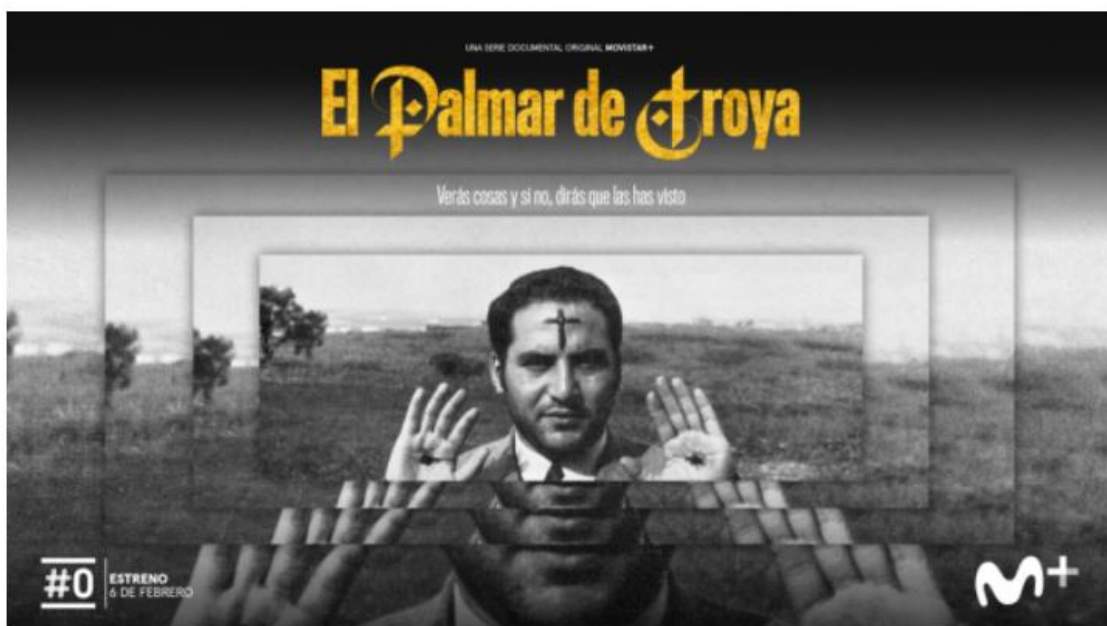


Conecta Fiction: 10 Takeaways – U.S. Predominance, Gender Challenges, Genre, New TV

By John Hopewell ▾



Credit: Movistar

Spain's hybrid 4th [Conecta Fiction](#), Europe's biggest TV co-production forum with Latin America, closed its on-site doors on Sept. 3, though its online complement runs until Sept. 11.

Following, 10 takeaways from a unique 2020 edition:

Co-Production Paradigm Shift

Conecta Fiction Reboot's most significant news may have broken Thursday: The announcement that ViacomCBS Intl. Studios (VIS) RTVE, the Spanish public broadcaster, and Onza Productions had initiated production on "Parot," a cop thriller shooting in Madrid. Ever more for Spain's networks and pay TV operators co-production involves less alliances with like-minded and like weight local partners in Europe more tie-ups with U.S. global streamers or pay TV giants. In another example, Conecta Fiction's gala night series, female conquistador tale "Inés of My Soul," originated at Chile's Chilevision, was boarded by RTVE, and then Amazon Prime Video.

At an estimated 477 million, the Spanish-language global market dwarfs the French and German and includes the lodestone of the U.S. Latino market which will contribute more growth than any other population segment in the U.S. and has a median age of 29 compared to 44 for white non-Hispanics, according to a Nielsen presentation at Conecta Fiction.

U.S. companies – Telemundo, Disney, Turner, HBO – are increasingly driving high-end production in Latin America. In 2019, Netflix produced more hours of original productions in Spain (163) than any other country outside the U.S., apart from South Korea (238), but on a par with the U.K. (160). Colombia (114) and Mexico (108) also outranked France (86), Germany (50) and Italy (19), according to an analysis by Omdia. For players of ambitions in Spain and Latin America, streamer and global studio production partnerships now look like the name of the game.

2020 Conecta Fiction: Decimated Attendance, But Still Worth the Ticket

Conecta Fiction on-site attendance plunged from 692 delegates in 2019 to 258 this year. Andrés Varela flew valiantly from Uruguay to Pamplona to present WWII drama-thriller "Graf Spee," one of Conecta Fiction's biggest new series unveils. Otherwise, travel bans impeded the Latin American attendance that has made Conecta Fiction such a going concern. So Conecta Fiction lost much of its networking punch, which a still very young premium TV industry such as the Spanish-speaking world's still desperately needs. That said, Conecta Fiction's other beating heart, its swathe of carefully curated series pitch sessions, still rocked, with young Spanish creators moving front-and-center in terms of on-site attendance. Their presence at Pamplona alone was well worth the travel ticket.

Latin American Pacemakers: Fabula, Fidelio, Jaque Content

This year's Conecta Fiction also served as a (online) springboard for Latin America's newest generation of international TV producers. Pablo and Juan de Dios Larraín's Fabula announced its first Mexico office production "Miss Mexico" – a working title – re-teaming with "La Jauría" show-runner Lucía Puenzo and co-production/international distribution partner Fremantle. Colombia's Fidelio Films exploded parlaying its extraordinary plethora of writing credits on Netflix and Amazon series into strategic co-production alliances with France's Gaumont and Spain's Editorial Planeta and Amor y Lujo, all unveiled at Conecta Fiction. Argentina's Jaque Content revealed its latest production out of Mexico, Santiago Fernández Calvete horror movie "Fátima" and talked up "The Hate Farm," competing in main Conecta Fiction CoPro competition.

Netflix's 'Rohwedder' Sneak Peek Crowns Drama Documentary Panel

Attendees came to Conecta Fiction to discover new fiction. Many will have gone away under the spell of a new generation of drama docs, after a round table presenting Emma Frank's BBC One doc feature, "Suffragettes"; David André's "The Students, the Traitor and the Nazis," upcoming on France 2; just released Movistar Plus original series "El Palmar de Troya; and "Rohwedder," Netflix's first non-fiction original in Germany, bowing on Sept. 25. "Rohwedder's" opening sequence was unveiled at Conecta Fiction by producer Christian Beetz. Moderated by Krishan Arora, a consultant from Mixing Media, the panel, a Conecta Fiction centerpiece, underscored two fascinations of current drama documentaries: The ability to bring little-known stories, or little-known aspects of stories, to life, by vibrantly creating the past with far more means than the clunky techniques of old; their reverence for character. André told Conecta Fiction he wanted to make "The Students" – about over 100 valiant Parisian high-school students, some just 14, who set off on June 6 1944 to join the French Resistance, were betrayed by one of their own, and massacred – when he discovered a photo of one of the students. "I wanted to get as close to him as I could," André said.

Genre Series: A Building Phenomenon

Conecta Fiction featured 28 series project pitches. Many – nine – rated as crime thrillers. As many – nine – were genre series, understood as fantasy, horror, sci-fi. Three of Conecta Fiction’s five Pitch Clips, framing standard format spec series scripts from young Spanish screenwriters, were fantasy pieces. In two, both comedies, young women talk to the dead (Antonio Martín’s comedy “Last Date”) or dying (Edurne San José’s “Wake Up). In Iker Aizpuru’s “The Endless Night,” a Conecta Fiction buzz title, two children escape from the bombing of the Basque Country’s Durango during the Spanish Civil War. One gets lost in the woods, pursued by an ancient pagan God.

What are International Players Looking For?

“Primarily, I’m looking for returnable scripted dramas,” Marc Lorber, Lionsgate SVP, intl. co-productions and acquisitions, said in his Conecta Fiction keynote, also stressing recognizable IP, known creators and actors who really move the needle forward.”

“In international content, we’re at a point where realism and verisimilitude are so pervasive. But you have to believe in your stories, they have to come from your heart,” Leonardo Aranguibel, head of production operations and strategy at Buena Vista Original Productions Latin America, said in his Content Fiction keynote.

Every company is its own world, not only in its content needs but ways of expressing them. Getting to know them remains part of the business.

TV’s Vertiginous Evolution

“The TV set still rules homes” said José Luis Lozano and Ruth Calvo at Spain’s Gabinete de Estudios de la Comunicación Audiovisual (GECA), estimating traditional TV viewers at 4.1 billion. OTT audiences, in contrast, came in at just 900 million. But TV, whatever the device, is in the throes of constant evolution, Lozano and Calvo argued at a Conecta Fiction presentation, drilling down on the dizzying smorgasbord of contempo digital offerings: VR/AR, e-Sports, interactive fiction in the “Bandersnatch”-style, short formats, dominated by Quibi, and, dating back to about 2018, vertical screens and podcast-to-TV formats. “There are numerous stories waiting to go in ways that haven’t yet been invented,” said Calvo, quoting Warren Buckleiter. Much of this entertainment serves as a complement to traditional TV viewing, said Lozano, citing the statistic that in Spain one-third of TV viewers streaming videos and watch TV simultaneously.

Spanish-language Fiction's Gender Challenge

Led by director Geraldine Gonard, Conecta Fiction is organized very largely by women. If its 28 pitched titles are any indication, however, the gender revolution still has some way to go in Spanish-language scripted. In creative terms, only two of the 12 projects in the main CoPro competition were clearly led by women.

Often originated by slightly less established creators, titles in Conecta Fiction's Short Form, SGAE Spanish authors society and Pitch Clips sections painted a more curious picture. The series are near all (87.5%) about women, in the sense of having female protagonists. When they appear, men can be patriarchal ("Herencia"), macho, and far right military ("Democracia") or behind the times ("Sirena"), to cite three titles in the SGAE lineup. Titles in all three sections, however, were still very mostly (72%) written by men.

Navarre: Bullish

Famed for its Pamplona bull-runs, the northern Spanish region of Navarre is looking bullish in other ways too. Backed by government support for start-ups and animation, its production, animation, [infrastructure](#) and R & D sectors continue to build. More international Spanish productions shoot for significantly longer in the region as Spain's high-end scripted TV production booms. Navarre's film-TV hub also has an economic and creative base. Companies can no longer rely on already limited central government support, where competition for funding is already fierce, to guarantee a future. Spanish creatives, in film and TV, are often looking to ground their works in authentic local settings which talk, however, about the verities of human nature.

Leonardo Aranguibel's "The Plague of Insomnia"

One Conecta Fiction highlight ends Aranguibel's online keynote: "The Plague Of Insomnia," a short he wrote and directed during COVID-19. In it, 30 Latin American actors, beginning with Ricardo Darín and Alicia Braga, read an episode in Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "100 Years of Solitude," which recounts how Macondo, the novel's village setting, suffers an insomnia virus, sending its inhabitants into lockdown. The story talks about the memory loss which comes with the plague. The film's beauty is its portrait of a collective exercise in remembering, here one of the things which makes life worth living: a shared and sometimes extraordinary culture.