco de la vida. (E4S2)

This client was actually an investigative journalist that reports Noemí's illegalities because, in addition to not being a certified aesthetician, she keeps selling Divacels that are out of the market due to being considered a health hazard. Consequently, Noemí goes into hiding. In the final season, she resurfaces as the agency's Community Manager, despite her limited understanding of social media. Employing her signature line, she takes on the role with her usual confidence, proclaiming '¿Soy *community manager*? Puede ser. De la vida' (E3S3). Noemí embodies a con artist spirit, performing various jobs with unwavering assurance, even though she lacks any proper training. As a community manager, she imparts social media lessons to Paquita, Lidia, and Belinda, exposing her lack of expertise through her humorous mispronunciations and amusing makeup-related definitions for technological concepts like Trending Topic and Hashtag.

Lastly, a recurring character that becomes essential in the third season is Clara Valle. She is introduced in the first season in the episode 'Hasta Navarrete' (E3S1), and she does not appear again until season three. Clara is a former client of Paquita's, who faked a film career in Hollywood with the help of Paquita, Magüi, and Photoshop. When the truth is revealed, she is forced to retreat from the industry and find a new purpose in life. Feeling responsible for Clara's discredit, Paquita offers her to stay in her mother's house, in Navarrete, to hide from the media pressure. There, she starts a new life taking care of Paquita's mother and teaching theatre to kids. Clara serves as a powerful illustration of the consequences of pursuing success at any cost and the disillusionment that may come from such a path.

Besides exposing the struggles of these women's careers, the mockumentary style employed in PS adds an additional layer of critique to the narrative of the effortless successful career woman. As a mockumentary, PS reproduces the documentary codes in its form to achieve the effect of truth-telling and it offers a parody of the increasingly popular autobiographical genre that focuses on successful and glamorous female entrepreneurs. Maria Adamson defines this genre as 'the female celebrity CEO autobiography genre' (2017: 315), which presents celebrity business women as role models for women aspiring to leadership in business. The autobiographical texts of powerful women take on different forms, for example, magazine articles, television interviews, and books such as the autobiographical best-seller *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) by Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, and the biography *Ana Botín. Nacida para triunfar. La reina de la banca* (2017) by Ana Samboal, about the CEO of Banco Santander. The most relevant examples of this genre for the purposes of this thesis are documentaries like *The September Issue* (2009), which explores the fashion mogul Anna Wintour's career, as well as more recent films like *Chiara Ferragni: Unposted* (2019) and *Dulceida al desnudo* (2022), in which both influencers explain the steps that they have taken to achieve success. According to studies on these autobiographical narratives (Adamson 2017, Adamson & Kelan 2019, Pritchard, Mackenzie Davey & Cooper 2019; Nadin, Smith & Jones 2020), their accounts confirm and reproduce the postfeminist career woman stereotype with discourses of choice, individualism, and femininity. These female celebrity executives 'promote not only business ideas, but also particular ideals of *the kind of woman* one needs to be to achieve success' (Adamson & Kelan 2019: 982). PS challenges this overly optimistic postfeminist version of the female entrepreneur by presenting Paquita with her story of failure as a protagonist in one of these documentaries. The series exaggerates the image of success presented in front of the camera, contrasting it with the reality behind the scenes, which is rife with disaster, unsuccessful attempts, and flops.

Adamson and Kelan explore the construction of the 'female hero' as the role model presented by celebrity businesswomen through their autobiographical narratives (2019: 981). This figure is characterised by three features: confidence, control, and courage. Paquita is presented as the anti-heroine who lacks those attributes. She is over-confident, which, according to Adamson and Kelan's analyses, is a negative quality because confidence for women must be carefully balanced in 'the right way' (2019: 988): having too much is also a problem. With respect to the second attribute, she is never in control, although she tries. PS emphasises the external circumstances that escape someone's control (accidents,

technological problems, casting decisions, etc.). Furthermore, Paquita is not in control of her emotions. She is eccentric, loud, and irascible, so she is not emotionally balanced, a quality expected from a woman who wants to get to the top. Courage, the last trait included in the 'female hero' role model, is presented in success stories as the woman being unable to give up. A woman must be in 'the constant battle,' exhibiting endurance, and relentless energy, and they cannot stop when they are tired, they have to push on (Adamson & Kelan 2019: 991).

In the series, although Paquita is depicted as a hard-working, tenacious woman, she is allowed to give up, to stop fighting when circumstances make it impossible to continue. Paquita shuts down her agency in Season Two due to a debt derived from an accident in which a very valuable object was broken. In Season Three, after a break in her career, Paquita feels that she has the strength and the passion to go back to work and opens an acting agency again, but it is different from what she had before. Now, she only manages two clients, Lidia and Belinda, and her office is her house. In this situation, she is not looking for recognition and awards for her agency, but for doing what she enjoys in life, which is working in the entertainment business. The Javis suggest that it is also necessary to have the courage to abandon your dream and redirect your life and aspirations to a more plausible goal. Paquita does not follow the 'female hero' role model, but she eventually achieves some success in the final episode. PS reveals that success is not only the result of the meritocratic principles reinforced in that model because, besides individual efforts and hard work, the series shows how crucial external elements such as good timing, chance, and seizing opportunities offered by luck are. The series offers a more realistic story of the difficulties and risks of being an entrepreneur. It also questions the concepts of success and failure in a society marked by a misunderstood obsession with success and, at the same time, by a fear of failure. Paquita, in the series as well as in the 'biographical' book published about her life titled *Paquita Salas, Superviviente* (2020), does not measure her career in relation to her success or failure, but by the happiness she feels for dedicating her life to what she is truly passionate about.

The fact that the characters in PS are not successful professionals destabilises the postfeminist model of the career woman that is constructed upon the notion of women's accomplishment in their jobs. Professional success is the stepping stone to the postfeminist narrative that resituates heterosexual romance as a factor of utmost importance to the happiness of women. Nevertheless, in PS, the emphasis on the challenges faced by the female characters within their work environments lessens the significance of the romantic storyline and the traditional happily-ever-after ending within the narrative. It inverts the postfeminist narrative in which the protagonists, being successful in their careers, do not face significant

conflict to drive the story forward, so the focus shifts to the romantic field. In PS, as the main characters strive for success in their jobs, the action primarily revolves around the professional struggles, with the romantic plot taking secondary stage.

4.2.2 – Love Is Not All We Need

By prioritising the career in the characters' storylines, PS defies the postfeminist romantic narrative and dispels the myth of romantic love that portrays the single woman as a 'deficient' identity that needs to be completed through the union with a man, consequently embracing the traditional roles of wife and mother. The series presents diversity in the characters' emotional life, challenging the postfeminist narrative's promotion of heterosexual, monogamous relationships as the norm. The only conventional romantic plotline in the series (Magüi and Álex) is swiftly resolved, in contrast to typical romance narratives that employ obstacles to delay the formation of the 'right' couple until the final scenes. Their romantic subplot unfolds within just a few scenes, and by the fourth episode of the first season, they are already a couple. Magüi harbours a secret affection for Álex, who frequently appears at the office for deliveries and assistance. In the first episode, Magüi's romantic interest in Álex becomes evident. Her interactions with him make her visibly nervous, with the camera capturing close-ups of her enamoured expressions. In the third episode, Magüi becomes distressed when Álex declines her invitation to a theatre play due to prior plans with his girlfriend. The fourth episode commences with a song in which Magüi expresses her love for Álex in her daydreams. While Magüi watches Álex fixing a shelf, a scene set against a white background represents Magüi's imagination in a musical number, where she sings to him:

> Ahí está el mejor macho que he visto,
> seguro que no sabe ni que yo existo.
> Siempre trabaja hasta que termina muerto,
> ardo en deseos de que trabaje mi cuerpo.
> Yo puedo ser alguien para enamorarte
> y con un ron, la perra más excitante.
> Siento en mi cuerpo un dolor que me devora, …
> Dime visionaria, dime *regionaria* [sic],
> Pero estoy segura que soy tu secretaria.
> Puedo ser tu musa, puedo ser tu esclava,
> puedo ser tu diva, puedo ser tu secretaria.
> Y un día al fin, me convertiré en tu esposa.
> Nos pasarán 3000 millones de cosas.
> Haré galletas a cambio de morreos,
> si no me salen compraré unas Oreo. (E4S1)

In this imagined sequence, Magüi performs the song while dancing sensually. In certain scenes, she is attired in a stereotypical secretary outfit, featuring a white shirt, pencil skirt,

high heels, and glasses. In another scene, she wears a bridal gown, symbolising a marriage to Álex. This musical number constructs a traditional love narrative that portrays a submissive and yearning woman in pursuit of a man's affection. It tells the tale of an overlooked woman deeply in love with an alpha male figure, finishing in a happily ever after ending when she weds him. This portrayal reflects the romantic ideal ingrained in Magüi's imagination, shaped by popular culture, which contrasts starkly with the reality of her personal narrative. By the episode's conclusion, her fantasy materialises as she and Álex become a couple. However, the subsequent segments of the series reveal that Magüi and Álex's relationship does not conform to the conventional norms presented in the musical sequence. Their dynamic is characterised by equality rather than Magüi becoming subservient to Álex.

PS presents an alternative form of masculinity embodied by the character of Álex. Contrary to traditional male identity norms, he encompasses 'feminine-typed characteristics such as cooperation, sympathy, empathy, and emotional expression' (Engstrom 2017: 47). Álex frequently assists Magüi with the various challenges that arise in the office, including tasks such as emails, photo shoots, and video castings. He also provides her reassurance during her difficult moments. In the final episode of season two, Magüi is worried because she decides to turn down an offer to remain in Paquita's office with the new tenants after the agency's closure, despite the risk of unemployment. At that pivotal moment, Álex appears with copies of her CV to aid her in finding a new job, alleviating her concerns. On another occasion, following a particularly complicated day at the fashion company when she made a mistake, Álex awaits her at home with lasagne, showing concern for her well-being and providing comfort. In Magüi's storyline, getting Mr. Right is not the end, nor do her actions focus on her sentimental relationship once they are a couple. She continues to embark on a journey of self-discovery in her professional life and her friendship with Paquita.

In Lidia's case, she engages in various relationships throughout the series, yet by the end, viewers are left uncertain about whether she is single or in a partnership. In the first episode, she's shown flirting with the actor Maxi Iglesias at an event, but three episodes later, her homosexuality is revealed after a sexual encounter with Noemí in an elevator. As the first season concludes, she introduces the well-known influencer Dulceida as her girlfriend.[11] However, in the second season, she seems single again, having a one-night stand with another actress during a film festival. Lidia identifies as a lesbian, but her sexual orientation does not

[11] Spanish influencer named Aida Domenech best known for her YouTube channel and blog, both titled Dulceida.

exclusively shape her character. Even her 'coming out' is not a central theme in the plot. The series approaches her sexuality casually. She talks about it with Paquita when she asks her about her sportswear. Lidia responds, 'es que me estoy poniendo al día con esto del *running*'. ¿Sabes que se ha puesto muy de moda? Sobre todo en el mundo lésbico. Es que ahora soy lesbiana' (E5S1). Lidia enjoys an active romantic and sexual life, but it does not hold paramount importance within her narrative. Instead, the series portrays her as a multifaceted character with diverse dimensions beyond her sexuality.

Belinda is the character who appears most invested in finding a partner, yet she faces challenges in her romantic pursuits. In her first scene of the series, she consults a fortune teller about a man and is disheartened when the card reading reveals he is gay. Later, when Noemí instructs the women in the office on using social media, Belinda initiates a relationship with a police officer through Tinder. However, the series does not definitively indicate whether they remain together at the end, as her storyline places greater emphasis on the media scandal arising from this relationship and the subsequent advancement of her career. Her relationship becomes relevant only as a trigger of a series of incidents that result in an unexpected increase in her popularity when an intimate video that was meant for him is leaked to the public. Regarding Noemí's romantic life, the series offers little insight, save for the elevator encounter with Lidia. Clara also experiences a brief romantic subplot within the series when she crosses paths with Ryan, the new English teacher at the school in Navarrete. Ryan invites her to the town festivities, prompting hesitation on Clara's part due to concerns that he might recognise her as the actress who fabricated a Hollywood career. Following advice from Belinda, she meets him, leading to a romantic moment during a concert where they dance and share a kiss. After that, the series refrains from providing further information about this particular couple.

Finally, when it comes to Paquita, her priorities are unmistakably established in the first episode titled 'Casada con esto,' where she underscores that her primary commitment lies in her job, relegating her romantic life to a secondary position. She had been married to film producer Paco Cerdeña for five years. However, they ultimately divorced due to growing apart. In her biography, Paquita confesses that,

> A Paco le gustaba su trabajo, pero no era como yo y poco a poco nos fuimos distanciando. Él siempre se reservaba su tiempo libre para estar con amigos y familiares, pero yo no entendía qué era eso. (Ambrossi & Calvo 2020: 116)

The evident link between her wholehearted dedication to her job and the cause of her divorce comes to light in the flashback episode 'Punto de partida' (E5S2), which portrays Paquita's

first day in her office in 1994. In this episode, Paco and Paquita are presented as a happy couple who work in tandem, but the viewers are also privy to the unravelling of their marriage. A moment illustrating this occurs when Paquita is at the office with young Lidia, awaiting her parents to pick her up following an audition that day. Despite her need to attend an important dinner with Paco, the plans are disrupted when Lidia's mother calls to convey that their flight has been cancelled, rendering them unable to make it. Then, Paquita remains with Lidia while Paco awaits her at the dinner with clients. The camera captures Paco's visibly annoyed expression as he checks the time, validating the account that Paquita provides in her memoirs. Throughout the series, Paquita engages in occasional sexual encounters with both her ex, Paco, and a friend's husband from her hometown. However, these relationships are purely physical in nature, devoid of any romantic attachments.

Despite engaging in both sexual and romantic narratives, the pursuit of romance does not become the centre of these women's lives as it often does in chick-lit narratives. The women in PS are constructed as independent individuals, with the focal point shifting to their relationship with themselves, their desires, fears, and experiences, defying traditional romances, where men play a role in shaping a woman's identity. The series introduces new storylines for the female characters, diverging from the sole emphasis on romantic love and altering the typical 'happily ever after' ending described in retreatism. For Paquita and her friends, happiness is not synonymous with having a husband and settling down. Instead, the series concludes their stories with triumph over their fears, the strengthening of their female friendships, and achievements in their professional endeavours.

Belén's happy ending is the discovery of her vocation, a profession that brings her fulfilment. Previously a waitress with aspirations of becoming an actress, Belén embarks on her acting career, only to realise that the job fails to provide her with satisfaction. In her own words: 'Yo estaba ahí, haciendo la prueba y me ha pasado lo mismo que cuando estaba currando de camarera. Que es que no sentía nada' (E4S2). Throughout her varied experiences in the film industry, she finds purpose and direction in her professional life, ultimately uncovering her true passion in making films. In the final season, she writes and directs the film *Hasta Navarrete*, narrating the story of Clara who had to abandon her acting career due to Paquita's managerial mistake. Belén's film garners outstanding reviews, leading to her nomination for best new director at the Goya Awards. Her happy ending stems from discovering a job that ignites her passion.

For many of the protagonists, Belén's project becomes a pathway to happiness. Magüi ultimately resigns from her dissatisfying job at the fashion company and, alongside Álex,

takes on the role of a production assistant in Belén's film. Her happy ending materialises by working with her loved ones within a sector she enjoys. As a sensitive individual, Magüi finds a workplace with a familiar atmosphere where she can apply the skills that she acquired during her time with Paquita in the entertainment industry. Similar to Magüi, Belén's film marks a turning point in Lidia's career. She becomes part of the film's cast, and the experience serves as a stepping stone to securing more job opportunities. During the finale, after the film premiere, she is inundated with interview requests from various programmes. She even receives congratulations from renowned film director Julio Medem, expressing interest in discussing a new project with her.[12] Lidia, finally, makes a career comeback. Belinda also breaks her streak of setbacks when she unexpectedly returns to the limelight due to a private video that goes viral. She capitalises on this chance to redirect her career, leading to a meteoric rise in popularity. She evolves into a highly sought-after singer, receiving brand endorsement offers and invitations to perform on radio and television shows. Belinda's triumph directly influences Noemí's trajectory. Having secured a role in Paquita's new agency as a community manager, Noemí advances to the position of press officer and co-manager, partnering with Paquita. While Paquita handles talent representation, Noemí focuses on contract negotiation and publicity. She appears to have secured a stable job that suits her well, leveraging her skills in persuasion and making deals.

Regarding Paquita's happy ending, the mere act of reopening her agency marks a significant achievement. Additionally, the future of her agency seems promising when another potential client approaches her. Susana, the star of Belén's film, requests Paquita to serve as her agent, as she's already receiving offers for projects in Hollywood. In the closing scenes, Paquita and Magüi observe joyously as all their friends relish professional success on the film's opening night. They go off together to celebrate their friendship and happiness for these triumphs. The series concludes with the two friends strolling through the streets of Madrid, engaging in heartfelt conversations about their personal lives, as this reunion follows a period of separation caused by the closure of the first agency.

PS delivers an emotionally satisfying ending to its audience without resorting to the conventional resolution of the female characters' marriage. It breaks with the postfeminist narrative ending in which 'through the rhetoric of choice, female characters reproduce retrogressive ideals of femininity in which romantic commitment displaces work' (Negra 2009: 88). The female characters' arc is not a romance narrative, but a journey of self-

[12] Julio Medem is a Basque film director, producer, editor, and screenwriter.

discovery and professional affirmation motivated by their desire to make a career of their passion. The women in PS challenge the themes and aesthetics of postfeminist series of the single woman defying the angst over single womanhood portrayed in them and confirming that, as CIMA director Inés París declared, 'las mujeres vivimos para algo más que para el amor' (Caso, as quoted in Coronado Ruiz 2022: 166). The series proposes new narratives 'with affairs of the heart as only one aspect of a broad spectrum of issues that are central to women's lives' (Schreiber 2014: 2). It focuses on the adversities in the world of acting and, particularly on the actresses' struggles because there are situations that are especially different for them just because they are women.

4.3. Gender Inequity Is Women's Real Concern

The female characters within the series present a spectrum of challenges encountered by individuals in the film industry. In my analysis, however, I concentrate on those predicaments that stem from gender inequities. Although the series provides insight into the intricacies of show business, the directors' inclination towards narrating women's stories is evident right from the opening credits. The introductory sequence alternates between images of Paquita strolling through the city and snippets from the Spanish television landscape of the 1990s and 2000s, prominently featuring recognisable female figures such as Concha Velasco, Lolita Flores, Paz Vega, Lydia Bosch, and Miriam Díaz Aroca.[13] This artistic choice immerses the audience in a distinctly female universe.

The series constructs the characters' personal challenges as systemic in nature. Drawing inspiration from pertinent and contemporary news stories, the directors transform the individual problems of the female characters into a critique of structural and societal conditions. In doing so, they craft a feminist narrative that exposes conflicting aspects that endure within the social landscape, particularly in terms of power distribution between genders. By situating their personal experiences within a broader context, the series highlights the patriarchal framework that has perpetuated female discrimination and social disparity. Consequently, the protagonists' stories cease to be solely intimate and individual accounts; they become relatable to a multitude of women who have experienced similar circumstances.

[13] Concha Velasco was a Spanish actress, singer, dancer, television presenter, and theatrical producer, Lolita Flores is a Spanish actress and singer, Paz Vega is a Spanish actress, Lydia Bosch is a Spanish actress and television presenter, and Miriam Díaz Aroca is a Spanish actress and television presenter.

Through their actions, Paquita and her friends are portrayed as agents of an everyday, lived feminism. They are women who fight to break the glass ceiling in the film industry, who live in equal partnerships breaking traditional gender roles at home, who do not comply with the beauty canon although that may reduce their job opportunities, who advocate for their right to make mistakes, who try to define themselves without depending on a male figure, and who challenge the patriarchal support system opting for a female collaboration involving women in their work projects. The series' feminist discourse articulates these women's problems as systematic discrimination, and in doing so it reverses the postfeminist's return to the personal in the representations of the single woman. Postfeminist female characters see their problems as individual ones, which is why the dilemma of career versus family is resolved by a personal decision, dismissing gender barriers that constraint women's choices such as limited workplace flexibility, unaffordable childcare, and negative stereotypes about working mothers. Due to the complexities of postfeminism, some postfeminist series have frequently included feminist issues in their narratives, bringing attention to problems that affect women such as sexual assault, wage gap, prostitution, and rape. However, those topics are addressed as particular and idiosyncratic cases that downplay gender structural discrimination. In *Ally McBeal*, for example, the satire and over-the-top depictions of some feminist complaints such as sexual harassment make it difficult to see these issues as legitimate problems. On the contrary, Paquita offers a text with which to examine feminist issues that still need to be addressed and solved in Spanish society.

As texts that invite critical viewing, the episodes of PS open the discussion about different topics that are familiar to contemporary viewers, such as hate speech in social networks, the difficulty of women to carry out their audiovisual projects, the importance of age and image for professional women, and the fierce criticism suffered by women in the public space. Throughout the experiences of several characters, the series reveals the persistence of the beauty myth in female representations on the screen. Its narrative points out the pressure suffered by many actresses throughout their careers so that they look thin and with a perfect body in order to fit into the traditional beauty canons demanded by the television industry.

The character of Mariona presents the case of an actress that does not embody normative beauty. Those around her frequently comment on her weight. In her first scene, Mariona rebels against consistently being cast in supporting roles due to her appearance. She confronts the director of the play she's participating in, saying, 'que solo me pones de criada, […] que estoy harta. Harta de que no me escuchéis, harta de que no me veáis' (E2S1). She

concludes her outburst by undressing and baring her non-normative body in her underwear, boldly declaring, 'Que sepas que esta puta gorda es una estrella, ¿vale?'. Upon becoming one of Paquita's clients, the series portrays how Mariona's weight becomes a recurring hurdle in securing roles. Paquita addresses this matter when describing the film industry's beauty standards: 'Mariona en Hollywood, tendría que ser una cosa… muy concreta, muy autoral. En Europa, Mariona es una chica guapa' (E3S1). Nevertheless, Paquita straightforwardly asserts that one's acting prowess is not linked to physical appearance, stating that 'una gorda vale para cualquier época si lo hace bien' (E3S1). Even after attaining success, Mariona's weight remains a topic of discussion. During a television interview to promote her film, the initial comment directed at her revolves around her body. The interviewer remarks, 'te veo más delgada' (E5S1) and the director explains that he was looking for a chubbier person. It is worth mentioning that the film in which Mariona manages to be the protagonist is directed by director Eduardo Casanova (playing himself), known for his boundary-pushing works that feature characters deviating from normative conventions.

Another of Paquita's clients, Belén, cannot be cast in the role that she wants because of her appearance. She is informed that her height makes her unsuitable for the role of a policewoman. While Paquita advocates for Belén to the casting director, a woman in the office chimes in, saying, 'mi marido es policía y es bajito, y tiene una tripa…' (E2S2). This scene highlights a corporeal diversity that television often fails to represent due to the unrealistic body expectations that perpetuates. The real world is far more varied than the flawless, standardised bodies frequently shown on TV. As the woman's comment underscores, short police officers do exist, even though the casting director refuses to acknowledge it.

The cases narrated in PS exemplify that the importance of the body in an actor's career is more pronounced when it comes to women. It exposes the reality that, typically, '[a]ctresses are not judged through the prism of their skills, acting or vocal talent, but their body' (Dwojnych & Kuczkowska-Golińska 2018: 87). Numerous actresses have spoken out about the pressure they have faced to alter their bodies in order to advance their careers or get specific lead roles. For instance, Kirsten Dunst has mentioned being asked to change her teeth (Guerrasio 2021: unpaginated), Adriana Torrebejano was suggested to remove a birthmark from her nose (Ander 2023: unpaginated), and Kate del Castillo has repeatedly been encouraged to undergo nose surgery (Colomé Santiago 2022 unpaginated). Weight loss is the most commonly demanded transformation. Renowned actresses like Jennifer López, Sophie Turner, and Jennifer Lawrence have all acknowledged being urged to lose weight at the outset

of their careers (Renae 2022: unpaginated). Some, like Jennifer Aniston, have even admitted yielding to this pressure. In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, Aniston revealed that her agent had advised her to slim down to make it in Hollywood. She shed thirty pounds before auditioning for *Friends* and believes she wouldn't have been cast as Rachel had she not lost the weight (Cohen 1996: unpaginated). By contrast, the women in PS are not obsessed with their bodies in spite of working in a very rigid world in which appearance is relevant to achieve a better job, and Paquita is presented as an agent who does not urge her clients to alter their physique.

The beauty canon, as previously discussed in Chapter Two, is intimately tied to the concept of youthfulness, thereby perpetuating the notion that women lose value as they age. The television and film industry, by perpetuating the feminine beauty standard, places a premium on youth in its actresses. This is exemplified by Belinda's situation, highlighting ageism primarily affecting women within television. Belinda, a mature woman, grapples with the challenge of securing an acting role. In her introductory scene with fortune teller, she consults her about potential television opportunities:

> Belinda: ¿Tele?
> Rosa María: Tele de momento no.
> Belinda: ¿Nada?
> Rosa María: No, teatro, musical, cabaret… (E5S1)

This dialogue alludes to the reality that women over the age of forty have limited roles on television, a point that numerous actresses have highlighted over the past decade. Actress María Adánez stated, '[c]uando entras en los 40 años en las series de TV ya no saben qué hacer contigo' (EFE 2017: unpaginated). A 2017 study by CIMA concluded that in films, very few female characters are protagonists, and those who are tend to be women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Typically, the only viable avenue for female actors, as the fortune teller suggests to Belinda, is turning to theatre. As Aitana Sánchez-Gijón asserts, '[e]l teatro es la salvación de las actrices mayores de 40 años' (Díaz 2017: unpaginated). The narrative of PS challenges the beauty standards centred on youth and slimness by showing a feminine subject often overlooked in television series: young women with non-normative beauty and women over fifty, exemplified by the character of Paquita and the actresses Yolanda Ramos (Noemí) and Belinda Washington (herself).

If obtaining acting roles is challenging for mature women, it becomes even more complicated for trans women. The series sheds light on the discrimination of transsexual actors, although it does not resolve the issue because the solution cannot come from an

individual alone; it necessitates a systemic change to integrate trans women into auditions for female roles without factoring in their transsexuality. In the episode 'Edwin' (E2S3), Lidia attempts to portray a transsexual man in a self-produced short film, financed through her savings and the sale of her motorbike, as she struggles to get other roles. However, the trans community initiates a Twitter campaign compelling her to abandon the project. This encapsulates the intricacies of the matter, illustrating Lidia's challenges while also highlighting the stance of trans actors. Laura Corbacho, a trans actress, contributes her voice to this ongoing discussion by portraying the director of COGAM (Colectivo LGTB+ de Madrid) and an actress within the series:

> ¿Sabes cuántos años he estudiado interpretación? Diez años. ¿Y sabes cuántos castings he hecho? Uno, para hacer de puta trans y figurante. Así que hasta que yo no tenga acceso a los papeles que hace Lidia, voy a seguir luchando para que me llamen a mí y a mis compañeras, antes que llamar a alguien como Lidia y ponerle un bigote postizo. Lo siento mucho por luchar por mis derechos, pero es lo que hay (E2S3).

Her speech exposes the labour exclusion of trans individuals in the acting industry, as they are primarily considered solely for trans roles. Such roles are exceedingly limited, and if the few available roles are given to cis actors, it subsequently deprives trans actors of their only job opportunities. Consequently, they contend that, in the absence of a more diverse casting approach, cis actors should not take on trans roles. Moreover, these casting decisions contribute to the misrepresentation of trans people on television, often portraying them as individuals in disguise. Lidia's portrayal of a man with a short wig and fake moustache raises concerns as it reinforces the problematic trope that a trans man's identity is merely a costume that unveils a woman underneath when removed.

This episode fictionalises the controversy of actor Paco León playing María José, a trans woman in *La casa de las flores* (Netflix, 2019), which at the time sparked a conversation about diversity and representation on screen. Lidia's story also echoes the case of Scarlett Johansson, who initially set to portray a trans man in the film *Rub and Tug,* a role she eventually relinquished due to the backlash from the trans community. The series addresses this issue with nuance and complexity, underlining not only the reality faced by trans actors but also defending Lidia's artistic freedom to cast the person she believes best fits the role. In this case, Lidia deems herself the most suitable actor for her low-budget project due to financial constraints, echoing the Javis' decision to cast a male friend for the role of Paquita. To contribute to changing this reality for trans actors, the Javis introduce, not only Laura Corbacho, but another trans character portrayed by a trans actor in subsequent episodes. This character becomes part of the employees at the fashion company where Magüi

works. Furthermore, their project after this series was *Veneno* (2020), a TV series that features a group of trans actresses in prominent roles.

The episode of 'Edwin' (E2S3) also introduces the topic of hate speech in social networks, particularly Twitter, which Paquita describes as 'un lugar de insultos y vejaciones, un lugar peligroso'. However, it is in the following episodes, particularly through Belinda's story, that this issue is further explored within the narrative, shedding light on the violence that women endure on the internet and the far-reaching consequences it has on their lives. In their article 'Ciberviolencia de género en redes sociales' (2021), Mayelín García Román and Dubravka Mindek Jagic present research that confirms cyber misogyny as an emerging form of violence against women. According to a report from the organisation *Working to Halt Online Abuse* (2012), during the first decade of the twenty-first century, 80% of the victims of harassment over the Internet were women. Another report by the *Broadband Commission for Digital Development* in 2015 stated that women were 27 times more likely than men to be the target of digital violence. Additionally, as highlighted by ONU Mujeres (2020), it is estimated that 90% of victims of non-consensual digital distribution of intimate images are women (García Román & Mindek Jagic 2021: 338-339). This issue is therefore both quantitatively and qualitatively significant in today's context.

The Javis initially had a project for another TV series centred around this issue, based on the real-life case of socialist city councillor Olvido Hormigos, who became a victim of the dissemination of an intimate video in 2012, an incident that led to changes in legislation to address such crimes. However, they chose to incorporate this topic into PS to provide Belinda's character with a substantial storyline. In the episode 'La actriz viral' (E4S3), Belinda becomes the protagonist of a media scandal due to the leaking of a video with sexual content. The video rapidly goes viral, garnering widespread attention from the media and tarnishing the actress's reputation. Social networks are flooded with comments such as '¡Menuda guarra!, ¡Qué asquerosa! aunque yo le daba, Belinda canceladísima, Las fornicarias no entrarán en el reino de los cielos, ¡Vergüenza!, ¿En qué estaba pensando la pava esta?'. These comments exemplify a form of online aggression referred to as 'slut-shaming', which is described as,

> la práctica de ridiculizar, avergonzar o hacer sentir culpable a una mujer por explorar y vivir libremente su sexualidad. Se describe como una forma social para ejercer presión y control sobre el erotismo y la sexualidad femenina […] que perpetúa una caracterización negativa de determinadas mujeres, que son percibidas como "promiscuas" o fuera de la norma social aceptada (García Román & Mindek Jagic 2021: 342)

In the series, the views of Belinda's video skyrocket, amplified by media coverage of the incident. The video is also disseminated through private chat groups, where individuals exchange comments about the incident. This portrayal highlights the complicity of spectators in perpetuating the violence against the victim of the leaked video, while also emphasising how the media capitalises on the spectacle of this type of violence. The series further illustrates how the damage inflicted by these hurtful comments extends beyond the immediate victims of the abuse. Belinda's distress is described in a scene where she converses with her son over the phone. He informs her that reporters are stationed outside their home's front door and that his classmates are labelling his mother as a slut. This sequence presents how the violence manifest on social networks permeates into the broader social fabric. Therefore, this torment brings Belinda to tears, underscoring the profound emotional impact of such cyber aggression.

Belinda's storyline intertwines with Clara's, illustrating two distinct approaches to coping with a public scandal while also serving as exemplars of the 'the gender punishment gap'. This term was coined by Mark L. Egan, Gregor Matvos, and Amit Seru in their paper 'When Harry Fired Sally: The double standard in punishing misconduct' (2022), in which they demonstrate that the differential treatment of men and women carries over to the punishment following an incident of misconduct in the financial advisory industry. They conclude that '[f]emale advisers are 20% more likely to lose their jobs relative to similar male advisers. Females are also punished more severely for misconduct committed at other firms and are 30% less likely to find new jobs following misconduct' (2022: 29). Heather Sarsons' study in 2017 similarly observes a comparable pattern in the medical field. Female surgeons experience a 34% drop in patient referrals after a bad outcome in comparison to a slight stagnation for male surgeons. Sarsons' results reveal how 'women are punished for one mistake in the same way that men are punished for three mistakes' (2017: 39). Although these investigations primarily focus on workplace dynamics, I incorporate the term 'gender punishment gap' in my analysis because I consider that this form of gender inequality, in which women face more severe penalties for their mistakes compared to men, exists across many social contexts. This phenomenon, tied to the unrealistic expectations placed on women as discussed in prior chapters—where they are pressured to be perfect mothers, wives, and professionals—renders society less forgiving of their errors.

Clara's and Belinda's narrative arcs illuminate the gender punishment gap by unmasking the public humiliation and repercussions they suffer due to their missteps. These errors, if committed by men, likely would not have incited the same levels of outrage and

disgrace, as certain real-life examples illustrate. The public response to Belinda's sex video parallels the ordeal faced by Pamela Anderson due to her infamous sex tape, which adversely affected her film career, personal life, and even her children. In the Spanish context, Olvido Hormigos had to relinquish her political role. Conversely, drummer Tommy Lee, also featured in Anderson's tape, faced no consequences in his career, and the commentary aimed at him was not damaging. Similarly, Spanish actor and TV presenter Santi Millán's sex video had similar effects as he did not suffer any negative backlash in his personal or professional life. Clara's plotline dramatises the punishment gap, laying bare the notion that 'the idea that behaving badly is considered more of a "should not" for women than men,' leading to a proclivity for subjecting females to harsher penalties regardless of the severity of the transgression (Heilman 2012: 124).

Clara's story of faking her Hollywood career is based on a significant controversy that unfolded in Spain in 2015, involving real-life actress Anna Allen, renowned for her role in *Cuéntame*. In her case, the revelation that she was concocting fictitious job experiences overseas, alongside her publication of manipulated images showcasing her attendance at the Oscars, led to a swift erosion of public opinion towards Allen, effectively causing her to withdraw from the public eye. The most disconcerting aspect of this matter is that while she was publishing her fake photos, she was working for a very successful series like *Cuéntame,* but she was barely known by the audience. Her notoriety only surged when her falsified Oscar pictures came to light. Clara's plotline discloses how the shame and the embarrassment due to public scorn made her quit her dream of being a famous actress and start a new life in Navarrete. However, this new life changes when she is back in the public eye. Her secret location is revealed when Paquita's mother dies, and the group travels to this town. This occurs in the wake of Belinda's viral video, prompting media attention to converge on the town, subsequently discovering Clara's presence alongside Belinda. In their pursuit of photographs and interviews, reporters and camera crews besiege the house.

The scene unfolding at Paquita's residence signifies a pivotal shift in the female characters' approach to societal judgment, which unfairly subjects women to heightened expectations and denies them the freedom to make mistakes. Initially, Paquita's response is to retreat within the confines of the house, a moment that distinctly echoes Federico García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936). In Lorca's play, Bernarda secludes her daughters at home to conform to the societal norms of mourning imposed upon women, effectively shielding them from public scrutiny. Similarly, Paquita assumes the role of the matriarch within this circle of women, who are also dressed in black as a symbol of mourning for

Paquita's mother. Paquita's directive to keep everyone indoors with the exclamation 'de aquí no sale nadie, cerramos puertas y ventanas' (E5S3) evokes Bernarda's decree, 'haceros cuenta que hemos tapiado con ladrillos puertas y ventanas' (García Lorca, 1936: 5). This confinement within the house becomes emblematic of the oppression experienced by women as they are ensnared by prescribed gender stereotypes. However, in a collective decision to confront societal sexism head-on, Paquita and her friends reject the limitations of traditional norms. They opt to reclaim their lives on their own terms, avoiding the tragic consequences that befell Lorca's characters in his play set in early twentieth-century Spain. Changing the strategy used with Clara, Paquita, who has always been preoccupied with appearances, gets rid of all her fears and prejudices, and opts to face the media and explain everything. Alongside her, the group of women stands before the cameras, addressing reporters' questions, and asserting their right to be imperfect women and to be wrong, which represents a new female subjectivity that feminists embrace, rejecting the idea of perfection imposed on women. Belinda admits the truth: she is the person in the sexual video. Clara explains her reasons for the deception, stating 'creía que así conseguiría lo que tanto quería pero me equivoqué' (E5S3). Magüi confesses her role in photoshopping Clara's images, acknowledging her error. Paquita concludes the press conference by asserting, 'esto es lo que queríais, ¿no? Nos hemos equivocado. Y seguro que nos vamos a equivocar muchísimas más veces. Pero, saldremos, lo explicaremos y tan tranquilas' (E5S3).

Their public appearance transforms into a declaration of liberation from the burden of guilt, shame, and insecurities that women often experience under the intense scrutiny they face. It also serves as a resolute proclamation of their commitment to move forward with their successes and all their mistakes. Belinda manages to transcend feelings of guilt and embarrassment by accepting the truth and reshaping it into something empowering. Through a summer hit titled 'Cinco deditos', she firmly 'asserts the right to control the meaning and content of her sexuality' (Calles Barger 2011: 343). The accompanying music video showcases Belinda openly embracing her sexuality and unabashedly depicting female self-pleasure. This transformative move shifts the humiliation and embarrassment associated with the leaked video towards an affirmation of her sexual freedom. It displays what Kathleen Rowe has identified as the aesthetic of the 'grotesque body,' a representation of 'the body in its "lower stratum" (the eating, drinking, defecating, copulating body)', symbolising the 'unruly woman', who has the potential of social disruption (2011: 33). The lyrics of the song further solidify masturbation as an act of feminism, a gesture through which women assert ownership over their bodies, their sexuality, and their autonomy: 'Ya sabéis de sobra, nos

tenéis hasta el moño. / Soy mujer y meto lo que quiero dentro el coño / […] Cinco deditos, son cinco deditos que yo me hago sola / […] Soy una mujer, dueña de mi destino. / Mi escoba no barre tu mierda, cariño' (E6S3). Through a witty and daring parody, this song shatters the taboo around female masturbation and firmly establishes that partner-oriented sexual experiences are not the sole avenues to female pleasure.

Regarding Clara, her liberation from shame is portrayed in a sequence following the press conference. In this scene, she opens all the windows and curtains in her house, allowing sunlight and fresh air to permeate her surroundings. This symbolic action illustrates her emergence from hiding and her willingness to expose herself to the world. Her demeanour exudes happiness and tranquillity. The accompanying background music, 'Fantasmas' by the pop band Miranda!, accentuates the idea of casting away the spectres that had held her back. This sequence signifies her release from the haunting memories that had been constraining her. Furthermore, Clara's narrative serves as a form of redemption for the real-life actress upon whom her character is modelled, Anna Allen. Through a metafictional twist within the series' storyline, Clara's experiences are transformed into a film directed by Belén. The actress selected to portray Clara is none other than Anna Allen herself, marking her return to acting after her retreat from the public sphere. In a moment of metafictional storytelling, Allen's character delivers a monologue that appears as a confession to the audience, directed at the camera:

> Sí, todo era mentira: las ofertas de trabajo en el extranjero, los guiones en los que trabajé, todos los papeles de los que me pediste que hablase en televisión … Y ahora he destruido mi carrera, la que tanto me costó construir. Así que dime qué hago ahora. Qué harías tú en mi lugar. Qué puedo hacer. Porque estoy rota. Porque ya nadie responde al teléfono cuando llamo. Porque se han olvidado de que soy una buena actriz. (E6S3)

Here, Allen admits her wrongdoing and acknowledges how she has been penalised in her industry because, as observed by Egan, Matvos, and Seru, women are less likely to get a second chance in their jobs after misconduct (2022: 37). In the following excerpt, she concludes her speech by echoing the positive message already expressed by the other female characters, who reject feelings of shame and continue to pursue their lives and aspirations:

> Llevo mucho tiempo aquí encerrada haciéndome preguntas y preguntas, y me he dado cuenta que me he estado haciendo las preguntas equivocadas. La pregunta importante no es por qué me pasó lo que me pasó. La pregunta importante es qué voy a hacer a partir de ahora. Y yo sé la respuesta. Voy a salir. Voy a luchar. Voy a seguir adelante. Voy a coger todo lo que me ha pasado y a convertirlo en algo que valga la pena. (E6S3)

In this last part of her speech, I find it relevant to comment on the question that Allen deems unimportant: 'por qué [le] pasó lo que [le] pasó'. While I understand that she does not

consider it important to question why she lied, if that is indeed her intended meaning, it is crucial to examine why her fabrication of acting jobs – a practice akin to embellishing a CV, which is common in Spanish society with one out of four individuals admitting to it (Udemy 2017: unpaginated) – elicited such an overwhelmingly adverse reaction. The answer might once again point to the existence of the punishment gap, which highlights the internalised gender bias against women.

This gender inequality does not only appear when penalising women but also in their promotions, i.e., the glass ceiling, which prevents women from reaching positions of great responsibility in any industry. In the series, this is exemplified in Belén's plot when she decides to become a film director. In the last episode, the scene in which she pitches her film to a television company illustrates a patriarchal context that continues to be adverse for women and exposes the glass ceiling in the film industry. The beginning of the conversation in the office, with two male executives and the woman who greeted her at the entrance, brings to light the sexism inherent in how a woman's work is perceived:

> Andy: ¡Qué jovencita! ¿Cuántos años tienes?
> Belén: 28
> (…)
> Andy: Nos gusta tener mujeres.
> Pelayo: Por fin, ¿no? Ya era hora
> Andy: Mujeres directoras. Mujeres guionistas… Mujeres. Son las voces que estamos buscando. (E6S3)

After this misguided attempt at flattery, Belén proceeds to describe her script based on Clara's story, to which the reaction from both men is: '¿Pero tú crees que eso a la gente le puede interesar?, Ya me dirás tú quién se va a sentir identificada con esa tarada'(E6S3). This dialogue echoes the prevailing misconception that women's stories are confined to a niche, unable to resonate with a broader audience, which restricts female filmmakers' possibilities to get finance for their projects. In response, Belén delivers a speech aimed at dismantling the male gaze that the executives hold. She clarifies that the narrative is not about a crazy woman, rather addresses something universal, about pretending to be someone that we want to be. Her speech concludes with the following statement:

> que todos mentimos de alguna manera. Antes me has dicho que os interesan las voces femeninas, pero a tu compañera no la has dejado hablar ni una vez. Que yo lo entiendo, que yo no estoy aquí para criticar el mundo ni para cambiarlo, pero creo que todo el mundo puede empatizar con Clara. (E6S3)

Although Belén eventually succeeds in convincing them to greenlight her film, the meeting evidences the limits of women's advancement as dependent on institutions controlled by men, which emphasises the need for women to be part of those institutions to overturn patriarchal

control. For this reason, organisations such as CIMA that promote the equal presence of female filmmakers and professionals in the audiovisual are necessary. As a film director, Belén seizes control of her project and exemplifies the transformative effect of feminist leadership. When Belén's idea of making a film becomes a reality, it sets off a chain reaction that brings about transformation in her own life and the lives of the women around her. The film, as elucidated earlier, represents new professional opportunities for her friends and plays a role in Clara's healing process upon seeing her story told.

Throughout the circumstances detailed in this section, PS exposes the manifold forms of discrimination and inequalities that women face. The series brings to light real issues that are central to the feminist political agenda. Hence, beneath its comedic exterior, PS offers authentic and current narratives with the intention of prompting viewers to reflect as they engage with them.

4.4. Conclusion

As shown in this chapter, *Paquita Salas* undermines the romantic theme as the exclusive plotline for female characters and works against postfeminist portrayals of the career woman on television. PS proves the multitude of stories that women can lead, by creating three seasons in which the female characters do not need a romantic interest to develop their storylines. The professional women in the series oppose the postfeminist career woman who is 'firmly demarcated and determined by her quintessential femininity and her heterosexual appeal' (Genz 2010: 102), whose narrative encourages a re-domestication of female protagonists as they come to realise that their lives as urban career women are deficient, so they begin to prioritise romance and family. Thus, postfeminist narratives seem to destabilise male dominance in the workplace, but they limit the possibility of challenging traditional gender roles at home. As María Luz Esteban and Ana Távora states, 'sigue habiendo una relación estrecha entre la organización del amor y el ordenamiento desigual del mundo' (2008: 61). In contrast, PS makes central the career narrative and enters into dialogue with a feminist cultural context by bringing attention to real-life issues and problems to raise awareness about the realities of women.

Even though the series narrates intimate and universal feelings of the female characters such as the fear of change, success, failure, and the uncertainty of not knowing what to do with one's life, it also sheds light on situations of gender inequality from a feminist perspective portraying the protagonists' issues as structural rather than personal. It recognises feminism not as a completed project, but as a daily struggle that must be addressed

in a collective way. PS breaks with dependence on men in female characters' narratives and deals with feminist subjects such as the glass ceiling, hate speech against women, and female sexuality. Furthermore, it offers a feminist representation of both female and male characters. Magüi's boyfriend represents a new masculinity that questions traditional gender imbalance in the heterosexual couple, and the female characters represent a multifaceted portrait of what it means to be a woman in contemporary times. PS confirms that '[t]here are all kinds of women in the world who have all kinds of goals and values; there isn't one 'right' way to be female' (Engstrom 2017: 7). The inclusion of a plurality of female protagonists allows the series to examine the breadth of female experience and the various perspectives that women embody. The series defies the cultural consciousness by inserting feminist discourse and gender politics that oppose masculine-coded media. It can be read as a new feminist paradigm on TV that does not necessarily need to explicitly articulate feminist theory within its narrative like *La otra mirada* because feminism is embedded in the characters' attitudes, and it does not need to confront postfeminist stereotyped characters that comply with the patriarchal order, as seen in *Señoras del (h)AMPA,* since it depicts a reality in which those postfeminist ideals are non-existent.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the impact of fourth-wave feminism in constructing new female representations in Spanish television series and explores the concept of postfeminism in the critical analysis of Spanish media culture. I focus on three TV series (*La otra mirada, Señoras del (h)AMPA,* and *Paquita Salas*) broadcast between 2015 and 2022, covering the period from the resurgence of Spanish feminism to date. The analysis concludes that while postfeminist and feminist discourses coexist in the Spanish contemporary mediascape, there is evidence of a shift towards a greater number of feminist series that challenge postfeminist discourses with new proposals in tune with the developing socio-political landscape.

The case studies analysed in this thesis reveal three key findings. First, the resurgence of the Spanish feminist movement has led to a renewed media interest in female stories; hence, women's narratives are no longer niche but are becoming the norm on screen. Second, television series featuring female characters have greatly benefited from the structural changes in the television industry during the last decade. And third, many contemporary Spanish TV series present new and diverse portrayals of women that are breaking away from the limitations imposed by the postfeminist discourse, which has been hegemonic in popular culture since the 1990s.

The politicisation of feminism and its increased visibility have undoubtedly influenced cultural discourses, such as those spread in popular culture like TV series. Media outlets are increasingly recognising the importance of reflecting the diversity of human experiences, including those of women, in their content. This recognition has resulted in a departure from the previous norm, where women's stories were relegated to the periphery or depicted through stereotypical lenses. As the feminist movement continues to advocate for equal representation, media producers and creators are responding by featuring a wider range of women's narratives that present their complexity, strength, and multifaceted roles in society. This has led to a shift in the way stories are told and portrayed on screen.

Feminist discourse has entered Spanish TV series challenging and reshaping postfeminist discourses, while highlighting ongoing gender inequalities and injustices. The agenda of fourth-wave feminism is evident in the narratives of the series analysed in this thesis, which showcase a feminist awareness and explicitly address the violence and constraints that women endure in various aspects of their lives. *La otra mirada, Señoras del (h)AMPA,* and *Paquita Salas* are not isolated cases of feminist narratives in the Spanish context, but rather exemplars of a new corpus of fiction series that has been steadily growing

since 2014. Examples of some contemporary feminist series that portray female subjectivities diverging from traditional depictions of motherhood, girlhood, and professional women, and that narrate women's experiences of inequality, include *Hierro* (Movistar+, 2019–2022), *Vida perfecta* (Movistar+, 2019–2021), *El embarcadero* (Movistar+, 2019–2020), *Mentiras* (Netflix, 2020), *La unidad* (Movistar+, 2020–2023), *#Luimelia* (Atresplayer Premium, 2020–2021), *Cardo* (Atresplayer Premium, 2021–2023), *Intimidad* (Netflix, 2022), *Fácil* (Movistar+, 2022), and *El hijo zurdo* (Movistar+, 2023).

Besides the impact of the feminist movement, the emergence and proliferation of cable providers like HBO and online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Movistar+, Amazon Prime, and others have played a pivotal role in transforming the landscape of female representation in media. These platforms have introduced a new era of content creation, distribution, and consumption that has changed the ways in which gender is portrayed on TV. They have provided opportunities for more varied and unconventional storytelling. By having more creative freedom and fewer content restrictions compared to network television, streaming platforms have opened doors for alternative narratives that contest gender norms and offer more nuanced portrayals of female characters. As demonstrated in this thesis, the cooperation of streaming services with broadcast channels has contributed to the incorporation of complex and diverse roles for women across all kinds of television outlets. Feminist narratives in Spanish fiction can be found on video-on-demands services like *Paquita Salas* (Netflix), as well as on traditional network television such as *La otra mirada* (TVE) and *Señoras del (h)AMPA* (Telecinco).

Unlike traditional network television, which is more resistant to exploring new voices and narratives beyond drama or comedy, streaming services also bring about changes in the representation of women for two reasons. Firstly, it offers a wide variety of genres, from drama and comedy to science fiction and fantasy, which allows for the exploration of different aspects of women's lives and experiences, portraying them as heroines and protagonists across various contexts. Secondly, by involving women and marginalised groups behind the camera, it moves away from a monolithic (male) gaze and provides multiple perspectives, making space for those who have never had a voice in the audiovisual canon. Streaming platforms and cable providers have been more intentional about promoting diversity and representation, both in front of and behind the camera. This has led to increased opportunities for women writers, directors, producers, and actors, resulting in more authentic portrayals of female characters.

The analysis of the case studies confirms the presence of these features as essential requirements in the creation of feminist series. The three series introduce novel approaches to television genres and are developed by non-patriarchal creative teams. This thesis identifies patterns and variations in how gender is negotiated in different TV genres. For example, *La otra mirada* diverges from the typical portrayal of historical period dramas, which often tend to uphold traditional gender norms in the name of historical accuracy. These dramas construct the past as a nostalgic celebration of the lifestyles and fashion of a historical period, and its narratives become escapist fantasies of a romanticised past representing a time of gender inequality as something fondly remembered and desirable. Given that period dramas usually target a female audience, some of these series spotlight the struggles and accomplishments of female characters within the context of their era's gender expectations. This approach offers insights into how societal perceptions of gender have changed, positioning women's oppression as a thing of the past. In contrast, LOM, although set in the early twentieth century, sheds light on the concerns and gender issues of contemporary audiences. It underscores how certain aspects of gender roles have not changed much over time. It appeals to viewers with themes that connect with current problems, such as a rape trial resembling *La Manada* rape case. An episode, written a month before the actual verdict, mirrors the same injustices present in the judicial process. The series breaks away from the romanticised nostalgia often seen in this genre to reposition the politics of nostalgia as a form of activism that recuperates overlooked women's stories and uses its narrative as critique of the present rather than idealising the past.

Paquita Salas and *Señoras del (h)AMPA* signify a shift away from the conventional Spanish comedy by embracing transgressive and innovative comedic approaches in their treatment of gender, humour, and storytelling. According to Beatriz Gómez Morales, traditional Spanish comedy has often prioritised attracting a large audience, thus 'ha preferido ser conservadora en sus planteamientos ideológicos y narrativos' (2020: 488). In her analysis on the Spanish television comedy over thirty years until 2018, Gómez Morales concludes that this genre has primarily functioned as a tool to legitimise power, neglecting the critical aspect of comedy and not only perpetuating inequalities but also disguising them as inevitable. In line with this, she observes that 'los subgéneros cómicos con más potencial transgresor o vanguardista, como la comedia negra o la comedia anárquica, no han estado presentes en la parrilla televisiva española. Y la sátira y la parodia son minoritarias' (2020: 488). As part of these minorities, PS as a parody and *Señoras* as a dark comedy align with these subgenres characterised by their heightened transgressive potential.

In terms of gender, the humour of the Spanish comedy has often been created from stereotypes and role reversals. Nevertheless, both series present what Rowe describes as the 'unruly woman,' a woman who defies the conventional standards of appearance and behaviour typically associated with the female gender. Through this character, Rowe suggests that television comedy can not only challenge societal expectations of women but also question broader social and cultural norms. The female characters in PS and *Señoras* resist patriarchal power rejecting established notions of femininity concerning motherhood and singleness. These women embrace unruliness as they are unwilling to confine themselves to prescribed roles. In *Señoras*, that means defying the mould of the perfect mother, while in PS, it entails resisting the archetype of the single career woman who is expected to prioritise romantic love. Within these narratives, humour serves as a vehicle to subvert traditional gender roles and underscore the absurdity of societal expectations. In breaking the taboos surrounding motherhood and female singleness, these series demonstrate that comedy can serve as a powerful platform for social commentary and critique while still being entertaining. *Señoras* also introduces a transformation in the conventions of several traditionally masculine television genres by appropriating them from a feminist perspective. The series expands female agency beyond restricted canons of male genres, like crime fiction and horror. The heroines in *Señoras* contest the established gender roles found in gangster stories, as well as other subgenres like heist, detective, and action crime narratives. These protagonists break with the archetypes of passive companions of the male character and the evil, sexualised *femme fatale*. As mothers embodying nurturing and warm emotions associated with femininity, these women take on criminal roles that highlight a violence often culturally ascribed to masculinity. Thus, the portrayal of these women as criminals and wrongdoers destabilises long-standing gender hierarchies in these typically masculinist genre stories. Therefore, as demonstrated in this thesis, each case study introduces a feminist reinterpretation of conventional TV genres, a phenomenon attributed to the innovative creative teams involved.

Based on the examination of the authorship and production of the series, what emerges is a picture of a significant shift in the landscape of media production. The three series disrupt the norm of having all-male creative teams, underlining women and LGBTQIA+ people as the driving force behind feminist discourses. In LOM, although the directors are men, the scriptwriting team initially comprised both men and women in the first season, transitioning to an all-women team in the second season. *Señoras* was created by a trans woman and a gay man, while PS was both written and directed by two gay men. These

series firmly position themselves as feminist narratives: in terms of their authors' position, the dominant reading offered by the narrative, and sometimes also by the marketing and distribution strategies. As a result, the absence of all-male creative teams in these series reaffirms the importance of diverse voices and perspectives in creating well-rounded and authentic feminist content that defy traditional gender norms and stereotypes.

All these factors mentioned above culminate in the third and most relevant finding of this thesis: the emergence of feminist series that could signify a paradigm shift in the portrayal of women in Spanish television fiction. These series dismantle the postfeminist woman, who is restricted to three models (the girl, the housewife, and the career woman), which are constructed around limited ideologies of femininity rooted in patriarchal myths of beauty, maternal love, and romance. By focusing on the postfeminist discourses in the narratives, this thesis demonstrates how LOM, *Señoras* and PS strip away the feminist rhetoric employed by postfeminism to depict the voluntary return to traditional female roles, like the housewife or the sexual object, as expressions of free choice and female empowerment. These series expose the constraints that the postfeminist models impose on women and their alignment with neoliberalism in perpetuating feminine myths that uphold the patriarchal order.

Each series undertakes the deconstruction of one of the three postfeminist archetypes along with the patriarchal myth it embodies, while offering feminist alternatives to them. These postfeminist models, which influence what society expects of women as young women, mothers or professionals, are constructed around the notion of perfection. Built upon neoliberal ideas of individualism, choice, freedom, and independence, these postfeminist subjectivities urge women to pursue perfection in their roles as professionals, mothers, and wives. The analysed series, by portraying imperfect and more real characters that women can identify with, debunk those perverse ideals of femininity that only create frustration in women who are unable to attain such perfection. Through their storytelling and narrative techniques, the three series expose the sexism of postfeminism and engage viewers in feminist discourse, fostering a deeper understanding of women's issues.

La otra mirada dismantles the model of the girl and interrogates the underlying beauty myth, which refers to the societal pressure on women to conform to unrealistic standards of beauty. In the three postfeminist archetypes, the representation of women often perpetuates this myth. The postfeminist housewife and mother feel compelled to adhere to traditional beauty standards to validate her role as a woman within the household, while the career woman engages in beauty practices to assert her femininity in the pursuit of her

profession because being ambitious and successful might make her seem less ‘feminine’. She also needs to focus on her appearance with the expectation of finding a partner and overcome her single status. However, the beauty myth is central to the postfeminist model of the girl, which presents the beautification process as a site of power, linking women’s right to freedom and emancipation with the beauty project.

In LOM, the various narratives involving young female characters serve to question the postfeminist girl archetype, exposing that the female empowerment achieved through embracing the beauty myth is a renewed sexualisation of young women that prescribes a homogenising image of the female body and feminine sexuality. It reveals that beneath the illusion of freedom and emancipation, girl power rhetoric imposes an oppressive model of femininity on young women, promoting the idea that a girl’s worth and social status are directly tied to her appearance. Through lessons provided by the teachers in LOM, the narrative dissects the beauty practices and examines their problematic aspects: the mechanisms of surveillance and restriction that emerge on the path to attaining the unreal image of beauty standards, the competition that arises among women, and the internalisation of the objectifying male gaze by women. Within these lessons, teachers also articulate a feminist discourse that helps girls to liberate themselves from these harmful beauty standards. Beyond critiquing the beauty canon, the series sets an example by featuring female characters who do not comply with the narrow and idealised version of beauty perpetually emphasised by the media. LOM does not present women with canonical bodies; rather, it portrays women of varying ages and appearances embracing features considered imperfections according to established norms. Furthermore, it breaks away from the sexualisation of female characters—a strategy that continues to recur in audiovisual fiction. This trend is also evident in the other analysed series, where characters encompass a diversity of beauty attributes and body forms. The series also contests the depoliticised feminism performed by the ‘girl’. LOM’s narrative recovers the notions of women’s collectivity and sisterhood that had been disarticulated in postfeminism through its criticism of second-wave feminism, emphasising the continued need for feminist action to improve women’s lives. The series showcases the political power of feminism through a return to collective activism.

Señoras del (h)AMPA explores the housewife model, particularly focusing on the idealised mother figure promulgated by the new momism discourse, which perpetuates the myth of maternal love. This pervasive discourse has even influenced a sector of Spanish feminist left women, particularly in politics, who publicly advocate for ‘crianza con apego,’ reinforcing the naturalisation and essentialisation of motherhood, positioning women as the

primary caretakers of children, which reinforces traditional gender roles. Thus, the high expectations placed on mothers make achieving a work-life balance challenging, creating the 'superwoman' figure for working mothers. Through the analysis of the main female characters, the series defies postfeminist tropes inherent in the superwoman ideal: the notion that a mother finds full satisfaction and completion in motherhood, the tendency for mothers to constantly monitor one another and themselves through feelings of guilt, the view of motherhood as an individual achievement, the emphasis on beauty and fitness, and a reliance on consumerism to fulfil children's needs. The protagonists reject this model and create a more realistic portrayal of the maternal experience, reclaiming the concept of 'good enough' mothers as a liberating force.

The series juxtaposes the two maternal experiences (the supermom and the good enough mother) to underscore the discrepancy between the unrealistic portrayal of motherhood promoted by new momism, and the multifaceted realities that women, like the main characters, navigate. The critical examination of the depictions of motherhood in *Señoras* sheds light on the ways in which the new momism discourse perpetuate harmful stereotypes and ideals about motherhood that oppresses and disempowers women because mothers who do not conform to this idealised version of motherhood may experience feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and pressure to meet these unrealistic standards. The series demonstrates the capacity of feminist mothering to be empowering for women and offers a co-parenting approach to care work, which would allow women to define themselves and their purpose in society out of motherhood. Moreover, by illustrating postfeminist discourses through a deceased woman who appears as a ghostly figure, the series positions postfeminism as an outdated model that lacks relevance in contemporary society.

Finally, *Paquita Salas* questions the postfeminist career woman archetype that is closely linked to the myth of romantic love. The series reveals how this model that falsely assumes progressive depictions of women as professionally and personally autonomous, masks the formation of a heterosexual love story. PS reworks the postfeminist narrative of professional series in which women, having seemingly conquered the public space, harbour aspirations in the private realm that could be classified as traditional. Therefore, while these women are ostensibly free to prioritise work and/or family, the postfeminist narrative often twists into a cautionary tale, emphasising the potential negative impacts of their choices on their personal and familial lives. These narratives insinuate that feminism is to blame for their discontent: as Gill and Herdieckerhoff observe, 'the codes of traditional romance are reinstated "through the backdoor"' by depicting singlehood as problematic and focusing

women's efforts on the creation of a feminine and sexy body and on the quest for a romantic partner, finding their ultimate fulfilment in a monogamous love relationship (2004: 494). This idea suggests that a woman's worth and happiness are intricately tied to her relationship status. PS opposes this model by constructing a feminist narrative in which female characters have narrative agency beyond the stigma of remaining single and the confines of romantic fantasies. It foregrounds the career narrative and demonstrates the myriad of storylines that women can lead, moving away from a reliance on male-driven plots to present more authentic and relatable stories that celebrate the richness of women's lives. The characters in PS are multidimensional, each possessing unique goals, ambitions, and challenges. The emphasis is on their careers, passions, and personal growth, allowing their stories to flourish independently from romantic subplots.

The series also confronts traditional romance narratives and normative heterosexuality by showcasing a diverse array of single women who are not fixated on pursuing a (heterosexual) partner, while also presenting a variety of relationships that do not follow the traditional coupledom. This might involve same-sex relationships, unconventional partnerships, or deep friendships that provide emotional fulfilment and support without necessarily being romantic. Moreover, the series emphasises that women's central concern extends beyond their single status; it revolves around addressing gender inequity. Through the characters' storylines, PS draws attention to the enduring gender barriers that persist in contemporary Spanish society, consistently undermining women's equality within the public sphere.

This thesis concludes that the postfeminist canon, which perpetuates traditional gender roles, beauty standards, and romantic narratives, has been contested in these contemporary Spanish series. These series offer more nuanced and realistic depictions of women's lives, addressing the complexities of their identities and struggles, while breaking away from the confines of patriarchal myths. This research emphasises the importance of utilising postfeminism as a critical term in the analyses of the Spanish culture, as it represents a dominant discursive framework that proposes rigid models of female subjectivity. The analysed series uncover the limitations and contradictions of the postfeminist woman, highlighting its collaboration with neoliberalism to maintain the current societal status quo. They enter into dialogue with a feminist cultural context by bringing attention to real-life issues and problems to raise awareness about the realities of women. By integrating themes such as gender violence, reproductive rights, sexual freedom, and the domestic labour imbalance, they instigate critical conversations about societal power dynamics, gender roles,

and systemic discrimination. Consequently, these series have the potential to provide viewers with a broader understanding of women's agency, challenges, and aspirations. However, while these series strive to portray a broad spectrum of female experiences, there is still room for improvement in terms of intersectional representation, particularly concerning race. Examples of black women in Spanish television remain scarce.

Due to the limited sample of the series analysed, it cannot be claimed that there is a paradigm shift. However, they signal a turning point in which new forms of visibility and female representation begin to take shape. These feminist series in the Spanish context represent an important cultural change towards new portrayals of women in television series, showcasing diverse female experiences and narratives that have often been marginalised or stereotyped in traditional television. Employing innovative storytelling techniques, they subvert patriarchal norms and facilitate nuanced, intersectional explorations of femininity. They represent a feminist TV culture in which women finally got to be what men had long been: 'complex, multi-dimensional, and even transgressive heroines of their own stories' (Hohenstein & Katharina 2019: 113). These series can become powerful tools in the struggle for representation and equality, as they can reflect and shape societal attitudes. Nonetheless, their potential should not be overestimated, and it is crucial that future research continues to examine the effects of these series on audience perceptions and behaviours, as well as their influence on the wider media landscape to better assess the impact of feminist representation in Spanish television on the broader cultural landscape. Examining audience reactions, media coverage, and the discourse generated around these series can provide a more precise landscape of the extent to which feminist representation in television has contributed to shifting societal attitudes and perceptions of gender roles.

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