

**NETFLIX' TRANSNATIONALISATION:**

**LA CASA DE PAPEL AS INSTRUMENT FOR CROSSING BORDERS**



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## Abstract

This thesis investigates how particular content on a subscription video-on-demand service (SVOD) could support the reach of the service. Central to this thesis are the platform 'Netflix' and the Spanish-language series *La Casa de Papel* (*LCDP*), which is available on Netflix. The medium of television and the internet have merged together, resulting in the development of new forms of television. As a consequence of these developments, Michael Curtin calls for 'the matrix media era': an era shaped by non-linear digital services on the internet, that is associated with a different reach than traditional media. Namely, the national character of television is replaced by the international, or sometimes global, character of SVODs. In the case of Netflix, some scholars, such as Mareike Jenner, argue that this platform's reach should be called 'transnational', since Netflix reaches across borders. It is not available in every country due to imbalances and, according to Jenner, therefore not global. As Netflix says to strive to be 'a global entertainment service', it is likely that the service tries to increase its transnationality. In this research, platform specific strategies that relate to spatiality are analysed, showing that Netflix actively works on increasing its reach. This involves both the level of its locations, and how the service deals with content: Netflix maintains strong relations with 'its countries' and, e.g., texts from diverse cultures are included in the library, therefore engaging a wide audience. The fact that *La Casa de Papel* has become Netflix' most watched non-English-language series indicates that it contains qualities that are accessible to people from various cultures. The format, linguistic aspects, genre and themes of *LCDP* and in what way the series is displayed on the Netflix interface are analysed to explore its connection to Netflix transnationalism. It is concluded that especially the four substantive features of the series could possibly contribute to Netflix transnationalisation, although the presentation of *LCDP* on the interface shows some connections to the extension of Netflix' reach as well.

**Key terms:** Transnationalism, Netflix, *La Casa de Papel*, Subscription Video-on-Demand Services (SVODs), Matrix Media Era, Television.

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## Introduction and Relevance

Due to various technological and social developments, television and the internet have evolved and subsequently merged together, resulting in the proliferation of online communication media. Whereas traditional television is considered to be predominantly national, the internet, being globally available, is a facilitator of connectivity across borders. According to media studies scholar Mareike Jenner, the decentralisation generated by the internet and the ability to create individual pathways through a wide variety of content indicate a new stage of television. This stage could be called 'the matrix media era': a concept introduced by media studies professor Michael Curtin.<sup>1</sup> Put differently, this era, shaped by new non-linear digital media such as the subscription video-on-demand service (SVOD) 'Netflix', encourages new viewing practices and is associated with a wider reach.

In contrast to traditional television, the decentralised matrix implies that platforms, such as SVODs, are not necessarily tied to nation-states. While Jenner and media and communication scholar Ramon Lobato differ in their understanding of the concept, both authors regard 'transnationalism' as Netflix' spatial characteristic. Transnationalism is explained by Jenner as the cross-border reach of institutions or cultural products, involving multiple - although not all - countries. Therewith, she considers the imbalances between countries (e.g., based on internet access) that limit the reach to be global. An aspect which Lobato practically omits. Since the connection between Netflix and transnationalism seems significant, I aim to further investigate this.

Starting in 1997 as a U.S.-based DVD rental service, in 2007 Netflix expanded its business with the addition of streaming media. Up until 2010, the service remained solely available in the U.S., whereafter it started to operate in other parts of American continents too. From this moment onwards, Netflix had to deal with transnational relations. Over the years more countries have been involved in Netflix, as it aims to become global. Accordingly, the service places increasing emphasis on maintaining and promoting its reach across borders.

Within the research on the matrix media era and associated streaming media, such as Netflix, mainly qualities of the internet are emphasised to explain cross-border scope. However, other strategies that enhance Netflix' ability to reach audiences across multiple nation-states can be distinguished too. For instance, the large international catalogues and the publication model for its exclusive content are considered to promote Netflix' reach.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the transnational

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<sup>1</sup> Mareike Jenner, "Is this TVIV? On Netflix, TVIII and binge-watching," *New media & society* 18, no. 2 (2016): 258-60.

<sup>2</sup> Mareike Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television* (New York City: Springer, 2018), 223.

quality could also be found in the substantive elements of original programmes ('Netflix Originals') or possibly in the presentation of such productions on the Netflix interface.

When aiming attention at the Netflix' exclusive productions, noteworthy is the wide variety of Spanish-language programmes. The Spanish series *La Casa de Papel* (*LCDP*; 2017-) seems especially interesting in the context of transnationalisation.<sup>3</sup> The show is about a gang wearing red overalls and Salvador Dalí-masks, who breaks into the Royal Mint of Spain, taking 67 people hostage, with the aim to escape with 2.4 billion euros. Four months after the series' transformation from a Spanish television to a Netflix format, *LCDP* (now regarded as an 'Original') has become Netflix' "most watched non-English-language series," gaining worldwide success.<sup>4</sup> Besides the format change which apparently allows for transnational accessibility, other content features of the series link to transnationalism too. Investigating *La Casa de Papel*'s role in Netflix' transnationalisation makes this research a relevant addition to the debate about the matrix media era and online streaming media.

The aspects related to internet distribution, as addressed in the debate, are significant for transnationalisation. Yet, it does not explicitly involve the contribution of features of original content or that of the Netflix interface. For this reason, this thesis examines certain substantive aspects of *LCDP* and how the series is displayed on the interface. By focusing on these elements, the analysis investigates the ways they relate to and potentially promote transnationalisation of Netflix. Hence, the aim is to answer the research question: **how does the series *La Casa de Papel* contribute to the transnationalisation, as defined by Mareike Jenner, of the online streaming platform 'Netflix' in the matrix media era?** Before this question can be answered, insight must be gained into how Netflix could be perceived as a transnational actor. Platform specific strategies of Netflix that relate to its spatiality are explained by answering the sub-question: what strategies does Netflix apply in order to be a transnational actor? Thereafter, subjects that specifically connect to the case study are explored, for which the following sub-questions are formulated: in what way do the format, language, genre and themes of *La Casa de Papel* play a role in transnationalisation of Netflix?; and how is the presentation of *La Casa de Papel* on the Netflix interface able to contribute to the transnationalisation of the platform?

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Ramon Lobato, "Rethinking international TV flows research in the age of Netflix," *Television & New Media* 19, no. 3 (2018): 241-2.

Chuck Tryon, "TV got better: Netflix's original programming strategies and the on-demand television transition," *Media Industries Journal* 2, no. 2 (2015), 104-16.

<sup>3</sup> *La Casa de Papel*, Netflix, dir. Álex Pina, Vancouver Media, 2017-, <https://www.netflix.com/search?q=money&jbv=80192098>.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Castro, and Concepción Cascajosa, "From Netflix to Movistar+: How Subscription Video-on-demand Services Have Transformed Spanish TV Production," *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 59, no. 3 (2020): 157.

Netflix Inc, "Netflix Q1 2018 Letter to Shareholders," *Netflix Investor Relations*, 16 April 2018, 2-3, [https://s22.q4cdn.com/959853165/files/doc\\_financials/quarterly\\_reports/2018/q1/FINAL-Q1-18-Shareholder-Letter.pdf](https://s22.q4cdn.com/959853165/files/doc_financials/quarterly_reports/2018/q1/FINAL-Q1-18-Shareholder-Letter.pdf).

Structurally, the topics of these three sub-questions are investigated through which a general, as well as a more specific understanding of Netflix' spatial character is created. In order to do so, the context for the analysis must be provided and useful concepts need to be further explained. Additionally, an explanation of the research method is required.

## **Theoretical Framework**

By including several authors' perceptions, in this theoretical framework the context for the analysis is provided first. Subsequently, concepts and interpretations relating to transnationalism are explained.

### Traditional Television and the Matrix Media Era

In his article from 2009, sociologist and communication scientist Elihu Katz argues about 'the end of television' as he recognises changes in the form of the medium and associated audience practices. Both Katz and sociologist specialised in global media Jean Chalaby (in 2005) note that classic TV was about shaping a national identity, 'family togetherness' and a limited choice of content. In contrast, the 'new phase' (i.e., television from the beginning of the 21st century), is characterised by multiple channels, niche broadcasting and individuality.<sup>5</sup> According to Katz, the traditional societal status of classic television was challenged by the addition of diverse types of local as well as global content.<sup>6</sup> More research conducted years later than the works of Katz and Chalaby aligns with these ideas about television's developments.

Whilst acknowledging traditional television's national character, Ramon Lobato emphasises that, for example, satellite and cable distribution systems already transformed television's spatial dynamics. He adds that the - what used to be - 'national' broadcasters now reached international markets and encouraged other viewing practices.<sup>7</sup> More recently, the rise of the internet and accordingly the rise of streaming services in the 21st century seem to have led to a further modification in viewing practices, as television researcher Anna Cristina Pertierra and professor of cultural studies Graeme Turner argue.<sup>8</sup> New distribution methods, according to

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<sup>5</sup> Jean K. Chalaby, "Towards an Understanding of Media Transnationalism," in *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*, ed. Jean K. Chalaby (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005a), 1.  
Elihu Katz, "Introduction: The end of television?," *The annals of the American academy of political and social science* 625 (2009): 7.

<sup>6</sup> Katz, "Introduction," 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ramon Lobato, *Netflix Nations: The geography of digital distribution* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Cristina Pertierra and Graeme Turner, *Locating Television: Zones of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2013), 17.

Turner, cause the medium's transition from a national to a 'hybrid and multi-platform' system. This new system, including SVODs like Netflix, encourages consumption practices based on customisation and individualisation, instead of 'nation building and family togetherness'.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Lobato, Turner and Pertierra provide an understanding that changes in the medium of television, often associated with the internet, have resulted in a diminishing connection to the nation. Collectivism and nationalism as the initial connotations of television make way for individualism and internationalism.

What can be inferred from the above-mentioned perceptions is that television should not be regarded as a fixed medium, but rather one that is always in transition as it develops along the axes of technology and society. The contemporary shifts in the characteristics of television are also noted by Mareike Jenner, who aims to conceptualise Netflix in the discourses of contemporary television, SVODs and audience practices. She involves Roberta Pearson's idea about 'periods' regarding the history of U.S. television: TVI, TVII and TVIII. While TVI and TVII are still about specific channels, mass audiences and branding strategies, TVIII includes technological innovations. This allowed television to move to other distribution platforms, causing "further audience fragmentation."<sup>10</sup> This latter stage is in line with Turner's above discussed understanding of television as a multi-platform system. Nevertheless, Jenner argues that the third stage of U.S. TV is closely connected to the familiar medium, since it is still tied in with the "technology, branding and programming strategies, and social connotations" of traditional television.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, she believes that online SVODs like Netflix signal a step away from this by employing different branding strategies, utilizing other technologies and types of programming, and consequently encouraging other viewing practices.<sup>12</sup> This is also noted by media studies professor Amanda Lotz, who illustrates the distinction by emphasising that SVODs' access and revenue model based on subscriber funding could be considered as the main features that distinguish online services from linear television.<sup>13</sup> Thus, using competitive tools that do not rely on selling viewers to advertisers, SVODs indicate a potential fourth stage in U.S. television history: TVIV.

Jenner and Lotz' emphasis on SVODs distinctive characteristics is nuanced by new media scholar Anne Gilbert, who notices that such outlets still rely on traditional television. Besides the creation of original content, the libraries of, for example, Netflix "comprise largely of licensed

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<sup>9</sup> Graeme Turner, "Approaching the Cultures of Use: Netflix, Disruption and the Audience," *Critical Studies in Television* 14, no. 2 (2019): 223-4, 227.

<sup>10</sup> Jenner, "Is this TVIV?," 258.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Amanda D. Lotz, "In between the global and the local: Mapping the geographies of Netflix as a multinational service," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2020): 2.

programming that originated on legacy television," indicating their relation to the traditional medium.<sup>14</sup> However, Gilbert admits that presenting television shows on online platforms may challenge their cultural quality, since they are transformed into a different format. Additionally, the licensed content is used in a business model that aims to appeal to a 'pulling' online audience: SVODs enable individuals to make selections of texts they want to watch. This is different from the legacy television model that shapes a 'pushed flow' programmed into a - for the audience - predetermined schedule.<sup>15</sup> Jenner and Lotz' idea that SVODs present content differently and encourage other viewing practices than ones associated with TVI-III thus seems to be agreed upon by Gilbert.

When considering the proliferation of digital distribution outlets - besides the changes already caused by satellite and cable distribution - it could be argued that the contemporary media landscape is less nation-oriented. Rather, it is more decentralised and international, providing a wide variety of content and allowing audiences to access and interpret programmes in an individualised manner. This dynamic, non-linear stage, signalling 'a move away from the television set', could be understood as - what Michael Curtin has called - 'the matrix media era'.<sup>16</sup> Following his idea, Netflix could be regarded as a matrix medium, since the platform allows its users to follow personal pathways that create a decentralised entertainment experience based on choice from diverse programming and suggestive algorithms. Since different 'nodes' in the matrix (i.e., various distribution outlets) and their developments stand in relation to each other, TVIV should be regarded as a dynamic stage.

Curtin's notion of the matrix media era is in accordance with media and communication professor Nick Couldry's conception of media as decentralised systems. Considering the flexibility and the interconnectedness of certain media located on the internet and their accessibility through portable devices, Couldry prefers to speak of the 'media environment', rather than to study media separately.<sup>17</sup> Jenner links this idea of a decentralised environment to the global media system, in which single media forms (e.g., Netflix) do not take up a specific location, in contrast to the television set.<sup>18</sup> Although the media environment can be regarded as global, the globality does not seem to be characteristic of all individual 'nodes' in this system. This is further elaborated in the next section.

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<sup>14</sup> Anne Gilbert, "Push, Pull, Rerun: Television Reruns and Streaming Media," *Television & New Media* 20, no. 7 (2019): 687.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 687-8.

<sup>16</sup> Jenner, "Is this TVIV?," 259-60.

<sup>17</sup> Nick Couldry, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 187.

Applying the term 'matrix media era' could help frame discussions of the contemporary media environment by outlining systems' characteristics and underlining their interrelations. Thus, the shift from traditional TV to the matrix media era provides the context for the concepts and interpretations explained in the following sections, as well as for the subsequent analysis.

### Transnationalism

As demonstrated, certain developments seem to have caused television's shift away from a national lens, consequently shaping a more individual, and paradoxically a global medium. However, when examining the debate on the matrix media era, it is worth noting that multiple authors link the scope of online streaming services to the concept of transnationalism.

In contrast to, amongst others, Katz and Lobato, Jenner still values broadcast television as predominantly national, since she believes that local networks cater to local audiences. Meanwhile, both Jenner and Lotz view Netflix as a decentralised service that is distinct from national media systems through different organisational strategies and models appropriate to online content distribution. The authors state that, therefore, Netflix tries to capture an audience that is positioned outside the national borders.<sup>19</sup> Even though SVODs such as Netflix seem to diminish the national lens, their globalisation does not appear to be without complications.

Whilst exploring Netflix in relation to national television, Jenner argues that the service's wide reach should not simply be considered as global without considering imbalances and national differences. The variety in access to Netflix in different countries, whether this is caused by a lack of necessary digital devices or a restriction imposed by a nation's government, demonstrates that the service's reach is limited and therefore - yet - not equally global. Similarly, Lotz points out imbalances between nations or regions as a consequence of internet availability and existing video ecosystem development.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence of the limitations, according to Jenner, the term 'transnational' should be used to describe Netflix' spatial characteristics. By including ideas of Steven Vertovec and Joseph Straubhaar, Jenner introduces transnationalism as a concept that could be approached by taking into account the qualities of cultural institutions, as well as the cultural value that is connected to texts.<sup>21</sup> Thus, according to her, transnationalism implies a connection between actors in a field (whether they are institutions or cultural objects) that takes place across multiple, but not all nation-states.

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<sup>19</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 186-7.

Lotz, "In between the global and the local," 12-3.

<sup>20</sup> Amanda D. Lotz, "The multifaceted policy challenges of transnational Internet-distributed television," *Journal of Digital Media & Policy* 10, no. 1 (2019): 28.

Lotz, "In between the global and the local," 6.

<sup>21</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 190-1.

The conceptualisation of transnationalism as proposed by Lobato, in contrast to Jenner, emphasises the importance of geographical locations. In his historical approach to the debate, he argues that ‘transnational’, in the context of early radio and television systems, indicated that content *leaked* to regions where nations share a border. He calls this ‘signal spillover’.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Lobato’s understanding of transnationalism is focused on the literal sense of the word: crossing national borders, and therefore ‘trans-national’. This ties in with Chalaby’s conception of transnationality with regards to satellite broadcasting. Herewith, he focuses on the nation and territoriality, and explains ‘transnational’ as “trespassing frontiers and violating the sanctity of ‘national cultural and communication sovereignty’.”<sup>23</sup> Considering Chalaby’s focus on satellite broadcasting may indicate that this way of interpreting transnationalism is associated with broadcast TV. For new online forms of the television medium, Jenner’s notion, as described above, seems more applicable.

Furthermore, according to Lobato, global television is the ability of services to “operate in a large number of international markets simultaneously.”<sup>24</sup> He discusses that the internet-distributed service HBO offers content in select markets, and is therefore not global, while on the other hand he defines Netflix as both transnational and global. Stating this, he again contradicts Jenner’s abovementioned view on the accessibility of online platforms: Lobato’s conception of global television ignores the limitations on the level of technology or the restrictions imposed by the national government. By omitting these elements, his notion seems insufficient when studying transnationalism in relation to the online streaming service Netflix and the ‘Netflix Originals’. Therefore again, Jenner’s conception of transnationalisation is more appropriate for this research, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the limitations of Netflix within a globalised media landscape and how this affects the reach of its content.

According to Jenner, accessibility and immediacy are Netflix’ qualities for achieving and enhancing transnationalism. The first analysis section of this thesis will demonstrate what strategies, associated with these qualities, the SVOD applies in order to be transnational.

### Transnational Genre

Regarding cultural texts, according to sociologists Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington, the framing of a production into a particular genre is useful for the global distribution of television series. Namely, producers could rely on the central classification of popular genres, and on the

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<sup>22</sup> Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 56.

<sup>23</sup> Jean K. Chalaby, “Deconstructing the transnational: A typology of cross-border television channels in Europe,” *New Media & Society* 7, no. 2 (2005b): 156.

<sup>24</sup> Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 50.

basis thereof anticipate on a production's global success.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, philosopher Stephen Neale describes that in genre films specific narrative elements are repeated, as well as the "'formal, narrative, and thematic' contexts in which they conventionally occur."<sup>26</sup> Cinema researcher Christina Klein adds that, through these 'generic formulas', genre films are "ideal candidates for transnational circulation," because they require no deep connection from audiences to, for example, other cultures.<sup>27</sup> Through the repetition of components or contexts, stable frameworks are created for genre productions, allowing them to cross borders.

As media professors Ib Bondebjerg et al. consider crime as the most popular genre for transnational TV and the heist (or 'caper') genre is regarded as a type of crime by media researcher Daryl Lee, it is interesting to see that Netflix has invested a lot in the heist-genre series *LCDP*.<sup>28</sup> Its genre might indicate a connection between this particular series and Netflix' transnationalisation. Amongst others this aspect will be further explored in the analysis of *LCDP*'s role in Netflix' transnationalisation.

### The Netflix Interface

Furthermore, genre is used as a tool by Netflix to organise its interface. Whereas broadcast television makes use of scheduling to construct consensus about a genre or theme, Netflix being a non-linear platform has no such control. Rather, Jenner argues, the interface is structured by generic categories, for which Netflix relies on the pre-existing consensus about genres.<sup>29</sup> Lobato emphasises that, through interface design and features such as the algorithmic recommendation system, platforms like Netflix are not neutral, as they have the ability to shape the manners of consumption they facilitate.<sup>30</sup> Even though Chalaby focuses on multi-territory TV, his belief that channels share a 'philosophy and concept', despite the territory in which it is displayed, relates to Lobato's view.<sup>31</sup> The ideas combined suggest that channels or platforms organise themselves according to their own philosophy. It therefore might be argued that, due to its interface organisation, Netflix establishes a certain use that is in favour of its aim to become global.

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<sup>25</sup> Denise D. Bielby, and C. Lee Harrington, "Managing culture matters: Genre, aesthetic elements, and the international market for exported television," *Poetics* 32, no. 1 (February 2004): 79.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), 196.

<sup>27</sup> Christina Klein, "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, Or, Transnational Genres in the Films of Bong Joon-ho," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2008): 873-4.

<sup>28</sup> Ib Bondebjerg, Eva Novrup Redvall, Rasmus Helles, Signe Sophus Lai, Henrik Søndergaard, and Cecilie Astrupgaard, *Transnational European television drama: Production, genres and audiences* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 18.

Daryl Lee, "Introduction: The Heist as Genre," in *The heist film: Stealing with style* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 132.

<sup>30</sup> Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 38-9.

<sup>31</sup> Chalaby, "Deconstructing the transnational," 156.

Important to take into account is that Netflix, to a certain extent, provides individualised interfaces through features such as the algorithm, various interface languages and the incorporation of different content in different countries. However, Lobato points out that Netflix aims at retaining its standard 'look and feel'.<sup>32</sup> Generally, Netflix thus facilitates a similar experience to every user in every country.

The last analysis section of this thesis will investigate how *LCDP* is incorporated in the Netflix' interface and how this may relate to transnationalism.

## Method

In order to systematically answer the main research question, the topics of the sub-questions mentioned in the introduction should sequentially be explored.

In the analysis of this research, first I examine the streaming service Netflix and its organizational strategies that can currently be identified. This SVOD is chosen because it contains some qualities (e.g., with regards to its original productions) that distinguish it from both national TV and other SVODs. Additionally, the Spanish-language series *La Casa de Papel* is selected as a case study for this research. The reason to choose this particular series is that it involves many characteristics for it to entail transnational quality. This has made evident, because the series has rapidly reached audiences from nation-states around the world, after its release on Netflix. Moreover, it is analysed how *LCDP* is presented on the Netflix interface. Although Netflix uses similar visual aspects to frame every type of content on its platform, this research focuses on *LCDP*'s icon. Analysis around this particular element might provide connections to the preceding analysis section.

As suggested in the theoretical framework, this research applies 'transnationalism' as explained by Jenner to the analysis of Netflix' strategies regarding its spatiality. Both academic and non-academic sources propose statements about the service's (spatial) characteristics. The textual analysis performed for the first analysis section discusses Netflix' most significant platform specific strategies and the (inter)actions it allows. This in order to investigate how Netflix could be perceived as 'transnational'.

After gaining an understanding of how Netflix acts transnationally, *LCDP*'s role in the platform's transnationalisation is investigated. As several authors link the series' worldwide success to substantive features, some that seem to be related to transnationalism are selected for this research: format, language, genre and themes. The relationship of the four features to

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<sup>32</sup> Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 119.

transnationality will be apparent from the analysis. This section is based on a textual and content analysis, because the connection is made between researchers' findings and specific elements from *LCDP*. Again, Jenner's notion of 'transnationalism' is referred to here.

The last analysis section explores how the presentation of *LCDP* on the Netflix interface might contribute to transnationalisation. Here, I refer to the interface that is offered to me, on a Dutch version of the platform (in December of 2020; set to English-language), since this is the version I have access to during the thesis process. In this way, the differences within the interface in each country and to each individual are taken into account. On the basis of images and text that shape *LCDP*'s icon on the service, I argue whether the display of *LCDP* on Netflix' interface could connect and contribute to the platform's transnationalisation.

The selection of the case material implies that the research is limited: only *LCDP* and my personal Dutch Netflix interface are incorporated. Arguments that are made might not apply to all Spanish-language Originals, or to the interfaces in other nations.

Within the analysis, references to concepts and views presented in the theoretical framework are made. Eventually, the three analysis sections together allow to give an answer to the main research question.

## **Analysis**

### **1. Netflix as a Transnational Streaming Platform**

As the theoretical framework demonstrates, some scholars regard Netflix as a transnational actor in the matrix media era. The following section will elaborate on how Netflix could be perceived as a transnational institution, considering how it operates and from where it is used in the world. Thereafter, the platform specific strategies it applies with regards to its exclusive content and publication model will be investigated, showing how Netflix' transnational characteristic includes the cross-border exchange of cultural texts.

#### 1.1 Netflix' Locations

After ten years of being a U.S.-based DVD rental service, streaming media were added to Netflix' business in 2007. Up until 2010, the service remained solely U.S. bound, whereafter it became

available in Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean too.<sup>33</sup> According to available data, by January 2016 the company held subscribers in over 190 countries, therefore announcing a “near global availability.”<sup>34</sup> In the year 2020, the number of areas in which Netflix is available has not changed: due to restrictions from the U.S. or the receiving country, China, Syria, North Korea and Crimea remain excluded. Recently released data shows that as of October 2020, Netflix owned over 195 million subscribers worldwide, of which 73 million are from the United States.<sup>35</sup> Considering the subscriber locations, Netflix’ spatiality could be connected to Jenner’s conception of transnationalism, as it maintains connections across multiple nation-states. Yet, certain restrictions cause a variety in access to the service around the globe, limiting the service to being global.

Moreover, Netflix’ transnationality is evident from the locations of its production facilities and offices. Since the company currently has offices in sixteen countries - and production facilities in four -, Lotz points out that the business infrastructure, which mainly overlaps with ‘subscriber geographies’, is structured by geographic regions. As the variety in ‘cultural and economic norms’ is monitored by the regional offices, Netflix is able to apply different strategies depending on the media environment of a region.<sup>36</sup> This indicates that the service acknowledges the importance of its transnational relations: it responds to countries’ needs and potentially creates a stronger connection to international audiences.

## 1.2 Transnational Library of Texts

Besides the relationship between transnationalism and the location of subscribers and business facilities, more substantive research shows that the transnational quality seems implemented in its content too. Lotz illustrates that a division could be made regarding Netflix’ content library: it contains ‘acquisitions’, ‘co-commissions’ and ‘commissions’. All three are considered important for the platform, however each category implies different “levels of economic allocation and creative control.”<sup>37</sup> For instance, the production of acquisitions is out of the hands of Netflix: this category comprises licensed content from, for example, television. As highlighted in the theoretical framework, Gilbert notes such content to be a significant part of the library.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, commissions or co-commissions are conditions for which Netflix could influence

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<sup>33</sup> “Netflix launches Canadian movie service,” CBC, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/netflix-launches-canadian-movie-service-1.872505>.

“Netflix expands to 43 new countries,” CNN, accessed December 4, 2020, [https://money.cnn.com/2011/07/05/technology/netflix\\_international/](https://money.cnn.com/2011/07/05/technology/netflix_international/).

<sup>34</sup> Lotz, “In between the global and the local,” 4.

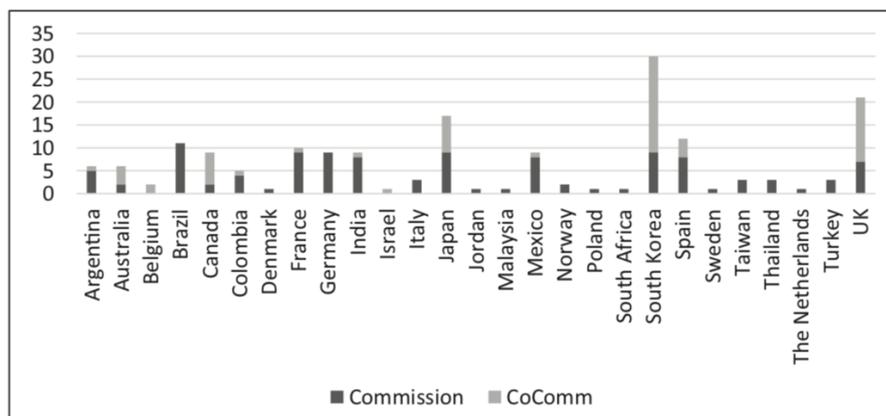
<sup>35</sup> Netflix Inc, “Investor Letter 2020 Q3,” *Netflix Investor Relations*, October 2, 2020, [https://s22.q4cdn.com/959853165/files/doc\\_financials/2020/q3/FINAL-Q3-20-Shareholder-Letter.pdf](https://s22.q4cdn.com/959853165/files/doc_financials/2020/q3/FINAL-Q3-20-Shareholder-Letter.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Lotz, “In between the global and the local,” 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert, “Push, Pull, Rerun,” 687.

creative production processes. These are often called ‘Netflix Originals’, although acquisitions for which Netflix owns exclusive rights, such as season one and two of *LCDP*, are treated the same. Whereas Netflix shares the rights and production costs for co-commissions, commissions are fully funded by the service. Seemingly, Netflix’ creative input into the production process of commissions could be larger than with co-commissions. Still, there is a certain influence on co-commissions as well, since Netflix owns part of the rights. Similar to how Netflix is able to maintain control over its interface, as suggested in the theoretical framework, co/commissions might also substantiate the service’s philosophy, since its identity and content strategies could be implemented in such productions.<sup>39</sup> Following this idea, analysing such texts could help investigate Netflix’ content strategy. With focus on *LCDP*, the second analysis section demonstrates in what ways Netflix could influence productions. This section further elaborates on the general strategies regarding Netflix’ content.



**Figure 1:** The number of commissions and co-commissions on Netflix by 27 countries, excluding the U.S. (by February 2020).<sup>40</sup>

Figure 1 shows the number of co/commissions by several countries, excluding the U.S. Remarkable is, for instance, the large number of co/commissions by some Asian or European countries. As Netflix itself says to “strive to be a global entertainment service that can satisfy the needs of members all over the world,” it is interesting to know that the ‘foreign’ co/commissions shape 58% of all co/commissions.<sup>41</sup> Apparently, multinational commissioning is prioritised in Netflix’ path to become global (or ‘more transnational’, when following Jenner’s terminology). Because of the service’s wide reach, it has the interest and ability to commission multinationally, which in turn allows for the incorporation of a large library of local (language) and niche content. For instance, early in 2020, I noticed the large number of Spanish/Latin American productions on Netflix. It made me interested to investigate this part of the library more in-depth: eventually, the popular Spanish series *LCDP* is central to this thesis. Lotz explains that the diverse library

<sup>39</sup> With ‘co/commissions’, both commissions and co-commissions are intended.

<sup>40</sup> Lotz, “In between the global and the local,” 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Netflix Inc, “Investor Letter 2020 Q3.”

distinguishes Netflix from national channels, since programming for ‘tastes and sensibilities’ of niche audiences would create a market too small for such outlets.<sup>42</sup> For Netflix, however, this content strategy enables the SVOD to expand transnationally, since a content library including texts from diverse cultures facilitates greater connections to local or niche audiences, whether they are English or non-English speakers.

### 1.3 Transnationally Accessible Content

According to Jenner, Netflix’ transnationalism is based on ‘accessibility and immediacy’.<sup>43</sup> The focus on diversifying its library, amongst others by including several languages, already implies that it aims at making the platform widely accessible. However, with regards to genres, themes and format, the service also seems to develop towards general accessibility. As discussed above, such substantive strategies are particularly possible within the production of original content (i.e., co/commissions). Both Jenner and media professor Chuck Tryon recognise that Netflix first applied specific narrative complexity and aesthetics that could be aligned “with the idea of quality television.”<sup>44</sup> However, when Netflix’ transnational audience increased significantly from 2015, and correspondingly its transnational interest, the brand started to focus more on popular genres. This is visible in the large library of romantic comedies and crime texts, which are two of the most popular genres. Although Netflix does not align anymore with quality TV, the platform seems to produce according to its own quality format. Regarding this format, Jenner argues for a ‘grammar of transnationalism’: the idea that Originals incorporate specific textual features that should make them transnationally accessible.<sup>45</sup> Besides the focus on popular genres, incorporating, for example, a construction of national history that conforms to a more transnational ‘canon’ or the use of broadly understood cinematic styles could promote the service’s transnational appeal. Certain themes or usages are thus ‘molded’ in an international form. This content format, that results from Netflix’ creative control over the production of Originals, is evidently linked to its aim to become global. The transnational accessibility of the Netflix texts might thus be achieved through the grammar of transnationalism.

### 1.4 Transnational Publication Model

In terms of ‘immediacy’, it is interesting to analyse Netflix’ publication model. In comparison to how Netflix deals with licensed content, the strategies it incorporates in the publication of Originals particularly seem to connect to immediacy. Jenner and Tryon both highlight the model’s

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<sup>42</sup> Lotz, "In between the global and the local," 13.

<sup>43</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 221.

<sup>44</sup> Chuck Tryon, "TV got better: Netflix’s original programming strategies and the on-demand television transition," *Media Industries Journal* 2, no. 2 (2015), 105.

<sup>45</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 220.

features of simultaneous availability to content for all Netflix' users and immediate release of all episodes of a series.<sup>46</sup> The mode of viewing encouraged by this is binge-watching: a viewing practice that many have probably fallen victim to.<sup>47</sup> Now that Netflix and 'binging' are two inseparable concepts, the 'binge-model' has been central to the promotion of the platform. However, the time of publication of texts is not exactly the same everywhere. So to say, different time zones are taken into account. In a matrix media era where digital communication systems (e.g., social media) are important, this elimination of a time lag, as far as possible, for the exclusive productions could support the transnationalisation of Netflix, since it enables users across nations to start the conversation about media texts.

The arguments in this first analysis section have illustrated how Netflix could be regarded as a transnational actor in the matrix media era, as well as how its texts are able to reach across multiple borders. The following sections elaborate on the contribution of the series *La Casa de Papel* to the transnational quality of Netflix.

## **2. *La Casa de Papel* as a Transnational Series**

Like Gilbert suggests, shows on linear television, where content is organised by schedules, are perceived differently compared to shows included in SVODs' non-linear libraries. Additionally, as demonstrated above, Netflix applies a platform-specific format for its exclusive programming, aiming to make such content transnationally accessible. This section will investigate how the format, language, genre and certain themes of *La Casa de Papel* could contribute to Netflix' transnationalism.

### 2.1 Format

*La Casa de Papel*, originally produced for the Spanish TV channel 'Antena 3' in 2017, was bought by Netflix a few months after its release on television.<sup>48</sup> The attention *LCDP* received on TV cannot be compared to that on Netflix. Despite its excellent premiere on Antena 3, the viewership declined considerably over the weeks that followed. However, four months after being released on Netflix, the series achieved worldwide success and became the platform's most-watched non-

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<sup>46</sup> Chuck Tryon, "TV got better: Netflix's original programming strategies and the on-demand television transition," *Media Industries Journal* 2, no. 2 (2015), 104-6.  
Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, 221-3.

<sup>47</sup> This viewing pattern, as explained by Deborah Castro, is shaped by viewing "several episodes of a program [...] in one sitting."

Deborah Castro, et al., "The binge-watcher's journey: Investigating motivations, contexts, and affective states surrounding Netflix viewing," *Convergence* (2019): 1.

<sup>48</sup> Castro and Cascajosa, "From Netflix to Movistar+," 157.

English-language show. Netflix had acquired international distribution rights to the series (now a co-commission) and adjusted the episode length to one that conformed to the international norms. The 15 episodes of 70 minutes (shaping one season divided in two parts: 9 and 6 episodes) were transformed into 22 episodes of 45 to 50-minutes (forming two seasons of 13 and 9 episodes). The restructuring of the series, which I have noticed through the occasional longer pauses or black screens between shots, caused a different placement of cliffhangers and plot twists. Nevertheless, thanks to the continuous flow of the story, according to producer Álex Pina the visual experience of watching *LCDP* on Netflix in essence works the same. Both he and Antena 3's fiction director Sonia Martínez argue that the Netflix format is more appropriate for *LCDP*, pointing out that the storytelling structure requires full attention and encourages a self-chosen viewing rhythm (e.g., binge-watching) that was not possible within the television-format.<sup>49</sup> Researchers in the field of television studies Deborah Castro and Concepción Cascajosa, just like the people involved in the series, regard this change in format as the cause of the series' worldwide success.<sup>50</sup> The choice to rearrange the structure and allow for binge-watching indicate Netflix' move away from Spanish national television, therefore making *LCDP* more accessible for international audiences on the platform.

## 2.2 Language

Due to its great success, Netflix fully acquired *LCDP*'s rights (a commission now) and renewed it for a third and fourth season (8 episodes each), released in July 2019 and April 2020. Again, these seasons were widely adopted: within the first week of its release, part 3 was viewed in 34 million households.<sup>51</sup> I regard the investment in Spanish-language productions as a strategic move of Netflix in its aim to become a global entertainment service, among others, because Spanish is the second most spoken language in the world.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, series produced in this language have the ability to cater to audiences across multiple nations from the outset. Thus, Spanish texts like *LCDP*, if only for language, could play a significant role in the transnationalisation of Netflix.

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<sup>49</sup> "Por qué 'La casa de papel' ha sido un inesperado éxito internacional," El País, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/03/26/television/1522083264\\_215034.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/03/26/television/1522083264_215034.html).

<sup>50</sup> "Las claves del éxito imparable de «La casa de papel», que triunfa en todo el mundo de la mano de Netflix," ABC, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://www.abc.es/play/series/noticias/abci-casa-papel-claves-exito-imparable-casa-papel-triunfa-todo-mundo-mano-netflix-201907160132\\_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/play/series/noticias/abci-casa-papel-claves-exito-imparable-casa-papel-triunfa-todo-mundo-mano-netflix-201907160132_noticia.html).

Castro and Cascajosa, "From Netflix to Movistar+," 157.

"Por qué 'La casa de papel' ha sido un inesperado éxito internacional," El País, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/03/26/television/1522083264\\_215034.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/03/26/television/1522083264_215034.html).

<sup>51</sup> 'It's pure rock'n'roll': how Money Heist became Netflix's biggest global hit," The Guardian, accessed December 14, 2020,

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/apr/02/how-money-heist-became-netflix-biggest-global-hit>.

<sup>52</sup> "List of languages by number of native speakers," Wikipedia, accessed September 29, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_languages\\_by\\_number\\_of\\_native\\_speakers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_languages_by_number_of_native_speakers).

Additionally, whilst releasing *LCDP* on the platform, Netflix dubbed it and renamed the series to *Money Heist*.<sup>53</sup> This allowed for distribution and accessibility in the English-speaking world. Through further development of the dub and subtitle options for *LCDP*, certain non-Spanish and non-English-speaking countries became engaged as well: the audio options are German, French, English and Turkish and subtitle options are Dutch, English, German, French. These customisation options that Netflix has made available for *LCDP* make the programme accessible for a transnational public. As the series is now able to attract audiences from different countries, equally the streaming service opens up to a wider audience, therefore promoting its transnational reach.

### 2.3 Genre and Themes

In appendix 1, *LCDP*'s genre and themes are explained in more detail. There, I have decided to regard 'heist' as the main genre of the series. Combining Bondebjerg et al. and Lee's perceptions (see theoretical framework) brings the idea that 'heist', as a subgenre of 'crime', is a popular genre for transnational TV.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned before, the service's focus on popular genres for its exclusive productions could make Netflix generally more accessible. Consequently, the addition of *LCDP* and the active attitude towards the expansion of this heist-genre series makes sense in this objective: the popular genre attracts audiences across borders, therefore presumably substantiating Netflix' transnationalisation.

Although the producers of *LCDP* claim they tried to maintain a strong connection to Spanish culture (e.g., with Spanish actors and references to Spanish political or popular culture), certain themes indicate the series' potential to spread transnationally from the start.<sup>55</sup> Besides heist-related themes, it includes feminism, emotional dynamics, comedic elements and certain symbols (see appendix 1). Firstly, feminism is an ideology that is not bound to one country, therefore it could attract audiences across multiple countries. More specifically, by involving this theme, the perhaps more male-oriented heist genre might also appeal to a larger female audience. Secondly, the dynamics of love, friendship and personal emotions are emphasised in the series. These universal emotions, presented in a passionate way, can be felt 'through the screen', making the worldwide public able to relate to and empathise with the characters. Furthermore, the

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<sup>53</sup> "La Casa de Papel: Setting the bar for global television," BBC, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190312-la-casa-de-papel-setting-the-bar-for-global-television?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2F>.

<sup>54</sup> Bondebjerg et al., *Transnational European television drama*, 18. Lee, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>55</sup> "Si 'La Casa de Papel' no hubiera estado en Netflix seguiríamos diciendo que no podemos competir con las series de fuera," Álex Pina, creador de la serie," Xataka, accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.xataka.com/cine-y-tv/casa-papel-no-hubiera-estado-netflix-seguiriamos-diciendo-que-no-podemos-competir-series-fuera-alex-pina-creador-serie>.

comedic elements make the story less dark and brutal. Therefore it may be accessible for audiences not normally attracted to the heist/crime genre. Lastly, the symbols incorporated in *LCDP*, for instance, the song 'Bella Ciao' and the Dalí-mask, show connections to popular culture. Through their repeating presence in the episodes and ability to be recognised by - especially Spanish and Italian - viewers, they allow the series to build greater audience engagement. Together with the iconic colour for the series (red), these symbols are 'absorbed' by the audience and subsequently spread via social media, as such outlets are extensively used in the matrix media era.<sup>56</sup> Although these latter aspects open up to another field within media studies, we could acknowledge that audience activities can increase the awareness about cultural texts. Social media platforms allow for global communication and since people share their interests online, others could become aware of texts that they were not familiar with.

In summary, substantive features of *LCDP* potentially allow for attracting a large transnational audience. With this thought, and possibly through the incorporation of social media, not only *LCDP*, but also Netflix in its entirety can gain a larger public.

### **3. *La Casa de Papel* on the Netflix Interface**

While combining Chalaby and Lobato's ideas (presented in the theoretical framework), it can be noted that the scholars argue for a certain control that - in this case - Netflix has over its interface. If Netflix had the urge to increase the public of *LCDP* from the moment of its release on the platform, seemingly this would have been prominently visible on the interface. However, when the series' first season was launched on Netflix in December 2017, no further promotion was added. Rather, *LCDP* was incorporated in the large library and left to the algorithm.<sup>57</sup> The success it achieved within four months of being on Netflix could be dedicated to the suggestive algorithm, although the interface design may have contributed as well. The following section elaborates on this latter aspect.

#### **3.1 Elements of the Interface**

Appendix 2 highlights some aspects of the interface related to the framing of *LCDP* on Netflix.<sup>58</sup> Remarkable is the variety of images used to display the show. Both moving images (e.g., a trailer)

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<sup>56</sup> *La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno*, Netflix, dirs. Pablo Lejarreta and Luis Alfaro, Vancouver Media, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/search?q=the%20phenomenon&jbv=81098822>.

<sup>57</sup> "Javier Gómez Santander: "Los españoles no somos un buen ejército, pero como guerrilla somos la hostia", " El Mundo, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/cultura/2019/09/12/5d791951fc6c8337538b45fe.html>.

<sup>58</sup> While analysing the Netflix interface, it should be taken into account that the algorithm influences how and where programmes are presented on Netflix: the interface may look different to each user and on

and still images (i.e., shots from the series) are applied, of which examples are visible in figures 6-16. The videos start when the mouse hovers over the icon or when an arrow is clicked. On the other hand, the still images are immediately presented to the user when Netflix is opened or when a search term is entered. For this, Netflix determines which image is shown, whether in horizontal or vertical form. The various images could give the user an idea about the content of the series, although this might also make the series stand out to users: regularly changing images could make the icon interesting for the viewer each time when it is seen. This potentially increases the viewership; however it depends strongly on the level of attention from the user to the interface.

Furthermore, some textual elements are applied (see figure 12-14). Even though the original name is used as a search term, 'La Casa de Papel' directly switches to 'Money Heist' when the mouse is placed on the icon. This linguistic aspect demonstrates Netflix' international character, as discussed in earlier analysis sections. Besides some general information about the series, the sentence "It's Official: A Final Season Is Coming" is added. With this sentence, Netflix possibly makes the series attractive and engages the already existing audience more.

Additionally, the documentary *La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno*, which was released simultaneously with season four, is the second icon when searching for *LCDP*.<sup>59</sup> Adding a Netflix-only documentary could boost engagement with the series, as it provides more information and entertainment material to the audience.

Since the above-mentioned elements are present on every user interface in each 'Netflix-country', the transnational audience of *LCDP* could be increased with the aid of Netflix' interface. The arguments presented are assumptions that are relevant to be examined for understanding how, through the interface, the Netflix audience could be engaged with the series. Although these remain assumptions, the enormous increase of the *LCDP*-audience is evident.

### 3.2 Search Terms for *LCDP*

With regards to search terms, when 'La Casa de Papel' or 'Money Heist' is entered, logically the icons for *La Casa de Papel* and *La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno* (or presented in English) are the first two on the page (see figure 6 and 7). However, when entering the genres that Netflix has linked to *LCDP* as search terms, the series does not seem to be widely promoted. The term 'Spanish TV programmes' includes the *LCDP*-icon in the second line, although 'TV thrillers' features it further down the page (see figure 15 and 16). Different from the former, the latter example suggests that Netflix does not always support the reach of a series like *LCDP* that contains various qualities for transnational distribution, as demonstrated in the previous analysis section.

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each day. The screenshots included in the appendix are from December 8, 2020, showing the interface as offered to my account.

<sup>59</sup> *La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno*, Netflix.

Generally, aspects of Netflix' interface might encourage the transnational viewership of *LCDP* as the series' icon is made interesting for the user. Nevertheless, some elements, such as using the genres as search terms, do not seem to make a big contribution to this process. The thought that emerges from this third analysis section is that the interface's role in transnationalisation depends heavily on the user's engagement with the platform.

## **Analysis Reflection**

The analysis includes arguments specifically directed to the case material of this thesis. The focus on *LCDP* and the Netflix interface implies that the research is limited. Presented arguments might not apply to other Spanish-language productions, since each cultural production has its own characteristics. Also, a non-Dutch interface might display content in another way, which could create distinct analysis results. It should be noted as well that this analysis is based on how the interface looked at one particular moment. Perhaps, the series is presented differently after the release of the final season.

While analysing the selected material, it turned out that more elaboration on the topic could have been done once the side of audience engagement with media texts had been investigated as well. This particularly seems to be an added value to the third analysis section. It appears that the relationship between the audience and interface is important. Assumptions might be supported when knowing how the audience perceives the interface and how engagement with the interface, and therefore with the series, is created. Additionally, the activities of the audience on social media resulting from an engagement with features of *LCDP* perhaps have contributed to the series' success. This thesis however does not cover the side of online audience participation. Therefore, if more audience research had been done, this research would be more substantiated. However, that also enlarges the amount of case material, which may not be feasible to research given the limited time frame.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have researched how platform specific strategies, the Spanish series *La Casa de Papel* and the presentation of this series on the interface relate to Netflix' spatiality. By analysing both textual and visual aspects, assumptions have been made about how *LCDP* could contribute to the transnationalisation of Netflix. Therefore, the analysis enables me to answer the research question: how does the series *La Casa de Papel* contribute to the transnationalisation, as defined by Mareike Jenner, of the online streaming platform 'Netflix' in the matrix media era? The most relevant findings from the analysis, in acquiring an answer, are summarised here.

The demonstration of various researchers' view on traditional television and SVODs indicates that spatial characteristics of media outlets from the matrix media era differ from that of television. Netflix distinguishes itself from national television, as it operates in multiple countries and applies several strategies with regards to its original content. Therefore, it should rather be considered as a transnational service. A remarkable strategy is the diversification of the content library, since hereby, catalogues are shaped by texts in different languages and from diverse cultures. Additionally, as Netflix aims to meet the needs of all its users, the production of co/commissions appears to be aimed at generating wide, transnational accessibility. This is visible through the incorporation of many popular genre productions and international themes. Moreover, the publication model allows for wide accessibility too, since content is released at almost the same time in every country. This enables transnational communication about texts. These aspects combined indicate that Netflix might be perceived as a transnational actor.

As some scholars presume that, through content and the interface, the philosophy of a medium could be implemented, I have investigated how particular elements of *LCDP* and the Netflix interface relate and contribute to the transnational character of Netflix. This appears to be interesting, since Netflix' philosophy is to, eventually, expand globally. Considering *LCDP*'s format, due to the adjustments made to the initial structure, the series is disconnected from Spanish national TV, consequently allowing for wider accessibility. Also, even though *LCDP* caters to a wide public from the outset (as Spanish is a global language), Netflix' addition of dub and subtitle options in multiple languages enables the series to engage a larger, transnational viewership. Furthermore, the genre and themes of *LCDP* demonstrate the series' connections to transnationalism: the heist genre is considered to be a popular, transnational genre and included themes and symbols are transnationally accessible. Thus, through various features, *LCDP* engages a wide public and therefore it could contribute to Netflix' transnationalism.

Moreover, assumptions are made for how the presentation of *LCDP* on the interface relates to transnationalisation. The use of various visual and textual elements, and the addition

of a *LCDP*-documentary might increase the transnational audience for the series. Particularly, these elements make the icon interesting for the user and could ensure greater engagement with both the series and the platform. Meanwhile, when using *LCDP*'s genres as search terms, it seems that Netflix does not widely promote this series, apart from the title of the production. Hence, regarding the interface, the presentation of *LCDP* seems to be partly related to the transnationalisation.

In general, the aspects incorporated in the analysis illustrate that Netflix' transnationality does not solely rely on its position on the internet and the affordances of the matrix media era. Besides the strategies Netflix applies, some features of *LCDP* and the way that this production is displayed on the interface indicate a relation to transnationalism. Some of these features (such as the series' format) even seem to promote the transnationalisation of Netflix.

In this research I have demonstrated how a specific text and an online interface relate to the spatiality of an online streaming service. For further research it might be interesting to investigate the field of audience engagement with online platforms. This thesis' analysis has only presented assumptions, and did not extensively cover how Netflix influences audience behaviour towards the platform. In-depth audience research, in combination with data about subscriber activities, perhaps gives more insight into the engagement of audiences with the interface. Additionally, since social media outlets are widely used in the matrix media era - by users as well as by Netflix - the international participatory culture and the active (online) audience could be explored. For this, Henry Jenkins' conception of convergence culture could be incorporated.

The rapid, worldwide increase of the audience for *La Casa de Papel* after its release on Netflix is in itself already a confirmation that the service and the series' qualities allow for transnational exchange. This invites us to consider that the same process might apply to other productions on Netflix, which will bring the platform closer to its aim to become global.

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## Appendix

### 1. *La Casa de Papel's* Genre and Themes

According to Netflix, the genre of *LCDP* is “Spanish TV programs, TV Thriller” and it can be described as “Suspenseful and Exciting.”<sup>60</sup> The Wikipedia page for *Money Heist*, which is based on other sources, lists the genres ‘crime drama, heist, thriller, mystery and suspense’.<sup>61</sup> Taking into account also the renaming of the series to *Money Heist* by Netflix, in this thesis ‘heist’ is considered the main genre of the show. Resulting from ideas presented in several sources, the most remarkable aspect is that the series subverts the heist genre: instead of an anglophone male taking the lead, in *LCDP* the story is told from the perspective of a Spanish female character (Tokyo).<sup>62</sup> Besides that *LCDP* incorporates themes that belong to the heist genre (e.g., crime, tension and mystery), remarkably some other themes usually not associated with the genre are involved as well. A few are introduced here.



**Figure 2:** Part of the gang waiting for the doors of the Royal Mint of Spain to open, holding weapons.

A theme that can be noticed already through the narration of the series done by a female character is feminism. In various other moments this theme is visible, for instance: the female character Nairobi leads the group of men that help the robbers make money (in the factory where the story takes place); both Tokyo and Nairobi stand up for themselves when someone bothers them, often holding a large gun; also, Nairobi’s motherhood as well as the story around character Monica’s pregnancy and her doubts about abortion are included respectfully.

The series also incorporates a lot of emotional dynamics, whether this is based on love or friendship. During the seasons, Tokyo and male character Rio’s love relationship is emphasised, just like Nairobi and gay male character Helsinki’s friendship and the love story of the robber Denver and hostage Monica. Eventually also the socially awkward Professor (the character who is the genius behind the heist) falls in love. Moreover, the robbers’ emotions, presented in a passionate, Latin-like way, are given significant attention in the series, since moments of sadness and happiness alternate, creating a personal layer to the suspenseful show.

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<sup>60</sup> *La Casa de Papel*, Netflix.

<sup>61</sup> “Money Heist,” Wikipedia, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money\\_Heist#cite\\_note-bbc\\_190312-77](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_Heist#cite_note-bbc_190312-77).

<sup>62</sup> “Money Heist,” Wikipedia, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money\\_Heist#cite\\_note-bbc\\_190312-77](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_Heist#cite_note-bbc_190312-77).

Furthermore, *LCDP* contains a lot of comedic elements. In numerous moments, the foolishness of - mostly the younger - characters shines through when they make a joke or react less seriously to a situation than expected. In addition, Denver's recognizable and cackling laugh is iconic for his character and runs through the whole series as a goofy aspect in this serious heist-story.



**Figure 3:** The gang celebrating that they opened the safe and found money.

Other symbolic themes for the series are the song 'Bella Ciao', the Salvador Dalí facemasks, which the robbers wear in order to keep their identities a secret, and the colour red (see figure 4 and 5). 'Bella Ciao' is played in several moments, often moments of joy or victory, throughout all the seasons. The mask is visible in the majority of the scenes, whether placed over the characters' faces or around their arms. Red is the iconic colour for the series, visible in for example: the overalls the gang and the hostages are wearing, the origami paper the Professor uses and the phone with which the gang and the Professor communicate.



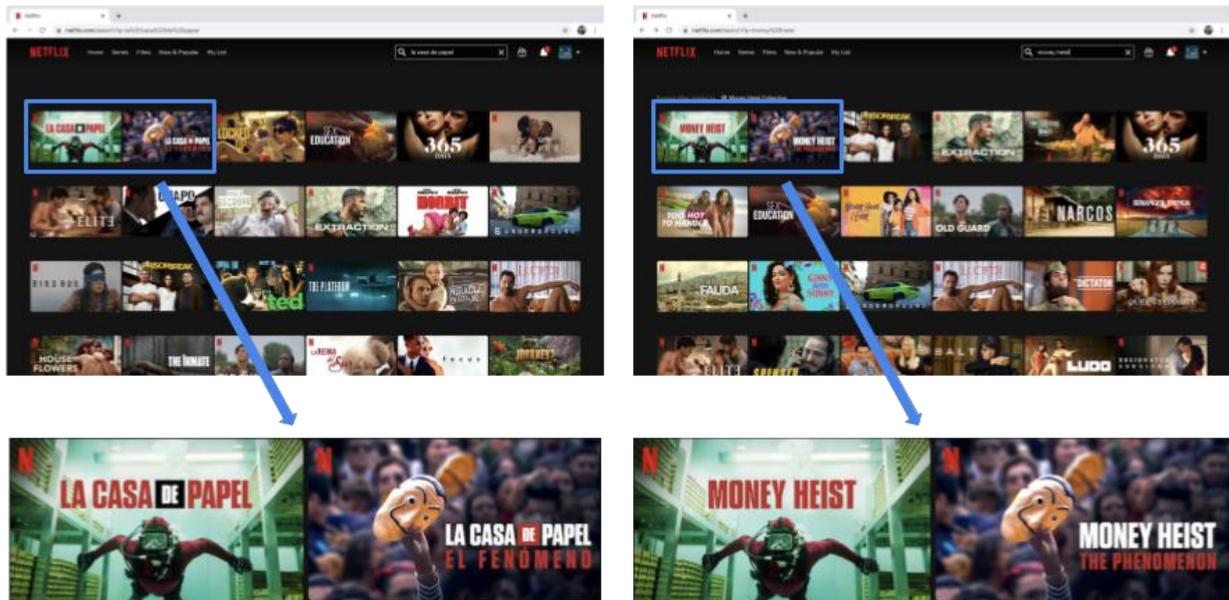
**Figure 4 (left):** Characters El Profesor and Berlín

singing the song 'Bella Ciao'.

**Figure 5 (right):** The *La Casa de Papel*-gang wearing red overalls and Dalí-masks.

## 2. Netflix' Presentation of *La Casa de Papel* on the Interface

The Netflix interface contains several visual elements through which the cultural texts are framed. Taking *La Casa de Papel*/*Money Heist* as an example, remarkable is the variation of images with which the interface presents this programme and the accompanying documentary (*La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno*/*Money Heist: The Phenomenon*). The Netflix interface of the Netherlands (set to English-language) includes images that are demonstrated in figures 6-13.<sup>63</sup>

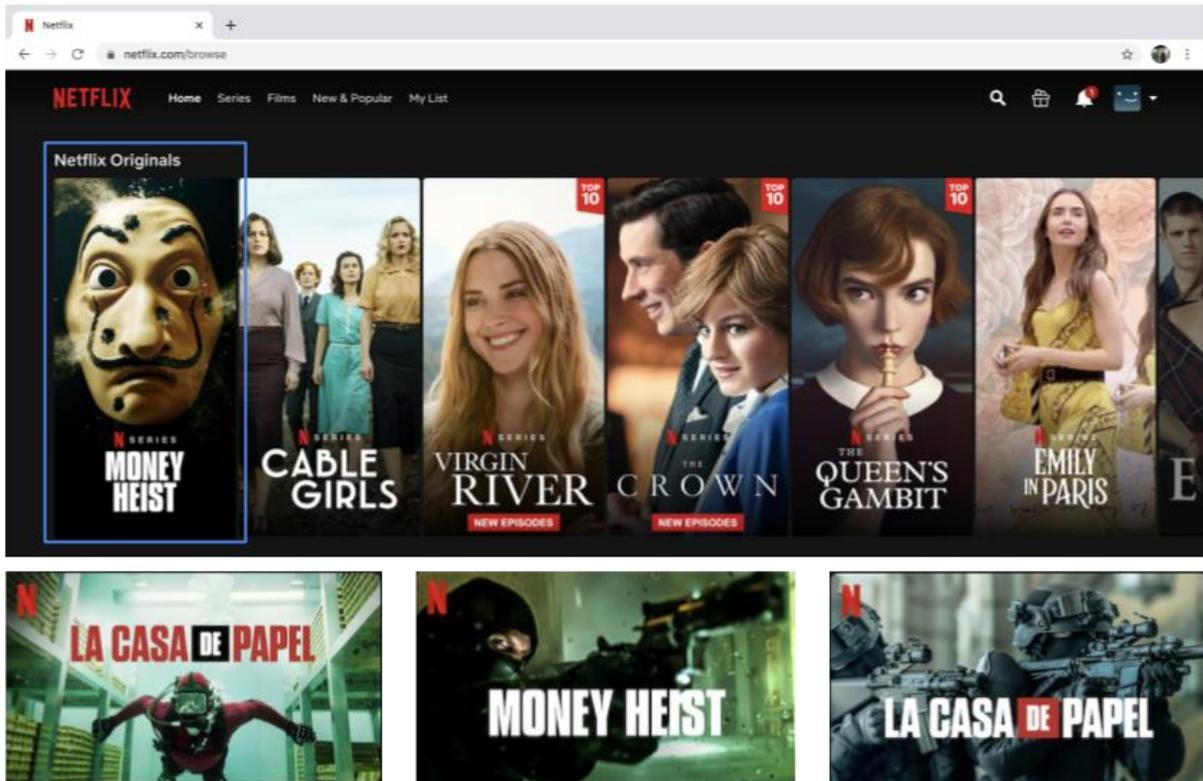


**Figure 6 (left):** Search term “La Casa de Papel” is used. The first two icons in the list are *La Casa de Papel* and *La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno*.

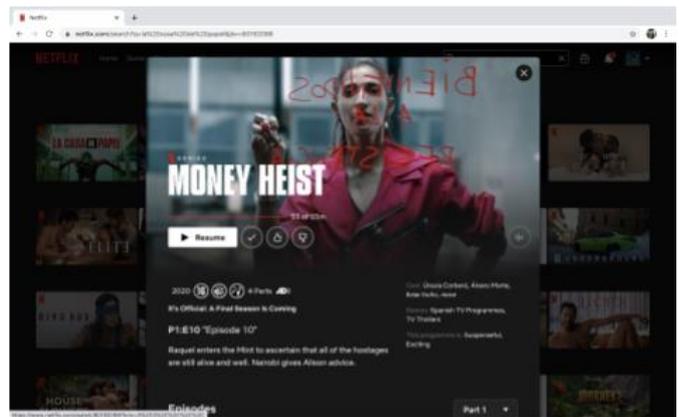
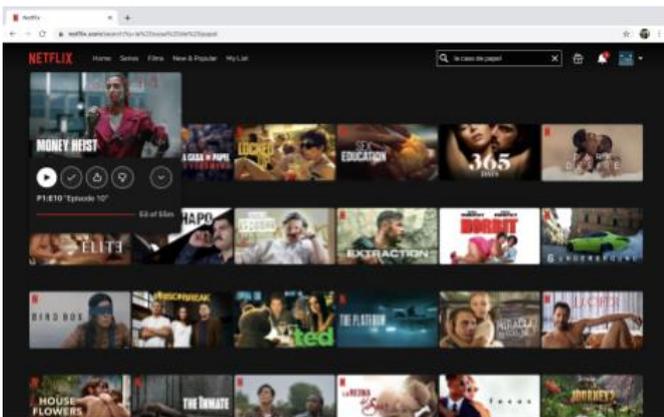
**Figure 7 (right):** Search term “Money Heist” is used. The first two icons in the list are *Money Heist* and *Money Heist: The Phenomenon*.

When searching for ‘La Casa de Papel’, the icon with the original Spanish title is shown (figure 6). When ‘Money Heist’ is entered, this title is visible on the icon (figure 7). When moving the mouse across the Spanish-titled icon, this switches directly to the English title. For the icon of *LCDP*, the interface shows a variety of still and moving images and programme specific text. The still images of the icons sometimes differ: examples are shown in figure 8, 9, 10 and 11. Both horizontal and vertical images are used.

<sup>63</sup> All the figures in appendix 2 are screenshots that have been made on December 8, 2020.

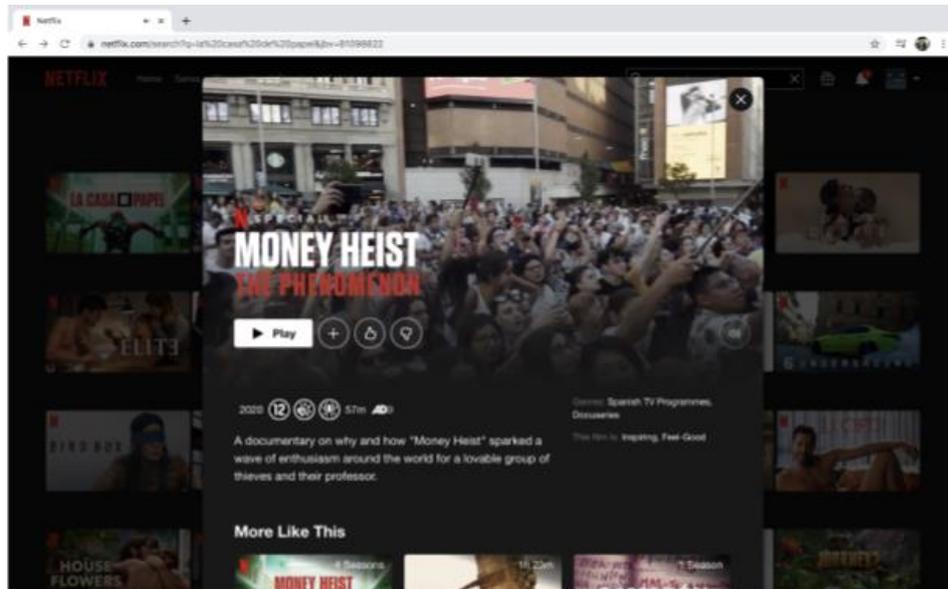


**Figure 8 (top):** *Money Heist* is presented in a list of Netflix Originals. This category is shaped by vertical images, instead of the horizontal images as that are normally displayed.  
**Figure 9, 10, 11 (bottom):** Examples of horizontal images in which the *LCDP/Money Heist*-icon is shown.



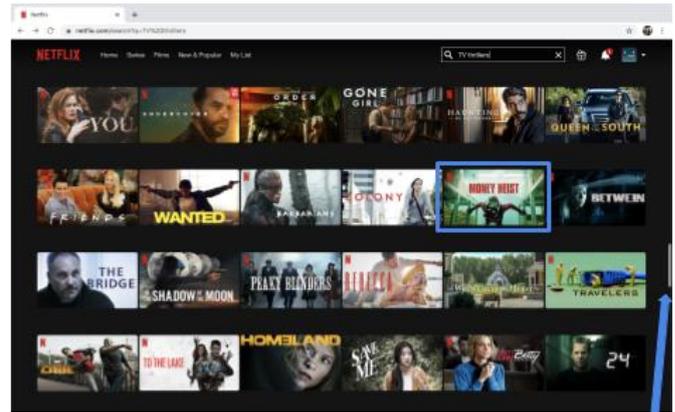
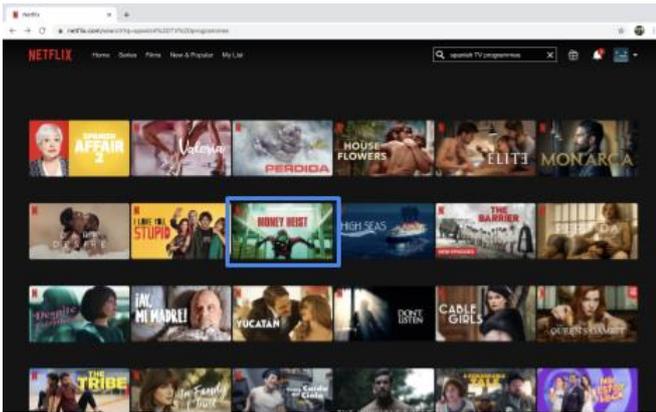
**Figure 12 (left):** When moving the mouse across the icon for *La Casa de Papel*, a larger box pops up. The text switches to the English version. The box shows a moving image (containing the trailer for the series), possibly with sound when switched on. (The same applies to the '*La Casa de Papel: El Fenómeno*'- icon, with its own content presented in the imagery.)  
**Figure 13 (right):** After clicking on the arrow pointing downwards (visible in figure 12), an even larger box is displayed. This box presents the same moving images (i.e. the trailer), but now also information about the series is added (in the form of written text and Kijkwijzer pictograms).

The videos are displayed when the user moves the mouse across the icon or when an arrow is clicked (figure 12 and 13). Information about the series in the form of text is visible when a larger box is opened (figure 13). This text includes a summary of the episode the user is about to watch, the date of release of the last season (2020), the number of seasons ('parts') it contains, some names of the cast members, the genres Netflix has positioned it in, and description of the series' themes. Additionally, the sentence "It's Official: A Final Season Is Coming" is added, indicating that a last season is being made.



**Figure 14:** Similar to what is shown in figure 13, also a larger box for *The Phenomenon* could be opened up. It includes information specific to the documentary. The 'More Like This' section on this page features the corresponding series as the first icon.

For the documentary, the same elements are applied as for *LCDP*, visible in figure 12 and 13. For this, text and images that are specific to the documentary are used. The connection to the series is strong: the icon for *LCDP* is visible on the same page and the text references the series (figure 14).



**Figure 15 (left):** Search term “Spanish TV programmes” is used. *Money Heist* is presented in the second line on the first page.  
**Figure 16 (right):** Search term “TV thrillers” is used. The *Money Heist*-icon is included far down in the list (see the scroll bar on the right side of the screen).

Searching for the genres that Netflix has placed *LCDP* in (visible in the box from figure 13) gives the results demonstrated in figure 15 and 16. When searching for ‘Spanish TV programmes’ the series is visible as one of the first productions. The search term ‘TV thrillers’ features *LCDP* further down in the list.

## PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

### **Fraud and Plagiarism**

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name: Meta van der Kint

Student number: 6502415

Date and signature: 24-01-2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. van der Kint', written over a horizontal line.

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.