

Citizenship and social representations in Chilean telenovelas. A context for the development of youth audiences¹

Ciudadanía y representaciones sociales en telenovelas chilenas. Un contexto para la formación de audiencias juveniles

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In this article, we analyze the social representations produced by the discourses of three current Chilean telenovelas and their contribution to the citizenship education of young people. From a qualitative and narratological perspective, the analyzed productions allow these audiences to self-identify with characters, problematize citizen issues based on the fictitious situations presented by these stories, use explanatory categories to solve the dilemma at hand, and critically analyze the stories, which are fundamental components of citizen education.

KEYWORDS: Telenovela, citizenship, youth, audience, representations.

En este artículo analizamos las representaciones sociales producidas por los discursos de tres telenovelas chilenas actuales y su contribución a la formación ciudadana de jóvenes. Desde una perspectiva cualitativa y narratológica las producciones analizadas permiten la autoidentificación de estas audiencias, la problematización de temáticas ciudadanas a partir de las situaciones ficticias presentadas por estos relatos y su conceptualización en categorías explicativas que permiten resolver el dilema planteado y contribuir al análisis crítico que está a la base de este tipo de formación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Telenovela, ciudadanía, jóvenes, audiencia, representaciones.

Neste artigo analisamos as representações sociais produzidas pelos discursos de três novelas chilenas atuais e sua contribuição para a formação cívica dos jovens. A partir de uma perspectiva qualitativa e narratológica, as produções analisadas permitem a autoidentificação desses públicos, a problematização de questões cidadãs a partir das situações fictícias apresentadas por essas histórias e sua conceitualização em categorias explicativas que permitem solucionar o dilema levantado e contribuir para a crítica análise que se baseia nesse tipo de treinamento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Telenovela, cidadania, juventude, audiência, representações.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, a series of social uprisings worldwide have captured media attention due to their demands and the violence used to repress them. Chile has been one of the epicenters of these demonstrations with student and feminist protests, a social uprising, a plebiscite, and the subsequent drafting of a new Constitution, among others (Faure, 2020). However, more than 50% of the population abstained from voting, indicating that the majority of the country is politically apathetic; among these people are young Chileans who no longer consider democracy to be a legitimate system of social coexistence (Jara et al., 2021).

In modern and post-industrial societies, the construction of interpretation frameworks for political phenomena and citizen memory is closely linked to the work of the media. Technology has facilitated access to media content and has also transformed how it is produced and (re)presented. This is even more evident in the case of young Chileans who mostly use social networks and television to obtain information (Condeza et al., 2014).

When compared to other age groups, young people are not the ones who watch the most television; nonetheless, some programs are still appealing to them, but these programs are accessed from other devices. Young audiences continue to watch telenovelas (Consejo Nacional de Televisión [CNTV], 2021), and for the majority, they are the only local format that they watch (Antezana & Andrada, 2018).

Telenovelas provide youth with a space to engage in the public discussion about various and multiple social problems (Franco, 2012), transforming this genre into a vehicle that visibilizes subjectivities and expresses democratization processes. These stories represent youth and society in their daily existence, allowing viewers to adapt to new scenarios that are the result of modernity (Martín-Barbero, 2002).

Telenovelas also entail an intergenerational and generational exchange that contributes to socialization processes since these programs are created for family viewing and the initiation of face-to-face or virtual conversations with other people (second-order viewing) (Chicharro, 2011). As a result, this paper asks: What are the social

representations of the discourses of current Chilean telenovelas? How do they interact with citizens? And, how can they contribute to the citizen education of youth audiences?

Some of these aspects have been intentional in Chilean telenovelas since the 1990s (the TV series war) when themes linked to the sociocultural context began to be introduced. Thus, in addition to incorporating specific populations (gypsies or circus artists), little-known places in the country were also used to create scenes for telenovelas (Easter Island or Chiloé) (Santa Cruz, 2003).

SOCIAL AND CITIZEN REPRESENTATIONS IN TELENOVELAS

The Chilean telenovela is a serial work of continuous episodes that maintains the Latin American melodramatic tradition. Chile's first telenovela was the teletheater production *Juntos se pasa mejor* in 1962 at the dawn of television in the country. In 1967, the first national telenovelas began to be produced (Santa Cruz, 2003), although it was not until the 1980s that industrial production began with *La madrastra* (1981). This telenovela marked a milestone in positioning this genre as the primetime star taking the place of Argentine and Venezuelan telenovelas.

The Chilean telenovela uses the Brazilian model for its local production. This model is designed for the middle classes and is characterized as being modern, agile, and colorful (Mazziotti, 2006). The stories use realism, allowing viewers to identify more with them since they are linked to daily life, idiosyncrasy, and the socio-cultural context of the country in which they are produced; however, this is all done without abandoning the melodramatic tradition.

The love story continues to be the central theme of these productions, but the happily-ever-after ending, although desirable, is no longer the norm. There is also a shift in characters' traits, where protagonists are no longer good-very good and antagonists are no longer bad-very bad, but instead, these characters are more complex and changing, responding to different social types (Fuenzalida, 2011).

Studies on the participation of youth in Chilean telenovelas are scarce since current telenovelas are generally aimed at a family

audience. The adolescent characters are narrated in these programs as part of the social context, but there is no specific interest in them. Two studies on this topic stand out. In the first study, a comparative analysis of the telenovelas *La Torre 10* and *Ámame* (Troncoso, 2001) is carried out, where the young characters' roles in the plots are described. The second study presents a comprehensive review of Chilean telenovelas that address issues of family, gender, and sexuality (Vidal, 2019). In this study, the young characters are analyzed based on the nuclear family and the relationships that are established within it.

Although telenovelas focus on the intimate-private spheres of their characters, they also represent a shared social imaginary in the fictional context and engage in the public discussion about diverse and multiple social problems. In the Chilean case, this is even more apparent as news events are a constitutive part of the developed plots.

In this sense, the telenovela as a cultural product plays an important role in the construction of the country's social reality and citizens' social imaginaries (Pintos, 2005), where social imaginaries are understood as subjective structures that give meaning to reality. This means that telenovelas introduce social representations into society that operate as "schemas" through their narration of reality. These schemas create an understanding of the world and are formed in the individual once he or she interacts with his or her social environment (Cegarra, 2012).

Telenovelas can be used to work on issues related to citizenship for two reasons: first, telenovelas connect "citizen practices and rights with the dramas and problems of their characters" (Franco, 2012, p. 12), and second, telenovelas are effective in preventing, educating, and changing viewers' attitudes on so-called pro-social issues.

A CHILE CLUTTERED WITH MIDDLE CLASSES

Chile is experiencing political transformations that have led to the drafting of a new Constitution.⁵ This process of major social upheaval began in the early 2000s with the first student movements that shook the public sphere (the "mochilazo" in 2001 and the "penguin revolution"

⁵ Drafting began in July 2021.

in 2006). Later, the education movement of 2011, the feminist demonstrations of 2018, and the social uprising of 2019 showed that citizens are increasingly indocile. Local citizen mobilizations also occurred in several regions in northern and southern Chile. Distrust in the country's institutions (political system, Catholic Church, neoliberal model, media, among others) is the main cause of the population's discontent, which accumulated during these collective movements.

Although there are other reasons, this crisis is the result of three main causes: a general decline in the concept of authority (Araujo, 2016), material precariousness that results in an uncertain future (Faure, 2020), and structural inequality that has altered social relations, generating sustained uneasiness in the population (Ossandón, 2020). The modernization process in Chile has faced more incisive citizen scrutiny due to the population's unmet expectations, which is typical in countries that are as unequal as Chile (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2017).

One of the expectations that citizens have is the possibility of moving up the social ladder (Sandel, 2020). Although poverty has declined since the return of democracy in 1990, upward mobility is still difficult to achieve (Cabalin, 2012). The majority of Chileans perceive themselves as middle class; however, they do not have the characteristics of this social class (Barozet & Espinoza, 2016).

The emergence of the middle classes in Chile is the result of the development of industrial capitalism, urbanization processes, the growth of the state apparatus, and the increase in coverage and duration of formal schooling since the mid-nineteenth century. The middle class distinguished themselves from the popular sectors due to their cultural capital, higher income, and social prestige.

This distinction has recently begun to fade due to economic growth and the stigma associated with poverty. In fact, 70% of Chilean families classify themselves as middle class (Barozet & Espinoza, 2016). However, these "new middle classes" are precarious sectors. Although they have managed to avoid the daily difficulties of the poorest through effort and educational capital, they are sectors that find themselves in situations of great insecurity because they lack the stability and social protection that people from higher classes have.

The October 2019 uprising demonstrates that the majority of Chileans agreed with the demands for greater dignity, equality, and social justice (Araujo, 2019). This socio-political scenario is a direct reference utilized in the telenovelas analyzed in this text, as it constitutes the context of questioning institutional power and the manifestation of the new middle classes as active citizens, who also have concerns about education.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education of Chile published the curricular bases for seventh to tenth grade within the framework of Law 2030, which establishes the General Law of Education of 2009. This regulatory modification accounts for a paradigm shift from civic education to citizen education, where students are now asked to actively and considerately participate in society.

This approach to citizenship considers four areas: encouraging democratic school coexistence, promoting human rights in a context where authoritarian governments exist or existed, working on the concepts of citizenship and democracy beyond the acquisition of knowledge, and understanding that learning must be multidisciplinary (Ministerio de Educación [Mineduc], 2013).

Martínez et al. (2010) state that the economic segregation and inequity that exists among students in the public and private systems limit citizenship education in Chile. For this reason, along with the areas indicated by the Ministry of Education, citizen education programs are proposed that promote situated learning by addressing the problematization of poverty and the extension of citizen experiences to the real-life contexts of young people.

METHODOLOGY

Epistemologically, we used a qualitative and narratological perspective, which proposes to analyze the television discourse, not only by focusing on the technical qualities of the programs, but also by emphasizing the elements that constitute the very narration of the telenovelas.

The analysis began with a preliminary viewing of each telenovela, where we took notes in a reception diary (Franco, 2012) about the evolution of plots, the development of intrigue, and the audiovisual

aspects used in the telenovelas (music, light, sounds, costumes, spaces, among others). We carried out an analysis that was divided into two large areas: narrativity and televisuality, and synthesis or hermeneutic interpretation.

Narrativity and televisuality involve the elements that build the fictional story by identifying the various layers that make up the plot (Rodríguez, 2016), the critical nodes of the stories, and the construction of suspense (López & Nicolás, 2016). We incorporated the elements related to the narrative and audiovisual resources that are used to tell the story and the three axes of the story: the characters, their actions, and the conflict (Galán, 2006).

For the hermeneutical synthesis, we questioned how the telenovelas relate to their world of reference and the symbolic operations that were identified in the audiovisual aspects used to connect with the audience. The three central elements of these telenovelas' narrative structure (characters, conflict, and actions) are located in a temporal, geographical, and social context within the narration, but they also include the representation of the most current socio-political aspects of the country of production at the time of broadcast.

Regarding the sample, we defined the telenovela transmission schedule as a selection criterion since this is an important factor when analyzing the programs. The transmission schedule predefines the characteristics of the ideal audience to whom the programs are directed and determines, among other things, the type of topics and how they can be addressed, what is shown or not shown (explicit violence, nudity, sex scenes, among others), the number and importance of secondary characters, and the complexity of the narrative.

Thus, in Chile, local productions that are broadcast in the evening, at 8:00 p.m., are aimed at a family audience. In the case of late-night shows, they are broadcast after 10:30 p.m. in a time slot for adults, while the daytime schedule at 3:00 p.m. is intended for a mostly female audience.

As of 2015, and after the success of the Turkish productions brought to the screen by the private channel Mega, there has been a change in the local production of telenovelas. TVN and Canal 13, two traditional channels, were displaced by this new channel that established a dramatic area that has won ratings in all time slots with its productions.

Mega's productions have achieved a considerable connection with audiences, which is the reason that leads us to select three of its telenovelas with the highest audience rating during the different broadcast schedules. These are *Amanda* (daytime, 2016-2017), 170 episodes, 18.6 average rating points; *Pituca sin Lucas* (prime time, 2014-2015), 153 episodes, 26.3 average rating points; and *Juegos de Poder* (late night, 2019), 161 episodes, 20 average rating points.

BETWEEN REVENGE AND JUSTICE.

THE CASE OF *AMANDA*

In the first episode of this telenovela, the true intentions of Amanda, the main character, are revealed. She arrives at the farm where she was raped 14 years ago by the Santa Cruz brothers, and her return is motivated by her search for revenge. This is one of the classic melodrama plots that, along with the police/thriller story, are the basis of this telenovela.

In addition to the secret that structures the entire plot, the story and the lives of the secondary characters are full of other hidden truths. Amanda had a daughter as a result of the rape, Anita, who was adopted by the oldest of the Santa Cruz brothers and the only one who did not participate in the rape. Anita and Amanda interact with one another, but both are unaware of their true relationship. This search for one's origin and recognition is another classic melodrama plot.

On a televisual level, the surroundings of the Santa Cruz mansion are set through panoramic views of the countryside, images of animals, and company workers. As for the music, it accompanies the scenes and guides the emotional reading of its content. The story takes place in the present; however, there are constant flashbacks of Amanda and the Santa Cruz brothers during the night of the rape.

In the end, the bad characters pay for their actions; however, the ending is not entirely happy since the protagonist dies at the hands of her abuser who is the father of her daughter. Amanda leaves a recording where she confesses the truth and forgives one of her attackers (the only one who repented), and she leaves a powerful message that all women should be respected despite their life circumstances. In that sense, one

of the morals or values that are transmitted in the telenovela is the idea that justice, although late, always comes. The truth about those guilty of Amanda's rape was exposed, and all acts that were intended to hide the truth after the rape brought negative consequences to their lives.

In the telenovela, youth is associated with themes such as love, friendship, parties, drugs, the threat of choosing the "wrong path", and the problematic relationship that young people can have with their parents. Also, when Amanda's adolescence is revisited, teen pregnancy, abuse, and the traumas of such an experience are addressed. In the case of Anita, a complicated adolescence is represented, and it is connected with themes such as adoption, the search for biological parents, and the complications of growing up without a mother figure.

Considering when *Amanda* first aired, the telenovela could have been influenced by the "La Manada" case in Spain, where an eighteen-year-old girl was raped by a group of five men during the early hours of July 7th, 2016, at the Festival of Saint Fermin.

NOT TOO RICH, NOT TOO POOR: THE CASE OF *PITUCA SIN LUCAS*

The plot of this telenovela with a melodramatic and comedy cut is revealed in the first episode with the image of one of its protagonists, Tichi Achondo, in her wealthy home in the exclusive commune of La Dehesa, where her belongings are being repossessed due to her husband's financial problems.

Thus begins the search for a new house that culminates in the arrival of the Risopatrón Achondo family, now made up of only five women (the husband flees), to the populous Maipú commune, where they become the neighbor of another of the protagonists, Manuel, who works at the Metropolitan Fishing Terminal. With this, the main dramatic node is specified: a romance between Tichi and Manuel, the former from the upper class and the latter from the middle class, specifically, from the new Chilean middle classes.

The protagonist must start from scratch, in a place foreign to her wealthy class reality, reinforcing love at different ages and social

contexts as the central themes of the telenovela. Values, religion, economic, and political themes intersect in the dialogues, showing how this production represents the social conflict in Chile.

Audiovisual techniques also demonstrate this upper class-middle class tension. The panoramic views of Santiago go from the affluent sector to the popular areas with quick motion to get closer to the specific areas where the action will take place.

The world of reference to which *Pituca sin Lucas* alludes is linked to the latest social transformations in Chile, where the meeting point of the majority of the population is the representation of the middle class. In geographic terms, the prototypical commune of this social group (Maipú) is used, with the capital's Fishing Terminal located nearby. The middle and popular sectors converge in the fishing terminal, but it is not a common place for the upper class to visit. This sector is the representation of hard work that begins early in the morning, the encounter between the poor and the not so poor, the place where local "mischief" arises, and the space where relationship codes between the less favored of society are established.

This transition of an upper-class family to a middle-class neighborhood sugarcoats social conflicts and passes off social distinctions as minor misunderstandings of manners, without accentuating conflicts. Although social demands associated with gender equality and power relations are narratively included, no class dispute is observed at the political level.

The young people represented in the telenovela are the main recipients of these messages through their parents although they maintain the archetypal characteristics of this age group. There is the middle-class teenager (Fidel), who does not do well in school, but he is funny and a good person. There is also a mature adolescent (María Belén), who accompanies her mother in the upper-class to middle-class transition. She is understanding, a good student, and a model for her little sister. On the other hand, a manipulative, violent, and obstinate adolescent (Margarita) is represented, who does not hesitate to express her rejection of the "integration" between the upper and the middle classes.

BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND ABUSE:
THE CASE OF *JUEGOS DE PODER*

This telenovela combines a police story with melodrama. The first subgenre is related to the late-night broadcast schedule where a crime needs to be solved. The main plot unfolds in the first episode when Camilo Beltrán, who is drunk driving, runs over two young men, killing one and leaving the second seriously injured. Instead of helping the survivor, he speeds away with his cousin and his girlfriend, resulting in the death of the survivor. Later, unable to cope with the guilt, Camilo confesses the crime to his father, Mariano Beltrán, so that he can turn himself in to the police. However, Mariano decides to hide the murders so as not to harm his presidential candidacy. Thus begins Beltrán's campaign to become the president of Chile under the promise of ending privileges and ensuring equality before the law, while using his influence and power to hinder the investigation of the fatal hit-and-run case led by prosecutor Aníbal Ramos.

In regard to televisuality, panoramic shots of the city are used to show social differences and flaunt the properties and goods of wealthy characters such as Mariano Beltrán. The music sets the emotional tone in the suspenseful scenes with dramatic instrumentalization. Another resource used is black and white images in nightmares where past crimes are remembered.

There is a direct link between the telenovela and the world of reference. It is related to an event that occurred in 2013 where Martín Larraín, the son of the former president of the Renovación Nacional political party, Carlos Larraín, was the protagonist. Martín ran over a person in Curanipe (southern Chile), who died due to not receiving medical assistance on time. Nonetheless, both Larraín and his companions were acquitted of the crime (Villegas, 2014).

The telenovela refers to the media coverage of crimes and political campaigns, where actual journalists from Mega interview Mariano Beltrán in the telenovela. The executive system, the prosecutor's office, the electoral system, opinion polls, and social networks are also shown. The contemporary world is also seen at parties, clinics, streets, and other everyday spaces.

The young people included in the plot are presented as irresponsible, partiers, and drug and alcohol abusers. These characters, especially the wealthy, do not consider the consequences of their actions. Their relationship with their parents is negative because their parents do not really know them and pressure them to maintain a perfect family image. For example, Mariano Beltrán does his best to hide that his son is responsible for the hit-and-run; he also asks his other son, Francisco, to hide that he is homosexual so as not to upset his “conservative voters”.

The world of youth is also represented through sexual relations. Throughout the plot, love relationships between young people and adults are revealed. Problems such as child sexual abuse, early pregnancy, and abortion due to rape are exposed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The telenovelas that we analyze in this paper represent individuals who are part of groups and social classes. These programs also give these individuals meaning and a place in a social group as well as highlight and reveal certain social problems and how they should be understood and addressed, exemplifying, teaching, and proposing an educational and normalizing ending. These representations can be utilized in the citizenship education of young people since they allow for the problematization of the themes previously identified in telenovelas and the conceptualization of these themes in explanatory categories, allowing students to solve the dilemma raised (Schujman & Siede, 2007).

With *Amanda*, students can work on the issue of gender violence and the dilemma that arises between revenge and justice. This telenovela can be approached from political, social, and cultural dimensions, considering that it presents a family of men who were raised by a violent and abusive father. In addition, the abusers’ purchasing power and social class are evident since they were exempt from the crime for almost 15 years. Similarly, the telenovela addresses issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, infidelity, teenage pregnancy, rural-urban migration, social class differences, corruption, and the importance of keeping up appearances.

With *Pituca sin Lucas*, students can problematize issues of social classes and their relationship with social structure and work. Other topics that can be raised are student movements, classism, bullying in schools, and different types of families, among others. These are intertwined in a story where love is presented as a universal feeling, and this type of love allows the characters to overcome economic problems (the misfortune of the protagonist) and class differences. With this, the telenovela “teaches how to love without prejudice”. This romantic vision of social relations, typical of the melodramatic genre, intersects with the meritocratic values of the middle class, such as hard work pays off, long work hours, and personal fulfillment through work (the protagonist must learn to work).

With *Juegos de Poder*, students can examine the inequality in access to justice depending on one’s social class and the corruption that can result from political power. Political rights and the importance of the integrity of authorities are addressed. The theme of individual freedom and sexual diversity is also presented. At the social level, the operation of the judicial system is explained, while at the cultural level, references to police cases are used where politicians who have been acquitted are involved and serve as a reference to question the unequal nature of society.

In all these telenovelas, the presence of a middle class that has seen education as the main engine toward upward social mobility stands out. For this reason, education as a right is mentioned frequently and differences between public and private education are also observed (use of uniform, infrastructure, and second language, among other elements). This distinction is also observed in access to health, decent housing, justice, and elderly care. In other words, telenovelas present the main social demands that have been raised in the public space in Chile during the last decade.

Student participation in society is a second aspect that can be worked on, and it is linked to the educational curriculum. To do this, the discourses present in the media about young people are key. We have seen that youth are represented in daytime and late-night telenovelas as threatening or threatened subjects, either causing problems or being victims of adults. They are defined by what they lack: responsibility and

maturity. They are generally shown as pre-social subjects, where their representation is based on the control and protection they need. These representations mask the paternalistic gaze present in telenovelas that prevents young people from being protagonists.

From these stories, which could influence youth identity construction, a critical analysis of these representations can be proposed, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the media “so that the citizen can produce messages to the same extent as they consume them” (Mateus et al., 2019, p. 300).

Issues related to the citizen education of youth audiences must be specifically addressed in secondary school according to the most recent curricular reform. Two aspects that are reiterated the most in citizen education are participation and democratic coexistence, and these issues can be approached using the social discourses of telenovelas.

Although there is no single way to carry out activities associated with citizen education, one possibility is to use one of the main themes of a telenovela to construct a problem (dilemma) that can be answered considering a socio-historical component (situated), whether ethical, legal, or political (Siede, 2013), and participants can generate a dialogue that allows for the collective construction of knowledge (Torres, 2015).

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