

Queer temporalities in TV series *Veneno*: breaking down the spiral of silence through trans visibility

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people, an evolution is detected from ostracism and fetishization in the past, to a future shift towards greater normalization and livable life forms. But the results also reveal a spiral of meanings that interconnect with different temporalities and contexts, reflecting the non-linear nature of queer temporalities. Additionally, the paper discusses how this series, due to its media impact, has contributed to socio-political public debate on the need to address the rights of trans people in modern-day Spanish society. Finally, its impact not only relies on improving trans visibility by portraying trans narratives, but we also discuss how the series is playing an important role in queering the media industry itself, ensuring trans people to work both in front and behind the cameras.

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Abstract

This study explores the implications of media visibility in the evolution of public opinion about trans people in the Spanish context. We focus on the socio-cultural impact of the TV series ‘*Veneno*’ (2020, Atresmedia) in relation to the breaking down of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) on trans issues. Based on Esteban Muñoz’s (2020) theoretical approach to queer temporalities, we conducted a ‘close reading’ analysis (Brummett 2018) of the diachronic narrative of the television series. Through a linear observation of the past, present and future of media representation and its relationship with the real-life situation of trans

1. Introduction: *Veneno*'s historical-temporal contextualization and cultural impact

The *Veneno* (2020) TV series is a biopic based on the life and memories of Cristina Ortiz, also known as 'La Veneno', who became famous on the highly successful late-night show *Esta noche cruzamos el Mississippi* on Spanish TV in the 1990s, which part of society viewed as sensationalist due to its tendentious subject matter and choice of extravagant characters (López-Talavera, 2016). Cristina's appearances made her one of the first trans people to feature prominently on a successful daily television show, and she helped introduce to public debate the realities of the trans community of that time, such as social rejection and prostitution.

Valeria Vegas, a trans journalist who followed La Veneno's television career, decided to tell her story in a book based on Cristina's narrated memoirs under the title *¡Digo! Ni puta ni santa. Las memorias de La Veneno* (Vegas, 2016). It was then adapted into a miniseries directed and written by Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo, two of the leading Spanish producers of audiovisual content that caters for the LGBTI+ collective (Smith, 2018).

The series has been recognized for its quality and cultural relevance in international awards, such as the GLAAD Media Awards and the MIPCOM Diversity TV Excellence Awards. It also achieved high audience ratings, becoming the most watched series on the VOD platform Atresplayer Premium (Jiménez, 2020), thus bringing to the center of social discussion such issues as the need for a law to protect the rights of trans people. Indeed, the vice president of Spain at that time, Pablo Iglesias, spoke positively about the series and recommended it on his social networks, while promising a law to foster the rights of the trans community.

Veneno was also an international success. It reached such diverse audiences as the United States and Latin America via the international platform HBO Max, where it also generated major media impact and repercussion, including the publication of articles on the subject in leading newspapers like Time (Haynes, 2020). Undoubtedly, numerous distribution platforms have been criticized for their aggressively expansionist content, which have in many cases had deleterious effects on local content. However, in the case of *Veneno*, there has been a play between local and global, benefiting the series and a character not known outside Spanish borders. Despite this, few studies on the representation and media repercussion of the series have appeared in the scientific literature (Sánchez-Soriano, 2021), so the implications of *Veneno* as a cultural product are still an unexplored area of study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The cisnormative system as a spiral of silence

The cisnormative system stigmatizes and marginalizes the transgender people, making them invisible and not viewing them as a valid reality. Cisnormativity is a hegemonic social, cultural, and ideological system based on the expectation that all people are cisgender, that is, their gender identity coincides with the sex assigned to them at birth (Bauer et al., 2009). This notion includes the tacit assumption that being cisgender is the only normal, natural, and desirable way to exist. The notion of ‘cisnormativity’ can be used to decipher the systemic nature of transgender invisibility and marginalization (Bauer et al., 2009), which promotes the sociocultural erasure of trans and non-binary experiences.

In this regard, the theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) serves to highlight the way in which trans people have traditionally suffered from being ignored by the media and society as a whole. Noelle-Neumann reflects precisely on how behaviors and opinions that are contrary to the hegemonic social discourses are made invisible and marginalized. She explains how the climate of opinion depends on who is speaking and who is silent, and how that which is not narrated does not exist. The predominant discourses about what is acceptable and what is not are transferred to public opinion through the different mechanisms of socialization, where the media, which are considered the new public sphere, have a fundamental role to play (Garnham, 2004).

For this reason, Fejes and Petrich (1993) considered that one of the fundamental goals of the LGBTI+ movement should be to achieve visibility in the media, under the premise that this would lead to changes in social attitudes towards LGBTI+ people. The media’s potential to influence the general audience’s opinion on issues that they only encounter in the media and not in their daily lives is especially highlighted (McCombs and Reynolds 2009), since “due to the lack of direct experience, individuals must rely on the media for information and interpretation of these issues” (Hester and Gibson, 2007, p. 301). The positive effect of fictional products on the construction of LGBTI+ identities, by providing such people with role models that serve as sources of pride, inspiration, and comfort, has also been widely discussed (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011; Villegas Simón, 2023).

Despite this, the results of the annual report of the ODA (Observatory of Diversity in Audiovisual Media) reveal that only 13 of 1.722 analyzed characters that appear in Spanish television series are trans (Cebrián Salé, et al., 2023), which shows such people are still in a stage of relative invisibility in Spanish fiction (Ventura, 2019). However, the ODA also mentioned that the trans community was more represented due to the appearance of the Atresmedia series *Veneno*. Indeed, given that numerous authors maintain that the spiral of silence can be broken by the same institutions that maintain it, that is, by the media (McCurdy, 2010), it seems appropriate to discuss the role of this series in such a regard.

The spiral of silence is based on four assumptions defined by Dittus (2005): a) fear of isolation; b) the threat posed by breaking hegemonic social norms; c) attempts to find out about those hegemonic norms so as not to be isolated; and, finally, d) the invisibility of opinions, values or realities that contradict the dominant discourses. Hence, the media act as a maintenance mechanism for a specific social, cultural and ideological system, in this case a cisnormative one.

However, against this cisnormative system and the spiral of silence that perpetuates it, Noelle-Neumann (2010) also highlights the existence of a “hardcore” group, that is, the minority of people whose opinions are unaffected by those of others. Thus, they defy the threat of isolation and continue trying to break the spiral of silence imposed by the hegemonic system. As the author explains, the “hard core” introduces values of the future, but in a certain sense it also retains the values of the past, which makes it suffer from isolation in the present. In fact, this complex mix of past, present, and future has also been the subject of numerous debates around time from a queer perspective.

2.2. Conceptions of time: Queer Time, utopian futurity and non-linear discourses

Queer theories have frequently addressed the issue of time (Dinshaw et al., 2007) from various perspectives, including the possibility of a ‘queer time,’ LGBTIQ+ historiography, or the potential for queer futures. Firstly, there exists a hegemonic conception of time, which Freeman describes as ‘chrononormativity’ (2010), with repercussions on non-cis-heteronormative (Halberstam 2005), racialized (Keeling, 2019; Phillips, 2015) bodies, among others. LGBTIQ+ individuals experience ‘anachronisms’ (Dinshaw, 2007) within this normative flow of time, such as experiences like ‘it’s just a phase,’ ‘second adolescence,’ or ‘transition.’ Contrary to more pessimistic readings of this analysis, Halberstam (2005) proposes the possibility of an agent and transformative ‘queer time’ against social structures. Secondly, queer historiography is a fruitful field of research. Beyond its ability to ‘discover’ queer individuals or cultures in the past (sic.), queer history stands out for creating alternative historiographical epistemologies, such as the revaluation of subjectivity and emotions (Cvetkovich, 2018), as well as the corporeal (Dinshaw, 2007), and even the erotic (Freeman, 2010). Nevertheless, and thirdly, within the framework of this research, we will focus on debates surrounding queer futures, aiming to a more precisely frame of our analysis of Veneno.

For Edelman (2004), the future is heteronormatively framed since it is always semantically and psychologically determined by cis-heterosexual reproduction. There is no future for queer people and their non-reproductive sexual practices, but a continuous present that, furthermore, rejects a conception of time as a linear path.

On the contrary, José Esteban Muñoz (2020) urges to recuperate the political idealism of a better future, since “queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (p.11). The future that

Esteban Muñoz urges us to build is not based on the normative idea that time is linear and progressive. He associates this linearity with capitalism, heteronormativity, gay pragmatism, and white reproductive futurity. For him, it is precisely this “hetero-linear time” that causes queer people to feel “that both the past and the future do not belong to them” and that “all we are allowed to imagine is barely surviving in the present” (p. 112).

Instead, he proposes the recovery of utopian idealism. Thus, with hope as a political tool, Esteban Muñoz defines queerness as belonging to the future, as something that we are not yet, that has yet to come, and that determines our political horizon. This horizon is not situated in a conservative idea of progress, or in a past-present-future heterolinerity, but in a queer time that, according to Esteban Muñoz, condenses the past, present, and future in what he calls “ecstatic” time:

Knowing ecstasy is having a sense of timeliness’s motion, comprehending a temporal unity, which includes the past (having-been), the future (the not-yet), and the present (the making-present). This temporally calibrated idea of ecstasy contains the potential to help us encounter a queer temporality (Esteban Muñoz, 2020, p. 186).

Esteban Muñoz’s utopian futurity is thus more than just thinking about the future. It also includes returning to a past memory to enable critical analysis of our present, as well as an imagining of our future; in the vein of queer approaches to archiving LGBTIQ+ history.

Moreover, Muñoz’s utopian frame has been widely used in cultural studies, including the analysis of queer audiovisual products, as proven by previous literature (Johnston, 2020; Ryberg, Kyrölä, & Koivunen, 2021). In our case study, his idea of utopian futurity is reflected in the relationship between ‘La Veneno’ (as a person) and *Veneno* (as a series). In fact, it is the series itself that demonstrates how La Veneno’s television appearances in the 90’s served as inspiration for a young Valeria, who felt somehow attracted to and identified with that trans revelation. Valeria then wrote La Veneno’s biography, on which this television series is based, perhaps inspiring further young and trans viewers. This revelation, interpreted as discovery of the unknown or making the hidden visible plays a fundamental role in breaking the spiral of silence.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to analyze the evolution of trans visibility in Spain in the context of the diachronic narrative proposed by the television series *Veneno* (2020), as well as the role of the media in relation to breaking the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1993), and its interactions with the sociocultural context (Rocha, 2011).

Audiovisual products are complex cultural texts that function on a broader discursive level than mere textual interpretation. For this reason, we perform an analysis based on a ‘close reading’, a technique that arose from Literary Studies and has been adapted to other media forms (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum, 2011). It is receiving increasing attention as a tool for analyzing audiovisual texts, such as series and movies, within the context of Cultural Studies (Calderón-Sandoval & Sánchez-Espinosa, 2021; Fedele & Masanet, 2021; Masanet *et al.*, 2022).

The purpose of this technique is to make a critical reading, a detailed examination, a process of deconstruction and an in-depth analysis of a text, in order to reveal how all the elements that intervene in its configuration (from production and content, to context and reception) come together to create a unified experience. Hence, close reading is a way to reveal the many ways in which a text can create socially shared meanings (Brummett, 2018).

One of the approaches used in this technique is based on Aarseth’s (1994) proposals with regard to non-linear texts, which seek to look beyond traditional linear temporality and invoke other meanings. We use this approach in our analysis, since it fits with the theoretical proposal on queer temporalities and “ecstatic” time (Esteban Muñoz, 2020) on which this study is based, and which precisely suggests the need to find alternatives to “hetero-linear” time. This allows us to reveal the underlying, non-linear queer discourses that intertwine in a spiral of interconnected meanings with different temporalities and contexts.

Our analysis is organized into four dimensions, following previous studies by Fedele and Masanet (2021): a) Context: historical, social, political and cultural environment; b) Aesthetics: typical aesthetic resources and technical codes of audiovisual language; c) Storytelling: plots, characters, actions and temporal structure developed within the narrative; and d) Content and meaning: themes, problems, subjects and institutions, in relation to the ideological code that makes the text coherent and places it in a certain discourse. The close reading analysis was performed according to a mixed method of induction/deduction, guided solely by the theoretical notion of queer temporalities (Esteban Muñoz, 2020).

The authors should also mention the position from which they undertook this analysis, which should help readers to appreciate the “place” that we are “speaking” from (Haraway, 1988). The three authors concur in their dissent regarding the cisheteronormative model. Even so, it should be noted that, as analysts, our individual conditions do not coincide with those of the subjects that are the object of study, that is, trans women. This entails a series of implicit limitations on the formulation of our discourse, to which is added a privileged situation within the scheme of intersectional power relations: white, Eurocentric, upper-middle class people with a high level of education. In sum, we discuss the trans question from an intersectional, feminist and trans and, therefore, transfeminist approach. Finally, as in previous research such as Tortajada *et al.* (2021) and Masanet *et al.* (2022), our study intends to be useful for improving the conditions of trans people.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. La Veneno

Cristina Ortiz's character, also known as 'La Veneno', is presented through five stages of her vital development: 1) childhood in her hometown, 2) adolescence and departure from the town, 3) youth, moving to Madrid and gender transition, 4) adulthood and television success, and 5) old age, decay of the character, and new awakening.

The past category corresponds to the first four stages, that is, from her birth to her triumph on television during the 1990s. The representation of this past in the series is a deconstruction of queer time. It is La Veneno herself who tells Valeria, the co-star of the series, about her earlier years. In this regard, past and present are combined in an intermediate place, suggested by the construction of the audiovisual narrative: audios from the present are superimposed over a visual representation of La Veneno and Valeria's respective childhoods, which are compared despite belonging to very different chronologies. We highlight three aspects of this stage, beginning with the "documentary" one. The series accurately narrates the difficulty of being born and growing up as a trans woman in rural Spain in the sixties and seventies, including the lack of parental love, harassment by the local community, the need to escape, and the delay in discovering the first trans references, whereby it serves as a necessary archive of queer memory that helps to remind us of the pain. There is, therefore, in *Veneno*, an undoubted conversation between fiction and the use of historical archival material.

Secondly, it is important to underline how this "documentary" past is, actually, a story mediated by various creators, such as La Veneno narrating her past, Valeria re-listening to her recordings and putting them on paper, and the producers of the series translating the written biography into audiovisual language. Consequently, it is also full of artificial mediation, although this does not imply a lack of rigor or objectivity. Rather, it seeks to define how queer memory is built on a catalog of individual and micro-collective feelings and experiences, which illustrate Donna Haraway's situated knowledges and her feminist politics of the situation.

Thirdly, and lastly, we describe a particular scene in which queer and trans-temporal mediations take center stage. It shows Cristina's catholic communion in Adra, her hometown. Narrated by La Veneno herself from the present, it shows her young self entering the church wearing a suit that she herself cut into a skirt. Cristina walks to the altar as if on a catwalk, parading before the astonished gazes of the congregation. When she reaches the altar, she unfurls a huge white peacock tail. This scene shows us how imagining the past is also an exercise of queer politics. It twists the so-called historical objectivity to build LGBTTI+ icons that mobilize emotions and strengths. Although we know perfectly well that La Veneno did not have a peacock's tail, the image sticks in our memory as something we wish had happened, continues to happen, or will happen in the future.

Moving forward to the present, our analysis focuses on the final stage of La Veneno's life, leading up to her death. This is when she narrates her past to Valeria, and with the writer's help she feels revived and tries to recover everything time has taken away from her. It is in this present when her memoirs are finally published, when the spiral of silence is broken once again. It is not only trans silence (that is, invisibility) that is broken here, but we also witness a change in the media framework that defined La Veneno as a public figure. She is no longer portrayed in the stereotypical manner as a person of spectacle, ridicule and fetishism, and is instead presented as a complex character, a woman suffering in the face of many difficulties, and whose mere televised existence marked a change in the future of Spanish trans rights.

During this present stage, we are shown the presentation of La Veneno's biography, a scene in which we witness a concert of ecstatic and queer times that perfectly exemplifies the theses collected in this article. La Veneno dances to *Always on My Mind*, by the Pet Shop Boys. The camera begins to pan around her. Eventually, she changes. She is the same La Veneno, but at a different moment of her life. All the La(s) Veneno(s) portrayed by the series, from the youngest to the oldest, appear together dancing. At that specific moment in the present, all of La Veneno's times converge in a single, ecstatic place, the dance floor, which Esteban Muñoz defines as a paradigmatic space of the queer imagination. And the camera does not just rotate. It also spirals, thus reflecting the spiral of silence that each La Veneno broke, in one way or another.

Finally, La Veneno's future is written in the realm of the imaginary. In one of the final scenes of the series, after her death, she (as a ghost) and Valeria meet again. La Veneno, her ability to invent and spectacularize her life still intact, asks Valeria to narrate her funeral. Valeria decides to create an imaginary burial that never happened. It takes place on a sunny day in the Parque del Oeste (Madrid), and everyone who appeared in the series is in attendance: family, friends, television colleagues... The series then cuts abruptly to what actually happened. How her ashes were scattered and only a few of her nearest and dearest ended up in the park, on a gray and rainy day, with hardly anyone there to say goodbye. However, in the imagination a different future is written, one that is much more interesting politically. A utopia that encourages mobilization, and that today, in our present, does regularly bring together LGBTI+ people who come to pay tribute to her at the plaque in Parque del Oeste that commemorates her figure.

4.2. Valeria

The first time we meet Valeria is during the 90s, where La Veneno appeared on one of the late-night television programs that turned her into a nationwide celebrity. Valeria was still a little girl at the time, and had to go to bed before her parents, who sit up on the couch watching the TV show. When Cristina Ortiz comes onto the set, they laugh at her jokes and comments, without noticing that behind her, Valeria has sneaked out of bed and is secretly watching La Veneno as well. Here, the spiral of silence is also broken on two different levels. On the one hand, the silence of Valeria's parents: two (apparently) cis and heterosexual people whose contact with La Veneno through television is probably the only way they will encounter a trans person. On the other hand, the rupture of a specific queer silence. When Valeria, as a child, sees La Veneno on television, an identity, a body and an experience like Cristina's becomes possible for her. She broadens her horizon of possibilities, her catalog of referents. She facilitates, albeit partially, her future as a trans woman.

During Valeria's young adult years, the spiral of silence is explicitly mentioned when she is studying journalism at college and a lecturer is teaching Noelle-Neumann's theory. Valeria, who has just met La Veneno for the first time, decides to explain the impact she had on trans visibility. This university project is the first stage of La Veneno's biography, as well as the relationship between Cristina and Valeria, and all the experiences they will go through together later. The series, from then on, constructs a narrative that temporarily connects Valeria's present and La Veneno's past. Cristina tells her story. Valeria listens to it and writes it down. And they both compare their lives. While La Veneno suffered the abuse of her family and local community and was forced to run away, Valeria was able to enter higher education, go through her transition at university and experience the love and affection of her mother and friends. She also finds a stable partner and a qualified job as a journalist, and she was never in the precarious position of sex work being her only possibility of gaining an income.

But there are also certain similarities in their stories: sexual fetichisms of the trans body, secrecy and being in the closet (Valeria hides her trans identity from her mother for a while), lack of acceptance (Valeria's boyfriend's family are subtly reluctant and some of their "soft" comments are deeply hurtful to her), and the continuing existence of professional discredit of her and her trans stories (her biography of La Veneno had to be self-published after an innumerable series of rejections by all publishing houses).

Valeria's future is suggested by a small, almost imperceptible detail in the series. In a conversation she has with La Veneno in her apartment in Madrid, Cristina gives her a VHS tape of the film *Vestida de Azul* (Antonio Giménez-Rico, Spain, 1983), one of the first Spanish documentaries to portray the reality of trans women. Later, the documentary will be the starting point for Valeria's follow-up book (Vegas, 2019). This introduces a new, esc-tatic time of trans political potential to the series. Through a simple gesture in the present

(passing a videotape from one hand to another) the screenwriters demonstrate how trans solidarity and visibility can build a future in which a new spiral of silence (the reality of Spanish trans women during the era of the transition towards democracy) will be broken in the future by another cultural product. Beyond Cristina's death, beyond the time-frame of Valeria's life reflected in the series; there is a place that has utopian potential, a time when the trans women portrayed in the series will finally get justice. Furthermore, it has recently been announced that *'Vestidas de azul'* will be the core reference material for the screenplay of *Veneno's* second season (Taibo, 2021).

4.3. Audience and society

Our final unit of analysis is ourselves: the audience, through the supra-category of the society in which this cultural product is inserted. Although the series traveled further, here we refer exclusively to Spanish society.

When reflecting on our past as a society, we cannot avoid talking about their stigmatization and repression. But also about their resistance and survival. We highlight their invisibility in the field of audiovisual representation and discourse. In the few cases in which trans women were represented audio-visually, this was through hyper-visibility, ostracism, ridicule, spectacularization and fetishism. However, there is also a positive side, and it is one that the series considers especially, namely that the spectacularized hyper-visibility of trans women was also a tool for breaking the silence and taking some of the first steps towards pro-rights policies for trans people.

We view our present, phenomenologically, as the moment when we were able to see *Veneno* for the first time. Here, *Veneno's* presence in the modern-day media and entertainment ecosystem encourages us to rethink the narratives on which we construct the story of our common past: our shared idea of La Veneno, of trans women, of the Spanish Transition, etc. At the same time, it also encourages us to imagine and campaign for possible futures that are free from violence.

Thinking further about our present as a society, we introduce diverse ideas. First, we should point out that the series was filmed, premiered and broadcast during the most difficult months of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had radical consequences for our perception of time, as proven by cognitive studies (Makarova, Makarova, & Korovin, 2022) and psychology studies (Holman et al. 2022). It encouraged us to rethink the mistakes of our past, it suspended the present in an intermediate moment, and, in the best of cases, it renewed our energies to think about a better future. We could perhaps even define our present-day society as an ecstatic time in itself.

Secondly, and more specifically, our social present is strongly determined by a collective debate around trans people's rights. Feminisms and LGBTI+ activism continue to campaign

for the well-being of and a dignified life for trans people, while at the same time facing the violent reactions of the growing far-right, Catholic organizations, “pro-family” groups, or, in a final twist, certain sectors of traditional feminist activism that are perversely suggesting that the advancement of trans rights is a threat to the achievements that have already been attained by cis women. This debate is crystallized in a tense discussion, in the midst of which the series emerged and consequently became an instrument in the argumentations of both sides. After it was broadcast, *La Veneno* was reappraised as a trans icon, and came to symbolize, despite the temporal distance, pro-trans law positions and the activism against transphobic reactions. On the other hand, she also became the target of anti-trans rhetoric. Consequently, her memorial plaque in the Parque del Oeste, Madrid is divided between shows of support, LGBTI+ flags and candles, on the one hand; and transphobic graffiti and other forms of fascist vandalism, on the other. Even the regional and local governments participated in this debate by threatening to remove the plaque. *La Veneno*’s historical objectivity is thus being forced into the background, to be replaced by a re-semanticization of her figure as a trans icon in a present of hard disputes over the increase in social rights.

In addition, if there is an aspect in which the *Veneno* series connects to the present zeitgeist of Spanish society, it is the recently approved “Trans Law”. In fact, when launching the draft bill on a ‘Trans Law’, the Spanish Ministry of Equality (during this time), Irene Montero, recommended ‘*Veneno*’ on Twitter to understand the stigma that trans people suffered (el-Diario.es, 2020). Thereby, the public debate on the LGBTI Law was marked by the premiere of the series, providing the audience an opportunity for the understanding of transgender lives. Although the finally approved law does not meet the expectations of social activism, it still is an unprecedented advance in our democracy, whereby it reduces the medical and psychological limitations on access to gender self-determination and incorporates hormonal and surgical transition processes in the national health budgets.

Therefore, we argue that the series was not a isolated cultural product, and neither was it an anecdotal biopic. On the contrary, it explicitly connected with the sensitivity of a moment, generating fundamental debate and historic changes to Spanish society, its freedoms and rights, and, above all, its acceptance or rejection of trans people. *Veneno* played an active part in the public debates and social struggles that led to some of the most recent achievements in LGBTI rights.

It is hard to say what role this series might play in that future. The legal and social advances in trans rights continue to face reactionary and violent positions, making utopia difficult to imagine. However, and according to Esteban Muñoz, our work must be informed by the idea that better times are coming. We find ourselves in an ecstatic time, when a series has recently premiered that recounts the history of a national icon who has been re-iconized in the present as a pro-human rights symbol who has driven us towards a future in which transphobic violence will indeed be eradicated. From here, a promising future can be built by encouraging the rupture of further multidisciplinary spirals of silence (audiovisual, publishing and academic, among others).

5. Conclusions

The *Veneno* series has appeared at a historical moment in Spanish fiction, when topics have been introduced that had not been dealt with in depth before, such as the feminist struggle for equality and attitudes to sexual freedoms (Lacalle & Simelio, 2019). This research has analyzed the series from three vertices, separately and dissected by temporal levels, in order to better understand the characters of La Veneno, Valeria and the audience/society itself. However, it is worth noting that queer temporalities are inevitably interspersed and are based on the fluidity and permeability between their different past, present and future tenses.

Veneno has stood out for its major cultural and media impact, including an excellent reception on an international level, and for receiving numerous awards and widespread critical acclaim. But its most important effect has been in the social sphere, introducing to the social debate the need for legal recognition that explicitly protects trans people. Hence, the series has helped to break the spiral of silence in public opinion on two levels: both within the diegetic context of the series itself, and also among its viewers.

However, although *Veneno* depicts the realities of the trans community, we also need to reflect on the kind of audiences that consume it. Is it watched by a broad, general audience, or perhaps only by a counter-public sphere that is already aware, LGBTI-friendly and of a more progressive nature? If it has such a focalized audience, can we truly claim that this program has helped to break the spiral of silence in the public sphere? While the TV program that gave rise to the phenomenon of La Veneno, *Esta noche cruzamos el Mississippi*, was shown free-to-air for a general audience in prime time, the *Veneno* series is restricted to niche and specifically pay-per-view consumption. Hence, *Veneno* could be classed as GLO (Gay and Lesbian Oriented) media (Bond, 2015) or, re-defined in our context, LGBTI+ media that is designed, produced and marketed specifically for an LGBTI+ audience. One of the fundamental characteristics of these media products is that LGBTI+ people are portrayed more frequently and in more realistic situations than in traditional media (Bond, 2015).

Nonetheless, the audiovisual contents that audiences choose to watch can be linked to the socio-political context (Mateos-Pérez & Ochoa, 2016), and fiction with a high media impact such as *Veneno* are not left out of social forums and generalized visibility. Hence, *Veneno* is characterized as a cultural product, as well as one of political activism that seeks to transform the social structure. This particular case has arisen from the production level, but it stands alongside other similar actions of political activism conceived from the audience level (Ventura et al., 2019). The TV series not only vindicates the avant-garde figure of La Veneno and her “hard core” role (Nöelle-Neumann, 1993), but has also played its part in breaking the spiral of silence from within the media itself.

In conclusion, there is no question that both the real-life La Veneno and the series about

her have served to generate debate in society around improvements to the living conditions of trans people. Therefore, paraphrasing the analyzed characters themselves, and as a metaphor for a promising future, we could say that “she walked so that all of us could run”.

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